

# Exploring the Psychological Contract Between Self-Initiated Expatriate Academics and Their Organizations in Japan

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## Abstract

A university is an organization – a place where we create and disseminate knowledge – it has an organizational focus and organizational units. Conceptualizing a university in this way makes it necessary to recognize that these organizations have typical organizational problems that require organizational solutions. One such organizational problem is human resource management. Academics and administrators in higher education are employees of the organization and are expected to fulfill the mission of the organization. Research on higher education (HE) employees, that utilizes theories from organizational behavior and HRM, is a relatively new field of research, particularly in cross-cultural settings. Within Japanese higher education, the number of self-initiated expatriate academics is increasing. As such, this multicultural and diverse workforce calls for more research to be conducted on the academics' positions within the organization. Through narrative inquiry, this qualitative, pilot study explores how seven non-Japanese, self-initiated expatriate academics in Japanese HE view their psychological contract with their organization. The paper argues that psychological contracts are indicative of communication within the organization and form a useful basis for better understanding intercultural workplaces.

**Keywords :** *Psychological contracts, university as organization, self-initiated expatriate academics.*

## I. Introduction

Berger and Luckmann (1967) stress that organizations are social constructions that largely exist in the mind. As such, research needs to be conducted on how people make sense of their organization while communicating within it. With pressure on Japanese institutions of higher education to internationalize, one solution has been to employ more foreign faculty, yet little is known about how these self-initiated expatriate academics view their appointments. This research looks at how these non-Japanese academics communicate their engagement with and within the university through the lens of the psychological contract. It is argued that knowledge of how non-Japanese faculty relate to their organization will better inform human resource management practices in Japanese higher education and will provide an interesting area of organizational behavior research.

## II. Literature Review

### I. The Context of the Academics in Japanese Universities

The university as an organization is fragile. There are many impacts, challenges and, trends that are long-term, and the function of the organization under the impact of globalization has resulted in numerous challenges for the employees of the organization. To be an effective academic one needs both academic knowledge and, it is argued, strategic management skills. Academics must take on a number of administrative roles throughout their career such as heads of faculty, sections, and centers. They are required to communicate effectively in a number of settings. In internal communications, an academic is expected to motivate, teach, reprimand, train, inform, educate while also having the ability to negotiate and be diplomatic in their administrative tasks. External communication includes interaction with outside stakeholders which each require different communication strategies, such as interactions with parents or interactions with government and funding agencies.

It is unsurprising that according to Bentley et al. (2013), Japanese academics feel highly satisfied with their job, but are highly stressed at the same time. Academics receive high social status within their society and to some extent, high academic freedom in their university. Although these factors differ slightly across countries, in Japan, academics are well regarded and their job is respected in society (Shin & Jung, 2013). Most non-Japanese academics in Japan are considered to be self-initiated expatriate workers. Through a variety of push and pull factors they have chosen to reside and work in Japanese academia. Although research on these employees and their motivations is lacking, according to the Japanese Ministry of Education (2006) in Hawley-Nagatomo (2015), there are approximately 5,600 foreign full-time tenured university professors in Japan, of whom 76% are male. It can be reasonably assumed that marriage to a Japanese national is a predominant push factor for these employees (see Yamamoto, 2010 for statistics).

Kwiek & Antonowicz (2015) ascertain in their research on Europe, that job instability in academia is growing, causing controversy inside the organization. In their research they found that “the cornerstone of the academic career is to be “discovered” by, and to be “invited” to work with, the right academic” (p.44). Yet, for many non-Japanese academics in Japan it can be argued that they relate their academic careers to what they term “chance”, “luck”, “accident”, or “opportunity”. Tenured positions are notoriously difficult to obtain (Whitsed & Wright, 2011) within the hierarchy of university teaching in Japan (Hawley-Nagatomo, 2015) and little research has been conducted on non-Japanese academics from an organizational behavior perspective.

Research suggests there are three general trends in the workplace for non-Japanese academics in Japan. Firstly, there is a trend towards recessionary disengagement. This is when employees are on short-term contracts and their positions lack stability. This situation can lead towards increased turnover meaning that groups within the workplace can become fragmented.

Second, there is a trend towards increased accountability. Employees are placed under heightened scrutiny, coupled with greater competition for positions due to recessionary engagement means there greater pressure to succeed. Alongside this is a greater need for intercultural communication awareness; Japanese language skills and higher degrees to differentiate oneself from the competition.

Finally, there is a trend towards modified job descriptions. In the past, non-Japanese employees were primarily in teaching roles. Yet these employees now face increasing administrative responsibilities that require different skills and more engagement with administrators. They need to develop skills to work diplomatically, using negotiation and awareness of the politics within the institution and awareness of cultural norms and expectations.

For many non-Japanese, the ability to successfully develop the skills necessary to function in a global academic environment can be challenging. As such, the relationship that the individual employee has with his/her organization is extremely important. In order to better understand how non-Japanese academics function within the organization it is helpful to use the psychological contract as a lens through which to explore their lived experience.

## **2. The Psychological Contract**

In an employment relationship, there are two components, the legal contract of service and the psychological contract (Tipples, 1996). These psychological expectations of the relationship are invisible, yet bounded in communication. Levinson et al. (1963) define the psychological contract as:

a series of mutual expectations of which the parties to the relationship may not themselves be even dimly aware but which nonetheless govern their relationship to each other (21).

As such it is the perception of the two parties, employee and employer, of what their mutual obligations are towards each other. The concept of psychological contract exemplifies the employee's "acceptance of the organizational values, willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization, and desire to remain an employee" (Rousseau 1989, p.125) and this is shaped by an employee's professional and administrative work ideologies (Bunderson, 2001). It is still a murky area of research, particularly

when examining these contracts in relation to culture and identity and because organizations and individuals change their expectations over time.

Based on a review of the literature, this research conceptualizes the Psychological Contract as:

- Implicit / explicit (Conway & Briner, 2009; Rousseau, 1989)
- Based in the language of promises, obligations, expectations
- The exchange relationship between two parties (employer, manager, organization, co-worker)
- Social Exchanges that indicate power imbalance/balance
- Beliefs (predispositions, personality/culture, social clues, etc (Conway & Briner, 2005, Suazo, Martinez & Sandoval, 2009)
- Something that changes over time (De Vos, De Stobbeleir, & Meganck, (2009)

Yet, researching psychological contracts within academia is still an under-developed field, particularly in Asian and specifically in Japanese intercultural contexts. Research outside Asia includes work by Dabos and Rousseau (2004), Newton (2002) Tipples and Krivokapic-Skoko (1997), Tipples and Jones (1998), with one of the most comprehensive studies coming from New Zealand (Tipples and Krivokapic-Skoko, 1997). This research attempts to start the discussion in a Japanese context.

### **3. Research Questions**

When reviewing the research, it is clear that the concept of the psychological contract has not yet been researched in the context of self-initiated expatriate academics in Japan. This research is focused around two main research questions. As this research is exploratory in nature, these questions also serve to explore the possibility and direction of future research:

RQ1. How do non-Japanese, self-initiated expatriate academics in higher education institutions in Japan articulate their psychological contract?

RQ2. What possible avenues for future research arise as a result of this research?

## **III. Method**

### **1. Theoretical Framework**

This research works within a constructivist paradigm based on Guba and Lincoln's (2001) three fundamental assumptions; the basic ontological assumption is relativism; there is no objective truth; reality is socially constructed. A useful summary comes from Schwandt (2000:197) who describes constructivist thinking as when we:

believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge... in

this sense, constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it (187).

It is the researcher's job to understand the social constructions of knowledge within the research context and to explore the communication and the construction of the psychological contract. There is a need for psychological contract research to broaden its scope to truly capture the individualized employment experiences. As such, this research uses the psychological contract as a lens through which to explore employee perceptions of workplace communication. The way people express their psychological contract is indicative of communication in the organization and by using narratives, we can share the academic lived experience.

## **2. Qualitative research**

As stated above, this research lies in a constructivist paradigm. In terms of organizational research, Gjernsvik (1993) provides a useful analytical framework for considering how reality is socially constructed in organizations. His work draws on previous work by Berger and Luckmann (1967). This research utilizes qualitative research as the small body of published qualitative studies and the potential of qualitative research to capture the complex nature of the psychological contract has been recognized (Conway & Briner, 2005). Qualitative research can also highlight the role of context in exchange relationships and can provide rich accounts of the actors' experiences. More descriptive qualitative assessment of individual psychological contracts is needed to better understand the potentially distinct perspectives that employee diversity and emerging changes bring to employment.

## **3. Data Collection**

The exploratory study focuses on qualitative interviews with seven non-Japanese academics administered online. A brief description of each respondent (A-G) can be seen in Table 1. The participants responded to an open call for subjects and were sent the interview questions. Follow-up interviews were conducted with those respondents who gave permission to be interviewed further to clarify information in more detail. The responses were coded and analyzed. The sample size for this research is small, yet was designed as an exploratory study in order to ascertain directions for future research. These seven cases serve as a pilot to a potentially larger study and were the first seven respondents to reply for the pilot call for cases.

Table 1 : Cases

	Years in Japan	Japanese Language ability	Institution	Time at institution	Contract type	Visa status (title & term)
<b>A</b>	10-14	N2	Private	Less than one year	Full Limited (C)	Professor Less than 5 years
<b>B</b>	15-19	Beginner	Public	2-5	Full Limited (C)	Permanent Resident
<b>C</b>	15-19	N2	Private	Less than one year	Full Limited (F&C)	Professor Less than 5 years
<b>D</b>	15-19	Beginner	Private	10-14	Tenured (F&C)	Permanent Resident
<b>E</b>	10-14	Beginner	Private	6-9	Full Limited (C)	Permanent Resident
<b>F</b>	10-14	N2	Private	10-14	Part-time Revolving (NM)	Professor Less than 5 years
<b>G</b>	15-19	N3	Public	6-9	Tenured (F&C)	Permanent Resident

The Japanese proficiency level of the respondents was self-evaluated based on the national Japanese qualification N1-N5, with N1 being the highest level. The length of time at the institution was considered an important factor when discussing the results as well as the contract type. 'Limited' refers to a contract that has a set limit of, for example, five years, whereas 'Revolving' refers to a contract that is renewed on a yearly basis with no strict limit. In Japan, being a member of the faculty and taking part in faculty meetings is part of belonging to the group. Those academics who do not take part in faculty meetings (either by choice or if they are not required to) are in many ways considered to be outside the group structure of the faculty. There are various levels of committee in Japanese higher education, ranging from study groups to full faculty meetings and high-level board meetings. In the table above a C in the contract type refers to an academic who attends committee meetings (these are meetings that relate to the general day to day aspects of work. F refers to faculty meetings; the official meeting of all faculty members. This meaning covers all aspects of running the faculty. NM refers to an employee who has no obligation to join any meetings on campus or who stated they did not attend any meetings with colleagues.

#### 4. Analysis - Codes & Explanatory Devices

This study utilized Gioia and Thomas's (1996) three-step analytical approach to data. The process began with category analysis, followed by first and second-order analysis and finally a loose-narrative analysis. The first step was to develop codes from the literature. In this research, themes were primarily derived from the literature on psychological contracts and workplace communication. The second step was to read the raw data and assign codes to the data. However at the beginning, it became apparent that there was a need for data-lead codes that were inductively derived from the raw data. After responses were coded manually, overarching explanatory devices were used to explain the findings. Box. 1 summarizes the codes derived from the literature and data.

**Box. 1. Codes derived from O'Leary-Kelly and Schenk (2000), Sels, Janssens and Van den Brande (2004) and directly from the data.**

Exchange symmetry (the extent to which the relationship is unequal) Contract (the extent to which the contract is regulated at the individual or collective level). Connectedness Comparison Professionalism Respect Autonomy No psychological contract Relationship (with students) Relationship (with colleagues) Commitment Time Frame Feedback Isolation Focus Stability (the extent to which the psychological contract is subject to change without negotiation) Tangibility (how explicit the contract is) Scope (the extent to which the boundary between work and personal life is permeable)
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In addition, four explanatory devices were derived from the findings as a way to present the data in this paper:

- Parties engaged in the psychological contract
- Perceptions of workplace relations
- Perceptions of communication in the workplace
- Changes over time

The following section will detail the results of the interviews in line with these explanatory devices.

## IV. Results

### I. Parties engaged in the psychological contract

Initially, it is important to establish who the employees felt the second party was in the construction of the psychological contract as this reflects the exchange symmetry relationship. In some cases, the interviewees felt that the other party was '*faceless*. (G)' They imagined them as a '*board*' (A) or a '*business*' (F) and did not really '*have any image*' (F) of who the other party were; it was intangible and there was a sense of disconnectedness. The following quote from respondent F summarizes the '*faceless*' nature of their opposite party:

*I think we both have expectations and obligations towards each other. But I don't even know who my employer or organization is really. It is difficult to understand WHO to communicate with as I work for a fairly big school run by a board of directors. I follow the written rules and the expectations the school has of me, and I think they maintain their end of the bargain just the same.*  
(F) (Capitalized for emphasis)

Additional expectations may be implied through interactions with near-peers, or immediate superiors or ascertained through watching others, but this employee did not specifically know to whom they were answerable and to whom they were contractually engaged. It could be speculated that this is due to the fact that F attends no meetings on campus, and thus, has not had the opportunity to build relationships with colleagues.

One respondent conceded that if '*there is some relationship*' (A) then it is possible to establish some kind of psychological contract, however, '*if there is no meaningful interaction, then there can be no psychological contract*' (A). Yet, what is considered to be meaningful interaction? The same respondent stated a clear division between themselves and their employer in that '*I work, they administer*' (A). This clarification and division of tasks could imply that this respondent does not view administration as '*work*' and shows some distance from the opposite party in the contract.

C and G both stated that their contractual relationship lies with the dean of their faculty. Possibly, as they are both tenured and they spend the most time engaging with the dean at faculty meetings they see the dean as the opposite party. Permission to engage in various activities, such as attending conferences, etc., lies with the dean, who then moves hierarchically up the organization to get answers



to requests. On the other hand, B and E, felt the other party was the head of their center (not a full faculty but a semi-autonomous research and teaching group, with a particular focus in the university). In these cases, the head fulfills the same functions as the dean.

It can be suggested that the more a faculty member interacts with his/her colleagues in the faculty, the more they see the whole faculty or dean as the exchange party in the psychological contract. Those who do not attend faculty meetings are somewhat outsiders; they do not seem to have a sense of connectedness.

## 2. Perception of workplace relationships

Respondents were clearly able to articulate their perceptions of workplace relationships. When asked how they perceive the workplace relationships and communication patterns, the respondents expressed both positive and negative perceptions. In terms of positive perceptions, they stated the relationship with colleagues was '*fair and straightforward at times*' (C). It was also '*respectful*.' (B). The need to be respected and be given a sense of '*autonomy*' (B) was seen as important to all the respondents. Additionally, respondent G stated that '*now*' he had a '*very positive*' relationship with his employer. What should be noted here is that this respondent is in a full-time tenured position, and has 10–14 years experience living and working in Japanese higher education. Yet, although respondent G has only lower-level Japanese (N3), this is not seen as a barrier to communication and the development of workplace relationships. It appears to be that the relationships have slowly developed over time. Relationships between G and individuals within the organization are valued by G more than the relationship he has with his organization.

On the other hand, negative perceptions of workplace relations were expressed through quotes that reflected a perceived distance, such as:

*I'm just a number in the grand scheme of commodified education. But that's fine. I accept the situation and just do the best I can.* (F)

Just being a 'number' shows a feeling that maybe many part-time, revolving contract employees feel as they have limited opportunities to build deep and meaningful relationships within the organization when compared with tenured or full-time faculty who work on the same campus with people every day. The perception of the relationship appeared to differ between those in full-time tenured positions and those with part-time or fixed-term conditions. Respondent F again stated, '*they are not interested in what part-time teachers do*,' implying that F's status as a part-time employee was

perceived to mean little to the employers.

Additionally, although a sense of autonomy was deemed positive by some respondents, others felt that the other party may not be aware of the work they are doing, as quoted by one respondent: '*at most of my [universities] they do not even know or care what I do in my classes*' (B). This perceived knowledge gap means that the nature of the relationship is difficult to ascertain '*until [the] contract comes up for renewal*' (B, E). These respondents appear to have distant relationships within the organization and individuals within the organization. In terms of scope, in some cases, the boundary between work and personal life is impermeable and very compartmentalized.

It was also expressed that close relationships with direct colleagues were more communicative than with those in senior management (deemed as employers). This is likely connected to ideas of power and proximity. It is more likely that an employee will build stronger relationships with those working in close proximity to them than their overall employer - the person who is thought of as having the power to hire and fire the individual. As G stated, '*I have many nice and communicative relationships with my colleagues, but not with my employer*' implying that communication was key to a nice relationship, and that maybe something was lacking in interactions with the employer. Respondent B described his relationship with his employer as '*very conservative and strong*' indicating the power relationship between employer and employee.

Finally, if the relationship does not fit the expectations of the employee, they may leave despite having a strong work ethic. As stated by respondent A:

*I worked for a long time at a college that was poorly managed. I stayed because I felt like my teaching had a purpose but finally got fed up with other communication issues with my employer – it wore me down over time.*

In this statement, A is drawing comparisons between the organization now and the previous organization. Incidentally, on further investigation it was found that A is now working at the university where C previously worked (which C now compares unfavorably with his new current organization). It could be suggested that both A and C, are in the honeymoon period of their new employment and are still adjusting to their new environments; putting them in a state of drawing constant comparisons with negative communication experiences in their previous organizations.

### 3. Perceptions of communication in the workplace

Verbal communication appears to be the primary form of communication as little reference is made to written communication via emails or printed documents, etc. This could be because the language of the university is Japanese and the level of comprehension among non-Japanese varies. As such, face-to-face communication appears preferable to avoid any miscommunication. Respondent D stated, *'I know[s] what I need to know through word of mouth'* and that in the case of F, there were *'very clear set of terms at the interview'* that were delivered verbally. In some cases when the respondent was *'not sure what [the] mutual obligations'* (E) were, this was because there were *'no specific terms or conditions stated verbally or on paper'* (E). E was required to *'teach such and such'* (E) but the specifics were lacking. E was just *'told'* or things were *'implied'*. Specifics had to be ascertained through implied communication, by observing others, and picking up cues from the environment.

In one case, the respondent sensed there was an extreme lack of communication in the workplace, especially during the hiring process and at the start of employment, D felt *'silently observed'* to see if there were any *'fit'* (D) issues with others in the organization. This led to a sense of *'frustration'* and *'anxiety'* as *'communication'* seemed to have *'broken down.'* D felt like an *'outsider, waiting to be accepted in to the group'* before communicating openly.

### 4. Changing perceptions over time

Another salient factor in the development of the psychological contract is the influence of time. Since some employees *'will only stay maybe two or three more years'* (A) due to the restrictions on their contract, it is difficult to ascertain if and how the contract will change with time. Employees who seemed somewhat satisfied with their employment would only stay *'until [their] contract expires'* (B) resulting in somewhat shallow expectations of what the university *'owed'* them – in this case they made the most of having *'a job while [they had] one'* (B). Comments like these suggest that developing smooth communication channels quickly is important for developing psychological contracts and relationships. Respondent D acknowledged that, *'perceptions'* have *'change[d] over time'* and that *'new duties'* were expected but they were not always *'reflected in pay.'* It is fair to assume, based on the respondents that in many cases, *'real terms and conditions gradually appear over time'* (E). As E continued:

*the real mutual obligations are revealed over time. Usually after I've made some mistake. At these times it's pretty clear to me that the staff are at a loss as to why I didn't know the correct procedure in the first place.*

The comment above shows a distinct lack of communication between two parties that resulted in an alteration to or possible of disappearance of the psychological contract. It is suggested that the length of time an employee is at the organization has a distinct bearing on the development of the psychological contract.

## V. Discussion

### I. Discussion

Initially, by exploring exchange symmetry, there appears to be an unequal relationship between employers and employees in this context. Frequent references to *'them'* and *'us'* show it is unclear as to whom the psychological contract relationship is between and there is a hint of an antagonistic attitude between employer and employee in each case. When considering contracts, it seems the contract is regulated at the collective level in some cases, where the contract is based on word of mouth exchanges and the picking up of implicit meanings. Yet, when written contracts exist, there are often many things *'above and beyond'* (E) the contract that become part of the psychological contract and at times some employees seek out communication opportunities explicitly and implicitly to negotiate such changes in terms or conditions.

In terms of connectedness, some respondents have a feeling of connection to their closest colleagues but not who they see as their employer. Another facet of this is this the way employees are recruited into the position. In two cases, the employee was recommended to the position and did not go through the same recruitment procedures as others (F and B), with one exempt from the interview process and the other having an informal interview with a teacher having left the position. When recommended into the position, these employees start their job with already established connections within the organization, combined with expectations derived from the personal relationship they already hold; possibly a clearer psychological contract.

Conversely, respondent D was hired from overseas, with a formal interview with the dean and president of the university, thus from the outset he had a stronger connection with the 'board' and 'senior management' team of the university. It could be implied that face-to-face interaction with senior employees from the outset, and the inclusion of a clear written contract, could be a useful means of establishing an open culture of communication that serves as a basis for the development of the psychological contract. Respondent G stated that initially there was no psychological contract, there was distance from the employer and that despite having experienced formal recruitment procedures, there was no written contract. It was problematic trying to establish a psychological contract as G felt there were no perceived explicit or implicit promises, yet, as time went on and communication with

senior management became more frequent and smoother, explicit promises became clearer and expectations began to be formed.

Respondent C expressed an interesting perspective on the psychological contract. Respondent C was *'really appreciative'* of the *'very clear'* and *'transparent'* terms that were laid out when starting the job. C was happy to have *'really good colleagues'* who were able to *'answer questions'* and it helped to *'follow the rules and expectations'* of the organization. Although respondent C stated that there was a requirement *'to do more...without a change reflected in pay,'* this did not seem to be problematic or discouraging. On one hand, as C expressed discontent with the previous employer, the new employer may seem a better fit in comparison. First, respondent C was a new hire with less than a year working at the institution. Secondly, C made frequent comparisons with his previous employer stating that the school he is in now is *'way better than the one I worked at for 12 years previously'* and that the *'transparency'* of the current university is *'in stark contrast to [the] previous employer'*. This again, shows the importance of the power of comparison and how communication and the psychological contract may change over time.

On the other hand, in this instance, it could be suggested that respondent C did not think that he was entitled to receive additional benefits because the employer did not convey promises in the formal, implied contract at the outset. Thus, only those expectations that emanate from perceived explicit or implicit promises by the employer are part of the psychological contract. In this case there was no expectation of or perceived obligation for extra pay, as respondent C *'follows the rules and expectations the school has'* and thinks that the school *'maintains their end of the bargain just the same.'*

Table 2. summarizes the content of the academic psychological contracts based on the cases in this study. They represent one side of the contract, the employees' side, and their assumptions and expectations of what they, as employees owe the university (or other party).

**Table 2. Content of Academic Psychological Contracts of Non-Japanese, Self-initiated Expatriate Academics in Japan (based on seven cases)**

Perceptions of what the university owes academics	Perceptions of what academics owe the university
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fairness</li> <li>● A relationship with the employee</li> <li>● Meaningful interaction between the employee and organization</li> <li>● Respect</li> <li>● Autonomy</li> <li>● Ability to serve their sense of purpose</li> <li>● Good management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Loyalty</li> <li>● Volunteering for extra work</li> <li>● Willingness to accept short term contracts</li> <li>● Stay for the full term of the contract</li> <li>● Commitment to the university</li> <li>● Ability to 'fit in'</li> </ul>

The content of the psychological contracts cited above differ with those found in Tipples and Krivokapic-Skoko's (1997) research. Firstly, in comparison to Tipples and Krivokapic-Skoko's (1997) findings, the respondents in this study did not state that they felt the university owed them long term job security or promotion. This is possibly due to the nature of non-Japanese employees having differing visa status and right to work issues, along with the nature of Japanese university contracts being temporary or often fixed-term, the respondents appeared resigned to the fact that long-term security and promotion were not a given in terms of the psychological contract. Similarly, respondents did not cite an increase in salary as something they thought the university owed them. This again, could be linked to the Japanese salary structure at universities that is often tied to age and experience as opposed to performance. Finally, these respondents did not cite an expectation of support for personal problems as something the university owed academics, possibly highlighting cultural differences surrounding the idea of scope in psychological contracts -which is the extent to which the boundary between work and personal life is permeable.

**2. Implications**

There are a number of implications arising from this study. Firstly, the issue of legal contracts needs to be addressed. From this short study it is clear to see that career development is difficult to obtain when an employee is faced with limited-term contracts. These types of contracts could result in transient employees who feel it is unnecessary to lay down deep roots of communication with their employer, as the duration of term is short. They will just do what they believe is the minimum expected of them for the students '*keep up their end of the bargain*' (C) until it is time to move on. Additionally, the absence of a written contract also makes establishing expectations problematic. There seem to be discrepancies between each situation and a more uniform contract system may add to the more sound development of psychological contracts.

Second, there is a need to establish how 'meaningful' communication and interaction is defined. What does the employer and employee feel is meaningful to them? Is it based on length of time, content, exchange of ideas and respect, etc.? Is it in terms of the manner of communication, tone, length of time and content? Related to the second implication, employees and employers need to seek out more opportunities for direct verbal and written communication. There are indications that this will increase the possibility of meaningful communication occurring and subsequently, more structured and tangible psychological contracts.

Finally, we need to open the doors of academia as a research site for research on organizational behavior and management research. A better understanding of what occurs among employees in academia will lead to organizations becoming more successful.

## **VI. Limitations and Future Directions**

Although this study is limited in a number of ways, it serves as a pilot, exploratory study from which to explore new avenues of research. First, although the sample size is small, initial themes and codes have been derived, the next step could be to expand this study into a larger number of respondents with focus groups and in-depth interviews. Second, this study was limited to non-Japanese self-initiated expatriate academics in humanities, and thus, conducting a similar study with respondents from different fields, or Japanese respondents, would serve as a good basis for further study. Third, there is a need to consider the university administrators' perceptions of their psychological contract. Fourth, a mixed-method approach could be applied in future and in particular, it would be interesting to explore the statistical correlations between length of time at the institution, contract type and presence/absence of a psychological contract. Fifth, the cultural dynamic of this target group of respondents concerning ideas of collectivism and individualism could be explored. Beliefs (predispositions, personality/culture, social clues, Conway & Briner, 2005, Suazo, Martinez & Sandoval, 2009) and how they influence the development of psychological contracts need more research, particularly in this cross-cultural setting. Finally, the concept of a self-initiated expatriate academic should be further researched; focusing on push and pull factors and how these may influence the psychological contract. This study has provided an opportunity to visualize potential avenues for future research, which should be interdisciplinary in nature.

## **VII. Final Comments**

This paper has explored the naturalistic perspective of the psychological contracts of seven self-initiated expatriate academics working in higher education in Japan. Initial indications show that the academics interviewed are governed by transactional psychological contracts. Successful and

functional psychological contracts appear to be underpinned by a desire to seek and gain respect and have that respect clearly communicated. By looking in detail at case D (page 136), it is possible to assert that the relational psychological contract in this case was achieved with the granting of tenure, respect from the institution, and open communication. In the responses analyzed, respondents state that although little has been expressed in written communication, much has been expressed explicitly and implicitly verbally, often via word-of-mouth. This should be the departure point for future research. It is necessary to establish what specific kinds of interactions occur in these workplaces, what constitutes meaningful and respectful communication and how that relates to research in organizational behavior and human resource management.

In conclusion, it is critical to be sensitive to possible differences in expectations and situational factors in the workplace. This paper has argued that the way these non-Japanese self-initiated expatriate academics in higher education express their psychological contract can be indicative of communication within the organization. This exploratory research has opened up further avenues for more extensive interdisciplinary research in the fields of educational management, organizational behavior and education.

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## Appendix Outline of Interview Questions

1. How many years have you lived in Japan?
2. Please describe your Japanese level.
3. Please describe your current main place of employment.
4. How long have you been employed at your current institution?
5. Please describe the contract conditions at your institutions.
6. Please describe your visa status.
7. Do you have a written, legally binding contract that you sign every year?
8. If no, please state the reason why, if known. If yes, please can you describe the general contents.

9. How would you describe the nature of your relationship with your employer?
10. Do you feel you have established a relationship with your employer that is beyond what is in the legal contract? Please explain.
11. Please could you share some information about the steps taken during your recruitment procedure (e.g. interview, teaching demo, etc.). What was required of you?
12. Did you receive a clear statement of terms and conditions when you started in your current position? If so, how did you receive this information? What kind of information did you receive?
13. Have you experienced any changes in the terms and conditions since you have been hired?
14. Have you heard of the term 'psychological contract?' It is defined as the perceptions of the two parties, employee and employer, of what their mutual obligations are towards each other. Do you consider yourself to have a psychological contract with your employer and if so, please could you describe it?
15. How would you describe your employer?
16. How long do you intend to stay in your current position?
17. Has the nature of your contract changed over time?
18. What are your thoughts about the concept of the psychological contract?