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Promises do matter! The contextual role of organisational culture in employees' perceptions of implicit promises.

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Purpose/contribution: This article is in response to Montes and Zweig (2009) paper regarding the insignificant role of promises on employees' perceptions of psychological contract breach. Although not disagreeing with the authors' that perceptions of breach may exist in the absence of promises, it is unclear whether perceptions of breach actually record a distinction between explicit and implicit promises. The significant role of 'implicit' promises in employees' perceptions of breach or fulfilment have been largely neglected in the literature. The present article argues that perceptions of promises and consequent perceptions of fulfilment or breach can evolve even in the absence of explicit promises. In particular, it focuses upon the influence of national and organisational culture on the way in which individuals' interpreted implicit promises as part of the reciprocal exchange relationship.

Design/methodology: The data were gathered using multiple methods, including interviews, non-participant observations and analyses of organisational documents. The findings reported in the paper draw upon 60 semi-structured interviews with employees who had been repatriated within the previous 12 months, and 14 interviews with Human Resource (HR) managers in the two organisations, triangulated with extensive documentary analysis and observations. The two organisations selected for this study are Saudi Arabian organisations that operate subsidiaries throughout the world.

Results: In the context of two different Saudi Arabia organisations, the research demonstrated the contextual role that organisational culture plays in the way in which employees come to understand the mutual obligations that comprise the psychological contract pre international assignment. Each organisation fostered quite distinctive beliefs about the way international assignments should be managed, repatriation, and work relationships, which influenced employees' perceptions/ interpretation of implicit promises of reciprocal exchange, and subsequent whether their psychological contract had been fulfilled or breached post-international assignment.

Implications/limitations: Research in the field tends to conceptualise the breach or fulfilment of the psychological contract at the individual level without taking into consideration the potential impact of organisational culture and the broader national culture context on the development of perceptual breach or fulfilment. The findings presented here demonstrate that employees' perceptions of breach or fulfilment of their psychological contract following repatriation arise and are influenced by a complex and dynamic interplay between national culture, organisational culture, and individual's perceptions of implicit promises. Specifically, this research contributes by illustrating the contextual role that organisational culture plays in the way in which employees come to understand the obligations that comprise the psychological contract.

Originality/value: Psychological contract theory has been widely studied in the West, but to date Middle Eastern scholars have been silent on the subject and this limits the possibility of generalising conclusions because of the very different cultural values and norms that exist. Given the multiple distinctive aspects of Arab culture and its possible influence on employer-employee relationships,

the exploration of psychological contracts within the Saudi Arabian context is not only desirable but also necessary for understanding the broader national/organisational influence on the way in which individuals interpreted implicit promises as part of the reciprocal exchange relationship.