Research Paper

On Target: The psychological contract at the heart of managerial communication practices

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper reports the results of research on the psychological contract (PC) of employees and the managerial communication practices of immediate supervisors in the context of mergers of healthcare institutions.

Methodology: To gather information on these practices, data collection using a mixed methods approach was conducted in two stages: (1) 17 semi-structured interviews with managers were conducted in 2013, when the merger of three Quebec healthcare facilities was announced; (2) 12 semi-structured interviews with managers were conducted in 2018, after the merger, and 25 employees under their supervision completed a questionnaire to measure their psychological contract (PC).

Results: The results provide a portrait of the gaps in management communication practices between two key phases of organizational transformation. Likewise, it presents the results obtained and highlights the management communication practices that protect the PC.

Originality: Offering transferable knowledge, this study lays the groundwork for other studies on change management practices by offering a categorization of the communication practices encountered. A handful of writings address human resources management under leadership and managerial styles. None offers a structured variation of management practices. The research here takes a step in this direction while setting the stage for a better understanding of the impacts of practices on PC.

Keywords: *Management practices, Merger, Psychological contract, Organizational changes*

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1. Introduction

The Quebec Health and Social Services Network (HSSN) is a public system and therefore subject to the decisions of the political authorities. As a result of restructuring, this network has undergone numerous mergers, which have called into question the practices and missions of several institutions. Previous transformations carried out by successive governments as part of the network's reforms have led to profound changes in health and social services (e.g., streamlining of administration, forced retirements, review of priorities, and transformation of structures). In addition to these changes, there are various situations that can change the work context, such as program reforms and reviews or the COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless of the magnitude of change, managers must ensure continuity of care and services while mobilizing employees in the desired direction.

The organizational transformations that accompany a merger, split, consolidation, or other disruption (e.g., the pandemic) bring about major changes within these organizations that can affect the PC of employees and managers. Defined as an implicit and subjective individual contract (Rousseau 1989) of the exchange relationship between the employee and the organization, PC evolves and stabilizes over time. In times of major change, such as those experienced in the health care sector, this contract is challenged. Employees must adhere to or accept major changes that disrupt their daily lives, expectations, and perceptions, or even break their PC. This paper presents the results of a research on managerial communication practices in a context of organizational change to show their impact on employees' PC. Despite exposing et categorizing different consequences of PC breach, these results provide new knowledge showing the importance of communication practices, categorizing them, and mainly suggest management practices to help preserve the PC of HSSN employees during future reorganizations.

### *Conceptual gap and aim of this study*

The actual study aims to observe PC into CHUM (Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal) transformational context which consists in a merge of three hospital sites: St-Luc hospital, Notre-Dame Hospital and Hotel-Dieu Hospital. To do so, two management practices categories were studied : general communication practices and specific communication (to change) management practices. These two practices are important, they can change throughout time, they are impacting the perceived participation

employees can have, facilitating comprehension and affecting the comprehension on eventual work content, all which being components of the PC off college and university level employees according to Bellou 2009.

2. Literature Review

Since the concept of a PC in the employer-employee relationship was identified by Argyris (1960), several authors have enriched our understanding of the concept, including Rousseau (1989), one of the contemporary authors who has significantly shaped the evolution of the construct, particularly by developing how it is measured. Rousseau's (1989) definition is one of the most widely used. It allows us to understand the PC as a mental schema, that is, a cognitive organization composed of expectations and perceptions of mutual obligations (Rousseau, 2000; Fiske and Taylor, 1984 cited in Dulac, 2005). It is therefore developed gradually and experientially from the first interactions with an employer and continues once employment begins. While each PC is individual, it is constructed through interactions, through the belief in mutual obligations, and through the perception of a shared understanding of the nature of these obligations (Rousseau, 2003). The shared understanding of obligations is based on shared information that is understood in the same way by both the organization and the employee. Developed largely from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1964), PC theory sheds light on the exchange relationship. The effect of managerial communication practices on employee PC requires an exchange relationship between an employee and a manager. Although the information needed to develop PC is important, it is not the only influential factor (Rousseau, 2003). Organizational, relational, social, and cultural factors also play a role. Figure 1 illustrates the process of creating, developing, and breaking the PC, the impact of an organizational event, and communication practices.

Figure 1: The process of creating, developing and breaking the PC
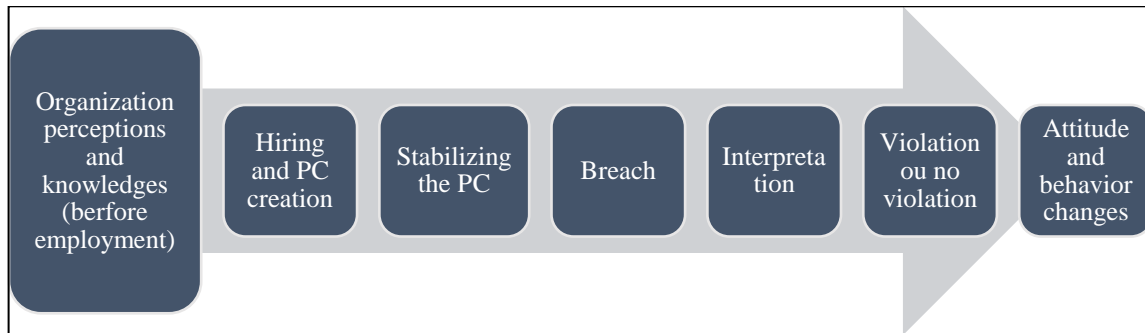
Source : Pelletier, C. (2019). L'influence des styles et pratiques de gestion sur le contrat psychologique d'employés d'établissements de santé faisant face à une fusion. Doctoral thesis. Université de Sherbrooke. Sherbrooke. 1-405.

During the employment relationship, the PC is a mechanism for evaluating commitments and the organization: if the employee feels that the organization has not fulfilled its commitments (Middlemiss ,2011; Rousseau, 2003), the PC is at risk of being violated or broken. A variety of responses can be manifestations of such a breach: emotional responses (Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, and Bravo, 2007; Morrison and Robinson, 1997), attitudinal changes (Zhao and others, 2007), and behavioral changes (Lester and others, 2002; Zhao and others, 2007). Consequently, discrepancies between individual and organizational perceptions of their respective obligations to each other are possible, sometimes leading to involuntary breaches of the psychological contract of both parties (Mullenbach-Servayre, 2009; Robinson & Morrison 2000) (see Figure 1).

The PC stabilizes over time, leading employee,s and employers to identify the behaviors they need to adopt to keep it intact (Rousseau, 2003). Once stabilized, it tends to resist change, which allows it to provide meaning and coherence to the work experience. The PC may or may not be maintained, depending on whether or not the expectations and perceptions of obligation that make up the PC are met. It can be broken in the face of disappointment or lack of response, especially following organizational change (Atkinson and Hall, 2011). The response experienced is individual and perceptual in nature (Mullenbach-Servayre 2009). Due to the intangible nature of the PC, organizations are not always specific about their expectations or aware of what they need to give back to employees (ibid). Similarly, employees may not have a clear picture of their expectations and perceptions of their obligations to the employer.

Consequences of a PC breach

Possible organizational commitments contained in the PC, such as participation in decision making, communication, and involvement, can be compromised or strengthened by information sharing practices during transformation. In this regard, managerial communication practices play a critical role in understanding the PC by clarifying the expectations it contains. Indeed, communication play a significant role in every step of building a working relationship: before, during, and after recruitment. It is also the channel via which every aspect of the work experience is shared. Moreover, managing the perceived promises, whether fullfil or betrayed, on a regular basis can affect appraisal processes leading employee's responses (Kiefer, Barclay, Conway and Briner, 2022).

The PC serves as a reference against which employees can assess the organization's compliance with the obligations contained in the PC, as it can lead to a breach of contract if the employee feels that the organization has not fulfilled its obligations (Middlemiss, 2011; Rousseau, 2003). Although the PC becomes more malleable as changes occur, differences in perception are likely to modify it or even cause a breach. Several responses can be manifestations of a breach of the PC:

1. Affective reactions following a "significant organizational event" (Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, and Bravo, 2007, p. 650), including frustration, anger, and loss of trust (Morrison and Robinson 1997).

2. Post-breach attitudinal changes are based on employees' evaluations of their employer and their environment, including decreased satisfaction or commitment and intentions to leave (Zhao and others, 2007).

3. Behavioral changes that follow a breach of contract can have tangible effects on the organization (ibid.), including voluntary turnover, organizational citizenship behavior, or a change in in-role performance (Lester and others, 2002; Zhao and others, 2007).

In addition to the impact on employees, various reactions to the breach can lead to performance losses that have direct and indirect organizational costs. These reactions include decreased commitment (Zhao et al., 2007), increased turnover intentions (El Bedoui Tlik, 2010), and cynicism (Dufour and Saba 2009), among others. Cynicism is also a contagious behavior: the literature tends to show that in the presence of cynical colleagues, other employees become cynical (Wilkerson, Evans, and Davis 2008). The findings on this contagion effect and on the role of social norms (Gino, Ayal, and Ariely,

2009) are worrisome, particularly in terms of the collateral effects of an employee's breach of contract in terms of the resulting effects on a group.

Organizations, management practices, and PC

As a result of existing knowledge, more and more factors that influence the state or development of the PC are being studied, including environmental (Liu, Cho, and Seo, 2011; Zhao & Chien, 2008), organizational and management (Aggarwal & Bhargava 2009; Pelletier, 2019), and individual factors (Bellou, 2009; Ng & Feldman, 2008; Dulac, 2005).

Organizational factors influencing PC constitution and development include organizational changes such as institutional consolidations (Pelletier, 2019), organizational culture (Cortvriend 2004), organizational identification (De Villartay, 2022), full-time, part-time (Saba, Blouin, & Lemire, 2005), student and regular employment status (Saba, Blouin, & Lemire, 2005), and public and private sectors of activity (Bellou 2007; Castaing & Roussel, 2006).

In addition, authors have documented management approaches or characteristics such as flexibility (Atkinson & Hall, 2011), support (Aselage & Eisenberg, 2003; Liu, Cho, & Seo, 2011), equity (El Akremi & Ben Ameur 2005; Kickul, Neuman, Parker, & Finkl, 2010), and open communication (Aggarwal et al. 2009; Winter & Jackson, 2006). In the last decade, researches also documented the occuring process following impairment phase such as effects of perceived organizational support and supervisor support (Pohl, Bertrand, and Pepermans, 2020), the reconstruction after both a short and long term imperment (Valéau et Gardody, 2021) of the PC.

Conceptual gap and aim of this study

Despite the importance of previously identified organizational and managerial factors and the critical role of actors on the state of PC, very little research has been conducted on the impact of management practices.

The purpose of this study is to examine PC in the context of the transformation of the CHUM (Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal), three separate hospitals that merged in 1995 and were later consolidated into a single site in 2017: Saint-Luc Hospital,

Notre-Dame Hospital, and Hôtel-Dieu Hospital. The objective of this study is therefore to present pragmatic knowledge on managerial communication practices in order to respond to a specific problem, namely the risks of PC breaches during an organizational merger.

This study aims to answer the following question "What communication and managerial practices can prevent a PC breach during a merger of healthcare organizations?" Understood here as the practices of the immediate supervisor.

Exploring this question will enable managers to assert their role as stakeholders in shaping and adhering to the PC. In addition, it will facilitate the establishment of critical communication practices within the reciprocal relationship that shapes employees' expectations and perceptions of their responsibilities.

3. Methodology

The choice to conduct an exploratory research study, using a single case study design, was made considering that no data in the literature had linked the manager's communication practices to the state of the PC. The relevance of conducting the research at CHUM is that it represents a large organization with more than 10,000 employees and even more before 2017, making it a preferred place to encounter multiple managers with different mandates and team sizes.

Study sample and process

Data collection was conducted in two phases using a semi-inductive approach. The first phase (2013) was completed when the change was announced but before it was implemented in the care units. The second phase (2017) was completed during the consolidation and subsequent changes. During these two phases, data were collected through semi-directed interviews with managers. In the second phase (2017), the qualitative data collection was complemented by a quantitative analysis of the employees' PC using the Psychological Contract Inventory or PCI (Rousseau, 1989), a tool that has also been validated in the French-speaking context, which is the case of the CHUM employees (Lemire and Saba, 2004; Dufour, 2008), to assess the PC of the employees who agreed to participate from the teams of managers interviewed.

The sample was drawn from the population of managers at the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal (CHUM). The following inclusion criteria were used to select managers in 2013 and 2017:

1.   Years of experience: at least one year in the position in question.

2.   Management level: first level managers (middle management).

Formal contracts and hierarchical structure justify this choice of criteria, and excluded managers with doctors or middle management level under them. For the first phase of data collection, in 2013, the sample consisted of 7 men and 10 women working for different branches. Five years later, for the second phase, another 10 women and 2 men agreed to participate. Each of the managers surveyed had between 6 and 120 employees with a high school, college, or university education. The managers who participated in each phase were different because of the time elapsed, which resulted in mobility.

Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis is based on thematic coding (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) of the interviews conducted in 2013 and 2017. The data were coded during the collection process in order to validate the achievement of theoretical and empirical saturation of the study topic. The coding was done using the QDA Miner software. Once the coding was stabilized, one-third of the interviews were coded by a second coder to ensure that the codes were applied consistently. This was done to strengthen the validity of the coding process. The qualitative analysis lead to management practices and their categories, as well as manifestations of the PC breach categories.

For quantitative data analysis, scores were collected in accordance with PCI guidance. The tool, which was previously validated, allows each participant's PC to be scored on a scale of 1 to 7, ranging from breached to intact. A report generated by the online survey tool (Unipark) provides each participant's score and the average score for the 84 PCI items. The analysis of the PCI can be described as a descriptive statistic. This statistic indicates whether the PC is completely breached (score of 1 and 2), partially breached (score of 3 to 5), or intact (score of 6 and 7) (Dufour, 2008) and helped to confirm the state of the PC and the manifestations of a breach as observed by the managers.

Triangulation

Given the analysis based on the research phases in 2013 and 2017, it was possible to compare the preferred management practices (number of different practices and practice categories) and relate their practices to the manifestations observed.

4. Results

The research results provide information on the management communication practices mentioned by managers in 2013 and 2017, and the employee reactions to breached PCs as observed by managers when an organizational change was announced (2013) and implemented (2017).

Managerial communication practices

Semi-inductive coding identified general communication practices and some more specific to the merger context. General management practices refer to day-to-day management communication, and the specific practices are those related to institutional mergers in particular. In this study, communication practices are defined as the different methods used by the participating managers to exchange and communicate information. These practices are described below:

General communication practices

- Direct (e.g., team or individual meetings)

- Indirect (e.g., emails, memos)

- Communication management (e.g., managing the what, when)

Specific communication practices

- Direct (e.g. preparing by talking about the change)

- Indirect (e.g. email about the change)

- Communication management (e.g., managing the what, when, about the consolidation)

General communication practices

Several findings emerged from the study that confirm and even reveal management practices used at two key moments: when the change was announced and when the change was implemented.

The results show that general communication practices changed between 2013 and 2017. Managers used general communication practices more often in 2013 than in 2017 (occurrences: 168 vs. 139, respectively). On the other hand, they used a wider variety of general communication practices in 2017 (16 different practices) than in 2013 (12 different practices). According to their statements, managers did not have enough time to communicate the way they wanted to, and according to the analysis of the practices used in 2017, teams had different needs in 2013 and 2017 in terms of the content and frequency of communication.

In this regard, direct communication (with individuals) was the most used in 2013, as 88% of managers surveyed mentioned it: 100% of managers mentioned direct communication at the group level (in teams). This trend decreased in 2017, with 67% and 58%, respectively. However, the variety of communication practices used was greater in 2017 (see Table 1). Thus, it seems that managers have changed their general communication practices between the announcement of the change and its implementation.

Table I: General communication practices in 2013 and 2017: occurrences and numbers of managers

Level 1	Codes	Occ.	Number of managers	Occ.	Number of managers
		2013 (n=17)		**2017 (n=12)**	
Direct communication	Communicating one-on-one	40	15	16	8
	Communicating with the team	41	17	15	7
	Communicating based on team needs	4	4	7	6
	Frequency of communication	4	3	7	7
	Communicating in a quick standing meeting	0	0	4	2

	Communicating with assistant	18	9	9	4
	Communicating by cell phone	0	0	4	3
Indirect communication	Communicating through shared file on common drive	1	1	1	1
	Communicating by memo or poster	0	0	6	6
	Communicating by email	19	11	9	5
	Communicating by text message	0		6	4
Communication management	Communicating at a specific time, with specific information	2	2	2	2
	Communicating on finances and workforce	3	3	14	8
	Communicating on day-to-day operations (tasks, distribution of work)	20	13	8	6
	Explaining decisions	7	4	22	9
	Communicating organizational decisions	9	5	9	6

Source : Pelletier, C. (2019). L'influence des styles et pratiques de gestion sur le contrat psychologique d'employés d'établissements de santé faisant face à une fusion. Doctoral thesis. Université de Sherbrooke. Sherbrooke. 1-405.

The direct and indirect practices added in 2017 include direct forms of communication such as text messages, notes and posters, cell phone calls, and short "standing" team meetings. In contrast, in 2013, indirect communication consisted primarily of emails.

In terms of managing communication, in 2013, communication was primarily about the day-to-day. In 2017, managers felt they spent more time explaining and communicating decisions than managers surveyed in 2013. In addition to the lack of time and different needs, the 2017 interviews also revealed a sense of pressure and urgency to communicate information, which was reflected in the variety of indirect communication. These participants expressed their intention to share as much information as possible as soon as they received it.

In the context of active organizational change, managers communicated more financial and workforce information and provided employees with more information about the current organizational context. In addition, they explained more decisions and talked less about day-to-day issues, which translates into a decrease in traditional communication such as team and individual communication. It seems that their priority – or what they see as their priority – is more about the situation and the transformation than about the

day-to-day work. It is also interesting to note that in 2017, managers refer more to the idea of communicating to meet the needs of the team and are more concerned about the frequency of communication: they manage communication differently.

Specific communication practices

With regard to communication practices specific to consolidations, a few observations stand out. In this regard, managers (see Table 2):

- mention preparing the team by talking more about the project in 2017;

- resort less to direct communication with their teams than on an individual basis;

- mention transformation-specific communication practices more often in 2017 (77) than in 2013 (38).

In addition to the general findings mentioned here, Table 2 shows that managers are changing their specific communication practices. First, in 2017, the use of direct communication reflects that the transformation project is a priority, and managers mention a specific interest in preparing teams. In addition, in 2017, managers refer to a wider range of indirect practices specific to the consolidation. Among these practices, there was a significant increase in the use of email in 2017 compared to 2013. This practice, which allows for quick communication, reflects a concern with managing communication and consistently communicating information about the project at hand. This increase may also reflect the aforementioned lack of time, as well as the need for teams to be informed quickly. Finally, consistent with general practice, direct, one-on-one, transformation-specific communication is more common in 2017 than in 2013. As a result, managers appear to be taking advantage of a variety of communication opportunities, including one-on-one conversations with employees.

Table II: Specific communication practices in 2013 and 2017: occurrences et numbers of managers

Specific practices	Level 1	Codes	Occ.	Number of managers	Occ.	Number of managers
			2013 (n=17)		2017 (n=12)	
	Direct communication	Preparing the team by talking about the plan	4	3	19	9
		Communicating directly with team	25	15	18	9

		Communicating directly with individuals	2	2	12	6
	Indirect communication	Communicating by email	1	1	10	5
		Communicating by memo, poster	0	0	3	2
		Communicating through shared file on common drive	0	0	1	1
	Communication management	Sharing information consistently	6	5	9	6
		Managing communications (the *why* and *when*)	0	0	5	5

Source : Pelletier, C. (2019). *L'influence des styles et pratiques de gestion sur le contrat psychologique d'employés d'établissements de santé faisant face à une fusion.* Doctoral thesis. Université de Sherbrooke. Sherbrooke. 1-405.

Observed reactions to breaches and status of the PC

To continue the presentation of the results, the following section reports on the manifestations of breaches as observed by the managers interviewed.

Behaviors and attitudes indicative of PC breaches

When asked about employee attitudes and behaviors, managers identified behavioral manifestations of PC violations such as withdrawal and disengagement, voluntary departure, anti-citizen organizational behavior (lack of courtesy and cordiality), low involvement, and absenteeism. Table 3 shows the results of the attitudinal and behavioral manifestations of a PC breach.

Table III: Employee attitudinal and behavioral manifestations of PC breach

Manifestation of breach - Attitudes and behaviours	Occurrence of manifestation		Number of managers	
	2013	**2017**	**2013** (*n*=17)	**2017** (*n*=12)
Withdrawal, disengagement	5	8	5	6
Voluntary termination	2	1	2	1
Low involvement	1	1	1	1
Organizational cynicism	11	9	8	6
Cynicism towards division/unit	13	1	11	1

Source : Pelletier, C. (2019). L'influence des styles et pratiques de gestion sur le contrat psychologique d'employés d'établissements de santé faisant face à une fusion. Doctoral thesis. Université de Sherbrooke. Sherbrooke. 1-405.

Analysis of the data shows that among the behaviors symptomatic of a PC breach, withdrawal and disengagement are the behaviors most often observed by managers. This observation was true in both 2013 and 2017. All things considered, however, the number of times participants mentioned withdrawal and disengagement was greater in 2017. In fact, this behavior was mentioned by half of the managers in 2017 and by just under a third in 2013. Furthermore, according to the data collected, few behaviors other than withdrawal and disengagement were observed. In fact, most of the other behaviors were mentioned by only one or two managers in both 2013 and 2017.

Partial breaches caused by unmet PC expectations and the resulting disappointment are the likely cause of the observed withdrawal and disengagement. Moreover, this disappointment changes the focus of employees' cynicism: if they were cynical about their department or unit prior to the merger, their cynicism turns toward the organization during the merger.

Employees' Emotional State as an Indicator of PC Breach

The emotional state of employees can also be a reflection of the state of the employee's PC. It is important to note, however, that the term "emotional state" refers to an emotion observed and named by managers, not a psychological state measured by psychometric scales. Similarly, the terms "burnout" and "stress, anxiety, and distress" represent a state as perceived by managers. In this respect, the analysis of the results based on the managers' observations is particularly interesting and should be highlighted for its possible relationship with the PC (Table 4).

Table IV: Employee emotional manifestations of PC breach in 2013 and 2017

Manifestations of breach – Emotional state	Occurrence of manifestations		Number of managers	
	2013	**2017**	**2013**	**2017**
Stress, anxiety, distress	0	21	0	10
Sadness	1	7	1	5

Tiredness and professional burnout	1	4	1	2
A closing off and lack of empathy	0	1	0	1

Source : Pelletier, C. (2019). L'influence des styles et pratiques de gestion sur le contrat psychologique d'employés d'établissements de santé faisant face à une fusion. Doctoral thesis. Université de Sherbrooke. Sherbrooke. 1-405.

The results regarding possible emotional manifestations of PC breaches suggest important differences between 2013 and 2017 (Figure 4). Indeed, the table 4 shows that in 2013 there were very few emotional manifestations of PC breach, while in 2017, during the period of active preparation for the move and just before the geographic consolidation, they were quite common. "Sadness, fatigue, and burnout, as well as detachment and lack of empathy" and "stress, anxiety, and distress" are how managers described the emotional states perceived in 2017 that were not or rarely observed in 2013. Sadness, a possible manifestation of a PC breach, was mentioned by only one participant in 2013, while it was mentioned by 5 participants in 2017. These differences may be a result of the rapidly approaching site consolidation and will be addressed in the discussion section. One of the main emotional states that is likely to be a manifestation of a PC breach is "stress, anxiety, fear" (Figure 4). This manifestation is a notable topic of discussion, as it was mentioned 21 times by 10 managers in 2017.

Cross-tabulated results

The analysis of the communication practices and their association with the manifestations of the PC breach leads to two findings:

- The difference between the number of communication practices and the number of manifestations suggests that communication practices have a stabilizing effect a few months before the organizational change.

- The difference between the number of different specific communication practices and the number of manifestations during the two data collection phases suggests that these practices had a protective effect during this last period of organizational transformation, and that the increase and variety of these practices had a positive effect.

An analysis of the general communication practices and the manifestations of breach of employee PC observed by the managers as mentioned in the interviews reveals the differences in managerial practices. According to the codes for both years, one manager

may favour five communication practices while another may use fourteen (Figure 2). There thus seems to be a significant difference in the number of communication practices mentioned by managers between the two data collection cycles.

Figure 2: Average number of different general communication practices and manifestations of PC
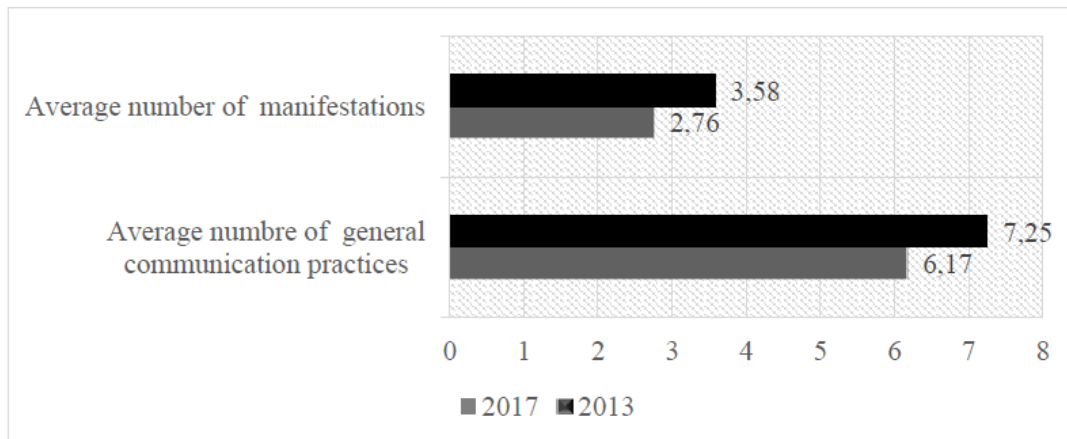
Source : Pelletier, C. (2019). L'influence des styles et pratiques de gestion sur le contrat psychologique d'employés d'établissements de santé faisant face à une fusion. Doctoral thesis. Université de Sherbrooke. Sherbrooke. 1-405.

Figure 2 shows the difference between the number of different communication practices identified and the number of violations observed by managers. The increase in common communication practices is not proportional to the observed manifestations of violations. Subject to the limitations of this study, this observation suggests that general communication practices have a stabilizing effect on the PC a few months before an organizational change.

In 2013, managers reported a higher frequency of general communication practices among the organizational changes mentioned. There seemed to be more communication practices related to employees' daily work in 2013 than in 2017. As the gap in the number of manifestations of violations narrows, this change in practice seems to be in line with employees' needs. However, even as this gap in manifestations narrows, the total number of manifestations is increasing, so it is possible to see that a certain number of common communication practices need to be maintained.

Furthermore, in 2013, the most common general communication practice was direct team communication. In 2017, this practice was used less, but the variety of general communication practices was significantly greater. As for the direct and indirect practices that were added in 2017, note the rapid modes of communication that have developed over the years.

In addition, managers feel they spent more time explaining decisions and refer to the idea of communicating based on team needs in 2017. It is not possible in this study to see if employee reactions justified this need to explain decisions in 2017, but participating managers indicated their intention to share as much information as possible, and as soon as it became available to them. Lastly, it is also interesting to note that in 2017, managers mentioned communicating based on the needs of the team more and were more concerned with the frequency of communications than in 2013: they were clearly managing communication differently. Figure 3 presents the specific communication practices.

Figure 3: Average number of different specific communication practices and distinct manifestations of PC breach
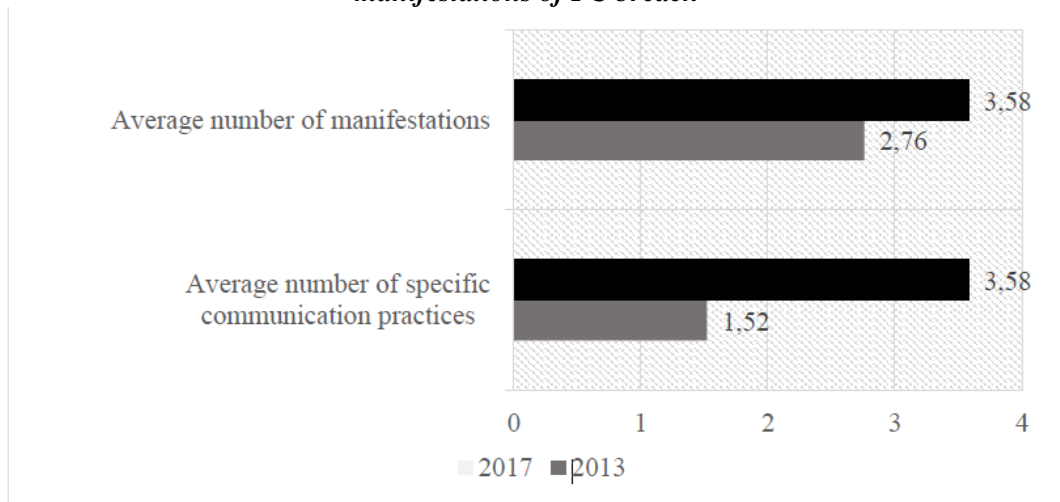
Source : Pelletier, C. (2019). *L'influence des styles et pratiques de gestion sur le contrat psychologique d'employés d'établissements de santé faisant face à une fusion. Doctoral thesis. Université de Sherbrooke. Sherbrooke. 1-405.*

The difference between 2013 and 2017 in the number of distinct manifestations of breach and the number of distinct specific communication practices is more observable (Figure 3). Although participants observed more manifestations of breach in 2017, the gap between the number of specific communication practices and the number of manifestations is smaller than in 2013 (Figure 3). This observation may indicate that these practices, or the diversity of practices, had a protective effect in 2017.

Specific direct practices reflect the organization's focus on its upcoming transformation. In 2017, managers mentioned preparing the team when discussing the project. Similarly, the choice to use a variety of specific indirect practices (memos, text messages, posters) either indicates that managers prioritized communicating quickly and consistently or reflects the needs of employees.

PC status and level of PC breach of participating employees

The PC status is based on the score obtained from the PCI results, ranging from 1 (complete breach) to 7 (no breach). Despite the rather low participation of employees (see Table 5), the results of the survey indicate a partial PC violation. While 38 employees started the survey, only 25 answered all the questions. They are mostly between 26 and 35 years old and have a university degree. Table 5 shows the partial breaches of the PC.

Table V: PCI scores and number of employees involved

PCI score Between 1 (full breach) and 7 (no breach)	Number of employees
6	2
5	9
4	15
3	1

Source : Pelletier, C. (2019). L'influence des styles et pratiques de gestion sur le contrat psychologique d'employés d'établissements de santé faisant face à une fusion. Doctoral thesis. Université de Sherbrooke. Sherbrooke. 1-405.

While 15 employees have a partial PC breach, none have a complete PC breach or an intact PC in 2017 (Table 5). They are mostly between the two extremes, meaning that despite communication management practices, their PC could not be fully preserved. It should be noted that we did not use the PCI during the first phase in 2013. In this regard, the managers' observations about the state of the PC are accurate, as they mention changes in emotional state, attitudes, and behaviors.

5. Discussion

The study conducted has led to several conclusions. First, there is a significant difference in the number of communication practices and the number of manifestations patterns observed in 2013 compared to 2017. This disparity suggests a stabilizing effect in 2017 due to the increase and variety of specific practices. Secondly, although not representative of all employees, the online survey results reveal a partial breach of the psychological contract. These results indicated a clear variation among the participating managers,

namely in the significant difference in the variation of the quantity of general communication practices mentioned. It is therefore difficult to distinguish which communication practices in particular had a stabilizing effect. However, the range of practices and their adaptation certainly helped. Through their stabilizing effect, managerial communication practices most probably contributed reducing the number of individual reactions in the context of organizational transformation. Examples include organizational cynicism and managers' efforts to communicate new information quickly, or the reaction of fear when institutions faced budget cuts. Similarly, managers in the process of active organizational transformation indicated that they wanted to maintain practices adapted to the needs of the teams, and this attentiveness is undoubtedly an important element. While the practices were more general in 2013, there was a shift to more specific practices in 2017.

Despite these adaptations, a noticeable increase in the number of breaches was observed. In terms of emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral reactions, managers observed manifestations of PC violations in the early phases of the organizational transformation. Some of these reactions intensify or began during the active phase of the transformation. As a result, one may wonder whether communication practices were adapted too late and the use of certain common direct practices was reduced too much. It is therefore possible to question whether these adjustments in managers' communication practices were proactive or reactive in nature: did managers adjust their practices before or after changes in the state of employees' PCs in order to reduce the number of PC breaches that occurred?

Nonbetheless the gap between the number of manifestations and the number of general practices shrinks, the growing number of manifestations of breaches underscores the importance of these communication practices for employees. Their stabilizing effect also demonstrates their value. As for the manifestations, their significance have human and financial costs for organizations and can negatively affect the attractiveness, work climate, performance, and engagement. Despite organizational change, day-to-day work is still important to employees and need to be the subject of communication to ensure that things continue to run smoothly. Moreover, according to their comments, managers are time-constrained and some see different needs in their teams when an organizational change is actively underway (2017). This may explain the choice of fast, immediate management communication practices, as communication methods have evolved since

2013. These findings are a reality that organizations must be able to address in order to allow managers to adapt their practices while meeting the needs of their teams; impacting positively the acceptance and adaptation. Many organizational changes and disruptions can impact managers and employees, therefore it may be important to plan for the resources needed to adapt and maintain the necessary communication practices with employees. It is important to set aside time and have the necessary tools to talk about the day-to-day and associated disruptions to mitigate their impact on employees' PCs.

Additionally, the communication practices appear to impact the object of employees' cynicism, as they went from seeing the project as something abstract, distant, and unlikely to seeing it as something imminent. In fact, several employee reactions may be of concern to managers: "sadness, fatigue, and burnout, as well as detachment and lack of empathy" and "stress, anxiety, and distress" are terms used by managers to describe the emotional states they perceived in their employees. These reactions can be caused by a variety of situations. Several types of organizational disruptions, as described in the situation under study, may have triggered them. Conversely, several types of managerial communication practices may positively influence employee reactions. In light of the current labor shortage and the major disruptions facing organizations, managers should pay special attention to their employees. Organizations need to consider realities such as time constraints when planning for or responding to disruptions.

6. Conclusion

Several observations highlight in this article warrant consideration in the context of organizational disruptions associated with health care network restructuring. The manifestations of partial disruption observed by managers in response to the active phase of organizational change are not without consequences for a workplace and allow managers to see the full impact of this type of disruption on employees. Stress, anxiety, distress, and cynicism are all reactions that come at a cost and reflect the state of the PC. In the long run, manifestations can have an impact on the retention or attractiveness of a work environment. It also affects the adaptability of teams and their attitudes toward change. In the context of organizational consolidation, managerial communication practices are clearly important in protecting the PC during organizational change. In the research conducted, communication practices were found to have changed from the time

the organizational transformation was announced to the time it was implemented. The study conducted does not predict the state of employee PC if management practices had not changed or if some practices had not been maintained. However, the study shows their stabilizing effect. Despite the protective effect of adapting general and specific communication practices during the consolidation, partial PC breaches occurred, leading to behaviors such as withdrawal and disengagement. It is therefore essential for managers to be aware of the importance of their managerial communication practices before and during a transformation if they want to mobilize and engage their employees.

Innovative direct and indirect communication practices seem to be preferable, but traditional direct and team communication also seem to be useful. Further studies on managerial communication practices in times of organizational change will be able to confirm the impact of each of these practices more specifically. In the meantime, this study has identified managerial communication practices, confirmed the impact of organizational disruptions on employees' emotional and behavioral state, and identified the protective effect of adapting these practices to employees' needs.

Since the consolidation of the CHUM facilities was postponed several times, the anticipation of change was spread out over time. This context may have destabilizes the employees'PC and exacerbated manifestations, despite evolving communication practices. It is also important to identify the specific context in which the study was conducted. First, during the study, Bill 10 came into effect and, even though they did not work in a CISSS (Integrated Health and Social Services Centre) or CIUSSS (Integrated University Health and Social Services Centre), both the employees and the institution involved in the study perceived this as a disruption of health care and services. In addition, as an institution that depends on public investment, the HSSN faces budgetary constraints in the midst of this organizational consolidation. These contextual details are important because they directly affect the context of employability in the different care settings and can explain certain communication practices, such as those used to communicate financial matters. In addition, the situation affects not only inter-institutional procedures, but also the planning required to transfer certain CHUM operations in preparation for their consolidation. It should be noted that the context and nature of the consolidation make the results of this study transferable, but not necessarily representative of all organizational changes. As these results are transferable, the study categorized the reactions and practices observed and identified by the managers themselves. Thus,

leading a ground base to understand several managers communication practices as well as several reactions during organizational changes.

Several writings address human resources management under leadership and style practices. None offers a structured variation of management practices. The research here takes a step in this direction, while setting the stage for a better understanding of the impacts of practices. The study allows for further research on PC and management practices. Given that it provides an operational framework for two practices and indications of their impact, it allows for future research to quantify these practices in order to continue the work empirically. In the post-pandemic context, characterized by labor shortages and the need for organizational reinvention, reevaluation of work structures and task allocation mechanisms, this study provides valuable insights. By considering employees' PC, it not only mitigates the risks of attitudinal and behavioral shifts, but also assists organizations in their efforts to attract, retain and mobilize employees towards achieving their goals. Whether it is teleworking, reviewing tools or adapting the production of care and services, employee buy-in requires a PC in good summer and management practices can influence the state.

The study gives practical and theoretical anchoring to managers, given the facts that they can plan their practices based on observed behaviors and practice categories revealed. Finally, the study has identified several significant communication practices that other research studies will be able to measure and quantify in order to discern their specific effects.

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