Full-Time versus Part-Time Employees: Understanding the Links between Work Status, the Psychological Contract, and Attitudes

Neil Conway and Rob B. Briner

Department of Organizational Psychology, Birkbeck College, University of London, London, United Kingdom

Research findings comparing the work attitudes of full-time and part-time employees have been inconsistent and inconclusive. Furthermore, empirical studies have tended to be atheoretical, and there are few convincing psychological explanations to explain differences where found. This article tests the psychological contract as an explanatory framework for attitudinal differences across work status (i.e., whether employed on a part-time or full-time basis). The model is tested across samples from two different organizations using structural equation modeling. The analysis reveals that part-time and full-time employees differed on a number of attitudes and that psychological contract fulfillment could be used to explain differences in certain attitudes (e.g., satisfaction) but not others (e.g., affective commitment). Analyses also show that the relationships between psychological contract fulfillment and outcomes were rarely moderated by work status, suggesting that part-time employees will respond in a similar way as full-time employees to adjustments in their psychological contract.

Key Words: part-time work; psychological contract.

In the United States, part-time employees constitute 20% of the workforce and numbered more than 22 million employees in 2001 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001), where the proportion has nearly doubled during the past 40 years (Feldman, 1995). Organizations have turned to part-time employees to provide greater scheduling flexibility, meet market demands more efficiently, and reduce wage and benefit costs. Furthermore, part-time employees represent a major proportion of the workforce for entire industries, such as service and retail, and part-time work is dominated by certain groups, such as women and younger and older workers (Feldman, 1990).

While the part-time workforce is clearly important in terms of its size and its utility, organizational researchers have lagged behind in their understanding...
of part-time employment and our understanding of the psychological experience of part-time work remains limited. In this article, we propose the psychological contract as a framework that may be useful in explaining attitude differences found across work status, and we empirically test this across samples drawn from two different organizations. More specifically, this article identifies a number of reasons why part-time employees may differ from full-time employees in terms of psychological contract fulfillment and proposes that this, in turn, can be used to explain any differences in attitudes and behaviors found across work status. In addition, through testing work status as a moderator of relationships between psychological contract fulfillment and outcomes, this article examines whether the psychological contract is of equal utility in explaining attitudes for part-time and full-time employees. In so doing, the article addresses the major limitations of previous research on this subject, which has had limited success in providing adequate theoretical explanations to account for any differences found across work status.

There are relatively few empirical studies of part-time employment. Part-time workers are acknowledged to differ demographically from full-time employees, but the extent to which work attitudes differ is less clear. The dominant approach taken by researchers trying to understand part-time employment is to assess differences in attitudes and behaviors between part-time and full-time employees (Barling & Gallagher, 1996). Whether job satisfaction differs across work status, for example, has been an unresolved issue from the earliest studies (e.g., Hall & Gordon, 1973; Logan, O’Reilly, & Roberts, 1973) to the more recent ones (Fenton-O’Creevy, 1995; Krausz, 2000; Morrow, McElroy, & Elliott, 1994; Sinclair, Martin, & Michel, 1999). Existing research has focused largely on the relationship between work status and job satisfaction and commitment, although some studies have considered other relationships such as work status and organizational climate (e.g., McGinnis & Morrow, 1990), job involvement (e.g., Wetzel, Soloshy, & Gallagher, 1990), and work characteristics (e.g., Eberhardt & Shani, 1984).

Studies comparing job satisfaction across part-time and full-time employees show contradictory findings (Barling & Gallagher, 1996; Jackofsky & Peters, 1987; McGinnis & Morrow, 1990; Wetzel et al., 1990). Part-time employees have been found to be more satisfied (Eberhardt & Shani, 1984; Fenton O’Creevy, 1995; Fields & Thacker, 1991; Jackofsky & Peters, 1987; Roberts, Glick, & Rothchildford, 1982; Sinclair et al., 1999; Wotruba, 1990), less satisfied (Hall & Gordon, 1973; Miller & Terborg, 1979), and equally satisfied with their jobs as compared to full-time employees (Krausz, 2000; Logan et al., 1973; Steffy & Jones, 1990; Vecchio, 1984).

Similarly, inconsistent findings have emerged from comparisons between the commitment levels of part-time and full-time employees. Studies have found part-time workers to be more committed (Martin & Peterson, 1987; Sinclair et al., 1999; Wetzel et al., 1990), less committed (Lee & Johnson, 1991; Martin & Hafer, 1995; Morrow et al., 1994), and equally committed to their jobs as compared to full-time workers (Krausz, 2000; McGinnis & Morrow, 1990; Still, 1983).
A major criticism of many previous studies is that they have been atheoretical in design and have sought to document simple empirical differences between the two groups (Barling & Gallagher, 1996; Lee & Johnson, 1991). There has been little effort to explain differences between the two groups or to place the research within a theoretical framework (Jackofsky & Peters, 1987; Lee & Johnson, 1991; Morrow et al., 1994), with the notable exception of some recent studies (Krausz, 2000; Sinclair et al., 1999). When researchers have attempted to explain differences across work status, they have most commonly, although not widely, used the theories of partial inclusion and frame of reference. The theories have received very limited attention and have been applied post hoc in an attempt to rationalize findings (Barling & Gallagher, 1996).

Part-time employees are argued as being partially included through spending less time in the workplace and being more involved in extra-organizational roles as compared to full-timers (Katz & Kahn, 1979). For frame of reference theory, part-time employees are believed to have a different frame of reference from that of full-timers (Feldman, 1990; Miller & Terborg, 1979) in that the comparison group and the aspect of the work environment they select in order to evaluate their jobs will differ from those of full-timers. For example, it has been argued that part-time employees will place more importance on working hour flexibility than will full-time employees (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995).

Each of these theories has been used in somewhat contradictory ways to explain differences across work status. For instance, feeling less included in the workplace has been used to explain both higher (Eberhardt & Shani, 1984) and lower (Miller & Terborg, 1979) levels of job satisfaction. It is perhaps because frames of reference and partial inclusion theory can be manipulated to explain any empirical finding that they have been used to post-rationalize findings (Barling & Gallagher, 1996). Neither of the theories has ever been tested empirically, and because the theories are so poorly elaborated, it is not clear how either may be operationalized. In short, these atheoretical studies have contributed little to understanding the experience of part-time work.

Using the Psychological Contract to Explain Differences Found across Work Status

This study used the psychological contract as a framework for understanding different attitudes across work status. The psychological contract has been defined as “an individual’s beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organizations” (Rousseau, 1995, p. 9). The “beliefs” refer to employee perceptions of the explicit and implicit promises (Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994) regarding the exchange of employee contributions (e.g., effort, ability, loyalty) for organizational inducements (e.g., pay, promotion, security).

Previous research has viewed the psychological contract as an explanatory framework for the employment relationship (e.g., Shore & Tetrnick, 1994), and it is seen by some researchers as central to understanding employee attitudes and
behavior (e.g., Rousseau, 1989; Schein, 1980). It has been used in a number of ways to better understand the employment relationship (e.g., by considering its contents and how the psychological contract is negotiated), but the key construct within psychological contract theory in terms of its relationship with outcomes is psychological contract fulfillment/breach. Psychological contract fulfillment has been found to associate positively with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) and performance and to associate negatively with the intention to quit (Guzzo, Noonan, & Elron, 1994; Robinson, 1996; Robinson & Morrison, 1995, 2000; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Turnley & Feldman, 1999, 2000). As such, the psychological contract seems like a very plausible approach to understanding attitudes and behaviors across different types of employment contracts and has recently been found to be of use in the understanding of contingent workers (Van Dyne & Ang, 1999).

There are a number of reasons for supposing that part-time employees may have a different psychological contract from that of full-time employees. There could be differences across work status in terms of psychological contract content (i.e., promises made); however, this research considered the extent to which psychological contract fulfillment (i.e., promises kept) differs across work status. Some possible reasons have been organized under four broad areas: reasons at the organizational level, reasons at the individual level, reasons at the interpersonal level, and reasons connected with the reduced time spent in the workplace.

At the *organizational level*, part-timers have been found to be treated differently by the organization in terms of work performed, benefit coverage, task variety, autonomy, and opportunities for advancement (Dubinsky & Skinner, 1984; Feldman, 1995; Levanoni & Sales, 1990). For example, there is considerable evidence that part-time employees are not as likely to receive similar promotion and training opportunities within the same organization (e.g., Belous, 1989; Tilly, 1992; Zeytinoglu, 1990). Organizations may also expect different contributions from part-timers as a consequence of the organizations’ own motives for hiring part-timers, such as to help during the busiest periods (McGregor & Sproull, 1992). Organizations’ expectations that part-time employees can perform fairly repetitive tasks at the busiest times of the working day may result in part-time employees perceiving their contributions to be different from those of full-time employees in terms of, for example, effort and flexibility. If part-time employees perceive themselves to be treated differently from full-time employees in terms of the inducements they receive and the contributions they give, then this is likely to affect how they perceive their psychological contract.

At the *individual level*, Feldman (1995) stated that part-time employees have different career orientations, so they make a knowing trade-off of types of compensation, such as promotion, for the chance to work reduced hours, to have greater flexibility, and to ensure that work fits well with out-of-work commitments (Feldman & Doerpinghaus, 1992). More generally, a number of researchers have speculated that full-time employees have higher expectations than part-time employees about what they should get from the organization (Logan et al., 1973;
Steffy & Jones, 1990; Wotruba, 1990). At the interpersonal level, part-timers may be treated differently and subject to different assumptions from supervisors and co-workers. Put simply, studies have found that part-timers are managed under “Theory X”-type assumptions and stereotypes (Darden, McKee, & Hampton, 1993; Godfrey, 1980). One would predict that such treatment would, through the mechanism of the psychological contract, be reciprocated through Theory X-type behaviors from employees (Schein, 1980). Furthermore, differential treatment across work status of this kind could also be seen as interactional injustice by part-time employees, a factor seen as leading to perceptions of inequity and breach (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Finally, spending less time in the workplace through working part-time may result in a reduced number of perceived promises and being less clear about the details of promises made. Previous studies have found that part-time employees experience problems of communication with the organization and of continuity in workplace relationships (e.g., Feldman, 1995; Godfrey, 1980; Sidaway & Wareing, 1992). Reduced communication and discontinuity of interaction may affect the communication promises. If employees perceive fewer promises between themselves and the organization, then the likelihood of perceiving a breach is reduced. With regard to the clarity of the promises, ambiguous promises could lead to incongruence relating to the terms of employees’ psychological contract, where incongruence is regarded as a main factor in employees perceiving broken promises and commitments (Lewis-McClear & Taylor, 1997; Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

In summary, there are reasons for supposing that part-time employees may hold a different psychological contract from that of full-time employees in terms of psychological contract fulfillment, and this may explain differences found in attitudes and behaviors across work status. Previous research on part-time work suggests that it is not work status itself that explains attitudes and behaviors; rather, it is how part-time employees perceive themselves to be treated along with individual differences that influence these perceptions. Hence, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1: Psychological contract fulfillment mediates differences in the work attitudes and behaviors of part-time and full-time employees.

Three points are worth noting. First, although the reasons why part-time employees may have a different psychological contract from that of full-time employees are presented as four separate groups, there can clearly be interactions across domains. Second, it is apparent from the above analysis that while some factors lend themselves to part-time employees perceiving that they have a less fulfilled psychological contract than that of full-time employees (e.g., fewer opportunities for promotion), others factors may mean that they perceive their contract in a more favorable light (e.g., having lower expectations). It is difficult, therefore, to state a priori whether part-time employees will have a “worse” or “better” psychological contract. Third, the reasons mentioned in this section not only will affect the extent to which psychological contracts differ across work status but also may result
in work status moderating the strength of the relationships between psychological contract fulfillment and attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. The arguments presented earlier for why spending less time in the organization may reduce the number and clarity of perceived promises point clearly in the direction of part-time employees having a less developed psychological contract with their employers, and hence its effect on work attitudes is expected to be weaker. Werbel (1985) has also argued that the attitude–behavior linkages for part-time employees will be weaker than those for full-time employees because the former are less influenced by events in the workplace and more influenced by events outside of work. The theory of partial inclusion, while limited in explaining baseline attitude differences across work status, may have more utility in explaining why the links between the psychological contract and related attitudes would be weaker for part-time employees than for full-time employees.

Testing work status as a moderator is important because it indicates whether the psychological contract is of equal importance in explaining attitudes and behaviors within each of the part-time and full-time work groups. If the relationship between the psychological contract and related attitudes is found to be weaker for part-time employees, then this implies that the psychological contract will be less of a motivational driver for this group. In this regard, it is argued that work status will moderate the relationships between psychological contract fulfillment and outcomes. More specifically, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Relationships between psychological contract fulfillment and outcomes are weaker for part-time employees than for full-time employees.

This can be seen as an important subsidiary hypothesis to Hypothesis 1 in that the utility of the psychological contract in explaining attitudinal and behavioral differences across work status will be diminished if it is not found to have similar associations with outcomes within each of the part-time and full-time work groups.

We chose outcome variables that provided a link with, and an extension of, existing research on part-time employment. Previous research on the relationship between work status and commitment has found inconsistent findings. This relationship may be clarified by considering more specific dimensions of organizational commitment; the dimensions considered here are Meyer and Allen’s (1991) affective and continuance commitment. Organizational citizenship behavior and affective well-being are included following Barling and Gallagher’s (1996) remarks that greater attention should be paid to the relationship of these variables to work status. Finally, job satisfaction and the intention to quit are included to provide further points of reference with previous research on part-time employment.

To develop a model, outcomes variables were related to one another to reflect previously established relationships. Affective well-being was directly related to job satisfaction (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996); well-being and job satisfaction were linked to affective commitment, although not with continuance commitment (for a review of the evidence, see Allen & Meyer, 1996); and affective commitment was linked to the intention to quit and OCB, whereas continuance commitment was
FIG. 1. Full mediation by the psychological contract between work status and outcomes.

not (Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). A model presenting full mediation between the psychological contract fulfillment and outcomes and the relationships among the outcomes is shown in Fig. 1.

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

Data were collected through a cross-sectional questionnaire survey in two samples from different organizations. The first sample was drawn from an organization in the banking sector and consisted of 1608 employees, with a response rate of 68%. The sample was 71% part-time, was 84% female, and had an average tenure of just over 6 years ($SD = 6.14$). The average number of contracted hours worked for part-time employees was 16 ($SD = 5.85$). The second sample consisted of four stores belonging to a supermarket chain. The sample consisted of 366 employees, with a response rate of 26%. The overall sample was 65% part-time, was 72% female, and had an average tenure of 2.42 years ($SD = 2.66$). The average number of contracted hours worked for part-time employees was 16 ($SD = 6.89$). In both organizations, part-time employees were treated on an equivalent or pro rata basis, as compared to full-time employees, with respect to human resource practices and typically worked alongside and in coordination with their full-time counterparts.

Two samples were chosen to cross-validate findings. Previous empirical studies on part-time work have tended to report findings from single samples. Where differences across work status have been found across studies, there has been some difficulty in knowing whether differences were substantive or due to the method or measures used. To overcome this limitation, samples from two different organizations using exactly the same methods are presented here. This enables a comparison of the results across the samples while being confident that construct measurements are identical.

The difference in the response rate across the two samples is likely to be explained by the differing work contexts. For the bank sample, employees had their own designated working areas, typically desks, which provided a comfortable
setting for completing a questionnaire. Such an environment is very largely absent for supermarket employees.

**Measures**

Unless otherwise stated, the scales in this section were found to have single-factor structures. Anderson and Gerbing’s (1988) recommendation was followed against using single items as indicators of latent factors; instead, composites of the items (i.e., “item parcels”) were used to serve as indicators.

**Kept promises.** In an attempt to improve on the content validity of previous measures of psychological contract fulfillment, which have used either facet-specific or global-item measures of kept promises, we have included two scales to assess the extent to which the organizations had kept their promises. Each scale is used as item parcels, where the average across the parcel is the indicator for the latent construct “kept promises.” The first scale consisted of seven facet-specific items and was similar to measures used previously by Rousseau and Robinson (Robinson, 1995, 1996; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994); it assessed the extent to which the organizations had kept their promises and commitments on different aspects of work (e.g., opportunities for promotion, job security). Participants were provided with a 7-point scale, where anchors ranged from 1 = not at all to 7 = very much, and a further response category separated from the scale, labeled “no promises made,” which was regarded as a nonresponse in later analyses.

The second scale consisted of four global items assessing the extent to which the organizations had kept their promises. Respondents reported how strongly they agreed with each item. This measure was developed specifically for this study. Items were as follows: “In general, this organization has kept its promises to me about what I will get from them,” “Managers in this organization have honored the commitments they have made to me,” “This organization says it will do things for you and then never gets around to doing them” (reverse scored), and “I am often told I will receive things from this organization that in the end never materialize” (reverse scored). Scale anchors ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

For the outcomes, job satisfaction and the intention to quit were treated as nonlatent variables, both being the arithmetic mean of the two items in the questionnaire. The remaining outcome variables were latent variables, with indicators constituting item parcels. Continuance commitment had two indicators, where the indicators were formed by averaging alternate items (in line with Bentler & Wu, 1995), with the first obtained by averaging the first, third, and fifth items from the questionnaire measure and the second obtained by averaging the second, fourth, and sixth items. A similar procedure of aggregating alternate items was followed for affective commitment and OCBs. For affective well-being, the two indicators were formed by averaging the six items from the two measured dimensions: anxiety–comfort and depression–enthusiasm.

**Affective and continuance commitment.** Commitment was assessed using Meyer et al.’s (1993) six-item measures of affective and continuance organizational
commitment. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the statements, where scale anchors ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

**Job satisfaction.** Two items taken from Warr (1987) were used to measure job satisfaction. The items were as follows: “Overall, how satisfied are you with your job?” and “Overall, how satisfied are you with [the organization] as an employer?” The 5-point rating scale ran as follows: 1 = I am not satisfied at all, 2 = I am just about satisfied, 3 = I am quite satisfied, 4 = I am very satisfied, 5 = I am extremely satisfied and couldn’t be more satisfied.

**Organizational citizenship behaviors.** A four-item measure of OCBs was designed specifically for this study because existing scales were unsuitable for the part-time employees within the sample. The global measure was designed to assess willingness to perform citizenship behaviors and consisted of the following items: “I am willing to do that bit extra for this organization, over and above what’s expected of me,” “I am willing to work beyond the formal requirements of my job,” “I am willing to exceed the performance expectations of [my] job,” and “I am not willing to put myself out for this organization” (reverse scored). Scale anchors ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

**Intention to quit.** Two items were used to measure the intention to quit, taken from a measure by Seashore, Lawler, Mirvis, and Cammann (cited in Cook, Hepworth, Wall, & Warr, 1981). The two items were as follows: “I often think about quitting this job” and “I will probably look for a new job in the next year.” Scale anchors ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

**Affective well-being.** This used Warr’s (1990) 12-item measure of affective well-being and asked participants the extent to which they had experienced the feeling described by each adjective during the day. The measure has two dimensions: anxiety–comfort and depression–enthusiasm. High scores reflect positive affect. The 6-point scale ran as follows: 1 = never, 2 = occasionally, 3 = some of the time, 4 = much of the time, 5 = most of the time, 6 = all of the time. Affective well-being was incorporated as a univariate construct, instead of having separate latent variables for anxiety–comfort and depression–enthusiasm, due to the high intercorrelation between the two dimensions. The treatment of this well-being measure as a univariate construct has been used in previous studies (e.g., Daniels & Guppy, 1994).

**Work status.** Work status was indicated by a dichotomous variable, where respondents reported whether they worked on a part-time (coded 2) or full-time basis (coded 1).

**Background/control variables.** Feldman’s (1990) work has drawn attention to the need to control for confounding variables when comparing part-time and full-time employees. The demographic control variables measured were gender (1 = female, 2 = male) and age (1 = under 20 years, 2 = 20–29 years, 3 = 30–39 years, 4 = 40–49 years, 5 = 50–59 years, 6 = 60 years or over). Organizational attachment was measured through length of tenure (measured in years and months) and managerial level (for the bank sample: 1 = nonmanager, 2 = line manager, 3 = middle
manager, 4 = senior manager; for the supermarket sample: 1 = nonmanager, 2 = manager). All employees were hired through the organization (as opposed to through an agency) and worked on a permanent contract.

Analytical Strategy

Hypothesis 1, psychological contract fulfillment as a mediator between work status and outcomes, was analyzed based on Baron and Kenny’s (1986) necessary conditions for mediation, namely that (a) the independent variable must affect the dependent variable; (b) the independent variable must affect the mediator; (c) the mediator must affect the dependent variable; and (d) when both the independent variable and the mediator are included, the direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable should become smaller (indicating partial mediation) or nonsignificant (indicating full mediation). The analysis involves testing a series of structural equation models (SEMs) using the EQS package (Bentler, 1995). SEM path estimates are reported as standardized path coefficients ($\beta$). All analyses controlled for background variables unless stated otherwise.

Hypothesis 2, work status as a moderator, was analyzed using the EQS multisample technique, where the levels of the moderator are treated as different groups (i.e., part-time vs full-time) and the equivalence of the structural relations between psychological contract fulfillment and outcomes is compared across the two groups.

Tables 1 and 2 present the means, standard deviations, Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients, and correlations between variables for the two samples.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: SEM Analyses

Hypothesis 1 was tested using several models. The first model examined whether the independent variable of work status had direct relationships with the dependent variables. A summary of the analyses for both samples is shown in Fig. 2. In the bank sample, those working part-time as compared to full-time reported more positive attitudes in terms of significantly higher ratings of well-being ($\beta = .08, p < .01$) and job satisfaction ($\beta = .15, p < .001$) and lower ratings of the intention to quit ($\beta = -.08, p < .01$), but less positive attitudes in terms of lower ratings of affective commitment ($\beta = -.10, p < .001$), continuance commitment ($\beta = -.16, p < .001$), and willingness to perform OCBs ($\beta = -.11, p < .001$). In the supermarket sample, working part-time was associated with lower rating of the intention to quit ($\beta = -.31, p < .001$), affective commitment ($\beta = -.34, p < .001$), and continuance commitment ($\beta = -.11, p < .05$). While the above results show some inconsistencies across the samples in the relationships between work status and outcomes, the relationships among the outcomes were consistent and as expected.

The second model, presented in Fig. 3, has psychological contract fulfillment (i.e., kept promises) fully mediating the relationships between work status and outcomes. In both samples, the relationship between psychological fulfillment
### Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, Alpha Reliabilities, and Zero-Order Correlations: Bank Sample

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variable</th>
<th>PT mean</th>
<th>PT SD</th>
<th>PT mean</th>
<th>PT SD</th>
<th>FT mean</th>
<th>FT SD</th>
<th>FT mean</th>
<th>FT SD</th>
<th>Total mean</th>
<th>Total SD</th>
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<td>1.29</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>−.24</td>
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<td>.29</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.36</td>
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<td>6. Kept promises: Global</td>
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<td>4.20</td>
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*Note. N = 1561 for variables measured in questionnaire. PT = part-time; FT = full-time; F = female; M = male; OCBs = organizational citizenship behaviors. For correlations > .05, p < .05; for correlations > .07, p < .01; for correlations > .08, p < .001. Figures in parentheses represent alpha reliability coefficients.*
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</table>

Note. PT = part-time; FT = full-time; F = female; M = male; OCBs = organizational citizenship behaviors. N = 357 for all variables. For correlations >.10, p < .05; for correlations >.13, p < .01; for correlations >.17, p < .001. Figures in parentheses represent alpha reliability coefficients.
contract and outcomes was as expected for job satisfaction, well-being, and the intention to quit. However, the findings were not in line with expectations for the remaining outcomes, with kept promises having a nonsignificant relationship with affective commitment and a negative relationship with continuance commitment and OCBs. Indirect effects appear to explain the seemingly contrary relationships between the psychological contract and affective commitment and OCBs. We ran the decomposition of effects procedure in EQS, where the total effects of an independent variable on a dependent variable are broken down into its direct and indirect effects, which showed that the total effects of kept promises on affective

FIG. 2. SEMs for the direct effect of work status on outcomes for bank and supermarket samples. A, bank sample; B, supermarket sample. Ovals represent latent variables; rectangles represent measured variables. Unidirectional arrows denote direction of influence. Standardized parameter estimates are presented (all statistically significant unless otherwise stated [i.e., ns representing nonsignificant]). For the bank sample, $\chi^2 (60, N = 1554) = 520.07, p < .001, GFI = .95, IFI = .95, CFI = .95$; for the supermarket sample, $\chi^2 (51, N = 356) = 208.23, p < .001, GFI = .92, IFI = .91, CFI = .91$. The control variables of tenure, managerial level, and age were included in the analysis but have been omitted from the diagram for ease of presentation.
FIG. 3. SEMs for psychological contract fulfillment as a full mediator between work status and outcomes for bank and supermarket samples. A, bank sample; B, supermarket sample; FT, full-time; PT, part-time. Ovals represent latent variables; rectangles represent measured variables. Unidirectional arrows denote direction of influence. Standardized parameter estimates are presented (all statistically significant unless otherwise stated [i.e., ns representing nonsignificant]). For the bank sample, \( \chi^2(84, N = 1554) = 641.03, p < .001, GFI = .95, IFI = .95, CFI = .95 \); for the supermarket sample, \( \chi^2(75, N = 356) = 305.21, p < .001, GFI = .89, IFI = .89, CFI = .89 \). The control variables of tenure, managerial level, and age were included in the analysis but have been omitted from the diagram for ease of presentation.

commitment consist nearly entirely of indirect effects through well-being and job satisfaction (i.e., these variables fully mediate the relationship between the psychological contract and affective commitment). For OCBs, the positive indirect effects may reflect mediation through positive affect, while the negative direct effects represent a calculative approach toward performing OCBs, wherein those who report performing high levels of citizenship behaviors do not believe they are being justly rewarded for their efforts and hence report a “poorer” psychological contract. Finally, the negative relationship between kept promises and continuance
commitment may reflect employees who have a good psychological contract wanting to stay with the organization rather than feeling “locked in” or that they have to stay.

For the bank sample, working part-time had a positive association with kept promises (i.e., part-time employees were more likely to report that the organization kept their promises), but no association was found in the supermarket sample. Hence, for the second sample, psychological contract fulfillment cannot possibly mediate between work status and any of the outcomes.

Before proceeding to the final stage of testing for mediation, note that because of one or more violations of the necessary conditions for mediation, psychological contract fulfillment cannot possibly mediate for the outcomes of affective commitment in the bank sample or any of the outcomes in the supermarket sample. The final test for mediation involves modeling the direct and indirect effects of work status simultaneously. In other words, this model included both the direct and mediated paths from the previous models.

For the bank sample, kept promises fully mediated the relationship between work status and well-being, job satisfaction, and the intention to quit and partially mediated for continuance commitment and OCBs; Fig. 4 summarizes the results. The extent of mediation, in terms of the percentage reduction in the direct effect of work status on the dependent variable on entering psychological contract fulfillment, ranges from 87% for job satisfaction to 15% for OCBs. Thus, this sample provides reasonable support for Hypothesis 1. In other words, for this sample, differences between part-time and full-time employees on well-being, job satisfaction, and the intention to quit are fully due to differences in the extent to which psychological contracts are fulfilled. The differences found on continuance commitment and OCBs between part-time and full-time employees are partially explained by different psychological contracts across work status.

For the supermarket sample, tests for mediation are inappropriate, as discussed above; however, a model including direct paths between work status and outcomes and between psychological contract fulfillment and outcomes was modeled to gain an understanding of the effects of work status in the full theoretical framework. The effects of working part-time were very similar to those in the first model, with significant negative relationships with affective and continuance commitment ($\beta = -.34, p < .001$, and $\beta = -.11, p < .05$, respectively) and the intention to quit ($\beta = -.26, p < .001$). If work status was found to be unrelated to outcomes, then this would not disconfirm Hypothesis 1. However, work status was unrelated to psychological contract fulfillment, yet part-time employees differed from full-time employees for four out of the six outcomes, showing for the supermarket sample that psychological contract fulfillment had no role in explaining different attitudes and behaviors between part-time and full-time employees. Thus, the second sample provides fairly strong evidence against Hypothesis 1.

The global fit statistics for these final models both were good (for the bank sample, $\chi^2 = 571.25, df = 79, p < .001, GFI = .96, IFI = .95, CFI = .95$; for the supermarket sample, $\chi^2 = 230.34, df = 69, p < .001, GFI = .92, IFI = .92, CFI = .92$).
FIG. 4. Final full and partial mediation model for the bank sample. FT, full-time; PT, part-time. Ovals represent latent variables; rectangles represent measured variables. Unidirectional arrows denote direction of influence. Standardized parameter estimates are presented (all paths statistically significant, \( p < .05 \)). \( \chi^2 (84, N = 1554) = 641.03, p < .001 \), GFI = .95, IFI = .95, CFI = .95. The control variables of tenure, managerial level, and age were included in the analysis but have been omitted from the diagram for ease of presentation. A figure is not produced for the supermarket sample due to the violation of conditions for mediation (i.e., work status unrelated to the psychological contract).

and were an improvement over those for earlier models, implying greater adequacy of these models in terms of fitting the data.

Hypothesis 2: SEM Analyses

Turning now to Hypothesis 2, testing for moderation in EQS is achieved by performing a multisample analysis, where the levels of the moderator are treated as different groups (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Bentler, 1995; Ullman, 1996). The parameters (e.g., factor loadings, factor covariances, structural regression coefficients) of a given model are hypothesized to be equal across the groups, and the plausibility of each of the imposed constraints can be statistically evaluated.
using a Lagrange multiplier (LM) $\chi^2$ statistic. In the current case, the framework presented in Fig. 1, less the links between work status and psychological contract fulfillment, was estimated within the part-time and full-time subgroups. If any of the equality constraints are not statistically supported (i.e., the LM test is significant), then the constraint is relaxed and the path is estimated freely within each of the part-time and full-time employee subgroups. A significant LM test for an equality constraint indicates that the parameter is unequal across the part-time and full-time subgroups and that there is an interaction between population membership (whether part-time or full-time) and the structural path. Constraints were imposed in a sequence beginning with factor loadings, then factor variance and covariances, and then structural regression coefficients (for a fuller discussion, see Ullman, 1999). Only results relating to the structural regression coefficients are reported.

For the bank sample, the LM test results showed that one of the cross-structural model constraints was significant at the 5% level, and that was the path between psychological contract fulfillment and affective well-being; as a result, this constraint was released. Reestimated, the standardized path coefficient between the psychological contract and well-being was .58 ($p < .001$) for part-time employees and .70 ($p < .001$) for full-time employees. In other words, work status moderated the strength of the relationship between psychological contract fulfillment and well-being. This particular result suggests that changes in the psychological contract will have a somewhat greater effect on affective well-being for full-time than on part-time employees. For the supermarket sample, because disaggregation of the total sample adversely affected the ratio of free parameters to participants, the control variables were omitted from this analysis. Work status moderated the relationship between psychological contract fulfillment and job satisfaction (for part-time employees: $\beta = .52$, $p < .001$; for full-time employees: $\beta = .64$, $p < .001$).

In summary, it was generally found that the strength of the associations between psychological contract fulfillment and attitudinal and behavioral outcomes was very similar across part-time and full-time employees.

**DISCUSSION**

The main aims of this study were to advance understanding of part-time work by proposing the psychological contract as a theoretical framework to explain differences across work status on a wide range of outcome attitudes and behaviors and to assess work status as a moderator of the relationships between the psychological contract and outcomes. Three of the theorized outcomes—well-being, OCBs, and continuance commitment—have not been researched previously in relation to part-time work.

Part-time employees were found to have a number of different “outcome” attitudes and reported different behaviors from full-time employees. There appears to be some consistency across the two samples, with part-time employees having equivalent or higher ratings of positive affect and job satisfaction and reporting equivalent or lower organizational commitment and willingness to perform OCBs.
There was mixed support for the utility of the psychological contract. For the bank sample, psychological contract fulfillment was found to fully mediate the relationship between work status and job satisfaction and the intention to quit and to partially mediate the relationship between work status and continuance commitment and OCBs. However, in the supermarket sample, work status was unrelated to psychological contract fulfillment but was associated with a number of outcomes, thus undermining its utility as an explanatory framework. The results indicate that it is likely we can conclude that where part-time employees are found to differ from full-time employees in terms of psychological contract fulfillment, this is likely to result in, or increase already existing, differences in attitudes and behaviors for certain outcomes. Conversely, if organizations ensure that the psychological contracts of part-time and full-time employees are equally well fulfilled, then this is likely to reduce any differences across work status on certain attitudes and behaviors, in particular for affect-related evaluations (e.g., job satisfaction, well-being) and, to a lesser extent, for behavior-related variables (e.g., organizational commitment, OCBs). The results may imply that while the psychological contract is a useful tool for explaining affect-related attitudes, other theories are required to explain work status differences on organizational commitment and behavior.

On the basis of these results, the endorsement of the psychological contract as an explanatory framework for the employment relationship (Beard & Edwards, 1995; Shore & Tetrick, 1994) is justified to some extent but requires further examination. The current research represents a more rigorous examination of the psychological contract as compared to most previous research, which has largely considered the relationship between the psychological contract and outcomes and not with antecedents, whereas here the psychological contract is tested as a mediating variable between work status and outcomes.

While this study points out the need to cross-validate research findings, it also raises questions about what may explain the inconsistent results across samples. One possibility is contextual explanations due to local organization factors. For the bank sample, the greater utility of the psychological contract in explaining different attitudes and behaviors across work status may be due to recent changes that occurred within the organization. The organization had significantly increased its numbers of part-time workers during recent years along with the introduction of flatter management structures. Such initiatives are believed to trigger a reassessment of employees’ psychological contracts (Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993). These changes may have disproportionately affected full-time employees, as reactions to violated psychological contracts formed over a longer duration are believed to be greater than those formed over a shorter duration (Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993). Furthermore, the introduction of large numbers of part-time employees may have triggered social comparisons between the two groups, which are regarded as a key factor in the reassessment of employees’ psychological contract. One such reassessment might be that of full-time, long-tenured employees feeling that their commitment to the organization over the years has not been rewarded and thus feeling that their reward-for-loyalty psychological contract has
not been honored, resulting in lower job satisfaction. Furthermore, in a study of contingent workers, Pearce (1993) found that the mere presence of contingent employees could reduce the core employees’ trust in the organization. The use of two samples in the current study has demonstrated how sensitive findings relating to part-time work are to organizational context.

Previous theory would suggest that the experiences of part-time employees in organizations, because they are believed to be less included in the workplace as compared to full-time employees, would have a reduced effect on work-related attitudes (Katz & Kahn, 1979; Morrow et al., 1994). In addition, work-related attitudes would be influenced to a greater extent by events that take place outside of work (Werbel, 1985). In the current study, there was very little evidence for the role of work status as a moderator of the relationship between psychological contract fulfillment and outcomes. This is a potentially very important result because it implies that the predictions that accompany psychological contract theory will apply equally across work status. From a practical perspective, it means that part-time employees will respond in exactly the same manner to rewards and punishments as will full-time employees and that the “levers” and motivational drivers assumed to apply to full-time employees’ psychological contract will work just as effectively for part-time employees.

Interpretation of the results is limited by the cross-sectional design, which means that causal inference statements about outcomes can be derived only from theory rather than from empirical analysis. Further research is required to examine whether or not changes in employment status result in changes in the psychological contract and attitudes or vice versa. A second issue is the common method used to measure the variables. However, concerns about common method variance are somewhat mitigated for the relationship between work status and other variables due to the descriptive nature of work status. Furthermore, issues of common method variance are not a plausible threat to the tests for interactions. In fact, previous research has found common method effects to attenuate the effects of interaction (Barling, Rogers & Kelloway, 1995). Third, while the response rate for the bank sample was very good (68%), the rate for the supermarket sample was rather low (26%). It was not particularly low, however, relative to other studies that have compared part-time and full-time employees (cf. Martin & Peterson, 1987; Morrow et al., 1994; Wotruba, 1990). Furthermore, similar patterns of relationships were observed between psychological contract fulfillment and outcomes across the samples, providing some assurance against an atypical sample. Nevertheless, such a response rate means that the sample is less likely to be representative of the population and that the results should thus be treated with some caution. Finally, no attempts were made to systematically collect contextual or qualitative data that may have explained differences found across the samples. Discrepant findings across the studies may be explained by the influence of recent organizational history and context (Johns, 2001), and if the surveys had been used in conjunction with a more qualitative method such as in-depth interviews, then this may have provided insight into such contextual information.
One future area of research to build on this study would be to consider factors that mediate between work status and the state of the psychological contract. As a starting point, a number of reasons why employees’ work status may affect their psychological contract were put forward at the start of this article, providing an agenda for future research in this area. Second, future research should explore how the psychological contract could be used in other ways to better understand work status differences. One possibility is that the contents of the psychological contract may differ across part-time and full-time employees. For example, Herriot and Pemberton (1995) proposed that a “lifestyle” psychological contract would be suitable for certain part-time workers, referring to flexible employment that accommodates employees’ other commitments. Third, while this article has focused on quantitative differences across work status, qualitative differences could also be explored. It may be that part-time employees place more emphasis on the balance of commitments between work and nonwork rather than on the assumption made for full-time employees that it is whether commitments are kept or not that matters most. Fourth, future research should consider different groups within the part-time workforce, such as Feldman’s (1990) categories (e.g., temporary vs permanent) and more recent research that has looked at work schedule preference (Krausz, 2000; Lee & Johnson, 1991), to investigate whether subgroup differences in job attitudes can be explained by the psychological contract. For instance, Lee and Johnson (1991) proposed that employees working their preferred schedules achieve a better balance between contributions and inducements. Finally, while the psychological contract was found to be of some use in explaining differences in attitudes across work status, it is clear that part-time and full-time employees can have different work attitudes regardless of the state of their psychological contracts. Future research should expand on the narrow range of theories that are currently applied to understand work attitude differences across work status. Particularly welcome, and building on the current research, would be theories that may explain organizational commitment and behavioral differences across work status. One such approach may be social identity theory. For instance, the extent to which part-time employees invest in nonwork roles considered more salient to their social identity (Lobel, 1991), such as caring and study commitments, might result in lower levels of work commitment and might influence work behavior. For example, absenteeism is seen as essentially a problem of time allocation between work and nonwork spheres, where individuals’ rates of absence are critically affected by the strength of their nonwork motives (Fichman, 1989).

REFERENCES


Received June 18, 2001