RESEARCH ARTICLE

EMR European Management Review
The Journal of the European Academy of Management

Violated contracts, inadequate career support, but still forgiveness: Key organizational factors that determine championing behaviors

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Abstract

To establish how and when psychological contract violations steer employees away from championing behaviors, this study addresses the mediating role of beliefs about inadequate career support and the moderating role of forgiveness climates, as perceived by employees. Survey data from 208 employees of a retail organization, along with a simultaneous estimation of mediation and moderation effects (Process macro), reveal that a sense of organizational betrayal undermines efforts to mobilize support for innovative ideas, because employees critique employers for offering limited career support. Perceptions of an organizational climate that forgives mistakes mitigate this harmful process. For championing research, this study unpacks an unexplored link between psychological contract violations and championing efforts, influenced by career-related adversity and organizational forgiveness. For practitioners, it pinpoints the danger that employees who feel betrayed might inadvertently make things more difficult, because they react with work-related complacency. Organizations should create benevolent internal environments to diminish this danger.

KEYWORDS
career support, championing behavior, conservation of resources theory, forgiveness climate, psychological contract violation

INTRODUCTION

Extant management scholarship acknowledges how important it is for organizations that their employees generate novel ideas to address organizational problem situations and improve the status quo (Alikay et al., 2021; Cirella, 2021; De Clercq & Pereira, 2020), but the mere development of innovative ideas does not lead automatically to beneficial outcomes, especially if other members of the company remain unaware of the merits of these ideas, so they lack any insight or motivation to help implement them (Islam et al., 2020; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). A crucial consideration in this regard is the extent to which employees actively promote their innovative ideas, as manifest in their *championing* efforts (Fugate & Soenen, 2018; Islam et al., 2020). Championing behaviors promise great benefits: They can boost the organization's innovative capabilities (Lempiälä et al., 2018; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017; Walter

et al., 2011) and also generate advantages for employees, whose efforts might enhance their network centrality (Wichmann et al., 2015) or job performance (Haq et al., 2020).

Favorable work conditions can increase the likelihood that employees mobilize support for their innovative ideas, such as active encouragement by their work team (Faupel, 2020), transformational leaders (Islam et al., 2021), organizational commitment (Wichmann et al., 2015), or a sense of control over their jobs (De Clercq et al., 2021). But in this study, we explicitly acknowledge that *unfavorable* or resource-draining work conditions might inhibit this likelihood. Idea champions often must overcome challenges, such as resistance from other organizational members who prefer the status quo or regard the proposed change suspiciously (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017; Yuan & Woodman, 2010). A relentless champion of an intrusive change that highlights a flaw in the existing system even might seem like a threat

to other employees who have created or accepted that flaw in the past (Hon et al., 2014; Islam et al., 2020). In light of these challenges, some studies suggest that employees might be *less* likely to engage in idea championing if they operate in rigid organizational structures (Lempiälä et al., 2018), experience organizational changes as threats (Fugate & Soenen, 2018), or are exposed to workplace incivility (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2021).

We complement this research strand by investigating a hitherto unexplored barrier to championing behavior: employees' perceptions of psychological contract violations or the extent to which they feel betrayed by an employer that has not kept previously made promises (Deng et al., 2018; Özçelik & Uyargil, 2019; Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Previous research has established the adverse effects of broken organizational promises on the quality of employees' professional functioning (Azeem et al., 2020; Cullinane & Dundon, 2006), including negative links between employees' sense of organizational betrayal and their discretionary work activities, such as efforts to meet organization-set performance targets (De Clercq et al., 2021) or displays of organizational citizenship behavior (Suazo & Stone-Romero, 2011), but we know of no investigations of the potentially harmful consequences for idea championing, which is striking, because this oversight prevents a detailed understanding of a possible counterproductive process by which unmet expectations escalate into work-related complacency among employees who never push their novel ideas toward implementation (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017).

As our specific research objectives, we seek to detail *why* and *when* employees' experience of psychological contract violation may lead to diminished idea championing. First, to pinpoint the reasons for such a conversion, we postulate a process by which employees form beliefs that they are receiving inadequate support for their careers (Cao et al., 2014; De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2021). Extant research, based in social exchange theory, predicts that employees respond favorably to psychological contract fulfillment (Birch et al., 2016; Ghulam et al., 2018); a parallel research stream, based in conservation of resources (COR) theory, predicts less favorable responses to *violations* of psychological contracts (Deng et al., 2018; Priesemuth & Taylor, 2016). Consistent with this latter view, a sense of organizational betrayal may prevent dedicated championing efforts, because employees develop a self-protective belief that their organization is hampering their career goals (Bowling et al., 2010). According to Gardner et al. (2015, p. 937), "fulfillment of psychological contracts … is a type of positive feedback that helps employees to corroborate their self-views," and a violation of these contracts, in turn, undermines such professional self-esteem.

Second, COR theory predicts that employees' perceptions that they operate in benevolent organizational environments *diminish* the risk of self-deprecating thoughts stemming from adverse organizational treatments (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2020; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). We specifically propose that employees' perceptions of a forgiveness climate in their organization—that is, they believe that others in the organization overlook mistakes and do not hold grudges (Guchait et al., 2016)—may act as buffers and make employees more forgiving of experienced contract violations too (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012). As a result, it becomes less likely that they exhibit negative responses, in the form of beliefs about inadequate career support and diminished idea championing. To be clear, our conceptual focus and empirical assessment center on employees' *individual* beliefs about how forgiving their organization is. Even if a forgiveness climate might be an organizational-level feature, encouraged by firm leaders, each employee of the same organization might have different perceptions of the extent of organizational forgiveness, according to their personal work experiences (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2020; Guchait et al., 2016).

These theoretical reflections set the stage for several research contributions. First, we predict that psychological contract violations decrease the likelihood that employees champion ideas for organizational improvement, because the associated threats to their sense of self-worth (Hughes & Palmer, 2007) fuel their desire to *express* their frustrations and criticize the organization for not caring about their career situation (Doden et al., 2018). In particular, we pinpoint a hitherto overlooked outcome of psychological contract violations and ignored determinant of idea championing, by considering a critical factor that *links* the two: inadequate career support (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2021). This mediating role is interesting from a conceptual perspective, in that it offers novel insights into a conduit for a persistent source of dissatisfaction, namely, employees' sense that their employer falls short with regard to ensuring their career success (Lin & Chen, 2021). The proposed chain of relationships also is theoretically compelling, in that it underscores how convictions about career-related adversity may create a troublesome sort of vortex for employees: They recognize their employer has not kept its promises, which prompts them to criticize the firm for insufficient career support, such that they start to believe this frustrating employer does not merit the effort demanded by challenging championing behaviors. Rather than find and promote novel ideas, they exhibit complacency, and thus, the situation might never be fixed (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017; Van de Ven, 1986).

Second, by addressing continued calls to adopt contingency perspectives on the detrimental consequences of psychological contract violations (Jayaweera et al., 2021; Shaffakat et al., 2022), we gain pertinent insights into

how the decreased likelihood of championing behavior, in response to resource-draining psychological contract violations and associated beliefs about inadequate career support, might be mitigated by employees' perceptions that they are surrounded by a climate of forgiveness (Guchait et al., 2016). The adverse outcomes of psychological contract violations do not arise automatically. Contextual factors—including communication (Chang et al., 2020), psychological entitlement (Priesemuth & Taylor, 2016), or psychological contract type (De Clercq et al., 2021)—influence this process. We propose a beneficial, buffering role of perceptions of organizational forgiveness, such that these perceptions prompt employees to be more forgiving themselves and respond less negatively to psychological contract violations. In so doing, we complement research on similar buffering roles of a forgiveness climate for helping employees deal with dysfunctional organizational politics (De Clercq & Pereira, 2022) or workplace bullying (Yao et al., 2020). As our study reveals, a forgiveness climate *decreases* the probability that employees respond to psychological contract violations with inadequate career support beliefs and then diminished championing behavior—which ultimately might increase the chances that they find novel solutions for the problems (Islam et al., 2021).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: We explain some key tenets of COR theory and their relevance for this study and then outline the arguments that underpin each of the hypotheses. Next, we explain the data collection and sample, the construct measurement, and the applied statistical technique. After describing the empirical results, we discuss the study's theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and research directions.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

COR theory

As mentioned, the conceptual arguments that substantiate the proposed links—a mediating role of beliefs about inadequate career support and moderating role of perceived forgiveness climate—are based in COR theory. This theory postulates that employees' desires to protect their current resource reservoirs and avoid any losses shape their work-related beliefs and efforts (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll, 1989), which implies two important premises. The first is that any threat of resource drainage, as might be caused by upsetting organizational treatments, leads employees to try to minimize the possibility of additional resource losses (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Resource drainage caused by unfavorable work conditions directs employees toward beliefs and activities that enable them to *cope* with the drainage (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). Previous applications of COR

theory indicate, for example, that exposure to incongruent organizational values (Doblhofer et al., 2019) or dysfunctional leadership approaches (Pandey et al., 2021) evoke self-defensive responses among employees, as a way to cope with the experienced challenges. A second premise of COR theory is that employees' access to relevant resources weakens or *buffers* their self-protective reactions, including organizational resources that render it less probable that experienced hardships deplete employees' resource bases (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Extant research that draws on COR theory notes, for instance, that negative reactions to resource-draining abusive supervision get mitigated by coworker support (Pradhan & Jena, 2018); employees also respond in less self-protective ways to self-serving organizational decision-making when they enjoy high-quality relationships with leaders (De Clercq et al., 2022).

The COR framework features a broad definition of resources, as "those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued in their own right, or that are valued because they act as conduits to the achievement or protection of valued resources" (Hobfoll, 2001, p. 339). One critical resource that employees adamantly seek to protect, according to pioneering work by Hobfoll (2001), is their self-esteem or sense of self-worth. Prior studies that rely on COR theory specify that employees' self-protective responses to negative work circumstances—such as despotic leadership (Haq et al., 2021) or workplace ostracism (Bedi, 2021)—are critically influenced by the threats they perceive to their self-esteem resources. Parallel research suggests that when employees realize their organization has not met its commitments, they suffer threats to their sense of self-worth, because the failure raises questions about the value of their organizational functioning (Bowling et al., 2010; Gardner et al., 2015).

In line with the aforementioned first COR-based premise, we posit that employees who experience a sense of organizational betrayal attempt to cope with the threats to their positive self-image by developing beliefs that their organization does not care about their career situation (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2021) and then by limiting their dedicated efforts to mobilize support for their innovative ideas (Howell, 2005). Convictions that an employer fails to support their careers and resultant propensities to halt championing behavior represent meaningful reactions to perceived contract violations that prevent any further drainage of their self-esteem resources (Bowling et al., 2010). In particular, these reactions constitute coping strategies, through which employees who feel betrayed can shield their sense of self-worth and unleash their irritation with a firm that has broken its promises (Gardner et al., 2015).

Consistent with the second COR-based premise, this coping process should be less prominent if employees can rely on supportive organizational climates that make self-protective responses less necessary (Bentein et al., 2017;

FIGURE 1 Conceptual model
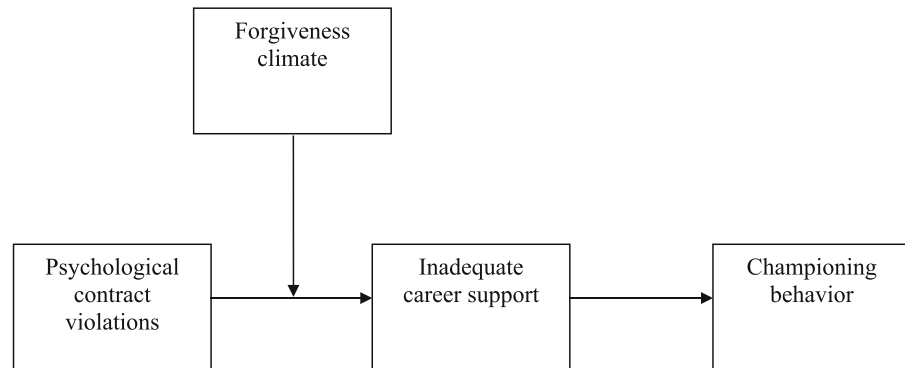
Hobfoll et al., 2018). In particular, employees may experience a weaker desire to criticize their firm for its insufficient career support, despite its psychological contract violation, if they are embedded in forgiveness-oriented climates that help them maintain a sense of self-worth even in difficult circumstances (De Clercq & Pereira, 2022; Fehr & Gelfand, 2012). Such a benevolent climate may make them more tolerant of their employer's failings (Yao et al., 2020), so they develop less negative views and remain more willing to devote some time and effort to championing activities. In short, perceiving a forgiveness climate may lower the risk that psychological contract violations escalate into thwarted idea championing behaviors, through beliefs about inadequate career support. Figure 1 summarizes the proposed conceptual framework; its constitutive hypotheses are explicated next.

Psychological contract violations and inadequate career support

We hypothesize a positive relationship between the experience of psychological contract violations and beliefs about inadequate career support. Self-esteem is a key resource for employees (Bentein et al., 2017), and as Hughes and Palmer (2007, p. 937) recommend, it "can be developed by managers, specifically in workers' perceptions of the fulfillment of obligations in the work arrangement." But if the employer does *not* meet its obligations, employees likely seek to find ways to avoid self-depreciating thoughts about their careers (Doden et al., 2018). In line with COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), the frustrations that these employees experience could threaten their self-esteem resources to such an extent that they criticize their company for not providing them with sufficient career support (Gardner et al., 2015; Lin & Chen, 2021). In particular, broken promises could prompt employees to develop self-damaging thoughts about why their organization does not find them valuable enough to give them what they have been promised (Bowling et al., 2010; Jiang et al., 2017). In

response, they accuse it of failing to provide them with sufficient career support, as a means to express their dismay and protect their remaining sense of self-worth (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

For this study, COR theory serves as the primary foundation, but we note that social exchange theory would predict a similarly positive relationship between psychological contract violations and perceptions of inadequate career support (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Emerson, 1981). According to social exchange theory, employees' work-related beliefs are influenced by the extent to which their employer complies with previously made commitments, either at the time of recruitment or thereafter (Ensher et al., 2001; Noble-Nkrumah et al., 2022). Employees who have a sense of organizational betrayal and feel upset with an employer that has not kept its word may develop negative views, because they experience the violation as a signal that the organization does not care about their professional success (Azeem et al., 2020; Jamil et al., 2013). Criticisms about receiving inadequate career support, in essence, provide them with an opportunity to vent their annoyance with a company that violates their exchange expectations of how they *should* be treated (Ababneh et al., 2022; Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). We hypothesize the following:

> **Hypothesis 1.** There is a positive relationship between employees' experience of psychological contract violations and their beliefs about inadequate career support.

Inadequate career support and championing behavior

When employees believe that their employer has fallen short in supporting their career, they also might decease their efforts to help the firm (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Consistent with COR theory, by limiting their championing behaviors, employees can safeguard their self-esteem resources and feel better about

themselves, because they are not dedicating themselves to helping an organization that does not appear to care about their career situation (De Clercq & Pereira, 2021; Lin & Chen, 2021). Their irritation with a lack of support for their career and the corresponding threats to their sense of professional self-worth decrease their willingness to mobilize support for innovative ideas, which seems like a justifiable way to convey their disappointment and protect their remaining self-esteem (Bowling et al., 2010; De Clercq, 2022). Finally, in addition to protecting self-esteem, diminished championing activities may produce a sense of personal fulfillment, which COR theory identifies as a notable resource *gain* (Hobfoll, 2001; Lempiälä et al., 2018). Annoyed by insufficient career support, these employees might achieve personal satisfaction from limiting their productive championing efforts, which otherwise could benefit the organization (Kissi et al., 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000). We posit the following:

> **Hypothesis 2.** There is a negative relationship between employees' beliefs about inadequate career support and their engagement in championing behavior.

Mediating role of inadequate career support

If we combine these explanations, we also might anticipate a mediating effect of inadequate career support beliefs. In this role, such beliefs complement the preceding hypotheses, in that they can explain how a sense of organizational betrayal may escalate into a diminished probability to promote innovative ideas, *because* employees feel motivated to denounce their organization for failing to support career progress (Hofstetter & Cohen, 2014). In line with COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), if they feel upset with an employer that violates psychological contracts, employees refuse to allocate energy to productive championing activities, a refusal that helps them to convey their beliefs that the organization does not care about their career and thus to avoid further drainage of their self-esteem resources (Gardner et al., 2015). Extant research similarly indicates that career-related frustrations mediate the links of other resource-draining situations, such as ineffective organizational career management (Guan et al., 2015) or perceptions of organizational politics (De Clercq et al., 2020), with adverse work outcomes. We aim to add to this research stream by postulating the following:

> **Hypothesis 3.** Employees' beliefs about inadequate career support mediate the relationship between their experience of psychological contract violations and their engagement in championing behavior.

Moderating role of perceived forgiveness climate

The extent to which the experience of a psychological contract violation translates into beliefs about inadequate career support may be subdued if employees perceive that other people in the organization forgive mistakes (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012). According to COR theory, employees' disappointment with resource-depleting organizational treatments should generate negative work beliefs to a lesser extent if the surrounding work environment makes these beliefs seem less desirable (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Examples of benevolence set by the company should make employees more benevolent themselves, so they are less likely to develop negative or self-damaging thoughts about broken organizational promises (Costa & Neves, 2017; Guchait et al., 2016). That is, employees who perceive high levels of organizational forgiveness might put their sense of betrayal into perspective: Others in the organization forgive mistakes, so they should too (Fehr & Gelfand, 2020). Consistent with COR theory, these perceptions should diminish the extent to which employees sense threats to their self-worth, even if they experience psychological contract violations (Gardner et al., 2015), which then decreases their desire to complain about an organization that does not support their career (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2021). Similarly, employees who operate in forgiving organizational climates tend to experience this work context as more focused on their long-term needs (Guchait et al., 2016), so they likely suffer fewer self-damaging thoughts, even if the organization has broken some promises. Extant research similarly notes that a forgiving organizational climate can attenuate other adverse effects, such as political decision-making (De Clercq & Pereira, 2022) or bullying (Yao et al., 2020). We predict the following:

> **Hypothesis 4.** The negative relationship between employees' experience of psychological contract violations and their beliefs about inadequate career support is moderated by their perceptions of a forgiveness climate, such that this relationship is weaker at higher levels of such perceptions.

Moderated mediating role of perceived forgiveness climate

The preceding logic culminates in a moderated mediation dynamic among the focal constructs (Hayes & Rockwood, 2020). A forgiveness climate functions as an important contingency factor in the negative, indirect relationship between psychological contract violations and championing behavior, through employees' beliefs that their organization prevents them from meeting career goals (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2021). If the organizational environment allows for errors, the

explanatory role of beliefs about inadequate career support, in terms of escalating psychological contract violations into thwarted championing efforts, gets subdued. Following COR theory, a forgiveness climate counters the threats to self-esteem resources that employees experience in the presence of unmet expectations (Hughes & Palmer, 2007), which diminishes the likelihood that they halt their efforts to promote innovative ideas due to negative views of their career potential (Guchait et al., 2016). We therefore hypothesize the following:

> **Hypothesis 5.** The indirect negative relationship between employees' experience of psychological contract violations and their engagement in championing behavior, through their beliefs about inadequate career support, is moderated by their perceptions of a forgiveness climate, such that this indirect relationship is weaker at higher levels of such perceptions.

RESEARCH METHOD

Data collection and sample

The data for this study were collected from a large, Portuguese-based retailer of construction materials and equipment in fall 2021. By investigating one organization in one specific industry, we decreased the risk of unobserved differences, in terms of how external competitive conditions or organization-level factors that are not included in our conceptual framework might influence employees' motivation to champion innovative ideas (Dayan & Di Benedetto, 2011; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). The construction retail sector in Portugal is characterized by intense competition; a lot of foreign and local companies fight for market share (Biscaia et al., 2017; Coelho, 2022; Pestana Barros & Alves, 2003). Companies in this sector accordingly can benefit greatly from novel ideas for organizational improvement, creating a highly relevant empirical setting for addressing questions about why and when the experience of organizational betrayal may interfere with employees' beneficial championing behaviors.

The survey development relied on a well-established translation and back-translation procedure (van Dick et al., 2018). The original English version was translated into Portuguese by a bilingual translator and then back-translated into English by another bilingual colleague. After resolving some minor discrepancies, the survey was finalized and administered in Portuguese. The survey was distributed electronically, through an institutional license of the Microsoft Forms software package, held by the university of one of the researchers. The participating employees were familiar with this software and found it easy and straightforward to use. The software also adheres to ethical norms with regard to data confidentiality. Beyond these features of the survey tool, we took several measures to protect participants' rights. A statement that preceded the survey promised full confidentiality noted that individual responses would never be discussed and guaranteed that the employer would not have access to any information about who took part (or not) in the study. Furthermore, we clarified that our objective was to detect broadband patterns in aggregate data, not single out individual cases. Finally, participants were told that there were no right or wrong answers, that varying responses were expected, and that it was critical to the validity of the study that they provide truthful opinions. This set of robust measures should diminish the likelihood of biases due to social desirability (Jordan & Troth, 2020).

The sample frame was the entire organization, with more than 500 employees. To a list of employees, provided by senior management, we applied a random digit generator that selected 300 potential participants. Among the 300 employees we contacted, 208 returned the survey, a response rate of 69%. The final sample included 86% men and 14% women, in line with the male-dominated nature of the construction retail sector in Portugal. Furthermore, 33% were younger than 40 years; 42% had a postsecondary degree or higher; 66% had at least some supervisory responsibilities; and 89% worked in sales and 11% in administration.

Measures

The measures of the focal constructs came from previous studies. The 7-point Likert anchors ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

Psychological contract violations

To assess the extent to which employees sensed organizational betrayal, we relied on a four-item measure of psychological contract violation (Priesemuth & Taylor, 2016). For example, respondents indicated whether "I feel that my organization has violated the contract between us" and "I feel betrayed by my organization" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89).

Inadequate career support

We evaluated the extent to which employees believed that their organization did not support their career goals with a reverse-coded, five-item scale of career satisfaction (Hofstetter & Cohen, 2014), similar to prior research into employees' career-related unhappiness (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2021). In light of our theoretical focus on employees' beliefs about the influence of their

employer on their career progress, we slightly changed the wording of these items to emphasize the *organization's* effects. Two sample items were "My organization enables progress towards my goals for advancement" and "My organization enables progress towards my overall career goals" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.94).

Championing behavior

We measured the extent to which employees actively promoted innovative ideas with a three-item scale of championing behavior (Janssen, 2000), such as "I often mobilize support for innovative ideas" and "I often make important organizational members enthusiastic for innovative ideas" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.79). Using self-ratings is in line with previous studies (e.g., Faupel, 2020; Lin et al., 2014) and with the argument that employees are better positioned to offer accurate and comprehensive assessments of their championing efforts, compared with other raters who may have incomplete insights into the entire range of efforts they direct toward different organizational members (Kissi et al., 2013; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017; Van de Ven, 1986).

Forgiveness climate

We assessed the degree to which employees perceived that their organizational climate involved forgiveness with a three-item scale (Guchait et al., 2016). Consistent with prior research, this scale captured employees' *individual* opinions, which may vary even within the same company (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2020). Participants rated their agreement with items such as "People within my organization are forgiving of each other's errors, mistakes, and offenses" and "People within my organization do not hold grudges" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.75).

Control variables

The statistical models included six control variables: *gender* (0 = male, 1 = female), *age* (1 = less than 30 years, 2 = 30–39 years, 3 = 40–49 years, 4 = 50–59 years, 5 = 60 years or above), *education level* (1 = secondary, 2 = postsecondary but not university, 3 = university), *organizational tenure* (1 = less than 6 years, 2 = 6–10 years, 3 = 11–15 years, 4 = 16–20 years, 5 = more than 20 years), *job level* (1 = line worker, 2 = intermediate, 3 = manager),[1] and *job function* (sales or administration, with the latter as the base case).

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[1]The survey specified that the line worker category pertained to people with no supervisory responsibilities, the intermediate category indicated people with some supervisory responsibilities, and the manager category involved people with significant supervisory responsibilities.

Women may be more hesitant than men to push their innovative ideas (Detert & Burris, 2007), and employees who are older, more educated, longer tenured, or higher in their job positions may feel more confident that they can successfully promote new ideas (Islam et al., 2020; Ng & Feldman, 2010). Finally, the type of job that employees perform may inform their idea championing (Howell, 2005; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017).

Construct validity

To assess the validity of the focal constructs, we used a confirmatory factor analysis of a four-factor measurement model. The fit of that model was great: $\chi^2(84)$ = 166.33, comparative fit index = 0.96, incremental fit index = 0.96, Tucker–Lewis index = 0.94, and standardized root mean residual = 0.07. Convergent validity was affirmed by the presence of significant factor loadings for all measurement items on their corresponding constructs ($p < 0.001$; Hair et al., 2010) and by the average variance extracted values, which all exceeded the benchmark of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). Moreover, the average variance extracted values were higher than the squared correlations between corresponding constructs, and the fit of models with unconstrained construct pairs (correlation between two constructs was free to vary) was significantly better than that of the corresponding constrained models (correlation fixed to 1), for all six construct pairs ($p < 0.05$). These tests provided support for the presence of discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2010).

Common source bias

The research design was cross-sectional in nature and based on a single survey. As Spector (2019, p. 126) asserts, "comparisons of corresponding cross-sectional versus longitudinal correlations [caused by common method variance] in meta-analyses do not uniformly find larger correlations from cross-sectional designs (e.g., Nixon et al., 2011; Pindek & Spector, 2016), and even when cross-sectional correlations are larger, it is not necessarily due to common method variance." In addition, cross-sectional designs are preferable to longitudinal equivalents when it is overly challenging to determine precisely how much time it might take for a particular cause to lead to a particular outcome (Spector, 2019). For example, predicting work-related convictions and actions in response to psychological contract violations clearly might entail multiple facets that occur over time (Griep & Cooper, 2019; Robinson & Morrison, 2000).

Still, we undertook some remedial measures ex ante to diminish concerns about relying on a common

TABLE 1 Correlation table and descriptive statistics.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Psychological contract violations										
2. Inadequate career support	0.291[**]									
3. Championing behavior	0.013	−0.274[**]								
4. Forgiveness climate	−0.262[**]	−0.166[*]	0.198[**]							
5. Gender (1 = female)	0.131	0.245[**]	−0.030	−0.138[*]						
6. Age	0.156[*]	−0.037	0.094	−0.167[*]	0.005					
7. Education level	0.119	0.070	0.118	−0.049	0.165[*]	−0.136[*]				
8. Organizational tenure	0.154[*]	−0.125	0.166[*]	−0.151[*]	0.003	0.475[**]	−0.058			
9. Job level	0.151[*]	−0.161[*]	0.237[**]	−0.036	−0.008	0.286[**]	0.061	0.603[**]		
10. Job function: sales	0.074	−0.094	−0.227[**]	−0.038	−0.289[**]	−0.103	−0.134	−0.159[*]	−0.102	
Mean	2.311	3.165	4.464	4.448	0.139	2.784	1.563	2.438	1.841	0.885
Standard deviation	1.166	1.317	1.143	1.173	0.347	0.759	0.733	1.375	0.708	0.320

Note: $n = 208$.
[*]$p < 0.05$.
[**]$p < 0.01$.

respondent in cross-sectional designs. According to Spector (2019), alternative explanations might exist for why a cause leads to an outcome, beyond the factors captured by the focal constructs. This problem can be mitigated by adding control variables to account for such alternative explanations (Spector, 2019). The inclusion of six control variables, as we detailed previously, aligns with this recommendation. Moreover, to avoid the possibility that participants could anticipate the predicted relationships, we kept the overall research objective vague in the statement that accompanied the survey (i.e., "to better understand how employees allocate their time in organizations"), and we took care that the survey never mentioned the study's constructs by name, directly or indirectly (Malhotra, 2010).

Finally, we undertook two statistical tests to assess common method bias ex post. First, we performed Harman's one-factor test (Huang et al., 2020; Oh et al., 2018), which uses an exploratory factor analysis to establish whether one factor explains the majority of variance in the data. The results rejected this claim: The first extracted factor captured only 34% of total data variance. Second, a comparative confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the fit of a one-factor model, in which each of the measurement items loaded on a single factor, was significantly worse than that of the four-factor measurement model ($\chi^2(6) = 792.54$, $p < 0.001$), offering additional evidence that common source bias was not a concern (Hair et al., 2010). From a conceptual perspective, we also note that the probability of this bias is significantly lower for theoretical frameworks that include a moderation dynamic, because it is difficult for participants to predict the nature of the tested models

and adjust their responses accordingly (Simons & Peterson, 2000).

Statistical analysis

We tested the hypotheses with the SPSS Process macro (Hayes et al., 2017). Unlike a traditional regression analysis, this approach enables the concurrent estimation of individual paths on the one hand (to evaluate Hypotheses 1, 2, and 4) and of mediation and moderated mediation effects on the other (to evaluate Hypotheses 3 and 5). Accordingly, it has been used extensively in previous studies that test theoretical frameworks that include moderated mediation (e.g., Jawahar et al., 2021; Majeed & Naseer, 2021). Notably, the Process macro approach is better than traditional Sobel tests, because it does not require the estimated (conditional) indirect effects to be normally distributed. The bootstrapping technique on which the approach relies recognizes that the distributions of effects may be asymmetric and nonnormal (MacKinnon et al., 2004).

RESULTS

Table 1 contains the correlations among the study variables, as well as the descriptive statistics; Table 2 lists the mediation results, as estimated by the Process macro. The results with respect to the control variables indicated that female employees ($\beta = 0.619$, $p < 0.05$) and employees who occupied lower-level job positions ($\beta = -0.281$, $p < 0.10$) were more likely to hold beliefs

TABLE 2 Mediation results (Process macro model 4).

	Inadequate career support		Championing behavior	
Gender (1 = *female*)	0.619*		−0.118	
Age	−0.035		0.067	
Education level	−0.020		0.164	
Organizational tenure	−0.098		0.010	
Job level	−0.281[+]		0.211[+]	
Job function: sales[a]	−0.445		−0.827***	
Psychological contract violations	0.334***		0.121[+]	
Forgiveness climate	−0.107		0.185**	
Inadequate career support			−0.238***	
R^2	0.190		0.217	
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
Indirect effect	−0.080	0.029	−0.145	−0.032

Note: n = 208.

Abbreviations: LLCI, lower limit confidence interval; SE, standard error; UCLI, upper limit confidence interval.

[a]Job function: Administration served as the base case.

[+]$p < 0.10$.

*$p < 0.05$.

**$p < 0.01$.

***$p < 0.001$.

about inadequate career support. Championing behavior was more likely among higher-level employees ($\beta = 0.211$, $p < 0.10$) and less likely among employees who worked in sales ($\beta = -0.827$, $p < 0.001$).[2]

In support of Hypothesis 1, psychological contract violations related positively to inadequate career support ($\beta = 0.334$, $p < 0.001$); inadequate career support also was negatively related to championing behavior ($\beta = -0.238$, $p < 0.001$), in support of Hypothesis 2. The mediation assessment revealed an effect size of −0.080 for the indirect relationship between psychological contract violations and championing behavior through inadequate career support; the confidence interval (CI) of this effect did not span 0 [−0.145, −0.032], indicating the presence of mediation (Hypothesis 3).

Table 3 provides the Process macro results for the moderating effect of forgiveness climate. We found a negative, significant effect of the psychological contract violations × forgiveness climate interaction term ($\beta = -0.152$, $p < 0.01$) in predicting inadequate career support. The positive relationship between psychological contract violations and inadequate career support was subdued at higher levels of forgiveness climate (0.452 at one *SD* below its mean, 0.299 at its mean, and 0.097 at one *SD* above its mean). The CI of this relationship did not span 0 at the two lower values of the moderator ([0.280; 0.623] and [0.147; 0.452]), but it included 0 at the highest levels ([−0.129; 0.322]). The corresponding effect sizes equaled 0.452 ($p = 0.000$), 0.299 ($p = 0.001$), and

0.097 ($p = 0.399$), respectively. The interaction pattern in Figure 2 depicts the relationship between psychological contact violations and inadequate career support at the lowest and highest levels of the moderator. Overall, these results are in line with Hypothesis 4.

The formal assessment of moderated mediation entailed a comparison of the strength of the *conditional* indirect link between psychological contract violations and championing behavior, through inadequate career support, at different levels of forgiveness climate. Table 3 indicates lower effect sizes at more elevated levels of the moderator: from −0.108 at one *SD* below its mean, to −0.071 at its mean, to −0.023 at one *SD* above its mean. The CI did not include 0 at the two lower values of the moderator ([−0.189; −0.045] and [−0.134; −0.029]), but it spanned 0 at the highest level ([−0.089; 0.023]). In addition, the index of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2015) equaled to 0.036, and the CI of this index did not feature 0 ([0.008, 0.074]), which corroborates Hypothesis 5 and our overall conceptual framework.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical implications

A first key theoretical insight of this study is that employees' disappointments about broken organizational promises prompt them to halt their active promotions of novel ideas, because they consider their organization responsible for their inability to meet their career goals (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2021). As predicted by COR theory, employees react to this resource-draining

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[2]In line with recommendations by Becker (2005), we assessed whether the findings for the hypothesized relationships were robust to the exclusion of control variables that did not exhibit significance in the estimated models, as was indeed the case.

TABLE 3 Moderated mediation results (Process macro model 7).

	Inadequate career support		Championing behavior	
Gender (1 = *female*)	0.646*		−0.118	
Age	−0.062		0.067	
Education level	−0.053		0.164	
Organizational tenure	−0.131		0.010	
Job level	−0.217		0.211[+]	
Job function: sales[a]	−0.467[+]		−0.827***	
Psychological contract violations	0.280***		0.121[+]	
Forgiveness climate	−0.130[+]		0.185**	
Psychological contract violations × forgiveness climate	−0.152**			
Inadequate career support			−0.238***	
R^2	0.220		0.217	
Conditional *direct* effect of psychological contract violations on inadequate career support				
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
−1 *SD*	0.452	0.087	0.280	0.623
Mean	0.299	0.077	0.147	0.452
+1 *SD*	0.097	0.114	−0.129	0.322
Conditional *indirect* effect of psychological contract violations on championing behavior				
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
−1 *SD*	−0.108	0.037	−0.189	−0.045
Mean	−0.071	0.027	−0.134	−0.029
+1 *SD*	−0.023	0.027	−0.089	0.023
Index of moderation	0.036	0.017	0.008	0.074

Note: n = 208.

Abbreviations: LLCI, lower limit confidence interval; *SD*, standard deviation; SE, standard error; UCLI, upper limit confidence interval.

[a]Job function: Administration served as the base case.

[+]$p < 0.10$.
*$p < 0.05$.
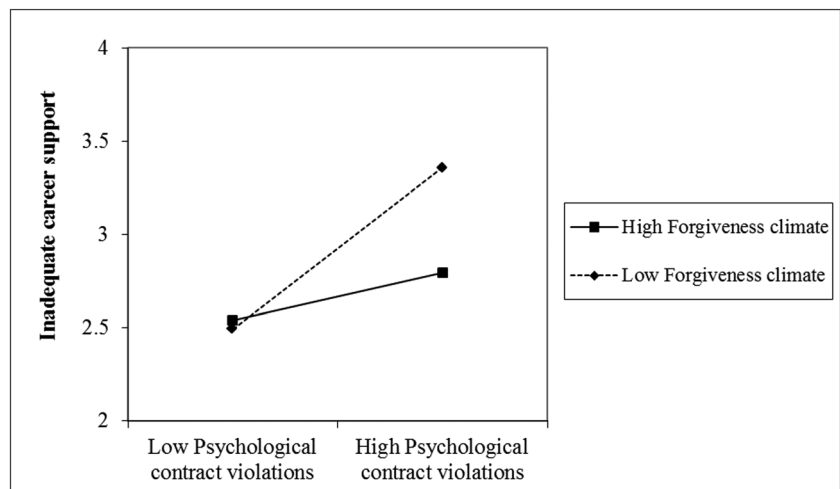**$p < 0.01$.
***$p < 0.001$.

FIGURE 2 Moderating effect of forgiveness climate on the relationship between psychological contract violations and inadequate career support

situation with negative convictions and behaviors, in an attempt to shield their self-esteem resources, which are critically threatened by psychological contract violations (Gardner et al., 2015). The mediating role of inadequate career support beliefs, as found herein, is intriguing from a theoretical angle, in light of an alternative argument that employees might be better able to handle the hardships of a sense of organizational betrayal if they can

leverage positive energy from their current career situation (Griep & Cooper, 2019; Quinn et al., 2012). But as our study reveals, employees develop *negative* beliefs that their employer does not provide them with adequate career support in response to broken organizational promises, which then renders them reluctant to help the organization with dedicated championing efforts (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017).

As a theoretical silver lining of this study though, we find that this downward process can be contained, to the extent that employees sense that their organizational environment is marked by high levels of forgiveness (Guchait et al., 2016). As we anticipated, criticism about inadequate career support serves as a less forceful conduit for the translation of resource-depleting psychological contract violations into reduced championing behavior when employees sense that other members of their organization do not hold grudges (Cameron & Caza, 2002; Fehr & Gelfand, 2020). Consistent with COR theory, employees who are upset about broken organizational promises sense weaker threats to their self-worth if they also have access to organizational resources that enable them to cope with the challenges (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Pandey et al., 2021). In turn, these employees experience diminished need to complain about career-related adversity or halt their championing efforts, as means to protect their remaining sense of self-worth (Costa & Neves, 2017). A forgiveness climate prompts employees, even those who experience a sense of organizational betrayal, to avoid making allegations about a lack of support or exhibiting complacency. It instead facilitates their idea championing efforts—which ultimately might help them address the root of the problem.

From a more general perspective, the study complements traditional applications of COR theory. This theory mainly aims to explain how employees react to resource-depleting work conditions, in *beneficial* ways that allow them to protect themselves against the danger of additional drainage of their resource reservoirs (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Our research, and particularly the mediation link we test, elucidates a possible risk of a *dysfunctional* dynamic, in which employees are complicit but potentially unaware. Because psychological contract violations leave them pessimistic about their career, they develop a potentially unconscious reluctance to champion novel ideas, but this complacent behavioral reaction likely makes it more difficult to change the unpleasant situation (Walter et al., 2011; Wichmann et al., 2015). In particular, to the extent that their "lazy" responses are poorly received by organizational leaders, employees may shoot themselves in the foot and lower the chances that leaders try to restore their broken promises.

As another general insight, this study explicates a critical benefit of forgiving organizational environments: They protect employees against self-damaging contemplations about unfavorable work situations. This beneficial role is somewhat counterintuitive and, therefore,

interesting theoretically. Arguably, employees might feel particularly upset if they are convinced that organizational errors are easily forgiven, because their hardships then may seem less likely to be addressed, but our results instead suggest that this conviction gets superseded by a positive *spillover* effect onto how employees approach resource-draining work conditions, such that the forgiving environment leads them to feel less upset about the associated hardships (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2021). Finally, our research extends prior investigations of *direct* functional effects of forgiveness climates on employees' job satisfaction and intentions to stay (Guchait et al., 2016), as well as parallel research on their buffering effects for employees' abilities to cope with ethical misconduct (Rommel, 2020) or denigrating interpersonal treatments (Yao et al., 2020). We provide the unique insight that the detrimental role of inadequate career support beliefs, in response to a sense of organizational betrayal, can be contained by forgiving climates. Perceived organizational forgiveness thus is a valuable boundary condition that reduces the chances of a double whammy, in which one challenge (psychological contract violations) begets another (work-related complacency, in the form of diminished idea championing).

Practical implications

This research provides relevant insights for managerial practice. Organizational leaders should be cognizant of a critical and upsetting work hardship for employees: a sense of betrayal that arises when the organization breaks its previously made commitments. This sense can be harmful for both employees and their organization, because the employees likely hold the employer accountable and therefore may refuse to invest their energy resources to help it (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Employees who feel betrayed also may be reluctant to speak up to the untrustworthy organization that already has broken its promises (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Thus, in addition to a general recommendation that organizations should do their best to keep their promises, our study cautions employees and their organizations to remain aware of the danger of various harms if unmet promises evoke excuses to refrain from dedicated championing efforts that otherwise could generate innovative *solutions* to the violations. To mitigate this risk, organizations should design customized training programs that feature role models who have successfully mobilized new ideas to combat sources of psychological contract violations. Another option would be to establish company-wide knowledge-sharing initiatives, one-on-one conversations between supervisors and affected employees, or appointments of dedicated ombudspersons, to help employees deal creatively and effectively with the hardships they experience in the presence of broken promises (Harrison et al., 2013; Wang & Noe, 2010).

As another pertinent takeaway, this study reveals a specific path that organizations can follow to avoid the harmful process by which unmet expectations lead to negative career beliefs and diminished idea championing. In particular, developing and nurturing forgiving organizational climates appears critical for disrupting this negative process (Cameron & Caza, 2002). In suggesting this pathway, we do not mean to suggest that organizational leaders cannot establish stringent standards and scrutinize errors. To keep employees motivated to work to the best of their abilities (Guchait et al., 2016), a healthy dose of organizational unforgiveness can be very useful; it helps employees focus on what is important and encourages them to align their own interests with those of their organization (Fehr & Gelfand, 2020). Moreover, if organizational forgiveness reaches an excessive level, employees might consider it pointless to complain, because any broken organizational promises will be forgiven anyway, but what our study findings indicate is that establishing forgiveness-oriented climates, despite their possible disadvantages, can increase the probability that employees willingly engage in idea championing, even if they feel frustrated about broken promises. Organizations should ensure that all their managers recognize *both* negative and positive potential outcomes of a forgiveness climate. On the positive side, our study details that employees who embrace an organizational forgiveness culture may consider psychological contract violations less upsetting, with beneficial consequences for their willingness to keep finding ways to benefit the firm, including their devoted, effortful idea championing.

Limitations and further research

This study has some limitations, which set the stage for future research endeavors. First, our theoretical logic is grounded in the robust COR framework, which stipulates that resource-draining organizational treatments encourage efforts to avoid additional resource losses (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Jahanzeb et al., 2020), yet the possibility of reverse causality cannot be completely eliminated. Successful idea champions might become optimistic about their career situation, for example. Continued research could apply longitudinal designs to assess each of this study's central constructs at different points in time, estimate cross-lagged effects, and explicitly establish causality (Antonakis et al., 2010). Noting Spector's (2019) point that longitudinal assigns do not *automatically* provide better information about cause–effect relationships, another option might be to rely on daily diary assessments, which could capture fine-grained changes in causal relationships and reveal individual employees' work-related beliefs and actions over time in natural work environments. Also with regard to our reliance on the well-established COR framework, we predict an important role of threats to employees' self-esteem

resources and corresponding desire to avoid additional depletion of these resources in determining their work-related convictions and actions in reaction to resource-depleting work situations (Bentein et al., 2017), but continued research would be needed to capture the levels and *changes* in employees' self-esteem resources in this mediation relationship, using sequential mediation models.

Second, we focused on the buffering role of perceived forgiveness climate as a relevant, contextual boundary condition, guided by previous evidence of its beneficial role in helping employees cope with other upsetting work situations. Other features of the internal context could play similar mitigating roles, such as justice (Ambrose et al., 2021) or innovation (Jiang et al., 2021) climates. In addition, *individual* factors may protect employees against the risk that psychological contract violations escalate into negative career-related beliefs and diminished idea championing, such as their total work experience (Kaur, 2014), career optimism (Eva et al., 2020), or general career orientations (Crowley-Henry et al., 2019). It would be valuable to compare the incremental effects of each contextual and individual factor for attenuating the escalation of psychological contract violations, as well as to assess the persistence of the influence of a perceived forgiveness climate after accounting for their effects.

Third, our theoretical arguments are not country-specific, and the empirical findings should be robust across a wide set of country settings, even if the *strength* of the proposed links might vary. For example, in cultural contexts marked by high levels of uncertainty avoidance, such as Portugal, employees likely experience violations of their psychological contracts as particularly upsetting and threatening, so they might react more vigorously with negative career beliefs and work-related complacency (Hofstede et al., 2010). Cross-country comparisons could explicitly assess how this and other cultural features may inform the proposed relationships. A related research avenue would be to detail the role of corresponding *individual* orientations, such as employees' own risk aversion (Allen et al., 2005).

Conclusion

This study complements extant scholarship on psychological contract violations by detailing the roles of inadequate career support beliefs and perceived forgiveness climates in the process by which psychological contract violations translate into reduced championing behavior. Disapproval of how the organization supports their career helps explain how a sense of organizational betrayal leaves employees reluctant to contribute to their employer's advancement with active promotions of innovative ideas. However, this harmful process is mitigated among employees who feel inspired by the forgiveness that marks their work environments. We hope these

insights stimulate continued research, pertaining to other ways organizations can avoid detrimental scenarios in which employees' personal hardships, due to psychological contract violations, escalate into negative behavioral responses.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Dirk De Clercq had primary responsibility for the conceptual development and empirical analyses; Renato Pereira had primary responsibility for the data collection and provided support for the conceptual development and empirical analyses.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the work in this manuscript.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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