

The Effects of Psychological Contracts and Breaches on the Preferred Customer Status in a Buyer-Supplier Relationship: A Dyadic Case Study at Company X and Three of its Suppliers

Author: Jan Kuhnke
University of Twente
P.O. Box 217, 7500AE Enschede
The Netherlands

ABSTRACT,

Recently, the notion of the preferred customer status (PCS) has received increased interest among scholars. Being a prioritized customer leads to beneficial treatment and ultimately to a competitive edge, as suppliers are more satisfied with the focal relationship than with available alternatives. As each buyer-supplier relationship is constituted by written or unwritten contracts, they can be differently interpreted by each party in the relation. Especially unwritten agreements involve the danger to be perceived differently about the terms and conditions by each side. These differing views in the reciprocal exchange linkage constitute a psychological contract (PC). Many types of PCs exist and they can have various effects on the partnership when breached (PCB). This dyadic case study scrutinized three B2B relationships in the construction materials industry. Antecedents and benefits revealed in practice strengthen the components recognized in the literature. Additionally, novel benefits were pinpointed as well. Further, reliability was identified as prime and not second-tier antecedent of supplier satisfaction. Moreover, this paper analyzed the effects of PCs and PCBs on the PCS. Relational PCs were revealed as underlying bonding effects in the relation between Company X and its suppliers. Thereby, communication serves as a mechanism to strengthen the partnership by aligning to the reciprocal implicit and explicit expectations. In case of breach, the PCS mediates the relation between the supplier's perceived PCB and the focal customer's preferential treatment. However, the PCS is thereby affected by the external market mechanisms surrounding Firm X and the relational components found to fortify each of X's relationships.

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Prof. Dr. L.A. Knight

Keywords

Preferred customer status, psychological contract, psychological contract breach, buyer-supplier relationship, supplier satisfaction, preferential treatment, relational contract, transactional contract

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, the purchasing function has become strategic contributing to organizations' value creation and competitive edges in a dynamic business environment (Poissonnier, 2017, pp. 1-2). Such a novel environment is characterized by the scarce availability of suppliers (Schiele, 2010, p.5) and thus it is essential for buyers to court the suppliers' favor (Schiele, 2012, p. 44). Due to the reduction of the number of suppliers in the market, their influence on buying firms has increased (Bew, 2007, p. 1). Especially, in times of turbulence, suppliers are forced to choose from their customer base to determine which buyer receives which resources (Schiele, Calvi, & Gibbert, 2012, p. 1179). This means that the procurement company's prosperity is dependent upon getting preferential treatment with major suppliers and that other factors than just price influence the management strategies of those firms towards their providers (Hüttinger, Schiele, & Veldman, 2012, p. 1194). Purchasing firms receiving preferential treatment by their suppliers over competitors have been awarded a PCS (Schiele, 2012, p. 44). Particularly, when supply surpasses demand, the favored buying firm could expect a "favor returned" (Nollet, Rebolledo, & Popel, 2012, p. 1186) by the supplier, due to the observed conclusive engagement with the former (Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1186). Moreover, being a preferred customer yields several benefits. According to Bew (2007, p. 2) favored customers could expect price reductions, selected allotment of resources as well as ingress to novel innovations. This implies that becoming a preferred customer is advantageous for purchasing firms and hence they should strive for attaining such a status with their key suppliers.

Furthermore, the buyer's performance is contingent upon the proper management of its supply base relationships (Krause & Ellram, 2014, p. 191). In general, these relationships can be either constituted by written or unwritten contracts. As oral contracts generally imply a high degree of ambiguity, even formal agreements can be difficult to interpret and thus crystallize in psychological (i.e. unwritten) contracts (Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993, p. 4; p. 19). Till this day, however, the psychological implications of buyer-seller relationships lack awareness in the extant body of literature (Lövlblad, Hyder, & Lönnstedt, 2012, p. 275). In addition, the ramifications of mutual interactions originated by individuals have been unexplored yet (Sweeney & Webb, 2007, p. 474). Since satisfying B2B relationships are a prerequisite for the supplier's decision to award the focal customer with a PCS (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1181), this paper investigates the possible relation between PCs and PCBs and the preferred customer conception. As PCs are highly subjective (Robinson & Morrison, 2000, p. 526; Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007, p. 649) their feasible effects cannot be neglected when striving for customer prioritization. Therefore, the following research question has been derived:

RQ: 'What are the antecedents of the preferred customer status with key suppliers for Company X and how is such a status affected by present psychological contracts as well as recent psychological contract breaches among the case company and its major suppliers?'

This research question will be answered through three interviews with representatives of Company X's purchasing department and three interviews with Company X's perceived key suppliers.

In general, the PCS has been recently emphasized by an enlarging number of academics, but still businesses miss the opportunities to take advantage of the gains inherent in it. Additionally, the psychological characteristics of B2B relationships potentially influencing such a status have not received sufficient attention yet. Consequently, the aim of this

paper is three-folded. Firstly, by conducting a dyadic case study in collaboration with Company X, the antecedents of becoming a favored client, and especially for the case company, will be revealed. Although customer attractiveness is seen as a crucial factor for attaining such a preferred rank (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1203; Pulles, Ellegaard, Schiele, & Kragh, 2019, pp. 2-3; Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1180), the focus here is on current relationships (i.e., supplier satisfaction) rather than on engaging in novel ones by being appealing. Buyers need to know how to leverage the suppliers' resources for its own benefit over peers (Pulles et al., 2019, pp. 1-2). Secondly, the case study will broaden the extent to which the practical insights found at the case company mirror and contribute to the components recognized in the extant body of literature. As yet, researchers confirmed that the antecedents of the PCS are hierarchically ordered and that not all are equally relevant (Hüttinger, Schiele, & Schröer, 2014, p. 711; Frederik G. S. Vos, Schiele, & Hüttinger, 2016, p. 4621). Lastly, specific emphasis is put on the identification of existent PCs as well as PCBs among Company X and its key suppliers in order to decipher their impacts on the PCS. Added value is provided by scrutinizing the potential positive mediating role of the PCS in the relationship between the supplier's perceived PCB and the focal customer's preferential treatment.

As illustrated in the previous paragraph, the overarching theoretical frameworks on which this paper rests were designed by Hüttinger et al. (2014); Hüttinger et al. (2012); Pulles et al. (2019); Schiele et al. (2012), and Frederik G. S. Vos et al. (2016). Consequently, the remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In section 2, an in-depth literature review of the PCS and associated concepts is provided. Specifically, these conceptions deal with preferential treatment and supplier satisfaction. Besides that, the antecedents of becoming a favored customer in the extant body of literature are presented for all frameworks. In addition, a detailed desk research about the origins of PCs along with PCBs is offered. Ultimately, it will be proposed how these contracts and breaches might affect the PCS. In section 3, the structure of the dyadic case study as well as the interview design are outlined. In section 4, Company X is briefly introduced followed by a synthesized analysis of the interview findings. In section 5, the practical findings revealed at Company X are critically discussed in order to compare them with the existing literature. In section 6, this paper culminates in a theoretical and managerial conclusion of the case study results. Ultimately, limitations of the case study together with stimuli for further research avenues are illustrated.

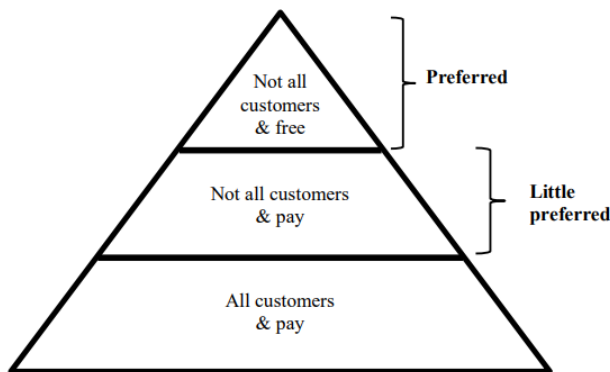
2. LITERATURE REVIEW: THE PREFERRED CUSTOMER CONCEPT & PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS & BREACHES

2.1 The status quo of customer prioritization: The modern buyer-seller relationship

Over 50 years ago, Hottenstein (1970) compared the PCS with a "job-order-control system" (p. 46). He (1970, p. 46) highlighted that in extreme situations specific orders of particular customers would take precedence over other shipments. Hereby the selling firm would do its outmost best to please those customers by guaranteeing delivery on time. The same favoritism was noticed by other researchers. For instance, Williamson (1991, p. 79) emphasized that in times where demand exceeds supply "[...] preferred customers would be the first in line to have their needs satisfied" (p. 79). In addition, Emerson (1976) related the PCS to the social exchange theory. He (1976, p. 359) underpinned the

steady exchange of crucial resources as being depended on the valuation of the social relations between enterprises. Here, it can be concluded that when faced with problems in the market, these relationships will ensure the uninterrupted continuation of business processes for the buying as well as for the supplying company. Consequently, key suppliers appreciate those customers considering social elements too in lieu of just price factors (Moody, 1992, p. 52). Additionally, Blenkhorn and Banting (1991, p. 187) recognized that the conventional relation between these two market participants has been switched. They refer to the preferred customer conception as “reverse marketing” (p. 187) where purchasing firms proactively approach the supplier in order to suit their needs (Blenkhorn & Banting, 1991, p. 187). Other researchers coined the concept “customer of choice” (Bew, 2007, p. 1; Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, p. 127) or “interesting customers” (Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, p. 179). A preferred customer is defined as a “buyer to whom the supplier allocates better resources than less preferred buyers” (Pulles, Schiele, Veldman, & Hüttinger, 2016, p. 129) and thus the conception is intended to direct the supplier towards granting the purchasing company in question preferential treatment over others (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1195; Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 11). Such a direction is displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: *The pyramid of prosperity*



The pyramid of prosperity in Figure 1 provides an overview of the various statuses and their implications for customers attempting to attain a better position in the market. At the bottom, all customers are equally treated by the supplier and must pay. In the middle, selected customers become a little bit preferred by the supplier over peers, but still need to pay for the benefits. At the top, focal customers are chosen as preferred customers by the supplier and receive the associated advantages free of charge. Besides having a competitive advantage (Pulles et al., 2016, p. 137; Schiele, Veldman, & Hüttinger, 2011, p. 18; Frederik G. S. Vos et al., 2016, p. 4621), the following benefits can be expected:

Technology acquirement and innovation advantages (Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, p. 193; Ellis, Henke, & Kull, 2012, p. 1265; Hald, Cordón, & Vollmann, 2009, p. 968; Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1187; Andrea S. Patrucco, Luzzini, Moretto, & Ronchi, 2019, p. 360; Schiele et al., 2011, p. 16; Zunk & Schiele, 2011, p. 978),

operational advantages like prioritized delivery (Hottenstein, 1970, p. 46; Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1187; Williamson, 1991, p. 79) or reduced cycle times (Ulaga, 2003, p. 685), and

pricing & costs advantages (Hald et al., 2009, p. 968; Moody, 1992, p. 57; Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1187; Andrea S. Patrucco et al., 2019, p. 360; Schiele et al., 2011, p. 16; Ulaga, 2003, p. 690; Zunk & Schiele, 2011, p. 978), which can be 5% to 30% or 2% to 4% respectively (Bew, 2007, p. 2; Blenkhorn & Banting, 1991, p. 188).

Recently, the term supplier resource mobilization was introduced and is closely related to the PCS. Being able to mobilize the resources of the procurement organization’s supply base is seen as a crucial exercise requiring consideration by the buyer in order to be favored by the seller (Pulles et al., 2019, p. 1). Hereby, succeeding and excelling over competitors is essential to take advantage over the supplier’s limited capacity attributable to each market participant (Pulles et al., 2019, p. 1).

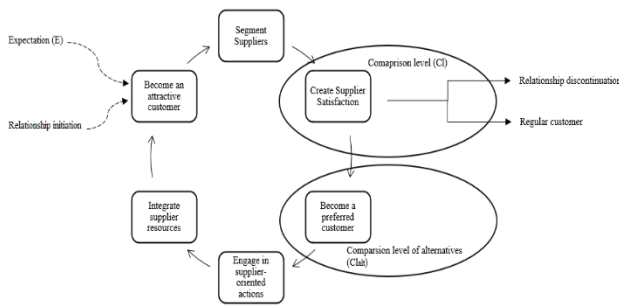
As purchasing organizations are required to advertise themselves and more actively approach their respective suppliers in today’s dynamic business environment, comprehending the antecedents of the PCS is of utmost importance to become favored over competitors. Therefore, the subsequent segment deals with a framework derived from two prominent research outputs stressing the interconnectedness of customer attractiveness, supplier satisfaction, and the preferred customer status.

2.2 The trailblazers of becoming favored: Customer attractiveness, Supplier satisfaction, and Preferred customer status

The path a buyer must follow to accomplish preferential treatment is sophisticated and involves multiple stages. Figure 2. is an adjusted and enlarged model deduced from the cycle of preferred customership (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1180) and the six stages of supplier resource mobilization (Pulles et al., 2019, p. 3). In contrast to the former, the latter sheds light on an extended number of steps required in order to become a prioritized customer and to maintain this rank (Pulles et al., 2019, p. 3). These steps are cyclical, because they must be regularly reviewed to ensure their effectiveness (Pulles et al., 2019, p. 2). Nonetheless, these two frameworks are intertwined. Supplier resource mobilization is associated with “the buying company’s efforts to influence supplier resource allocation” (Pulles et al., 2019, p. 1). Since favorable distribution of funds by the supplier indicates preferred customer status (Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 11), the purchasing company must mobilize these resources for its own benefits.

As Figure 2. presumes social interactions among participants, it is essential to comprehend the origin of the theoretical framework. The model has emanated from social exchange theory (SET). Homan (1958) was one of the first who contemplated that “[s]ocial behavior is an exchange of goods [...]” (p. 606). He stated that relationships between parties are characterized by costs and rewards. Each of these linkages will be maintained if the rewards can maximize the satisfaction of the receiving side (Homans, 1958, p. 606; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, p. 31). Such an exchange can lead to economic together with social ramifications (Lambe, Wittmann, & Spekman, 2001, p. 6). More precisely, Figure 2’s initial position begins with becoming attractive. Based upon previous work, Hüttinger et al. (2012) re-emphasized that a client must be appealing for the supplier to commence engaging with the former. If the purchaser can assuage the seller’s expectancies, then the latter will be pleased (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1194). Further, the supplier satisfaction stage includes a comparison level accentuating that the supplier assesses its relation with the customer (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1180). Only if the discrepancy between its initial prospects and the actual matter of course reaches the supplier’s merest yardstick, gratification will be the outcome (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1180). The greater the satisfaction with that buyer over competitors is, will result in assigned PCS (Hüttinger et al., 2012, pp. 1194-1195). However, before such a status is conferred, the supplier contrasts available alternatives with the client in question. Therefore, he decides whether to abandon the relation or to endure with the customer either as a ‘normal’ client or as favored customer (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1180).

Figure 2: A combined framework for achieving a PCS



Although, prominence is given to supplier satisfaction and achieving a PCS, Figure 2 foregrounds the relevance of understanding customer attractiveness and other elements within the preferred customer paradigm which have been explained by SET. Yet, supplier satisfaction calls for comprehending its vital predecessors for becoming a customer of choice. Therefore, the subsequent section deals with the drivers of supplier satisfaction.

2.2.1 Supplier satisfaction and its antecedents:

Relational behavior, growth opportunity, profitability as supreme and contact accessibility, support, innovation potential, involvement, and reliability as inferior antecedents

Figure 2 highlights supplier satisfaction as crucial element when trying to become an interesting customer for suppliers. Several definitions of supplier satisfaction have been derived (Benton & Maloni, 2005, p. 5; Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 104), but this paper utilizes the definition stemmed from Schiele et al. (2012). They specified supplier satisfaction as “[...] a condition that is achieved if the quality of outcomes from a buyer-supplier relationship meets or exceeds the supplier’s expectations” (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1181). Therefore, being appealing is not sufficient when the purchaser strives for a PCS and thus must be aware of the predecessors embedded in supplier satisfaction (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1198).

The overarching elements attributable to supplier satisfaction were outlined by Hüttinger et al (2012). They identified four overall antecedents of supplier satisfaction being 1) Technical excellence, 2) Supply value, 3) Mode of interaction, and 4) Operational excellence. Each of these predecessors is traceable to particular functions within an organization (Hüttinger et al., 2012, pp. 1200-1201). Subsequently, these antecedents together with more recent findings will be discussed.

Firstly, technical excellence is shaped by components which are related to the Research & Development division (Hüttinger et al., 2012, pp. 1200-1201). Earlier supplier involvement can be seen as a key contributor to technical excellence (Maunu, 2002, p. 94). For the buyer, it can be advantageous in terms of getting access to novel technologies as well as increased usage of the supplier’s assets (Maunu, 2002, p. 94). Other researchers found that joint relationship efforts are closely linked to technical excellence. Through these efforts both parties involved in the relation can live up to the counterpart’s interests along with the respective prosperity (Nyaga, Whipple, & Lynch, 2010, p. 109). Suppliers value such initiatives from the buyer resulting in higher trust levels (Nyaga et al., 2010, p. 110). Moreover, supplier development efforts by the buyer, such as particular strategies together with capital specific investments, were associated with supplier satisfaction and commitment (Ghijsen, Semeijn, & Ernstson, 2010, p. 24).

Secondly, the purchasing department impacts the underlying supply value elements comprising supplier satisfaction (Hüttinger et al., 2012, pp. 1200-1201). Wong (2000, p. 429)

noted cooperative relationships and the buyer’s dedication to increase its supplier’s satisfaction as the respective drivers leading to overall better trade performance. These buyer-seller exchange relationships are an important finding, since the purchasing organization’s responsibility and quality concerns are enhanced by pleased suppliers (Benton & Maloni, 2005, p. 2). This conclusion has been recently confirmed by research. Glas (2018, p. 107) uncovered that the quality of the purchasing function consisting of a ‘normal’ degree of service -, time management -, and communication quality, as well as the degree of professionalization are additional major antecedents for supplier satisfaction. Other scientific findings highlighted that the status within and the quality of the absorptive capacity of the procurement function influence joint collaboration efforts with suppliers which in turn firmly impact innovation (Andrea Stefano Patrucco, Luzzini, & Ronchi, 2017, p. 1282).

Underlying factors of buyer-seller exchange relations are commitment, cooperation, and trust resulting in described enlarged performance by the supplier and ultimately in supplier satisfaction (Benton & Maloni, 2005, pp. 9-10). As commitment affects supplier satisfaction (Benton & Maloni, 2005, pp. 9-10), dedicated investments by both buyer (Andrea S. Patrucco, Moretto, Luzzini, & Glas, 2020, p. 8) and supplier strengthen their commitment to each other in the long-run (Ghijsen et al., 2010, pp. 24-25; Nyaga et al., 2010, p. 109). If the apparent merit in a relationship outweighs the value of another in terms of satisfaction, the supplier will be more inclined to increase its commitment towards the ‘better’ relation, due to the anticipated relational benefits (Pulles et al., 2016, pp. 131-132). Once supplier satisfaction and thus commitment are achieved, it is argued that suppliers will work towards accomplishing the buyer’s objectives (Wong, 2000, p. 429). Consequently, commitment is crucial for the supplier to be pleased with the relationship and its results (Nyaga et al., 2010, p. 110).

Thirdly, all organizational functions can have an influence on the mode of interaction identified as another antecedent of supplier satisfaction (Hüttinger et al., 2012, pp. 1200-1201). It has been recognized that suppliers put greater emphasis on collaborative actions rather than relationship results (Nyaga et al., 2010, p. 110). Therefore, they value prompt information exchange influencing their satisfaction (Whipple, Frankel, & Daugherty, 2002, p. 76). Through the information sharing the sellers can adapt their processes to the buyer’s needs resulting in commitment (Nyaga et al., 2010, p. 110). Moreover, another important factor for achieving supplier satisfaction was found to be communication (Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 107; Maunu, 2002, p. 96; Wong, 2000, p. 430). It is a relevant finding, since it also impacts the operational dimension leading to supplier satisfaction (Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 107). Predominantly, relational behavior affects supplier satisfaction (Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 712)

Fourthly, the buying organization’s production division impacts the operational excellence contributing to supplier satisfaction (Hüttinger et al., 2012, pp. 1200-1201). Essig & Amann (2009, p. 107) ascertained statistical significance in their supplier satisfaction index for the operational antecedent of supplier satisfaction being order process. As a result, the order process can be seen as essential element representing high reliability for predicting supplier satisfaction. Reliability, in turn, has been ascertained as one supreme aspect impacting supplier satisfaction (Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 712). Further, Meena and Sarmah (2012, p. 1238; p. 1249) align with Essig & Amann’s (2009, p. 107) observed finding. They detected purchase policy, which embeds the order process, as the most important determinant for supplier satisfaction in their developed supplier satisfaction index. Recently, an advanced supplier satisfaction index (SSI)

model was developed which is based upon previously identified factors and key performance indicators (KPIs) influencing supplier satisfaction to measure the value of a given buyer-seller relationship (Hudnurkar & Ambekar, 2019, pp. 1488-1489).

Newly, Hüttinger et al (2014, p. 712) found growth opportunities for the supplier as another paramount antecedent, whereas support, contact accessibility, operative excellence, supplier involvement, and innovation potential were not statistically relevant. These findings have been empirically amended by recent research. It has been accentuated that these antecedents follow a hierarchical structure meaning that not all of them are directly affecting the extent to which a supplier is satisfied (Frederik G. S. Vos et al., 2016, p. 4621). In ascending order, Vos et al. (2016, p. 4621) identified operative excellence, relational behavior, growth opportunity and profitability as the prime antecedents of supplier satisfaction, whereas contact accessibility, involvement, reliability, support, and innovation potential are mediocre. Lately, the degree of dependency among the buyer and seller was pinpointed as a further relevant component of supplier satisfaction (Caniëls, Vos, Schiele, & Pulles, 2018, p. 349). Mutual dependence (i.e., buyer and supplier are equally dependent on each other) in a buyer-supplier relationship favorably impacts supplier satisfaction (Caniëls et al., 2018, p. 343; 349). In addition, however, asymmetric dependence (i.e., buyer and supplier are not equally dependent on each other) results in greater satisfaction of suppliers when the current relationship with the buyer is characterized by a moderate level of total dependence (Caniëls et al., 2018, pp. 348-349). Notwithstanding the extent to which the supplier is contingent upon the buyer, the former can potentially obtain virtue by seizing the purchaser's growth opportunities and operative excellence. These first-tier supplier satisfaction antecedents (Frederik G. S. Vos et al., 2016, p. 4621) can neutralize any adverse aftereffects resulting from dependence (Caniëls et al., 2018, p. 349). In contrast to supplier dependence, it has been discovered that buyer dependency on the supplier is not detrimental if the former's intention is to foster the latter's innovation contribution. Additionally, the buyer must be highly attractive to avoid negative consequences resulting from such dependence (Schiele & Vos, 2015, pp. 143-144). An overview of the antecedents of supplier satisfaction can be found in Table 1 in appendix A.

In sum, if the supplier encounters alignment of its expectancies, he will be pleased with the current relationship with the consumer in question (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1181). Previously, the drivers of supplier satisfaction were categorized into four overarching groups being technical excellence, supply value, mode of interaction, and operational excellence (Hüttinger et al., 2012). Newly, additions were made to these categories (Caniëls et al., 2018; Hüttinger et al., 2014) and they were ranked by their relevance (Frederik G. S. Vos et al., 2016). If the supplier is satisfied in the current relationship, beneficial allotment of resources for the customer will be interceded by supplier satisfaction and not customer attractiveness. Therefore, knowing how to content suppliers, is critical to become a preferred customer (Pulles et al., 2016, p. 137) and ultimately to acquire a competitive edge (Frederik G. S. Vos et al., 2016, p. 4621). Consequently, the following section will deal with attaining the PCS and its antecedents to be able to outperform competitors in today's competitive market for suppliers.

2.2.2 Preferred customer status and its antecedents: Economic value, Relational quality, Instruments of Interaction, Strategic compatibility

Supplier satisfaction was determined as one prerequisite for becoming favored by the seller (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1181).

Regarding this conclusion, the subsequent step in Figure 2 deals with the supplier's decision to either assign or not assign the focal customer a preferred customer status which is contingent upon the comparison of available alternatives (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1180). Therefore, comprehending what elements influence the supplier's decision to grant favorable treatment is crucial.

Hüttinger et al. (2012, p. 1201) pointed out that economic and social touchstones are relevant for suppliers to award preferential treatment to a client. They grouped the preferred customer's antecedents into four categories, namely 1) Economic value, 2) Relational quality, 3) Instruments of Interaction, and 4) Strategic compatibility (p. 1202). Each of these antecedents will be discussed in the following.

Firstly, 'Economic value' considers the inherent benefits and expenses for the supplier when generating value (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1202). Accordingly, suppliers value buyers that consider the total expenses rather than sales price (Moody, 1992, p. 52). As the buyer's price/volume decision and growth potential are perceived facilitators by suppliers (Hald et al., 2009, p. 968), enlarged purchase volumes result in less expenses for the supplier to treat the customer and hence provoke intensified customer relevance (Williamson, 1991, p. 81). Ergo, the limitations of the expenses within a partnership by the supplier are valuable for the buying organization (Ulaga, 2003, pp. 689-690) and the aforementioned favored relevance can lead to a competitive edge for the focal customer (Schiele, 2012, p. 44).

Secondly, 'Relational quality' is comprised of the driving, relational aspects making up the buyer-seller relationship (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1202). It has been noted that reciprocal loyalty between the purchasing organization and the seller as a result of long-lasting business relationships, influences the latter's decision to serve the former rather than competitors (Williamson, 1991, pp. 80-81). In addition, it is crucial for the customer to please the supplier and its decision in order to reap the benefits of getting beneficial allotment of resources (Baxter, 2012, p. 1255). Other underlying elements making up the quality of a specific buyer-seller relationship are trust and commitment. These were found as the major attributes valued by suppliers (Moody, 1992, p. 52). Bew (2007, p. 2) reinforced the relational importance of having an understanding for what suppliers value. Procurement organizations must enhance their relational competences (Ellis et al., 2012, p. 1265), since it can assist the buyer with obtaining preferential treatment (Bew, 2007, p. 3; Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 712).

Thirdly, another antecedent for the preferred customer status is the 'instruments of interaction'. They describe techniques with which the buyer can engage with the supplier in their respective relationship (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1202). Such an engagement is essential, since it could extend the gains derived from such a relation (Ellis et al., 2012, p. 1266). Customers must come up with novel and creative strategies to serve the suppliers' needs and wants and to take advantage of their resources (Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, pp. 193-194; Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, p. 127). Other tools to enlarge the value inherent in a buyer-seller relationship were all found to be about including the supplier in the buyer's processes, properly managing crises as well as reacting to efficiency initiatives to limit expenses (Moody, 1992, pp. 52-53). Also, suppliers favor foreseeable decision processes by the buyer, which, in turn, can contribute to customer prioritization and ultimately to preferential allotment of resources (Bew, 2007, p. 3).

Fourthly, another antecedent of the PCS deals with the degree to which the buyer and seller are 'strategically compatible' with each other (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1202). Researchers stressed that there must be alignment between the buyer's and supplier's

business intentions to benefit from the relationship (Lambert, Emmelhainz, & Gardner, 1996, p. 8). Additionally, the strategic fit is of major relevance for suppliers in order to award the customer in question with preferential treatment (Bew, 2007, p. 3). Here, customer prioritization is furthered by the vicinity between the client and the supplier and cluster membership (Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 11).

Conclusively, Hüttinger et al (2012) designated the underlying drivers of the PCS. This status implies that several buyers compete with peers to enhance their current rank and hence win the supplier's favor and ultimately its assets (Pulles et al., 2019, p. 4). An overview of the antecedents of the PCS can be found in Table 1 in appendix A. However, to what extent psychological contracts and psychological contract breaches influence customer prioritization will be examined in the ensuing sections.

2.3 Psychological contracts and psychological contract breaches: History, definitions, concepts

From the preceding sections it becomes obvious that the PCS is of supreme relevance for the buyer. Figure 2 highlights that supplier satisfaction antedates such a status. Therein, expectations play a crucial role (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1181). As customer prioritization has been derived from SET, researchers found that psychological contract theory (PCT) exhibits similarities in their meaningfulness with the former (Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall, 2008, p.8). In general, since PCs and PCBs have been extensively studied for the inter-personal and inter-organizational affairs, their applicability for the procurement field lack attention. Therefore, this paper attempted to outline the relevant SET aspects on which PCT rests and extended the PCT to the preferred customer concept.

2.3.1 The historical development of PCs and frameworks and their shifting prominence

2.3.1.1 In the period from 1930-1980, PCs were defined as mutual expectancies on which the employment-relationship rests

Already in 1938, the complementary exchange between the organization and its employees was underlined. Chester I. Barnard (1938) emphasized that employees obtain higher utility when derived from the organization's purposes. These purposes function like firm creed mechanisms (Godfrey & Mahoney, 2014, p. 365). The following two decades were characterized by salience about the focal theme. In 1960, Argyris (1960) introduced the expression 'psychological work contract' when talking about the implicit conditions inherent in the supervisor-employee relationship at a US factory (N. Conway & Briner, 2009, p. 74). According to Argyris (1960) PCs are mainly based upon the interchange of physical resources within a relationship and that such a relation, in turn, is characterized by the actors' reciprocal realization of their respective requisites (Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall, 2008, p.3). However, earlier research noticed that psychoanalytical contracts embed physical as well as non-physical elements (Menninger, 1958, p. 30).

In the same year as Argyris, Gouldner (1960, p. 171) claimed that the norm of reciprocity is a universal aspect. It means that humans should reciprocate obtained assistance from others and not harm any of these persons. This principle is the fundamental idea of social exchange behavior (Blau, 1964, p. 196; Homans, 1958, p. 606). It has been asserted that one party's satisfaction within a relationship is derived from the counterparts' perception of obligatory moral standards to reciprocate the received value from the former (Gouldner, 1960, p. 174). When reflecting on his work from 1965, Schein reinforced that unwritten

expectations (i.e., perceptions) between an individual and an organization constitute a PC (Schein, 2015, p. 11). Levinson, Price, Munden, Mandl, and Solley (1962) prescribed these expectations as mutual and that they can be either more explicit or implicit (Anderson & Schalk, 1998, p. 638).

During the period from 1930-1980, two theoretical frameworks by Kotter (1973) and Portwood & Miller (1976) gained relevance. Kotter (1973, p. 91) attempted to comprehend the underlying complexities of the 'joining-up' process (i.e., a new employee hired to work at focal firm). He postulated that the organizational mismanagement of the joining-up process and the associated intransigence to admit these blunders, as well as the ex-ante experiences of potential employees, would be possible fundamental reasons for complications (Kotter, 1973, p. 91). Kotter (1973, p. 92) confirmed that organizations which better met the early expectations of employees, could expect lessened turnover, increased productivity, and job satisfaction by its laborers. Similar results were found by Portwood & Miller (1976, p. 109), who studied whether employees' a priori expectations towards working at that organization were met or not on the job later. Employee work behavior and job satisfaction were identified to be favorably related to the type of means chosen by the organization to manage and match the employees' expectancies (Portwood & Miller, 1976, p. 109).

2.3.1.2 The reconceptualization of PCs & novel frameworks: Obligations in an employment-relationship are dependent on perceived promises

Rousseau's opus (1989) designated a cesura for PCs. She reconceptualized previous works by drawing special attention to obligations based upon perceived promises (Roehling, 1997, pp. 212-213). As opposed to Argyris (1960), Schein (1965) and Levinson et al. (1962) who beheld that PCs are comprised of reciprocal expectancies (J. A. M. Coyle-Shapiro, Costa, Doden, & Chang, 2019, p. 9.2), Rousseau (1989, p. 123) defined these contracts as "an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party". Such beliefs are based upon made pledges to get a supplementary compensation in any form leading to reciprocal obligations among the actors in the given relationship (Rousseau, 1989, p. 123). Derived from Rousseau's definition (1989, p. 123), it can be concluded that PCs vary in their scope of application; either these agreements pertain to individuals or to relationships. As the individual's self-perception to the partnership and its unique history affect the formation of PCs (Spindler, 1994, p. 327), the reciprocal exchange relationship can be perceived by the participants as differing in terms of the extent to which obligations have been accomplished and the way PC implications have been interpreted (J. A. M. Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019, p. 9.2). It is important to notice that PCs differ from Gouldner's (1960) norm of reciprocity. Such a contract is established based upon the merit put on reciprocity and not because a person has received help from another one and thus should return this assistance (Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994, p. 147; Rousseau, 1989, p. 126).

Howsoever, the employer-employee relationship covers the whole contract spectrum from precisely legal to solely psychological (Spindler, 1994, p. 327). Wherefore, slightly different definitions of PCs have been delineated by other researchers as displayed in Table 2 in appendix B. As can be seen from Table 2, the underlying mechanism on which PCs rest is dependent upon achieving an equilibrium between the promises made and received (Millward & Hopkins, 1998, p. 1531).

2.3.2 Differing influencing factors, effects and consequences of PCs & PCBs exist on an inter-personal and inter-organizational level

2.3.2.1 PCs on an inter-personal level: Qualities inherent in PCs, personality traits, and types of PC contracts

Hitherto, research has mainly focused on the assessment of as well as the ramifications of relational and transactional PCs (Hansen & Griep, 2016, p. 121; O'Donohue, Hutchings, & Hansen, 2018, p. 1380). However, other types such as transitional, ideological, organization-centered, and I-deal contracts exist as well (Hansen & Griep, 2016, p. 121; McInnis, Meyer, & Feldman, 2009, p. 176). The various definitions of these agreements can be found in Table 3, whereas their differences and similarities can be found in Table 4 in appendix C. PCs are distinguished based upon features and content (Hansen & Griep, 2016, p. 121).

By looking at the features inherent in PCs, relational and transactional contracts can be differentiated from each other by formality, explicitness, negotiation, scope, time frame, tangibility, focus, and stability (Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall, 2008, pp. 12-13; McInnis et al., 2009, pp. 178-179; Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993, p. 11). From a content standpoint, the former describes a continuous relationship which is based upon palpable and impalpable (e.g., support, career rewards and mutual loyalty (Millward & Hopkins, 1998, p. 1532)) relational exchanges (Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall, 2008, p. 13), whereas the latter is centered on economic barterers (J. A. M. Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019, p. 9.3). Economic barterers, in turn, are characterized by autonomous, one-time interactions (Millward & Hopkins, 1998, p. 1532). The greater the extent to which the relational aspect is embedded in the PC, the lesser the transactional element in such an agreement and contrariwise (Millward & Hopkins, 1998, p. 1546). Ergo, these two types of contracts are contingent upon each other and cannot be handled with in isolation (J. A. M. Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2019, p. 9.3).

Furthermore, two theoretical frameworks have emerged. Firstly, D. E. Morrison (1994, pp. 355-357) adjusted Levinson et al. (1962) initial conceptualization of the qualities inherent in PCs in work settings. The adapted underlying mechanisms of PCs are 1) Predictability, 2) Interdependence, 3) Psychological Distance, 4) Change, and 5) Danger. All these qualities are reciprocal, and contracts develop from people's actions and not from what they will probably tell to do (D. E. Morrison, 1994, pp. 356-357). Secondly, inspired by the work done by MacNeil (1985, p.484) who categorized relational contracts into the behavioral, legal, and scholarly dimension, Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni (1994, p. 463) extended the number of contracts by developing a framework to identify to what extent various PCs can influence the employees' collaboration, accomplishment and retention with customers and colleagues. According to these researchers, each contract has two features: performance requirements and time frame (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994, p. 467). Performance requirements are referred to as "the degree of specificity in performance standards as a condition of employment (well-specified or weakly specified)" (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994, p. 467). These two contract features make up a framework consisting of four different kinds of contracts; 1) Transactional contracts, 2) Relational contracts, 3) Balanced contracts, 4) Transitional contracts (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994, pp. 467-468).

To date, researchers empirically tested the effect of various moderators, respectively contingencies on the different types of PCs. Raja, Johns, and Ntalianis (2004, p. 350) gauged the relation

between the big five personality traits and PC types. Relational contracts were found to be influenced by self-esteem and conscientiousness, whereas equity sensitivity (i.e., you want more for a given level of input than others), neuroticism (i.e., emotional instability), and external locus of control (i.e., success failure is determined by external mechanisms) did not have an effect (Raja et al., 2004, p. 358). At this point, it can be concluded that employees will perceive fewer PCBs with their managers, if both parties are more alike in their cognitive style (Suazo, Turnley, & Mai-Dalton, 2008, p. 303).

Table 5: *Influencing factors of PCs*

Influencing factors of PCs	Reference
Qualities inherent in PCs	(Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall, 2008, pp. 12-13; Levinson et al., 1962; McInnis et al., 2009, pp. 178-179; D. E. Morrison, 1994, pp. 356-357; Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993, p.11; Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994, p. 467)
Type of PC contract	(Hansen & Griep, 2016, p. 121; McInnis et al., 2009, p. 176; Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994, pp. 467-468)
Personality traits	(Raja et al., 2004, p. 350; Suazo et al., 2008, p. 303)

2.3.2.2 PCBs on an interpersonal level: context of the person

As O'Donohue et al. (2018, p. 1380) pointed out, the second strain of research concentrated on meeting or infringing perceptions. On the one side, fulfilling a PC is defined as "the extent to which one party to the contract deems the other has met its obligations" (Lee, Liu, Rousseau, Hui, & Chen, 2011, p. 204). On the other side, Robinson and Morrison (2000, p. 538) confirmed that violation and breach are separated concepts. As breach deals with one party's recognition of the non-fulfillment of obligations proportionally to the other side's contributions, PC violation (PCV) is postulated to derive from a PCB (E. W. Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 230). Violations of PCs were defined as the "[...] failure of organizations or other parties to respond to an employee's contribution in ways the individual believes they are obligated to do so" (Rousseau, 1989, p. 128). These agreements cover the affective and emotional mental conditions of individuals (E. W. Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 230). Further, contract violations can result in emotional outrages (Dulac, Coyle-Shapiro, Henderson, & Wayne, 2008, p. 1092; Zhao et al., 2007, p. 669) with varying vehemence (Rousseau, 1989, p. 129). As PCs build upon reciprocal obligations, a cognizant relation and trust, the latter must be renewed in order to revitalize the relation (Rousseau, 1989, p. 128).

As regards PCB and PCV, one strain of academics have developed a framework to delineate the mental processes through which a laborer goes through a priori perceiving a PCV (E. W. Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 226). An abstract version was utilized by the same researchers three years later. They attempted to pinpoint the underlying mechanisms of these psychological processes and to empirically test the relation between perceived PCBs and the central mechanisms (Robinson & Morrison, 2000, p. 526). Recently, psychical processes have gained renewed academic interest (Bankins, 2015, p. 1071; Solinger, Hofmans, Bal, & Jansen, 2016, p. 494). In case of PCV, however, the remaining employees in an organization experience the following: 1) the destruction of trust in equity, fairness, and

justice (with trust being the fundamental component of PCs (Rousseau, 1989, p. 128)); 2) employees' perceived degree of security has been decimated and their self-respect together with their individuality have been periled; and 3) firm loyalty has been disappeared (Sims, 1994, p. 374).

Heretofore, several researchers investigated the consequences of PCBs and how many times these breaches were experienced by employees (Neil Conway & Briner, p. 295; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994, p. 252). Investigators ascertained that employees begin with adversary work behavior (Doden, Grote, & Rigotti, 2018, p. 2; p. 24; Restubog, Bordia, Tang, & Krebs, 2010, pp. 431-432), have enlarged cynical attitudes (i.e., lower levels of gratification and organizational commitment) (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003, p. 643; Raja et al., 2004, p. 362; Zhao et al., 2007, p. 662), reduce their in-role performance and individual effectiveness (Zhao et al., 2007, p. 662), and have increased turnover intentions (Zhao et al., 2007, p. 662). As these findings were mediated by emotional reactions such as violations and mistrust (Zhao et al., 2007, p. 669), Bal, De Lange, Jansen, and Van Der Velde (2008, pp. 151-152) found that age moderates the relationship between organizational commitment and trust and breach.

Furthermore, the employees' initial trust levels towards the employment-relationship influence breaches because breach is more likely to happen when the employer is dishonest to the laborer (Robinson, 1996, pp. 591-592). At this juncture, effective communication assists with limiting observed PCBs, because unambiguously stated PCs enhance trust as well as fairness levels (Guest & Conway, 2002, p. 35). Recently, Vantilborgh, Bidee, Pepermans, Griep, and Hofmans (2016, pp. 16-17) found that job resources limit the individual's tendency to perceive a PCB, because this aspect contributes to long-lasting positive emotions and gratifies fundamental wants. Other academics concentrated upon procedural justice as a potential predecessor of PCB. Indeed, procedural justice on an individual – and group level was revealed to antedate a breach (Peng, Jien, & Lin, 2016, p. 1323; Rosen, Chang, Johnson, & Levy, 2009, pp. 212-213). An overview of the empirical findings is displayed in Table 6, whereas in Table 7 the approaches to avoid PCB are illustrated in appendix D. The influencing factors of PCBs are illustrated in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Influencing factors of PCBs

Influencing factors of PCBs	Reference
Context of the person:	
Mental processes	(Bankins, 2015, p. 1071; E. W. Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 226; p. 230; Robinson & Morrison, 2000, p. 526; Solinger et al., 2016, p. 494)
Age	(Bal et al., 2008, pp. 151-152)
Initial trust levels	(Robinson, 1996, pp. 591-592)
Communication capabilities	(Guest & Conway, 2002, p. 35)
Job resources	(Vantilborgh et al., 2016, pp. 16-17)
Perception of procedural justice	(Peng et al., 2016, p. 1323; Rosen et al., 2009, pp. 212-213)

2.3.2.3 PCs and PCBs on an inter-organizational level: Increased/reduced trust & commitment, emotional outrages, enhanced relational ramifications, and fortified relational bonds

Other researchers looked specifically into the buyer-supplier relationship and the potential influences of PCs on commitment and trust in these partnerships (Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, p. 1057). In addition, the supplier relational orientation in a seller-distributor relationship together with the PC were investigated (Kingshott, 2006, p. 730). Kaufmann, Esslinger, and Carter (2018, p. 62), in turn, scrutinized the effects of PCBs on a B2B relationship. Researchers ascertained that when a PC among the buyer and seller exist, the former's commitment and trust levels towards the supplier will be increased (Kingshott, 2006, p. 730; Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, p. 1062). Commitment is ostensibly improved, due to the expectancies of obligations in the future created through the PC and the outlook of reliable performance of these obligations through trust by the supplier (Kingshott, 2006, p. 731). Herein, reciprocal interactions in the buyer-supplier relationship bound the parties to each other. This effect was constituted by the PC (Kingshott, 2006, p. 731). A PCB was found to reduce the interorganizational trust levels, but the effect was more powerful on collaborative rather than adversarial buyer-supplier relationships (Kaufmann et al., 2018, p. 71). From the customer's perspective, a perceived PCV led to considerable trust decline towards the supplier (Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, p. 1062). Consequently, PCV can terminate the relationship between the buyer and supplier (Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, pp. 1064-1065). Emotional, physical, and psychological stress are expected to follow from such a relationship termination (Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, pp. 1062-1063). However, as trust and commitment in an exchange relationship crystallize in PCs (Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, p. 1063), buyers establishing a PC with their supplier can expect enhanced relational ramifications as well as fortifying their relational bonds (Kingshott, 2006, p. 734).

2.3.2.4 Synthesis of PCs and PCBs on inter-personal & inter-organizational level

In sum, either in an employment – or in a buyer-supplier relationship, if a PCB occurs, trust and commitment by the party experiencing the breach will be reduced and the relationship might be terminated (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003, p. 643; Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, p. 1062; p. 1065; Raja et al., 2004, p. 362; Robinson, 1996, pp. 591-593; Zhao et al., 2007, p. 662; p. 669). However, precise communication about the PC aids in avoiding a breach from happening (Guest & Conway, 2002, p. 35). An overview of the differences between the various concepts of psychological contract fulfillment (PCF), breach, and violation can be seen in Figure 3 in appendix E.

2.4 Research Model & Propositions: Rationalizing the potential effects of PC outcomes on the PCS

After examining the literature on the preferred customer conception and PCs as well as PCBs, the following framework (Figure 4) has been developed and is displayed below.

As the fulfillment of PCs has empirically shown to crystallize in trust and commitment enhancing the relational bond in a partnership (Kingshott, 2006, p. 730; p. 731; Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, p. 1062), it is expected that these agreements from the supplier's viewpoint positively relate to its degree of satisfaction with the focal customer, since trust and commitment were also identified as fundamental antecedents of supplier

satisfaction (Benton & Maloni, 2005, pp. 9-10; Moody, 1992, p. 52).

Proposition 1 (P1): When the supplier perceives a psychological contract as fulfilled, its satisfaction, which is constituted by trust and commitment, is positively affected.

Given the positive relation between PCF and employee commitment (J. Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000, p. 918), which herein is assumed to become supplier commitment, and trust as being the prime component of SET and PCs (Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, p. 1063; Rousseau, 1989, p. 128), satisfying the supplier is a prerequisite for the customer to become favored by the former (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1181). Purchasing professionals need to know how to gratify the suppliers in order to enjoy benevolent treatment by them and gain a competitive advantage over peers (Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 712; Pulles et al., 2016, p. 137; Frederik G. S. Vos et al., 2016, p. 4621). If the supplier's expectations are fulfilled by the buyer, the former will be pleased and has a higher tendency to assign the focal customer a prioritized status (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1181; Frederik G. S. Vos et al., 2016, p. 4621). As it is premised that PCF positively affects the supplier's degree of satisfaction, its tendency to award the customer in question with a preferred status is expected to be positively influenced through an increase in supplier satisfaction.

P2: The fulfillment of a psychological contract perceived by the supplier positively affects its decision to prioritize the focal customer, due to the mediating effect of enlarged supplier satisfaction.

Due to the broad spectrum of PCs covering the employment-relationship (Spindler, 1994, p. 327), it is assumed that these agreements also apply to a business-to-business relationship. Hereby, it is surmised that different types of PCs emerge and have distinct effects on the relation between supplier satisfaction and PCs, since each relation is unique in terms of performance requirements and time frame (Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994, pp. 467-468). As relational agreements are generally based upon mutual loyalty and trust and emphasize long-term orientation with broadly defined performance standards and transactional contracts deal with in detail defined economic exchanges and performance standards (Rousseau, 2001, p. 4; Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994, pp. 467-468), it is supposed that weakly defined performance requirements in relational PCs are based upon higher trust and commitment levels than specified conditions in transactional PCs. As trust and commitment were found to be fundamental components of supplier satisfaction (Benton & Maloni, 2005, pp. 9-10; Moody, 1992, p. 52), both contract types provide relevant implications for the preferred customer paradigm, since supplier satisfaction is a precondition for the customer to become favored by the seller (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1181). Given the implied nature of ambiguity in a partnership, enhanced faith in the other party is called for. Consequently, the greater trust and commitment are embodied in a PC, the stronger the supplier's satisfaction with a given buyer and hence the latter's chances to be prioritized over competitors.

P3a: A relational psychological contract will fortify the relationship between supplier satisfaction and psychological contracts.

P3b: A transactional psychological contract will weaken the relationship between supplier satisfaction and psychological contracts.

Furthermore, if a PCB occurs, trust and commitment by the party experiencing the breach will be reduced and the relationship

might be terminated (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003, p. 643; Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, p. 1062; p. 1065; Raja et al., 2004, p. 362; Robinson, 1996, pp. 591-593; Zhao et al., 2007, p. 662; p. 669). As trust and commitment are the key antecedents of supplier satisfaction (Benton & Maloni, 2005, pp. 9-10; Moody, 1992, p. 52), a PCB is presumed to negatively influence supplier satisfaction and hence the chances to become a preferred customer. In addition, however, it is assumed that the preferred customer status favorably mediates the relation between perceived breach and preferential treatment. The reason for this is that the supplier cannot easily regain its resources invested into the relationship (Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1190), which, in turn, have led to the focal customer's PCS. Therefore, it is expected that the PCS protects the customer from the loss of trust and commitment derived from the breach and ensures that preferential treatment by the supplier towards the focal customer remains in place.

P4a: When the supplier perceives a psychological contract breach its satisfaction is negatively affected and hence the buyer's chances to become a preferred customer and to obtain preferential treatment are diminished.

P4b: The preferred customer status positively mediates the relation between perceived psychological contract breach and preferential treatment.

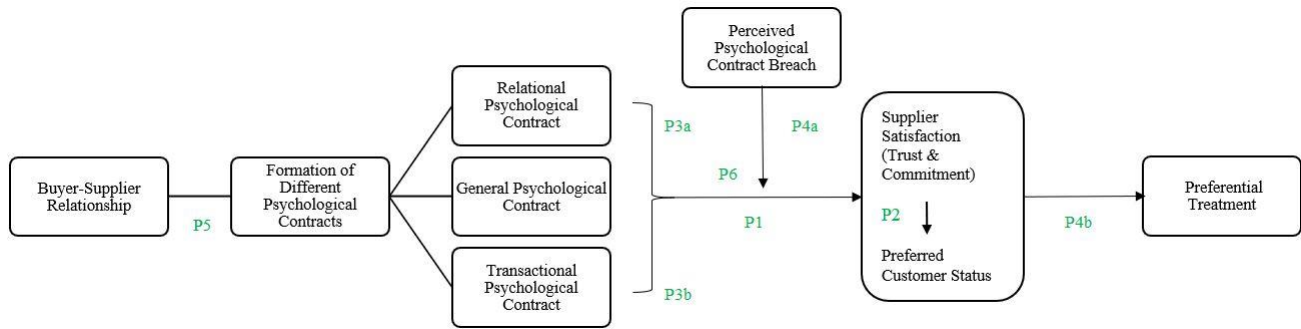
As previously said, PCBs are negatively related to commitment and trust (Kingshott, 2006, p. 732). It is premised that in case of breach, the type of the relationship, undermined by its distinct PC, differently influences trust and commitment levels in a buyer-supplier relationship. Trust loss has been found to be stronger for collaborative rather than adversarial buyer-supplier relationships. This is because in the former relational contracts elicited the expectancies to receive social and/or economic advantages, whereas in the latter transactional contracts evoked mainly economic benefits (Kaufmann et al., 2018, pp. 64-65; p. 71). Therefore, the initial type of relationship seems to be a contingency factor for the magnitude of negative consequences a buyer can expect, when the supplier perceives the respective relational or transactional contract to be breached. The distinct magnitude of the effects of these two types of relations are crucial to be considered, since under normal conditions, trust and commitment increase the supplier's degree of satisfaction and hence increase the buyer's tendency to obtain beneficial treatment from the seller (Benton & Maloni, 2005, pp. 9-10; Moody, 1992, p. 52; Frederik G. S. Vos et al., 2016, p. 4621).

P5: The type of the relationship has an impact on the respective formation of psychological contracts which, in turn, differently influence the buyer-supplier relation in case of breach.

Furthermore, the buyer-supplier relationship will be terminated by the seller if the PC and all its respective obligations have been observed as violated. In such a case, the PCV has been derived from a foregone PCB (E. W. Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 230) and the fundamental component of these agreements being trust (Rousseau, 1989, p. 128) is critically harmed and emotional outrages can be expected (Dulac et al., 2008, p. 1092; Zhao et al., 2007, p. 669). Due to the destruction of trust, which is a central mechanism of supplier satisfaction, it is presumed that the focal customer will not become a preferred customer and that the reciprocal exchange relationship cannot be restored.

P6: Perceived psychological contract violation is mediated by the destruction of trust and hence negatively relates to the preferred customer status.

Figure 4: The effects of (different) psychological contracts & their outcomes on the preferred customer status



3. METHODOLOGY: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS AS DATA COLLECTION METHOD

In general, two different types of data collection methods exist: qualitative or quantitative. In quantitative research, surveys are a possible technique to utilize. However, given the aim of this paper to scrutinize the effects of PCs and PCBs on the preferred customer status in a B2B relationship, surveys could not be used as data collection method as they are too ambiguous to investigate such an underdeveloped topic for the procurement field (Ahmad et al., 2019, p. 2831). Although surveys have more power in generalizability (Muijs, 2012, p. 140), the author wanted to discover the underlying mechanisms and interrelationships. Therefore, a qualitative approach has been selected as data collection method to answer the proposed research question. It deals with comprehending the thoughts and feelings shaping the behavior of individuals (Sutton & Austin, 2015, p. 226). Since the qualitative data collection method comprises personal data (Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa, & Varpio, 2015, p. 669), the researcher must objectively scrutinize the interviews to ensure reasonability (Meyrick, 2006, p. 806). In addition, the sample size must consist of an ideal number of respondents in order to draw generalized conclusions from the sample which are reliable and valid (Faber & Fonseca, 2014, pp. 28-29). The most common forms of qualitative research are interviews and focus groups, but other alternative techniques exist as well (Marks & Yardley, 2004, p. 15).

Focus groups are characterized by discussions about a specific theme among the partakers and are guided by a moderator (Morgan, 1996, p. 130). They differ from interviews in the sense that the denotation of a particular situation is derived from social exchanges among individuals (Marks & Yardley, 2004, p. 10). By utilizing focus groups, the interviewer can scrutinize the candidates' backgrounds and perspectives to comprehend the various reasons of their judgment (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299). However, dialogues will be different than in 'normal' settings (Smithson, 2007, p. 367), due to the ex-ante motive of directing the discussion through a predefined route to guarantee theme coverage (Mishra, 2016, p. 2).

Consequently, for the dyadic case study, interviews were selected as the proper data collection method. In particular, semi-structured interviews were conducted, since they provide the interviewees with great room for maneuver to extensively elaborate on the asked questions (Adams, 2015, pp. 493-494). The researcher gains an in-depth understanding of the investigated theme (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019, pp. 2-3), because each individual is interviewed in isolation (Adams, 2015, pp. 493-494; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019, pp. 5-6). However, one drawback deals with the time-consuming process of examining the interviews, since they need to be run, recorded,

and analyzed (Boyce & Neale, 2006, p. 3). In addition, this process was even more sophisticated and time-taking, due to the present Covid-19 pandemic. Given the developments of the Covid-19 situation, interviews were held virtually and physically. For the former, prevalent telecommunication services were utilized, whereas the latter was focused upon face-to-face meetings to conduct the interviews. In both cases, participants were asked to give their a priori consent on recording each individual session.

Moreover, this paper studies the responses of three buyers and three suppliers leading to six separated interviews in total. Therefore, the extrapolation of data collected is questionable in terms of its general applicability (Hackshaw, 2008, p. 1143). Consequently, only previous findings in the extant body of literature can either be confirmed or rejected. The interviews are based upon two formerly developed questionnaires about the PCS. The first survey was designed for the buyer and embeds 9 questions, whereas the second survey was devised for the supplier and includes 8 questions. Both forms interrogate how the respective party is classified within the relationship as well as the benefits and antecedents of becoming a favored client. Besides that, the buyer and supplier will be asked to respond to a third questionnaire dealing with 5 respectively 4 queries about the experiences with and effects of PCs and PCBs on the PCS. All questions are open-ended, to guarantee extensive elaboration on the initially stated research objectives. As these conceptions can be looked at in either isolation or conjunction, the reason for the separated sections is to incrementally identify the various underlying drivers of the preferred customer paradigm and its associated concepts as displayed in Figure 2. The interview questions for this study's findings can be seen in appendix H.

Furthermore, the findings of the dyadic case study will be compared by randomly arranging pairs to ensure a more holistic view. Each interviewed buyer will be assigned to a probed supplier and vice versa. For instance, purchaser 1 (P1) is paired with supplier 1 (S1). The same structure holds true for the remaining interview partners. An overview of the interview design can be seen in the consecutive table.

Table 9: Interview design

Case	Company respondents	X's	Suppliers' respondents
A	P1		S1
B	P2		S2
C	P3		S3

Besides, all interviews were held in German language, because the case company's and the suppliers' lingua franca is German. Also, the former's headquarter is in Germany as well. As a result, the three questionnaires were translated into German. As interviews were conducted in German, avoiding mistranslations

were of utmost importance to warrant qualified outcomes. Therefore, a second German-speaking student was asked to verify the accuracy of the rephrased queries. After the interviews had been conducted, the software program Amberscript was used to transcribe the interview responses. Amberscript is a transcription tool transforming audio into text files. After the responses had been transcribed, the German answers were translated back into English.

The author followed an inductive coding strategy to structure and explain the interview findings for the analyses and results section. The codes applied are related to the research question and the associated conceptions of the preferred customer status. For instance, searched codes for were about how to (not) fulfill the other side's expectations as these emphasize the underlying drivers of the effects of PCs and PCBs on a B2B relationship. Regarding the PCS, codes like "Suppliers' demands towards buyers" or "Buyers' satisfaction measures" assisted with discovering meanings and patterns crucial for obtaining customer prioritization. Thereby, the individual relevance of the elements responsible for achieving such a rank was revealed.

4. ANALYSES & RESULTS

Left out due to confidentiality.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Addendum and verification of benefits

When striving for customer prioritization, companies can expect a range of benefits which are financial, operational, innovative, and relational in nature. These rewards are systematically discussed in the following. In addition, the benefits found in practice align with the extant literature and can be found in detail in Table 16 in appendix G.

Firstly, regarding financial benefits, except from one seller, all mentioned that benevolent pricing is either received or provided by the respective market participant. Thereby, discounts and rebates are the most common form. Conclusively, the findings are in line with previous literature (Moody, 1992, p. 57; Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1187; Andrea S. Patrucco et al., 2019, p. 360; Schiele et al., 2011, p. 16; Zunk & Schiele, 2011, p. 978). Also, Bew (2007, p. 2); Blenkhorn and Banting (1991, p. 188); Nollet et al. (2012, p. 1187); Ulaga (2003, p. 689) emphasized cost reductions as a result of the PCS. However, only one supplier indicated the reduction of acquisition costs in terms of jointly procuring new customers. Surprisingly, another seller did not mention this aspect, although it does not have the capacities to serve all generalists. A potential reason seems to be the given industry structure presuming the support of customers as an explicit role of the commerce (i.e., Company X) and hence being a hard synergy effect as it has a large branch network reducing the distance between suppliers and end-users. Lastly, paying the old price for the supplier's products even after a price increase for a limited period was accentuated by one purchaser as an additional, prime benefit belonging into the top level of Figure 1. At this juncture, the literature does not provide any similar findings.

Secondly, concerning operational benefits, most buyers and sellers accentuated to obtain/provide prioritized delivery not only under normal conditions, but also in times of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. In alignment with Hottenstein (1970, p. 46); Nollet et al. (2012, p. 1187); Williamson (1991, p. 79), a buyer can expect preferential product supply by its distributors in case of crises or shortages. Further, one buyer stressed that its respective supplier aligns its production schedule and production costs to the former's budget and perceptions confirming "[that] operations are [indeed] handled in a sorrow and efficient way [...]" (Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 703) by the supplier.

Interestingly, one purchaser indicated that he can deviate from terms and conditions in terms of withdrawal costs and period of withdrawal which is a free of charge benefit as displayed in Figure 1 and which has not been found as a benefit by academics so far.

Thirdly, innovation advantages were foregrounded by all interviewees, except from one seller, in the sense that they conduct joint innovation projects with the opposition. Not only does it mean that the purchasers have access to their suppliers' innovations, but also that distributors actively share such type of information and permit access to these novelties. Many researchers have identified the same and emphasized its relevance for the PCS (Baxter, 2012, p. 1259; p. 1265; Bew, 2007, p. 2; Maunu, 2002, p. 94). Besides that, one buyer mentioned that a jointly developed private brand serves as an advertising and image medium which is beneficial for the former and has not been recognized in the literature yet.

Fourthly, both buyers and suppliers highlighted that on an interpersonal level information exchange about the market, innovations, and economic trends as well as close collaborations are the gains of possessing a PCS. Empirical evidence is strong on this aspect (Benton & Maloni, 2005, p. 9; Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1190; Nyaga et al., 2010, p. 111; Whipple et al., 2002, p. 76). Additionally, both sides share the same opinion about what is meant with the respective benefits. Intriguingly, one supplier greatly contributes to Firm X's anniversaries which is a benefit that has not received attention in the literature yet.

5.2 Profitability, growth opportunity, relational behavior, reliability, and operative excellence as first-tier antecedents of supplier satisfaction

The structure of this section is based upon the hierarchical structure of the supplier satisfaction antecedents identified by Frederik G. S. Vos et al. (2016, p. 4621) and emphasizes the relevance of reliability as first- instead of second-tier antecedent.

Firstly, profitability was found in practice as major antecedent of supplier satisfaction. All interviewees agreed upon it. The suppliers are gratified with Company X as it purchases in bulk and thus they have large warehousing at the buyer's side. In addition, all aspects included in the transaction, such as invoice payments, are directed to one central location of Firm X which is deemed satisfactory. The buyers confirmed to buy in large quantities. In line with Frederik G. S. Vos et al. (2016, pp. 4620-4621); Williamson (1991, p. 81) bundling purchasing volume, as implication of profitability, satisfies suppliers and de novo profitability is emphasized as first-tier antecedent of supplier satisfaction.

Secondly, all suppliers are satisfied with Firm X's financial attractiveness. One supplier even indicated to receive the highest turnover from Company X's branches. The reason why suppliers are satisfied, as presumed by all buyers, is Company X's market size and – position. Financial performance as growth opportunity for suppliers was already recognized by Baxter (2012, p. 1255) accentuating the positive effect of economic allure on the PCS.

Thirdly, the relational behavior was deemed as important by both buyers and suppliers for the latter's satisfaction. Especially, trust, communication, and collaborative actions were perceived as underlying drivers, but differences exist in frequency. Most interviewees observed trust as crucial. Indeed, trust was identified as antecedent for supplier satisfaction (Benton & Maloni, 2005, pp. 9-10; Moody, 1992, p. 52). Further, some interviewees pointed out that close relationships are characterized by precise communication as it increases

satisfaction and averts misunderstandings. Literature foregrounds this point too (Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 107; Maunu, 2002, pp. 96-97; Moody, 1992, p. 52; Wong, 2000, pp. 429-430). Ultimately, both parties closely conduct collaborations and protect them from any damage, because they expect reciprocal rewards which, in turn, are underlined by a moral obligation to recompensate the obtained benefits to the respective party. Such behavior is the fundamental assumption of the social exchange theory including the norm of reciprocity (Glavee-Geo, 2019, p. 2; Gouldner, 1960, p. 174; Homans, 1958, p. 606; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, p. 31; Frederik G. S. Vos et al., 2016, p. 4615).

Although identified as second-tier antecedent (Frederik G. S. Vos et al., 2016, p. 4621), reliability was frequently cited as fundamental and supreme by most of the interviewees to gratify suppliers. Existent literature aligns with the finding that acting reliably and consistently assists with enlarging supplier satisfaction (Hald et al., 2009, p. 965; Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 703; Frederik G. S. Vos et al., 2016, p. 4618).

Interestingly, only some suppliers explicitly mentioned operative support leading to enhanced satisfaction. A reason why one seller might remained silent on this point is due to its market share of ca. X% and hence it is not as dependent on Firm X as compared to the rest of suppliers. Given Firm X's market share of Z%, most sellers are asymmetrically dependent on the former since they distribute their products through the commerce. However, such dependence led to enlarged satisfaction as most suppliers seized the buyer's operative excellence for their own merit and by doing so offset any negative ramifications derived from dependence. This is aligned with previous research about supplier dependency (Caniëls et al., 2018, pp. 348-349; Frederik G. S. Vos et al., 2016, p. 4621).

5.3 Economic, relational, & growth factors influence supplier's decision to assign a PCS

First and foremost, a given buyer-supplier relationship must yield some value before the seller assigns a PCS (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1202). Therefore, this section's structure is determined by Hüttinger et al. (2012, pp. 1201-1202) and Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 712) pointing out the relevant antecedents of the PCS. As Company X already possesses a PCS, this part aligns with and extends the previous discussion parts.

Regarding economic factors, most suppliers assigned Company X a PCS, because they are solvent and have large sales and revenue. As all buyers confirmed to purchase large quantities, previous research is confirmed. Indeed, the buyer's volume decision is a perceived facilitator by suppliers (Hald et al., 2009, p. 968), before awarding the focal customer with a PCS. Concerning relational elements, all purchasers stressed to possess long-lasting relationships, marked by mutual trust and loyalty. Veritably, this paper found that sellers assign only those customer with a PCS which consider social elements too instead of just price factors verifying previous research (Moody, 1992, p. 52). As regards growth factors, this research confirmed Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 712)'s finding that growth opportunities are indeed major antecedents of the PCS. As can be seen in Table 11, all suppliers highlighted the importance of growth-oriented drivers. Lastly, only one supplier mentioned the relevance of operational factors for the PCS and thereby authenticating Hüttinger et al. (2014, pp. 711-712) assumption that operative excellence is not considered by suppliers when granting the PCS to a buyer.

5.4 Psychological contracts & the partial support of the initial research model

In general, all respondents could relate to and understood the concept of psychological contracts and its relevance for the preferred customer status in a B2B relationship. However, the former conception was not perceived as being about observed promises, but about sensed expectations. In essence, interviewees aligned with Rousseau's oeuvre (1989), which is about PCs being obligations based upon perceived promises (Roehling, 1997, pp. 212-213), but replaced promises with expectations. The subsequent paragraphs discuss the revised research model and its revamped propositions as displayed in Figure 5 above.

Proposition 1 & 2: Both propositions were confirmed by the interviewees. The majority of suppliers and one buyer mentioned that fulfilling a PC enhances trust and commitment which, in turn, leads to enlarged satisfaction. Simultaneously, such increased gratification indeed enlarges the buyer's chances to become prioritized. As the PCS rests on SET and researchers found analogies between SET and PCT (Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall, 2008, p.8), this paper verifies previous findings about supplier satisfaction positively influencing preferential treatment and extends them to the fulfillment of PCs in a B2B relationship (Pulles et al., 2016, p. 137; Frederik G. S. Vos et al., 2016, p. 4621). Interestingly some respondents accentuated communication as a necessary condition to fulfill PCs in a given relationship foregrounding its mediation effect. Since communication was identified as underlying driver of supplier satisfaction (Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 107; Maunu, 2002, pp. 96-97; Moody, 1992, p. 52; Wong, 2000, pp. 429-430), it assists with adhering to PCs as trust and fairness levels are enhanced through it (Guest & Conway, 2002, p. 35). Trust, in turn, was recognized to positively affect supplier satisfaction providing additional empirical support for P1 and the mediation effect of communication (Benton & Maloni, 2005, pp. 9-10; Moody, 1992, p. 52). Additionally, and in alignment with Ellis et al. (2012, p. 1265), the buyer's attained trustworthiness helps to consistently live up to the supplier's expectations expressed in the PCs to reduce conflicts from emerging in the relation. Consequently, Schiele et al. (2012, p. 1181)'s definition of and Figure 2's indication that supplier satisfaction is a necessary condition to achieve customer prioritization are confirmed.

Another reason why the buyer's chances are increased through supplier satisfaction is two-folded: Firstly, due to the dependency issues described in the previous section. Secondly, given the lack of alternatives in the market (see Figure 2 CLalt), because of the set industry structure in which the "traditional" buyer-supplier relationship still exists, and Firm X's purchasing volume, market size, and branch network. Most suppliers' relative satisfaction with the case company is strengthened and more strongly affecting their decision to assign the case company a PCS. Recent research emphasized the same (Piechota, Glas, & Essig, 2021, p. 1; p. 11).

Proposition 3a & 3b: In each case, a relational PC marked by weakly defined performance standards, seems to be the underlying factor reciprocally binding both parties to each other and increasing their satisfaction. Indeed, these agreements must be based upon higher trust and commitment levels. Even though research ascertained that PCs are formed in the presence of trust and commitment and enlarge the relational bonding effect in an exchange relationship (Kingshott, 2006, p. 734; Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, p. 1063), the novelty is the following: the formation of a relational PC leads to enhanced communication among the partners to avoid future misunderstandings in terms of implicit and explicit expectancies which, in turn, gratifies them

with the given B2B relationship. As communication is a driver of supplier satisfaction (Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 107; Maunu, 2002, pp. 96-97; Moody, 1992, p. 52), a relational PC does indeed strengthen the relationship between supplier satisfaction and PCs. Increased satisfaction can lead to beneficial treatment. Although this study did not provide evidence for P3b, given the confirmation of P3a it can be surmised to be true.

Proposition 4a & 4b: Regarding P4a, all suppliers emphasized that in case of breach trust is lost, and dissatisfaction emerges. However, the chances to become prioritized are not diminished for the entire firm, but for individual branches as one seller indicated. Thereby, the set market structure plays a crucial role and is explained together with P4b in the subsequent paragraph. Conclusively, P4a is partly verified by all sellers, because and in line with prior literature, trust loss negatively affects distributor or employee satisfaction (Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, p. 1062; Robinson, 1996, p. 593).

Most interviewees confirmed that the PCS positively mediates the relation between perceived PCB and preferential treatment (P4b). However, the set external market mechanisms and the relational component confer the PCS the power to mediate the relation between PCB and preferential treatment and not the status itself. The prioritized rank is based upon the long-lasting relationships with suppliers and the external market mechanisms as stated by a buyer. Given Firm X's status in the market and market share of Z%, most suppliers are indeed satisfied with the former as increased turnover can be generated, since more end-users can be reached through Firm X's branch network as most suppliers stressed. Since, the construction materials industry is still characterized by 'traditional' buyer-supplier relationships, the majority of sellers is asymmetric dependent on Firm X, but indeed their satisfaction is increased by the long-lasting mutually beneficial relationship and Company X's status in the market. Recently, F. G. S. Vos, Van der Lelij, Schiele, and Praas (2021, p. 10) ascertained that a buyer's status has seemingly a doubled influence on supplier satisfaction. Due to their asymmetric dependence, both cannot easily regain their invested resources in the relationship, wherefore they do not withdraw the Firm X's PCS and its associated benefits in case of breach, because the partnership is too valuable and satisfactory. The extant body of literature argues similarly on the finding (Caniëls et al., 2018, p. 348; Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1190).

Proposition P5: The proposition was authenticated by the interviewees, but with the subsequent consequences: Indeed, trust loss was found as a logical consequence following a breach, but trust loss has not found to be stronger and hence the PCB had no dramatic effect on the given relationship. The reason why is the long-term relationship marked by mutual trust, clear communication, commitment, and the continuous fulfillment of reciprocal expectations. Seemingly, the initial type of the relationship was and still is collaborative and hence is undermined by a relational PC. Thereby, mutual trust and loyalty are the underlying drivers of such agreements as something is expected to be received by the partner that has already provided the other with something similar in value (Rousseau, 1989, p. 128; Rousseau, 2001, p. 4). In case of breach, then, trust loss can theoretically happen, but practically does not occur, since the other party waiting for its reward utilizes communication as a protection mechanism towards maintaining the buyer-supplier relationship in order to establish a 'win-win situation'. This finding contradicts with and extends Kaufmann et al. (2018, pp. 64-65; p. 71)'s findings by: 1) trust loss as not being stronger in collaborative than in adversarial relationships characterized by their respective PCs, and 2) communication serving as a protection tool to receive expected benefits and to scotch trust loss.

Proposition P6: The reasons why differences in the perception about P6 exist are the following: Since Firm X is the dominant leader in the set market structure, most suppliers are asymmetric dependent (Caniëls et al., 2018, pp. 348-349), as they have no other alternative to business with if they want to generate turnover and hence the violation of reciprocal obligations does not negatively affect the PCS of Company X, although trust levels are reduced. In the other case, the market structure is switched, and a 'modern' buyer-seller relationship exists. Thereby trust levels would be reduced in case of PCV and hence the relationship would continue to exist, but in the form of a partnership of convenience. Although Firm X might conform with that one supplier, it would not enjoy beneficial treatment anymore and thus rejects previous research. Being dependable on the supplier would not lead to a PCS (Schiele & Vos, 2015, p. 144).

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Theoretical contributions

The aim of this paper was three-folded: Firstly, this study advocates research by Hüttinger et al. (2014), and Frederik G. S. Vos et al. (2016). The latter revised the former's findings about the antecedents of supplier satisfaction and identified that these are hierarchically ordered. In descending order, profitability, growth opportunity, relational behavior, and operative excellence are the first-tier, whereas innovation potential, support, reliability, involvement, and contact accessibility are the second-tier antecedents (Frederik G. S. Vos et al., 2016, p. 4621). The study confirmed the prime antecedents, but also reported reliability to be a first-tier instead of second-tier antecedent.

Secondly, this paper authenticated that prioritized customers can expect beneficial treatment by suppliers. Previous benefits in the literature have been verified and novel ones have been added. Additionally, the drivers of supplier satisfaction and the PCS have been validated and extended.

Ultimately, given the long-lasting relationships, marked by mutual trust and loyalty, between Company X and its key suppliers, relational PCs have been revealed as underlying bonding effects of these linkages. Thereby, communication serves as a mechanism to strengthen the partnership by aligning to the reciprocal implicit and explicit expectations. Indeed, it has been found that the PCS mediates the relation between the supplier's perceived PCB and the focal customer's preferential treatment. However, the PCS is thereby affected by the external market mechanisms surrounding Firm X and the relational components found to fortify each of X's relationships.

6.2 Managerial contributions for Firm X

Although the German construction materials industry is dominated by 'traditional' buyer-supplier relationships, Firm X should pay attention to maintain its PCS, current market position and long-lasting relationships with its key suppliers. Next to economic elements, all suppliers reported that their satisfaction is derived from the relationship level with Company X. Regarding the PCS, long-lasting relationships ensure that trust, commitment, and communication levels are maintained. As these aspects highly influence the PCS, Firm X cannot neglect these factors and should not rest upon its set market position. Therefore, it is supposed to focus upon the antecedents revealed in Table 10 and 11.

Considering PCs and PCBs, all sellers emphasized that PCF leads to strengthened trust and commitment which are crucial mechanisms in case of PCB. These aspects assist with creating win-win situations so that both parties are protected from negative consequences. Besides that, consequences are

influenced by the continuity and time of the partnership. Additionally, the type of the PC contract, the context of the person, and the qualities inherent in PCs do influence the current relationship between Firm X and its key suppliers. Therefore, the former should pay attention to these influencing factors, effects and consequences as displayed in Table 5, 8, 12, and 21.

Conclusively, just one supplier mentioned room for improvements in terms of Firm X's supplier policy for its subsidiaries. However, given the aforementioned points about the relevance of possessing prosperous partnerships with key suppliers for the PCS as well as for the effects of PCs and PCBs on the linkage, it is recommended to exercise care in adhering to supplier feedback, since more German-based sellers are bought up by international competitors potentially periling Company X's set market position as highlighted by one of its purchasers.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Regarding the limitations, this study cannot be generalized, due to the qualitative data collection approach chosen with its small sample size of 6 respondents (Hackshaw, 2008, p. 1143). As these respondents were chosen based upon their availability, this research represents a convenience sampling bias and further supports the foregone limitation of generalizability (Jager, Putnick, & Bornstein, 2017, p. 3). Additionally, only one company representative was interviewed assuming to possess all relevant information for this study. However, everyone is bounded in its rationality and thus the given answers might be invalid. Therefore, it would be valuable to conduct a quantitative

analysis to limit potential mistakes and re-confirm this study's findings.

Stimuli for future research avenues are especially centered on the different trust levels inherent in PCs as trust is an essential component of supplier satisfaction which, in turn, has an impact on obtaining a PCS. Fox (1974, p. 77) stated that neither the relational nor the transactional PC can be without a certain level of trust. Heretofore, research assumed that cognitive trust is attributable to transactional PCs and affective trust is presumed to be associated with relational PCs (Atkinson, 2007, p. 231). Consequently, it is logical to premise that these trust constructs have differing effects on the buyer-supplier relationship and the PCS following a PCB.

Furthermore, it might be valuable to scrutinize firms from different industries with different states of dependency in relationships as this study was highly influenced by the set external market mechanisms. Contingent upon the results of these future studies, this paper's findings could be re-attested and extended.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Antecedents of supplier satisfaction & the preferred customer status

Table 1: *Antecedents of the preferred customer status*

Prime antecedents	Implications	Reference
Profitability	Purchase volumes offered	(Hald et al., 2009, p. 968; Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1202; Moody, 1992, p. 52; Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, pp. 129-130; Vos et al., 2016, p. 4621; Williamson, 1991, p. 81)
Growth Opportunity	Brand name, Corporate image, Global Player, Reputation, Mutual growth	(Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 718; Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, p. 130)
	Economic allure	(Baxter, 2012, p. 1255)
	Enter novel markets, approaching new business partners, jointly creating merit	(Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, p. 188; Hald et al., 2009, p.963, p. 968; Walter, Ritter, Gemünden, 2001, pp. 372-373)
	Innovation potential, Early supplier involvement	(Maunu, 2002, p. 94; Vos et al., 2016, p. 4620)
Relational Behavior	Commitment, Cooperation, Reciprocal loyalty, Trust	(Benton & Maloni, 2005, pp.9-10; Moody, 1992, p. 52; Williamson, 1991, pp. 80-81)
	Trained relational competences	(Ellis et al., 2012, p. 1265)
	Status & Quality of buyer's purchasing function	(Glas, 2018, p. 107; Patrucco et al., 2017, p. 1282)
	Value of relationship	(Pulles et al., 2016, pp. 131-132)
	Buyer commitment, - collaboration effort, - goal alignment	(Patrucco et al., 2020, p. 8)
	Collaborative actions	(Nyaga et al., 2010, p. 110)
	Communication, Feedback, Information exchange	(Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, p. 193; Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 107; Maunu, 2002, p. 96; Moody, 1992, p. 52; Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1190; Whipple et al., 2002, p. 76; Wong, 2000, p. 430)
	Openness, Reciprocity in agreements	(Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 718)
	Involvement, Support	(Vos et al., 2016, p. 4620)
	Close relationships, Long-lasting interactions	(Ellegaard, Johansen, & Drejer, 2003, p. 347; p. 354; Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, p. 130)
Geographic proximity develops close ties	(Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 11)	
Reliability	Sticking to agreements Behaving in a reliable and consistent manner	(Hald et al., 2009, p. 965; Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 703; p. 718)
	“[...] a buyer's consistent fulfillment of its implicit and explicit promises to the supplier [...]”	(Ellis et al., 2012, p. 1265)
Operative Excellence	Purchase Policy (including order process)	(Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 107; Meena & Sarmah, 2012, p. 1238; p.1249)

	Order stability, reliableness of forecasting activities	(Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 718; Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, p. 131)
	Delivery, Payment terms/policy, Support	(Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 109; Hudnurkar & Ambekar, 2019, p. 1479)
	"[...] operations are handled in a sorrow and efficient way [...]"	(Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 703)
	Contact accessibility	(Vos et al., 2016, p. 4620)
Strategic compatibility	Alignment of business intentions	(Lambert et al., 1996, p. 8; Bew, 2007, p. 3)
Dependence		(Benton & Maloni, 2005, p. 19; Caniels et al., 2018, p. 349; Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, pp. 130-131)

Appendix B: Definitions of psychological contracts

Table 2: *Overview of various psychological contract definitions*

Overview of various psychological contract definitions

Construct	Definition	Reference
Psychological contracts	"an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party."	Rousseau, 1989, p.123
	"the bundle of unexpressed expectations that exist at the interfaces between humans."	Spindler, 1994, p.326
	"the set of expectations held by the individual employee that specify what the individual and the organization expect to give to and receive from each other in the course of their work relationship."	Sims, 1994, p.375
	"beliefs, held by an employee or employer, that each is bound by promise or debt to an action or course of action in relation to the other party."	Robinson, Kraatz, Rousseau, 1994, p.138
	"what employees are prepared to give by way of effort and contribution in exchange for something they value from their employer, such as job security, pay and benefits, or continuing training."	Newell & Dopson, 1996, p.4
	"an individual's relational schema regarding the rules and conditions of the resource exchange between the organization and the person."	Guo, Gruen, Tang, 2017, p.360

Appendix C: Types of psychological contracts

Table 3: *Different types of psychological contracts*

Different types of psychological contracts		
Classification	Definition	Reference
Relational contract	"long-term or open-ended employment arrangements based upon mutual trust and loyalty. Rewards are only loosely conditioned on performance, derive from membership and participation in the organization."	Rousseau, 2000, p.4
	"a long-term arrangement without specific performance-reward contingencies."	Hui, Lee, Rousseau, 2004,
Transactional contract	"limited duration with well specified performance terms."	Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994, p.468
	"employment arrangements with a short-term or limited duration, primarily focused upon economic exchange; specific, narrow duties and limited worker involvement in organization."	Rousseau, 2000, p.4
	"a short-term exchange of specific benefits and contributions that are highly monetary or economic in focus."	Hui, Lee, Rousseau, 2004, p.312
Balanced contracts	"open-ended and relationship-oriented employment with well-specified performance terms subject to change over time."	Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994, p.468
	"dynamic and open-ended employment arrangements conditioned on economic success of firm and worker opportunities to develop career advantages. Both worker and firm contribute highly to each other's learning and development. Rewards to workers are based upon performance and contributions to firm's comparative advantages, particularly in face of changing demands due to market pressures. "	Rousseau, 2000, p.4
	"an open-ended relational emphasis with the transactional feature of well-specified performance reward contingencies."	Hui, Lee, Rousseau, 2004, p.312
Transitional contracts	"essentially a breakdown in contracts, reflecting the absence of commitments regarding future employment as well as little or no explicit performance demands or contingent incentives."	Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994, p.468
	" a breakdown or absence of an agreement between the parties, as observed in unstable circumstances such as radical change or downsizing in which commitments between the parties are eroded or do not exist."	Hui, Lee, Rousseau, 2004, p.312
Ideological contracts	"ideological currency as credible commitments to pursue a valued cause or principle (not limited to self-interest) that are implicitly exchanged at the nexus of the individual-organization relationship."	Thompson & Bunderson, 2003, p.574
(Idiosyncratic) I-Deals	"voluntary, personalized agreements of a nonstandard nature negotiated between individual employees and their employers regarding terms that benefit each party."	Rousseau, Ho, Greenberg, 2006, p.978

Table 4: Differences & similarities between the various psychological contracts

Contract characteristics	Relational contracts	Transactional contracts	Balanced contracts	Transitional contracts	1-Deals	Ideological contracts	Reference (for all characteristics)
Scope	Broad	Narrow	Broad	Broad	Broad & Narrow	Broad & Narrow	(Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall, 2008, pp. 12-13; Hu et al., 2004, p. 312; MacInnis et al., 2009, p. 173; pp. 175-176; Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993, p. 11; Rousseau & Wade-Benzoni, 1994, pp. 467-468; Rousseau et al., 2006, pp. 978-979; pp. 985-986)
Focus	Socio-emotional & Economic	Economic	Emotional & Economic	Absent	Emotional & Economic	Ideological commitments	
Stability	Flexible	Static	Static	Flexible	Flexible & Static	/	
Tangibility	Intangible/Subjective & Tangible	Tangible/Observable	Tangible	Intangible or Absent	Tangible & Intangible	/	
Time Frame	Long-term/Open-ended	Short-term/Close-ended	Long-term/Open-ended	Short-term/Close-ended	/	/	
Formality	Unwritten & Written	Written	Unwritten	Unwritten or Absent	Written or Unwritten	/	
Explicitness	Implicit	Explicit	Explicit	Implicit	Explicit	/	
Negotiation	Negotiated	Imposed	Negotiated	Imposed or Absent	Negotiated	/	

Table legend: / = no precise literature has been found

Appendix D: Psychological contract breaches

Table 6: *Empirical evidence of the psychological contract consequences*

Empirical Findings: Consequences of Psychological Contracts

Construct	Consequences	Reference
Psychological Contract Fulfillment	Increased commitment & trust	(Kingshott, 2006, p. 730; Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, p. 1062)
	Reciprocal interactions bound one party to the other (i.e. enhanced relational bonds)	(Kingshott, 2006, p. 731; p. 734).
	Enhanced relational ramifications	(Kingshott, 2006, p. 734)
Psychological Contract Breach	54,8%-69% of employees have experienced a breach	(Neil Conway & Briner, 2002, p. 295; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994, p. 252)
	Destruction of trust, fairness, justice, firm loyalty, individuals' self-respect & sense of security	(Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, p. 1062; Robinson, 1996, pp. 592-593; Sims, 1994, p. 374; Zhao et al., 2007, p. 669)
	Employees begin with adversary work behavior	(Dodan et al., 2018, p. 2; p. 24; Restubog et al., 2010, pp. 431-432)
	Reduced organizational commitment & job satisfaction (i.e. enlarged cynical attitudes)	(Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003, p. 643; Raja et al., 2004, p. 362; Zhao et al., 2007, p. 662)
	Reduced in-role performance & organizational citizenship behavior	(Zhao et al., 2007, p. 662)
	Increased turnover intentions	(Zhao et al., 2007, p. 662)
	Termination of relationship leading to increased emotional, physical, psychological stress	(Kingshott & Pecotich, 2007, pp. 1062-1065)

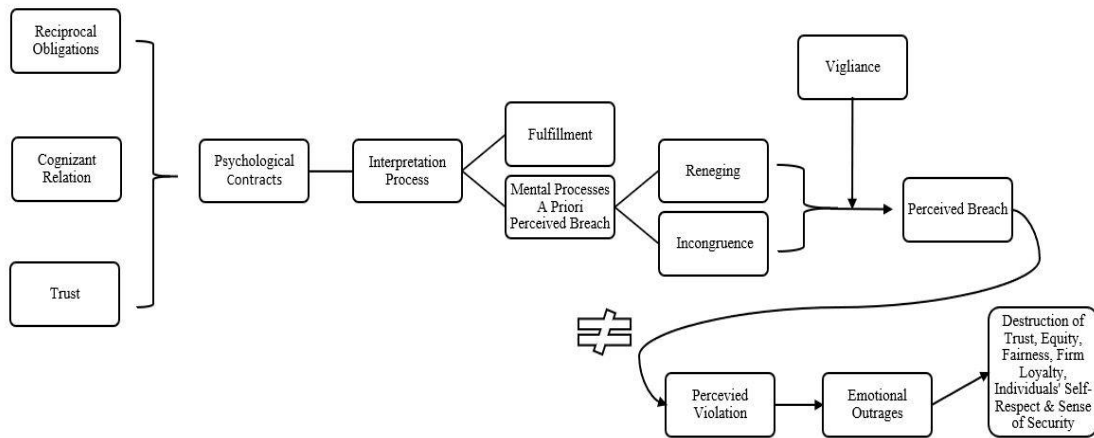
Table 7: *Approaches to avoid psychological contract breach*

Approaches To Avoid Psychological Contract Breach

Construct	Approaches	Reference
Psychological Contract Breach	High initial trust levels in employment-relationship	(Robinson, 1996, pp. 591-592)
	Effective communication, since it enlarges trust & fairness levels	(Guest & Conway, 2002, p. 35)
	Job resources, since they contribute to positive emotions and gratify fundamental wants	(Vantilborgh et al., 2016, pp. 16-17)
	Unambiguous procedural justice on individual - & group level	(Peng et al., 2016, p. 1323; Rosen et al., 2009, pp. 212-213)

Appendix E: How psychological contracts function

Figure 3: Synthesis of different psychological contract concepts



Appendix F: Case study findings

Left out due to confidentiality.

Appendix G: Benefits, supplier satisfaction & customer prioritization in practice

Left out due to confidentiality.

Appendix H: Interview questions

Interviewfragen für die Einkäufer (Questionnaire for the buyers)

Klassifizierung

1. Klassifizieren Sie Ihre Beziehungen mit Lieferanten? Wenn ja, wie?
 2. Haben Sie Indizien dafür, dass Ihre Lieferanten die Beziehung mit Ihnen ebenfalls klassifizieren? Wenn ja, welche?
 3. Existiert Engagement von Seiten der Unternehmensleitung einen präferierten Kundenstatus mit strategisch wichtigen Lieferanten zu erreichen? Wenn ja, wie spiegelt sich dieses wider? Falls nicht, wie könnte ein intensiviertes Engagement der Geschäftsleitung dazu beitragen, einen bevorzugten Kundenstatus zu erwirken?
 4. Mit welchen Lieferanten haben Sie einen präferierten Kundenstatus? Warum?
-

Vorteile

5. Nehmen Sie gegenwärtig kürzere Lieferzeiten, Einflüsse auf den Einkaufspreis, besseren Zugang zu den Innovationsfähigkeiten des Lieferanten oder gemeinsame Entwicklungsprojekte mit Lieferanten wahr? Wenn ja, wie und warum?
 6. Nehmen Sie noch andere, individuellere Vorteile durch Ihren bevorzugten Kundenstatus wahr? Wenn ja, welche?
-

Antezedenzen

7. Was haben Sie in der Vergangenheit unternommen, um ein präferierter Kunde von strategisch wichtigen Lieferanten zu werden? Existieren Ihrer Ansicht nach noch andere Maßnahmen, welche Sie zwar nicht unternommen haben, die aber dennoch geholfen hätten einen bevorzugten Kundenstatus zu erreichen? Wenn ja, welche?
 8. Ist Ihre Firma in der Lage, strategisch wichtige Lieferanten zufriedenzustellen in Geschäftsbeziehungen? Welche Faktoren verursachen Lieferantenzufriedenheit in solchen Tauschverhältnissen? Welche Faktoren rufen Lieferantenumzufriedenheit hervor? Warum?
 9. Sind Maßnahmen geplant, um ein präferierter Kunde von anderen Lieferanten zu werden? Wenn ja, welche und warum?
-

Psychologische Verträge

10. Hatten Sie schon einmal das Gefühl/Glaube, dass Erwartungen außerhalb des rechtlichen Vertrages zwischen Ihnen und einem Lieferanten, bezüglich ihrer gegenseitigen Verpflichtungen gegenüber, bestand? Warum?
11. Wie haben psychologische Verträge Ihre Beziehung zueinander beeinflusst?
12. Hatten Sie schon einmal das Gefühl/Glaube, dass Lieferant X Erwartungen außerhalb des rechtlichen Vertrages zwischen Ihnen und ihm, bezüglich Ihrer Verpflichtungen gegenüber diesem, hatte?
13. Haben Sie schonmal einen Bruch des psychologischen Vertrages erlebt? Wenn ja, welchen Effekt hatte dieser Bruch auf Ihre Beziehung zueinander? Wie haben Sie reagiert? Wie hat die Gegenseite reagiert?
14. Wie würde Ihr bevorzugter Kundenstatus durch diesen psychologischen Vertragsbruch beeinflusst werden oder wie würde Ihr bevorzugter Kundenstatus die Reaktion des Lieferanten, auf Ihre Nichteinhaltung seiner Erwartungen, beeinflussen?

Interviewfragen für die Lieferanten (Questionnaire for the suppliers)

Klassifizierung

1. Ordnen Sie Ihre Kunden in unterschiedliche Kategorien ein? Wenn ja, welche Kategorien bzw. Positionen vergeben Sie?
 2. Vergeben Sie einen präferierten Kundenstatus an die gesamte Firma, oder separat an unterschiedliche Niederlassungen oder Zweigstellen dieser Firma?
 3. Haben Sie Firma X als bevorzugten Kunden eingestuft? Wenn ja, warum?
-

Vorteile

4. Wie und in welchem Ausmaß beeinflussen Ihre unterschiedlichen Klassifizierungen der Kunden Ihr Verhalten gegenüber diesen? Was für Vorteile kann ein präferierter Kunde von Ihnen erwarten? Warum, vergeben Sie diese Vorteile oder Nachteile?
-

Antezedenzen

5. Sind Sie zufrieden mit der Geschäftsbeziehung zu Firma X? Welche Faktoren beeinflussen Ihre Zufriedenheit oder Unzufriedenheit in dieser Beziehung? Warum?
 6. Was ist Ihre Firmenmotivation Unternehmen X einen bevorzugten Kundenstatus zu erteilen? Was hat Firma X getan, um diesen Status zu erreichen? Was könnte Firma X weiterhin tun, um ihren gegenwärtigen Status zu verbessern? Warum?
 7. Was sind Ihrer Meinung nach, wichtige Maßnahmen, die ein Kunde unternehmen muss, um einen präferierten Kundenstatus zu erwirken? Was sind notwendige Verhaltensweisen, die gezeigt werden müssen? Warum?
 8. Was unternehmen Kunden, um generell einen bevorzugten Kundenstatus bei Ihnen zu erreichen? Unterscheidet sich deren Handlungsweise von dem aus Ihrer Sicht wünschenswerten Verhalten? Warum?
-

Psychologische Verträge

9. Hatten Sie schon einmal das Gefühl/Glaube, dass Erwartungen außerhalb des rechtlichen Vertrages zwischen Ihnen und einem Kunden, bezüglich ihrer gegenseitigen Verpflichtungen gegenüber, bestand? Warum?
10. Wie haben psychologische Verträge Ihre Beziehung zueinander beeinflusst?
11. Haben Sie schonmal einen Bruch des psychologischen Vertrages erlebt? Wenn ja, welchen Effekt hatte dieser Bruch auf Ihre Beziehung zueinander? Wie haben Sie reagiert? Wie hat die Gegenseite reagiert?
12. Wie würde der bevorzugte Kundenstatus von Firma X durch einen psychologischen Vertragsbruch beeinflusst werden oder wie würde der bevorzugte Kundenstatus von Firma X Ihre Reaktion, auf dessen Nichteinhaltung Ihrer Erwartungen, beeinflussen?

Appendix I: Frequency tables

Table 19: Literature review approach for the preferred customer conception

Keywords	Initial Hits	Limit to 2021 - 2000	Hits only relevant in subject areas	Usable and assessed papers	Search Key
Supplier Satisfaction	4,107	3,793	1,484	11	TITLE-ABS-KEY (supplier AND satisfaction) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2020) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2019) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2018) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2017) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2016) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2015) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2014) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2013) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2012) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2011) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2010) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2009) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2008) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2007) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2006) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2005) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2004) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2003) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2002) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2001) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2000)) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI"))
Preferred customer status	74	66	32	13	TITLE-ABS-KEY (preferred AND customer AND status) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2020) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2019) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2018) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2017) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2016) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2015) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2014) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2013) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2012) OR LIMIT-

					TO (PUBYEAR , 2011) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2009) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2008) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2006) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2005) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2004) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2002) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2000)) AND (LIMIT- TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI"))
Preferred customer	2,406	2,196	681	12	TITLE-ABS- KEY (preferred AND customer) AND (LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2021) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2020) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2019) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2018) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2017) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2016) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2015) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2014) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2013) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2012) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2011) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2010) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2009) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2008) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2007) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2006) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2005) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2004) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2003) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2002) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2001) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2000)) AND (LIMIT- TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI"))
Buyer-supplier relationship	1,691	1,568	1,304	8	TITLE-ABS-KEY (buyer- supplier AND relationship) AND (LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2021) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2020) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2019) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2018) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2017) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2016) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2015) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2014) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2013) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2012) OR LIMIT-

					TO (PUBYEAR , 2011) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2010) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2009) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2008) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2007) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2006) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2005) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2004) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2003) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2002) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2001) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR , 2000)) AND (LIMIT- TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI"))
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Table 20: Literature review approach for psychological contracts & breaches

Keywords	Initial Hits	No limit set	Hits only in relevant subject areas	Usable and assessed papers	Search Key
Psychological contracts	4,141	/	1,585	8	TITLE-ABS KEY (psychological AND contracts) AND (LIMIT- TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI"))
Psychological contract breach	550	/	352	17	TITLE-ABS KEY (psychological AND contract AND breach) AND (LIMIT- TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI"))
Psychological contract violation	352	/	233	13	TITLE-ABS- KEY (psychological AND contract AND violation) AND (LIMIT- TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI"))
Psychological contract fulfillment	303	/	210	2	TITLE-ABS- KEY (psychological AND contract AND fulfillment) AND (LIMIT- TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI"))

Appendix J – Detailed analysis of each individual case

Left out due to confidentiality.

Appendix K – Psychological contracts & breaches: Consequences, effects, & influencing factors

Left out due to confidentiality.