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**PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS OF INTERNATIONAL
BUSINESS TRAVELLERS**

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PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS TRAVELLERS

Introduction

Since the late 1980s, the global economy has grown rapidly with an associated expansion in the field of International Human Resource Management (IHRM) (Collings et al., 2007). While IHRM's focus has shifted from managing staff expatriation to broader organisational, contextual and HR-related issues (Björkman et al., 2012, Björkman and Welch, 2015), much research remains preoccupied with traditional, long-term international assignments. Only recently there has been a growing research interest in alternative forms of international assignments (Mäkelä et al., 2017, Pate and Scullion, 2017). Here we focus on an emergent, non-traditional form of international employee, the international business traveller (IBT). We define an IBT as a professional who works across countries for business purposes on a regular basis and for a maximum of consecutive three weeks per assignment (Shaffer et al., 2012). We explore IBT employment relationships using a psychological contract framework which explores employee perceptions of their own and their employer's obligations (Pate and Scullion, 2010), provides a fruitful construct for analysis and explanation (Rousseau, 1995) and offers a mechanism for effectively working to attract and retain scarce employees (Rodwell et al., 2015). There are no existing studies of IBT psychological contracts and we develop in-depth understanding of how Belgian IBTs experience and interpret their psychological contracts. Belgium is an interesting context as it plays a 'pivotal role' within the global economy (Sleeuwaegen and Peeters, 2012: 7), assuming a strategic location on the north-western side of Europe and being one of the most globalised countries

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in the world (OECD, 2013). Our research makes a number of important contributions. First empirically to IHRM, in developing understanding of an emergent form of international employee, the IBT. Second, to psychological contract theory in developing understanding of contract nature. Finally, to practice in developing understanding of how to manage the valuable strategic resource that is the IBT.

The paper is organised as follows: first we discuss extant research on IBTs and psychological contract, synthesising these to establish our research focus; second, we present our research methods and third, we report the findings. Finally, we discuss and draw conclusions on the contributions and implications our research.

International Business Travel(lers)

Globalisation not only creates an increasingly complex environment, it also requires more internationally-prepared workers, occasioning new forms of international employment (Harvey et al., 2010). Alongside traditional, long-term expatriate assignments, short-term international missions are emerging that meet organisational operational objectives and individual career objectives within today's dynamic business environment (Mayerhofer et al., 2004, Collings et al., 2007). Traditional expatriate assignments require the employee and family (where present) to move countries for work purposes, usually for over a year, to address a specific task or organizational goal (Petrovic et al., 2000). IBTs, by contrast, are professionals for whom regular international travel for periods of up to three consecutive weeks, without their family, constitutes an 'essential component' of their work (Welch and Worm,

1 2006: 284, Shaffer et al., 2012). IBTs tend to be utilised for specialised and
2 complex tasks, often in challenging or dangerous environments, that occur
3 intermittently and determine the duration of visit (Collings et al., 2015). The
4 flexibility which characterises IBT assignments, avoiding the need for
5 permanent relocation, is often more acceptable to employees than longer-
6 term expatriate assignments (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). It also benefits
7 organisations, as it does not incur the huge financial and other costs
8 associated with employee and family/spouse relocation (Welch et al., 2007).
9 IBT assignments are thus attractive to employees, cost effective and allow
10 companies to respond more swiftly than with traditional expatriate
11 placements (Tahvanainen et al., 2005).
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27 Understanding of IBTs is, however, lacking (Welch and Worm, 2006,
28 Welch et al., 2007), against a backdrop in which there is no widely agreed
29 classification of various short-term international work experiences (Shaffer et
30 al., 2012). This is a serious omission given the increasing prevalence of
31 international business travel in the modern global economy (Beaverstock et
32 al., 2010). Drawing on Welch and Worm (2006), we suggest that IBTs form a
33 diverse group, perhaps more diverse than traditional expatriates.
34 Assignments can typically include project-work, maintaining client and
35 supplier engagement/relations, monitoring business development, skills
36 transfer, participation in meetings or conferences, management development
37 and management control (Mayerhofer et al., 2004). IBTs have the capacity to
38 act as 'powerful knowledge transfer agents', implying that they are 'at the
39 heart of international business' and play an essential, strategic role within the
40 survival and development of globally operating companies (Welch et al.,
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2 2007:180). Critical to assignment success is an IBT's capacity for self-
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4 management, especially in relation to work, cultural issues and planning of
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6 leisure time (Mayerhofer et al., 2004). As frequent business travel disturbs
7
8 everyday routines (Makela et al., 2015), stress both to the travellers and their
9
10 families (Baker and Ciuk, 2015, Mäkelä et al., 2017), jet lag and health issues
11
12 are common problems (Espino et al., 2002). Thus, to maximise the strategic
13
14 potential of IBTs, organisations must understand how to manage and support
15
16 non-standard international employment (Demel and Mayrhofer, 2010). Yet
17
18 many find themselves at the beginning of a steep learning curve or in
19
20 'organisational silence' where management of IBT assignments are
21
22 concerned (Tahvanainen et al., 2005: 671, Demel and Mayrhofer, 2010). Our
23
24 research aims to develop understanding of IBT employment relationship,
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26 using a psychological contract framework, to support this management
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28 process.
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34 ***Psychological Contracts***

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36 A psychological contract reflects 'the perceptions of mutual obligations to
37
38 each other held by the two parties in the employment relationship, the
39
40 organisation and the employee' (Herriot et al., 1997:151). Since its first
41
42 formal introduction in the 1960's, the concept has been a prominent part of
43
44 human resource management and its related organisational discourse
45
46 (Conway and Briner 2009). Given the perceptual and socially constructed
47
48 nature of the contract, however, it is neither possible nor advisable to
49
50 establish 'the' content of the psychological contract, that is, one set of
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52 obligations that holds good in all situations (Authors). A wide array of
53
54 possible obligations has been identified and we discuss these in more detail
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1 below, noting here that these may differ according to organisational setting
2
3 and across nations or cultures (Rousseau and Schalk, 2000). Despite this,
4
5 psychological contract theory represents a useful framework for
6
7 understanding workplace relationships and developing insights on how to
8
9 address employee (here IBTs) perceived obligations and those of their
10
11 employer (Guest, 1998). While some have challenged the construct as a
12
13 vague 'container concept of questionable value' (Guest, 1998: 650), its basic
14
15 premise of reciprocal social exchange holds good (Coyle-Shapiro and
16
17 Conway, 2010, Conway and Briner, 2009). Lack of research and clarity on
18
19 content is not considered problematic here as this is inherent to the reality of
20
21 organisational experience (Tetrick, 2010). Rather, our focus is the nature of
22
23 psychological contract content (Agarwal and Gupta, 2018) which reflects the
24
25 distinction between contract exchange types, that is, transactional or
26
27 relational (MacNeil, 1985).
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34 **Transactional** contracts are specific economic, monetisable exchanges
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36 between parties over a finite, typically short, term. They are characterised by
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38 competitive wage rates and the absence of long-term commitments
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40 (Robinson et al., 1994). Terms and conditions tend to be objectifiable and
41
42 remain static during a specified period of time (Chambel et al., 2016).
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44 **Relational** contracts, on the contrary, imply open-ended, less specific
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46 agreements that establish and maintain a relationship involving both
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48 monetisable and non-monetisable exchanges and emotional investment from
49
50 both employees and employers (Robinson et al., 1994). While a useful
51
52 heuristic, relational/transactional distinctions are far from clear cut (Conway
53
54 and Briner, 2009) with many arguing that to categorise an entire contract is
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1 too blunt an approach (Authors). Rather than polar opposites, relational and
2 transactional contracts may co-exist (Conway and Briner, 2009) or be viewed
3 along a continuum (Coyle-Shapiro and Parzefall, 2008). A more nuanced
4 approach is to consider categorisation of obligations within contract content,
5 rather than the contract itself. Even here it is not always clearcut how
6 particular obligations are best categorised (Authors). We draw on our earlier
7 work (developing that of Robinson et al., 1994), to present categorisation of
8 typical employer and employee obligations (Table 1). This forms the
9 theoretical base of our study and these obligations are explored from the
10 employee perspective.
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25 Table 1 here
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30 We draw on our earlier definition to argue that both parties, employer and
31 employee, have obligations and that these are both transactional and
32 relational in nature. Employers have transactional obligations of
33 advancement, high and merit pay and relational ones of training, job security,
34 development and support. Employees have transactional obligations of giving
35 adequate notice, transfers, not supporting competitors and protecting the
36 organisation, and a minimum stay and relational ones of working overtime
37 and demonstrating loyalty and extra role behaviour. We explore these for
38 Belgian IBTs, considering only the employee perspective of their own and
39 their employer's obligations. A focus on only one party to the relationship is
40 common practice and does not detract from overall understanding (e.g.
41 Rodwell et al., 2015).
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4 As there are no previous studies of Belgian IBT psychological
5 contracts, we draw on and synthesise existing psychological contract studies
6 of both traditional expatriate employees and Belgian workers. Taking first
7 expatriates, research has traditionally suggested a tendency to more
8 relational contracts than typical employees (Guzzo and Noonan, 1994). This
9 results from the employer's broad sphere of influence over both work and
10 non-work conditions whereby almost all aspects of the expatriate's daily life
11 are affected. This creates a strong emotional bond with the employing
12 organisation. Further, expatriate assignments are typically open-ended
13 employment and offer high autonomy which contributes to their relational
14 nature. This has, however, been contested. Pate and Scullion (2010), for
15 example, evidence that expatriates reflected a relational contract focus in
16 terms of promotion upon return as well as recognition of skills development,
17 but employers adopted a transactional approach reflected in aggressive
18 contract negotiation and offering less organisational support (Pate and
19 Scullion, 2010). Further, existing research pays little attention to the
20 intentions that organisations have towards expatriation, especially in
21 increasingly flexible economies, where more permeable boundaries (between
22 both organisations and countries) are becoming more common (Thomas et
23 al., 2005). Employees become 'boundaryless careerists' (Thomas et al.,
24 2005: 341), adopting a transactional approach whereby 'highly qualified
25 mobile professionals who develop their career competence levels and market
26 value through continuous learning and transfer across borders' (Stahl et al.,
27 2009: 92). There are clear parallels here to IBT roles that indicate their
28 contracts will be more transactional than relational in nature. Suggestions of
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1 a predominantly transactional psychological contract are also allied to a
2 general shift away from relational psychological contracts as changes in the
3 economic environment, such as increased international competition, lower
4 growth, and essential cost reduction amongst companies shift the
5 employment deal onto a more transactional basis (De Meuse et al., 2001).
6 Here employees are supposed to take responsibility for their own career
7 development and commitment to the job or organisation has been replaced
8 by commitment to the specific work performed (Hiltrop, 1996). The transition
9 also involves a more learning oriented and project-based contract focus with
10 reduced consideration to loyalty (Yan et al., 2002) which is particularly
11 relevant given the typically project-based nature of IBT work (Meyskens et
12 al., 2009). Indeed the IBT psychological contract may not be relational in
13 nature given an often short-term rather than a long-term assignment focus
14 (Stahl et al., 2009).

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16 In summary, the IBT psychological contract might be less relational
17 than traditional expatriate contracts. The flexible nature of the IBT
18 employment relationship, the dynamic business context and the impact/input
19 of the individual (and not the employer-employee partnership) on determining
20 the success of the assignments could all be considered as factors
21 strengthening the transactional nature of the contract.

22
23 The Belgian context is also an interesting aspect of this study. Belgian
24 psychological contract research indicates a somewhat limited shift towards a
25 more transactional approach (Sels et al., 2000). De Cuyper et al. (2008)
26 evidence both transactional and relational employee and employer
27 obligations, for example, the striving towards individualism and the focus on

1 monetary compensation is balanced by the upholding of the collective
2 negotiated rules and the need for security or belonging, despite the clear
3 importance of the financial aspect with employment (Sels et al., 2000).
4 Further insight into Belgian psychological contracts can, indirectly, be found
5 in the work of (Soens et al., 2005). Their research, aimed at charting Belgian
6 careers, demonstrates that the traditional career marked by a relational
7 psychological contract still occupies a dominant role. Belgian employees
8 have a preference for a permanent, stable and full-time employment deal
9 (Soens et al., 2005). The 'old' (relational) psychological contract is thus not
10 entirely 'dead' (Rousseau, 1995: 110). Nevertheless, new, diverse and
11 transactional career-related trends are also evident. A more competitive and
12 broadening market with changing economic circumstances is recognised as
13 driving more transactional and individualistic working relationships (De
14 Meuse et al., 2001, Pate and Scullion, 2010). Societal factors also play a key
15 role, particularly where there is a prevalence of highly educated employees,
16 as in Belgium (Soens et al., 2005). Erosion of the strictly relational and non-
17 individual career is acknowledged by Vloeberghs et al. (2005) who evidence
18 the ad hoc nature development policy of Belgian companies in relation to
19 their high potential employees. Further, career elements such as attention to
20 performance, marketability and identification with a job (instead of the
21 organisation) appear to be less-developed policy components within Belgian
22 companies. (Van den Brande et al., 2002) likewise remark in their study of
23 Flemish employees that one out of five employees still holds on to an 'old'
24 contract with their employer. The conclusion of the researchers is that the so-
25 called transformation from traditional employment relationships towards 'new
26 deals' is restricted to a very small group of young and highly educated

1 professionals (Van den Brande et al., 2002: 174). Given, however, that this
2 reflects typical IBT characteristics, we may expect them to have
3 predominantly transactional contracts.
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10 Current research thus presents a mixed picture of the extent to which
11 Belgian IBT psychological contracts might be relational or transactional in
12 nature. Our study aims to develop understanding of this issue.
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18 **Methods**

19 We adopted an interpretive approach to developing understanding of the
20 nature of (Belgian) IBT psychological contracts, which is appropriate to their
21 socially constructed nature (Authors). Situation with a subjectivistic paradigm
22 serves to expand existing psychological contract research and addresses the
23 'methodological (quantitative) rut' into which psychological contract research
24 has fallen (Taylor and Tekelab, 2010: 279). Our interpretive approach
25 responds to increasing pressure to focus psychological contract research on
26 individual employment experiences and their complexity (Coyle-Shapiro and
27 Parzefall, 2008). This indicates reliance upon a qualitative research strategy
28 which supports exploration of new, seldom-researched phenomena. We used
29 semi-structured interviews to obtain descriptions of the life world of the IBT
30 participants (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The interview guide adopted was
31 constructed from the extant literature and offered space and flexibility for the
32 interviewees to share their lived experiences (Miles and Huberman, 1994).
33 The flexibility characterising qualitative and interpretive data collection
34 techniques allowed for adjustment of the initial guide to reflect the learning
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1 process of conducting interviews and the expanded knowledge offered by the
2 respondents (Miles and Huberman, 1994, Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).
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8 A purposive sampling technique was adopted through which nine
9 participants, two women and seven men, meeting the definitional criteria of
10 an IBT were identified. Contact was made via the networks of one of the
11 authors who works in an environment where IBTs are commonly found.
12 Participant details are outlined below and indicate the job title and age
13 (average 35 years) for each participant as well as their current employer's
14 business activity and the total number of employees working at the firm, with
15 a reference to the location of operation (Table 2). The participants are listed
16 in the order in which they were interviewed, stating their assigned
17 pseudonym.
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32 Table 2 here
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38 The small sample size is acknowledged but the principle of data
39 saturation was followed (Mason, 2010), that is, little new information emerged
40 during the eighth interview and a ninth was conducted to confirm that
41 consistent themes had been established. Data collection ceased at that
42 point. We also draw on others' work on appropriate sample sizes within the
43 context of interpretive research (Smith et al., 2009, Mason, 2010) to argue
44 that our sample size is adequate, particularly that of MacLean et al. (2011)
45 who evidence that data saturation typically occurs within six to 12 interviews.
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Obligations were identified by using a practical set of 'phenomenologically inspired' rules, in particular two of the three approaches proposed by (van Manen, 1990: 92-3) were followed, namely: the selective or highlighting approach and the holistic or sententious approach. The approaches generated both explicit and implicit concepts that were clustered into sub-themes and themes and became apparent through 'dialogue with the text' (van Manen, 1990: 21). In this way, we surfaced 18 employer and employee obligations, although we present only employee (not employer) perceptions of these.

We note the inevitable limitations of our study. It draws on a small number of participants and is highly dependent on their willingness to share views and experiences. Additionally, it is situated only within a Belgian context. Consequently, we do not seek to generalise our findings but representativeness was not our aim and we argue that its absence is unproblematic. On the contrary, the findings allow for exploration of in-depth experiences and rich descriptions of the IBTs involved.

Findings

As noted, the interviews surfaced 18 obligations within contract content, four employee obligations, 10 employer obligations and four shared by both parties (Table 3). Our analytical focus is on contract nature and space precludes detailed discussion of how this content was established (for further information see Authors). In brief, IBTs perceived themselves to be obligated to conduct certain in-role behaviours (e.g. doing the job well) together with extra-role and proactive role behaviours (e.g. going above and beyond what

1 could be reasonably expected within the role). Additionally, IBTs perceived
2 that they owed loyalty to their employers. Turning to employer obligations,
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4 IBTs perceived that their employers were obligated to support them (e.g.
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6 finding them accommodation during their international travel) and offer them
7
8 flexibility in work and working patterns. Job content was an important
9
10 employer obligation, there being an expectation that IBTs would be offered
11
12 responsible work, the opportunity to travel and varied work assignments.
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14 Autonomy was also a vital aspect of job content. Employers were expected to
15
16 offer development to the IBTs whether this be vertical (promotion), horizontal
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18 (secondments to widen experience) or personal. High financial reward was
19
20 also expected by most of the IBTs. Certain obligations were perceived to be
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22 held by both parties. This included social atmosphere and open relations. In
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24 the former, a family-like atmosphere was felt to be important and collegiality,
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26 respect and trust were core to the psychological contract. Honesty and
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28 candour were also central to an effective psychological contract.
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36 Here, we explore in more detail the nature of these obligations. Each is
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38 categorised as transactional or relational according to Author's (year) work
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40 (see Table 1). Most categorisations were widely agreed, other than support
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42 which was presented as transactional by some participants and relational by
43
44 others. Obligations were predominantly relational in nature, although
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46 transactional obligations also featured, supporting the idea that contracts are
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48 not wholly transactional or relational, but a combination of sets of obligations
49
50 which may differ in nature (Coyle-Shapiro and Parzefall, 2008). Given space
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52 constraints, we explore in most detail those obligations which provide insight
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54 into contrasts with a typical expatriate psychological contract.
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8 **Employee obligations**
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10 Three of the four obligations identified were relational. Within role
11 behaviour, IBTs perceived that in-role behaviour, doing the standard job they
12 were paid for, was transactional, that is, an economic exchange in which '*the*
13 *work must be done*' (Bill). This is not a new finding (see Sels et al., 2000) but
14 we argue that 'just' doing the work is nevertheless extremely complex and
15 challenging, given the inter-country/cultural context that characterised the IBT
16 role (see Authors). Extra-role and proactive role behaviour, both relational,
17 were also IBT obligations. Extra role behaviour is defined as 'all obligations
18 that fall outside the work-package of duties, such as commitment, being
19 flexible about hours and volunteering to do extra tasks' (Bal et al., 2010:
20 382). There were numerous examples of this:
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36 *(...) I always have something in my suitcase, I say my suitcase but my*
37 *computer bag is actually my suitcase, and in it there's always a shirt and*
38 *underwear for one overnight stay. That means I can always go somewhere*
39 *for one night. And that sometimes happens. (Kevin)*
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46 And in similar vein:

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48 *Between Christmas Day and New Year, I had a huge problem, a contract of*
49 *[customer] that could not be delivered. I therefore left on Christmas Eve and I*
50 *got back at New Year, on New Year's Eve. That was such a major issue, I*
51 *wasn't able to resolve it from here. They don't celebrate Christmas and New*
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1 *Year in [country],. For me, that's... I shouldn't think about it... sure I had to*
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4 *organise it, that's something else. But I shouldn't think about whether or not*
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6 *I'm going to do that....* (Florence)
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10 Here we see a highly relational extensive exchange in which the IBTs work to
11 accommodate organisational demands at, potentially, the expense of their
12 own domestic convenience. The flexible nature of their travelling schedules
13 created an obligation that would not be within a typical expatriate contract.
14 Finally within role behaviour, we surfaced proactive role behaviour which
15 refers to 'the obligations that employees feel in order to enhance the
16 operation of the organisation as a whole' (Bal et al., 2010: 382). Proactive
17 behaviour is considered broader than in-role and extra-role behaviour and is
18 not widely featured in psychological contract literature. Again it is relational
19 as it demonstrates a strong sense of identification with the employer's
20 position. Marc for example suggested that he '*fights for the company*' as if
21 married to it in order to '*push it forward*'. This links closely to the final
22 employee obligation, loyalty, which was also relational. IBT accounts
23 reflected expectations of long-term open ended employment relationships
24 was envisaged and this was particularly important to them:
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42 *I start in every new working partnership with the idea of 'for the rest of my*
43 *life'. You never know how it's going to go, but I think that's the only way to*
44 *start out...* (Nils)
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51 The IBT's concerned offered their employer a form of security in relation to
52 the potential term of their employment relationship. Surprisingly, however, the
53 IBTs did not expect employers to reciprocate with a job security obligation:
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1 *I certainly never take my position for granted. And I don't think that's so bad,*
2
3 *it doesn't bother me that that's how it is. (Andy)*
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8 While lack of job security reflects Belgian research in which a more
9 transactional career trend is observed amongst highly educated employees
10 (Soens et al., 2005), it is at odds with the loyalty displayed by the IBTs.
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16 **Employer Obligations**

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18 Of the ten employer obligations identified, seven were relational, two
19 transactional and one lacked clear categorisation, again reflecting a
20 predominantly relational contract. Taking support first, IBT constructions of
21 the obligation varied and related mainly to support while undertaking
22 international assignments. Walter expressed a transactional view in that '*I*
23 *want a good bed and a good shower*' while Kevin had a more relational
24 interpretation:
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34 *And then once you're there, (...) that you're taken care of there, by the host,*
35 *that you're received in the company as a guest (...). That means that they'll*
36 *eat with you, they show you where you can go in the area, etc., that you're*
37 *not left to fend for yourself.*
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45 The support obligation expressed by the interviewees is consistent with the
46 importance Mäkelä et al. (2017) attach to this in order to keep satisfaction
47 with work-related travel high. Nevertheless, no IBT suggested that the
48 employer should provide functional support for the IBT's home base or family
49 which again differs from expatriates who desire support in and alongside
50 work for both themselves and their family (Guzzo and Noonan, 1994).
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4 The flexibility obligation reflects much of the extant literature and
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6 ranged from '*adjusting hours in the working day*' to '*taking 3 months off to*
7
8 *build a house following a period of extensive travel*' (Kevin). However, little
9
10 specific to the IBT role emerged, whereas job content more clearly reflected
11
12 the nature of IBT role. Central to this was travel, which all IBTs expected and
13
14 enjoyed provided there was a clear purpose:
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16
17 *That you aren't just travelling to show your face, but that there's also*
18
19 *something connected to it...* (Cindy)
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24 While there was recognition of potential inconvenience (as substantially
25
26 illustrated in the study of Baker and Ciuk, 2015), it was also stimulating and
27
28 Nils suggested that it was something '*he could not do without*', albeit within
29
30 certain boundaries:
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33 *It's always like searching for a balance, like at a certain point you also get a*
34
35 *feeling of guilt. You know you aren't leaving your wife and three children*
36
37 *behind, but I mean dumping all of the week's worries on her, and that's just*
38
39 *how it is...* (Nils)
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44 This again contrasts with a typical expatriate experience in which the family
45
46 relocates together. There were other benefits to traveling:
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49 *I really like being on aeroplanes, for eight hours or so.... There's no*
50
51 *telephone, no computer because you can't get any network, so it's real time*
52
53 *for me. I can do a report and for once I can think a long time about it.*
54
55 (Florence)
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4 This reflection or 'me time' was also suggested to facilitate the proactive role
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6 behaviour obligation by creating space to prioritise the company's agenda.
7
8 The travel obligation linked closely to variety, as IBTs perceived that
9
10 employers '*really have to continually give you new challenges and*
11
12 *satisfaction*' (Kevin). This reflects Demel and Mayrhofer (2010) notion of
13
14 'getting high (internationally)' which refers to interesting and new job-tasks
15
16 that must be strategic and international in nature. Cindy reflected powerfully
17
18 that she would find it '*horrible*' having to do the same thing '*for the rest of*
19
20 *your days*'.
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26 Responsibility, for people or projects, and autonomy, Bill almost '*being*
27
28 *his own boss*' and being able to work '*without too much control*' were both
29
30 important and relational obligations and broadly reflect extant research.
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35 Development obligations, both vertical and horizontal were identified.
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37 Vertical development centred largely on promotion and was seen to be part
38
39 of a largely economic exchange (Rousseau, 1995). IBTs further recognised
40
41 that opportunities may be limited given their current seniority. Horizontal
42
43 development, through perhaps job rotation or *assignment of challenging*
44
45 *projects* (Florence), was more relationally viewed. Interestingly, personal
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47 development was both relational and reflective of the IBT role. Personal
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49 growth was achieved by both role execution and travel, for example:
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1 ... I want to gain different experiences in my life. I want, when I'm old, to be
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4 able to look back onto different experiences, I want to have tried out different
5
6 things. (Bill)
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10 Sam suggested that international experience was 'enriching' which
11
12 was supported by Kevin's experiences:
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14 *I was in Bahrain, for instance. In Islam you don't shake women's hands.*
15
16 *Although they're just in the same office and do the same work as anyone*
17
18 *else, they don't shake hands with women. So I didn't know that... a person*
19
20 *explains it. You don't feel embarrassed because it's explained to you, and*
21
22 *that's really important.... that there's a local person who takes you along and*
23
24 *who shows you everything.*
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30 Kevin also argued that the intercultural training often offered for expatriate
31
32 assignments is not required for short international stays provide this local
33
34 development was available. This contrasts with Mäkelä et al. (2017) who
35
36 consider cross-cultural education as beneficial for IBTs since they might work
37
38 in multiple cultures in a rather short amount of time.
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43 The final employer obligation was financial rewards which was,
44
45 perhaps not surprisingly, transactional in nature. There was substantial
46
47 emphasis on this in light of the individualised nature of the IBT employment
48
49 relationship, for example, '***have to** [emphasised] get paid well.*' (Walter)
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53 This related in part to the demanding and open ended nature of the IBT role:
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1 *Er, extremely important. I'll come out with it, I think regarding the role you*
2 *perform, that you should get for it what is required. Also regarding the*
3 *travelling, all that working, the number of hours that you do. We don't get an*
4 *hourly wage, we don't have hours, I think they [the employer] then have to*
5 *pay enough. (Kevin)*
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14 This emphasis on financial obligations reflects the importance of monetary
15 reward within the Belgian context (Sels et al., 2000), although Cindy (like
16 others) suggested that balance was required in that *'For me, what's very*
17 *important is the job content, more than the actual financial aspect.'*
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25 **Joint Obligations**

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27 The final four obligations were shared between employer and IBT and,
28 accordingly, were relational in nature. Social atmosphere was important and
29 comprised obligations of family, collegiality and respect and trust. A familial
30 and personal work environment was important, despite the international
31 nature and volatility that characterises the IBT role:
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38 *You could describe it [working with colleagues] as a family. It also feels like,*
39 *everywhere you go you're always welcome, there's very little conflict, it really*
40 *feels like a family. (Kevin)*
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48 Collegiality related to working with people who were *stimulating and*
49 *triggering'* (Sam) while respect and trust constituted core obligation for
50 operating professionally. These were linked to both the relationship between
51 colleagues and with the connection with their employer or manager. Florence
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1 suggested that trust 'on both sides' offered her the possibility to achieve what
2 is best for her and the company. Open relationships were clearly linked to
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6 this:
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10 *That [social relationship with the employer] is actually an extremely important*
11 *aspect of my life, if I don't feel right in my job, then yes... for me it certainly*
12 *isn't just economic, that's of course part of it. (...) The social aspect is*
13 *definitely important and I'm someone who has to be in a good group. Feeling*
14 *recognition, not just financially but also getting the feeling of what I do being*
15 *appreciated and being taken into account... (Nils)*
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26 Florence expressed the mutual openness as follows:

27 *They [the employer] know me, they know how I think, they're in so many*
28 *meetings with me (...) a very open relationship, that's very important for me,*
29 *being able to have an open discussion. I can't stand having to hide things, or*
30 *that I can't say things for some reason or another, if there's something I*
31 *should be able to say it. Straightforward and very open. I'm extremely direct,*
32 *even towards my employer, otherwise I can't perform this role. That's always*
33 *with respect. For me, that's also very important.*
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47 In summary, the IBT contract portrayed reflects an open-ended relationship
48 with autonomy and a strong sense of responsibility for managing the work
49 contract. Travel, support and financial rewards were also prominent. While
50 predominantly relational, transactional aspects were also obvious in the
51 contract. This observation is not entirely surprising given extant literature
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1 (Authors; Conway and Briner 2009) but is nevertheless an important
2 contribution to understanding the nature of the IBT psychological contract.
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8 ***Discussion and Conclusions***

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10 That the IBT psychological contract is predominantly relational is an
11 interesting finding and perhaps contrary to much recent IHRM research. For
12 example, the expatriate psychological contract literature indicates the
13 increasingly transactional nature of international employee psychological
14 contracts (Thomas et al., 2005, Stahl et al., 2009, Pate and Scullion, 2010).
15 Our findings are more reflective of original expatriate studies in which the
16 psychological contract was still principally seen as steeped in relational
17 elements (Guzzo and Noonan, 1994). Wider research on 'boundaryless
18 careerists' also argues for a relational to transactional shift, i.e. from 'old' to
19 'new' deal (Rousseau, 1995, Hiltrop, 1996). Yet, despite the highly educated,
20 career-focussed nature of our participants, their psychological contracts were
21 still predominantly relational in nature. As well as informing understanding of
22 international employment relations, our findings more widely call into
23 question the extent to which the much-discussed relational/transactional
24 transition has taken place. We support Conway and Briner (2009: 49) who
25 suggest that 'it is difficult to evaluate whether or not there was an actual
26 transition from an old contract to a new contract because no decent historical
27 data with which to test the proposition are available'.
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51 The Belgian context may also be important, as the mix of both relational
52 and transactional IBT obligations reflects wider Belgian psychological
53 contract research (Sels et al., 2000, De Cuyper et al., 2008). The findings
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1 also provide strong support for previous research on Belgian high potential
2 employees (Van den Brande et al., 2002, Vloeberghs et al., 2005) whereby
3 the individual assumes a certain responsibility for his/her career and related
4 psychological contract formation. For example, while participants expected
5 the employer to provide growth opportunities, they perceived it to be an IBT
6 responsibility to realise the potential of these opportunities. The IBT also had
7 responsibility for clearly signalling his/her career needs. As Sam stated: *'If
8 you don't say anything yourself, you won't get anything. You have to
9 continually share your thoughts.'* Differences between IBT psychological
10 contracts and wider Belgian research did, however, emerge. The job content,
11 (in-/extra-) role behaviour and loyalty obligations, all relationally categorised,
12 are somewhat at odds with typical psychological contract characteristics of
13 Belgian employees (Sels et al., 2000, Soens et al., 2005). While according to
14 Sels et al (2000), the Belgian psychological contract reflects a strong
15 connection between employer and employee, Soens et al (2005) suggest
16 that loyalty is reducing amongst highly educated employees such as IBTs.
17 However our findings evidence a clear role for IBT loyalty, albeit the converse
18 employer obligation, job security, was little in evidence. IBTs did not explicitly
19 voice that the employer must offer them job security which diluted the strong
20 employer/employee connection (Sels et al., 2000).

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45 In conclusion, we argue that our research makes a number of
46 contributions, empirical, theoretical and practical. First and in light of the
47 relative scarcity of focus on non-expatriate international work (Baker and
48 Ciuk, 2015) we contribute empirical data to the IHRM field in developing
49 understanding of a newly emerging form of international employee, the IBT.
50 Further, the adoption of an established concept such as the psychological
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1 contract contributes to the 'maturing nature of the IHRM as a field of scientific
2 endeavour' (Björkman and Welch, 2015: 136) and serves to develop the
3 scope of its multi-disciplinarity. Second, we contribute to the psychological
4 contract theory. In studying a new employee group, we develop general
5 understanding and additionally inform the unresolved debate on the
6 relational/transactional shift (Conway and Briner, 2009). Contrary to much
7 extant research, we demonstrate the continuing relational nature of many
8 psychological contracts. Further we add to the relatively small body of
9 qualitative psychological contract research, allowing for nuanced and in-
10 depth insights into the little-researched IBT group (Gibson and Hanes, 2003).
11 Our findings offer a unique insight into the nature of the IBTs' employment
12 relationship which lays the foundations for further exploration of the IBT
13 psychological contract.

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32 Third, we make a contribution to practice in that our work develops
33 insight into effective management and maximisation of psychological
34 contracts (Rodwell et al., 2015), which is essential to realising IBTs' strategic
35 potential (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). We provide HR practitioners and/or
36 organisations with a rich and expanded understanding of the IBT
37 employment relationship. Insight into IBT perceptions of their employment
38 deal offers the opportunity to tailor it accordingly. For example, job content,
39 support and autonomy are vital within IBT working relationships and
40 assignments. Importantly, we evidence that it was not possible to propose a
41 psychological contract categorisation that was applicable for all of the IBTs in
42 this study, let alone for the entire population given its idiosyncratic, socially
43 constructed nature. This highlights the importance of individual negotiation

1 and understanding between IBTs and their managers to ensure the offer of a
2 deal appropriate to that particular IBT. In this way transparent working
3 partnerships that serve to avoid breach of the contract can be established
4 (Robinson and Morrison, 2000). Given both the strategic importance (Mäkelä
5 et al., 2017) and 'marketable' nature of IBTs (Stahl et al., 2009: 92), the
6 understanding developed through our research is extremely valuable to
7 organisations operating internationally wishing to develop and retain their
8 high potential employees (Tahvanainen et al., 2005, Collings et al., 2007,
9 Welch et al., 2007).

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23 We recognise, however, that there is further work to be done. Our
24 findings address only the employee perspective and the employer
25 perspective provides a fruitful avenue for future study. As we noted in our
26 original definition, the psychological contract is bilateral and thus
27 understanding the perspectives of both parties is essential to its effective
28 operation. Further, a larger sample of both IBTs and organisations is required
29 to confirm and build upon our work. Finally, we note that we have adopted a
30 content approach to our investigation while others have called for use of
31 process perspectives to further develop understanding (Conway and Briner,
32 2009). Such future research would also provide a valuable complementary
33 perspective to our findings.
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Table 1: Nature of obligations within the psychological contract

TRANSACTIONAL EMPLOYER OBLIGATIONS	TRANSACTIONAL EMPLOYEE OBLIGATIONS	RELATIONAL EMPLOYER OBLIGATIONS	RELATIONAL EMPLOYEE OBLIGATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advancement ▪ High pay ▪ Merit pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Notice ▪ Transfers ▪ No competitor support ▪ Proprietary protection ▪ Minimum stay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training ▪ Job security ▪ Development ▪ Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overtime ▪ Loyalty ▪ Extra-role behaviour

Table 2: Profile of Participants

PSEUDONYM	JOB TITLE	AGE	APPROXIMATE % OF TIME SPENT ABROAD	BUSINESS ACTIVITY OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT'S EMPLOYER	N° OF EMPLOYEES
Nils	Sales Manager	37	30-40	Production of (laminated/wooden) flooring-solutions, panels and roofing elements	4,000 (world- wide)
Cindy	Global Category Manager	31	15	Steel wire transformation and manufacturing of coatings	27,000 (world- wide)
Bill	Senior Consultant	40	15-20	Business (IT) consulting	750 (Belgium)
Kevin	Solution Integration Manager	35	80	Production of compressors, construction and mining equipment, power tools and assembly systems	35,000 (world- wide)
Sam	Export Manager	35	40	Production of kitchen and bath linen	200 (Belgium)
Florence	Import Director – Mgt.	42	10-15	Production of kitchen and bath	200 (Belgium)

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	Committee member			linen	
Marc	Export Sales Manager	29	40	Production of linen/fabrics for upholstery and curtains	24 (Belgium)
Andy	Business Analyst – Corporate Mgt. Team member	28	50	Heavy lifting manufacturing and engineered transport	3,000 (world-wide)
Walter	Technical Manager	40	10	Glass mould manufacturing	3,500 (spread over 6 sites in the EU and 1 in the US)

Table 3: Summary of contract obligations categorised according to nature

EMPLOYER OBLIGATIONS	EMPLOYEE OBLIGATIONS
	Role behaviour:

	(1) in-role behaviour: transactional (2) extra-role behaviour: relational (3) proactive role behaviour: relational
(4) Support: transactional/relational	
(5) Flexibility: relational	
Job content: (6) responsibility: relational (7) travel: relational (8) variety: relational	
(9) Autonomy: relational	
	(10) Loyalty: relational
Development: (11) vertical: transactional (12) horizontal: relational (13) personal: relational	
Social atmosphere: (14) family: relational (15) work atmosphere – collegiality: relational (16) respect and trust: relational	
(17) Financial rewards: transactional	
(18) Open relation: relational	