



Balancing contracts expectations and professional identity: Conscientiousness and organisational support as enablers for career resilience



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 May 2024

Received in rev. form 22 June 2024

Accepted 22 July 2024

Keywords:

Psychological contract;
Conscientiousness; Supportive
organisational climate; Professional
Identity Strength; Career Resilience

JEL Classification:
M5

ABSTRACT

This study integrates the psychological contract theory with the self-determination theory to examine the impact of relational and transactional psychological contracts on the professional identity of young professionals in Ghana's professional services sector. It further explores how these identities influence their career resilience, considering the moderating effects of conscientiousness and organisational support. Using a quantitative methodology, the research collected data from 421 professionals through a structured questionnaire across various sectors within Ghana's professional services firms. Data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings revealed that relational and transactional psychological contracts positively influence Professional Identity Strength, with relational contracts exhibiting a more substantial effect than transactional contracts. The study also reveals that professional identity strength significantly influences career resilience. Additionally, conscientiousness and a supportive organisational climate significantly enhance the positive impact of professional identity strength on career resilience. The findings underline the importance of relational contracts and a supportive environment in promoting a strong professional identity and career resilience among young professionals. This research provides new insights into the dynamics of professional identity and resilience in the workplace, particularly within Ghana's professional services sector.

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Introduction

Psychological contracts, reflecting the unwritten expectations and obligations that shape workplace dynamics, are essential in studying employer-employee relationships (Conway & Pekcan, 2019; Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall, 2008; Robinson & Brown, 2004). These contracts can be relational, emphasising long-term relationships and emotional investment, or transactional, focusing on short-term economic exchanges (Conway & Pekcan, 2019; Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall, 2008; Robinson & Brown, 2004). Both contract types play a crucial role in influencing outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, and retention (Ampofo, 2021; Rogers et al., 2023). In today's rapidly changing work environment, understanding psychological contracts is more important than ever, especially in the professional services industry in emerging economies. As Ghana's workforce becomes younger and more dynamic, with a keen focus on professional career development, examining the collective impact of psychological obligations, professional identity, employees perceived self-efficacy, and organisational support collectively on their career resilience is crucial.

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The understanding of psychological contracts and their impact on employee outcomes has traditionally focused on transactional and relational contracts within various organisational settings. The prevailing view emphasises the significance of these contracts in shaping job satisfaction, commitment, and retention, particularly within stable and well-resourced environments (Ampofo, 2021; Conway & Pekcan, 2019; Rousseau, 2000). However, this perspective is less applicable to dynamic, resource-constrained contexts such as the professional services sector in emerging economies like Ghana, where the effects of these contracts on professional identity strength and career resilience remain underexplored. This gap is markedly pronounced when examining the moderating effects of conscientiousness and organisational support in professional identity strength and career resilience relationship, despite their recognised influence on work outcomes (e.g., Agyapong et al., 2019; Boakye et al., 2023; Hanu et al., 2023; Hur et al., 2017; Koomson et al., 2022).

This study addresses these gaps by integrating the psychological contract theory with the self-determination theory to investigate the differential influence of relational and transactional psychological obligations on professional identity strength and its subsequent effect on career resilience in Ghana's professional services sector, with conscientiousness and organisational support as moderating factors. This approach provides insight into how these contracts intrinsically influence professional commitment, particularly relevant in Ghana's evolving professional environment, emphasising employee empowerment and career management.

Theoretically, this study extends the application of psychological contract theory by incorporating professional identity and career resilience, areas previously explored in limited conjunction. It also investigates the role of personal traits (conscientiousness) and an organisational factor (supportive climate) in enhancing career resilience within the Ghanaian context, where such empirical research remains sparse. Practically, the results provide strategic insights for professional services firms in Ghana and similar settings. This study guides the formulation of policies and practices that enhance career longevity and promote a resilient professional community. This contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship among work environment, inherent motivation, and professional development.

The paper is organised as follows: The next section reviews the literature on the theories and concepts, forming the basis for hypothesis development. Following this, the research design, data collection, and analysis methods are detailed. Key findings on the relationships among study variables are presented. The final section discusses theoretical contributions and practical implications for enhancing professional identity and career resilience.

Literature Review

Psychological Contract Theory

The psychological contract represents the individual's beliefs about mutual obligations between the employee and employer, transcending written contractual agreements (Argyris, 1960; Rousseau, 1989). Rousseau (1995) categorised psychological contracts into relational and transactional, which have since become prominent in literature. Relational psychological contracts hinge on implicit exchanges beyond formal agreements, involving employee loyalty in exchange for job stability and growth opportunities (Baruch & Rousseau, 2019; Conway & Pekcan, 2019; Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall, 2008). These contracts are characterised by long-term, socio-emotional relationships, mutual trust, and shared organisational culture. They play a crucial role in shaping professional identity and resilience by encouraging personal and career development within supportive organisational environments (Baruch & Rousseau, 2019; Lu et al., 2016).

In contrast, transactional psychological contracts focus on the specific exchange of work for rewards, often emphasising short-term economic benefits (Conway & Pekcan, 2019; Guest et al., 2010). Employees with a transactional orientation may see their roles mainly as a means to financial ends, potentially leading to higher turnover and lower engagement (Soares & Mosquera, 2019; Wang et al., 2017). However, some research suggests that clear transactional agreements can provide stability and predictability, potentially supporting professional identity development and enhancing career prospects by clarifying the boundaries of professional engagement (e.g., Dabos & Rousseau, 2004).

Both relational and transactional contracts involve mutual obligations that influence workplace outcomes like job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Ampofo et al., 2023; Rogozińska-Pawelczyk & Gadomska-Lila, 2022). Satisfying these contracts yield positive results, while breaches can lead to negative responses due to perceived imbalances in the employer-employee relationship, highlighting psychological contracts' significance in organisational behaviour and employee outcomes (Arthur & Kolson, 2017; Koomson & Opoku Mensah, 2020; Mensah, 2019).

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) provides insights into employee motivation by differentiating intrinsic motivation, which stems from personal interest, and extrinsic motivation, influenced by external factors (Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT posits three essential psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which, when met, enhance motivation, well-being, and performance (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the workplace, supporting these needs through job design and managerial practices boosts motivation and role identification, contributing to resilience against career challenges (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). This concept is relevant to psychological contracts, suggesting that meeting employees' perceived obligations can fulfil these psychological needs, enhancing professional identity and career resilience.

Professional identity strength

Professional Identity Strength (PIS) embodies the clarity, confidence, and stability individuals associate with their professional roles and career paths, reflecting their level of identification, investment, and belonging in their professions (Pratt et al., 2006). Recognised as a dynamic, multi-dimensional construct, PIS influences professional confidence, effectiveness, and behaviours and is shaped by experiences, interactions, and reflection (Pratt et al., 2006). Recent research underscores the importance of robust methodological approaches and reliable measurement tools in understanding PIS's development, emphasising the role of targeted professional development and organisational support (Braithwaite, 2017; Tomlinson & Jackson, 2019).

The literature reveals mixed outcomes regarding the impact of transactional psychological contracts. Sometimes studies link transactional contracts with negative outcomes, such as decreased job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions (e.g., Lu et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017). Conversely, other studies suggest that both contract types significantly affect organisational and individual outcomes, though relational obligations yield more positive impacts on employee outcomes than transactional obligations (Mensah, 2019; Rogozińska-Pawelczyk & Gadomska-Lila, 2022). This distinction stems from the deeper emotional and developmental commitments inherent in relational obligations, which promote a more robust professional identity, facilitating greater professional engagement and resilience.

However, the distinct mechanisms through which relational and transactional contracts influence PIS, particularly within emerging economies, remain unexplored. Existing studies often need to pay more attention to the contextual factors unique to resource-constrained environments like Ghana, limiting the generalizability of their findings. Drawing on the works of Rogozińska-Pawelczyk and Gadomska-Lila (2022), Coyle-Shapiro and Conway (2005), and Rousseau (1995), this study aims to fill this gap by exploring the distinct effects of relational and transactional psychological contracts on professional identity within Ghana's professional services sector. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: The influence of relational psychological contracts on professional identity strength is stronger than that of transactional contracts.

Career resilience

Career resilience, the capacity to adapt to challenges and leverage growth opportunities, has become essential in today's workforce (Borg et al., 2023; Hartmann et al., 2020; Mishra & McDonald, 2017; Peeters et al., 2023). This attribute, associated with traits like self-efficacy and optimism (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016; Luthans et al., 2007; Slay Ferraro et al., 2018), is influenced by personal, organisational, and broader socio-economic factors such as adaptability, support systems, and professional networks (Bimrose & Hearne, 2012; Hartmann et al., 2020; Kossek & Perrigino, 2016).

Empirical studies consistently associate a strong professional identity with positive outcomes, including job satisfaction, career commitment, and overall well-being (Jue & Ha, 2018; Wang et al., 2020). For instance, Pratt et al. (2006) found professional identity as a basis for career decisions and responses to work situations. Similarly, Haggard et al. (2011) found a solid professional identity to be correlated with higher career satisfaction and commitment. Moreover, scholars like Jafarianamiri et al. (2022), Raemy (2021), and Rogers et al. (2023) affirm that professional identity can serve as an anchor during career uncertainties and transitions, underscoring its significance in career decision-making and trajectory.

Despite its recognised importance, the link between professional identity and career resilience in contexts where employees face unique socio-economic challenges still needs to be explored more. Strengthening professional identity among professionals in Ghana's service sector may increase their commitment and satisfaction, thereby enhancing career resilience. Building on the premise that a robust professional identity provides direction and motivation, this study hypothesises:

H2: A stronger professional identity leads to greater career resilience.

The moderating role of conscientiousness

Conscientiousness characterises individuals known for their thoughtfulness, reasonable impulse control, methodical and goal-directed behaviours, and prefer planned over spontaneous actions (Demerouti, 2006; Van Scotter & Roglio, 2020). In the workplace, this trait is associated with positive outcomes, including reliability, diligence, and a strong sense of responsibility—qualities highly valued in the professional services sector (Akinwale & Oluwafemi, 2022; Kim & Oh, 2024; Twumasi Baffour et al., 2019). Barrick and Mount's (1991) seminal meta-analysis highlighted conscientiousness as a critical predictor of job performance across various occupations, consistently supported by subsequent research (e.g., Bakker et al., 2012; Mahlamäki et al., 2022).

Individuals with high conscientiousness excel in structured roles that leverage their organisational skills and diligence. In contrast, those with lower levels of this trait may exhibit a more relaxed approach to their tasks, often delaying work and showing less commitment to high standards (Bakker et al., 2012; Mahlamäki et al., 2022). This suggests a significant variability in how different levels of conscientiousness influence workplace behaviour and performance.

This study builds on existing literature by proposing that conscientiousness enhances the link between PIS and career resilience. Conscientious individuals' self-discipline, persistence, and responsibility will likely strengthen their ability to leverage a strong

professional identity to boost their career resilience (Barrick et al., 1993; Demerouti, 2006). Conscientious individuals' goal-oriented and disciplined nature helps them navigate employment agreements, overcome setbacks, and persistently pursue long-term goals, especially in demanding sectors.

However, existing studies have yet to fully explore how conscientiousness moderates the relationship between PIS and career resilience, particularly in emerging economies. By addressing this gap, the current study makes a unique contribution to understanding how personal traits can enhance the beneficial effects of professional identity on career outcomes. Therefore, this study posits that:

H3: Conscientiousness moderates the relationship between PIS and career resilience, enhancing this relationship.

The moderating role of a supportive climate

An organisation's supportive climate is how employees perceive their contributions as valued and their well-being as a priority (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This supportive environment is characterised by appreciation, the availability of necessary resources, and emotional backing (Agyapong et al., 2019). Key elements in this climate include managerial support, recognition, team cohesion, resource availability, and career development opportunities (Çemberci & Civelek, 2018).

Extensive evidence shows that employees who perceive high organisational support exhibit positive work attitudes and behaviours, such as enhanced job satisfaction, stronger organisational commitment, psychological safety, and reduced turnover intentions (Quagraine et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2018; Tetteh et al., 2020). Research by Boakye et al. (2023) and Hanu et al. (2023) highlights the significant moderating role of a supportive organisational culture on work outcomes. May et al. (2004) further demonstrated that employees in supportive environments show greater engagement and can more effectively leverage their professional identity, suggesting a potential moderating effect on resilience. These supportive environments provide essential resources and validation, enabling employees to utilise their professional identity to enhance resilience (Pratt et al., 2006).

Despite these findings, there is a need for more understanding of how supportive climates moderate the relationship between professional identity strength and career resilience within emerging economies. Aligning organisational support with professional values enhances employee empowerment and resilience in facing career challenges (Luthans et al., 2007). Thus, to provide insights into how organisational support can enhance career resilience through strengthened professional identity, this study hypothesises:

H4: Supportive organisational climate moderates the relationship between professional identity strength and career resilience, strengthening this relationship.

Conceptual framework

Figure 1 shows the study's conceptual model. It integrates psychological contract and self-determination theories to examine the impact of relational and transactional contracts on professional identity strength and its subsequent effect on career resilience. The model suggests that both types of psychological contracts shape professional identity strength, which influences career resilience. It also proposes that personal resources such as conscientiousness, and organisational resources like a supportive climate, moderate the relationship between professional identity strength and career resilience. This indicates that the effect of professional identity on career resilience might vary based on an individual's conscientiousness and the perceived support from the organisational environment. Integrating psychological contract and self-determination theories, the study formulated and empirically tested seven hypotheses.

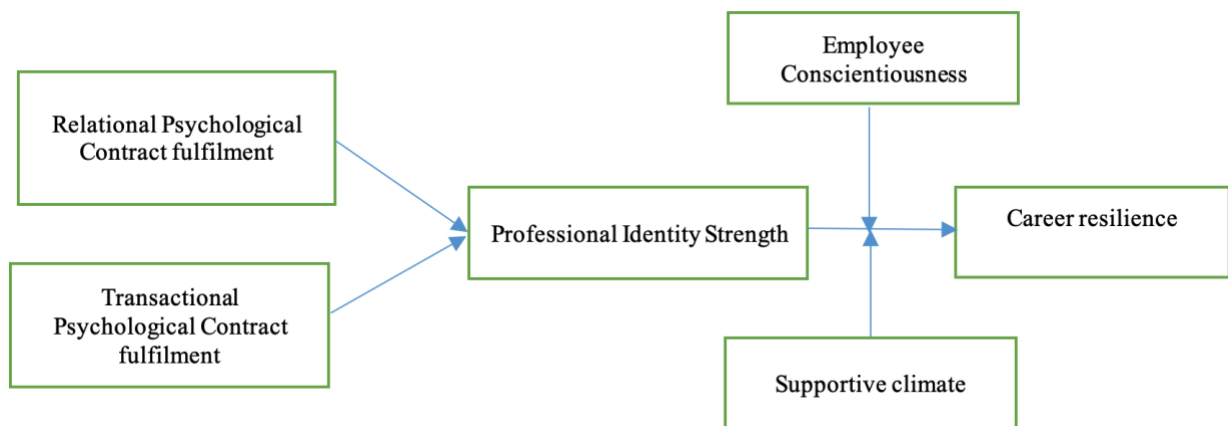


Figure 1: The proposed research framework

Research and Methodology

Research design and procedure

This study utilised a quantitative research design to explore the proposed model through a survey. The target demographic comprised young professionals within Ghana’s professional services firms, including legal, accounting, architecture, IT, and marketing sectors. These sectors are known for their dependency on specialised skills and emphasis on client-focused, knowledge-based services. Respondents were selected based on criteria that included an age range of 25 to 55 years and a minimum tenure of three years within their current organisation, focusing on early to mid-career stages, excluding associate, manager, and partner levels, to align with significant career development phases as per Spurk et al. (2016) and Bozionelos et al. (2011). A stratified random sampling method was employed to ensure a representative sample across the sectors, with a sample size of 421 respondents determined through A-priori Sample Size analysis, adopting the standard alpha level of 0.05 and a power of 0.80 (Soper, 2024).

To mitigate common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012), constructs were measured in two phases using an online survey over a five-week interval. Professional identity strength, conscientiousness, and organisational support were measured in the first phase, while psychological contract fulfilment and career resilience were measured in the second phase. The survey distribution used professional networks, emails, and personal contacts. A pilot test involving 21 respondents was conducted to inform refinements of the items for clarity and reliability. Ethical protocols ensured that respondents were informed about the study’s intent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality to reduce social desirability bias, with electronic informed consent obtained before survey commencement. Data were matched across phases using unique identifier codes for each respondent, consistent with Hanu and Khumalo (2023b) and Hanu et al. (2022).

The data was analysed using SmartPLS-SEM (v4). Sector-wise response distribution included 81 from legal, 93 from accounting and finance, 49 from IT, 57 from engineering and architecture, 68 from consulting, and 73 from marketing and advertising. Other respondent demographics are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents’ Biographical profile

Biographical profile		Frequency (n=421)	Percentage
Gender	Male	244	57.96
	Female	177	42.04
Age group	25 – 35	101	23.99
	36 – 45	184	43.70
	46-55	136	32.30
Highest educational qualification	Undergraduate	196	46.55
	Graduate	204	48.45
	Doctorate	09	2.13
	Others	12	2.85
Organisational level	Entry	187	44.41
	Middle	203	48.21
	Senior	31	7.36
Tenure	3 – 7 years	94	22.32
	8 – 11 years	149	35.39
	12 – 15 years	121	28.74
	16+ years	57	13.53

Measures

The survey utilised validated scales to measure key constructs, detailed in the Appendix. Transactional and relational contracts were assessed using four items from the Psychological Contract Inventory (Rousseau, 2000), where respondents rated their obligation to their employer on a scale from "Not at all (1)" to "A great extent (5)." An item for relational expectations is "I make personal sacrifices for this organisation," while a transactional contract item is "I do only the tasks I am paid to do."

Professional Identity Strength was assessed using four items adapted from the Professional Identity Strength Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), with a sample item being, "The professional community I am part of significantly mirrors my identity." Responses were from "Strongly disagree (5)" to "Strongly agree (1)."

Career resilience was evaluated with a four-item subscale from Carson and Bedeian’s (1994) career commitment measure, inverting items to gauge resilience levels. An example is, "The problems in my profession sometimes seem overwhelming," with ratings from "Strongly disagree (5)" to "Strongly agree (1)."

Conscientiousness was assessed using five items from the ‘Big Five’ personality traits scale (Goldberg, 1999; Soto & John, 2017), including “I am methodical, well-organised, and prefer to keep things in order,” rated from “Strongly disagree (5)” to “Strongly agree (1).”

Supportive Organisational Climate was measured with five items from Eisenberger et al. (1986), such as “Whenever I face a problem, the organisation provides the necessary assistance”, with agreement level rated from “Strongly disagree (5)” to “Strongly agree (1).”

Findings

The analysis commenced with the measurement model and the structural model evaluation, adhering to Hair et al.’s (2020) recommendations.

Measurement model

The model’s goodness-of-fit was evaluated, revealing a Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of 0.084, which fell below the acceptable threshold of 0.10, indicating a good fit between the model and observed data (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Discrepancy measures, *d_ULS* (unweighted least squares discrepancy) and *d_G* (geodesic discrepancy) fell within acceptable ranges, suggesting minimal deviation from the observed data (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015). Although the Chi-square statistic was high, suggesting some misfit, this metric can be sensitive to sample size (Ringle et al., 2015). The Normed Fit Index (NFI) stood at 0.736, slightly below the preferred benchmark of 0.95, indicating that the model explained 73.6% of the variance in the observed data (Bentler & Bonett, 1980).

Table 2 details statistical indicators for each construct, including mean values and standard deviations, reflecting central tendencies and score dispersion, respectively. For instance, PIS had a mean of 2.613 and a standard deviation 0.565. Reliability and validity metrics indicated strong performance across constructs. PIS demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.927) and convergent validity (AVE = 0.695). Relational and transactional contract constructs also showed good reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.825 and 0.784, respectively) and adequate validity (AVE = 0.656 and 0.608). Career resilience and conscientiousness were reliably measured (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.794 and 0.813, respectively) with high validity (AVE = 0.706 and 0.743). The supportive climate had a reliable Cronbach’s alpha of 0.765, with its composite reliability and validity (CR = 0.876; AVE = 0.699) confirming consistent measurement accuracy.

Table 2: Statistical analysis of constructs

Constructs	Mean (SD)	SFL (range)	α	CR	AVE
PIS	2.613(0.565)	0.803*** – 0.872***	0.927	0.931	0.695
Relational	3.184(0.571)	0.795*** – 0.840***	0.825	0.826	0.656
Transactional	2.088 (0.644)	0.838*** – 0.862***	0.784	0.816	0.608
Career resilience	4.031 (0.417)	0.816*** – 0.897***	0.794	0.820	0.706
Conscientiousness	2.610 (0.318)	0.754*** – 0.872***	0.813	0.811	0.743
Supportive climate	3.021 (0.876)	0.824*** – 0.883***	0.765	0.876	0.699

SD= Standard deviation, α = Cronbach’s alpha, *CR*= Composite reliability, *AVE*= Average variance extracted *SFL*= Standardised factor loadings.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) matrix, a rigorous approach for assessing discriminant validity in a measurement model (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 3 demonstrates that all HTMT values fall below the 0.85 threshold, confirming that each construct is distinct and contributes unique variance to the research model (Henseler et al., 2015; Sarstedt et al., 2022).

Table 3: Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) Matrix

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6
Professional Identity Strength (1)						
Relational (2)	0.789					
Transactional (3)	0.617	0.534				
Career resilience (4)	0.447	0.626	0.461			
Conscientiousness (5)	0.511	0.508	0.560	0.681		
Supportive climate (6)	0.478	0.451	0.510	0.478	0.774	

Structural model

Table 4 presents the hypothesis testing results, affirming support for all the proposed relationships. The relationship between relational contracts and PIS is significant ($\beta = 0.632, t = 12.074, p < 0.001$), validating Hypothesis 1. The effect of transactional contracts on PIS is also significant ($\beta = 0.473, t = 7.015, p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 2. The link between PIS and career resilience is significant ($\beta = 0.656, t = 10.493, p < 0.001$), corroborating Hypothesis 3. The moderating role of conscientiousness in the PIS-career resilience relationship is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.263, t = 4.351, p < 0.001$), endorsing Hypothesis 4. Finally, the significant moderating effect of supportive climate on the PIS-career resilience dynamic ($\beta = 0.538, t = 11.707, p < 0.001$) confirms Hypothesis 5.

Table 4: Path coefficients, significance, effect sizes, and model fit indices

Relationships between constructs	Beta	T	P	Decision	f ²	VIF
Relational -> PIS	0.632	12.074	0.000	H1=supported	0.311	1.324
Transactional -> PIS	0.473	7.015	0.000	H2=supported	0.179	1.245
PIS -> Career resilience	0.656	10.493	0.000	H3=supported	0.252	1.150
Conscientiousness x PIS -> Career resilience	0.263	4.351	0.000	H4=supported	0.151	1.120
Supportive climate x PIS -> Career resilience	0.538	11.707	0.000	H5=supported	0.307	1.431
					R²	Q²
Career resilience					0.386	0.227
PIS					0.423	0.084

The "Beta" column represents the standardised regression coefficients, "T" represents the t-statistics, and "P" represents the p-values.

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, ranging from 1.120 to 1.431, fall below the threshold of 5, indicating no multicollinearity concerns (Hair et al., 2022; Kock & Lynn, 2015). The R² values for career resilience (0.386) and PIS (0.123) reveal that the model explains 38.6% and 42.3% of the variance in these constructs, respectively. The Q² values for career resilience (0.227) and PIS (0.084), being above zero, affirm the model's predictive relevance for both constructs (Hair et al., 2022). These findings demonstrate the significant impacts of psychological contracts, conscientiousness, and a supportive climate on PIS and career resilience.

Discussions and Implications

Firstly, the study investigated the impact of relational and transactional psychological contracts on PIS. The results indicated a significant but differential link between these contracts and PIS, with relational contracts exerting a stronger influence. This finding underlines the relevance of the psychological contract theory, particularly the distinction between relational and transactional contracts, in understanding how the different types of employer-employee obligations shape professional identity. Relational contracts, characterised by emotional investment and long-term commitments, promote a deeper professional identity. This impact might stem from the comprehensive nature of relational contracts, encompassing personal development and a sense of organisational belonging, resonating with the core aspects of professional identity such as role clarity and value alignment (Coyle-Shapiro & Conway, 2005; Mensah, 2019; Rogozińska-Pawelczyk & Gadomska-Lila, 2022). Conversely, transactional contracts, which focus on economic exchanges and short-term benefits, have a lesser impact on PIS. While they provide job security and fair compensation, they do not influence the intrinsic motivation essential for a strong professional identity. This finding aligns with the self-determination theory, which emphasises that intrinsic motivations—nurtured by relational contracts—are more effective in developing a robust professional identity than extrinsic rewards and short-term benefits (Mensah, 2019; Rogozińska-Pawelczyk & Gadomska-Lila, 2022). Thus, transactional obligations' economic and task-related focus may contribute to professional stability but does not engender the more profound, personal connection to one's profession that relational contracts do.

Second, this study reveals a strong positive relationship between PIS and career resilience among young professionals in Ghana's professional services sector, aligning with the psychological contract theory and the self-determination theory. Consistent with studies (Jafarianamiri et al., 2022; Raemy, 2021; Rogers et al., 2023), individuals with stronger PIS exhibit higher levels of career resilience. This finding underlines the importance of a well-defined professional identity in enabling career challenges and adapting to a professional environment. Thus, a strong PIS, reflecting the fulfilment of relational psychological contracts and intrinsic motivation,

provides professionals with a sense of purpose and direction essential for resilience (Haggard et al., 2011; Pratt et al., 2006). This study indicates that aligning professional identity with career roles helps young professionals cope with career-related obstacles, acting as a buffer against job stressors and promoting recovery from setbacks (Jafarianamiri et al., 2022; Raemy, 2021; Rogers et al., 2023). This suggests that nurturing a strong professional identity is crucial for enhancing career resilience, offering practical implications for organisational strategies for employee development and support in dynamic professional environments.

Finally, this study investigated the moderating roles of personal and organisational resources in enhancing the link between PIS and career resilience. The results show that conscientiousness and a supportive organisational climate significantly strengthen this relationship, though in different ways. Conscientious individuals, known for their diligence and goal-oriented nature, can leverage a strong professional identity to manage career challenges, highlighting the relationship between personality traits and professional identity, which is consistent with related studies (Demerouti, 2006; Mahlamäki et al., 2022; Van Scotter & Roglio, 2020). This finding aligns with self-determination theory, which suggests that intrinsic motivation, fostered by personal traits such as conscientiousness, plays a crucial role in professional development and resilience (Demerouti, 2006; Mahlamäki et al., 2022; Van Scotter & Roglio, 2020). It underlines the importance of considering personality traits in understanding how employees interact with their work environment and respond to professional development efforts.

Similarly, the influence of a supportive organisational climate highlights its importance in facilitating employees' ability to utilise their professional identity effectively in building resilience. This is consistent with the psychological contract theory, which posits that perceived organisational support can fulfil relational psychological contracts, thereby enhancing professional identity and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007). Thus, in supportive work environments, employees are more likely to feel valued and understood, which can amplify the positive effects of a strong professional identity on resilience. Such a climate facilitates a sense of belonging and security, enabling employees to take risks and embrace challenges, which are crucial for career growth and adaptation. Hence, employees with a strong professional identity may find more opportunities and encouragement to apply their strengths and values, leading to enhanced resilience (Luthans et al., 2007; Pratt et al., 2006). These findings highlight the critical role of supportive contexts in facilitating employee development and well-being, consistent with the broader organisational behaviour literature (Agyapong et al., 2019; Boakye et al., 2023; Hanu et al., 2023). Thus, by aligning organisational support with employees' professional values and personal strengths, organisations can create a resilient workforce capable of managing career challenges effectively.

Theoretical Implications

This study provides significant theoretical implications by integrating Psychological Contract Theory with Self-determination theory (SDT), providing a unique perspective on employer-employee expectations and intrinsic motivation. This integration enriches our understanding of workplace dynamics and significantly shows how psychological obligations influence employees' basic psychological needs, as outlined in SDT. In particular, the study reveals that relational contracts have a more substantial effect on PIS than transactional contracts, deepening our comprehension of how different psychological contract facets distinctively impact employee identity. Furthermore, by establishing a link between PIS and career resilience, this study extends the literature on career development by emphasising the relationship between professional identity and resilience. The result supports the notion that identity formation is an active component of career progression, influencing an individual's capacity to adapt to and thrive professionally (Pratt et al., 2006). This insight enriches our understanding of the mechanisms through which professionals develop resilience, emphasising the importance of identity strength as a key determinant, thus warranting more attention in career planning and management. Additionally, this study enriches models of career resilience by showing that conscientiousness and supportive organisational climates amplify PIS's positive effect on resilience. The moderating effect of conscientiousness stresses the importance of individual differences on organisational outcomes, suggesting that personality traits significantly influence how employees respond to organisational initiatives, providing valuable insights to refine theories related to employee behaviour and motivation. Likewise, the study highlights the crucial role of organisational factors, especially a supportive work environment, in improving employee resilience, broadening the focus from individual traits and coping mechanisms to include organisational influences. Finally, conducting this research in Ghana's professional services sector expands the applicability of organisational theories across diverse cultural and economic contexts, contributing to a more globalised understanding of organisational behaviour. This study underlines the relevance of these theories in varied settings and encourages further cross-cultural organisational psychology research, enhancing theoretical clarity and coherence.

Practical Implications

This study's findings offer several managerial implications, particularly for organisations in the professional services sector. Organisations should develop and maintain these relationships through strategic initiatives to capitalise on the strong effect of relational contracts on PIS. For instance, organisations can implement personalised career development plans, nurture a mutual trust and commitment culture, schedule regular career development discussions, offer continuous learning opportunities, and facilitate cross-departmental projects. Establishing transparent communication channels, recognising employee achievements regularly, and conducting periodic surveys to understand and integrate employees' career goals into performance reviews are crucial.

Additionally, although the influence of transactional contracts on PIS is less pronounced, they are still significant. Organisations should ensure fair compensation and clear job responsibilities by conducting regular market salary reviews and defining job roles during onboarding. Addressing essential employment needs promptly and maintaining open communication can resolve discrepancies in job roles and compensation and build a stable professional identity, particularly in sectors like the professional services in Ghana, where the workforce is young and potentially more receptive to their employment's relational and economic aspects.

Given the direct relationship between PIS and career resilience, there is a need for initiatives and policies that support and facilitate the development of strong professional identities among employees. This could include mentorship programs, professional growth and development opportunities, and a work culture that acknowledges and supports employees' career aspirations. This involves creating environments where employees can align their personal and professional values, feel confident in their professional roles, and see clear pathways for their career advancement. Such practices are likely to yield a more resilient workforce capable of adapting to the evolving demands and challenges of the professional world, particularly in fast-growing and dynamic sectors.

The moderating effect of conscientiousness indicates that conscientious individuals benefit more from a strong professional identity regarding career resilience. Managers could incorporate personality assessments into recruitment, assign roles that align with these traits and establish a reward system that recognises conscientious behaviour. Providing constructive feedback and recognition for conscientious efforts is also essential.

Creating supportive work environments is crucial for leveraging professional identity effectively. Regularly acknowledge employee achievements, provide emotional support through counselling services, maintain open communication, and ensure employees have the necessary tools and resources to perform their jobs effectively by investing in technology and training.

Finally, customised employee development programs are essential given the varying impacts of psychological contracts and individual traits. Design individualised development plans based on each employee's career aspirations and personal strengths and develop HR policies that balance relational and transactional elements. Implement ongoing training for managers to recognise and nurture employee strengths and professional identities. Integrating these practical approaches will provide a roadmap for enhancing professional identity and career resilience in the professional services sector.

Conclusions

This study fills the gap in understanding how employees' perceived obligations under psychological contracts influence their professional identity and career resilience, particularly considering the roles of conscientiousness and supportive organisational climates within professional services firms in emerging economies. Integrating psychological contract and self-determination theories reveals that relational contracts significantly enhance professional identity more than transactional contracts. Additionally, a supportive organisational climate and conscientiousness strengthen the link between professional identity and career resilience. These findings offer practical guidance for organisations to develop tailored HR policies and supportive environments, enhancing employee development and resilience. This research contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding and opens avenues for future cross-cultural studies in organisational psychology, particularly in diverse cultural and economic contexts.

Limitations and direction for future research

This study, while providing valuable insights, has limitations. First, the sample is restricted to young professionals in Ghana's professional services sector, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other sectors or geographical locations. Future research could extend this study's scope to include diverse industries and cultural contexts to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, the study adopts a cross-sectional design, which captures a snapshot in time but cannot establish causality. Longitudinal studies are recommended for future research to track changes over time and better understand the causal relationships among the constructs. Thirdly, the study relies on self-reported data, which might be subject to social desirability bias despite measures taken to mitigate this. Incorporating more objective measures or triangulating data sources could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the constructs. In terms of future research directions, exploring the impact of other personality traits beyond conscientiousness on the relationship between professional identity strength and career resilience could yield further insights. Additionally, it would be valuable to examine the role of organisational policies and practices in shaping psychological contract fulfilment and its subsequent impact on professional identity and career resilience.

Acknowledgement

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation, M.T.A.Y, L.Z. N, C.H., and D.M.Z; methodology, M.T.A.Y, and D.M.Z; validation, All authors; formal analysis, C.H; investigation, All authors; resources, All authors; writing—original draft preparation, All authors; writing—review and editing, All authors.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to restrictions.

Declaration: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix A

Measures

Psychological Contract Scale (Rousseau, 2001).

	I work only the hours set out in my contract and no more.
	My commitment to this organisation is defined by my contract.
Transactional	My loyalty to the organisation is defined by my contract.
	I prefer to work a strictly defined set of working hours.
	I expect to grow in this organisation.
	I have a reasonable chance of promotion if I work hard.
Relational	To me, working for this organisation is like being a member of a family.
	This organisation develops and rewards employees who work hard and exert themselves.

Professional Identity Strength Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992).

My work as a professional has a lot to do with how I feel about myself.

The professional group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am.

My sense of what I am deeply connected to my role within this professional firm.

Overall, belonging to my professional group is an essential part of my self-image.

Career resilience (Carson & Bedeian, 1994)

The costs associated with my work or profession sometimes seem too great.

The challenges I encounter in my work sometimes lead me to question the rewards I receive.

Given the problems I encounter in my work, I sometimes wonder if the burden is worth it.

The problems associated with my line of work or profession sometimes seem overwhelming.

Consciousness (Donnellan et al., 2006; Soto & John, 2017).

I enjoy seeking new ways of doing things.

I am always dependable and reliable

I can always be counted on

I am methodical, well-organised, and prefer to keep things in order.

I am always prepared to get things done.

Supportive organisational culture (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

The organisation is willing to assist me in maximising my job performance.

The organisation really cares about my well-being.

Help is available from the organisation whenever I encounter a problem.

The organisation celebrates and values my work achievements.

The organisation tries to make my job as interesting as possible
