The psychological contract has emerged relatively recently as a key concept for understanding people’s attitudes towards work and organizations, their behaviour and their psychological well-being. It has also been identified as a crucial feature of new types of employment relations (Alcover, 2002; Guest, 2004).

Guest and Conway (2002) define the psychological contract, slightly adapting a previous definition by Herriot and Pemberton (1997), as “the perception of both parties to the employment relationship, organization and individual, of the reciprocal promises and obligations implied in that relationship” (p. 22).

Although it is a construct with a substantial research tradition, recent years have seen the emergence of some critical and innovative approaches (Guest, 1998; Guest & Conway, 2002), in contrast to the traditional perspective of Rousseau and colleagues (Rousseau, 1995). Guest (1998) argues the need to construct a general theory on the psychological contract in order to overcome the restrictions of current research on the topic. For this author, one of its main limitations is its descriptive nature, and he advocates developing theoretical models and studies that would allow researchers to go beyond mere description of the content of the psychological contract to an evaluation of its state.

The content of the psychological contract refers to the reciprocal obligations that characterize the individual’s psychological contract (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). This content can be analyzed from the perspective of the employee, which has been the commonest approach in the literature, from that of the employer, or from both. Thus, the psychological contract refers to the set of reciprocal obligations that form part of the psychological contract.

Guest and colleagues introduce the concept of state of the psychological contract. For these authors, evaluation of the state of the psychological contract should represent a qualitative leap in research on the psychological contract, rendering it more explanatory and less descriptive, and making possible the prediction of diverse variables related to attitudes, behaviour and employees’ health.

The present paper explores the role of the state of the psychological contract in predicting psychological health outcomes in a sample of 385 employees from different Spanish companies. Results indicate that the state of the psychological contract significantly predicts life satisfaction, work-family conflict and well-being beyond the predictive capacity of the content of the psychological contract. In addition, trust and fairness, two of the dimensions of the state of the psychological contract, jointly contribute to explaining these psychological health variables, adding value to the predictive role of fulfilment of the psychological contract. These results lend support to the approach proposed by Guest and colleagues.

The original Spanish version of this paper has been previously published in Psicothema, 2006, Vol. 18, No 2, 256-262