

Employee Opinion Survey on Shaping Employee Loyalty

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This article presents the nature of employee loyalty, focusing on its affective and behavioral aspects. Symptoms of loyalty are pointed out, with the reservation that the manifestation of the lack of loyalty that affects the employer the most is voluntary employee departures. In order to prevent them, steps are taken to recognize employee expectations. Several tools are used for this purpose, however, the research based on employee opinion survey is particularly effective.

Keywords: employee loyalty, employee opinion survey, employee expectations.

Introduction

In the times when the labor market is an employer's market, actions directed towards ensuring employee loyalty may appear redundant. However, in many organizations they are of top priority. These are mainly those organizations where employees, or a portion thereof, are classified as key stakeholders in the community, due to the fact that they have strategically valuable skills. The purpose of the article was therefore to identify the role of employee opinion surveys in shaping their loyalty. To achieve this objective, an analysis of the literature was performed. Also social reports – documents in which organizations present themselves as socially responsible entities – were analyzed. In order to do this, the 2010 “report library”, published on the website www.raportyspoleczne.pl, was used. 18 reports mostly revolving around large enterprises were presented. Attention was paid to issues such as voluntary departure of employees, as well as ways to communicate with employees. Another method utilized in the research was partially structured interview,

conducted in two multinational companies in which employees are key stakeholders and in which employee opinion surveys are used. The interview concerned the procedures for conducting employee surveys, with the particular emphasis on the analysis and interpretation of quantitative data obtained.

1. The essence of employee loyalty

The consequence of recognizing the key role of human resources in the company's performance is the identification of their characteristics that determine the effectiveness of this performance. It was decided that employee loyalty is one of such properties. It turns out, however, that the interpretation of "employee loyalty" is ambiguous. One of the authors pointed out that it has evolved over time, as loyalty initially was identified with dedication to the organization, commitment, feeling of attachment to the organization and pride in belonging to it, while today attention is paid to the moral foundations of loyalty. The author explained that employee loyalty is reflected in behavior resulting from undisclosed, voluntarily undertaken obligations relating to compliance with the moral principles of universal character, while pursuing individual and organizational objectives¹. However, the moral connotations of loyalty were pointed out long before by one of the Polish psychologists who explained that the mechanism of loyalty is a specific type of employee identification with the institution, where the identification means identifying with "a thing, idea or value and treating the fact of identification as a superior moral value"². The psychologist noted, however, that this mechanism is formed with great difficulty, since the objectives of higher order "have little effect on the individual's actions". Among people there is a general tendency to choose these higher objectives which are subject to operationalization and are the basis for measuring developments in the given field"³.

It can be seen that currently loyalty is usually considered as a compilation of attitudes and behaviors. Psychologists recognize that the attitude towards any object is a relatively constant tendency of a person to relate, positively or negatively, to this object. The aforementioned object may be a physical object,

¹ R. Coughlan, *Employee Loyalty as Adherence to Shared Moral Values*, "Journal of Managerial Issues" 2005, 17, 1, pp. 44–45.

² S. Tokarski, *Psychologia organizacji*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk 1995, p. 69.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 70.

an event, an idea or another person⁴, and also an organization and an employer. The attitude mentioned in the definition is assessed on a bipolar scale ranging from an extremely negative attitude, meaning a total rejection of the object, to absolutely positive one, i.e. total acceptance of the object⁵. "Key characteristics of attitude are therefore: a sign (positive or negative) and intensity (higher or lower)"⁶. Behavior, in turn, is "a way of life, a manner of reacting to something, manners, and conduct"⁷. It is therefore somewhat a response of the individual to stimuli from the environment, taking the form of actions and activities.

In the light of the presented information it can be assumed that employee loyalty is an attitude directed to the employer, consisting of relatively constant positive or negative relationship to them, and expressed in behavior consistent or inconsistent with the expectations of the employer. Such an interpretation of employee loyalty has an affective, emotional character, referring to employee attitudes, but also behavioral, as it is expressed by employee behavior. The examples of behavior that is in accordance with the employer's expectations are as follows:

- involvement in the functioning of the organization and pursuing its objectives, which means that the attitudes such as social idleness or the "stowaway" attitude, which consists in minimizing one's efforts, are not adopted by the employee;
- ignoring attractive job offers sent by other employers as a result of the bond between the employee and the organization⁸. As has been noted, this does not mean that in the future the employee will not regret the fact that he or she turned down a job offer⁹;
- conscious or unconscious positive employer branding, i.e. the way in which the organization is seen in the internal and external labor market. It turns out that among the various activities undertaken by employers and aimed at the development of a positive image in the labor market, the priority is to be attributed to the communication from the employees. The reason for the

⁴ B. Wojciszke, *Postawy i ich zmiana*, in: *Psychologia t.3*, Ed. J. Strelau, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2000, p. 79.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ *Uniwersalny słownik języka polskiego*, Ed. S. Dubisz, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2003.

⁸ J. Bloemer, G. Odekerken-Schröder, *The role of employee relationship proneness in creating employee loyalty*, "International Journal of Bank Marketing" 2006, 24, 4, pp. 253–256; R. Coughlan, *Employee Loyalty...*, op. cit., p. 45; G. M. Logan, *Loyalty and the Sense of Purpose*, "California Management Review" 1984, 27, p. 150.

⁹ A. Lipka, *W stronę jakości zasobów ludzkich*, Difin, Warszawa, 2005, p. 130.

fact that the message is more effective than e.g. the information presented on the website of the organization is that it is the current employees who are more trusted in the labor market than the employer themselves. A loyal employee speaks positively about the organization and gladly recommends it to candidates¹⁰.

In the light of the above, it is not surprising that employee loyalty is a priority of many employers. This is especially true for those whose employees are the key stakeholders, as they have significant and rare skills.

2. Categories of employee loyalty

Discussed in the literature customer loyalty identifies and describes its different categories. For the purpose of research in the field of employee loyalty one could adapt the proposal of categorization by A. Dick and K. Basu, based on a two-dimensional approach to loyalty, which is the previously mentioned employee attitudes (affective dimension) and behavior expressing loyalty (behavioral dimension) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Typology of employee loyalty

Attitude towards the employer	Positive	True loyalty	Hidden loyalty
	Negative	Apparent (false) loyalty	No loyalty
		Showing loyalty	Showing no loyalty
		Behaviors	

Source: Own, based on: W. Urban, D. Siemieniako, *Lojalność klientów. Modele, motywacja i pomiar*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2008, p. 82; P. Kwiatek, *Programy lojalnościowe. Budowa i funkcjonowanie*, Oficyna a Wolters Kluwer business, Kraków 2007, p. 34.

¹⁰ J. Bloemer, G. Odekerken-Schröder, *The role of employee relationship...*, op. cit., pp. 253–256.

Particularly valuable kind of loyalty for the employer is true loyalty, which is manifested both in a positive attitude and the behavior of the employee. The opposite of it is the lack of loyalty, when the employee does not accept the employer, which is also expressed in their behavior.

The apparent (false) loyalty occurs when the behavior of the employee declares loyalty, but in the affective area no symptoms of a positive relation to the employer can be found. The fact that negative attitudes do not translate into negative behavior results e.g. from the employee's helplessness, low self-esteem or lack of career prospects and the possibility of finding a new job. This type of loyalty can be described by the term "calculating", as it is the result of calculation of profitability of leaving the organization and looking for a new job made by the employee¹¹.

Hidden loyalty is characterized by a positive attitude towards the employer, which, however, is not reflected in the behavior. A particular example is the situation in which the employee leaves the organization on their own initiative, despite the fact that the organization is strongly and positively connoted emotionally. The reasons for such behaviors can be seen e.g. in the employee's vulnerability to pressure regarding changing jobs exerted by the environment, such as their family.

A cause-and-effect connection between the attitude and the behavior does not always exist. Ongoing research has shown that sometimes the inconsistency or even divergence in attitudes and behavior of people can be caused by e.g. moderating variables (moderators of conformity), which are social pressures¹². With regard to loyalty such a modifying factor can be, e.g. the aforementioned pressure on the employee from their family. In addition to moderators of conformity, inconsistency may also be caused by mediators, which are automatic (unconscious) mental processes, or ones that are controlled, intermediary between attitude and behavior¹³. These explanations allow one to express reservations about a fairly common belief, also presented in the scientific literature, that in order to make its employees loyal, the organization must be able to make them satisfied. In the light of the information about the moderators and mediators of conformity, it would be risky to assume that job satisfaction is a sufficient condition to obtain employee loyalty. It is possible that, in the case of hidden loyalty, the employee achieves job satisfaction and still decides to leave the organization. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine

¹¹ Ibidem, pp. 253–256.

¹² S. Robbins, *Organizational behavior*, Prentice Hall, Inc., Upper Sadle River, 2001, p. 72.

¹³ B. Wojciszke, *Postawy...*, op. cit., p. 89.

the employee whose loyalty can be described as true, but who does not derive satisfaction from work. Satisfaction can be understood as the psychological state indicating the feelings of the individual associated with the situation, based on an assessment of the situation¹⁴.

So far, symptoms of employee loyalty have been indicated. A behavior expressing lack of loyalty that is particularly acute for an organization is employee departure, especially when her or his value to the organization was significant, as he or she had significant and rare skills. As already mentioned, relation between the employee that resigns from the job and the employer can be positive (hidden loyalty). Although there are situations in which an employee decides to leave suddenly under the influence of a stimulus, in most cases such a decision is made over a period of time, when the employee analyzes the costs and benefits of leaving the organization or staying. It was noted that the behavior of individuals differs in this area, because they take into account one or more features of employment with the given employer, and sometimes compare them with the characteristics of a new potential job. Some attribute importance to these features, while others compare the present work with the ideal, imaginary one¹⁵. The employee that makes a decision to leave the organization takes into consideration such a factor as situation in labor market, including unemployment rate.

Estimating the profitability of remaining in the organization or leaving it is often subconscious. What is more, an employee may not even be aware of the preferences for physical and psychosocial working conditions, but makes the decisions that result from these preferences and needs. Employee needs related to work and the organization may be universal, when they are felt by all employees regardless of their personal characteristics, personality, or the character of the employer organization; or individualistic, if they result from personal factors and the employee's personality.

3. Identification of employee expectations

As for the employer keeping employees in the organization is such an important issue, in other words preventing their voluntary departures, one of the researchers pointed to adequate modes of action, including:

¹⁴ D. Hellriegel, S. E. Jackson, J. W. Slocum, *Management. A Competency-Based Approach*, Thomson, South-Western, Singapore 2005, p. 384.

¹⁵ A. Lipka, *Inwestycje w kapitał ludzki organizacji w okresie koniunktury i dekonunktury*, Oficyna a Wolters Kluwer business, Warszawa 2010, p. 153.

- application of legal provisions for periods of notice;
- application of clauses prohibiting competition;
- determining the conditions of repayment of invested funds;
- offering additional incentives – “golden handcuffs”, rewarding the employees for the duration of stay in the organization¹⁶.

It may be observed that the first three methods actually result in employee retention; however, they do not maintain their commitment in the achievement of organizational goals. In turn, efficiency of the last method of conditioning is determined e.g. by the difficulty to copy it by the competition. This is especially important in certain rare labor resources, when it is important to retain employees to ensure high quality of human resources of the organization. Then, it is often those key employees who receive job offers from competitors, which one of the authors described as “opening golden handcuffs”¹⁷. Therefore, key employees are offered incentive packages referred to as loyalty programs. A loyalty program for employees is a tool whose purpose is to manage the employees aimed at maintaining the optimal, planned level of voluntary departure rates, while stimulating their commitment to the organization’s strategy. Therefore, employers often offer employees very sophisticated benefits included in the incentives. However, it is vital to repeat and emphasize that the needs and expectations of the employee that he or she wants to be met by the organization or thanks to it are particularly important in designing an effective loyalty program, or a “custom package”, or as it has been defined – “golden handcuffs”. This especially implies to the needs and expectations of individuals, constituting the psychological contract. These expectations are the result of explicit promises (e.g. made during a recruitment process), interpretation of the standards of exchange implemented in the past, indirect experience acquired through learning from others, and the presence of factors that each party considers to be obvious¹⁸. Therefore, creating loyalty programs is connected with recognition of mutual expectations of the involved parties.

In organizations, different ways are sought to identify employee expectations. As social report analyses suggest¹⁹ numerous tools for communication are used for this purpose. In view of these considerations those tools which include vertical communication are crucial. In some organizations

¹⁶ S. Taylor, *Płynność zatrudnienia. Jak zatrzymać pracowników w firmie*, Wolters Kluwer Polska, Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Kraków 2006, pp. 96–99.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 121.

¹⁸ S.L. Robinson, D.M. Rousseau, *Violating the psychological contract: not the exception but the norm*, “Journal of Organizational Behavior” 1994, 15, 3, p. 246.

¹⁹ All analyzed reports are available on the website www.raportyspoleczne.pl.

board meetings with the representatives of the employees, e.g. trade unions and staff councils, are used, but also meetings with all employees take place. To increase the effectiveness of communication in one of the companies (Arcelor Mittal Poland) the Academy of Social Dialogue was held, in which training in discussion moderating techniques, dispute settlement and development of constructive dialogue was conducted.

One of the tools of communication that is used is the employee opinion survey. It is indeed a reliable source of information about the expectations of employees, and last but not least, it informs the employee that the employer is interested in these expectations and they are important to them.

The credibility of the information gathered, and thus the possibility of its effective use, depends on the methods used in the survey research and adaptation of these methods to the needs of specific studies in the specific organization. A questionnaire is among the most frequently chosen methods. The application of a questionnaire allows for the acquisition of quantitative data. Unfortunately, in typical opinion surveys, their relevance is guaranteed by their anonymity²⁰ which in turn will make the creation of a "custom-made employee package" more difficult. It turns out that increasing the credibility of the information can be achieved by arranging the implementation of research by an "independent, external body," which shall conduct it non-anonymously and execute the analysis of the results²¹. In order to determine the needs and expectations of employees, it is also necessary to obtain qualitative data. Therefore, open-ended questions in the questionnaires are introduced, or free or structured (categorized) interviews are conducted with employees, especially key employees.

The analysis of social reports suggests that nine organizations (50% of those covered by the report) used employee opinion surveys in the form of questionnaires, defined as the employee satisfaction survey (KP, PGNiG S.A., Schenker Sp.), employee poll (CEMEX Polska Sp. z o.o), or employee opinion survey (RWE Polska, Telekomunikacja Polska S.A.). The voluntary nature of the surveys is emphasized; however, some reports published information on the percentage of employees who decided to participate. The fact that not all employees are willing to participate in the survey can be explained by the fact that the completion of a questionnaire containing 100 questions sometimes takes about half an hour. It may be noted, however, that along

²⁰ J. Radosławska, *Sondaż opinii pracowników jako instrument wspomagający zarządzanie personelem w przedsiębiorstwie*, „Zarządzanie Zasobami Ludzkimi” 2005, No. 3–4., p. 83; S. Taylor, *Płynność zatrudnienia. Jak zatrzymać pracowników w firmie*, Wolters Kluwer Polska, Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Kraków 2006, p. 87.

²¹ S. Taylor, *Płynność zatrudnienia...*, op. cit., p. 88.

with the subsequent editions of research in organizations, the number of respondent employees is growing²², which is undoubtedly influenced by the implementation of corrective actions by the employer, suggested by the employees in previous studies. Such research is confidential, anonymous, and most often carried out by external and independent research institutes. The declared aim of the research is, e.g. to increase the involvement of employees (CEMEX Polska Sp. z o.o.), to build a positive employer image (PGNiG S.A.), or a sentiment analysis and determination of the validity of employees' individual work areas (Telekomunikacja Polska S.A.). It can be noticed that these goals do correspond with shaping employee loyalty. The frequency of surveying is different: once every year or every two years, although in some organizations it is greater, or there are several surveys on a variety of issues. Frequently, the thematic scope of research can be defined as comprehensive, on such issues as organizational strategy, remuneration, working conditions, cooperation within the organization, social benefits, communication, and opportunities for growth. Some reports, however, indicated that there are also surveys carried out on selected issues, such as leadership (Schenker Sp. z o.o.).

Apparently, the results of the analyses of the reports cannot be considered as representative. However, organizations described in the reports are recognized on the market. Because of that they can be treated as indicating some trends, or even fashions in the described areas. Analyzing the reports one shall find out that connections between employee opinion surveys and actions limiting fluctuation are not underlined. Although the reports have often emphasized the importance of limiting voluntary departures of employees (usually presented by indicators of fluctuation, rotation or retention of employees), just one of the eighteen reports (CEMEX Polska Sp. z o.o.) stated that in the company, due to the importance of staff experience, employee departure risk is monitored by means of surveys. It is worth emphasizing that in this company surveys are also used in the case of voluntary departures of employees (the ratio of such departures is ca. 1%), and their purpose is to analyze the reasons for the departure and to specify corrective actions. In one case (GlaxoSmithKline Pharmaceuticals S.A.) it was noted, however, that retention in the organization is supported by pay levels and benefits. At the same time, systematic surveys on a variety of issues, including, e.g. medical benefits and wages are carried out there. These actions may be regarded as effective, as the rotation in the enterprise has been limited and is below 10%.

²² Achieving 100 % participation is hardly possible, e.g. employees who are on maternity leave usually do not complete the questionnaire.

Slightly different conclusions are based on interviews conducted in two international companies. There, the question of low fluctuation is treated as a priority (this is confirmed by its inclusion in the company strategy). At the same time, systematic surveying of employees aimed at reducing fluctuations is carried out. In one case, based on the principle of prevention, as it does not exceed the assumed 3% per year, in the other, the surveys are corrective measures as fluctuation is much higher than acceptable, in some engagements exceeding 20%. There, after carrying out a survey and obtaining the aggregated results, teams were set up to explain the reasons for the excessive fluctuation and indicate ways to reduce it. It was noted that the largest fluctuation applied to employees with seniority in the organization from one to three years, followed by those whose employment lasted for less than a year. Employees with a work experience of over three years are the ones to leave the organization least frequently. The studies were intended, among others, at identifying the causes for such a situation. It turned out that employees leave before the period of three years in an organization because with the end of this period, according to the labor law, the notice period is extended from one to three months, which in their opinion reduces their mobility and flexibility in the labor market. On the other hand, the employees departing shortly after they were employed are the ones who have negatively verified their expectations of the employer. One of the tasks of the teams was to set up the expectations that their members had had towards the employer before they started work, and then the degree of satisfaction of those expectations was determined. It was also sought to identify the factors that connect the employees with the organization, push them out of it, and those that give the advantage to competitors. Members of the set up teams also indicated factors which, in their opinion, were the main reason for departure from the organization. This was performed in such a way that all the employee complaints expressed in the surveys were to be grouped, by classifying them into the most, medium and the least important ones. Then, in the same manner, those regarded as the most important were grouped. Eventually, it turned out that the reason for employees leaving the organization is unsatisfactory pay.

In these enterprises, where employee satisfaction surveys are conducted, also corrective actions designed to meet the expectations of the employees are taken. Such conclusions are derived from the reports' analyses as well as from interviews held.

Among the benefits offered to employees as a response to their expectations reflected in the surveys, one can list e.g. free legal consultations for all employees, a gym in the office, school kits for the employees' children, flexible working hours for parents of children aged up to 10, co-operation between

the employer and a kindergarten, the organization's intermediation in hiring caregivers for children and parents of the employees, as well as very popular health care packages, gym passes and funded professional training. It is worth stressing that in one of the companies (PGNiG S.A.) the results of the surveys were used to create a code of ethics for the company.

In turn, according to the interview carried out in the organization, the relationships of employees with managers within it, who have been transferred from separate offices to open space, have changed significantly (in previous studies the main complaints from the employees in the organization was the significant distance between them and the management). The dress code was abolished, attempts are being made to positively influence atmosphere at work, theater and film pass offer has become more flexible, which has been appreciated by employees and, what it is worth noting, employees see this as a consequence of the comments expressed in surveys.

It should be reminded that already experiments conducted by Elton Mayo showed that the employees feel appreciated just by the fact that the organization is interested in them, and an employee opinion survey is received as a sign of this interest. It may, therefore, contribute to job satisfaction, one of the most important determinants of employee loyalty.

Conclusion

Employee loyalty, considered as a positive attitude and behaviors favorable towards the employer, is often seen in organizations as a factor of strategic importance. One of the behaviors that express lack of loyalty is the voluntary departure of an employee from the organization, which is a particularly harmful experience to the employer if that employee had significant and rare skills. Organizations, therefore, are making attempts to retain workers, and different supplementary incentives are used for this purpose. It is important, however, that these benefits correspond to employee expectations. Therefore, employee expectations are diagnosed across organizations using opinion surveys. It turns out that employees who have experienced the positive consequences of this research are increasingly willing to submit to them, as evidenced by their growing participation.

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Резюме

Опрос мнения работников в формировании их лояльности

В своей статье авторка представляет суть лояльности работников, обращая внимание на ее аффективный и бихевиоральный аспекты. Определяет признаки лояльности, признавая одновременно, что самым обременительным для организации признаком нелояльности являются добровольные уходы с работы. Чтобы их предотвратить стремятся узнать ожидания работников. Для этого используются разные инструменты, а особенно эффективным является опрос, опирающийся на анкетные исследования.

Ключевые слова: лояльность работников, опрос мнения работников, ожидания работников.

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