MARCIN WNUK*

SOCIAL EXCHANGE AS A KEY FACTOR IN SHAPING EMPLOYEES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ORGANIZATION

Introduction

Relationship between an employee and an employer is in nature an exchange transaction under which the organization, through remuneration, fulfills employee's living needs and creates conditions for professional development as well as satisfies socio-emotional needs, such as the need for belongingness, respect, recognition, acceptance or emotional support [Armeli et al., 1989]. Organization expects from the employee to engage his mental, emotional, intellectual and interpersonal resources in order to achieve its goals and that he will act for its good, being devoted, loyal and honest towards it. In turn, employee expects that he will be properly treated by the employer, who will take care of his well-being. He will also expect that his involvement in the development of the organization and the results of his work will be appreciated and properly rewarded.

Theory of organizational support [Eisenberger et al., 2002; Eisenberger et al., 1986] explains the relationship between the employee and the organization from the social exchange perspective [Blau, 1964], in which, according to the rule of gratitude [Gouldner, 1960], employee should repay the organization for what, according to his perception and feelings, he received from it. In the presented context, gratitude to the organization will be a consequence of the desire to preserve the image of the person paying his debts, to avoid social stigmatization resulting from violation of the reciprocity principle and to maintain positive attitude on its part [Eisenberger et al., 2001]. This means that if the employee has the conviction that the organization is taking good care of him, he will repay it with his commitment to his actions, focus

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* **Marcin Wnuk, Ph.D.** – Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

on achieving its goals and lack of willingness to change his job. Employee's attitude towards the organization will be a consequence of the perception of the organization based on relations with the supervisor, who, according to the assumptions of the theory of organizational support, is the personification of the organization by acting as its agent and representative [Levinson, 2001]. Authenticity of the organizational support theory has been repeatedly verified, confirming that the assessment of the organization's intentions towards the employee made from his perspective is determined by the quality of his relationship with his supervisor, which shapes his attitude towards the organization. According to previous studies results, perceived organizational support (POS) mediates totally between perceived supervisor support (PSS) and affective commitment and the desire to leave the organization [Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades, Eisenberger, 2002].

In the DeConinck and Johnson's [2009] sales managers study POS mediated between PSS and employees' affective commitment. Among employees and students from China, POS mediated between PSS and the desire to leave the organization [Zhanga et al., 2012]. According to the results of Wnuk's research, which involved 802 employees employed in various organizations located in Poland, PSS had only an indirect impact, through POS, on affective commitment and the desire to leave it [Wnuk, 2017a].

First hypothesis: POS fully mediates between PSS and affective commitment.

Second hypothesis: POS fully mediates between PSS and the desire to leave the organization.

Literature on the subject describes the remaining mechanisms identified so far of POS influence on affective commitment based on the theory of social exchange.

According to the results of studies conducted so far, POS directly and indirectly affects employees' affective commitment through identification with the organization [Kurtessis et al., 2015] and self-esteem based on being a member of the organization [Fuller et al., 2003].

Employee's perception of the organization as one that cares for his well-being results in a sense of commitment to it, which is accompanied by a positive mood, which in turn is increases affective commitment [Eisenberger et al., 2001]. Also in Wnuk's research, variables that partly mediated between POS and the employees' affective commitment included gratitude to it and concern for its positive image [Wnuk, 2017a]. This means that employees who have the conviction that the organization supports them in their activities and cares about their well-being, in exchange for good treatment feel gratitude towards it and care about its positive image, which results in increased affective commitment. One decided to check whether these mechanisms also function in a group of employees of one organization.

Third hypothesis: Gratitude partly mediates between POS and affective commitment.

Fourth hypothesis: Caring about the image of the organization partly mediates between POS and affective commitment.

POS is another source of gratitude to the organization and care about its image. According to research by Wnuk [2017a], both gratitude and care about a positive image of the organization are full mediators between PSS and affective commitment. This is a proof of the role of variables other than POS for the indirect impact of PSS on the employees' affective commitment. Supervisor's support plays an important role for shaping employee's gratitude towards the organization and care about its image, leading to greater affective commitment.

Second aspect of loyalty, apart from care about a positive image of the organization in the form of a willingness to make sacrifices for it, is not subject to reciprocity and is not an effect of social exchange, which means that this type of attitude is not an expression of gratitude for the support offered by the organization and the supervisor as its representative. Being a virtue resulting from the processes of socialization and internalization of norms and values, it is rather a permanent disposition independent of how one is treated by the organization and its representatives [Chirkowska-Smolak, Wnuk, 2018]. It was assumed that while one aspect of loyalty – care about a positive image of the organization will mediate fully between PSS and affective commitment, so much its other manifestation – tendency to make sacrifices for the organization will influence affective commitment regardless of whether the employee will have a sense of support received from his supervisor and organization.

Fifth hypothesis: Gratitude mediates fully between PSS and affective commitment.

Sixth hypothesis: Care about the positive image of the organization fully mediates between PSS and affective commitment, while the tendency to make sacrifices for the organization is not a consequence of POS and PSS, being also a predictor of affective commitment.

Another mechanism of shaping employees' affective commitment is based on the impact of gratitude towards the organization, which, both directly and through organizational loyalty, fosters the bond between employee and organization [Wnuk, 2017a].

Employee can express gratitude to the organization as an emotional response to good received in various forms, which is accompanied by commitment and the need to give back conditioned socially by the rule of reciprocity [Wnuk, 2017b]. It is a consequence of a generalized belief that one should be grateful for everything that one receives and experiences, making it easier to perceive good that has been given to us [Wnuk, 2017b] and at the same time arouses one's moral obligation to settle the account and to pay back to the one that gives. Gratitude to the organization takes real shape by engaging in achieving its goals and caring for its welfare, which is the case when the employee is committed to it. One of the ways to repay the organization is a loyal attitude towards it, leading to greater affective commitment. This means

that employee who feels gratitude towards the organization due to reciprocity rule will care about its positive image and will be willing to make sacrifices for it as a result of which he will become more emotionally committed to it. This regularity was confirmed among a heterogeneous group of employees employed in various organizations in Poland [Wnuk, 2017a]. We decided to verify it on a homogeneous group consisting of employees of one large organization.

Seventh Hypothesis: Loyalty partly mediates between gratitude and affective commitment.

1. Research methodology

Description of the research group

Survey was anonymous. All respondents agreed to participate in the study. Average age of participants equaled 30.15 years (SD = 8.30). Survey participants were divided into three groups according to their work experience. Employees employed for 1–12 months (short work experience) constituted 17% of the whole sample, those employed for 12–48 months (average work experience) – 42.4% and employees with more than 48 months of work experience (long work experience) – 40.6%. Women constituted 19.9% of respondents and men 80.1%. Managers represented 16.8% of respondents, while other employees – the remaining 83.2%.

Research tools

Affective commitment was tested based on the questions from the Polish adaptation of the Organizational Commitment Scale by Allen and Meyer [Wnuk, 2017d]. This tool consists of three dimensions: affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment. Study used statements regarding emotional commitment to the organization. Reliability of the used tool, measured by the Cronbach coefficient, amounted to $\alpha = 0.80$.

Intention to leave organization was measured with the use of a tool consisting of three questions [Yücel, 2012]. Survey participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale – from "I strongly disagree" to "I strongly agree." Cronbach's α reliability equaled 0.95.

POS study was conducted using the Polish version of the Perceived Organizational Support Review consisting of 8 questions [Wnuk, 2017c]. Questions were answered on a 5-point scale from 'I strongly disagree' to 'I strongly agree'. This tool consisted of one factor, and its reliability was $\alpha = 0.90$.

PSS was measured using the Perceived Supervisor Support Scale consisting of three questions [Eisenberger et al., 1986]. Respondents provided answers on a 5-point

scale from "I strongly disagree" to "I strongly agree". The reliability of this measure was Cronbach's α = 0.93.

Gratitude to the organization was verified by the Gratitude Scale towards the Organization [Wnuk, 2017b]. It is two-dimensional. Four out of eight statements about the dimension of conditional gratitude based on the reciprocity rule were used in the research. Answers were given on a 5-point scale from "I strongly disagree" to "I strongly agree". Reliability amounted to Cronbach's α = 0.93.

Loyalty to the organization was examined through the Loyalty Scale to an Organization consisting of two factors. The first one is care about the positive image of the organization, and the second one is the tendency to make sacrifices for the organization [Chirkowska-Smolak, Wnuk, 2018]. Short version of the scale was selected consisting of eight questions (four for each dimension). According to the factor analysis with promax rotation, both factors explained 75.66% of the variance of organizational loyalty. Respondents gave answers on a 5-point Likert scale from "I strongly disagree" to "I strongly agree". The reliability of this tool was 0.83. For the dimension of care about a positive image of the organization, Cronbach's reliability was 0.91, and for the dimension, a tendency to make sacrifices for the benefit of organization it amounted to 0.86.

2. Results

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Pearson's r correlation coefficients are presented in Table 2. Verification of the degree of fit of the model was carried out using the Amos program, using the analysis of structural equations with the most probability method. The initial model is presented in Figure 1, while the final model in Figure 2. Tables 3, 4 and 5 present overall, direct and indirect effects of the individual variables studied.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of variables used in the study (N = 443)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Willingness to leave the organization	443	3	15	8.17	3.64	0.39	–0.92
Affective commitment	443	6	30	18.60	4.63	–0.22	–0.13
PSS	443	3	15	11.83	2.92	–1.01	0.61
POS	443	8	40	23.55	6.69	–0.05	–0.32
Gratitude to the organization	443	4	20	13.33	3.64	–0.42	–0.16
Willingness to sacrifice	443	4	20	11.54	3.83	–0.22	–0.54
Caring about the image of the organization	443	4	20	17.63	2.50	–0.92	0.36

Source: own study.

Table 2. Correlation coefficients between the variables used in the study (N = 443)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Willingness to leave the organization							
Affective commitment	−0.62**						
PSS	−0.47**	0.40**					
POS	−0.70**	0.61**	0.50**				
Gratitude to the organization	−0.63**	0.80**	0.46**	0.71**			
Willingness to sacrifice	−0.29**	0.54**	0.20**	0.33**	0.44**		
Caring about the image of the organization	−0.22**	0.38**	0.24**	0.18**	0.38**	0.27**	
Work experience	0.15**	−0.03	−0.03	0.20**	−0.03	0.15*	0.05

* $p \leq 0.05$
** $p \leq 0.01$
Source: own study.

Figure 1. Model reflecting research hypotheses
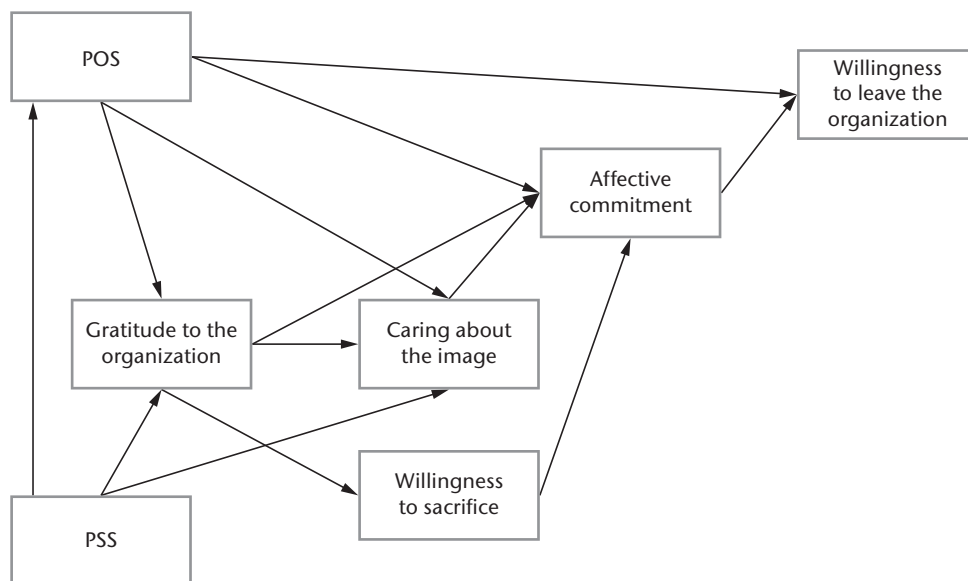
Source: own study.

Following model fit indicators were used: Normed Fit Index (NFI), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation – RMSEA.

The obtained RMSEA index (0.00), which should take the smallest value, was lower than 0.05, below the level that is understood as a perfect fit of the model [Steiger,

1990]. Values of NFI (0.99), GFI (0.99) and CFI (–1), which should be as close to 1 as possible, were higher than the reference values of 0.90, 0.90 and 0.93 respectively [Byrne, 1994]. Also, the value of CMIN / DF statistics based on chi-square statistics, which amounted to – 0.752 (p = 0.608) was lower than the accepted standard – 2 or 3 [Kline, 1998]. Presented results evidenced a very good fit of the model. One change was noted in relation to the initial model reflecting the hypotheses. It turned out that PSS is not only indirectly, but also directly related to the willingness to leave the organization.

Figure 2. The final model after verification
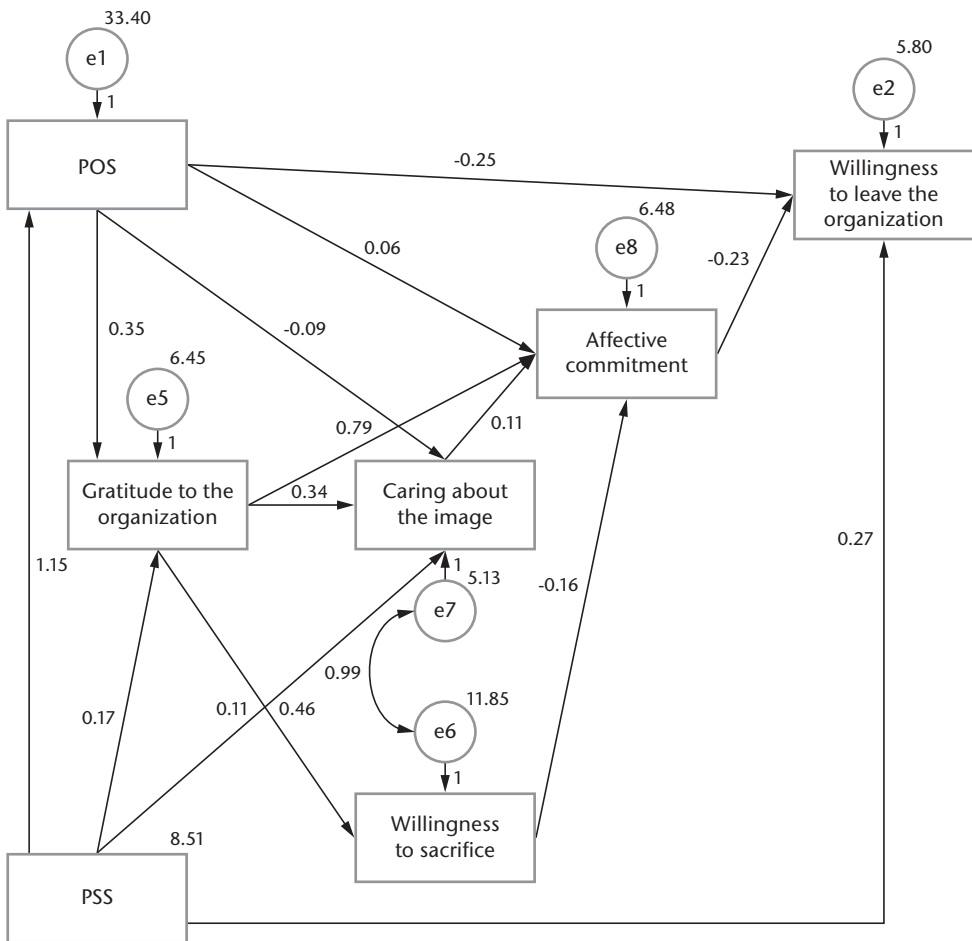
Source: own study.

Table 3. Standardized total effect (N = 443)

	PSS	POS	Gratitude to the organization	Caring about the image of the organization	Willingness to sacrifice for the organization	Emotional attachment
POS	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gratitude to the organization	0.46	0.63	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Caring about the image of the organization	0.24	0.08	0.49	0.00	0.00	0.00
Willingness to sacrifice for the organization	0.20	0.28	0.44	0.00	0.00	0.00
Affective commitment	0.39	0.55	0.74	0.06	0.22	0.00
Willingness to leave the organization	−0.47	−0.62	−0.22	−0.02	−0.06	−0.29

Source: own study.

Table 4. Standardized direct effect (N = 443)

	PSS	POS	Gratitude to the organization	Caring about the image of the organization	Willingness to sacrifice for the organization	Affective commitment
POS	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gratitude to the organization	0.14	0.63	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Caring about the image of the organization	0.13	−0.23	0.49	0.00	0.00	0.00
Willingness to sacrifice for the organization	0.00	0.00	0.44	0.00	0.00	0.00
Affective commitment	0.00	0.09	0.62	0.06	0.22	0.00
Willingness to leave the organization	−0.13	−0.45	0.00	0.00	0.00	−0.29

Source: own study.

Table 5. Standardized indirect effect (N = 443)

	PSS	POS	Gratitude to the organization	Caring about the image of the organization	Willingness to sacrifice for the organization	Affective commitment
POS	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gratitude to the organization	0.32	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Caring about the image of the organization	0.11	0.31	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Willingness to sacrifice for the organization	0.20	0.28	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Affective commitment	0.39	0.46	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00
Willingness to leave the organization	−0.34	−0.16	−0.22	−0.02	−0.07	0.00

Source: own study.

3. Discussion

The first hypothesis regarding the mediating role of PSS between POS and the employee's affective commitment was confirmed. This means that the subordinate, who feels that his supervisor supports him in his activities and cares for his well-being, identifies this attitude with the organization which is personified in his superior, which means that employee cares for the organization's goals as part of returning the favor. Results achieved are consistent with the results obtained so far [Wnuk, 2017] confirming validity of the theory of organizational support Eisenberger et al. [2001] and role of exchange between organization and employee [Blau, 1964], in which supervisor is perceived by employee as a personification of organization [cf. Levinson, 2001]).

The second hypothesis according to which POS fully mediates between PSS and the desire to leave the organization was partially confirmed. It turned out that POS is a partial and not a full mediator between PSS and the willingness to quit the organization. These results prove that PSS has not only an indirect but also a direct impact on the intention to leave the organization [cf. Wnuk, 2017a]. In the presented context, in accordance with the reciprocity principle, employee repays organization for support received from the organization and the superior and is not motivated to leave it [cf. Gouldner, 1960].

Also, the third and fourth hypotheses, which put gratitude and taking care about the image of the organization in the role of partial mediators between POS and the employee's affective commitment, were fully confirmed. Results obtained are consistent with previous studies conducted among employees from various organizations in Poland, proving that good treatment and care for employees evokes gratitude to the organization and encourages them to take actions focused on caring about organization's positive image, which increases their emotional bond to the organization [Wnuk, 2017a].

The fifth hypothesis according to which gratitude mediates fully between PSS and affective commitment has been confirmed. This means that, according to the results of research to date, employee expresses gratitude to the organization through affective commitment, the indirect source of which lies in perceived support received from the supervisor, manifested in concern for the well-being of the employee [cf. Wnuk, 2017a].

The sixth hypothesis referring to the fully mediating role of caring about the image of the organization between PSS and affective commitment turned out to be true. Employee becomes emotionally committed to the organization due to the fact that he or she has a feeling that the supervisor supports him and cares for his well-being, and he repays the organization by caring about its image [cf. Wnuk, 2017a]. Also, according to the second part of this hypothesis, another aspect of loyalty in the

form of a willingness to sacrifice for the organization turned out to be a predictor of affective commitment without being simultaneously a consequence of POS and PSS [Chirkowska, Wnuk, 2018].

Also, the seventh hypothesis was confirmed according to which both elements of organizational loyalty in the form of caring about the image of the organization and the willingness to sacrifice for it mediate between gratitude to it and affective commitment. The obtained results prove that organizational loyalty is a manifestation of gratitude to the organization, leading to affective commitment [cf. Wnuk, 2017a].

Conducted research has numerous theoretical implications.

They confirm validity of the organizational support theory and the role of social exchange between employee and organization and between employee and supervisor as its representative, as well as the role of gratitude and loyalty in this relationship.

They prove that in addition to self-esteem based on being a member of the organization [Fuller et al., 2003], identification with the organization [Kurtessis et al., 2015], a sense of commitment to the organization and positive affect [Eisenberger et al., 2001] variables that mediate between POS and affective commitment include gratitude and care about a positive image of the organization [cf. Wnuk, 2017a].

Concept of loyalty by Chirkowska and Wnuk [2018], confirms that caring about a positive image of the organization is part of the social exchange mechanism and is based on the reciprocity principle [Gouldner, 1960], according to which support perceived by an employee and received from the supervisor and the organization, strengthens emotional bond of both parties involved in this exchange. At the same time, they prove that the second aspect of loyalty, defined as a tendency to sacrifice for the organization, is independent of social exchange, which means that this type of employee's attitude is not a sign of gratitude resulting from the perceived support received from the supervisor and the organization.

Research positively verified existence of mechanisms shaping affective commitment and the intention to leave the organization through support obtained from the organization and supervisor, as well as gratitude and loyalty to the organization. The first of the identified mechanisms refers to the direct influence of POS on the employee's affective commitment. The other four are based on the indirect influence of POS and PSS on affective commitment through gratitude expressed to the organization and care about its positive image. It is worth noting that, while the perceived support received from a supervisor has a positive effect on care about the positive image of the organization, indirectly increasing commitment to it, support obtained from the organization directly reduces concern about its image, while indirectly, through gratitude, it positively affects this variable. Positive indirect effect balances the direct effect, which is weaker. In previous studies carried out on a more heterogeneous group of employees from many organizations, both POS and PSS, directly and indirectly, with the participation of gratitude to the organization had

a positive effect on caring about its positive image [cf. Wnuk, 2017a]. The reason for this discrepancy may lie in organizational culture, which may play a significant role in the relationship between the two variables in one organization, while it has no effect among different organizations.

Three mechanisms of the impact of employees' gratitude to the organization on the employees' affective commitment were also confirmed. One of them has a direct nature and the other two are based on organizational loyalty. Obtained research results prove that employee's attitude to the organization manifested in affective commitment and lack of willingness to leave it is a consequence of the exchange taking place between him and the organization and the supervisor who represents it. Employee who feels that the organization cares for him and treats him properly, shows gratitude to it, wanting to repay it by caring about its image, committing to achieving its goals and by showing no willingness to leave it.

Practical implications of the obtained test results refer to several key recommendations. The first of these concerns the need for the organization and its representatives to take care for the employee's needs and to shape his sense that the organization is interested in him and cares for his well-being, as a key factor determining his commitment and keeping him in the organization. Tools that could serve this purpose include conversations with the direct supervisor, evaluation interviews conducted in accordance with the adopted schedule, or employee surveys aimed at monitoring employee attitudes, in which they can express their expectations towards the employer and assess the current attitude of the organization and its representatives towards each other.

When planning development and training activities, organization should take into account such forms of shaping attitudes of the managerial staff so that on the one hand they are aware that they are a key element of building a positive image of the organization in the eyes of employees, and on the other that they are able to respond in an individualized way to the needs of its subordinates so that they have a sense of support and concern for their own well-being.

From a recruitment perspective, one should employ people who have a strong tendency to make sacrifices for the organization, i.e., they can, when the situation requires it, give up part of their own interest for the good of the organization, for example, by staying longer at work. People with this virtue express this attitude, even when the organization and its representatives do not care about their well-being. This means that they are willing to develop emotional ties with the organization, and thus are motivated to continue work in the organization even if they do not feel support from the organization and the supervisor who is its personification. This provides a greater chance of keeping an employee involved in the implementation of organizational goals, being a kind of protective factor in the absence of affective commitment and willingness to quit caused by the lack of support provided by the organization and the supervisor.

Conclusions

Research confirmed the existence of mechanisms of impact of PSS and POS on the employee's attitude towards the organization and the key role of gratitude and loyalty for shaping affective commitment and the desire to leave it. Among the surveyed employees of one large organization, POS mediated fully between PSS and affective commitment, and partly between PSS and the desire to leave it. Employees perceiving both the organization and the superior as supportive and caring about their welfare, are more likely to be grateful to the organization and caring about its image, which in turn promotes their affective commitment. Organizational loyalty is also the result of employee's gratitude to the organization, leading to stronger affective commitment.

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SOCIAL EXCHANGE AS A KEY FACTOR IN SHAPING EMPLOYEES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ORGANIZATION

Abstract

Social exchange has a significantly shapes employees' attitudes towards organization. The aim of the study was to verify the mechanisms of the impact of perceived support received from the organization (POS) and supervisor (PSS), gratitude and organizational loyalty on the affective commitment of employees and the desire to leave it. 443 employees of one organization took part in the research. Following research tools were used: Overview of Perceived Organizational Support, Scale of Perceived Supervisor Support, Scale of Gratitude to the Organization, Scale of Organizational Loyalty, Organizational Commitment Scale and one measure of intention to leave the organization. POS mediated fully between PSS and employees' affective commitment, and partly between PSS and the desire to leave the organization. Gratitude to the organization and care about its positive image partly mediated between POS and PSS and the employees' affective commitment. Organizational loyalty was also a partial mediator between gratitude to the organization and affective commitment.

The role of social exchange in shaping employees' attitudes towards the organization has been confirmed. One identified mechanisms, both of the direct impact of POS and PSS on affective commitment, and the indirect impact of these variables, through gratitude to the organization and care about its positive image. The role of gratitude and organizational loyalty for the willingness to leave the organization was also confirmed.