
The importance of organisational climate and commitment of knowledge workers for increasing the competitive advantage of enterprises

Stefan Tokarski,^a Karolina Oleksa-Marewska,^b

^aWyższa Szkoła Bankowa w Gdańsku, aleja Grunwaldzka 238A, 80-266 Gdańsk

^bWyższa Szkoła Bankowa w Poznaniu, ul. Powstańców Wielkopolskich 5, 61-874 Poznań

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Abstract

As a result of socio-economic transformations and development of the Information Era, the competitive advantage of enterprises is based on intellectual capital. Competent employees as owners of knowledge, skills and creativity, essentially contribute to the strengthening of the position taken by their organisation on the market. In order to allow employees to use their capabilities in an effective way, it is crucial to provide them with favourable organisational conditions, which constitute organisational climate. The concept of organisational climate refers to employees' perception of organisational conditions, which can be combined with the first level of economic analysis in the approach presented by New Institutional Economics, according to the model presented by O. Williamson (2000, p. 597). It is assumed that the employees' positive assessment of the organisational climate is correlated with a higher level of the employees' commitment, which leads to an increase in the competitive advantage of an organisation. In order to verify the hypothesis, some quantitative surveys have been carried out among knowledge workers (N = 639). In the research, two questionnaires have been used: the Organisational Climate Questionnaire (authors: L. Rosenstiel and R. Bögel) and the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI developed by E. Demerouti), which examine the level of burnout and commitment to work. The results of the statistical analysis have shown a significant, strong relationship between the assessment of organisational climate dimensions and the level of employees' commitment to work, which contributes to an increase in the competitive advantage of an enterprise.

Keywords: Organisational climate, knowledge employees, New Institutional Economics, work commitment

Key words: Neighbouring countries, tourist traffic, inbound tourism

Introduction

Although it has been developing since the 1960s, New Institutional Economics has grown in significance for only a dozen years, first of all, in the face of dynamically changing mechanisms of economic development and globalisation processes (Rudolf, 2016, p.39). It can be particularly observed in the changes in the approach towards intangible resources, which denote the competitive advantage of

enterprises, and which allow them to adapt to the turbulent environment. Among the above-mentioned resources, intellectual capital is the most important, that is, namely: employees and their capabilities to acquire, to process and to develop knowledge. Considering the approach of New Institutional Economics, the main emphasis is laid on the role of exchange that takes place between employers and knowledge workers. In order to allow employees to use their knowledge efficiently and to contribute to the growth of the competitive advantage of their enterprise, they require conditions, which will allow them to develop and to become more committed to their work. An indicator of the assessment of the conditions provided at a particular enterprise can be its organisational climate, namely: a set of observations shared by the employees on management practice, procedures and other features of their enterprise (Payne, Pheysey & Pugh, 1971, p.46; Kopelman, Brief & Guzzo 1990, p. 297; Rosenstiel & Bögel, 1992, p. 46). A negative assessment of the organisational climate may come as a response to a situation in which the terms of the contract have not been met by the company that offers unfavourable conditions to its employees.

The aim of the article is to identify a relation between the assessment of organisational climate and the level of knowledge workers' commitment to their work, which is translated into their willingness and readiness to work, and which increases the competitive advantage of the enterprise in this way. There has been a quantitative survey carried out on 639 knowledge workers, with the use of two questionnaire forms: the Organisational Climate Questionnaire developed by L. Rosenstiel and R. Bögel (1992) and the OLBI (Oldenburg Burnout Inventory) developed by E. Demerouti (2003) to examine the level of burnout and commitment to work. Subsequently, the results of the survey have undergone a statistical analysis. It has been assumed that the positive assessment of organisational climate is correlated with a higher level of employees' commitment. The article is of empirical nature, and it is divided into four parts. In the first part, the concept of organisational climate is discussed along with transactional costs and the contractual theory of the firm. The second part refers to the role of knowledge workers in the development of the competitive advantage of enterprises and the significance of organisational climate for an increase in workers' commitment. The third part of the article is of methodological nature, and it presents the research sample, the tools applied in the research and the statistical analysis of the results obtained after the research. The fourth part presents a discussion of the results and a presentation of some practical conclusions. The closing part refers to the limitations of the conducted research and the perspectives for further development of the discussed problem.

Transactional costs and organisational climate

In the approach of New Institutional Economics, an enterprise is a concatenation of contracts (Gruszecki, 2002, p.131), which can be understood as a network of mutual agreements between some economic entities. In each contract, there are some transactional costs, which come as dissension in the system (Williamson, 1998, p.32). During the exchange between an organisation and its knowledge workers, there might be numerous costs related to the contracting problems. The aim of contracting is to establish a favourable relationship, which will allow the parties to minimise transactional costs; hence, it usually involves the choice of the most profitable variant at the lowest costs (Zbroińska, 2013, p. 165). Some costs are subject to legal regulations; however, some other costs refer to less formalised aspects, and they are more difficult to be minimised. If an invoice is not paid in its due time, the problem is to be decided by the court, but offering employees some delusive prospects of promotion and failing to meet the terms of a contract is the question of trust and interpersonal relations.

Costs are related to limited rationality of entities and opportunism, which is a tendency towards pursuing one's own interests without any consideration for the interests of other parties, with the use of passive and active forms of deceit and manipulation (Williamson, 1998, p. 600). In accordance with the contractual theory of the firm, opportunist behaviour is considered to be the basis of entering contracts (Gruszecki, 2002, p. 216). Opportunism allows the contract parties to limit their own efforts in the hope of increasing their gain at the minimal contribution on their side; however, in fact, it introduces a lot of uncertainty, and it impairs the quality of relationships. In economy based on knowledge, the long-term character of relationships is of high significance, because it allows parties to establish stable links and to obtain long-term advantages. Companies that neglect their transactions and do not meet terms of their contracts act to their own detriment. Considering the long-term contracts that allow parties to increase their competitive advantage, it is necessary to notice the high significance of the social aspect in which

the values, norms and usual practices of enterprises are based (Williamson, 2000, p. 596). In accordance with O. Williamson's assumptions (*ibidem*), this aspect is the first level constituting the New Institutional Economics. At this level, it is possible to observe the norms and premises of an enterprise, which come as the constant attributes of an organisation (in the management sciences, this level may be referred to as organisational culture). As O. Williamson observes (2000, p. 597), some unwritten aspects, such as usual practices or norms, are divided into groups (of employees, of managers), and they form a framework for informal institutions, which are understood as the principles of cooperation. Due to such principles of cooperation, transactions become more predictable (Klimczak, 2005, p. 16). The social level forms a basis for further transactions (compare the scheme of New Institutional Economics published by O. Williamson (2000, p. 597)); therefore, the assessment of organisational factors provided by employees comes as a significant indicator of corporate efficiency. On one hand, monitoring the assessment provided by employees makes it possible to control fulfilling the terms of the contract by the company; on the other hand, it is possible to know employees' willingness to participate in the transaction.

In expert literature on management sciences, the assessment of organisational factors provided by employees is defined as organisational climate. It is a set of observations and opinions shared by employees on managerial practice, procedures, relationships between employees and management staff and other attributes of an organisation (Payne, Pheysey & Pugh, 1971, p. 46; Kopelman, Brief & Guzzo 1990, p. 297; Rosenstiel & Bögel, 1992, p. 46). Common perception of organisational conditions affects the actions undertaken by employees, also under the contracts that have been concluded. Interaction between the objective status of the organisational factors and the subjective assessment provided by the groups of employees affects the atmosphere among the parties of the contract (Moran & Volkwein, 1992, p. 29). The assessment of the organisational climate may refer to the whole enterprise or its part, because the basis of such an assessment is formed by a social group in which some observations are made about the workplace (Rosenstiel & Bögel, 1992, p. 29). The total organisational climate is affected by numerous factors. According to L. Rosenstiel and R. Bögel, there are seven dimensions in the concept that they have assumed for their research (Durniat, 2016, pp. 46–49):

- 1) General assessment of the management staff's intentions – it refers to convincing employees about the good intentions of their superiors and about their genuine concern for the employees' interest. The dimension examines general trust of employees towards their superiors.
- 2) Co-workers – the assessment of the quality of relationships among employees, the level of mutual trust and the sense of community
- 3) Superiors – the assessment is focused on relationships with superiors, general impression referring to whether the management staff is oriented towards people rather than towards tasks.
- 4) Work organisation – the dimension refers to the structuring of work, delegation of responsibility and the level of control over employees. The main aspect is the assessment of work overload and organisation of tasks in a way which is favourable or unfavourable for their implementation.
- 5) The flow of information and communication – the assessment refers to the way of communication and the level of information transparency. The dimension also verifies the assessment of communication credibility and the sense of being well informed.
- 6) Representing employees' interests – the assessment refers to respecting employees' rights, respecting the representatives of professional groups and taking care of employees' interests.
- 7) Remuneration and opportunities for promotion – the assessment refers to the system of remuneration.

Organisational climate performs a function that not only represents the employees' assessment but also a function, which determines the behaviour of the contract parties and perception of transactional costs.

The significance of organisational climate in the development of knowledge workers' commitment

Contemporary competition of enterprises takes place in specialist, qualitative and intangible fields (Drucker, 1999, p. 13; Gruszecki, 2002, p. 225; Kowalczyk & Nogalski, 2007, p. 17). The

production process or owned materials are not enough to develop a competitive advantage. Contemporary competitive capabilities cannot be limited only to the reduction of production costs, but they must be considered from many perspectives (Rudolf, 2005, p. 48). Hence, in our contemporary economy, the key capital in an organisation is formed by its knowledge workers, as in 1959 P. Drucker (1999, pp. 13–14) defined the educated practitioners who had knowledge and who knew how to apply it in their work. Since then, a number of studies have been presented on knowledge workers, who until the end of the 20th century did not form the most important professional group. This was dynamic economic development along with advancing globalisation and the requirement of specialisation, which caused the fact that at present, knowledge determines the competitive advantage of enterprises. Among the various studies on knowledge workers, we should pay particular attention to the studies by T. Davenport (2007, p. 22) who defines knowledge workers as people with highly developed specialist knowledge, education and professional experience, which allow them to gather, to process, to apply and to develop new knowledge in the process of work. In Polish expert literature, a suggestion proposed by M. Morawski (2009, p. 40–41) should be noticed. The author suggests that knowledge workers are employees who use, develop, analyse and practically apply their knowledge at work. Knowledge workers, talented employees and specialists form networks of information exchange and cooperation, which result in the synergy effect that contributes to an increase in the competitive advantage of an enterprise (Rudolf, 2005, p. 51). Distortion in the relationships between workers and deterioration in organisational climate result in the fact that the chances for the establishment of synergy, knowledge sharing and maximisation of operations become smaller. This effect is opposite to the assumptions of New Institutional Economics, because the aim of a transaction is cooperative surplus, which is possible due to the freedom of exchange and trust among the parties of a contract (Staniek, 2017, p. 152). Enterprises oriented towards an increase in their competitive advantage should pay some special attention to their human resources policy, based on a model of human resources management, which will enable them to retain competent and talented employees for a long time (Kłos, 2012, p. 393).

In all the companies where knowledge workers are employed, it is important to take care of the welfare and enhancement of employees' efficiency, because employees' work makes the development of enterprises possible. Any negligence of work conditions in an organisation will mean difficulties in retaining its human resources and, in this way, also retaining its efficiency, which may eventually lead to the recession of that company. Hence, it is extremely important to pay a lot of attention to work environment and to form it in a way that will encourage knowledge workers' commitment and their development. It will be impossible with opportunist behaviour of the members of the management board and management staff. As S. Rudolf postulates (2005): Conditions for the functioning of an enterprise are provided only when the costs of its coordinating functions are lower than the transactional costs, which are indispensable to provide some particular products to the market (op.cit. p. 49). Hence, it requires good care about the conditions inside an organisation, which are favourable to a decrease in coordinating costs. Organisational climate is one of the main determinants indicating the behaviour of employees and efficiency of companies (Bratnicki, Kryś & Stachowicz, 1988, p. 95). For employees, the assessment of an enterprise comes as a decisional criterion in undertaking activities and putting effort into their work (Bratnicki & Wyciślak 1980, p. 89). Organisational climate also affects the level of employees' commitment (Stankiewicz & Moczulska, 2012, p. 217). It means that the climate that has been positively assessed fosters higher commitment and effort put into work. In this way, it contributes to an increase in efficiency and reinforcement of the position taken by the company on the market. Commitment is an affective state, which is characterised by high professional activity, focus on work and involvement into professional issues (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Employees' commitment can be perceived in the context of the contractual theory of the firm (Pietrzak, 2016, p. 52). It performs a function that stimulates people to meet their responsibilities defined in the contract or even to go beyond the assigned tasks. Committed workers perform their tasks more easily and more willingly than the non-committed people. It is possible to assume that committed workers share their knowledge more willingly, and they apply it in their work, which contributes to the development of their company and its competitiveness. Knowledge workers are usually characterised by performing intellectual tasks, mobility, a need to exercise control, readiness for further development and learning (Davenport, 2007, p. 23-25; Morawski, 2009, p. 47–48). Considering their awareness of their own value in the market, knowledge workers decide to leave their companies faster than other employees if these companies do not meet their expectations, and transactional costs are higher than possible benefits. Hence, in order to

increase its competitiveness, an enterprise should, first of all, take good care of working conditions, limit opportunist behaviour at the organisation and increase employees' commitment.

As a result of the above-mentioned considerations, it has been decided to verify the relation between the assessment of organisational climate and the level of commitment of knowledge workers. Hence, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

H1: There is a relation between the assessment of organisational climate and the level of commitment presented by knowledge workers.

H2: The level of the respondents' commitment has various relations to the assessment of the particular dimensions of organisational climate.

Methodology and analysis of the research on the relation between the assessment of organisational climate and the level of commitment presented by knowledge workers

The aim of the research was to verify the relation between the assessment of organisational climate and the level of commitment presented by the surveyed knowledge workers. It has been assumed that the positive assessment of the climate fosters an increase in commitment, and that the negative assessment of the climate correlates with the loss of commitment. In order to verify the hypotheses, the quantitative research has been conducted along with the statistical analysis of the collected data.

The characteristics of the research tools and the research sample

The research survey has been implemented with the use of the Organisational Climate Questionnaire developed by L. Rosenstiel and R. Bögel in its Polish version adapted by K. Durniat (2012) and the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) questionnaire developed by E. Demerouti in its Polish version adapted by Ł. Baka and B. Basińska (2016). Dedicated to the examination of organisational climate, the questionnaire consists of seven parts, which refer to the analysed dimensions that have been described in the first part. There are 55 statements in the questionnaire and the respondents are asked to refer to them by choosing a variant on a 5-level Likert scale. The OLBI questionnaire measures the level of two factors: burnout and commitment loss. The tool consists of 16 statements, 8 of which refer to burnout and the other 8 – to commitment loss. The respondents refer to the statements by choosing a variant on a 4-level Likert scale. In order to mark out knowledge workers, the purposeful selection to the sample has been performed. The criterion assumed to select the respondents has included their higher education and tasks that they have to perform using, processing, transferring and developing new knowledge (Drucker, 1999, p. 13; Davenport, 2007, p. 22; Morawski, 2009, p. 40-41). There have been 639 knowledge workers selected from the following professional sectors: architecture, education, finance and accountancy, pharmaceutical science, computer science, medicine, sales and marketing, human resources management and business administration. There have been 388 women in that group (60.1%) and 251 men (39.3%) from ten provinces of Poland. Some respondents have completed their questionnaire forms on paper and some of them on-line, providing the material for the research from almost the whole territory of Poland.

Statistical analysis of the results

In order to verify the assumed hypotheses, pairwise correlation has been carried out with the use of the Pearson's r coefficient and stepwise linear regression. The results of pairwise correlation are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Pearson's r coefficient of the correlation between the dimensions of organisational climate and the level of the respondents' commitment

Dimensions of organisational climate	Commitment loss (N = 639)
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General intentions of the management	-.599**
Relationships with co-workers	-.498**
Relationships with superiors	-.665**
Work organisation	-.604**
Information flow and communication	-.603**
Representation of employees' interests	-.608**
Remuneration and opportunities for promotion	-.630**
Total assessment of organisational climate	-.688**

** Correlation significant at the level $p < 0.01$ (bilaterally)

The Pearson's r coefficient indicates that there are significant inversely proportional negative relations between the level of commitment loss and all the dimensions of organisational climate and its total assessment. It means that 'commitment loss' decreases along with the higher assessment of organisational climate and its every dimension (that means that the respondents indicate higher commitment to their work). The strength of correlation differs, depending on the dimension of organisational climate. In order to check which dimensions of organisational climate explain the phenomenon of commitment loss better in the analysed sample, the linear regression of variables has been conducted. Table 2 presents the regression model.

Table 2. The model of the R linear regression of the *commitment loss* variable

Model	R	R-squared	Corrected R-squared	Standard deviation of assessment
1	0.701	0.492	0.489	0.43508

The stepwise linear regression indicates that there is a model that fits well and explains the variation of commitment loss. The R^2 coefficient is 0.492, which means that the model explains the variability of commitment loss in the analysed sample in 49.2%. The model includes the following dimensions: relationships with superiors, remuneration and opportunities for promotion, work organisation. The equation for the linear regression model, which explains the linear relation between commitment loss and the assessment of the dimensions of organisational climate, is as follows:

$$y = \beta_{-0,30} x_1 + \beta_{-0,26} x_2 + \beta_{-0,21} x_3 + \varepsilon$$

where:

y = the level of commitment loss

β_x = the value of the beta rate

x_1 = the assessment of the *relationships with superiors* dimension

x_2 = the assessment of the *remuneration and opportunities for promotion* dimension

x_3 = the assessment of the *work organisation* dimension

ε = random error

The beta (β) rate for the *relationships with superiors* dimension is -0.30, which means that a decrease in the assessment of this dimension by 1 unit will increase the level of commitment loss by 0.30 point. A decrease in the assessment of the *remuneration and opportunities for promotion* dimension by 1 unit will increase commitment loss by 0.26 point and a decrease in the assessment of the *work*

organisation dimension by 1 unit will contribute to an increase in commitment loss by 0.21 point. The equation is applicable under an assumption that other parameters are constant.

Considering the results obtained after the analysis, it has been possible to confirm the assumed hypotheses H1 and H2, which refer to the relation between the assessment of organisational climate and the level of commitment, and which refer to the fact that the level of the respondents' commitment has a different relation with the assessment of the particular dimensions of organisational climate.

Conclusions after the research

The research and statistical analysis that have been conducted indicate a strong positive relation between the assessment of organisational climate and the level of commitment presented by the surveyed knowledge workers. It is particularly significant when competitiveness of enterprises is concerned. In economy based on knowledge, enterprises can be developed due to social capital, namely, relationships established among employees that form a network of connections optimising communication, coordination and cooperation (Rudolf, 2005, p. 51). In a situation when such a network is disrupted by deficient communication, lack of trust among employees and opportunist actions of superiors, it is impossible to achieve high efficiency and competitive advantage in the market. Transactional costs come as the measure for the assessment of corporate efficiency (Zbroińska, 2013, p. 164); hence, decreasing uncertainty related to contracting is highly significant for enhancing competitive capabilities.

The statistical analysis indicates that the volatility of the commitment level can be explained in the best way by the assessment of relationships with superiors, a remuneration system, opportunities for promotion and also by the assessment of work organisation and distribution of responsibilities. While assessing their superiors, the respondents have been asked to refer to the communication style, the quality of feedback information they receive, the proportions between orientation towards tasks and orientation towards employees, sensitivity to employees' needs and conflicts between superiors and their employees. In order to increase knowledge workers' commitment, the management staff should take care of an attractive incentive system, open and sound communication, a sense of partnership and autonomy (Morawski, 2009, p. 49, 51). Enterprises dealing with knowledge management should improve processes inside the organisation, adapting themselves to market transformations and respecting privacy and independence of their employees, which shall contribute to an increase in the competitive advantage of their companies (Szaban, 2003, p. 68). Hence, openness towards discussion with employees, consideration of their requests, keeping promises and skilful appreciation (both in financial and praise terms) make it possible to increase the willingness to intensify effort put into the development of the company.

The second important organisational factor that explains the volatility of the commitment level in the analysed sample is a remuneration system and opportunities for promotion. A transparent and fair remuneration system increases workers' commitment, whereas the lack of estimation, the lack of transparent principles of remuneration and promotion based on acquaintance with some people and not on skills decrease commitment and willingness to work for a particular company.

The third significant factor is the assessment of work organisation. Commitment can be decreased by too many responsibilities, a sense of unfair delegation of tasks and excessive supervision. A practical conclusion that can be drawn by management staff is careful consideration of workload and abandonment of exploitation systems. If knowledge workers are given some more freedom and trust in their operations, they will be more efficient and they will be able to work more than in a situation when tasks have been imposed and strictly supervised. Commitment is a factor that stimulates willingness to work, however, it can be weakened by pressure exerted by some other people. It is not without a reason that O. Williamson (1998) postulates that *instead of responding to opportunism in the same way, it is more advisable to give and fulfil credible pledges* (op. cit. p. 61). The higher the assessment of organisational climate and its components is, the higher the level of perceived commitment becomes.

The results that have been obtained may provide some applicable conclusions for management practitioners. Among various organisational factors, the strongest correlations can be observed between the assessment of relationships with superiors and the level of employees' commitment. It indicates a necessity of training dedicated to management staff, also in the field of soft competences and management style oriented more towards people than towards tasks.

Results

The conducted research indicates high significance of organisational climate for the improvement of commitment presented by knowledge workers, whose work contributes to an increase in competitive advantage of their company. Lower assessment of organisational climate indicates that transactional costs are more perceptible in relation to the advantages resulting from the contract concluded between an organisation and knowledge workers. In the case of knowledge workers, who often form a mobile group of specialists highly aware of their value on the market, low assessment of organisational climate may even contribute to a decision about leaving the company. Usually, losing a well-qualified worker involves costs related to recruitment and onboarding procedures, but it also means the loss of intellectual capital, which is the most important element of the competitive advantage of a company. Even if employees do not leave the company because of the work conditions that are assessed as poor, their commitment to work may still go down. Understood as willingness to work, concentration on one's responsibilities and being engaged in organisational operations, commitment seems to be one of the key factors that condition the development of an organisation. Committed employees wish to work hard and in the best possible way, and it contributes to growing competitiveness. Therefore, it is important for enterprises that employ knowledge workers to take good care of their organisational climate, particularly in the field of partner relationships with employees, even distribution of tasks with the optimal level of supervision and fair remuneration systems based on employees' performance. Although the surveyed knowledge workers represent various professional groups, the relationships with the superiors and their management style have been the most significant factors explaining the level of commitment. The style that is oriented towards people rather than towards tasks is correlated with an increase in commitment.

It would be worth carrying out further research on employees' commitment with regard to the improvement in the competitive advantage of enterprises. The limitations to the discussed research involve the size of the sample ($N = 639$); hence, an increase in the number of respondents would be valuable for the development of knowledge in this field. Some longitudinal studies would be worth considering too, as they could verify the assessment of organisational climate, the level of knowledge workers' commitment and an increase in the competitive advantage of an enterprise in a particular period of time. Longitudinal studies would allow us to identify the influence exerted by the assessment of organisational climate on the level of commitment and the relation between the assessment of organisational climate, commitment and an increase in the competitive capabilities of an enterprise in a particular time. In its current form, the quantitative research allow us only to provide an analysis of the relations and to explain the volatility of the commitment level with the use of the regression model that comprises the analysed factors of organisational climate.

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