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LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE AND LEARNING CLIMATE IN INCREASING EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION: A POST-PANDEMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Purpose: The paper tries to answer the following question: what are the relationships between the quality of leader-member exchange (LMX), learning climate, and employee motivation in public administration? Its purpose is to identify the relationships between LMX, learning climate, and employee motivation in public administration organizations.
Methodology: The paper presents the results of a survey carried out in the Górnośląsko-Zagłębiowska Metropolis (Metropolis GZM), i.e. the metropolitan association located in the area of Upper Silesia. The sample consisted of 153 employees in all of 41 municipal offices of the Metropolis GZM. A model of relationships between LMX, learning climate, and employee motivation was proposed and tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).
Findings: It was found that the quality of LMX positively affected learning climate, which in turn influenced employee motivation. Analysis proved that learning climate mediated the relationship between LMX and motivation of public administration employees.
Research limitations/implications: The study focused only on the municipal offices in the Metropolis GZM and its results cannot be generalized. However, it implies that public administration organizations can create the learning climate by improving relationships between supervisors and subordinates to increase employee motivation.
Practical implications: The results obtained indicate that in the contemporary public administration, a traditional approach to motivate employees should evolve and move towards an approach based on positive social relations, mutual trust, and leaders' developmental support.
Originality/value: This research has provided empirical evidence regarding the relationships between the quality of LMX, learning climate and employee motivation which was hitherto absent from public administration.

Keywords: leader-member exchange (LMX), learning climate, employee motivation, public administration.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a deep sense of uncertainty of many employees, not only regarding their health but also jobs and financial situation. In response to the prevailing conditions many public organizations have rapidly begun to introduce new forms of work organization, information technologies and remote work. This situation has accelerated the process of informatisation of many public services, particularly in public administration (e.g. e-administration). Public employees had to face new workplace challenges, sometimes being forced overnight to learn new technologies to adjust to the situation. These dynamic changes have led to a growing sense of insecurity of many employees, frequently accompanied with the decrease of their commitment, motivation and job performance.

Concurrently, the development of IT technology, COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of knowledge society pose new challenges for public organizations. This problem particularly concerns local government administration whose performance determines providing the fundamental municipal services. New concepts of public management emphasize the significance of human capital and social aspects of organizational performance for the quality of public services. These ideas lead to the increased interest in the issues of organizational climate, employee motivation and impact of leaders on them. However, most of the empirical studies are conducted in business organizations and are focused on motivational effects of leadership styles. In this context an important research aim becomes identification of relations between relational aspects of leadership and employee motivation in the public administration. Special attention should also be paid to the significance of the quality of relationships between leaders and followers (LMX) and its impact on organizational climate.

The paper tries to answer the following question: what are the relationships between the quality of leader-member exchange (LMX), learning climate, employee motivation in public administration? This aim will be reached by presenting the results of empirical research concerning these phenomena carried out in all of 41 municipal offices in the Metropolis GZM. The model of relationships between LMX, learning climate and employee motivation was tested with the use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This study not only highlights the significance of the LMX quality in motivating employees but also reveals a mediating role of learning climate in this process. On this basis some practical implications for motivating employees are also provided for the post-pandemic workplaces.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1. Employee motivation and its antecedents

Diverse theories and approaches have been applied to explain the process of human motivation. Moreover, the literature on the subject has also distinguished a variety of factors influencing employee motivation. In some studies the impact of various characteristics of leadership on employee motivation has been explored but mostly they have only stressed the influence of leadership style on employee motivation. Much less attention has been paid to its relational aspects and the significance of the quality of relations between leader and his/her followers on employee motivation.

The Deci and Ryan's (2000, 2002) Self-Determination Theory (STD) provides a valuable framework for examining and understating the essence of these relationships, its motivational effects and impact of learning climate on employee motivation. The STD theory applies the cognitive evaluation theory to explain relationships between external incentives and intrinsic motivation what allows to discriminate between external and intrinsic motivation (Chrupała-Pniak, and Grabowski, 2016). The STD theory also indicates a multidimensional and complex nature of employee motivation. It uses the needs theory which is widespread in the literature on employee motivation but in contrast to the traditional approach, in this theory, human psychological needs are considered as innate necessities rather than acquired motives of actions, which are crucial for employees' psychological growth, integrity, and well-being (Deci, and Ryan, 2000). A fundamental assumption of the STD theory is that an individual is naturally oriented to actively engage in development, psychological and social integration.

Deci and Ryan (2000) distinguish two basic types of motivation, i.e. intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation concerns an active engagement in activities which an individual considers as interesting, hence they support his/her individual development. Extrinsic motivation encompasses diverse kinds of motivation, which vary regarding the level of internalization of social expectations and rules by an individual, i.e. an external regulation, introjected, identified and integrated regulations. They represent a specific continuum of extrinsic motivation. On one end of this continuum, the external regulation is a typical example of extrinsic motivation, when human behaviors are controlled by external conditions. On the other, at the integrated regulations, people accept and fully identify with the values which are the core of these regulations and treat them as their own despite their external nature.

Adopting this theory, employees possess a potential to perform autonomously, to regulate their behaviors and to develop. Moreover, striving for this development is a natural process enhancing their well-being. It enables them to satisfy such fundamental human needs as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Neither of these needs should be neglected because all of them are nutriments without which the processes of intrinsic motivation as well as integration of extrinsic motivational regulations will not operate optimally (Deci, and Ryan, 2000).

It should be noticed that in contrast to the traditional approach, pursuing to meet these needs is not the basic aim of employees but they endeavor "to act in the direction of increased psychological differentiation and integration in terms of their capacities, their valuing processes, and their social connectedness" (Deci, and Ryan, 2000, p. 230). A consequence of adopting this perspective is also that such organizational characteristics as learning climate enhanced with the high quality of relationships with leaders, will facilitate employees to meet their psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness and will enhance their optimal performance, well-being and job satisfaction. Outcomes of employee efforts will positively influence their intrinsic motivation if employees pursue the aims and relationships allowing them to satisfy their psychological needs. Therefore, adjustment of organizational conditions regarding these characteristics to employees' expectations is needed for increasing their motivation and optimal performance in the organization.

2.2. Leader-Member Exchange

Some argue that many of the contemporary commonly-accepted theories of leadership are rather based on psychoanalytically-driven approaches than on real leaders' experiences (Cunliffe, and Eriksen, 2011; Carroll et al., 2008; Lawler, 2005). In this context Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) point out to the significance of a relational leadership theory which is embedded in everyday practice that leaders follow, emphasizing that attention should be given to explain "how leaders construct organizational 'realities' and identities in social-psychological processes occurring in relation to other people" (Cunliffe, and Eriksen, 2011, p. 1429). Relational approach to leadership is crucial to understand how specific features of the relationship of leaders with their followers can affect employees' behaviors (Lavie, Haunschild, and Khanna, 2012).

The relationship of the leader with his/her followers is often conceptualized in terms of leader-member exchange (LMX) relationship (Thrasher et al., 2020). The LMX theory demonstrates the role of interpersonal processes between the leader and his/her follower (Erdogan, Kraimer, and Liden, 2004). An essential assumption of the LMX theory is that outcomes of leadership depend on the quality of a dyadic relationship between the leader and members of an organizational unit (Alo, and Arslan, 2022). The quality of this relationship decides about the intensity of the process of mutual exchange of tangible and intangible resources (Marzec, 2019; Erdogan, Kraimer, and Liden, 2004). According to the LMX theory, leaders build two kinds of relationships with followers in an organizational unit, i.e. a high and a low quality exchange. In the high-quality LMX, the process of mutual exchange is intensive, which means that e.g. an employee takes the initiative to complete tasks which require more effort, even exceeding his/her job responsibilities. In return, the leader provides the member with, e.g. bigger autonomy, support in career advancement, access to information, and development, etc. (Balasundaram, and Sathiyaseelan, 2016). Contrary to this kind of relationships, in the low-quality LMX, the exchange between the leader and the subordinate is

limited and strictly based on their formal responsibilities arising from an employment contract. One of the most commonly accepted and empirically tested models is proposed by Liden and Maslyn (1998), which includes such LMX dimensions as:

- contribution, which concerns the perception of an employee's work effort, and quality, as well as his/her input in the achievement of mutual goals,
- professional respect, which refers to the mutual respect of professional competences and expertise,
- loyalty, which is the extent to which the leader and subordinate are loyal to each other and they offer support to one another,
- affect, which concerns their mutual affection, based more on the perception of personal attractiveness than on their professional values.

The quality of LMX affects various aspects of an individual and organizational performance. It influences employees' perception of their work environment (Kheng, and Mahmood, 2013). Moreover, also some empirical research suggests that there is a relationship between the quality of LMX and learning climate. In the study conducted in Polish enterprises it was found that the quality of LMX influenced employees' commitment and career satisfaction (Marzec, 2015). Other previous research showed that there was a relationship between employees' evaluation of organizational climate and the quality of LMX (Cogliser, and Schriesheim, 2000). The survey conducted in Malaysia revealed that there were significant relationships between pro-innovation organizational climates, leader-member exchange and the innovative work behavior of knowledge workers (Kheng, and Mahmood, 2013). Based on the foregoing, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H1: The quality of LMX will be positively related to the learning climate of municipal offices.

To conclude, based on the previous studies on LMX and learning climate it is reasonable to assume that the quality of relationships between leaders and employees influences employees' possibilities of learning and development in public municipal offices. In turn it is also logical that opportunities of professional development may affect employees' perception of learning climate of an organization. However, hitherto this relation has not been empirically examined in the Polish municipal offices in the Metropolis GZM.

2.3. Learning climate

It should be noticed, that although the quality of LMX has been already linked with employee motivation in some studies, the mediating role of learning climate in this relationship has still been overlooked in the empirical research carried out in the public organizations. Despite the fact that the concept of the organizational climate was introduced by Lewin, Lippit and White (1939) into social science in the late 1930s, it has received more attention of researchers on management only in the 1970s along with a growing interest in an organizational culture's phenomenon with which it has still been wrongly equated or considered as its element.

Since then, a wide variety of definitions, approaches and methodologies to the examination of organizational climate have emerged in management studies. In contrast to organizational culture, many theorists emphasize subjective aspects of organizational climate, e.g. Gustafson, Pomirleanu, and Mariadoss (2018) describe organizational climate as the perception of organizational policy and practice. Organizational climate is mostly conceptualized as employees' perception of specific features of organizational context, i.e. the characteristics of process and practices taking place in the organizational environment. It is stressed that this perception strongly influences employees attitudes and behaviors (Van der Heijde et al., 2018). Although undoubtedly the concepts of organizational climate and culture are closely related, many researchers also stress differences between them (e.g. Goh et al., 2020). An organizational culture encompasses values, norms and expectations shared by employees which are often hidden and difficult to identify but guide employees' behaviors, whereas organizational climate concerns the subjective perception of organizational environment features and events occurring in this environment (Rowold, Hochholdinger, and Schilling, 2008).

It should be noticed that today, in the knowledge-based economy, these features of an organizational climate which enhance individual and organizational learning as well as initiative and creativity of employees, arouse special attention of theoreticians and practitioners of management both in the private and public sectors. A learning climate concerns the employees' shared perception of how the organizational, procedures, policies and practices in their work environment support their learning behaviors (Van der Heijde et al., 2018; Nikolova et al., 2016; Mikkelsen, Ogaard, and Lovrich 2004). Abbas et al., 2011 maintain that learning climate is a "bridge" between learning and development of employees and knowledge acquired by the organization, hence organizations which create learning climate are able to maximize their advantages obtained from investments in employee development. Van der Heijden et al. (2009) argue that employee learning and their development are strictly related to learning climate in an organization. In organizations creating a learning climate, value of learning and employees' rights to comprehensive professional development are commonly accepted. In the learning climate employees give value and weight to the learning. They perceive processes and practices related with learning as a way to achieve a career success. This approach leads to integration of individual and organizational aims and results in a balance of employees' well-being and organization's success.

There has been a great deal of studies supporting the idea that organizational climate has a significant impact on employee behaviors, their job performance, commitment, motivation and job satisfaction (Zhang, and Liu, 2010; Obeng et al., 2021). In the Polish private organizations it was found that learning climate influences employee development and subjective career success (Marzec, 2015). Similar results were obtained in the study conducted in the German service sector, which showed that learning climate led to an increase of employees' participation in developmental practices (Rowold, Hochholdinger, and Schilling, 2008). Moreover, this study revealed positive relations between employees' participation in developmental practices, learning climate and employees' job performance.

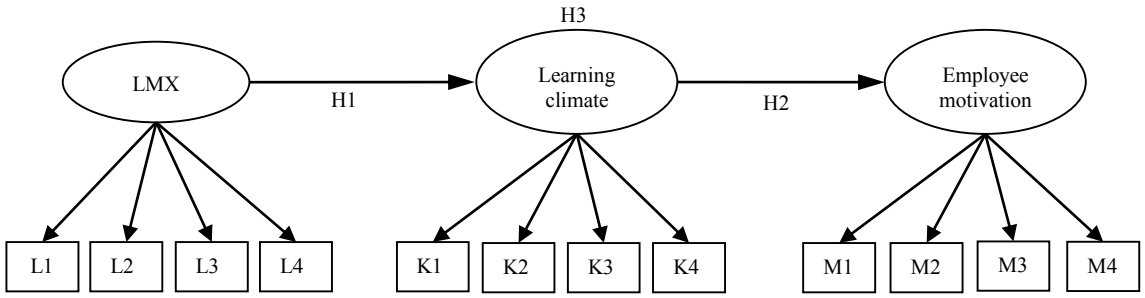
According to the SDT theory, cultural values, reflected in the organizational climate, affect meeting individual psychological needs. Aims and values complying with psychological needs may be integrated by an individual what results in his/her motivation and well-being. Gagné and Deci (2005) argue that, a supportive organizational climate should enable employees to satisfy their psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the learning climate the value of learning and growth is stressed. Employees perceive the organization and its leaders as supporting their competence development. These suppositions are justified by results of some previous empirical studies. The survey conducted among employees of a university in Iran revealed that organizational climate influenced employees' job motivation (Ghanbari, and Eskandari, 2014). Similar findings were reported by Tyagi (1982), who discovered that organizational climate contributed to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of salespersons. In turn Rusu and Avasilcai (2014) discovered that the organizational climate influenced employee motivation in industrial firms in Romania. In a study carried out at a Spanish university, it was found that learning climate enhanced intrinsic motivation of teachers (Calderón, Meroño, and MacPhail, 2020). Consequently, it is reasonable to formulate following hypothesis:

H2: The learning climate of municipal offices will be positively related to motivation of public administration employees.

The hypotheses H1 and H2 are directed towards a mediating role of the learning climate in the relationship between the quality of LMX and employee motivation. Moreover, this supposition is supported by a previous study carried out in Malaysian banking industry, which revealed that organizational climate mediated the relationships between leader-member exchange and employee citizenship behaviors (Vasudevan, and Mahadi, 2019). Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H3: The learning climate will mediate the relationships between the quality of LMX and motivation of public administration employees.

Based on the conceptual framework derived from the literature study, a model of relationships between the phenomena examined was constructed (Figure 1).



L_i, K_i, M_i – dimensions of the latent variables.

Figure 1. The proposed conceptual model of relationships.

The conceptual model presents the relationships between LMX, learning climate and employee motivation (Figure 1). It assumes that the quality of LMX affects employee motivation indirectly, i.e. through its impact on learning climate in organizations, which next influences employee motivation. Therefore, according to the proposed model, learning climate will be a mediator of the relationships between the quality of LMX and employee motivation. Next, the model needs to be tested across municipal offices in the Metropolis GZM.

3. Research method

3.1. Procedure and participants

The survey was carried out among 153 employees of municipal offices in the Metropolis GZM. The study encompassed all of 41 municipal offices in the Metropolis GZM. The number of employees examined was dependent on the number of inhabitants of the commune (from 3 to 5 employees in each of the municipal offices), i.e. 66 respondents were employed in communes with less than 20 000 inhabitants, 12 respondents in communes from 20 001 to 50 000 inhabitants, 30 respondents in communes from 50 001 to 100 000 inhabitants, and 45 respondents were employed in communes having above 100 000 inhabitants.

Due to the specificity of employment in municipal offices the sample included 31 men and 122 women. Mean age of respondents was 41.3 years (SD = 8.8). Because of legal requirements regarding educational qualifications of employees in public administration, most of the respondents held a Master's degree (81.7%), only 11.8% a Bachelor's degree and 6.5% of the employees had post-secondary education.

3.2. Measures

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) was measured using the modified Liden and Maslyn's (1998) scale that encompassed four dimensions, i.e. affect, professional respect, loyalty, and contribution scored on a seven-point rating Likert scale (ranging from 1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree). The value of Cronbach's alpha coefficients of subscales ranged from 0.79 to 0.95 what indicates high internal consistency of the scale.

Learning climate was assessed with Hult, Ketchen and Slater's (2002) instrument that contained four subscales representing its dimensions, i.e. team orientation, system orientation, learning orientation, and memory orientation. Each subscale encompassed four items. The value of Cronbach's alpha coefficients varied from 0.72 to 0.91, what indicated high homogeneity of the scale.

Employee motivation was measured with the modified scale elaborated by Tremblay et al. (2009). Its four subscales were used to assess employee motivation. To enhance the user-friendliness, the number of subscales was reduced after the content analysis conducted by an experts' team (Van der Heijde, and Van der Heijden, 2006). Based on Deci and Ryan's approach, motivation was measured by intrinsic motivation, and three types of external motivation representing different stages of internalization of external regulations, i.e. integrated regulation, introjected regulation, and identified regulation. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the subscales ranged about 0.66. It needs to be stressed that in order to increase the validity of the results all scales applied, were previously tested and validated in the Polish studies (e.g. Chrupała-Pniak, and Grabowski, 2016; Marzec, 2015; Turek, and Wojtczuk-Turek, 2014). Scales of employee motivation and learning climate were also scored on the seven-point Likert's scale.

4. Results

In order to test the hypotheses formulated, at first descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation analyses were applied. The SPSS 27.0 and Amos 27.0 were used to process data collected. The results demonstrated a relatively high level of motivation of the surveyed employees: their average general motivation was 5.04 points on the 7-point scale (ME = 5.08; SD = 0.73) (tab. 1). The primary analysis also revealed that in general the employees highly rated the quality of their relationships with supervisors (LMX): the mean was 5.49 points on the 7-point scale (ME = 5.63; SD = 0.97). The level of the learning climate was also assessed high, its mean was 4.99 points on the 7-point scale (ME = 5.19; SD = 0.91) (table 1).

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics of the variables examined

Variable	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Affect	5.56	5.67	1.15	6.00	1.00	7.00
Professional respect	5.64	6.00	1.27	6.00	1.00	7.00
Loyalty	4.94	5.00	1.19	6.00	1.00	7.00
Contribution	5.66	5.75	0.93	4.25	2.75	7.00
LMX (generally)	5.49	5.63	0.97	5.40	1.60	7.00
Team orientation	4.86	5.00	1.12	6.00	1.00	7.00
System orientation	5.14	5.25	1.07	6.00	1.00	7.00
Learning orientation	5.36	5.50	0.96	4.75	2.25	7.00
Memory orientation	4.58	4.75	1.21	6.00	1.00	7.00
Learning climate (generally)	4.99	5.19	0.91	5.13	1.88	7.00
Identified regulation	4.74	5.00	0.98	6.00	1.00	7.00
Intrinsic motivation	5.29	5.33	0.88	4.33	2.67	7.00
Integrated regulation	5.25	5.33	0.85	4.67	2.33	7.00
Introjected regulation	4.85	5.00	0.80	4.67	2.33	7.00
Motivation (generally)	5.04	5.08	0.73	4.42	2.58	7.00

Then, the relationships between the examined phenomena were analyzed (table 2). Pearson's correlation analysis showed that there were significant positive correlations between learning climate and employee motivation (0.384; $p < 0.01$) as well as between the quality of LMX and learning climate (0.438; $p < 0.01$), hence it was reasonable to conduct the SEM analysis

Table 2.
Pearson's correlation rates between the variables examined

No.	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	Identified regulation	-														
2	Intrinsic motivation	0.524**	-													
3	Integrated regulation	0.530**	0.634**	-												
4	Introjected regulation	0.694**	0.585**	0.612**	-											
5	Motivation (generally)	0.835**	0.819**	0.826**	0.859**	-										
6	Affect	0.186*	0.188*	0.280**	0.154	0.242**	-									
7	Professional respect	0.125	0.088	0.234**	0.110	0.166*	0.779**	-								
8	Loyalty	0.176*	0.140	0.235**	0.102	0.197*	0.667**	0.646**	-							
9	Contribution	0.335**	0.334**	0.419**	0.338**	0.427**	0.630**	0.590**	0.459**	-						
10	LMX (generally)	0.230**	0.207*	0.332**	0.194*	0.289**	0.908**	0.899**	0.827**	0.760**	-					
11	Team orientation	0.382**	0.134	0.233**	0.217**	0.295**	0.357**	0.376**	0.380**	0.295**	0.417**	-				
12	System orientation	0.330**	0.103	0.247**	0.227**	0.275**	0.295**	0.319**	0.327**	0.296**	0.364**	0.765**	-			
13	Learning orientation	0.455**	0.362**	0.419**	0.388**	0.489**	0.228**	0.310**	0.178*	0.358**	0.310**	0.513**	0.501**	-		
14	Memory orientation	0.296**	0.111	0.166*	0.272**	0.255**	0.297**	0.333**	0.338**	0.284**	0.369**	0.693**	0.563**	0.529**	-	
15	Learning climate (generally)	0.432**	0.203*	0.309**	0.325**	0.384**	0.354**	0.401**	0.372**	0.366**	0.438**	0.896**	0.847**	0.743**	0.849**	-

Note. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

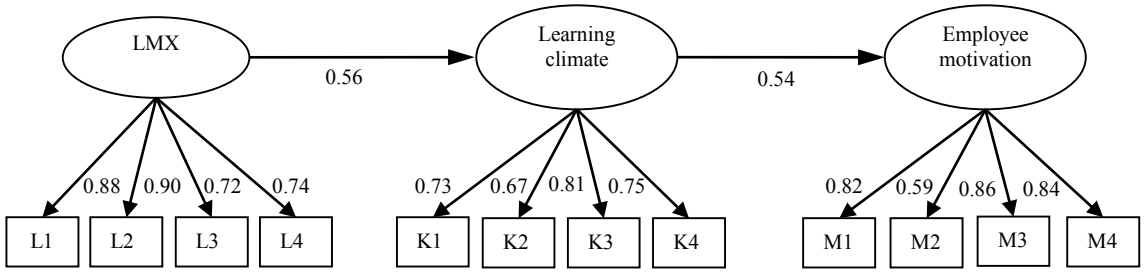
In the next step, the posed hypotheses and the assumed model of the relationships between LMX, learning climate and employee motivation were tested by means of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis using the generalized least squares method (Figure 2). Due to the number of variables the SEM analysis was conducted with the mean scores of the scales (Van der Heijde et al., 2018). In order to examine the fit between the model assumed and the data, such traditional indicators of goodness of fit as Chi^2, Chi^2/df, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) were applied.

The SEM analysis confirmed the correctness of the model (Model 1), which had reasonable fit ($Chi^2/df = 1.69$; GFI = 0.91; RMSEA = 0.067) (Table 3).

Table 3.
The goodness of fit of the estimated models of relationships between LMX, learning climate, and employee motivation

Model	Chi^2	df	p	Chi^2/df	GFI	RMSEA
Model 1	79.298	47	0.00	1.69	0.91	0.067
Model 2	78.041	46	0.00	1.70	0.91	0.068
Independence model	238.856	66	0	3.62	0.74	0.131

It was found that LMX had a positive impact on learning climate ($\gamma = 0.56$; $p < 0.01$) (H1). In turn learning climate positively affected employees' motivation ($\beta = 0.54$; $p < 0.01$) (H2). Both relationships examined were statistically significant (Figure 2). Next to test the third hypothesis, an alternative model additionally including the direct impact of LMX on employee motivation was analyzed. Judge and Colquitt (2004) proved that a mediation is confirmed if adding a direct path between the variables examined (i.e. between LMX and employee motivation in this case) will not significantly improve the quality of the model and will make an indirect path statistically insignificant (Figure 2). However, further analysis showed that the direct relationship between LMX and employee motivation was not significant ($\gamma = 0.15$; $p = 0.166$) and it did not improve the quality of the model (Table 3; Model 2). Therefore, there were no reasons to reject the third hypothesis (H3).



L_i, K_i, M_i – dimensions of the latent variables examined.
* Note. In the model the standardized regression weights are presented. In the model only the key relationships are shown for reasons of simplicity. All factor loadings are significant at the 0.001 level.

Figure 2. The model of the relations between variables examined.

Subsequently, in order to increase validity of the results, the Sobel test was also conducted to test the mediation effect of learning climate (H3). The test confirmed its mediating impact (full mediation), i.e.: $Z_3 = 3.35$ ($p < 0.001$).

5. Discussion

The results obtained do not give reasons to reject the posed hypotheses H1-H3. The model tested illustrated how the quality of LMX influenced learning climate, which in turn affected motivation of public administration employees. In line with the previous studies, the relationships between the quality LMX and learning climate, as well as between organizational learning climate and employee motivation were confirmed. Generally, these results proved that the quality of personal relations and organizational climate are important factors in increasing employee motivation in contemporary public administration organizations.

The study offers an important input to HRM theory by providing insight into the relationships between the quality of LMX, learning climate and employee motivation in public administration organizations. It showed that the quality of LMX had a significant role in contributing to learning climate in municipal offices. The results obtained also imply that these organizations should create the learning climate by improving relationships between supervisors and employees to increase employee motivation because employees' perception of learning climate involves the quality of their relationships with leaders, which includes leaders' support for learning and development. It needs to be mentioned that an important contribution of the study results from the fact that its subject concerns human capital of public administration, whose distinctive features are emphasized in the literature on the subject (e.g. Blom et al., 2020). Simultaneously, due to its specificity, practical adaptation of a new approach to motivate employees becomes a particularly important aim of HRM in public organizations. An extended hierarchy, formalization, rigid rules of promotion, limited flexibility of rewarding which are accompanied with high politicization and uncertainty of the organizational environment can decrease employee motivation. Therefore in the context of ongoing changes in the public administration and the fundamental role of human capital in this process, a significant challenge for HRM has started to be creating such organizational climate which encourages learning of employees, enhances positive personal relationships and increases employee motivation. These findings also suggest that an important step in this process should be developing a high quality of relationships between subordinates and supervisors, who ought to support employees' learning and growth. Today, in the postindustrial economic era, the role of leaders is also changing in the public sector. In order to develop learning climate, public leaders should rather build their relations with employees upon mutual trust, empathy, respect, and developmental support, than on top-down control and a position in the organizational hierarchy.

The conducted study had some limitations that need to be discussed. These limitations also point out the possible directions of further studies. First of all, the study focused on the public administration. The survey was conducted only in the municipal offices in the Metropolis GZM, thus the results obtained cannot be generalized. Furthermore, due to specificity of employment in the public administration the sample was homogenous as regards demographic characteristics of the respondents. Therefore, they could not be considered as potential moderators of the analyzed relationships. Moreover, in this research only the quality of the relationship between supervisors and subordinates was examined. In a more comprehensive study, the impact of lateral relations on organizational climate and employee motivation should be analyzed too. Moreover, the impact of other organizational features, especially these characteristic of public administration, on organizational climate and employee motivation should be investigated.

6. Final conclusions

It is commonly accepted that employee motivation plays an essential role in achieving high organizational performance, because it affects employees' attitudes and behaviors which externalize in their efforts to achieve organizational goals (Rusu, and Avasilcai, 2014). Contemporary public administration organizations need highly motivated employees who want to learn and develop to deal with uncertainty of the environment and dynamic changes in public administration. Therefore, specific focus should be given to organizational conditions which enhance motivation of employees enabling them to face challenges in the environment. Dynamic changes and threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the wave of refugees related to it imply new responsibilities and obligations for the public administration (Iwaniuk et al., 2021). To meet these obligations, competent and highly motivated employees are needed. Consequently, developing a new approach based on high-quality LMX and learning climate to motivate employees in public administration should become an inherent element of creating human capital of contemporary public administration.

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