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## Developing Employee Commitment Taking into Account Diversity Management

Shaping an attitude of commitment among employees brings many advantages to companies in connection with an increase in employee efficiency and innovation. As to motivation itself, it is the matching of solutions applied to the needs of people employed that seems to be crucial. The actual taking into account of individual expectations is difficult to achieve, however, especially in big and medium-sized companies. Creating a wide gamut of motivation instruments tailored to the needs of specific groups of employees seems to be more manageable. The aim of this article was an analysis (conducted on the basis of research undertaken by the Institute of Labor and Social Studies\*) of connections between membership in specific groups of employees—men/women, people of different age, with various educational backgrounds, employed on the basis of different contracts, holding various positions, and of different seniority—and preferred solutions in the development of commitment.

**Key words:** commitment, diversity management

### By Way of Introduction

In an age of growing competition among companies, a fact that may determine the achievement of sustainable advantage over other entities is the creation of a unique and committed team of employees. It must be unique not only in terms of the knowledge it holds or its skills, but its stance must be driven by commitment, a key

\* Conducted on the basis of research performed by Institute of Labor and Social Studies within the framework of the “Creating Engagement in the Context of Diversity Management” Project financed thanks to funding by the National Scientific Center, Contract No. UMO–2012-/07/B/HS4/03008.

from the point of view of the company and its innovativeness. The concept of *commitment* is not univocal. It may be understood as:

- a) Worker dedication to the performance of tasks he or she was entrusted with as well as identification with them,
- b) Co-participation in the company in connection with identification with its values and goals (commitment),
- c) Commitment to the profession performed,
- d) Identification with the social environment of the organization (Borkowska, 2010, p. 45).

From the point of view of the company, it seems that commitment of the *a* and *b* type are the most important. Specialists in the field of human resource management can take advantage of several motivational instruments in efforts to build it. On the one hand, their selection should take into account the organizational culture, structure, and general company strategy in effect in the company, while on the other the needs and expectations of employees. The dominant view in topical literature is that the development of a universal mechanism for building employee commitment is not possible. The authors of high involvement work practices and high commitment work systems (especially those based on commitment) are of the opinion that it is possible to identify a bundle of HRM practices that strongly influence an increase in worker commitment to matters involving the company. Among them, J. P. Guthie (2001) includes competency-based remuneration, application of group bonuses, teamwork organization, participation development, encouraging knowledge sharing, and regularly conducted research into worker attitudes. E. Lawler III additionally stresses the weight of the broad inclusion of all employees in the decision-making process, clearing communication channels and providing access to information resources about the company and the principles of its functioning, sharing knowledge, and linking remuneration to work outcomes (compare with Konrad, 2006, p. 2). Other researchers looking into questions of building commitment include the following practices among factors having a positive influence:

- Worker empowerment,
- Leadership development,
- In-house communication development,
- Improved flexibility,
- Assigning ambitious tasks,
- Care regarding continuous development, and
- The building of an organizational culture supporting commitment (compare with Kochan and Dyer, 1993; Smith, 2006; Croston, 2008; Cook, 2008; Smythe, 2009; Federman, 2009, Kaye and Jordan-Evans, 2012).

C. Stephenson (2006) is of the view that cultural impact on improved employee commitment may be influenced by diversity, dialogue, and lucid action principles (discipline). In this approach, on the one hand the term *diversity* relates the employees themselves who, having their origins in many cultural circles, are encumbered by the baggage of various life experiences (including those linked to age and sex), where on the other it is tied to the multiplicity of forms of work organization. The concept of *dialogue* takes into account the sharing of knowledge, good communications among workers from various company organizational cells, and mutual support in learning new attitudes and behaviors. B. Halmjest (2011, p. 93) is of the view that organizational culture supporting commitment should expand worker powers, be appreciative of individual effort, assure openness of communications and access to information, guarantee greater flexibility of actions, stress the impact of each and every employee on the outcomes of the entire organization, and strive to broader integration of employees with the company.

Polish analyses of methods of building commitment have confirmed the importance of the factors identified by foreign researchers. The results of research conducted by the team of S. Borkowska indicate that, according to employees, the development of such a stance is influenced to the greatest extent by:

- a) Appreciation of efforts and achievements on the part of superiors,
- b) Increased possibilities for development,
- c) The setting of ambitious targets,
- d) Improving the efficiency of information flow,
- e) Increasing participation in decision-making,
- f) Support on the part of the immediate superior, and
- g) Making the employee aware of the link between his or her tasks and company goals (Borkowska, 2010, p. 93).

At this point it worth stressing that certain differences have been noted in the assessment of weight of the mentioned factors that stem from the position held by the respondent. In its turn, research conducted by M. Juchnowicz (2012, p. 94) indicates that strongly committed persons deemed remuneration linked to effects, possibilities for development, good relations with co-workers, participation (decision-making and financial), and independence in choosing ways for performing tasks as being the most effective motivators. In spite of the existence of a broad gamut of solutions in the building of worker commitment, the development of this quality among employees remains a major challenge. This is indicated in the results of both foreign and Polish studies in line with which one out of three workers demonstrates a high level of commitment in company matters (Rashid et al., 2003, p. 702; Colan, 2009, p. 3; Juchnowicz, 2012, p. 84). This may be the result of errors made in the

practice of human resource management, including cases of company management not taking into account the needs and expectations of various groups of employees (Rodgers and Hunter, 2003, p. 223). In the meantime, diversification of methods of building commitment brings tangible benefits.

## Diversity Management

### THE CONCEPT OF DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

Profits gained from the skillful utilization of the potential of all employees have been expressed in the concept of diversity management (DM), which may be stated as follows: “Personnel management strategies based on the conviction that personnel diversity (all possible aspects in which people can differ among themselves as well as be alike) is among the key organizational resources that subject to defined conditions can become a source of business benefits” (Kirton and Greene, 2005, as cited in Gryszko, 2009, p. 5). This approach has been popular for years in the United States and the European Union. Research conducted in 2005 among companies in twenty-five member states of the European Union demonstrated that in 42% of the organizations encompassed by the analysis and associated in the European Business Test Panel (EBTP), diversity management policies have been functioning for over five years, while in a successive 27% such policies were implemented during the five years preceding the study. For the moment, Poland seems to be separated by a great distance from other European countries. Analyses conducted by the Responsible Business Forum as well as the regular “Diversity Barometer” studies as performed by the Lewiatan Confederation demonstrate that such an approach is applied in a more or less developed version by approximately 20% of companies while only about 2% of companies have an official diversity management strategy (Gryszko, 2009, p. 5; Lisowska and Sznajder, 2013, pp. 7–8; Lisowska and Sznajder, 2014, p. 12).

Such minor interest in diversity management may have a negative impact on the effectiveness of HRM methods. Both Polish and foreign analyses have indicated that various groups of workers (age and sex were taken into account in the research most often) prefer somewhat different instruments of motivation in commitment. B. Kaye and S. Jordan–Evans (2012) call attention to the essence of adapting methods for increasing commitment to the age of the employee. The research of A. Wziątek–Staśko (2012, pp. 104–145) has indicated that in addition to age, a factor differentiating methods of assessing the effectiveness of individual motivational tools is gender.

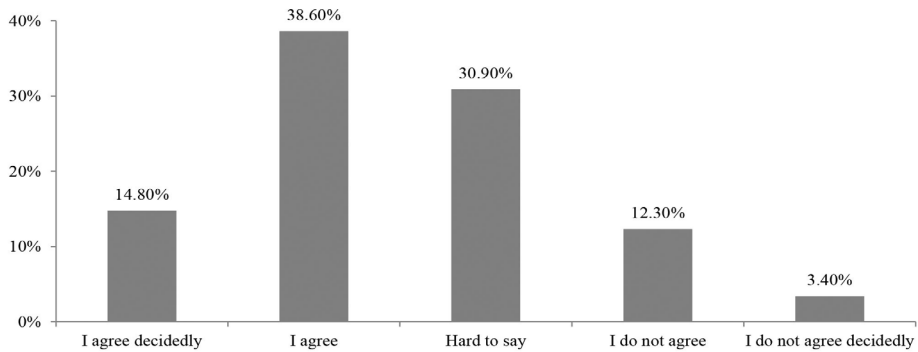
Among researchers into HRM and DM, a conviction that the effects of applied motivational instruments are determined by the degree to which they are adapted to the needs of employees is growing in popularity. Complete individualization of such tools is difficult or even impossible to achieve, especially in large and medium companies. However, a greater adapting of tools for shaping commitment to the expectations of selected groups of employees may be attempted. It was exactly on this subject—motivational instruments preferred by people of various sex, age, employed through various forms, and with differing education and seniority—that research conducted by the Institute of Labor and Social Studies (ILSS) was targeted. The main aim of this research was the defining of the most effective methods and tools for building commitment in diverse groups of workers. The analyses encompassed data collected during quantitative and qualitative research conducted at the turn of 2014 and 2015. The first phase consisted of two focus group interviews (FGI) with employees from medium and large companies, while the second phase consisted of 104 in-depth individual interviews (IDI) with heads of HRM departments and surveys were conducted on 2,045 people employed in 104 medium and large companies in knowledge-intensive industries.

#### **APPLYING DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT**

Research results confirmed the level of under-appreciation by employers of the weight of diversity management, inclusive of the taking into account of the needs of various groups of workers. Almost all HRM department heads had difficulties in simply defining the concept. This being the case, the implementation of concrete, effective solutions in the area of diversity management seems an extremely ambitious challenge. The decided bulk of the examined companies preferred not to take it up. Less than three percent of the organizations (2.8%) had a strategy for the management of diversity in place that was developed in the form of an official documents known to employees. A portion of the workers taking part in the ILSS study declared that although there is no diversity management strategy functioning in their companies, certain elements have been implemented. When requested to provide more details they usually mistook diversity management for equal opportunity policies in the workplace declaring that all employees are treated the same and there is effort made not to set anyone apart, including in the area of motivation. Research showed a universal lack of familiarity with the idea of diversity management and a failure to appreciate the importance of varied motivational instruments taking into account the needs and expectations of employees among Polish HRM specialists (mainly representing the medium-sized company sector). To a degree, this information was confirmed by employees encompassed by the analysis of companies

taking part in the survey. Every other worker from among them (53.4%) was of the view that the company management is aware of the diverse needs of employees, where 15.7% was of the opposite view (compare with Figure No. 1).

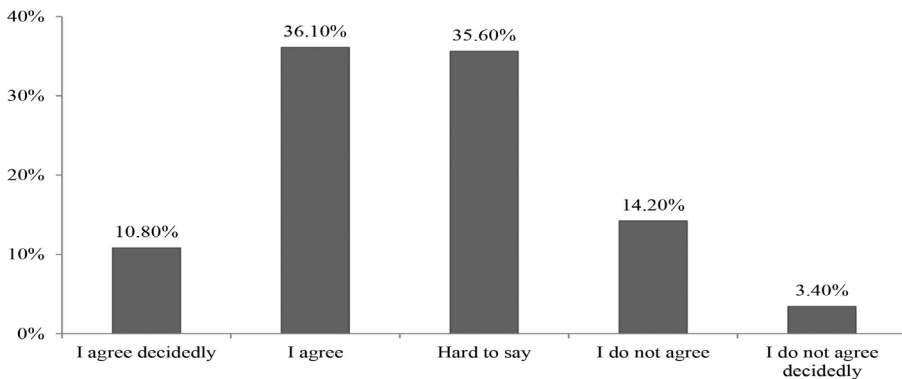
**Figure No. 1.** My company takes note of the fact that employees have various needs and expectations



Source: Own study.

However, when requested to define if differences in expectations are taken into account in the management process, those interviewed were more skeptical. Less than half of the employees (46.9%) declared that their companies take into account the needs and expectations of employees. The opposite view was held by 17.6%, but a total of 35.6% was incapable of univocally assessing how their organization does.

**Figure No. 2.** My company takes the needs and expectations of employees into account.



Source: Own study.

This information may be a cause for concern, especially when compared with the opinions of employees regarding expectations as to the building of commitment. The failure to take into account their needs in this respect may result in misguided motivational instruments being applied in the companies.

### **THE DIVERSITY OF EMPLOYEE NEEDS IN THE AREA OF COMMITMENT MOTIVATION**

Research into workers unequivocally shows that the selected groups of employees differ among themselves in terms of preferred solutions as to molding commitment. Participants in the focus group interviews as conducted by the ILSS indicated that in as much as the level of remuneration and employment stability are important to the bulk of employees, of key importance to women are solutions facilitating the reconciling of professional and family life, while for men it is the awarding of bonuses for the effects of work. As to the needs of people representing various generations, interviewees from Generation Y (born between 1977 and 1998) place great weight on additional benefits (the possibility of using the company car, telephone, and laptop, including for private needs) as well as proposals for all forms of development. No less important for them is the establishing of a clear professional career path as well as guaranteeing freedom in the performance of tasks. This last factor, together with the possibility of continuous professional development, is of key importance to the representatives of Generation X (who came into the world between 1965 and 1976). For their part, the interest of the oldest employees, born between 1946 and 1964, is primarily focused on employment stability and the availability of additional benefits, e.g., those related to healthcare. Also of importance to them (similarly to employees who are also parents) is the guaranteeing of flexibility regarding working time and forms of employment.

Moreover, analyses of the statements forwarded by the FGI participants indicate the existence of differences in the range of preferred instruments for building commitment between people holding various positions. In the case of line employees, the most significant motivational factor is employment safety. In the case of people performing relatively simple jobs, special weight is also assigned to the possibility of replacing an agreement under civil law with an employment contract, which provides a greater sense of stability. Employees with unique competencies allowing them to be grouped as specialists prefer commitment-building instruments that facilitate continued professional development as well as significant independence taking on such forms as freedom to decide as to methods of performing assigned jobs. As to commitment among the company's managerial staff, factors creating

conditions for self-fulfillment and defining obligations in a manner making the work more ambitious have the greatest impact on them.

Statement made by the focus group interview participants show that certain groups of employees are actually treated in a discriminatory manner in the real world of Polish companies. This primarily applies to people approaching retirement as well as those employed on the basis of a civil law agreement. They have restricted access to training, promotions, bonuses, and employee privileges.

To a great extent, data acquired during the quantitative studies were in agreement with those collected during the FGI. For the bulk of the examined workers, factors most strongly influencing their commitment include remuneration level, higher than the industry average (78% of indications), and employment stability (77%). Next in terms of significance are factors involving relations and atmosphere at the workplace (good atmosphere was indicated by 77%, equal treatment of all employees was chosen by 76%, while 76% indicated good communication in the company). In its turn, among the most significant barriers impeding the building of commitment among employees, apart from remuneration that is too low, named by the decided bulk of those interviewed (82%) were factors in the non-financial category—failure to appreciate the employee and his or her work input by superiors (79%), and bad atmosphere in the company and a lack of support on the part of the direct superior (78%, each). These factors are most acute for women, representatives of Generation Y, and people with higher education.

Assessment of the most significant factors building employee commitment varied depending on the respondent's sex, age, position, and education. The greatest differences between employees of difference sex were noted in the case of non-financial motivational instruments. Thus, appreciation of an employee's efforts and expressions of acknowledgement on the part of the superior are of greater importance in the case of women (77% of indications) than men (69%). The situation is similar in the case of guaranteeing an employee the possibility of continuous development (74% and 67%, respectively). This last motivational instrument is assessed differently by the worker depending on education. The possibility of continuous development is important to 53% of employees who are graduates of primary and vocational schools and up to a total of 77% of college graduates. Differences between people with a primary (61%) and secondary education (64%) are relatively small in their assessment of tools involving the possibility of making decisions as to ways of performing assigned jobs. Employees with a higher education indicated this motivational instrument decidedly more often (71%). The greatest divergence was noted in opinions concerning the assessment of good communications in the



company. This was especially appreciated by people with a higher education (80%) and a secondary one (71%) and, to a lesser extent, by those with a primary and vocational education (63%).

Analysis of motivational tools taking into account groups of employee job positions demonstrated relatively small differences between the preferences of managers, specialists, and line workers. The greatest differences involved sharing in company profits, which was especially appreciated by the managerial staff (70%) and more rarely by the line workers (62%) and those with specialist competencies (59%).

The age of an employee has a decided impact on assessment of individual instruments for building commitment. The greatest range was noted in the case of clear remuneration criteria, considered to be particularly important in the case of the youngest (up to thirty-five, 82% of indications) and the oldest employees (over fifty-five, 72% of indications). The least weight was applied to this tool by persons in the thirty-six to forty-five age group. Bonuses linked with work effects were viewed similarly, where they were the most popular among representatives of Generation Y (83%) and the oldest workers (77%), and were considered less important in the view of people in the thirty-six to fifty-five age group (67.5%). The assigning of significant weight to clear principles of remuneration and promotions as well as bonuses linked to work effects by employees of the oldest generation may be the result of the unequal treatment of this employee group as observed in other studies. Both Polish and foreign analyses show that older people tend to be bypassed in the promotion process as well as in employee development programs (Litwiński and Sztanderska, 2010; *Promoting ...*, 2005). Perhaps, this is the origin of their declared need for basing remuneration and promotions on clear criteria that do not allow arbitrary decisions, but rather an appreciation of true work input. The feeling that an employee's position in the company is only related to his or her competencies and achieved results, not age, is of significant motivational importance. The supposition relating to unequal treatment of people of various generations found confirmation in the ILSS study. Although a little over half of those interviewed declared that all employees, regardless of age, are treated equally in their companies, every fifth worker (20.9%) had the opposite view and every fourth worker had a problem making a univocal assessment of the situation in his or her organization. The greatest share of people of the view that there is unequal treatment of employees due to age in their companies was from the oldest group of employees. What is more, women forwarded negative opinions more often than men.

A successive criteria assumed during the analyses of factor building the commitment of various groups of employees was the form of employment. The greatest

differences in assessing the most important motivators was noted in the case of the taking into account of the opinions of employees in the process of periodic assessment. This instrument proved of key importance in the case of tele-workers (76% of indications) and was decidedly less important for people employed through civil law agreement (55%) and doing part-time work (52%). What is interesting is that in contrast to the results of the qualitative study (FGI), which indicated the bypassing of people undertaking commission work and specifically contracted work in the process of employee development, for example, equal treatment in the workplace is of lesser importance to this group (68%) as compared to those employed on the basis of tele-work (81%) and fulltime employment contractors (80%).

Data collected during the survey of the employees of medium and large companies was subsequently subjected to statistical analyses whose goal was the establishing of significant links between preferred tools for building employee commitment and their membership in a selected group. Four indexes of factors influencing the building of commitment—remuneration, development, work environment, and interpersonal relations—were created for the needs of these tests. Performed analyses confirmed the existence of statistically significant ties between employee sex, age, education, job seniority, and form of employment and their preferred methods of building commitment. The directions of these dependencies are presented below.

### **Commitment Building and Gender**

In the case of men, factors tied to interpersonal relations and the work environment are of the greatest importance. In the case of women, no statistically significant positive correlations with any of the motivational factor indexes were noted.

### **Commitment Building and Age**

There is a link between preferences in the area of motivational instruments and age in the case of the over thirty-six age group. In the case of employees over forty-six it is remuneration that is most important, which is the least important for the thirty-six to forty-six age group.

### **Commitment Building and Education**

The strongest ties between individual types of motivators and education were noted in the group of employees with primary and vocational education. Factors linked with the work environment have particularly significant motivational meaning for people with a secondary education—development. The study showed no positive

correlations between selected motivational factors and a higher education. Moreover, the lower the educational level of the respondent, the more highly assessed was the importance of individual motivational instruments.

### **Commitment Building and Job Position**

No statistically significant ties were noted between job position and preferred motivational instrument.

### **Commitment Building and Job Seniority in the Company**

There is a significant link between having low seniority in the company ranging from one to three years and all of the analyzed motivational factor indexes. There is particularly strong correlation with factors supporting employee development and one that is significantly less in the case of remuneration. However, it is a key motivational factor for the most experienced employees (those with seniority of over ten years). There is also a significantly weaker, albeit statistically significant dependency between high job seniority and preferred motivational instruments connected with the work environment. In the case of people tied with the company for three to ten years, interpersonal relations are of great importance.

### **Commitment Building and Employment Form**

A statistically significant link between all motivational factor indexes and work benefits has been confirmed in the case of part-time employees. It is interpersonal relations and work environment that take on particular importance in the case of part-time employees. However, in the case of people working on the basis of civil law agreements, in addition to interpersonal relations, factors tied with development are of key importance. None of the indexes for the motivational factors has a positive correlation in the case of full-time employees.

## **Conclusions**

The presented research results indicate that there are significant links between preferred motivational instruments for building commitment and belonging to a defined group of employees. Their detailed analysis makes possible the development of a list of motivational tools adapted to the expectations of employees. Taking into account the outlined preferences in implementing a strategy for shaping employee commitment in the company it may be possible to significantly improve the effectiveness of efforts undertaken within their framework. Familiarity with the

needs of employees is all the more difficult to overestimate as, according to the results of ILSS research, most Polish companies do not see the weight of diversity management and, therefore, do not fully utilize the potential inherent in their employee teams.

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### **Budowanie zaangażowania pracowników z uwzględnieniem zarządzania różnorodnością**

#### Streszczenie

Ukształtowanie wśród pracowników postawy zaangażowania przynosi firmom korzyści związane ze wzrostem ich efektywności i innowacyjności. Jeśli chodzi o motywowanie, to kluczowym wyzwaniem staje się możliwie jak najlepsze dopasowanie stosowanych rozwiązań do potrzeb osób zatrudnionych. Uwzględnienie indywidualnych oczekiwań jest trudne do osiągnięcia w przypadku firm dużych i średnich. Łatwiejsze wydaje się stworzenie oferty instrumentów motywowania, dostosowanych do potrzeb określonych grup pracowników. Celem artykułu jest analiza (przeprowadzona na podstawie badań zrealizowanych przez Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych) istniejących związków pomiędzy faktem przynależności do wybranej grupy osób zatrudnionych (kobiet/mężczyzn, osób w różnym wieku, mających różne wykształcenie, zatrudnionych w różnych formach, piastujących różne stanowiska, mających różny staż pracy) a preferowanymi rozwiązaniami w kształtowaniu zaangażowania.

A n n a J a w o r - J o n i e w i c z – Doctor of Economic Sciences, Adjunct Professor with the Department of Human Resource Management of the Institute for Labor and Social Studies. Eight years of experience in government administration, including in the area of the equal status of men and women and fighting discrimination. Scientific interests primarily concentrate on questions of motivating employees and organizational culture. Participated in many research projects on the role of human resource management in improving company innovativeness, employee remuneration, the measurement of human capital, reconciling professional and personal life, and the situation of the 50+ on the labor market. Author of numerous scientific studies in the area of human capital management.