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The role of LMX and organizational climate in improving performance and effectiveness of local public administration: evidence from the Metropolis GZM

Abstract: Since the 1990s, along with the transformation of public administration and the emergence of new concepts of public management, the improvement of organisational effectiveness and performance (OEP) of local public administration has become an important goal of regional policies in many countries. The OEP of local public administration has started to be considered as an essential factor affecting the process of regional socio-economic development. However, to improve the performance of local public administration, factors influencing the OEP of public administration organizations need to be determined. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to identify how such factors as the quality of relations between leaders and subordinates as well as learning climate influence the OEP of public administration organizations.

Method/approach: The paper presents the results of a survey research conducted among 153 employees of municipal offices in the Górnośląsko-Zagłębiowska Metropolis (i.e. Metropolis GZM). A model of relationships between LMX, organizational learning climate, and the OEP was examined with the use of Structural Equation Modeling and path analysis.

Findings: It was found that the LMX affected the OEP only indirectly through its impact on organizational learning climate which in turn influences the OEP. Therefore, the study also revealed that organizational learning climate mediated the relationship between the LMX and the OEP.

Originality: The presented results of the study have provided empirical evidence regarding the influence of LMX and organizational climate on the OEP of public organizations which was hitherto absent in the literature on the subject. A novel conclusion from this study is that the high quality of relationships between leaders and subordinates and organizational learning climate improve the OEP of local public administration organizations. Highly effective local public administration can become a driver of the regional development promoting new ideas, innovation and local incentives.

Key words: leader-member-exchange (LMX), organizational effectiveness and performance (OEP), organizational learning climate, public administration

JEL codes: O15, M54, O29, H83

Introduction

Since the 1990s along with the transformation of public administration and the emergence of new ideas of public management, the improvement of organizational effectiveness and performance (OEP) has become an essential goal of public administration in many countries. The OEP of public administration is an important factor affecting processes of national and regional socio-economic development (Chudzyńska 2021). High expectations of the society regarding the OEP of public administration set new challenges to its organizations (Marzec 2022a). In order to fulfill their mission and goals, public administration organizations need to keep pace with changes in their environment, flexibly adjusting to new demands and continuously improving their OEP.

Today the wave of refugees associated with the war in Ukraine brings about new responsibilities for public administration in many countries. Public administration organizations have to deal with many new tasks concerning not only emergency assistance for refugees but also their long-term support in providing jobs, accommodation and access to basic public services such as education, social assistance, healthcare etc. Limitation of negative consequences of refugee crises and their adaptation to new conditions also depend on the OEP of public administration organizations.

To meet these obligations, public administration organizations need competent and highly committed employees who contribute to the increase of OEP. This requires the creation of organizational environment which supports learning behaviours of employees to enable them to adjust to a new situation and realize new tasks. In this context particular attention should be paid to social aspects of management in public administration such as the quality of relationships between leaders and employees (LMX) and its impact on employees' perception of organizational climate as well as on the OEP (van der Heije et al. 2018). It should be stressed that high formalization, extended hierarchy and bureaucratic culture accompanied with authoritarian style of leadership, which are characteristic of many public administration organizations, may negatively affect the LMX and organizational climate, hindering employee learning processes, their commitment and decreasing performance. Today in public administration the roles of leaders have been gradually changing. They are expected to build positive relationships with their subordinates encouraging them to seek for development opportunities and to create learning climate enabling employees to maximize their contribution to the achievement of organizational goals and the OEP.

Despite the fact that undoubtedly the LMX and organizational learning climate may significantly influence the OEP, there are still a few relevant empirical studies in public administration. Therefore, an important research question is: what are the relationships between the LMX, learning climate, and the OEP in public administration organizations? This question will be answered by presenting the results of the study conducted in municipal offices in the Metropolis GZM.

The paper has been structured accordingly. In the section "Theoretical framework and conceptual model of relationships between LMX, learning climate and

OEP development” the relationships between LMX, learning climate and the OEP are discussed. The first part of this section presents a brief literature review on the concepts of the OEP of public administration organizations. Next the concepts of LMX and organizational learning climate and their links with the OEP are analyzed. On this basis the conceptual model of relationships between these phenomena is proposed. In the subsequent section the method applied in the empirical research is described. Then, the results of analysis of the data collected are presented. The paper ends with the section “Discussion and conclusions” which summarizes the contribution of the study along with an outline of its limitations and possible directions for future research.

Theoretical framework and conceptual model of relationships between LMX, learning climate and OEP development

Performance and effectiveness of public administration organizations

The literature study points out to diversity of research perspectives towards organizational effectiveness and performance (OEP), what shows the complexity of these constructs. Moreover, these terms are also often equated with such notions as efficiency, productivity, quality, etc. Some researchers use them interchangeably to describe organizational outcomes (Baruch, Ramalho 2006). Others maintain that effectiveness is a more subjective construct than organizational performance (e.g. Bratnicki, Ząbkowska 2010).

In a long history of studies on the OEP many approaches to effectiveness can be distinguished, e.g. the goal approach, the system resource approach, as well as stakeholders and competitive-values approaches. The adopted approaches affect the way of the OEP measurement. Additionally, its different criteria are usually applied in business and public organizations. In business organizations the OEP is mostly considered as an economic-financial category and its assessment is based on economic-financial indicators which are often acknowledged as its more objective measures. However, some argue that the OEP expresses not only economic but also organizational values hence such one-dimensional approach may constitute an important barrier to its reliable evaluation (Baruch, Ramalho 2006). Therefore, the various aspects of OEP should be analyzed to achieve its comprehensive picture.

According to a relatively new stakeholders approach, which emerged in the 1970s, performance is a multidimensional construct and it should be assessed with the use of diverse criteria. This approach is based on an assumption that diverse groups of stakeholders affect an organization, which needs to react to their expectations. Consequently, the OEP measurement criteria should be different for various groups of stakeholders, their aims, expectations and relations with

the organization. However, the fundamental criterion of the OEP is the degree in which the organization meets expectations of its key stakeholders, because without their support it is not able to perform (Love, Skitmore 1996). Some also argue that these are not the best criteria of the OEP assessment because their use depends on a particular situation, e.g. who makes the assessment and what are his/her aims and values (Zeb et al. 2021). In accordance with the competing values approach (CVF), which is popular in reference to the public organizations, the criteria applied mostly reflect the values of managers and the significance which they attribute to particular areas of the OEP (Quinn, Rohrbaugh 1983).

Diversity of the OEP concepts results in a multiplicity of its measurement criteria and indicators proposed in the literature. It suggests that there is no “best way” of OEP assessment and the choice of measures depends on many factors, e.g. the sector, type of an organization, its aims, etc. Today descriptive and subjective criteria have started to gain great popularity, particularly in reference to public administration organizations. Due to their specific mission and goals, the usefulness of traditional economic-financial criteria is very limited in these organizations. Undoubtedly, in public administration, the social dimension of its performance is very important because outcomes of public administration organizations are to a great extent intangible. They serve the common good. The main goal of local public administration is to react to the emerging social needs of inhabitants of communes and to meet these needs at the best possible level. Therefore, an important criterion of the OEP is social acceptance of local public administration actions, which shows its ability to manage its relations with citizens (Wronka 2014, Marzec, Ganiek 2018). Consequently, in local public administration organizations a social legitimization of their actions is considered as one of the essential criteria of the OEP. It depends on the accomplishment of mission and goals of local public administration, what at a community level means providing high quality public services to its inhabitants. This criterion is related to the goal approach which indicates that the OEP should be assessed by the achievement of its goals by an organization. Therefore, the accomplishment of organizational mission and goals needs to be considered as one of the important criteria of the OEP of local public administration organizations. However, it should be noted that the achievement of organizational goals depends on financial resources. Public administration organizations are not directed towards profits but their ability to manage public finances to achieve financial stability is also an important criterion of the OEP. This criterion is related to traditional economic-financial indicators of the OEP used in for-profit organizations but adjusted to the specificity of public administration organizations.

The concepts of LMX and organizational learning climate and their links with the OEP

The LMX theory points out to the impact of interpersonal processes between a leader and his/her subordinates on their attitudes and behaviours in an organi-

zation (Thrasher et al. 2020). The quality of this dyadic relationship determines the intensity of the process of a mutual exchange of tangible and intangible resources between a leader and a subordinate (Alo, Arslan 2022). A fundamental assumption of this theory is that in an organizational unit the leader develops diverse relationships with their subordinates which can range from low to high quality relationships. According to the Liden and Maslyn's (1998) classical LMX model, these relationships can be described by four dimensions, i.e. contribution, professional respect, loyalty, and affect.

A low-quality LMX is based on a formal description of employee's job duties resulting from an employment contract. Conversely, a high-quality LMX is characterized by mutual trust, respect, loyalty and an employee's striving to maximize his/her effort and contribution into the success of a team. The high-quality LMX has various positive effects on job outcomes, e.g. it increases work engagement, employees' empowerment, task performance, motivation, job satisfaction, citizenship behaviors, etc. (Lebrón et al. 2018, Saputra, Ariyanto 2019, Aggarwal et al. 2020, Park et al. 2022). These characteristics of high-quality LMX also support creating a positive organizational learning climate. In the high-quality LMX employees on their own initiative take difficult tasks demanding more effort, while in return, leaders provide them with a greater autonomy, access to information and stronger support for their professional development (Marzec 2009). Therefore, it is logical, that employees, whose relationships with their supervisors are characterized by high quality, perceive organizational climate as supporting their learning. Furthermore, these statements are justified by results of some empirical research. In the study carried out in the Chinese IT sector, it was found that the high quality of the LMX positively influenced employees' sharing knowledge behaviours (Hao et al. 2021). In the survey conducted in the retail sector in the United States it was discovered that LMX and organizational climate moderated relationships between organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intentions (Nandedkar, Brown 2017). The study carried out in American clinics revealed significant relations between LMX and organizational climate (Aarons

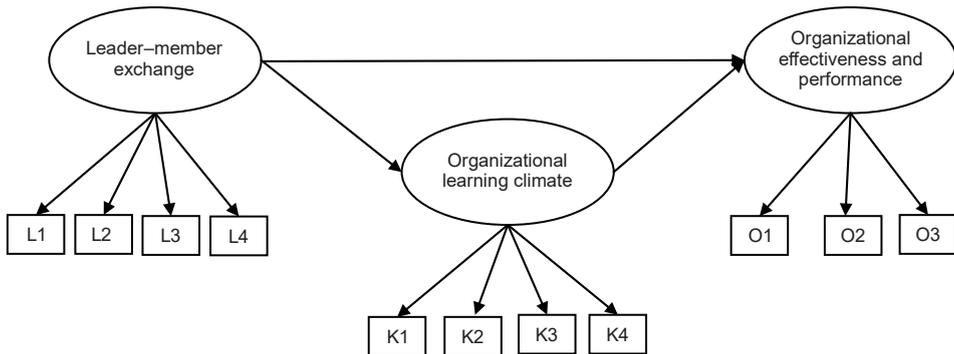


Fig. 1. The conceptual model of relationships between LMX, organizational learning climate, and OEP

Source: own study.

et al. 2021). In the U.S. Army's survey it was found that the relationship between LMX and citizenship role was moderated by organizational safety climate (Hofmann et al. 2003). The study of Dutch schools indicated the relationships between the LMX, learning climate, teachers' inquiry habit of mind and their innovative behaviour (Vermeulen et al. 2022). Moreover, it was also found that the organizational learning climate mediated the relationship between LMX and employees' motivation in the Polish municipal offices (Marzec 2022b)¹. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that the LMX quality affects the organizational learning climate (Fig. 1).

The universalistic approach to performance is based on a general statement that the proper organizational climate may lead to desirable employees' attitudes and behaviours, resulting in their greater job performance. Organizational learning climate enhances employees' competences, their commitment and motivation, thus it creates behavioral leverages allowing to improve organizational performance (Borkowska 2009). This idea is also supported by empirical research conducted in Mazandarani small-medium-sized enterprises, which revealed that employees' perception of organizational climate affected organizational performance (Shahin et al. 2014). Moreover, in Pakistani industrial companies significant relationships between the types of organizational culture and organizational performance were discovered (Zeb et al. 2021).

There are strong logical reasons to maintain that LMX may affect OEP. The LMX theory indicates that the high-quality of the relationship between the leader and his/her subordinates leads to higher commitment and work effort, what in turn results in the increased work outcomes and performance (Harrison et al. 2006, Dulebohn et al. 2012). The relationship between learning climate and the OEP assumed in the model is also confirmed by some previous studies. Martin et al. (2016) in the meta-analysis of previous studies found the relationship between the LMX, citizenship and counterproductive performance. Therefore, it is rational to suppose that the learning climate and LMX may affect the OEP of municipal offices.

It should be noted that the relationship between the LMX and learning climate together with the relationship between learning climate and the OEP point to a mediating role of organizational learning climate in the relationships between the LMX and the OEP. Based on this framework derived from literature analysis, a model of relations between the phenomena discussed was established (Fig. 1).

Method

The study was aimed to answer the following research question: what are the relationships between the LMX, learning climate, and the OEP in public administration organizations?

¹ Based on this data, the other model of relationships between LMX, learning climate and employee motivation was previously analyzed in municipal offices of Metropolis GZM (see Marzec 2022b).

To answer this question, the survey was conducted in all of 41 municipal offices in the Metropolis GZM². At the organizational level of sampling, after contact with the top management of the municipal offices, the employees were randomly chosen from the sample by managers who had access to employee lists in each municipal office. The number of employees depended on the number of inhabitants of the commune, i.e. 3 employees were examined in each municipal office in the 26 communes with the number of inhabitants below 50 000 and 5 employees were examined in each municipal office in the 15 communes with the number of inhabitants above 50 000 (Table 1). Data was processed by means of SPSS 27.0 and Amos 27.0. Sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Total number of respondents		153
Inhabitants of the commune:		No. of respondents
< 20000 (22 communes)		66 employees
[20001: 50000] (4 communes)		12 employees
[50001: 100000] (6 communes)		30 employees
100000 > (9 communes)		45 employees
Average age (years)		41.3
Education (%)	Master's degree	81.7
	Bachelor's degree	11.8
	Post-secondary education	6.5
Gender	Women	122
	Men	31

Source: own study.

All scales used were previously validated in the Polish organizations and they were scored on the seven-point Likert's scale (ranging from 1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree).

Organizational learning climate was measured by the Hult et al. (2002) scale encompassing four subscales representing diverse dimensions of the learning climate (16 items), i.e. learning, team, system, and memory orientations. Each subscale encompassed four items. The value of Cronbach's alpha coefficients of subscales ranged from 0.72 to 0.91, what indicated their high internal consistency.

LMX was measured with the use of Liden and Maslyn's (1998) scale that also encompassed four subscales representing diverse LMX dimensions (12 items), i.e. affect, professional respect, loyalty, and contribution. The value of Cronbach's alpha coefficients of subscales varied from 0.79 to 0.95 what shows high homogeneity of the scale.

OEP was assessed by Wronka's scale (2014) based on the Cornforth's (2001) study. It encompassed three subscales (10 items) of key dimensions of the OEP of public administration organizations, i.e. the accomplishment of the organizational mission and goals, social legitimization of actions, and financial stability. The Cronbach's alpha of the subscales ranged from 0.83 to 0.86.

² See the GZM location on the map: <https://infogzm.metropoliagzm.pl/infomapa.html>.

Results

First, the conducted Pearson's correlation analysis revealed significant correlations between the variables examined, what justified carrying out further analyses (Table 2).

In order to test the proposed model of relationships the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis was conducted in the next step. The maximum likelihood method was applied for the estimation of the model (Fig. 2). The analysis was conducted with the use of the mean scores of the scales because of a large number of variables (van der Heijde et al. 2018). Traditional indicators such as Chi² test, Chi²/df, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (Steiger-Linda test; RMSEA), the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) were used to assess the goodness of fit of the model to the empirical data (Szcześniak 2009). These are the most commonly applied goodness-of-fit tests of the estimated model.

The proposed conceptual model assumed that the LMX affects the OEP directly and indirectly, i.e. through its impact on organizational learning climate which in turn influences the OEP (Model 1). Therefore, organizational learning climate partly mediates relationships between the LMX and the OEP (Fig. 1). First the value of the Chi² statistic traditionally used to assess the model fit was applied. Based on the results obtained, it could be concluded that, the theoretical model differs significantly from the empirical one (Szcześniak 2009). However, the usefulness of the Chi² test, especially for a large number of variables, is limited. Therefore, the Chi²/df statistic becomes widely used because it is acknowledged as a more reliable (Byrne 2001).

SEM analysis revealed that though the first model (Model 1) was acceptably fitted to empirical data (Chi²/df = 1.991; GFI = 0.924; CFI = 0.964; RMSEA = 0.081) (MacCallum et al. 1996), the direct impact of the LMX on the OEP was not significant ($\gamma = 0.002$; $p = 0.987$). Because it did not mean that it was the best possible model, thus subsequently an alternative model considering only indirect impact of the LMX on the OEP was analyzed (Konarski 2009). A full mediation is confirmed if a direct path between predictors and outcomes (i.e. between the LMX and the OEP) does not significantly increase the fit of the model to empirical data and does not result in an insignificant indirect path (Model 2) (Judge, Colquitt 2004). On the contrary, the SEM analysis exhibited that the second model (Model 2) including only an indirect path was slightly better matched to the data (Chi²/df = 1.937; GFI = 0.924; CFI = 0.965; RMSEA = 0.079) and the direct impact of LMX on the OEP was not significant, hence a full mediation of learning climate was found (Table 3). It was revealed that the LMX had a significant positive influence on the learning climate ($\gamma = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$), which in turn positively affected the OEP ($\beta = 1.1$, $p < 0.01$) (Fig. 2).

Additionally, an independence model assuming the lack of relationships between the variables was also verified but it showed a poor fit to empirical data (Table 3).

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and Pearson's correlation rates of variables examined

No.	Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	Affect	5.56	1.15	-													
2	Professional respect	5.64	1.23	0.779**	-												
3	Loyalty	4.94	1.19	0.667**	0.646**	-											
4	Contribution	5.66	0.93	0.630**	0.590**	0.459**	-										
5	LMX (generally)	5.45	0.97	0.908**	0.899**	0.827**	0.760**	-									
6	Team orientation	4.86	1.12	0.357**	0.376**	0.380**	0.295**	0.417**	-								
7	System orientation	5.14	1.07	0.295**	0.319**	0.327**	0.296**	0.364**	0.765**	-							
8	Learning orientation	5.36	0.96	0.228**	0.310**	0.178*	0.358**	0.310**	0.513**	0.501**	-						
9	Memory orientation	4.58	1.21	0.297**	0.333**	0.338**	0.284**	0.369**	0.693**	0.563**	0.529**	-					
10	Learning climate (generally)	4.99	0.91	0.354**	0.401**	0.372**	0.366**	0.438**	0.896**	0.847**	0.743**	0.849**	-				
11	Financial stability	4.79	1.19	0.234**	0.370**	0.221**	0.161*	0.297**	0.499**	0.503**	0.390**	0.424**	0.544**	-			
12	Social legitimization of actions	5.33	1.02	0.390**	0.456**	0.333**	0.341**	0.449**	0.625**	0.639**	0.429**	0.517**	0.663**	0.587**	-		
13	Achievement of organizational mission and goals	5.63	0.87	0.301**	0.314**	0.204*	0.338**	0.336**	0.649**	0.702**	0.563**	0.450**	0.703**	0.420**	0.694**	-	
14	OEP (generally)	5.25	0.87	0.361**	0.455**	0.300**	0.321**	0.425**	0.692**	0.716**	0.536**	0.548**	0.745**	0.830**	0.895**	0.800**	-

Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

Source: own study.

Table 3. The goodness of fit of the models examined

Model	Chi ²	df	p	Chi ² /df	CFI	GFI	RMSEA
Model 1	71.67	36	0.00	1.991	0.964	0.924	0.081
Model 2	71.67	37	0.00	1.937	0.965	0.924	0.079
Independence model	1035.38	55	0.00	18.825	0	0.316	0.342
Acceptable levels	–	–	>0.05	≤4–5	>0.9	>0.9	≤0.08

Source: own study.

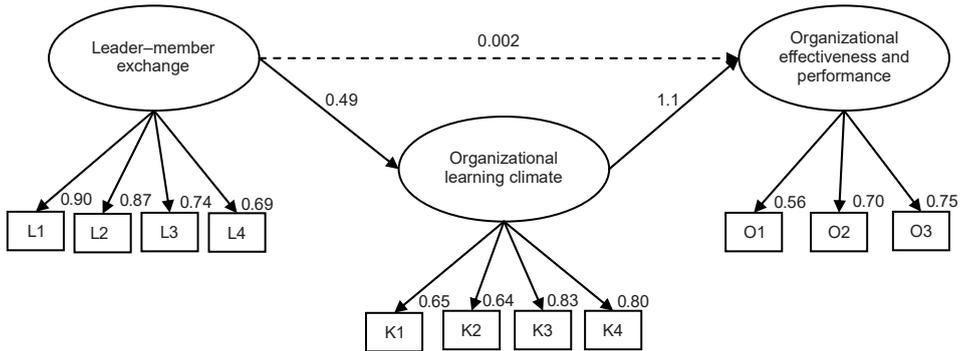


Fig. 2. The model of the relations between variables examined

Note: L_i, K_i, O_i – dimensions of the latent variables examined. The standardized regression weights are presented in the model. Only the key relationships are shown for reasons of simplicity. All factor loadings marked by a full line are significant at the 0.001 level.

Source: own study.

Discussion and conclusions

The results of the research allowed to answer the posed research question concerning the relationships between the LMX, learning climate, and the OEP in public administration organizations and to build the empirical model of these relations (Fig. 2). The conducted analyses showed that the quality of LMX positively influenced the organizational learning climate, which in turn positively affected the OEP. However, contrary to the conceptual model assumed, it was also discovered that the organizational learning climate fully mediated the relationships between the LMX and the OEP. The study revealed that the LMX did not have a significant direct impact on the OEP but only indirect one through learning climate, which influenced the OEP of the examined organizations. This fact may be considered as the key finding of this research because it emphasizes the significance of organizational climate and its impact on organizational performance and effectiveness, which is an issue rarely examined in the Polish public administration.

These findings also highlight the importance of social aspects of management in public administration organizations, often neglected in previous research conducted in the public administration organizations. The results showed that the

work environment based on positive relations between supervisors and subordinates and organizational climate encouraging employees' learning and development should be created in public administration organizations to increase their effectiveness and performance.

The value of this study also stems from the fact that the study concerns performance and effectiveness in the public administration organizations. Assessment of the OEP of these organizations is a very complex issue because many of their traditional indicators are of little use in public administration organizations due to their specificity. Additionally in the context of scarcity of knowledge on factors conditioning organizational effectiveness and performance of public administration, it is a particularly important epistemic and practical challenge to identify its predictors. In this context it should be stressed that the OEP of local public administration determines the quality of many basic public services and regional development. In the era of growing social requirements and demands regarding these issues it is necessary to put more attention on the OEP of public administration organizations. The increase of the OEP needs to become the key goal of municipal offices which want to stay competitive as public services providers and become a driver of regional development (Skotnicka-Zasadzień, Wolniak 2011). Some researchers even maintain that nowadays regional development has become one of the most important tasks of public administration (e.g. Wlazlak 2010, Fleszer 2011).

The carried out study has some limitations which should be discussed and which also suggest the probable directions of future research. This study focused on the impact of the LMX and organizational learning climate on the OEP. Other predictors of the OEP should be identified in public administration organizations. In a further study a particularly important issue will be the analysis of the effect of specific features of these organizations such as an extended hierarchy, an authoritarian leadership style, rigid procedures, etc. on the OEP. It should be also stressed that in this study organizations, i.e. municipal offices were the subject of the examination and the study encompassed all municipal offices in the GZM. However, despite this fact the sample of employees participating in the study was not representative due to inability to get complete employees' sampling frame because personal data are secured (the Personal Data Protection Act 1997) which could allow to determine the representative sample size in each organization. Therefore, the obtained findings should not be generalized and they can be treated as a specific case study.

Furthermore, because of the specificity of employment in municipal offices, the sample of survey participants was homogeneous regarding its demographic features such as age, gender, educational level, position etc. but the previous research showed that they can affect organizational climate and the LMX (Thomas 2008, Truxillo, Burlacu 2016). Therefore their moderating effects on the relationships examined could not be analyzed.

The results obtained are in consonance with the new ideas of public management, which stress the role of human and social factors of public administration in enhancing its performance. High-performing local public administration

organizations should become a driver of regional socio-economic development. During the influx of the Ukrainian refugees and the growing economic crisis their role is becoming more and more important. However, the accomplishment of this goal will only be possible if public administration organizations create organizational conditions which encourage employees' learning and competencies development and in consequence organizational performance. As this study proved, undoubtedly these conditions encompass creating positive relationships between employees and supervisors as well as organizational learning climate in local public administration.

Acknowledgements

This paper has been prepared based on the data of the research project entitled "Motivation as part of human resource management in public service providers" carried out in the Department of Public Management & Social Science, University of Economics in Katowice.

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Rola LMX i klimatu organizacyjnego w poprawie wyników i efektywności lokalnej administracji publicznej: dowód z Metropolii GZM

Zarys treści: Wraz z transformacją administracji publicznej i pojawieniem się nowych koncepcji zarządzania publicznego poprawa wyników działania i efektywności lokalnej administracji publicznej stała się ważnym celem polityki regionalnej w wielu krajach. Jednak aby poprawa taka była możliwa, konieczne jest rozpoznanie w tych organizacjach czynników ją warunkujących. W konsekwencji celem artykułu jest określenie wpływu na wyniki działania i efektywność lokalnej administracji publicznej takich czynników organizacyjnych, jak: jakość relacji między przełożonym a podwładnym i organizacyjny klimat uczenia się. Artykuł prezentuje rezultaty badań ankietowych przeprowadzonych we wszystkich 41 urzędach miasta/gminy Górnośląsko-Zagłębiowskiej Metropolii (GZM). Model związków odnośnie do jakości relacji wymiany między liderem a członkami zespołu (LMX), organizacyjnym

klimatem uczenia się oraz wynikami działania i efektywnością (OEP) urzędów miasta/gminy został poddany analizie z wykorzystaniem modelowania równań strukturalnych (SEM).

Słowa kluczowe: jakość relacji między liderem a członkiem zespołu (LMX), klimatem uczenia się, wyniki działania i efektywność organizacji (OEP), administracja publiczna