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# TURNOVER OF EMPLOYEES WITH EMPLOYABILITY MARKET ORIENTATION VERSUS AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF SUPERIOR SUPPORT, ROLE AND INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL EMPLOYABILITY

#### Anna PAWŁOWSKA

Warsaw University, Management Department; annap@wz.uw.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0001-8534-3317

**Purpose:** The objective of this article is to show that superior support, a clear role and intraorganisational employability are intangible ways to build affective commitment, thus reducing expensive turnover of employees who display Employability Market Orientation (EMO) and might intend to quit their jobs. The research was partially financed by the IDUB micro-grant of the University of Warsaw.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The research was conducted using the CAWI method on a representative sample of adult Poles (N = 1712) in 2019 and 2021. Nine hypotheses have been verified based on the Pearson's r coefficient and a multiple regression analysis.

**Findings:** Seven established hypotheses assuming the existence of mutual relationships between employment duration, EMO, affective commitment, intra-organisational employability, superior support, and role have been confirmed. A direct relationship between employment duration and intra-organisational employability as well as affective commitment and role has not been confirmed. There was no evidence of a relationship between the studied phenomena and gender and age.

**Research limitations/implications:** The prediction that employees with the Employability Market Orientation are one of the sources of employee turnover has been confirmed. It has been shown that with a high level of this attitude, longer employment duration is possible if the human resources management process leads to employees' affective commitment and the possibility of their building intra-organisational employability. The condition for this is that superiors provide support and ensure that the employee's role is clear.

**Practical implications:** Thanks to the research results, practitioners obtained tips on how to retain employees and reduce employee turnover.

**Originality/value:** This research expands the knowledge about employees adapted to the shortterm employment rules and about the development of a transactional psychological contract. The importance of Employability Market Orientation and intangible motivators has been confirmed as regards turnover reduction. **Keywords:** affective commitment, employee turnover, Employability Market Orientation, intra-organisational employability, superior, role.

Category of the paper: research paper.

### 1. Introduction

Today, one of dominant problems identified by human resource managers is high employee turnover and low employee loyalty, often associated with a lack of engagement and commitment to the organisation (PARP, 2020; 2022). The reasons for this situation include the employee market and the need to compete and "fight for talents" (Deloitte, 2016). This is reflected in actions aimed at attracting employees such as poaching (Wechta, 2015; Stankiewicz et al., 2018), which was indicated by 64.8% of respondents already in 2015 (Hajec, 2016).

This article focuses on the causes of turnover ensuing from emoplyees' individual decisions to quit their jobs and their possible susceptibility to such influences. One particular reason is the emerging para-trade employer-employee relationship based on a transactional psychological contract in parallel to the formal and legal one, which results in the end of lifetime employment with one employer (Pawłowska et al., 2014).

Only every fourth employee in the general group of respondents does not expect a change of employer, as compared to 76% of those willing to do so (Hays, 2021). Research and practice show that even the conclusion of a long-term contract with appropriate clauses is not a sufficient safeguard against this (Feng et al., 2017). This is due to the situation of employees on today's labour market. They function as the employed, while also being entities with their professional portfolio to offer to another employer. The temptation to change the employer is strong in view of the demand-supply structure of the labour market where the employee is in a privileged position. This situation becomes very serious from the point of view of the profitability of enterprises and their competitive advantage built on the basis of their competence portfolio (Boudreau et al., 2013). Its shape is determined, among others, by efficient human resource management processes aimed at attracting, retaining and optimising the number of employees in order to maximise the efficiency of the organisation's operations (Dessler, 2016; Armstrong, 2017). Undoubtedly, the methods of retaining employees used in accordance with the strategy of achieving the goals of the organisation determine the organisation's financial condition and competitiveness (Ulrich et al., 2010). Meanwhile, some market data indicate that the dominant approach to retaining employees involves higher wages (cf. Łukaszewicz, 2022) or a number of tangible bonuses. It is probably an important motivational aspect, yet it causes an increase in the organisation's operating costs and reduces its profitability and resilience to competition. Hence, it seems important that reliable research offers pro-efficient solutions by identifying other, intangible aspects of management that will help retain employees and reduce their costly turnover.

This issue is particularly complex in relation to employees who have adapted to the rules of short-term employment and are not afraid of losing their jobs. People with this attitude can be identified by measuring their Employability Market Orientation (EMO).

According to previous studies, these are people who are characterised by a low level of job insecurity and high employability, which guarantees that they will find another employer quickly. The question is whether there are aspects of human resource management that can be explored to keep people who are inherently open to quitting their jobs and therefore difficult to retain. All the more so as previous studies indicate that their willingness to change the employer does not depend on the type of employment contract or wages, i.e. the traditionally used methods of influence (Pawłowska, 2020).

The results of research on a representative sample of adult Poles presented in this article are a search for an answer to the question of whether there are intangible, available and employer-controllable methods that can be followed to retain such employees<sup>1</sup>.

First, the research established the number of people with the Employability Market Orientation in the sample in order to estimate the scale of the phenomenon and potential problems for employers. Subsequently, such employees were tested for their ability to display affective commitment as a significant determinant of the employee staying with a given employer for longer. Finally, a link was identified between these variables and the potential to build intra-organisational employability provided that support is ensured by the employer and the role in the organisation is clearly defined. The rationale for such a research approach is outlined further in this study.

# 2. An employee with the Employability Market Orientation versus affective commitment and employment duration

Employability Market Orientation (EMO) is an adaptive pattern of employee behaviours in response to flexible human resource management resulting in a change of the psychological contract from relational to transactional. It comprises five types of behaviours, identified by extrapolation of the marketing approach to the level of an individual: Career Exploration, Future Time Perspective, Vocational Self-Concept Crystallisation, Career Planning, and Career Strategy Implementation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Research in 2021 financed by a micro-grant of the Excellence Initiative – Research University (Polish acronym: IDUB) of the University of Warsaw.

EMO serves to build employability and marketability of the employee, ultimately leading to the reduction of job insecurity (Pawłowska, 2017). It is the result of employees fulfilling the role of workpreneurs on the labour market (Frey et al., 2015). Such people are more inclined to change employers than others because, although working for a given employer, they also contact competing employers.

It should be clearly noted that turnover is a term referring to the general organisational processes related to the departure of employees. Meanwhile, in this article, the problem is analysed from the perspective of an employee's individual decision that, however, leads to problems throughout the entire organisation. Of note is that the employer can exert much less influence on such employees to retain them. Therefore, one of specific objectives of the presented research was to check the distribution of the EMO variable in a representative sample of Poles. In this way, the level of this phenomenon and possible challenges for employers resulting from the need to retain employees with EMO was estimated.

Simultaneously, it was assumed a certain range of possibilities exists to exert influence by developing an adequate human resource management process. Hence, it was checked whether the adoption of the Employability Market Orientation could be associated with the manifestation of affective commitment to the organisation at the same time. According to the definition that is in line with the concept by Meyer and Allen (1991), commitment is a mental state that binds an individual to the workplace and determines his or her willingness to stay with the organisation or leave it.

This concept assumes three types of people's commitment to the organisation: affective, continuance, and normative (Bańka et al., 2002). To achieve the set research goals, affective commitment was chosen. It means the employee's emotional commitment to and identification with the organisation for which he or she works. This follows from studies that indicate that such commitment involves a job-related positive feeling (Wołowska, 2013) and a state of mind that results in employees who feel it being less prone to quit their jobs (Spik et al., 2012).

In addition, studies have confirmed the relationship between affective commitment and employee absenteeism (Mathieu et al., 1990).

For clarity of the adopted terminology, it should be noted here that scientific publications frequently use the concepts of organisational commitment and engagement interchangeably, while they refer to different aspects of the employee's functioning in the work environment (Juchnowicz, 2012). In these dimensions, Armstrong (2010) describes four types of employees who may be strongly or weakly committed while being strongly or weakly engaged. An employee who is committed to the organisation does not have to be engaged at the same time. Hence the need to distinguish between these two concepts.

Summing up, it should be presumed that there is a strong case for seeking connections between EMO and affective commitment in the context of employees' individual decisions to quit their jobs. In order to verify these assumptions, the following hypotheses were put forward:

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between employment duration and EMO.Hypothesis 2: There is a relationship between EMO and affective commitment.Hypothesis 3: There is a relationship between employment duration and affective commitment.

# 3. The employer's impact on employee turnover – intra-organisational employability with superior support and a clear role

The specificity of EMO ensues from the fact that employees build such a position on the labour market that offers employment opportunities in the event of job loss and results in their sensing a low level of job insecurity (Pawłowska, 2017). Therefore, it can be assumed that if employees feel that their employment situation allows for building their position and role – i.e. intra-organisational employability – in the longer term, they will be less likely to leave (Sanchez-Manjavacas et al., 2020).

A. De Vos, S. De Hauw, and B.I.J.M. Van der Heijden (2011) demonstrated a relationship between employability and job satisfaction. This is confirmed by the outcomes of a Randstad survey (Randstad...) which show that employees appreciate development opportunities. Therefore, the presented research adopts a definition of employability as self-perceived and self-assessed possibility to maintain the job so that employees are convinced that their competences are used and needed by the current employer (Kampkötter et al., 2018). This is confirmed by studies that have identified a strong relationship between EMO and employability (Pawłowska, 2017; 2020).

Subsequently, it can be presupposed that in such a situation, employee affective commitment will develop. This is confirmed by Meyer and Allen (1997), who see affective commitment as developing with job satisfaction that can ensue from the sense of importance at the workplace, one's own contribution to the functioning of the organisation, and received support. In research conducted by the British government agency Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (Kwestionariusz Źródeł Stresu...), a lack of such a sense and support is a potential source of organisational stress that reduces the efficiency of employees. This concerns the availability of superior support such as constructive feedback or assistance while performing emotionally difficult work. It should be clearly emphasised that this measurement refers directly to one's ability to perform professional duties efficiently. It does not cover such issues as the atmosphere and quality of interpersonal relations or the occurrence of mobbing. In the context of the perception of intra-organisational employability, it was considered important to verify the meaning of the "role" dimension from among the aforementioned sources of organisational stress. The role is highlighted, for example, by Oleksyn (2006) in the context of competence management. Under the adopted approach, it is related to the assessment of whether the

employee understands his or her role in the organisation and whether the work organisation can lead to, for instance, a role conflict.

In connection with such understanding, it can be predicted that the support and role may be crucial from the point of view of building intra-organisational employability of employee displaying EMO and affective commitment. Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 4: There is a relationship between intra-organisational employability and affective commitment.

Hypothesis 5: There is a relationship between intra-organisational employability and support.

Hypothesis 6: There is a relationship between intra-organisational employability and role.

Hypothesis 7: There is a relationship between intra-organisational employability and employment duration.

Hypothesis 8: There is a relationship between affective commitment and support.

Hypothesis 9: There is a relationship between affective commitment and role.

In the presented research, a relationship between EMO and employability was examined as it was confirmed by several other studies. The same applies to wages, which are related neither to EMO nor to the type of sector (public or private) (Pawłowska, 2017, 2020).

### 4. Research schema and applied diagnostic tools

The research was carried out through the CAWI method by a specialised research agency on a representative sample of working and non-working Poles aged 18-65. The structure of the nationwide sample reflects the gender and size of the place of residence in the population.

The study took place in two stages:

- stage I in December 2019 823 respondents,
- stage II in December 2021 (during the pandemic) 889 respondents.

A total of 1712 respondents were surveyed. EMO and intra-organisational employability were checked at both stages. On the other hand, the variables of employment duration, affective commitment, superior support and role were diagnosed in the second measurement.

The **Employability Market Orientation** (**EMO**) variable was diagnosed by means of a questionnaire developed by A. Pawłowska (2017). It consists of 28 items and a high value of Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 allows this tool to be considered a reliable diagnostic instrument. Each respondent's result was calculated as the sum of responses for all subscales, divided by five, i.e. the number of scales.

To measure **employability**, four questions from the General Employability (MAE) indicator as developed by A. Pawłowska (2017) were asked, for example: "There are numerous development opportunities for me in my workplace." "I am perceived as a valuable employee

by my company." It includes two components: employability and marketability of the employee.

Affective commitment was diagnosed with the use of six questions from Allen and Meyer's Organisational Commitment Scale (1997). Its Polish adaptation was translated by A. Bańka, A. Wołoska, R. Bazińska (2002).

The **role and superior support** were diagnosed by means of appropriate scales from the Organisational Stress Sources Questionnaire developed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). "Superior support" was diagnosed with five questions, for example: "I receive constructive comments and feedback on my work"; "I am supported in emotionally difficult work." In turn, "role" was diagnosed with five questions, for example: "I know how to carry out the tasks entrusted to me"; "I know how my role fits in with the overall goals of the organisation."

**Employment duration** is an indicator that was constructed as a relation of how long the employee had been working for the current employer to his or her age. This is due to the fact that in the studied group, a strong correlation (Pearson's r 0.49, p < 0.05) was identified between the duration of employment with the current employer and age. This approach replaced the measurement of the propensity to change employers as a declarative variable which had already been used in other studies (see Pawłowska, 2020). Hence, this variable is called **Relative Employment Duration**.

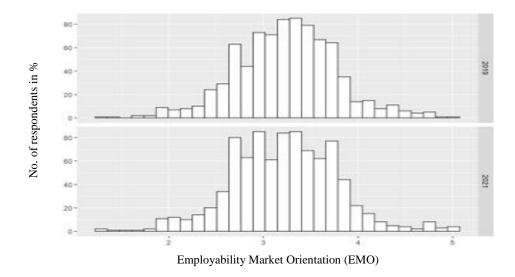
For all variables, the respondents answered the questions on the basis of a five-point Likert scale (1: I strongly disagree - 5: I strongly agree). The exceptions are two (out of five) EMO subscales, where the respondents provided answers on a four-point scale (1: very rarely - 4: very often).

The hypotheses were verified with the use of the Pearson's r coefficient and a multiple regression analysis.

#### 5. Research results and their analysis

# 5.1. Distribution of EMO in the studied sample and sociodemographic characteristics of respondents with Employability Market Orientation

As can be seen in the figure, the frequency distribution of the EMO variable in both 2019 and 2021, when the measurement was performed, has a similar shape resembling normal distribution. At the same time, the differences between the average levels of Employability Market Orientation (EMO) in 2019 and 2021 were not statistically significant.



**Figure 1.** The frequency distribution of Employability Market Orientation (EMO) in 2019 and 2021. Source: own elaboration based on the research results.

The multiple regression analysis (Table 1) revealed that respondents with EMO can perform managerial functions and are less likely to be younger, yet the % of the explained variance is very low. No relationship was found with education, gender and type of employment contract (Pawłowska, 2017, 2020). This result undermines the belief that the employer can retain employees by offering a particular type of employment contract.

#### Table 1.

*Multiple regression results – Employability Market Orientation (EMO) as a variable dependent on sociodemographic variables* 

| Predictor/dependent variable  | <b>Employability Market Orientation</b> (EMO) * * |  |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
|                               | $R^2 = 0.5252$                                    |  |
| Managerial/non-managerial job | 0.182***  |  |
| Age                           | -0.005***   |  |

The sign next to the dependent variable refers to the significance level of the regression model. The adjusted R-squared value is given below. Education, type of employment contract and gender – insignificant.

\* \* \* p < .001.

Source: own elaboration based on the research results.

The number of respondents with a low, medium and high EMO level in both measurements is similar. This variable remains at the medium level for most respondents. It is therefore confirmed that EMO can be a source of problems for employers.

# **5.2.** Means, standard deviations and Pearson's r correlation coefficients for the diagnosed variables

Table 2 below contains a summary of means and standard deviations for all diagnosed variables for the entire study sample (N = 1712).

|      | Mean  | Standard deviation |
|------|-------|--------------------|
| EMO  | 3.18  | 0.55               |
| MAEW | 3.4   | 0.64               |
| AC   | 3.12  | 0.76               |
| SS   | 3.27  | 0.79               |
| RL   | 3.77  | 0.67               |
| RED  | 0.2   | 0.17               |
| Age  | 42.87 | 13.33              |

## Means and standard deviations for the diagnosed variables in 2019 and 2021

Designations: Intra-organisational employability (MAEW); Employability Market Orientation (EMO); Affective commitment (AC); Relative employment duration (RED); Superior support (SS); Role (RL).

Source: own elaboration based on the conducted research.

Table 3 below shows Pearson's r correlation coefficients displaying the relationships between the diagnosed variables.

#### Table 3.

Table 2.

Cross table of statistically significant Pearson's r correlation coefficients of the diagnosed variables

|        | EMO     | MAEW    | AC      | SS      | RL      | RED     | Age     | Gender  |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| EMO    |         | 0.67    | 0.41    | 0.38    | 0.32    | -0.1    | insign. | insign. |
| MAEW   | 0.67    |         | 0.44    | 0.47    | 0.43    | insign. | insign. | insign. |
| AC     | 0.41    | 0.44    |         | 0.63    | 0.36    | insign. | insign. | insign. |
| SS     | 0.38    | 0.47    | 0.63    |         | 0.51    | insign. | insign. | insign. |
| RL     | 0.32    | 0.43    | 0.36    | 0.51    |         | insign. | 0.15    | insign. |
| RED    | -0.1    | insign. | insign. | insign. | insign. |         | -       | insign. |
| Age    | insign. | insign. | insign. | insign. | 0.15    | -       |         | insign. |
| Gender | insign. |         |

All Pearson's r correlation coefficients are statistically significant at the level of p < 0.05; insign. – insignificant. Designations: MAEW – Intra-organisational employability; EMO– Employability Market Orientation; AC– Affective commitment; RED – Relative employment duration; SS – Superior support; RL – Role.

Source: own elaboration based on the conducted research.

As can be seen, the age and gender of the respondents do not matter for the analysed variables. Relative employment duration does not reveal a statistically significant correlation with any of the variables taken into account, which is inconsistent with theoretical predictions in this respect and requires more in-depth analyses. The more so because statistically significant relationships between the other variables were identified. Therefore, the hypotheses were verified on the basis of a multiple regression analysis as described in the next chapter.

#### 5.3. Verification of the hypotheses based on a multiple regression analysis

In the multiple regression analysis for relative employment duration (Table 4), it turned out that while EMO, affective commitment and support are significant, the percentage of the explained variance is low.

## Table 4.

Multiple regression results for the dependent variable of relative employment duration (RED)

| Predictor/dependent variable | <b>Relative employment duration (RED)</b> * * * |  |  |
|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| -                            | $R^2 = 0.1702$                                  |  |  |
| EMO                          | -0.057***                                       |  |  |
| MAEW                         | insign.   |  |  |
| AC                           | 0.032**   |  |  |
| SS                           | -0.029*   |  |  |
| RL                           | insign.   |  |  |
| Gender                       | insign.   |  |  |

The sign next to the dependent variable refers to the significance level of the regression model. The adjusted R-squared value is given below. Designations: MAEW – Intra-organisational employability; EMO – Employability Market Orientation; AC – Affective commitment; RED – Relative employment duration; SS – Superior support; RL – Role.

insign. – insignificant

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01.

\* \* \* p < .001.

Source: own elaboration based on the research results.

It is worth emphasising that, as expected, there is a negative correlation between EMO and the relative duration of employment with a given employer. This means that the higher the EMO level, the more likely the employee will be to resign (shorter employment duration). It is thus one of the sources of employee turnover and a justification for research into how to retain such employees.

Simultaneously, based on the Person's r correlation coefficient, a relationship was found between EMO and affective commitment. An in-depth analysis (Tables 5 and 6) shows that self-perceived intra-organisational employability (more than 40 per cent of the explained variance) is of particular importance for EMO, which brings about affective commitment but may co-occur with shorter employment duration. Thus, hypotheses 1 and 2 are confirmed.

## Table 5.

*Multiple regression results for the dependent variable of Employability Market Orientation (EMO)* 

| Predictor/dependent variable | Employability Market Orientation (EMO) * * * |  |  |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|
|                              | $R^2 = 0.3927$                               |  |  |
| MAEW                         | 0.543***                                     |  |  |
| AC                           | 0.103***                                     |  |  |
| RED                          | -0.203*                                      |  |  |
| SS                           | insign.                                      |  |  |
| RL                           | insign.                                      |  |  |
| Age                          | -0.006***                                    |  |  |
| Gender                       | insign.                                      |  |  |

The sign next to the dependent variable refers to the significance level of the regression model. The adjusted R-squared value is given below. Designations: MAEW – Intra-organisational employability; EMO – Employability Market Orientation; AC – Affective commitment; RED – Relative employment duration; SS – Superior support; RL – Role.

insign.-insignificant

\*p < .05.

\*\*p < .01. \* \* \* p < .001.

Source: own elaboration based on the research results.

Interesting results were obtained for the multiple regression analysis for affective commitment as the dependent variable (Table 6). Over 50 per cent of the variance is explained by superior support and – importantly – in connection with EMO and relative employment duration. Affectively committed respondent may have a high level of EMO and will work longer if they receive support from their superiors. The role and intra-organisational employability do not matter.

Thus, the supposition was confirmed that this may be one of intangible motivators for employees to stay. Therefore, there are no grounds to reject hypotheses 2, 3 and 8. However, hypotheses 4 and 9 were not confirmed.

#### Table 6.

Multiple regression results for affective commitment (AC) as the dependent variable

| Predictor/dependent variable | Affective commitment (AC) * * * |  |  |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|--|
|                              | $R^2 = 0.577$                   |  |  |
| EMO                          | 0.216***                        |  |  |
| MAEW                         | insign.                         |  |  |
| RED                          | 0.292 *                         |  |  |
| SS                           | 0.519***                        |  |  |
| RL                           | insign.                         |  |  |
| Age                          | insign.                         |  |  |
| Gender                       | insign.                         |  |  |

The sign next to the dependent variable refers to the significance level of the regression model. The adjusted R-squared value is given below. Designations: MAEW – Intra-organisational employability; EMO – Employability Market Orientation; AC – Affective commitment; RED – Relative employment duration; SS – Superior support; RL – Role.

insign. – insignificant p < .05. \*\*p < .01.

\* \* \* p < .001.

Source: own elaboration based on the research results.

Finally, hypotheses 5 and 6 about the significance of the perceived intra-organisational employability were verified. They were confirmed because this variable was positively correlated with support and role, as was the relationship with affective commitment discussed above. The multiple regression model (Table 7) revealed that respondent displaying it show, above all, a high level of EMO (over 60% of the explained variance). The role and superior support also turned out to be of minor importance. Data were identified to reject hypothesis 7.

#### Table 7.

*Multiple regression results for the dependent variable of intra-organisational employability* (*MAEW*)

| Predictor/dependent variable | Intra-organisational employability (MAEW) * * * |
|------------------------------|---|
|                              | $R^2 = 0.428$                                   |
| EMO                          | 0.628***  |
| AC                           | insign.   |
| RED                          | insign.   |
| SS                           | 0.095**   |
| RL                           | 0.168***  |
| Age                          | 0.004**   |
| Gender                       | 0.071*  |

The sign next to the dependent variable refers to the significance level of the regression model. The adjusted R-squared value is given below. Designations: MAEW – Intra-organisational employability; EMO – Employability Market Orientation; AC – Affective commitment; RED – Relative employment duration; SS – Superior support; RL – Role.

in sign.-in significant

\*p < .05.

\*\*p < .01.

\* \* \* p < .001.

Source: own elaboration based on the research results.

#### 5.4. Conclusion and practical implications

Out of nine hypotheses put forward, two were not confirmed. The first one concerns a relationship between intra-organisational employability and employment duration. The second one relates to a relationship between affective commitment and role. No grounds have been found for rejecting the remaining hypotheses.

It follows that employees with affective commitment can display EMO and work longer at a given workplace if they receive employer support at the same time. Intra-organisational employability is much less important, though it cannot be said to be insignificant. In this case, the significance of the role is also manifested.

A solution that can reduce employee turnover resulting from individual decisions of employees with EMO is to develop affective commitment through superior support and a clear role so that employees can build intra-organisational employability.

#### 5.5. Limitations and further research studies

A major limitation of inference based on the obtained data results from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. Nonetheless, it should be noted that no differences have been established between the average levels of EMO in the years before and during the pandemic. Yet, it is worth repeating these studies in more stable circumstances and by means of qualitative research. In addition, it is worth analysing the data by testing the model through a confirmatory path analysis.

The analysis of the results presented in this article has confirmed the prediction that employees with EMO are one of the sources of employee turnover, which justifies further research on how to retain them until business goals are achieved. Undoubtedly, however, a certain fact should be accepted, namely that there are individuals with EMO on the labour market who are adapted to short-term employment and have a low sense of job insecurity. That is why efficient cooperation with them should be sought.

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