

# Perception of Ability-Motivation-Opportunity oriented HRM practices and organizational commitment: The role of task uncertainty

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## Abstract

*Using the premises of the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity theory, the main aim of the paper is to answer the question of how HRM practices affect individual commitment considering task uncertainty as for the important moderator of the relationships between HRM practices and commitment. For that purpose, we use data from 164 employees working in 32 teams in international recruitment and selection agency departments located in Poland. We find out that HR practices differently affect organizational commitment. In particular, HR practices focused on fostering employees' motivation and creating opportunities within organizations positively influence affective commitment, while HR practices focused on fostering employees' abilities are negatively related to continuance commitment. Further, we also find that task uncertainty significantly moderates the relationship between HR practices and continuance commitment. The study finishes with theoretical and practical implications and future research directions.*

**Keywords:** *ability-motivation-opportunity, AMO theory, HRM practices, organizational commitment, task uncertainty*

## INTRODUCTION

Organizational decision-makers and boards of directors in particular, among others, expect employees to commit to firm performance. However, individual actions rarely lead to above-average organization-level outcomes.

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Collective actions are clearly necessary for firm performance to occur. That is why organizations invest in human resource management (HRM) practices that focus on developing competencies, abilities and motivation, and create appropriate conditions for employee behaviors beneficial for the whole organization. HRM practitioners, trying to justify their value to organizations, invest their time and efforts in developing a concise, holistic set of HRM practices targeted towards achieving organizational outcomes. However, literature recommendations and scholarly activities have so far failed to recommend a universally effective set of practices. While a single HRM practice does not lead to any significant increase in performance levels, scholars have focused on diverse theoretical approaches – including best practice perspective, situational and configurational theories, and finishing with systems' level approach (Delery & Doty, 1997; Pauwe & Farndale, 2017). In 1995, Huselid published a ground-breaking paper demonstrating how a degree of sophistication in a human resource management (HRM) system influences the market value per employee, and the results of this study are constantly discussed in the literature (Glaister, Karacay, Demirbag, & Tatoglu, 2018). While answering the question regarding the influence per se, this study does not clearly explain how precisely HRM translates to organizational level outcomes. In the following years, scholars have focused on investigating mechanisms helping to understand the influence of HRM on organizational performance. Among diverse theories, researchers have recently come to the conclusion that HRM practices should focus on developing individual abilities and motivation and should help organizations to develop conditions that utilize these abilities and motivation for the purpose of organizational-level outcomes. This conception has been labeled AMO (understood as the ability to introduce human resource management policies, the individual motivation to do so, and the opportunity created within the organization (Rauch & Hatak, 2016), following previous studies carried out by Applebaum, Bailey, Berg and Kalleberg (2000) or Boon, Eckardt, Lepak, and Boselie (2018).

Delving into the relationship between HRM practices and AMO, the paper focuses on the HRM practices that concentrate on the development of one particular element of AMO, namely organizational commitment, which is perceived as the manifestation of individual motivation. However, to our best knowledge, the relationship between HRM and AMO does not exist in a vacuum, as there are diverse organizational and task characteristics that impact the effectiveness of HRM practices. From the plethora of organizational, team, and individual situational factors, we have chosen task uncertainty, a rarely investigated aspect of individual functioning within the organization (Sund, 2008). In particular, the main aim of the paper is to gain a better understanding of the influence of HRM practices on individual

commitment, considering task uncertainty as the important moderator of the relationship between HRM practices and commitment. To achieve this aim, we are using data from 164 employees working in 32 teams in international recruitment and selection agency departments located in Poland.

In the paper, we start with the literature review on the links between HRM practices, AMO theory and its linkages with firm performance. Further, we delve into the task uncertainty effect on the stated relationship. Next, we present the methodology and empirical research results followed by a discussion encompassing the implications for theory and practice as well as future research directions.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

### HRM and the firm performance: The missing link

HRM scholars and practitioners face the continuous challenge of demonstrating how HRM practices contribute to organizational performance (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). HRM, understood as the set of organizational policies crafted in order to maximize employee performance and commitment to meet organizational goals, has a long tradition in management and psychological literature (see Alagaraja, 2012). However, for years, human resource management researchers have struggled to identify the impact of HRM on diverse facets of organizational performance (Melton & Meier, 2016, pp. 118-130). HRM was linked with different individual, team and organizational level outcomes, including job satisfaction (Den Hartog, Boon, Verburg & Croon, 2013), employee commitment and engagement (Bal, Kooij & De Jong, 2013), individual (Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees & Gatenby, 2013) and organizational performance (Bou-Llusal, Beltrán-Martín, Roca-Puig & Escrig-Tena, 2016, Bryl, 2018), intentions to stay (Bal et. al., 2013) or leave (Van Dierendonck, Lankester, Zmyslona, & Rothweiler, 2016) the team or organization, as well as motivation (Jiang, Lepak, Hu & Baer, 2012) and innovativeness (Fay, Shipton & Patterson, 2015; Tesfaye & Kitaw, 2018) to mention a few. Nonetheless, studies have led to inconclusive results, and in consequence, to increased ambiguity and confusion among both scholars and practitioners (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). This can be attributed to the fact that HRM itself is a distant variable to diverse individual, team and organizational level outcomes. Thus, scholars have focused on various mechanisms that translate HRM practices employed by the organization to fuel diverse aspects of performance (Boxall, Guthrie, & Paauwe, 2016). The search for the mechanisms translating human resource management practices into

organizational performance has gone in different directions. Some scholars were searching for the reasons for exceptional organizational performance in the resource-based theory approach which focuses on valuable, rare, inimitable and organizable competencies (Jankowska, Mroczek-Dąbrowska, Gorynia, & Dzikowska, 2016; Kang, Snell, & Swart, 2012). However, these endeavors have led to inconclusive, or even mutually excluding, results. Another, widely accepted mechanism that forms a path from HRM practices to organizational level outcomes is the AMO theory, which we perceive and define as the ability to introduce human resource management policies, the individual motivation of decision-makers to do so, and the opportunities for employees created within the organization (Rauch & Hatak, 2016). In the paper we focus on the latter approach, concentrating attention on the AMO theory and HRM practices that foster ability, motivation, and lead to increased opportunities for employees to demonstrate behaviors profitable for the organization.

### **On the wings of AMO theory**

The origin of the AMO model lies in the continuous scientific discourse between industrial psychologists, who believe that performance is a function of hiring and training, and social psychologists, who assume that motivation is necessary to ensure performance (MacInnis & Jaworski, 1989). Actually, the roots of AMO can be found in Vroom's (1964) works, where he claims that performance is a function of both ability and motivation. However, this approach omits the external environment influence and focuses only on personal (individual) characteristics. This model was enriched by Blumberg and Pringle (1982) by the opportunity element reflecting working conditions, tools, materials, leader behaviors, procedures and time. These authors argued that individual performance is a result of capacity (C, i.e. abilities), willingness (W, i.e. motivation), and opportunity (O). All three elements are necessary for performance (P) to occur, if we assume that  $P = f(O \times C \times W)$ . Also, a low level of any of these dimensions would strongly, negatively affect levels of individual performance. The AMO framework was first, initially proposed 11 years after Blumberg and Pringle's (1982) work by Bailey (1993), and later developed by Applebaum et al. (2000).

More recently, Kaufman (2015) has argued that in order to achieve better performance, perceived as individual productivity, creativity, and discretionary effort, companies should focus on boosting the ability and motivation of employees while creating opportunities by giving them the necessary autonomy, tools, and power to make decisions. According to Jiang et al.

(2012), these three processes help to translate human resource management practices (or systems, broadly speaking) into organizational performance.

There are also other conceptualizations in regard to HRM practices. Complicating the landscape of AMO, Lin and Tang (2016) argue, that to understand complex relationships between HRM practices and performance, there is a necessary distinction to be made between High Performance Work Systems (HPWS) and High Commitment Work Systems (HCWS). HPWS, as the management approach, focuses on the direct influence on performance through attitudinal structuring, for example, skill formation, quality control, and performance management. On the other hand, HCWS focuses rather on encouraging employee commitment and involvement through practices such as in-company welfare and long-term commitment.

Ability – motivation – opportunity (AMO) theory, as proposed by Applebaum et al. (2000) focuses on helping to choose from HRM practices that foster organizational performance. According to Gerhart (2005) proper choice of HRM practices is essential for the conscious shaping of employee abilities (i.e. selection, hiring, and training), motivation (for example, performance-related pay), and opportunities to act (emphasizing teamwork, or suggestion systems). Later, Katou, and Budhwar (2010) divide HRM practices into three groups: HRM systems that influence ability to perform, motivation to perform, and an opportunity to perform. Finally, in this vein, Rauch and Hatak (2016) systematize and clearly define and distinguish HRM practice into three groups distinguishing: skill, motivation, and empowerment enhancing practices. Skill enhancing HR practices (Subramony, 2009) are aimed at increasing the knowledge, ability, and skill levels within the company, enabling staff to do their job properly. This group entangles two subgroups: HR practices focused on abilities, and that is primarily job selection; and HR practices focused on the development of knowledge and skill, and these can be shaped by interventions, particularly, training and coaching (Schmitt, 2014).

Motivation enhancing practices are, in turn, created to direct employee behaviors towards the aims of an organization by using the appropriate set of inducements. And these practices include, inter alia, performance management, compensation, incentive and reward practices (Jiang et al., 2012). In this approach, it should be noted that motivation-enhancing practices diverge from the organizational behavior literature (Deci & Ryan, 1985), where they focus mainly on extrinsic motivation by the focus on rewards and incentives. Finally, empowerment-enhancing practices are concentrated on developing employee autonomy, involvement into the decision-making processes, and increasing the responsibility of the employees, and feedback mechanisms (Mathieu, Gilson, & Ruddy, 2006; Wood & Wall, 2007).

To sum up, the discussion on AMO theory helps to formulate several implications. First, according to the AMO theory, HRM practices or systems tend to affect organizational performance indirectly, by enhancing individual abilities (or skills), motivation, and shaping conditions for creativity, responsibility, and taking an active part in an organization's life. Second, diverse HRM practices impact different elements of AMO, there are some practices that foster abilities, some focus on motivation, and some are considered to impact organizational conditions. Third, the studies on HR practices perceived as the antecedents of AMO are located at the intersection of management, psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior theories. Fourth, AMO refers to and entails diverse elements, including skills, abilities, knowledge, commitment, job satisfaction, decision-making, empowerment, responsibility, creativity and innovation, and others. It would be extremely difficult to study all the elements of AMO in one study due to the sheer number of diverse manifestations of AMO; thus researchers frequently focus on only one AMO manifestation at a time, for example, satisfaction, commitment, knowledge, decision-making, or creativity. Finally, some of the elements comprising the AMO theory are perceived as an important organizational goal per se. One of them is organizational commitment. In the following part of this paper, we focus on the answer to the question of how HRM practices help to foster organizational commitment, complicating this relationship by adding an important organizational characteristic – task uncertainty.

Based on the above discussion, we believe that there are strong arguments to assume that HRM practices lead to commitment, both individual and organizational. But, diverse HRM practices affect commitment in a different way – there are practices (compensation, incentives, rewards, performance appraisal) that affect commitment to a higher degree than other practices (including recruitment and selection, training, or decision-making possibilities). Thus, we hypothesize what follows:

H1: HRM practices foster the organizational commitment of employees.

H2: Different bundles of HRM practices influence organizational commitment diversely.

### **Task uncertainty: The neglected although influential characteristic of work**

Tasks performed by the employees and individual-level outcomes, including individual commitment, do not occur in a vacuum. There are diverse conditions that affect individual-level outcomes, and one of them is task uncertainty. As Collins and Jackson (2015) point out, increasing complexity and difficulty of tasks implies different approaches in leading employees,

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and, by analogy, different task uncertainty levels denote diverse approaches to the management of employees.

Task uncertainty is understood and defined in three terms: complexity, dynamism and the level of routinization, which corresponds to the Ben-Ner, Kong, and Lluís (2012) concept. In general, the construct of task uncertainty has received some research attention in the literature. Gibson (1999) argues that task uncertainty is strongly related to the level of knowledge of the relationships between efforts and actions and their results. It means that task uncertainty is larger when employees are not sure about the future results of their actions. In particular, Cordery, Morrison, Wright, and Wall (2010) tend to link task uncertainty to the lack of predictability between the effort put into a task, processes required to complete the task and its results. Such understanding of task uncertainty is rooted in the changeability of tasks and aims, the quality and availability of resources, lack of support from technological processes, different customers' expectations and market conditions. Their study fits into the research stream of team-based work focusing on the determinants of team performance (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gibson, 2008). They concentrate on task uncertainty perceived as a contingency variable, arguing that any management practice focused on the behaviors of employees will promote improved performance differently depending on the level of task uncertainty (Wall, Cordery, & Clegg, 2002). In particular, studying team autonomy (perceived as a result of managerial practice), they conclude that it will interact with task uncertainty in such a manner, that the higher the level of task uncertainty, the stronger the positive impact of team autonomy on team performance, and they find support for their hypothesis on the basis of empirical, longitudinal experimental research.

As Leach et al. (2013) argue, uncertainty comprises of an important contingency in the relationship between work and outcomes, including employee performance and well-being. According to Freeman, Burns, and Stalker (1969), unstable, uncertain and unpredictable work environments require greater flexibility and decentralized decision-making. No matter the source, uncertainty, or differently speaking – lack of predictability in work tasks – represents a key contingency, or moderator, in work design theory (Parker, Wall, & Cordery, 2001). Although uncertainty has been studied as a moderator of the relationship between job control and its outcomes (Slocum & Sims, 1980), it is arguable that individual perceptions of job clarity are highly influenced by managerial practice (for instance, an employee might be entitled to make decisions, but still experience uncertainty in regard to the order of tasks he performs).

To summarize the abovementioned, there are at least three conclusions to be made. Firstly, task uncertainty is perceived as complexity, dynamism, and

the level of routinization. As such, it reflects the very nature of the job. Secondly, similarly to the concept of task environment (understood as complexity, dynamism, and hostility of external environment), it most frequently plays a moderating role in relationships between two variables. Thirdly, there is no denying that task uncertainty affects the individual, team, and organizational performance in such a way, that the higher the level of task uncertainty, the lower the level of diverse aspects of organizational performance. On the basis of the arguments above we hypothesize what follows:

H3: Task uncertainty negatively influences organizational commitment.

H4: Task uncertainty moderates the relationships between HRM practices and organizational commitment.

## RESEARCH METHODS

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An empirical study was carried out in a company that specializes in HR consultancy and delivers recruitment and selection services. The data was gathered between May and August 2017 in 39 teams employing 273 employees in total. A survey was distributed to all employees as well as their managers. We gathered 132 completed questionnaires from employees and 32 questionnaires from managers. There were 29 men and 135 women in the sample. Most of the employees had higher education (124), there were 13 employees with high school education, 26 employees finished postgraduate studies, and one employee had a Ph.D. degree. The majority of employees were employed by the company for less than 2 years (86), 49 employees had an experience of 2-5 years, and 29 employees had been working for the company for more than 5 years.

The research questionnaire was composed of four main parts. The first one reflected the information on the sample and respondents (age, sex, education, work experience, type of activity in the office). It was followed by questions in which respondents were asked to rank on a 7-point Likert scale their assessment of 14 HRM practices, developed on the basis of the Jiang et al. (2012) study, which promote individual abilities, motivation and create opportunities for the development and usage of both abilities and motivation. On the data regarding HR-AMO oriented practices we carried out confirmatory factor analysis, in Mplus 8.2, while there was a theory in this respect that Jiang et al. (2012) clearly assigned HR practices to either strengthening abilities, motivation or opportunities. The model was estimated at the satisfactory level (RMSEA = 0.055, with the level below 0.06 perceived as indicating a good fit, and Compound Fit Index – CFI and Tucker-Lewis Index

- TLI – both reaching levels above 0.9; 0.946 and 0.931 respectively, and that also indicates an acceptable fit). Reliability statistics (Cronbach's alphas) for the isolated factors were as follows: ability (3 items, alpha = 0.717; values of alpha if items deleted varied from 0.276 to 0.630), motivation (6 items, alpha = 0.778; values of alpha if item deleted varied from 0.651 to 0.774), and opportunity (5 items, alpha = 0.748, values of alpha if item deleted varied from 0.722 to 0.737). Correlations between items and construct varied from 0.346 (one item slightly below the literature criteria of 0.4) and 0.786. Thus, the confirmatory factor analyses confirmed the hypothesized structure of AMO-oriented HR practices. As a result of our model estimation there were 3 HR practices focused on abilities (recruitment, selection, training), 6 HR practices focused on motivation (including, for example, compensation, benefits, career opportunities, inducements, talent management), and 5 practices focused on opportunities (including information sharing, teamwork, flexible jobs based on roles, performance appraisal with feedback). We treated HR practices as a formative – reflective second level construct, thus we calculated metavariables for all factors identified and we implied they are reflections of HR practices latent construct. We used this approach for further calculations.

Next, respondents were asked to assess their level of commitment according to Allen and Meyer (1990, p. 1-18) conception. The questionnaire was composed of 8 items measured on the 7-point Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha for that scale equaled 0.758. In this instance, we carried out explorative factor analysis (KMO = 0.768, Bartlett's sphericity test: chi-square = 556.478, with 28 degrees of freedom, and  $p < 0.005$ ), and it revealed a two factor structure of commitment, namely: affective commitment (5 items, Cronbach's alpha = 0.793), and continuance commitment (3 items, Cronbach's alpha = 0.721). Correlations between items and the scale varied from 0.447 and 0.701 (the literature cut-off line is equal to 0.4 for all of the above). We treated commitment factors as reflective constructs, and we have not calculated metavariables for the following structural equation modeling analysis.

Finally, we have measured task uncertainty using a three-item long questionnaire used previously by Ben-Ner, Kong, and Lluís (2012) in their study. We perceived the items as manifestations of three different aspects of task uncertainty; thus we have not calculated a single meta-score and conceptualized task uncertainty as a latent variable. Such an approach was used for further analyses.

In the study, we used two individual-level control variables, namely the age of the respondent and experience measured as a number of years worked in the organization. We believe that the age of the respondent might be an important control variable while it might be related to the perception of HR policies and practice as well as commitment. On the other hand, experience

in the company should be related to perceived task uncertainty (task uncertainty should be lower for employees with greater experience, while they had an opportunity to familiarize with different tasks and situations).

## STUDY RESULTS

In the first instance, we carried out correlation analyses combined with basic descriptive statistics, namely mean and standard deviation (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Correlations and descriptives (n=164)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
HR Practices focused on Abilities	1							
HR Practices focused on Motivation	.305**	1						
HR Practices focused on Opportunity	.288**	.558**	1					
Affective commitment	.166*	.430**	.453**	1				
Continuance commitment	-.143	-.042	-.023	.121	1			
Task uncertainty	.045	.065	.140	.136	.198*	1		
AGE	-.108	-.057	-.026	-.046	-.036	.099	1	
Experience in the company	-.185*	-.252**	-.120	-.040	.099	.147	.368**	1
MEAN	4.2886	4.1098	5.3988	4.3415	4.5447	5.1118	3.5	2.4085
STANDARD DEVIATION	1.03354	0.97505	0.87851	1.0234	1.43433	0.90765	1.09936	1.14482

Note: \*correlation is significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*correlation is significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

Correlation analysis reveals that all three types of HR practices are interrelated, and the relationships are moderate to strong. All three types of practices are significantly related to affective commitment; however HR practices focused on motivation and HR practices focused on opportunities' creation are significantly stronger related to affective commitment than HR practices focused on employees' abilities. Continuance commitment is unrelated to any of the HR practices and neither is it related to affective commitment. Task uncertainty is correlated significantly with continuance commitment. Age of respondents is unrelated to any of the studied constructs,

and experience in the company is negatively related to HR practices focused on abilities and motivation, and it is unrelated to other studied constructs. Finally, age and experience in the company are correlated.

Means of the HR practices focused on abilities and motivation are significantly lower than of the HR practices focused on opportunities' creation. Means of affective commitment and continuance commitment are similar, although in the latter case standard deviation is significantly higher, which means that answers are more diversified. Overall, task uncertainty is perceived as high by the respondents. In most cases, standard deviations are close to 1, apart from the higher level of continuance commitment, which exceeds 1.43. The distribution of the answers is close to normal, except for task uncertainty and HR practices focused on opportunities' creation.

This analysis shows numerous relationships between the studied variables. To understand these relationships to a greater extent we carried out further structural equation modeling in the Mplus 8.2 statistical package. We calculated 3 models. The first one was a basic model comprised of affective commitment and continuance commitment as two dependent variables related to age and experience of the respondents. In the second model, we introduced perceptions of the HR practices (the independent variables). Finally, in the third model, we added task uncertainty (as a latent variable), and we positioned it as a moderator of the relationship between HR practices and facets of commitment. Because of the small sample size, we decided to analyze HR practices as a second level latent construct with three indicators: HR practices focused on abilities, motivation, and opportunities. We calculated the moderation effect for the HR practices as a latent variable that interacted with task uncertainty (also the latent construct). This limited the number of model parameters and allowed it to be estimated normally. Models' estimations are presented in table 2. To estimate parameters in the models we used a maximum likelihood estimator. In all three models, factor loadings were significant at  $p < 0.05$  and exceed the value of 0.5, ranging from 0.506 to 1.375. In respect to a discriminant validity test, in the first instance, we calculated average inter-item correlations within, and error adjusted inter-construct correlations between (derived from CFA model) HR practices scale and commitment scale. Average inter-item correlations for HR practices equaled 0.265 and for the commitment – 0.285. Inter-item correlations between HR practices and commitment equaled 0.193. The value of discriminant validity equaled 0.702, which is lower than the cut-off line 0.85, and this signifies that the two scales measure theoretically different constructs.

The first model was very well fitted. However, analyses revealed that neither of the two control variables explains the facets of organizational commitment. Dependent variables – i.e. affective commitment and

continuance commitment were explained in 0.1 and 1.7% respectively. The second model was also well fitted (see Table 2) and its analysis revealed that HR practices focused on motivation and HR practices focused on opportunities are important predictors of affective commitment. Their influence is positive which means that the higher the perception of HR practices, the higher affective commitment. On the other hand, the second facet of organizational commitment – continuance commitment – was affected negatively by HR practices focused on abilities, but HR practices focused on motivation and opportunities were found to be insignificant in explaining the variation of the dependent variable. This brings partial support for our hypothesis H1, while to some extent HR practices affect organizational commitment, however, some of them affect commitment positively (HR practices focused on motivation and HR practices focused on opportunities), while others affect it negatively (HR practices focused on abilities). These mixed results bring support for our second hypothesis. This confirms that HR practices affect differently diverse aspects of organizational commitment and should not be treated jointly.

In our third model, we tested the moderating effect of task uncertainty on the relation between HR practices and the two facets of organizational commitment. We found that task uncertainty per se does not play an important role in explaining either the variability of affective commitment or the changeability of continuance commitment. Thus, it does not bring support to our third hypothesis. In particular, task uncertainty in the studied company does not affect organizational commitment. However, research results bring partial support for our fourth hypothesis finding out that continuance commitment is affected by the interaction of HR practices with task uncertainty. To gain a better understanding of the moderation effect we prepared a two-way interaction graph (simple slope test, see Figure 1).

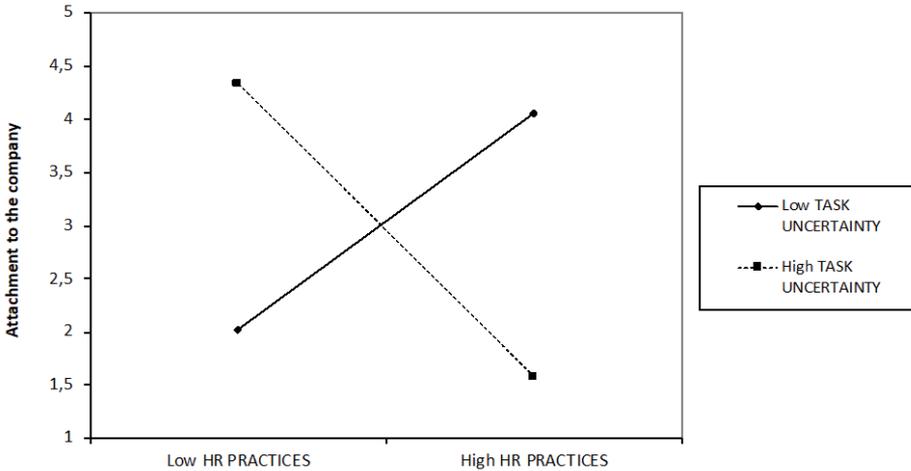
The graph indicates there are different effects of HR practices on the continuance commitment depending on the level of task uncertainty. With low task uncertainty, a high level of HR practices leads to increased continuance commitment. On the other hand, when the task uncertainty is high, a high level of HR practices leads to lower levels of continuance commitment. We discuss this result in the next part of the paper.

**Table 2.** Relationships between AMO-oriented HR practices and commitment in the context of task uncertainty

Model	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	Base model: affective commitment and continuance commitment, age and experience as control variables	Relationships between AMO oriented HR practices and affective commitment and continuance commitment	Relationships between AMO oriented HR practices and affective commitment and continuance commitment: task uncertainty as moderator*
<b>MODEL FIT STATISTICS</b>			
RMSEA	0.030	0.038	-
CFI (Compound Fit Index)	0.991	0.980	-
TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index)	0.988	0.973	-
Akaike information criteria	4166.811	4132.034	7069.324
	parameter (p-value)	parameter (p-value)	parameter (p-value)
<b>Affective commitment as the dependent variable</b>			
$r^2$	0.001 (0.865)	<b>0.271 (0.000)</b>	<b>0.441 (0.000)</b>
Respondent's age	-0.027 (0.740)	-0.041 (0.590)	-0.039 (0.606)
Respondent's experience	0.004 (0.955)	0.098 (0.195)	0.084 (0.259)
HR practices focused on abilities	-	-0.014 (0.867)	-
HR practices focused on motivation	-	<b>0.287 (0.005)</b>	-
HR practices focused on opportunity	-	<b>0.402 (0.000)</b>	-
HR Practices (latent variable)	-	-	<b>1.631 (0.001)</b>
Task uncertainty	-	-	0.165 (0.220)
<b>Continuance commitment as the dependent variable</b>			
$r^2$	0.017 (0.414)	0.039 (0.206)	0.096 (0.108)
Respondent's age	-0.107 (0.229)	-0.116 (0.188)	-0.082 (0.347)
Respondent's experience	<b>0.123 (0.151)</b>	0.101 (0.245)	0.096 (0.265)
HR practices focused on abilities	-	-0.168 (0.041)	-
HR practices focused on motivation	-	0.013 (0.907)	-
HR practices focused on opportunity	-	0.014 (0.911)	-
HR practices (latent variable)	-	-	-0.186 (0.539)
Task uncertainty	-	-	-0.044 (0.776)
<b>Moderation effect of interaction of task uncertainty and HR practices (latent variable)</b>			
Dependent variable: affective commitment	-	-	0.090 (0.787)
Dependent variable: continuance commitment	-	-	<b>-1.197 (0.032)</b>

**Note:** significant parameters, with p-values lower than 0.05 are highlighted.

\*For the third model RMSEA, CFI and TLI statistics cannot be computed because of the random type of analysis with an integration algorithm (used for estimation of moderation effects involving latent constructs).



**Figure 1.** The effect of HR practices and task uncertainty interaction on continuance commitment

## DISCUSSION

Our study sheds light on the antecedents of organizational commitment. In our research, the results we received bring partial support for the first hypothesis - we found out that AMO-oriented HR practices affect organizational commitment. In particular, in our study, the affective commitment is, in fact, fostered by HR practices focused on motivation and HR practices focused on opportunities. This signifies that if an organization is willing to invest in HR practices focused on motivation and creating opportunities, employees will be more likely to identify with organizational goals, feel “fitted into” the organization, will be generally more satisfied with their job, feel valued, and act as ambassadors of their organization. In this respect our research results reflect recent endeavors and indicate the potential profits of investing in sound compensation systems (Marescaux, De Winne & Sels, 2013), talent management activities (Chami-Malaeb & Garavan, 2013), or teamwork opportunities created by the organization (Kooij, Jansen, Dikkers, & De Lange, 2010). On the other hand, continuance commitment is negatively affected by HR practices focused on abilities, which signify that the perception of obligation to remain employed in the company is lower among employees who received proper attention during recruitment and selection as well as intensive training. This can be explained

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by the fact that these employees are aware of their competencies which are valuable in the market, and their loyalty is not strengthened significantly by compensation systems and opportunities created within the organization. In this respect, it can be argued that in the studied company the HR practices focused on maintenance (mainly related to compensation, inducements and creating career opportunities) are not perceived as significantly valuable for the employees, and these practices do not affect employees' continuance commitment. This is a contradictory result to the findings of Gong, Law, Chang, and Xin (2009) who found that appropriate HR practices focused on fostering continuance commitment do work. However, we are strongly convinced that the explanation of these finding lays in a moderate perception of HR practices related to compensation systems.

We also found out that HR practices affect commitment in a mixed manner, which is a strong argument for shaping them consciously having in mind the goals the organization is willing to pursue. This is in line with the Kinnie, Hutchinson, Purcell, Rayton, and Swart (2005) findings who convincingly argue for the differentiation of HR practices while they affect commitment in a different manner. In respect to our third hypothesis, we found no support for the argument that task uncertainty plays an important role within this organization. Although there is a relatively high level of task uncertainty perception among employees, it does not seem to affect commitment levels to any degree. This signifies that the level of task uncertainty does not directly influence either employees' affective commitment or their continuance commitment to the company. It clearly indicates that there are other important factors that affect commitment. In particular, in future studies, we argue for considering a conjoint effect of task uncertainty and leadership style, which in our opinion comprises of an important factor influencing loyalty and willingness to stay within the organization (Srivastava, Bartol, & Locke, 2006).

In respect to our fourth hypothesis, we found support for the argument that task uncertainty is a moderator of the relationship between HR practices and continuance commitment. To our knowledge, this is the first study to test the task uncertainty effect on the relationship between HR practices and commitment at the team level. Our research results reveal that the effectiveness of HR practices and its influence on commitment is dependent upon the level of perceived task uncertainty. In particular, with high task uncertainty, HR practices tend to be ineffective in terms of shaping employees' loyalty. Previous studies have already confirmed the differentiated impact of task uncertainty on relationships between organizational phenomena – for example, the relationship between participative intervention and commitment

in the context of different facets of task uncertainty (Sorensen & Holman, 2014), and we believe our research extends this theory in respect to HR practices.

Our study also brings practical implications. In the first instance, it is worth mentioning that managers responsible for HR practices should focus on compensation systems and creating opportunities for employees (for example, career paths, information sharing, teamwork) if they are willing to shape affective commitment among employees. On the other hand, creating a highly-skilled workforce does not always translate into loyalty and perception of obligation among employees. In particular, recruitment and selection practices, as well as the training offered to employees, do not convert into a willingness to stay. To maintain an employee's interest in working for the organization, HR practices should be well fitted together and crafted consciously, which is especially important when bearing in mind low levels of unemployment and the war for talent (Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

The second implication of the study is to focus attention on the level of task uncertainty. While it is not an extremely important factor per se, for organizational commitment, it does interact with HR practices. Our research clearly indicates that in order to maintain an HR practices impact on organizational commitment (in particular, continuance commitment), organizations, leaders, and managers should focus on reducing task uncertainty, while lower task uncertainty levels allow HR practices to positively impact continuance commitment.

In regard to future research directions, we argue that it would be profitable to study HR practices in the context of task uncertainty, similarly, as it is in the case of leadership effectiveness (Parker et al., 2001). This contingency has been mostly missing in studies of HR practices, and it seems to comprise an interesting and significant factor explaining various effectiveness facets. Further, our study encourages further investigations on the mediating role of AMO in translating HR practices into performance aspects. Although there is clear evidence that AMO plays an important role as a mechanism helping to unveil higher organizational performance (Paauwe, 2009), further studies are needed. Next, it would be profitable to test the AMO hypothesis on a diverse organizational level. In particular, we argue that studies carried out simultaneously at the individual, team, and organizational levels of analysis are of special importance for the development of the HR field (Snape & Redman, 2010). Finally, we strongly believe that HR practices should be examined in a broader context. We included task uncertainty as a moderator of the relationship, although there are also other valuable research streams, including linking HR practices with leadership studies (Chuang, Jackson, & Jiang, 2016).

We are convinced that further studies on the relationships between HR practices and organizational performance facets comprise a valuable

research area. The special role of AMO in these relationships still requires empirical evidence. Our study aimed at filling this research gap by examining the impact of task uncertainty on the relationship between HR practices perception and a single facet of performance – organizational commitment. We believe that further investigations in this regard are necessary.

## **CONCLUSION**

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The search for determinants of different facets of organizational commitment (Bateman & Strasser, 1984; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016) has a long tradition and research endeavors have led to diverse, frequently contradictory, conclusions. Understanding the antecedents of organizational commitment is of special research interest since the commitment itself is an empirically confirmed, important determinant of organizational performance (Steffens et al., 2018). Thus, shedding light on determinants of organizational commitment helps to explain distant predecessors of the holy grail of management studies. Our study deepens the discussion on organizational level constructs by explicitly focusing on human resource management practices as determinants of organizational commitment, providing proof that the investment into the HR practices pays returns in this respect. Our study, putting the relationship between HR practices and organizational commitment in the context of task uncertainty, enriches knowledge on when, and in what conditions, HR practices affect organizational commitment. We are convinced our study clearly shows that to understand the basic relationships between the variables in the HRM field, it needs to be studied in diverse organizational settings and, considering the knowledge in the field, that more emphasis should be put on searching for the mechanisms and circumstances in which certain effects take place (Dasgupta, 2016). Thus, this study calls for further research focused on understanding why and how organizational commitment and other dependent, organizational level outcomes are shaped. We argue that the AMO theory is one valuable research path to search for HRM – organizational level outcome explanations.

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### **Abstrakt**

*Głównym celem artykułu jest znalezienie odpowiedzi na pytanie jak praktyki ZZL wpływają na zaangażowanie w kontekście niepewności związanej z zadaniami, traktowanej jako moderator wskazanej zależności z wykorzystaniem założeń teorii AMO. Aby odpowiedzieć na tak postawione pytanie wykorzystano dane płynące od 164 pracowników zatrudnionych w 32 zespołach międzynarodowej agencji pośrednictwa pracy w Polsce. Wyniki badań wskazują, że praktyki ZZL w zróżnicowany sposób kształtują zaangażowanie pracowników, a w szczególności praktyki ZZL zorientowane na motywację i tworzenie warunków organizacyjnych są pozytywnie powiązane z zaangażowaniem afektywnym, podczas gdy praktyki ZZL skoncentrowane na kreowaniu zdolności i umiejętności negatywnie wpływają na przywiązanie do organizacji. Wyniki wskazują również na to, że niepewność związana z zadaniami jest istotnym moderatorem zależności pomiędzy praktykami ZZL a przywiązaniem do organizacji. Artykuł kończy implikacje teoretyczne i praktyczne oraz przyszłe, postulowane, kierunki badań.*

**Słowa kluczowe:** teoria AMO, praktyki ZZL, zaangażowanie, niepewność związana z zadaniami

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