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Do Coworkers Make the Service Customer? A Field Study in the Public Sector

Pascal Paillé¹

Abstract
This article examines whether relationships among colleagues are related to commitment to the customer and intention to leave the employer. Using a sample (N = 228) of public employees in contact with citizens (customers), the data showed that exchange process among colleagues enhances commitment to the customer and diminishes intention to leave through intention to help colleagues. Results are discussed.

Keywords
commitment to customer, employee attitudes, behavior and motivation, helping, intention to quit, state government HRM

Introduction
Citizens have come to expect a better quality of service from the public sector (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002; Milakovitch, 2003), a challenge that has faced public sector organizations for more than 20 years. To meet this challenge, one recent trend in the public sector has been to adopt management practices commonly used in the private sector (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000) under the auspices of the new public management (NPM; Battaglio, 2010). In line with the universality criticism (Hood, 1991), a number of studies have shown that the modernization of the public sector has taken a wide range of forms and directions (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994). Public administration has undergone modernization at varying rates in different countries (Simonet, 2008)

¹Université Laval, Québec City, Québec, Canada

Corresponding Author:
Pascal Paillé, Département de Management, Faculté des Sciences de l’administration, Pavillon Palasis-Prince, Université Laval, 2325, rue de la Terrasse, Local 1626, Québec City, Québec G1V 0A6, Canada. Email: Pascal.Paille@fsa.ulaval.ca
and with varying degrees of efficacy, with cultural differences playing a key role (Bouckaert, 2007; Kickert, 2002). In examining this process, Pollitt (1995) identified a major paradox: although NPM requires measurable outputs of administrative activities, no assessment tool has so far been provided to evaluate NPM.

A number of studies (e.g., Box, 1999; Pollitt, 1995) have indicated that one of the most important aspects of NPM is the increasing emphasis on customer service quality (other key aspects include cost-cutting, the creation of separate agencies, the decentralization of management authority, the introduction of market mechanisms, the introduction of performance-related pay, quality management, privatization, downsizing, rightsizing, and entrepreneurism). The modernization of public administration requires an improvement of the services provided to citizens, who expect to be treated as customers. As a critical resource in customer service, public human resource management has become a key target of recent NPM reforms (Battaglio, 2009; Battaglio & Condrey, 2006; Kellough, Nigro, & Brewer, 2010). Irrespective of their position (i.e., blue collar or white collar), their rank in the hierarchy (i.e., manager or subordinate), or the nature of their interactions with customers (i.e., back office or frontline), all public service employees have become involved in this process. At the point of service delivery, managers are able to assess employees’ willingness to provide better service to the public based on their commitment to the customer (i.e., the citizen). As a result of the modernization of public administration, there has been a radical shift in the status of citizens, who have come to be viewed as customers by public servants. Although service delivery to citizens as customers has emerged as an important concern for public management in recent years (e.g., Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Vigoda-Gadot & Golembiewski, 2001), Kelly (2008) indicated that the adoption of a citizen-as-customer model reflects a confusion between means and objectives, arguing that “if citizens are dissatisfied with high-performing services, the modern public manager may be more inclined to intensify his or her outreach activities than to adjust the way services are delivered to increase satisfaction” (p. 78). Furthermore, simply defining citizens as customers is not enough to ensure that public service users will be treated as customers. As argued by Hirschman (1970), a dissatisfied customer in the private sector has a choice between two options: either to seek for a remedy (voice) or to switch providers (exit). Ideally, public service users (i.e., citizens) should also be able to use the same “voice” or “exit” options. Yet dissatisfied citizens are often limited to exercising the “voice” option (Savoie, 1995). The modernization of public services has required a more balanced relationship between citizens (now viewed as customers) and public administration, not only in part because customer focus has become a major concern for public administration (Demers & Gow, 2002) but also because the accountability of public employees has significantly increased (Borins, 1995).

Since customer (citizen) service employees are defined as a critical resource at the point of delivery (Sergeant & Frenkel, 2008), the provision of appropriate support to customer service employees represents an important challenge for public employers. Holmes and Shand (1995) suggested that the application of a market culture in the public sector highlights the importance of the role of immediate public sector
managers, who must take decisions quickly to enable team members to respond to customer (i.e., citizen) demands. Consistent with this development, many studies (e.g., Amstrong, 1998; Arnaboldi, Azzone, & Palermo, 2010; Demerss & Gow, 2002; McGurk, 2009; Robbins, 2007) have argued that public sector managers have gained in autonomy as a result of the modernization of public administration. However, despite this autonomy, some service outcomes fall outside the public manager’s control (Kelly, 2008).

Demerss and Gow (2002) found that one third of the managers surveyed in their study indicated that a good workplace environment was a key motivating factor that fosters and strengthens employee willingness to provide good services to citizens. Recently, Chiaburu and Harrison (2008) argued that “how coworkers ‘make place’ for individuals (focal employees) remains not only unanswered, but in some cases, unasked.” The same complaint applies to the public management literature. To date, very little has been said about the role of colleagues as a critical resource for customer service delivery among public employees. This study aims to contribute to the literature by addressing the following question: How can a public servant be supported by their co-workers to ensure service delivery? The way in which individuals deal with their colleagues in a customer service context has yet to be examined in detail, although Moynihan and Pandey (2008) made some inroads into this issue. Some of their findings reported a negative relationship, indicating that employees tend to reduce their intention to leave when they experience support from colleagues. However, despite providing valuable results, Moynihan and Pandey (2008) failed to provide a clear explanation of how the process of reciprocity actually occurs. Therefore, more data are required to understand this process. The purpose of this article is to extend the findings of the study by Moynihan and Pandey (2008). Consistent with the social exchange framework, the main objective of this study is to improve our understanding of the inclination or willingness of public employees to deliver better service to customers (i.e., citizens).

**Theoretical Background and Hypotheses**

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) argued that SET provides strong theoretical and empirical arguments for examining various types of behavior in the workplace, such as job performance, desire to quit, absenteeism, and OCB (among others). Schaninger and Turnipseed (2005) noted that social exchange is based on reciprocity and occurs when employees respond effectively to a donor (e.g., organization, supervisor, or colleague) who provides something that is deemed to have value. Give and take between individuals in the workplace forms the basis of exchange relationships (Schaninger & Turnipseed, 2005). An employee receiving support from one or several colleagues is placed in a situation of “moral debt.” Scholl (1981, p. 594) defined the simple rule governing reciprocity in a social group. People must (a) help those who help them and (b) avoiding harming those who help them. Experiencing support develops a sense of obligation to “pay back” as part of a reciprocity mechanism. Various aspects of this
process were reported in a recent meta-analysis (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). As suggested by the findings of the study by Boyne, Poole, and Jenkins (1999), and as positive work experiences facilitate the desire to reciprocate (Witt & Wilson, 1990), we may expect to find empirical data demonstrating the usefulness of applying the social exchange process to public employees. However, very few empirical studies have studied social exchange by examining intention to leave among coworkers in the public sector. As noted above, Moynihan and Pandey (2008) took a first step in this direction, suggesting that public employees tend to reduce their intention to leave when they experience support from their colleagues.

Perceived Support and Commitment Between Colleagues

In the context of social exchange theory (SET), perceived colleague support (PCS) and commitment to colleagues are closely related. PCS is defined as the extent to which employees believe their colleagues value their contribution and care about their well-being (Bishop, Scott, & Burrough, 2000). Support occurs when an employee perceives that a colleague takes concrete action to demonstrate their concern for coworker well-being in the workplace. Additional cues of supportive coworkers are given when an individual is shown expressions of affective or instrumental concerns. According to Chiaburu and Harrison (2008), affective concerns refer (among other things) to friendliness, empathy, and solidarity, whereas instrumental concerns refer (among other things) to helping with related tasks, mentoring, and communication. Commitment to colleagues is defined as the psychological attachment felt by an employee toward other colleagues (Pearce & Herbik, 2004).

While PCS refers to colleague involvement with an individual, commitment occurs when an individual is attached to their colleagues. This mirror process is based on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). As noted by Blau (1964),

A worker may help a colleague a few times. If the colleague fails to reciprocate, the worker has lost little and can easily protect himself against further loss by ceasing to furnish assistance. If the colleague does reciprocate, perhaps excessively so out of gratitude for the volunteered help and in the hope of receiving more, he proves himself trustworthy of continued and extended favours. (p. 64)

Emotional support in the form of sympathy, care, comfort, and encouragement fosters employee attachment to a colleague (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). Consistent with the SET literature, when colleagues have a positive perception of professional competency and personal skills or positive feedback, feelings of being supported and valued create a positive mood fostering attachment. Very few studies to date have provided findings showing that PCS and commitment to the colleague are positively related (e.g., Bishop, Dow, Goldsby, & Cropanzano, 2005; Bishop et al., 2000; Paillé, 2009). These findings suggest the following relationship: the higher the level of PCS, the greater the level of employee commitment to coworkers. Therefore,
Hypothesis 1: PCS and commitment to colleagues are positively related.

Commitment to Colleagues and Intention to Help Colleagues

Nielsen, Hrivnak, and Shaw (2009) argued that SET and its corollary mechanism (i.e., reciprocity) are often cited as theoretical bases for predicting citizenship in the workplace (i.e., helping colleagues) to influence employee effectiveness. Some findings indicate that employees are likely to reciprocate by engaging in OCB when they feel that they have been well treated by the organization (Kessler, Coyle-Shapiro, & Purcell, 1999). Employee commitment is one of the key variables in the development of OCB (Morrison, 1994). OCB is defined by Organ (1988) as
discretionary individual conduct, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal system of compensation contributing to the general proper functioning of the organization that does not arise from the prescribed role or tasks of the job; in other words, the specific terms of a contract between employees and organizations. This behaviour arises rather from personal choices, such that its omission is not generally understood as punishable. (p. 4)

Most empirical studies have examined citizenship toward individuals and toward the organization (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). Whereas citizenship toward individuals is defined as helping others, citizenship toward the organization involves two main behaviors—civic virtue and sportsmanship. Civic virtue occurs when an employee participates actively and voluntarily in decision making by formulating new ideas, suggests improvements during seminars or meetings, or protects the organization (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006). Sportsmanship occurs when an employee is willing to roll with the punches, abstains from complaining about trivial matters, and sets about being an example for others (Organ et al., 2006). Helping occurs when an employee provides technical or moral support to a coworker (for example) to help a colleague solve a complex problem or to overcome temporary setbacks at work. Following Organ et al. (2006), “helping behaviours may enhance morale, group cohesiveness, and a sense of belonging to a team, all of which may enhance performance and help the organization to attract and retain better employees” (p. 201). Based on the findings of recent meta-analyses, we may infer that helping others (and related behaviors such as altruism) is the most common type of OCB examined in empirical research on the relationship with organizational consequences (Podsakoff et al., 2009), issues related to work group (Nielsen et al., 2009), leader-member exchange (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007), and attitudes at work (Organ & Ryan, 1995). Although citizenship at the individual level of analysis provides more empirical data than the organizational level of analysis, Nielsen et al. (2009) estimated that OCB toward individuals and colleagues as a level of analysis remains largely underdeveloped. In this article, citizenship toward colleagues is defined as the extra
effort that an employee is willing to make to support colleagues. Extra effort may involve exhibiting helping behavior (e.g., assisting colleagues to overcome obstacles) or specific forms of helping such as courtesy (e.g., avoiding creating problems for others) or cheerleading (e.g., celebration of a coworker’s accomplishments). Irrespective of its specific form, citizenship behavior contributes to creating a healthy atmosphere among individuals within a department or work unit.

Previous literature reviews (Hoffman, Blair, Meriac, & Woehr, 2007; Organ et al., 2006; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000) and meta-analyses (LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002; Organ & Ryan, 1995) indicate that the relationship between OCB and employee commitment is a well-documented issue. Based on extensive data, the literature suggests the following relationship: The greater the level of employee commitment to the organization (or to the employer), the greater the likelihood that an employee will make extra efforts to help the organization and/or other employees. A theoretical study conducted by Reichers (1985) on employee commitment argued that the organization now tends to be viewed by individuals as one possible target among others. Previous findings suggest that commitment to colleagues and other foci of commitment (i.e., supervisor and organization) are different constructs. In previous studies, data were collected in a wide range of cultural contexts and organizational settings (Becker, 1992; Bentein, Stinglhamber, & Vandenberghhe, 2002; Clugston, Howell, & Dorfman, 2000; Ellmers, de Gilder, & van den Heuvel, 1998; Zaccaro & Dobbins, 1989). In the workplace, an individual may be committed to their employer, superior, union, profession, career, and the like. Whereas the relationship between employee commitment to the organization and OCB-helping, is well established, the relationship between employee commitment to colleagues and OCB-helping is known but is less documented. The application of field theory premises (Lewin, 1951) to employee commitment suggests that in a given situation, individuals are more or less proximal to certain foci of commitment. Outcomes are thus related to an employee’s affective reactions to entities (organization, supervisor, or colleagues) with whom they have the highest level of interaction. Bentein et al. (2002) used the concept of “proximity versus distance” to assess the relationship between commitment to the organization, supervisor, and workgroup and citizenship toward the organization, supervisor, and workgroup based on a sample of 118 blue-collar workers. Commitment to the workgroup was found to be the best predictor of citizenship toward the workgroup. These findings are consistent with Chiaburu and Harrison (2008), who found that more frequent coworker interactions are also more likely because they have generally the same status as the focal employee (by definition), and exchanges of all types are less restricted. Coworkers should, then, have a nontrivial influence on colleagues’ role perceptions, attitudes, withdrawal and effectiveness, even in the presence of other influences originating from the direct leader” (p. 1084).
The findings of the study by Deckop, Cirka, and Andersson (2003) also indicate that helping others constitutes a form of reciprocation in exchange for PCS. As a positive relationship has been found between PCS and commitment to colleagues (see Hypothesis 1 developments), between commitment to colleagues and intention to help colleagues, and between PCS and helping, respectively, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**Hypothesis 2:** Commitment to colleagues and intention to help colleagues are positively related.

**Hypothesis 3:** Commitment to colleagues mediates the relationship between PCS and intention to help colleagues.

**Commitment to Colleagues and Intention to Leave**

Employee commitment is widely accepted as the key variable of research on retention/turnover (Maertz, 2004). The greater the level of employee commitment, the less likely employees are to want to leave the organization. Redman and Snape (2005) found no relationship between commitment to coworkers and withdrawal cognitions among unionized government workers. Bozeman and Perrewé (2001) note that a number of studies have shown that turnover intention measures are not well differentiated from measures of other closely associated precursors to actual turnover, specifically, from thoughts of quitting and intentions to search for another job with a different organization (p. 162).

Insofar as Redman and Snape operationalized organizational withdrawal cognitions with a measurement reflecting an overall construct, it is difficult to determine which of the various dimensions among intention to leave, thoughts of quitting or intentions to search for another job affect commitment to coworkers. Research also indicates that a high level of commitment to colleagues is related to a perceived high level of cohesion among team members (Vandenberghe, Bentein, & Stinglhamber, 2004, Study 1). In addition, cohesion within a workgroup increases the desire of its members to remain in the organization (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). Becker (1992) found a negative relationship \( r = -0.15, p = .05 \), suggesting that as commitment to colleagues increases, the desire to leave the organization decreases. Chiaburu and Harrison (2008) found an average negative correlation between coworker support and turnover intentions \( k = 43, N = 15,604, r = -0.265 \). Consistent with SET, previous studies found that team commitment plays a complete mediating role between perceived team support, defined as the tendency of an employee to believe that colleagues are concerned about their well-being, and intention to leave the team, suggesting a direct effect of commitment on the relationship between PCS and intention to leave (Paillé, 2009). Thus,
Hypothesis 4: Commitment to colleagues and intention to leave are negatively related.

Hypothesis 5: Commitment to colleagues mediates the relationship between PCS and intention to leave.

Helping and Intention to Leave the Employer

Because citizenship behavior is discretionary, it is less risky for employees to reduce helping than to express their discontent through diminished efforts at work. As suggested by Harrison, Newman, and Roth (2006), citizenship behavior may therefore be viewed as the first step of a withdrawal process. However, Chen, Hui, and Sego (1998) argue that “employee interactions presenting high levels of OCB are likely to enhance attractiveness and cohesion within the group while decreasing voluntary turnover” (p. 928). Recent findings suggest that citizenship behavior and intention to leave are negatively related, providing support for this argument at an organizational level (Chen, 2005; Coyne & Ong, 2007; Podsakoff et al., 2009). We may expect a similar pattern at a colleague level. Citizenship behavior toward colleagues (e.g., helping others) helps to create a healthy environment in the workplace. It seems reasonable to assume that colleagues encourage employees to remain in their current job when they demonstrate helping behavior. Receiving help fosters a healthy social context and a positive working atmosphere conducive to fostering employee retention. Based on a sample of IT workers, Paré and Tremblay (2007) reported data showing a negative relationship between citizenship toward coworkers and intention to leave the employer. Based on a sample of Australian officials, Albrecht (2006) found a negative relationship (correlation matrix, \( r = -.27, p = .01 \)), suggesting that the experience of receiving help in the workplace decreases the inclination to leave the employer. Thus,

Hypothesis 6: Intention to help others and intention to leave are negatively related.

Helping and Commitment to the Customer

Commitment to the customer is defined as the extent to which the relative propensity of an individual to engage in continuous improvement and to make efforts at work for the benefit of customers is exercised (Pecci & Rosenthal, 1997). Organ et al. (2006) provided theoretical arguments suggesting a positive relationship between helping behavior and commitment to the customer. As noted above, citizenship behavior helps to create a healthy work atmosphere. Employees who help a coworker also contribute to improving the coworker’s productivity and to spreading best practices among colleagues. Therefore, we may expect to find evidence supporting the following relationship: The greater the level of helping experienced by an employee, the more likely they will be to make extra efforts at the point of service delivery. Previous data
collected in the private sector reported mixed results on the specific relationship between helping and commitment to the customer. While Peccei and Rosenthal (1997) found a positive relationship between altruistic customer service and commitment to the customer among employees working in the retail food industry, a more recent study conducted by Vandenbergh et al. (2007) in the same industry reported a nonsignificant relationship between helping behavior and an affective commitment to the customer. Although mixed, these results suggest a possible relationship between helping provided to an employee in the workplace and the efforts made by the employee at the point of customer service delivery. However, no study has addressed this relationship among public employees.

In the public sector, serving citizens viewed as customers has emerged as an important concern as a result of the modernization of the public sector (Vigoda, 2002). This type of work requires a wide range of personal skills. Consistent with the spillover hypothesis (Randall, 1988), Cohen and Vigoda (1998) suggested that general altruism provides personal skills that are transferable to the work setting. General altruism occurs when an individual offers individual care, kindness, compassion, and consideration to another individual. The main argument advanced by Cohen and Vigoda is that before being a public employee, a person is primarily a citizen at the service of other citizens. In the case of public employees working with the public, the fact of having developed feelings of caring, kindness, compassion, and consideration outside the workplace and of showing these feelings to other citizens contributes to encouraging such conduct in the workplace through helping behavior toward colleagues. The findings of the study by Cohen and Vigoda suggest a positive and significant relationship between general altruism and performance among nurses working in the nonprofit sector. Previous empirical research conducted among employees working in local municipalities also provides interesting results showing a positive relationship between experiencing helping and higher levels of work outcomes, such as in-role performance (Vigoda, 2000). In public organizations, commitment to the customer is viewed as an effective criterion for employees in contact with citizens (i.e., customers; Cohen & Vigoda, 2000).

Hypothesis 7: Intention to help colleagues and commitment to the customer are positively related.

Method

Sample

The data were collected from employees working in a public agency created by the government of Quebec in December 2004 to improve the delivery of public services to citizens and businesses. The agency’s main objective is “to offer citizens and businesses throughout Quebec a one-stop service to simplify access to a wide range of public services.” Furthermore, “as a government sponsored provider of public
services,” the agency “is committed to meeting the legitimate expectations of citizens and businesses.” The data were collected 5 years after the creation of the agency (May 2009). At the time of the survey, the agency employed 943 people. Among the agency’s staff, 296 employees were in frontline contact with customers, whereas the remaining 647 employees worked in back-office positions. Only frontline staff were invited to participate in the study. Of the 296 questionnaires distributed as part of this research, 228 completed and useable questionnaires were returned (77% response rate). The final sample included 228 public employees working in contact with customers, including 174 women (76.3%) and 52 men (22.8%). Two respondents did not state their gender. The average age was 30.6 years ($SD = 9.5$ years). The average overall professional experience was 7.0 years ($SD = 9.1$ years). Although the gender distribution of the sample is highly skewed, it is consistent with data from the Government of Quebec, which generally employs more women than men (Secretary of the Conseil du Trésor, 2010).

**Measurement**

As the research was conducted in a French-language context, the procedure recommended by Brislin (1980) was followed. The measurement scales were subjected to a double-translation process (English to French and French to English).

A short version of four items was used ($\alpha = .90$) for the measurement of PCS. Following Stinglhamber, de Cremer, and Mercken (2006), four high-loading items from the SPOS were selected and adapted to measure perceived support at a colleague level (e.g., “my colleague really cares about my well-being”).

The three-item scale (e.g., “I really feel a part of this work group”) developed by Bentein et al. (2002) was used to measure commitment to colleagues ($\alpha = .93$).

The three items of the subscale developed by Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1994) were used to measure helping colleagues ($\alpha = .75$). However, consistent with Schnake (1991), intention to help colleagues (rather than behavior) was measured.

The three-item scale (e.g., “I frequently consider leaving my organization”) developed by Lichtenstein, Alexander, McCarthy, and Wells (2004) was used for the measurement of intention to leave ($\alpha = .91$).

Three items ($\alpha = .75$) were selected from the scale (e.g., “I really feel as if my customers’ problems are my own”) developed by Redman and Snape (2005) to measure commitment to the customer.

Finally, based on a Likert-type scale, all items (shown in Table 1) were measured on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 10 (*completely agree*).

**Analysis**

The two-stage process recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was used to meet the objectives of the study. The first stage involves an examination of the measurement model to evaluate the independence of the constructs. The second stage
Involves the use of structural equation modeling (SEM) for data analysis. There are two main reasons for using this method. First, as the data were collected using a cross-sectional design, the measurement model (i.e., the first stage) examines the independence of the constructs. Second, the study focuses on several simultaneous relationships to determine whether commitment to the customer and intent to leave occur when employees reciprocate the support (help) shown by the donor (colleague) who provides something of value to the employee (support) through effect (commitment). SEM (i.e., the second stage) is used to calculate the standardized path coefficient (SPC) for simultaneous relationships. The two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was therefore both relevant and appropriate. The chi-square statistic and various other fit indices were used to interpret the data at both

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Measurement Model (N = 228).</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Loadings CR Jöreskog AVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived colleague support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My colleague appreciates my contribution .848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My colleague considers my aspirations and values .878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My colleague appreciates my contribution .858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My colleague really cares about my well-being .776</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitment to the colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I really feel that I belong in this workgroup .865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am proud to be a member of this workgroup .922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My workgroup has a great deal of personal meaning for me .937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping behavior (intention)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I take steps to try to prevent problems with other personnel in the company .795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I act as a “peacemaker” when others in the company have disagreements .622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a stabilizing influence in the company when dissent occurs .875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to the customer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The customers I deal with in my job .770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I really identify with my customers .521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am proud to work with my customers .846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to leave the employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a good chance that I will leave this organization in the next year .926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I frequently think of leaving this organization .869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will probably look for a new organization in the next year .834</td>
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Note: CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.
stages. The larger and more significant the value of the chi-squared test, the more the model differs from perfect adjustment. The other indices used in the study included the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), with an expected value between .05 and .08 as an adequate fit, and ideally less than .05 (Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the nonnormed fit index (NNFI), with expected values greater than .95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Hypotheses 3 and 5 require a mediation test. Following Holmbeck (1997), the SEM strategy is appropriate when the latent variables under consideration have multiple indicators. The mediation effect was tested using the procedure described by Holmbeck (1997). Considering three latent variables, A (PCS), B (commitment to colleagues), and C (intention to help others), three basic requirements need to be met. First, path A → C must be significant. Second, the A → B → C model must provide an adequate fit. In addition, at this stage, each path (A → B, B → C, and A → C) should be significant in the directions predicted. In the third and final step, the A → B → C model fit is compared under two conditions. Under the first condition, path A → C is constrained to zero. Under the second condition, path A → C is not constrained (i.e., free). As argued by Holmbeck (1997), “if there is a meditational effect, the addition of the A → C path to the constrained model should not improve the fit” (p. 602). A chi-square difference test was used to compare the fit of the models (Bentler & Bonnett, 1980).

Results

Measurement Model

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using the AMOS program (Arbuckle, 2003), including the five latent constructs (PCS, commitment to colleagues, intention to help others, intention to leave the employer, and commitment to the customer) and their measurement variables. The covariance matrix was used as input. Based on a maximum-likelihood estimation, the measurement model fits the data well ($\chi^2 = 150.78, df = 96, p < .000; CFI = .97; NNFI = .97; RMSEA = .05$).

Table 1 shows the composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and Jöreskog’s Rhô ($\rho$) of all the constructs of the sample. CR estimates the extent to which a set of latent construct indicators share in their measurement of a construct. AVE refers to the ratio of the total variance due to the latent variable. Jöreskog’s Rhô estimates the internal consistency of a scale by taking into account both factorial contributions and measurement errors. Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998) recommend a composite reliability higher than the 0.70 threshold and an average variance extracted higher than the 0.50 threshold. Fornell and Larker (1981) recommend a Jöreskog’s $\rho$ higher than the 0.70 threshold. As the values respected the recommended cutoff, it was concluded that the measurement model provided evidence of the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measures.

Table 2 shows the mean, standard deviation, and zero-order correlations among the variables of the study. Correlations among the variables ranged from $r = -.04$, ns
(intention to leave and commitment to the customer) to $r = .66$, $p < .01$ (PCS and commitment to colleagues). All of the reliability coefficients included in the measurement section were higher than the .70 threshold recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). The VIF (variance inflation factor) test was used to detect possible multicollinearity among the variables. Data indicated an absence of multicollinearity if the VIF value ranged between 0.10 and 10 (Neter, Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Wasserman, 1989). In this study, the VIF value ranged from 1.14 (commitment to the customer) to 2.28 (commitment to colleagues).

**Model Validation and SEM**

As the data were collected using a cross-sectional design, the recommendations of previous studies were followed to assess the validity of the model based on cross-model validation (e.g., Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Byrne, 2010; Cudeck & Browne, 1983). A number of strategies can be used to ensure model validity (Byrne, 2010). This study used the procedure in three phases used by Camilleri (2006). First, the initial data set (full sample) is split randomly into two data sets (Samples A and B, respectively). Second, the fit index and squared multiple correlations are calculated for each data set. Third, the difference of $R^2$ is compared for each data set. Model validity is achieved if a small difference is reported by the results. Table 3 summarizes cross-validation to ensure the validity of the model. The cross-validation procedure yielded good results overall. Fit indices (CFI, NNFI, and RMSEA) were above the recommended cutoff.

**Table 2. Correlation Matrix.**

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Year of experience</td>
<td>.62***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Commitment to the colleague</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Perceived colleague support</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.66***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. OCB-helping (intention)</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>−.31</td>
<td>.19***</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Intent to leave the employer</td>
<td>−.20</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>−.49***</td>
<td>−.27***</td>
<td>−.06</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Commitment to customer</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td>.24***</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>−.12</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$M$ | 30.6 | 7.00 | 22.93 | 30.63 | 16.54 | 7.22 | 27.64 |

$SD$ | 9.1 | 9.50 | 6.63 | 8.26 | 8.44 | 8.54 | 2.79 |

**Notes:** **p < .05. ***p < .01.
In addition, $\Delta R^2$ values for Samples A and B were small, suggesting the closeness of explained variances. The validity of the model was thus demonstrated.

The model hypothesizing that the exchange process between colleagues increases commitment to the customer and decreases intention to leave provided a good fit of the data: $\chi^2 = 170.28; df = 97; p = .000; \text{NNFI} = .96; \text{CFI} = 97; \text{RMSEA} = .05$. Except for Hypothesis 6, all hypotheses were supported.

As predicted by Hypothesis 1, PCS is positively related to commitment to colleagues ($\text{SPC} = .681, t = 10.436, p = .000$). As predicted by Hypothesis 2, commitment to colleagues is positively related to OCB-helping ($\text{SPC} = .298, t = 3.416, p = .001$).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that commitment to colleagues plays a mediating role between PCS and intention to help others. Based on the requirements defined by Holmbeck (1997), the coefficient of the direct path from PCS to intention to help others ($A \rightarrow C$) is $\beta = .68, p < .000$. Second, consistent with the second requirement, the $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C$ model provides a good fit ($\chi^2 = 78.87; df = 32; p = .000; \text{NNFI} = .96; \text{CFI} = 97; \text{RMSEA} = .08$). Following Holmbeck, all paths are significant (see the coefficients $A \rightarrow C; A \rightarrow B$, and $B \rightarrow C$ shown in Table 4). Consistent with the third requirement, Table 4 shows how the fit of the model changes when path $A \rightarrow C$ is free and when it is set to zero, respectively. Finally, the addition of the $A \rightarrow C$ path to the constrained model does not improve the fit, $\chi^2_{\text{diff}}(1) = 0.17, ns$. In addition, the result of the Sobel test ($z = 2.64, p = .008$) confirmed that the indirect effect of PCS on

### Table 3. Results of Model Cross-Validation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fit indices for the models including all variables</th>
<th>Full sample ($N = 228$)</th>
<th>Sample A ($N = 114$)</th>
<th>Sample B ($N = 114$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
<td>153.32</td>
<td>123.47</td>
<td>155.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$df$</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NNFI</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFI</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSEA</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicted variables</th>
<th>$R^2$ in full sample</th>
<th>$R^2$ in Sample A</th>
<th>$R^2$ in Sample B</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$ for Sample A and Sample B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to the colleagues</td>
<td>.474</td>
<td>.396</td>
<td>.453</td>
<td>.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention helping others</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to the customers</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to leave the employer</td>
<td>.307</td>
<td>.360</td>
<td>.341</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NNFI = nonnormed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.
intention to help others through commitment to colleagues was significantly different from zero. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

As predicted by Hypothesis 4, commitment to colleagues is negatively related to intention to leave the employer (SPC = −.755, t = −8.065, p = .000).

Hypothesis 5 predicted that commitment to colleagues plays a mediating role between PCS and intention to leave. Considering the first requirement (Holmbeck, 1997), the coefficient of the direct path from PCS to intention to leave (A → C) is β = −.31, p < .000. Second, consistent with the second requirement, the A → B → C model provides a good fit ($\chi^2 = 51.57; df = 33; p = .02; NNFI = .98; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .05$). Consistent with the third requirement, Table 5 shows how the fit of the model changes when path A → C is free and when it is set to zero, respectively. Finally, the addition of the A → C path to the constrained model does not improve the fit, $\chi^2_{\text{diff}}(1) = 2.59$, ns. In addition, the result of the Sobel test ($z = −6.41, p = .000$) confirmed that the indirect effect of PCS on intention to leave the organization through commitment to colleagues was significantly different from zero. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 is supported.

Contrary to the prediction of Hypothesis 6, OCB-helping was not related to intention to leave the employer (SPC = .077, t = .974, ns).

As predicted by Hypothesis 7, OCB-helping (intention) was positively related to commitment to the customer (SPC = .058, t = 2.313, p = .021).

**Additional Results**

The research model shown in Figure 1 suggests the need to examine two further mediations. These mediations will be tested to provide more complete results. The first possible mediation involves PCS, commitment to colleagues and commitment to the customer. The second possible mediation involves commitment to colleagues,
intention to help others, and commitment to the customer. The same procedure was used for Hypotheses 3 and 5 to test these two mediations.

**First mediation.** Considering the first requirement (Holmbeck, 1997), the coefficient of the direct path from PCS to commitment to the customer (A → C) is $\beta = .34$, $p < .000$. Second, consistent with the second requirement, the A → B → C model provides a good fit ($\chi^2 = 60.02; df = 33; p = .000; \text{NNFI} = .97; \text{CFI} = .98; \text{RMSEA} = .05$). At this stage, Holmbeck recommends a significant path for A → C, A → B, and B → C. The coefficients are shown in Table 6. The three coefficients meet the recommendation.

### Table 5. Results of Mediation Test (Hypothesis 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>$df$</th>
<th>$\chi^2/df$</th>
<th>NNFI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>$\chi^2_{\text{diff}}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct paths</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path A → C</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>****</td>
<td>32.05</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A → B → C</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>64.54</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path A → B</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>****</td>
<td>21.52</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path B → C</td>
<td>-.56</td>
<td>****</td>
<td>21.13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator: Commitment to colleagues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path A → C free</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
<td>61.95</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path A → C zero</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>64.54</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NNFI = nonnormed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.

* $**p < .01. ****p < .001. ****p < .000.$

### Figure 1. Research model
Table 6. Results of Mediation Test (PCS-Commitment to Colleagues-Commitment to Customer).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>χ²</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>χ²/df</th>
<th>NNFI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>χ² diff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct paths</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path A → C</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>****</td>
<td>17.24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A → B → C</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>60.02</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path A → B</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>****</td>
<td>31.88</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path B → C</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>****</td>
<td>7.19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator: Commitment to colleagues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path A → C free</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>****</td>
<td>53.76</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path A → C zero</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>60.02</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>6.44*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NNFI = nonnormed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .003. ****p < .000.

Figure 2. Final model

Table 6 shows an improvement of the fit, $\chi^2_{\text{diff}}(1) = 6.44$, $p < .05$, when path A → C is free. As the coefficient $\beta$ (path A → C) does not decrease significantly (from .34 to .29), we may infer that the third requirement is not met. Therefore, commitment to colleagues does not mediate the relationship between PCS and commitment to the customer.
Second mediation. Considering the first requirement (Holmbeck, 1997), the coefficient of the direct path from commitment to colleagues to commitment to the customer \((A \rightarrow C)\) is \(\beta = .27, p < .000\). Second, consistent with the second requirement, the \(A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C\) model provides a good fit \(\chi^2 = 42.46; df = 25; p = .016; \text{NNFI} = .97; \text{CFI} = .98; \text{RMSEA} = .05\). At this stage, Holmbeck recommends a significant path for \(A \rightarrow C\), \(A \rightarrow B\), and \(B \rightarrow C\). The coefficients are shown in Table 7. While the three coefficients meet the recommendation, we may note that the \(B \rightarrow C\) coefficient is above the standard cutoff \((p < .05)\). In addition, Table 6 shows an improvement of the fit, \(\chi^2_{\text{diff}}(1) = 9.51, p < .000\), when path \(A \rightarrow C\) is free. As coefficient \(\beta\) (path \(A \rightarrow C\)) does not decrease significantly (from .27 to .25), we may infer that the third requirement is not met. Therefore, intention to help others does not mediate the relationship between commitment to colleagues and commitment to the customer.

As the path from intention to help others to intention to leave was not significant, the path was removed and the model rerun to provide a more parsimonious model (James, Mulaik, & Brett, 2006). Although the fit was good \(\chi^2 = 171.23; df = 98; p = .000; \text{RMSEA} = .05; \text{NNFI} = .96; \text{CFI} = .96\), the \(\chi^2\) difference test (Bentler & Bonnett, 1980) was not statistically significant, \(-\chi^2_{\text{diff}}(1) = .95, \text{ns}\). The hypothesized model was therefore retained. Finally the figure 2 depicts the final model.

**Discussion**

**Findings of the Study**

The overall objective of this study was to identify how the exchange process occurs at a colleague level. As part of this objective, the study tested a model aimed at examining whether PCS, commitment to colleagues, and intention to help colleagues contribute to enhancing commitment to the customer and to reducing intention to leave. The purpose was to fill a gap in the literature on human resource management in the public sector. First, consistent with previous research, this study provides evidence of
a direct relationship between PCS and employee commitment to colleagues (Bishop et al., 2000). Second, the study provides evidence of a direct relationship between employee commitment to colleagues and intention to help colleagues (de Lara, Zoghbi, & Espino Rodríguez, 2007). Third, the study provides evidence of a direct relationship between employee commitment to colleagues and intention to leave (Becker, 1992). Fourth, the study provides evidence of a direct relationship between intention to help colleagues and employee commitment to the customer (Cohen & Vigoda, 2000). Finally, contrary to previous findings (Paré & Tremblay, 2007), a direct relationship between citizenship toward colleagues and intention to leave the employer was not supported by the data. The data provided by this study add to our understanding of the underlying processes governing the relationships between coworkers in the public sector. Although some inroads were made by Moynihan and Pandey (2008), more data are required to provide a better explanation of how these processes actually occur. Some of the findings obtained by Moynihan and Pandey reported a negative relationship, indicating that employees tend to reduce their intention to leave when they experience support from colleagues. Given that previous findings in the private sector (Paillé, 2009) reported the mediating role of employee commitment to colleagues between colleague support and intention to leave, employee commitment to colleagues in the public sector appears to be a missing link. Based on the premises of SET, the present study adds to our understanding of the role of colleagues in improving effectiveness in the public sector. This study is the first to provide such findings among public employees. The following sections consider the theoretical implications of the study, the managerial implications for the public sector, the limitations of the study, and avenues for future research.

Theoretical Implications

This article makes several important contributions. First, the study contributes to the subject of turnover among public employees. Although recent efforts have been made to identify the factors predicting intention to leave the employer (e.g., Lee & Whitford, 2008; Moynihan & Pandey, 2008), Selden and Moynihan (2000) noted that employee turnover has been largely overlooked in the literature on the public sector. Previous efforts have focused for the most part on intention to leave the organization (e.g., Bertelli, 2007; Meier & Hicklin, 2008; Moynihan & Landuyt, 2008). As support, intention to help colleagues, and commitment at the colleague level have not been examined in conjunction to predict employee decisions to leave the public sector, this study extends the findings of recent research in the field. By showing that PCS affects intention to leave through commitment to colleagues, this study adds to our understanding of how the process occurs among colleagues. Moynihan and Pandey (2008) also provide results indicating that both colleague support and obligation toward colleagues are related to low turnover intention. However, Moynihan and Pandey used an ordered logistic regression technique. Their results make a relative contribution to independent variables (e.g., colleague support) in explaining turnover
intention. As the exchange process suggests simultaneous regression, the use of the SEM technique in this study adds to our understanding of the key role of colleagues in public employee effectiveness. Additional findings supplement previous results obtained by Moynihan and Pandey. Moynihan and Pandey used Parker’s contention in addition to the social network and social exchange literature to predict intention to leave. Parker (2002) argued that in public agencies, “providing care in such a work environment requires giving of oneself emotionally and replenishment, in the form of relational and emotional support from coworkers and other employees, is important.” In this study, commitment to colleagues and helping behavior were added to colleague support, primarily with a view to determining whether effectiveness occurs in the exchange process at the colleague level of analysis.

Second, despite recent empirical research (e.g., Albrecht, 2006; Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002; Noblet & Rodwell, 2008; Restubog, Hornsey, Bordia, & Esposo, 2008), SET has been used sparingly in research on human resource management in the public sector. The academic literature on HRM in the private sector provides a wealth of empirical results showing how variables involved in an SET framework improve employee performance (e.g., Konovsky & Pugh, 1994; Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000; Tekleab, Takeuchi, & Taylor, 2005). Moynihan and Pandey (2008) argued that there are no major theoretical differences in empirical research across the public and private sectors. Research and findings in the private sector thus appear to be an excellent source of inspiration for research in the public sector. In addition, as noted by Boyne et al. (1999), public settings tend to be more concerned about caring and developing well-being in the workplace. Accordingly, SET may provide a highly productive framework for research in the public sector. However, it is surprising to note that the social exchange framework is far more developed in private settings than it is in public settings. Therefore, the findings of this study are important for improving our understanding of how the social exchange process contributes to enhancing employee criteria. Consistent with Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), who noted that in a relationship of exchange, something must be given and something returned, the results of this study indicate that PCS (the give) fosters helping (the gift) through commitment to colleagues. Discouraging OCB affects service quality and may lead to the development of negative perceptions toward the public system (Cohen & Vigoda, 2000). The results of this study also suggest that encouraging helping increases commitment to the customer. This result is significant because, consistent with the new challenge that must be met by the public sector, public employees in contact with citizens (viewed as customers) may be viewed as boundary spanners between the public system and citizens as customers.

**Managerial Implications**

Intention to leave and commitment to the customer have become important factors in public organizations. First, turnover is costly for the public sector in terms of recruitment, training, and productivity losses (Moynihan & Landuyt, 2008). Second, com-
mitment to the customer appears to be a necessary condition for providing quality service to citizens (Cohen & Vigoda, 2000). Findings indicate that good relationships between colleagues are key factors that reduce intention to quit and increase commitment to the customer, which should help the public sector to meet new challenges.

For most supervisors working in government organizations, motivating employees can be (and usually is) a difficult task (Rector & Keiner, 2002). The findings of this study suggest that a public workplace should encourage both employee retention and commitment to the customer by promoting social exchange between colleagues. As noted in the introduction, the public sector worldwide faces significant new challenges (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002). Encouraging flexibility and creativity among public employees has been identified as an important source of efficiency (Stewart & Ranson, 1994). As a high rate of turnover is associated with costs that decrease efficiency (Steel & Lounsbury, 2009), employee stability needs to be promoted in the public sector. Based on the results of this study, the quality of the relationship of exchange among coworkers appears to be an interesting avenue of exploration for human resource management in the public sector. The public sector management literature emphasizes that modernization has highlighted the important role of supervisors (e.g., Demers & Gow, 2002; Holmes & Shand, 1995). The modernization of public administration underpins the quest for efficiency, which involves “doing more with less” (Borins, 1995). However, this challenge may be problematic when supervisors themselves are held to objective requirements in terms of results. Under these circumstances, public managers may consider PCS as an important input in view of its role in enhancing employee effectiveness. Diminishing intention to leave and increasing helping are two possible options. To achieve this kind of objective, practices that foster cohesion among employees (Howes, Cropanzano, Grandey, & Mohler, 2000) should be examined. In addition, as previous findings suggest positive relationships between leader fairness and positive effect (Williams, Pite, & Zainuba, 2002), public managers could undergo training to improve their leadership skills with a view to fostering a positive atmosphere among their subordinates.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Despite its contribution to the literature, this study has a number of limitations. First, one important limitation relates to the measurement of helping behavior. Self-report measures were used in this study. Although the suggestion made by Schnake (1991) was followed (i.e., measuring intention rather than behavior to capture helping others), it is important to acknowledge the issues raised by the source of the measurement. Researchers tend to differ on the difficulties associated with various data acquisition techniques. Some researchers (e.g., Organ & Ryan, 1995) have argued that self-report measures produce biased results and encourage the use of responses reported by a third party to avoid interference from respondents’ subjective views. Others (e.g., Turnipseed, 2002) see the use of self-reporting methods as justified when the investigation is focused on an examination of the links between psychological...
variables. As argued by Meierhans, Rietmann, and Jonas (2008), “The assumption underlying the use of self-reports is that OCB is generally not carried out in front of the supervisor and is therefore better known to the actor himself” (p. 139). Clearly, the decision to collect data using self-reported measures may lead to a common variance bias that can result in an overestimation of the results, in particular because of the phenomenon of social desirability (Spector, 1987). However, as indicated by Schnake (1991), “Supervisor ratings may be biased as a result of halo, or deficient because citizenship is so difficult to observe” (p. 741). Last, Van Dyne and Cummings (1990) point out that both self-report and supervisor ratings of OCB have a number of serious weaknesses (cited by Schnake, 1991). Finally, the measurement of OCB (self-reports vs. supervisor or colleague ratings) raises a number of unresolved issues. Future research could use more sources (self-rating, supervisor rating, and coworker rating) to neutralize the threat of common variance. Second, although methodological precautions were taken to mitigate the risk of shared variance, the results are based on a single sample and a cross-sectional research design. Therefore, the data need to be approached with caution. Future investigations could use a longitudinal research design to verify the stability of the observed correlations over time. Third, the research decisions made in this study involved examining perception as an input medium of exchange processes at a colleague level. Therefore, the findings provide no indications of individual or collective characteristics that might prompt an employee to support their colleagues. Finally, although consistent with the objectives of the study, commitment to the customer was examined as an outcome of the exchange process at a colleague level. However, commitment to the customer is merely one variable among others for capturing the service encounter. To provide more accurate findings, future research could also examine (for example) customer-oriented behavior, prosocial behavior toward the customer, customer satisfaction, or customer complaints.

**Conclusion**

The main purpose of this study was to contribute to the public management literature by showing the important role played by coworkers in the quest for efficiency, examined in this article through intention to leave and commitment to the customer. SET was used as a guide to investigate how perceived support and commitment help improve effectiveness among public employees. It is hoped that the results of this study will add to our understanding of SET in the study of employee outcomes in the public sector.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

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References


Author Biography