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Hierarchical distance and employees' commitment as conditioning of team-based work in the Spanish public sector

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Team-based work (TBW) plays a crucial role in the success and quality of public services. In the context of the Spanish public sector, our study evaluates if a low level of hierarchical distance (HD) in public organizations condition the public employees' commitment (EC) as well as TBW, assessed in terms of participation and consensus among team members. Simultaneously, we evaluated to what extent EC help to enhance TBW. Employing a sample of 213 government organizations from the south of Spain through a model of structural equations, we were able to answer the above questions. Our results revealed that team-based work functions more successfully within public organizations where there exists little verticality in their structures, norms, values and rules – in simplest terms, where there is minimal organizational HD. Such results also suggest that although regulations exist in the Spanish public sector, should public organizations attempt to be less vertical and more horizontal, they would perhaps have public servants that were more committed to their organizations. As a result, servants view the organization as their own and remain loyal. Finally, from an academic perspective, this study could be one of few to research and evaluate the hierarchical role and employees' commitment to the functioning of public employees based on participation and consensus in their work teams.

Key words: Employee commitment, hierarchical distance, organizational behavior, public organizations, Spain, team-based work.

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INTRODUCTION

Whether it be academics, professionals, policymakers, or society in general, all parties demand effective and efficient public services. Consequently, a constant challenge for public employees is *how* to provide high-quality public services as the services business employees do in order to guarantee its survival.

The Spanish public sector has been affected by multiple changes, and significant efforts are required to improve it, such as a growing diversity of the workforce, rapid technological advances, repeated political changes, legislative changes, and so on. Furthermore, the users of public services are not a homogeneous group but encompass multiple categories different from each other due to their nationalities of origin, races or ethnicities, languages, cultures, and so forth (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019). Hence, these changes represent a significant challenge in which governmental organizations must face (Isett, Glied, Sparer & Brown, 2013; Van der Voet, Steijn & Kuipers, 2017).

In Spain, the public sector is typically characterized by its enormous bureaucracy and the low degree of flexibility in how rules are fulfilled (Burzaco Samper & Sáenz de Santa María Gómez-Mampaso, 2013; Hernández de Cos, 2004). In this country, another characteristic of the public sector, is the existence of multiple layers of rules and regulations at various levels of government in a decentralized public administration, as well as the deeply implanted unions that are often powerfully opposed to changes in working conditions (Arenilla Sáez, 2017; Luxan Meléndez, 2016). These characteristics are the main elements which form the environment where Spanish public servants must deliver their services either individually or in teams.

In private companies, the employee's capacity to *work in teams* has become a mandatory requirement to the point where it is expected that the employee has this ability in order to be hired. In fact, empirical evidence has revealed that team-based work (TBW) is a significant factor for improving the quality of public services, and in particular cases, in public organizations (Procter & Currie, 2004).

Therefore, in the context of the public sector, it would be useful to comprehend these factors and characteristics which in turn may assist TBW. According to Procter and Mueller (2000), between the most significant factors are rewards, evaluations, training and development, labor relations and *organizational culture*. The latter factor may be the one to constrain TBW the most, due to the public sector implementing a high bureaucratic culture, as previously mentioned. In the private context, other studies have shown that TBW might be conditioned by the employees' committed (EC) to their enterprises as well (Da Silva *et al.*, 2018; Gollan, 2005; Gould-Williams & Gatenby, 2010; Hartnell, Ou & Kinicki, 2011). Yet in the public sector (e.g., in Spain), this relationship has not been deeply explored (Steijn & Leisink, 2006).

Existent empirical research do not adequately consider the role that the organization's culture (OC) might play in the success of TBW (Geary & Dobbins, 2001). Among the dimensions of OC most employed in the field of management and organizational behavior are those in the study by Hofstede (2011). They represent a frame of reference and are highly recommended by the scientific community (Meyer, Stanley, Jackson, McInnis, Maltin & Sheppard, 2012; Triguero-Sánchez & Peña-Vinces, 2013; Triguero-Sánchez, Peña-Vinces & Guillen, 2016).

Hierarchical distance (HD) is one of the most important factors of OC to take into consideration due to its effects on both employee commitment and TBW (Krokosz-Krynke, 1998; Stewart & Barrick, 2000). HD can be understood as the way in which one visualizes the hierarchical structure emphasizing the differences in status between employees and their superiors (Desmarais & Gamassou, 2014; Gómez-Mejia & Palich, 1997; Waldman *et al.*, 2006). HD refers to a set of values, attitudes, and beliefs shared between the members of an organization (Davies *et al.*, 2007) and is capable of generating expectations, shaping behaviors and leading to the interpretation of facts. Therefore, in the context of the Spanish public organizations, HD results are crucial to take into consideration as long as it is associated with the success of TBW since HD influences interpersonal relationships among the members of the team (Stewart & Barrick, 2000) and the employee's commitment (Geary & Dobbins, 2001; Wood & Menezes, 1998). According to *contextual theory* (Lepak, Bartol & Erhardt, 2005; Oc, 2018; Osborn, Hunt & Jauch, 2002) (the main theory of this study[1]), HD might drastically influence the degree of participation and consensus of public employees in their departments and/or work teams, characterized by active professional and administrative control (Calciolari, Prenestini & Lega, 2018) (i.e., bureaucracy). Thus, in organizations marked by considerable distances of power (very *vertical* organizations), major hierarchical differences are assumed since they characterize the prevailing inequality.

Moreover, in the context of business, some studies have shown how HD influences TBW success (Bhatti & Qureshi, 2007; Somech, 2010). However, in the context of the public sector, very few studies have yet to be conducted (Abane & Phinaitrup, 2020; Gould-Williams & Gatenby, 2010). Therefore, in the context of Spanish public organizations, we attempt to answer the following question (*research gap*):

> Does a low level of the hierarchical distance of public organisations positively influence both TBW and public employees' commitment?

In answering this question, our research will be useful not only for academics but also for managers of public organizations, as today's society demands high-quality public services, often obtained through TBW.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Before moving to the theoretical background, it is important to have a clear concept of team as it continues to be vague since it has been used to define a great variety of organizational values, processes and structures (Chen & Rainey, 2014; Gould-Williams & Gatenby, 2010). Mueller, Procter, and Buchana (2000) offer a broad definition of their understanding of a team: it involves a group of workers (usually 3–15) who meet regularly to work independently in fulfilling a specific task or aim. While Bayona and Cruz (2012) define a team as the grouping of two or more people who interact dynamically (face to face or virtual), interdependently and adaptively, in which each member has a specific role and shares the responsibility for their results in an organizational environment. In this sense, our research of TBW was studied from the perspective of the participation and consensus among team members, given that these features are critical elements of the success and efficiency of TBW. Due to the possibility of managers not being able to deal with such features, it will be difficult for teams to efficiently achieve their goals (Isett *et al.*, 2013). It is highlighted that in the public sector the goals that a team pursues are rather different from the goals of a team in a firm; while in a firm their efforts are mainly focused on the firm's profitability, the efforts of a team in a public organization are focused on delivering public services in the best way possible.

The theoretical framework used here is supported by contextual theory (Lepak *et al.*, 2005; Osborn *et al.*, 2002). This theory aims to change the approach to the reality of human resource management (Martín Alcázar, Romero Fernandez & Sánchez Gardey, 2004, 2005). From a psychological perspective, the contextual theory (CT) states that the *context* under which employees work may affect their behavior either positively or negatively and could affect an employee's performance (Brewster, 1999). Management often overlooks the contextual factors that conditions employees behavior and consequently, their performance (Lepak *et al.*, 2005; Osborn *et al.*, 2002). Thus, this research focuses on the contexts of work environments, specifically in the context of the hierarchical distance (HD) present in public organizations. For instance, contextual factors of HD such as competition between employees on the basis of wealth, power, and status tend to reward behaviors of power (domination versus submission), of strength (weakness versus strength), and of authority (boss versus subordinate) in which "competitiveness" between work teams usually plays a crucial differentiating role. Contextual factors affect employee behavior, both negatively and positively. In cases where organizations are characterized by a low HD due to a work environment where team members participate in discussions without the approval authority, their participation in decision-making is taken into account as it is usually developed with a level of personal autonomy superior to control systems in high HD organizations (Holt & DeVore, 2005).

From the organizational behavior perspective (Brewster, 1993), CT is essential in order to understand how employees behave and perform in different sectors (private or public) and careers. In other words, how the employees' environment affects their performance, positively or negatively. For the purpose of this research, the aim is to understand these particularities of the public sector affect TBS. According to their perspective, Martín Alcázar *et al.*, (2004) criticize the literature of previous contextualist authors (e.g., Hoogendoorn & Brewster, 1992), claiming that they underestimate the environmental variables that are crucial to understanding a business' reality and its internal and external relationships. Brewster, Larsen, and Maryhofer (1997) define that the role of HR applies not only to staff specialists, but also to the rest of the organization's managers. Furthermore, it gives particular importance to the role of teamwork since aspects like organizational culture will affect members' skills and competences to a greater or lesser extent.

In short, and in the context of this study, CT is useful because it allows explaining how the context-environment in which public employees provide their services might affect TBW (Gould-Williams & Gatenby, 2010; Mueller *et al.*, 2000). In our case, the contextual factors might affect TBW referring to the level of

authority, supervision style, management style, and status– in other words, to the level of HD present inside said public organization.

Gould-Williams and Gatenby (2010) claim that in public organizations, a change of management style from a supervision-control basis toward a participative and facilitator style basis would positively enhance the performance of TBW. Therefore, according to the contextual theory, factors may affect not only TBW but also employee commitment. Due to whether or not public employees have a boss that is more of a "policeman" instead of a "coach", it would be difficult for them to want to commit themselves to the organization's mission and vision. Thus, employees participation in decisions is usually encouraged, which favors their commitment to their work teams and the organization (Gould-Williams & Gatenby, 2010) and in turn, allows more efficient work systems to be created (Arthur, 1994).

Campbell's (2018) study on the willingness of public employees to collaborate with their team members has shown that if organizations want to achieve their organizational goals, they must pay special attention to the role played by norms, processes and corporate culture. Furthermore, Ramirez-Alujas (2012) has stated that when academics are conducting research on organizational behavior, it is crucial to consider the element of the organizational culture. Due to, their research models could be unrealistic and disconnected from real management (Abane & Phinaitrup, 2020). Therefore, in the context of the public sector, HD becomes an essential factor of OC to be considered in our research model (Fig 1).

In order to address our research objective in Fig 1, the theoretical framework is summarized and the hypotheses are put to the test.

Hierarchical distance and team-based work

Hierarchical distance is a crucial element of organizational culture (Hofstede, 1984), and is determined by internal structures and relationships (e.g., supervision, salaries, privileges, etc.), employee involvement in decision-making, and the establishment of rules in relationships and any conflicts that may arise (Fischer & Mansell, 2009). In organizations characterized by a high HD, workers do not usually share information with their bosses or those superior to them – the management is perceived to be an authority that provides guidelines and responses that all employees must follow (Wright, Szeto & Cheng, 2002). Meanwhile, in organizations with a low HD, there is a high

contribution to decision making by team members, which encourages consensus between them (Knight, Pearce, Smith *et al.*, 1999). Additionally, the low HD strengthens the communication between employees, increasing their desire to belong to their organization (Hartnell *et al.*, 2011). Thus, in this kind of organization, it is not unusual to see an employee and their superior jointly determined to meet the employee's training needs (Costigan, Insinga, Berman, Kranas & Kureshov, 2011). This occurs because employees have the chance to engage in the decision-making process (Jackson, Joshi & Erhardt, 2003), which has important implications for public organizations as they have a marked bureaucratic and normative profile (Conger & Pearce, 2003; Mbonu & Azuji, 2021). Therefore, in organizations characterized by a low power distance (i.e., a low HD), a horizontal hierarchical structure is most likely present (Triguero-Sánchez, Peña-Vinces & Sánchez-Apellániz, 2013; Waldman, Sully de Luque, Washburn *et al.*, 2006).

Regarding the impact HD might have on TBW, it will depend on the degree of employee participation in decision making and the search for consensus (Somech, 2010). The search for agreement implies avoiding final decisions until there is a certain level of consensus among the work teams (Knight *et al.*, 1999). Participatory management, when introduced in organizations where power is shared (low HD), provides everyone with the opportunity to participate. There is empirical evidence of this based on 100 Spanish firms, as reported by Triguero-Sánchez *et al.*, (2016).

The work is carried out by consensus (Khalid & Qureshi, 2007), not only in basic and medium level organizations but also in top management teams (Camelo, Fernández-Alles & Hernández, 2010; Marcelo, Araujo & Trez, 2018). These arguments have shown that the existent level of HD in organizations can affect the functioning of TBW. Therefore, in the context of the public sector, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: A low level of organization' hierarchical distance will positively influence the public organizations TBW.

EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT

Employees' commitment (EC) has been defined by Robbins (1998) as the extent to which workers identify themselves with their organization and, the organization's goals, and want to remain employed by the organization. A high commitment at work implies identifying oneself with the work. In contrast, a high organizational commitment requires a commitment to the organization's mission. Meyer and Allen (1991) establish that commitment can be studied from three perspectives: *affective commitment*, *instrumental commitment*, and *normative commitment*, which will be unpacked in the paragraphs to follow.

Affective commitment (AC) refers to the employee's engagement with the organization's values and objectives, and their desire to remain loyal to the organization (Bastos, 1993). Furthermore, AC is distinguished from other types of commitment because it considers whether or not employees voluntarily continue to work for the organization (Siqueira & Gomide, 2004).
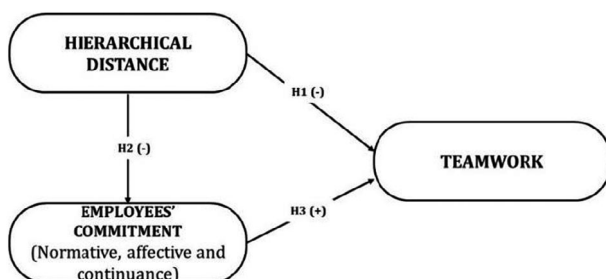

Fig. 1. Research model.

Continuance commitment (CC) means that employees remain with the organization because the loss that may arise from abandoning it would be greater than the benefits obtained from continuing (Bastos, 1993; Meyer *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, the remaining or leaving cost-benefit analysis that employees make has a great influence on their wish to remain with the organization. Generally, employees tend to think that in another organization, they will probably not receive the same economic benefits that are associated with their current status (Bastos, 1993).

Normative commitment (NC) suggests that employees continue with the organization as they consider it ethically correct to do so (Medeiros, de Albuquerque, Siqueira & Marques, 2003), because they think of themselves in debt to their organization (Siqueira & Gomide, 2004). As mentioned by Bastos (1993), NC is as a consequence of a range of normative pressures internalized by the person, causing them to behave according to the organization's objectives.

Therefore, the development of normative commitment allows the development of organizational culture, since it implies that the employees assimilate a series of values and patterns that achieve the organization's mission (Medeiros *et al.*, 2003). For example, in organizations where hierarchical cultures are predominant, instrumental commitment are favored because of their low affective relationship with the organization (Hauff, Richter & Tressin, 2015). Organizations with flatter cultures, on the other hand, favor both affective and normative commitment (Bigliardi, Ivo Dormio, Galati & Schiuma, 2012) since flexibility and autonomy of the members of the work teams favors the increase in their commitment (Pinto Silva, Angel Rivera Castro, Gilberto Dos-Santos *et al.*, 2018). A study carried out in the Spanish private sector (Triguero-Sánchez *et al.*, 2016) suggest that employee commitment is more present when organizations are horizontal and empower employees. In the context of the public sector, this would be crucial given the existence of excessive labor control standards (Isett *et al.*, 2013). On this matter, Wood and Menezes (1998) in a study conducted in UK public organizations have shown that when personal management is based on commitment policies rather than control policies, effectiveness increases in organizations with little hierarchy. Suzuki and Hur (2020), in 20 European countries, evaluated public servants' commitment. They found which public organizations based on bureaucratic organizational structures encourage employees' commitment; more specifically, the effects are on continuance and normative commitment. Molina's (2014) research based on Spanish public enterprises revealed that an organization's low HD indeed *boost*s an employee's commitment. Therefore, public personal management should consider some factors which may condition it towards the organizational culture; HD (Arundel, Bloch & Ferguson, 2019; Geary & Dobbins, 2001).

Therefore, the explanations previously developed on organizational commitment suggests that organizational culture – in particular HD – may condition it. In consequence, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2: A low level of the hierarchical distance of public organizations positively influence the public employees' commitment.

EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT AND TEAM-BASED WORK

On the one hand, the organization commitment policies are related to greater integration and employee satisfaction (Jeanquart Miles & Mangold, 2002), but at the same time favor the identification with their team, and by default, diminishes the perception of injustice and strengthens the trust between its members (Benschop, 2001; Budihardjo, 2013; Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; Khuwaja, Ahmed, Abid & Adeel, 2020). Consequently, the high participation of employees in their work teams has proven to be critical in the employees' commitment (Gould-Williams & Gatenby, 2010) in which it has been found that the TBW practices with high participation take advantage of the employees' commitment and in turn, count on their contributions (Arthur, 1994; Budihardjo, 2013; Remmen & Lorentzen, 2000; Renwick, Redman & Maguire, 2013).

On the other hand, the literature reviewed on TBW has shown that when organizations are working in teams, it is beneficial in terms of decision-making participation, cooperation and conflict resolution (Ahmandnia & Mohammnad, 2013; Colman & Gold, 2018; Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002). However, to achieve this, it is necessary that organizations keep an open debate since this method increases team members' commitment to their organizations.

Moreover, an open dialogue that is active and respectful to the disparity opinions among the team members becomes a critical factor of successful TBW which implies the participation between members, as well as the search for solutions that are agreed upon in the group (Hunton-Clarke, Wehrmeyer, Mckeown, Clift & King, 2002). The relationship between participation and consensus on the one hand, and attitudes towards the organization, show the importance of participation in order to obtain the support of employees towards new initiatives (Oreg, Vakola & Armenakis, 2011). Arguments have lead some academics (Gollan, 2005) to consider participatory employees in their work teams as high-quality workers, which makes it an essential means of achieving organizational effectiveness through commitment (Gollan, 2005).

In a study based on a sample of 697 public servants of Spain, Mañas, Salvador, González & Agulló (2007) revealed the fundamental role an employee's commitment plays within TBW under pressure. In the context of public organizations, we therefore propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Public employees' commitment will positively influence TBW..

RESEARCH METHOD AND STUDY DATA

Unfortunately, in Spain and other European countries, there does not exist a dataset which can indicate the precise number of public organizations that a country has. This is because in Spain, the public sector size is evaluated based on the public employment quantity rather than the number of the country's public organizations. Thus, it was impossible to determine the sample of study given that we did not have a number as a starting point. Therefore, on the basis of the above-mentioned discussion, it was decided to conduct a self-administered questionnaire using a sample of convenience, which is an accepted amount the

academic community (see e.g., Leat & El-Kot, 2009). As a result of this, we surveyed 214 public institutions.

The survey was carried out in the second semester of 2018 (from February to July) collecting the data using a structured questionnaire sent by email ($N = 184$) and a printed version ($N = 30$).[2] We surveyed the managers and directors[3] of teams of public organizations from the south of Spain. Table 1 shows the profiles of the public services organizations that were investigated.

Our research was focused on exploring to what extent HD of public organizations affect both TBW and employee commitment, as this topic has not yet been thoroughly investigated. Therefore, in order for a manager in a public organization to be considered as a target of the study, it was necessary that they fulfill the following three requirements:

1. Be responsible for leading a group of employees.
2. Be a public employee, because in Spanish public organizations there are many politicians as well as public employees. Politician employees are designated by one of the political parties and, therefore, they are given their job not on their merits but because they are part of a political party.
3. Have a minimum of five years working for the organization, regardless of the kind of contractual relationship (permanent or temporary).

One might wonder why, in this research, we have chosen solo managers and directors instead of subordinates. First, it must be

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of the sample*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Organization size (Employees)	214	4	2,700,000	18161	185592
Employees' age	214	20	64	49.70	8.35
Employees' Seniority	214	5	50	19	10.50
Employees' Contract		%			
Temporary	49	23			
Permanent	164	77			
Gender		%			
Female	127	59			
Male	87	41			
Position		%			
Director	32	15			
Mid-manager	81	38			
Senior-manager	101	47			
Sectors		%			
Education	32	15			
Employment	9	4.2			
Central government	20	9.3			
Health	20	9.3			
Justice	5	2.3			
Local government	46	21.5			
Ports services	4	1.9			
Postal services	3	1.4			
Regional government	62	29			
Security	8	3.7			
Social services	2	0.9			
Transport	2	0.9			
Public TV	1	0.5			
Total	214	100			

made clear that according to the literature review (Camelo *et al.*, 2010; Cannella, Finkelstein & Hambrick, 2008; Carpenter, Geletkanycz & Sanders, 2004), when one is investigating aspects of personal management, it is considered normal to survey solely managers and directors. Second, these kind of employees plays a fundamental role as a leader in a team setting which implies managing teams, encouraging people to participate within the team, and deal with possible conflicts or encourage people to look for consensus. Third, they are responsible for spreading the organization's policies and rules. Fourth, to differentiate between the remaining subordinates, they work with teams below and above their organizational hierarchy. Therefore, they have a complete vision of how easy or difficult working in teams is. Fifth, they are the responsible for creating a work environment that promotes less hierarchical environments (e.g., a less HD), in other words, informal settings and cultivating the organizational culture.

In Table 1, we present the descriptive statistics for the sample. It should be pointed out that most of the organizations are large; in particular, many were related to the regional government, and these account for 29% of the sample. Regarding the respondents' characteristics, the majority of them were female (59%), were on a permanent contract, and had worked for an average of 19 years in public administration.

SCALE MEASURES OF THE RESEARCH MODEL

TBW in our research attempts to evaluate teamwork functioning in terms of team members' participation on decision-making processes, on the collaboration between team members to accomplish both the team and organization's goals and the search for team member consensus. Consequently, to measure TBW, it was necessary to fit a scale to the context of a public organization. Therefore, we used the scale in the paper by Triguero-Sánchez, Peña-Vinces, González-Rendon & Sánchez-Apellaniz, (2012), which was a modification of the items proposed by Lam, Chen, and Schaubroeck (2002) in order to evaluate the role of teamwork in Spanish private companies, which they called the social process. Using a seven-point Likert scale, we measured this construct (Appendix Table A1 lists the items used to measure TP).

Regarding the employees' commitment construct, we used Allen and Meyer's (1990) multidimensional model as the instrument of measurement. This incorporates the three components or types of commitment – affective, instrumental and normative – as previously described. In this way, it is possible to measure the employees' commitment to the organization in terms of job satisfaction, their experience, and their intentions to stay with or leave the company. In the structural equation modeling (SEM) approach, this variable is a second-order construct; consequently, its treatment is a little different (Fig. 2).

The hierarchical distance variable was evaluated using Baker, Carson, and Carson's (2009) scale. The objective of assessing HD is to discover the extent to which lower HD in a public organization could help to increase participation on decisions making and consensus among the members' team. To reiterate, a seven-point Likert scale was utilized.

Most of the empirical studies in the management–business field (Boxall, Purcell & Wright, 2007) use control variables, and this
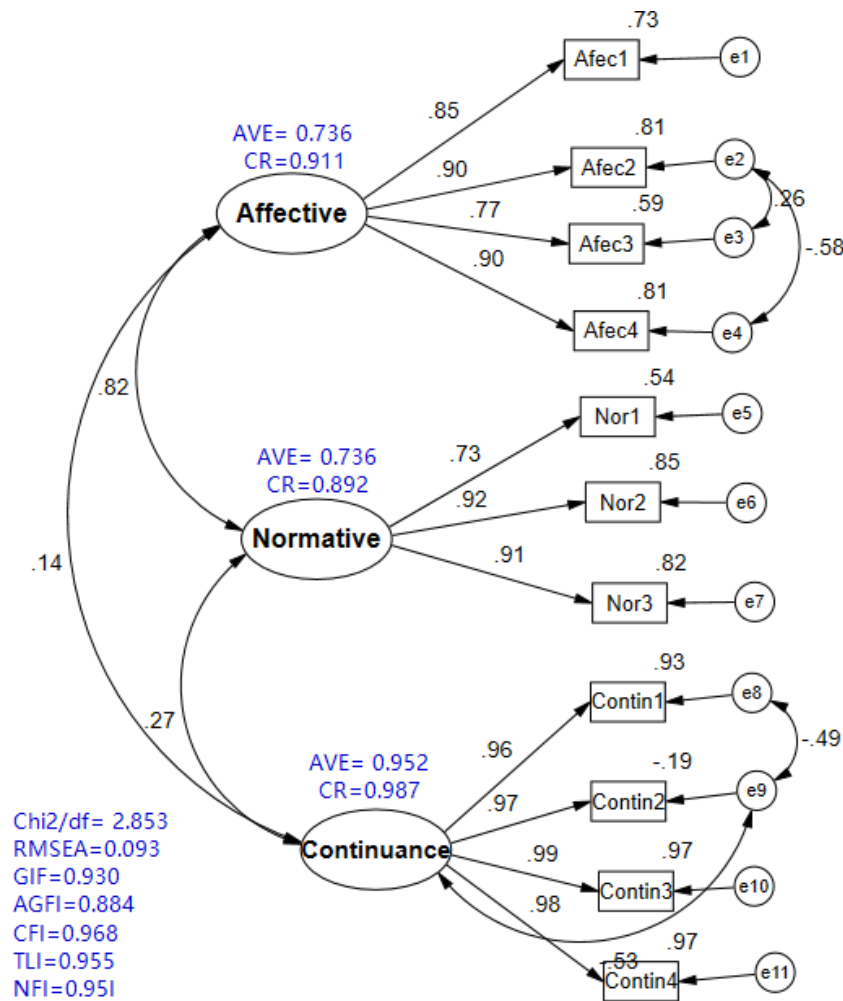
Fig. 2. CFA evaluation for EC. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

study is no exception. Furthermore, a study of phenomena looks in-depth at many factors but does not necessarily study them all. Thus, TBW might be affected by factors other than HD and employees' commitment. Understanding this, the control variables used are as follows: (1) the size of the organization; (2) the size of the organization's departments; (3) seniority in the organization; (4) gender; and (5) age of the respondents (Blau, 1977; Chen, Liu & Portnoy, 2012; Kuada, 2010; Richard, Barnett, Dwyer & Chadwick, 2004; Tsui, Egan & O'Reilly, 1991). Variables 1 and 2 are related to each other due to the fact that the number of members of an organization depends on the size of the organization, and the same is true for the size of a department; both these variables were measured through the number of employees.

SEM ASSESSMENT AND RESULTS

To test the three research hypotheses (Fig. 1), SEM was used as an econometric technique. The main advantage of an SEM model is that it allows one to work with unobserved variables (Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). SEM, as an econometric procedure, has been extensively employed in economics and management disciplines over recent years (Barrera & Carrión, 2014; Guerrero,

Cunningham & Urbano, 2015; Kim, Park & Park, 2017). Hair, Anderson, and Tatham (2010) pointed out the advantages of SEM; it permits the exploration of relationships amongst different constructs that are either independent or dependent.

The vast majority of research works that use SEM follow a two-phase approach. In the primary phase, the measurement model (MM) is evaluated, while the structural model (SM) is estimated in the second step (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Kim *et al.*, 2017). However, due to this specific research model being composed by a second-order construct – employee commitment – it is necessary to, evaluate if its three components are sufficient predictors of EC construct. Firstly, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was made, which revealed that commitment: normative, affective and continuance are proper elements to explain employee commitment. The CFA results can be seen in Fig. 2. CFA and the rest of analyses were performed utilizing the IBM SPSS and AMOS statistic 22.0 software.

In the MM evaluation (Table 2), we have assessed individual item reliability by considering the *standardized loadings* (λ) the *convergent validity*, (CV) and *discriminant validity* (DV) of constructs.

In Table 2, we can see that some items do not fit with the criterion of a $\lambda \geq 0.50$ (mainly when studies are applied to a

Table 2. *SEM-Measurement model*

Constructs/indicators	N	Mean	SD	λ	α	AVE	CR
Employees' commitment (second order construct)							
Affective					0.955	0.710	0.907
Afec1	214	4.659	1.495	0.823			
Afec2	214	4.313	1.577	0.870			
Afec3	214	3.827	1.593	0.774			
Afec4	214	4.645	1.531	0.898			
Normative							
Nor1	214	3.752	1.706	0.442	0.895	0.592	0.801
Nor2	214	4.248	1.653	0.933			
Nor3	214	4.402	1.615	0.843			
Continuance							
Contin1	214	4.930	1.918	0.987	0.960	0.785	0.932
Contin2	214	3.196	1.779	0.466			
Contin3	214	4.126	1.901	0.989			
Contin4	214	4.327	1.893	0.986			
Teamwork							
Team1	214	4.303	1.771	0.888	0.950	0.586	0.893
Team2	214	4.287	1.767	0.854			
Team3	214	2.971	1.807	0.625			
Team4	214	4.568	1.810	0.722			
Team5	214	3.294	1.801	0.735			
Team6	214	3.298	1.781	0.737			
Hierarchical distance							
HD1	214	3.724	1.865	0.838	0.935	0.558	0.861
HD2	214	3.421	1.766	0.789			
HD3	214	3.210	1.804	0.808			
HD4	214	2.771	1.765	0.690			
HD5	214	3.341	1.717	0.580			
HD6	214	3.743	1.753	Removed			
Model fits		**Chi2/df**	**GFI**	**AGFI**	**CFI**	**IFI**	**RMSEA**
Results		1.513	0.872	0.837	0.771	0.787	0.049
Recommended		< 3	0-1	0-1	0-1	0-1	< 0.8

Note: 0(not fit) to 1(perfect fit)

different context, or in exploratory studies like this). To avoid loss of useful information and especially because constructs accomplished the remains of criteria of a MM evaluation, it was decided not to eliminate the item Nor1. However, the item HD6 was eliminated as it reached a λ pretty far off the set parameter. Regarding, the tests for construct reliability such as Cronbach's alpha (α) and composite reliability (CR), gave values above the recommended limit of 0.70. Moreover, for the average variance extracted (AVE) measures (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), all the constructs were above the suggested limit of 0.50. Therefore, the results confirm the CV and DV of the scales of measurement for the research model. Furthermore, in Table 2, it is possible to observe the *goodness-of-fit* (GOF) statistics from the SEM-MM (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Kim *et al.*, 2017), which indicate an appropriate fit (GOF) of the model to the data.

Concerning the DV of the SEM, our results (Table 3) indicate that each variable is different from each other variable, and therefore that the DV is also confirmed.

Beyond the previous analysis of the SEM-MM, the research provides the descriptive statistics and assessment of the normality of each item for every construct's item (see Appendix Table A1). We evaluated the normality by using the *critical region* (cr) for both kurtosis and skewness. The figures suggest that all the

indicators have values lower than the set criteria of 1.0 for kurtosis and skewness. Concerning the critical region, our values obtained do not surpass the limit of 8.0.

The econometric analysis of the SEM-SM (Appendix Fig. A4) is concluded once the validity and reliability of the research model have been shown. It is then possible to pass on to the second phase, that is, the evaluation of the structural model (Barrera & Carrión, 2014; Guerrero *et al.*, 2015; Kim *et al.*, 2017). However, before performing the structural model evaluation and by using the intercepts of the variables' study, the latent constructs were standardized. This process is highly recommendable since it allows for a better model fit. Furthermore, because through latent constructs' intercepts, it is possible to evaluate if multicollinearity exists among the variables. In fact, such an assessment has shown that the SM did not have multicollinearity problems, as the highest VIF value was of 1.444.

The structural model (Appendix Fig. A2) was evaluated using the estimation of path coefficients and the explained *variance* (R^2) of the dependent constructs, that is, the relationships between hierarchical distance, employee commitment, team-work, and the control variables. The SM results are provided in Table 4 – the results of the SEM indicated that it had a proper fit. The significance of the parameter estimates was assessed using *t-values* (C.R.)

Table 3. *SEM discriminant validity*

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1. Hierarchical distance	*0.747*						
2. Employees' commitment	−0.230	NA					
3. TBW	−0.251	0.472**	*0.766*				
4. Organization size	−0.016	−0.053	−0.018	NA			
5. Employees' Seniority	0.062	−0.067	−0.085	0.039	NA		
6. Employees' Age	0.050	−0.029	−0.048	−0.018	0.513**	NA	
7. Employees' Gender	−0.018	0.057	0.015	−0.076	−0.050	−0.227	NA

Italicized figures are the square root of AVE.
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Table 4. *Structural model results*

Hypotheses	Effect	β	b	S.E.	C.R.	P	R^2	*Support*
Hierarchical distance → Employees' commitment	(−)	−0.231	−0.025	0.007	−3.491	***	25%	*Yes*
Employees' commitment → Teamwork	(+)	0.414	3.441	0.510	6.748	***		*Yes*
Hierarchical distance → Teamwork	(−)	−0.157	−0.144	0.056	−2.584	0.010		*Yes*
Control variables								
Age →Employees' commitment	NA	0.017	0	0.002	0.213	0.831	8%	NA
Gender→ Employees' commitment	NA	0.026	0.010	0.026	0.380	0.704		NA
Seniority→ Employees' commitment	NA	−0.032	−0.001	0.001	−0.410	0.682		NA
Org. Size → Employees' commitment	NA	−0.153	−0.029	0.013	−2.220	0.026		NA
Age→ Teamwork	NA	−0.019	−0.003	0.013	−0.272	0.786		NA
Gender→ Teamwork	NA	−0.043	−0.132	0.190	−0.692	0.489		NA
Seniority→ Teamwork	NA	−0.015	−0.002	0.010	−0.210	0.834		NA
Depart Org. Size→ Teamwork	NA	−0.141	−0.219	0.097	−2.264	0.024		NA
Model fit	Chi2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI	TLI	NFI	
Results	1.443	0.046	0.990	0.946	0.977	0.902	0.938	
Recommended	<3	<0.8	0–1	0–1	0–1	0–1	0–1	

Note: β = *Standardized Regression Weights*; b = *Regression Weights*.
***Significantly different from zero at the 0.001 level (two-tailed)

RESULTS

The results in Table 4 suggest that a low level of hierarchical distance present in a public organization boosts the TBW's participation and consensus. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 (*β: −0.157 p < 0.05*) is confirmed. The results here are coherent with prior research (Gould-Williams & Gatenby, 2010), particularly with studies conducted in the private sector context (Triguero-Sánchez *et al.*, 2013) which found that a lower organizational HD allows improves the performance of TBW. Therefore, these results support the contextual theory (Lepak *et al.*, 2005; Osborn *et al.*, 2002) to show that the organization's culture is a crucial element of TBW in our case, studied from the HD perspective.

Hypothesis 2, which proposes that a low level of HD in a public organization allows organizations to count on more committed employees (*β: −0.231, p < 0.001*), is also confirmed. Consequently, it indicates that this environment decreases their wish to abandon the organization (Contin1; λ = 0.987) (Siqueira & Gomide, 2004) and promotes the idea of EC-continuance commitment (Suzuki & Hur, 2020), so that its objectives tend to coincide with those of its organization (Afect3; λ = 0.774) (Medeiros *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, these effects are consistent with contextual theory as HD influences the TBW participation and consensus of public employees. Once again, this theory is shown to confirm the relationship between proper teamwork management – participation and consensual agreements – and their cultural environment (Brewster, 1999).

Concerning Hypothesis 3, it is confirmed that the results obtained were as expected (*β: 0.414, p < 0.001*). This has shown that if organizations count on employees committed to their organization, they could benefit from the TBW participation and consensus. Once again, these results underpin contextual theory

employed as the theoretical background of this study, due to HD influences on the level of participation and the degree of interest in reaching consensus within work teams, which is in line with previous research (Budihardjo, 2013; Remmen & Lorentzen, 2000; Renwick *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, such results (see Table 4) confirm the mediative role employee commitment has in the relation of HD towards TBS. That being said, it should not be forgotten that public employees are more committed to their organization when working within environments with less of a hierarchy. In other words, employee commitment only fosters TBS within organizations that aim to establish more balanced work environments, as opposed to those with high HD. Therefore, it is crucial to keep this in mind when analyzing employees' commitment versus TBS.

Regarding the control variables related to employees' diversity (Richard *et al.*, 2004; Triguero-Sánchez, Peña-Vinces & Guillen, 2018) such as age, gender, and seniority, unfortunately, none of them had the statistical significance that was expected. An explanation that can be considered is that such variables do not have direct effects but rather have mediative effects, which is coherent with previous studies which have shown that employees' diversity variables influence their performance through HRM practices (Triguero-Sánchez *et al.*, 2018). However, from an SEM point of view, research model's control variables are adequate in order to understand that 25% of R^2 of TBW is due to both EC and HR, plus control variables. Thus, there is a 75% gap where other factors may affect TBW. As a result, these findings will be useful in future research in order to investigate other factors (e.g., related to organizations and employees) that could affect TBW.

Respect the control variables related to the organization (e.g., the organization's size and the organization's departments). On the one hand, the result (β: -0.156, $p < 0.05$) suggests that when smaller organizations leverage TBW, participation and consensus would work much better. Alternatively, employees may be more committed to their organization when their department tends to be small rather than large (β: -0.141, $p < 0.05$). This is because when public employees work in small departments mainly composed by few members, it is more comfortable to foster interpersonal relationships and exchange ideas and feedback.

DISCUSSION

There seems to be a wide consensus between academics and professionals that indicates the importance of the management of work teams for the achievement of consensus instead of confrontation (Team4; $\lambda = 0.722$) and employee participation in decision-making (Team 2; $\lambda = 0.854$). However, the importance of the working environment in which these teams are developed has not been noted. Among the multiple factors that make up the organizational context, the organizational culture must be taken into account, and especially HD or the degree of horizontality that dominates in these organizations. In organizations where the structure is predominantly horizontal, fostering commitment policies with employees can be of assistance. The research conducted here indicates that the positive effects of such commitment policies are manifested in the results of the participation and consensus' teamwork (Team4; $\lambda = 0.722$).

Regarding employees' commitment to their organization (Abdullah, Shamsuddin & Wahab, 2015; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) the research revealed that the TBW participation and consensus of public employees is supportive of the three kinds of commitment – affective, normative, and continuance (Bastos, 1993) – and by the organizational culture which in this context, means less bureaucratic organizations (i.e., those where the HD is lower, and the structure is more horizontal). Therefore, it is essential to highlight that high participation in work teams and agreements between team members (Team6; $\lambda = 0.737$) within predominantly horizontal cultures, and the adoption of pro-commitment policies, will lead to greater effectiveness of the decisions taken in those teams, in terms of quality and commitment to the aims of the entity.

Thus, we can say that if an employee is committed, this implies that they identify with their work and their teams, and therefore will work toward the future of the same since commitment is able to create loyalty to the organization (Afec2; $\lambda = 0.870$). This commitment also implies a commitment to public services (education, health, safety, etc.), since after all, the employees owe a duty to the society they serve. At the same time, it is not to be forgotten that employees tend to have a commitment to an organization when they are clear about their future and the possibilities of career development (Contin3; $\lambda = 0.989$) (Knight *et al.*, 1999; Triguero-Sánchez *et al.*, 2012). In fact, Spain and other European countries have been criticized by European institutions because of the high number of their public servants on temporary contracts. Permanent contracts and career development are crucial to achieving commitment from employees. In this regard, one might ask oneself why Spanish public employees have not abandoned their organizations yet, given the high proportion of temporary contracts in the public sector. The answer may be that this kind of employee knows clearly how to manage their expectations since most know well that once they have a permanent contract, they will have a job for the rest of their lives. In contrast, in the private sector, even when an individual has a permanent contract, it is very easy to be dismissed.

CONCLUSIONS

In the first place, this study has shown that in the Spanish public organizations with little verticality (< HD) in their structures norms, values, and rules can benefit from higher levels of employee commitment in the form of both the desire to remain in the organization whether in their own personal interest or a matter of moral principles, as well as affective attitudes towards the work team or organization.

Second, a low hierarchical distance can achieve greater efficiency in the processes that are developed in their team work, especially when there is greater participation in decision-making and the adoption of better quality agreements – these effects are enhanced by the EC.

Third, in the public sector of Spain, some specific barriers that are present such as bureaucracy and the status of managers, could have an effect on the TBW participation and consensus. However, the results mentioned previously have confirmed that a low level of hierarchical distance in a public organization allows this kind of barrier to be broken down and therefore public organizations could potentially boost their TBW. This would, indirectly,

influence the quality of the Spanish public services and surely provide better services for the people whom they attend or serve.

Fourth, in Spanish public organizations, a low HD favors a more significant employees' commitment among themselves and with the organization itself. This enables higher levels of efficiency in the internal processes of their work teams, in terms of collaboration and interest in reaching agreements. Thus, a low HD might boost the employee's loyalty and desire to remain in these organizations.

Implications

Our study findings have significant implications for practitioners of the public sector. The first implication is for the organizational model, which is usually highly bureaucratic and sometimes rigid (Isett *et al*., 2013). In this respect, our results suggest that TBW works better when managers are able to create an informal work (less HD) environment (which is not always possible). One way to do this is for the managers to avoid abusing their authority and power over the employees (HD2; $\lambda = 0.789$) – on the contrary, they must look for consensus instead of confrontation (Team4; $\lambda = 0.722$), which also implies that the managers and the employees should maintain a consistent and active dialogue (Team1; $\lambda = 0.888$). However, the highly standardized processes and the requirement to fulfill the law in public organizations, particularly in the Spanish case, sometimes makes it almost impossible to create an informal work environment. Nevertheless, this must not be used as an excuse. As it has been shown here, working in an informal environment that is a little hierarchical environment (e.g., less HD), improves team-based work.

Another important practical implication is for public organizations' culture. A culture of delegation and the assumption of responsibilities between employees and their bosses should be encouraged. For this reason, managers in public organizations must share the decision-making with their collaborators, since in this manner, they will produce a culture of empowerment in their organizations.

The last implication for practitioners of the public sector relates to the creation by managers and middle managers of an environment that increases the participation and consensus of public servants. First, they should use their formal authority less, and delegate tasks with certain guarantees of success. However, to achieve this, the three dimensions of commitment (Fig. 2) must be understood, as commitment is based on the principle of reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Johar, Nor & Hassan, 2019). Managers can enhance their employees' loyalty to the organization and their sense of belonging, as well as a third dimension of emotional attachment. Therefore, for this personal management policy to function appropriately, the employees' commitment is the best tool for managers of public organizations.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Most scholarly research has constraints, and this study is no exception. The first limitation is that a single country sample was used, which implies that our conclusions can be applied solely to those countries whose system of public employment is analogous

to the Spanish system (e.g., France, Portugal and Italy). For instance, in the Spanish system of public employment, two kind of contracts coexist. First, there are contracts based on a business regime, meaning employees have the same rights and obligations within a company. Alternatively, in public servant contracts, the main difference is the fact that public employees have more benefits (e.g., bonuses, career development, promotions, job stability, etc.) than those employees hired according to the private sector regime.

The second limitation is the fact that this research has covered almost all public services. However, this limitation might lead to future research that produces different results if the same study was carried out in one particular sector, such as education or health.

It is also important to recognize that there may exist other contextual factors and variables that can influence TBW. Future research could consider whether the level of trust and leadership styles may contribute to it.

Additionally, new research could explore the meditative role hierarchical distance may have on the relationship between employee commitment and TBW. It could explain why employee commitment has the same impact (a positive one) when hierarchical distance plays a meditative role in this relationship.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

http://dx.doi.org/10.17632/bvnnw2pcpm.1#file-fe01f7b4-8ede-445f-a265-b93bee69b0c3

NOTES

[1]In the theoretical background, we offer a small discussion about why the contextual theory is essential for explaining TBS.
[2]An ANOVA analysis revealed that there were no differences in the responses between the printed surveys and the email surveys.
[3]Because of the difficulties of collecting data, most studies are based on one informant from each organisation, and this was the case in our study as well. For this reason, one might expect that our study could suffer from the typical problem of common method variance (CMV). Therefore, to avoid it, we first ensured that the participants fulfilled the three requirements of the study (as set out in the data collection section). Second, before performing the statistical analysis, an exploratory principal components (EPC) analysis was implemented, which revealed that none of the study variables show CMV. In fact, Harman's test analysis revealed that the single factor EPC value of the total variance was of 32% (below the limit of 50%). Furthermore, a multicollinearity analysis revealed that there were no multicollinearity troubles as the variance inflation factor's values were below 1.40

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APPENDIX

Table A1. *Normality assessment*

Variable	min	max	skew	c.r.	kurtosis	c.r.
HD5	1	7	0.366	2.185	−0.833	−2.488
HD4	1	7	0.715	4.268	−0.683	−2.039
HD3	1	7	0.482	2.877	−0.987	−2.947
HD2	1	7	0.260	1.552	−1.029	−3.072
HD1	1	7	0.148	0.885	−1.191	−3.555
Team6	1	7	0.292	1.741	−1.075	−3.21
Team5	1	7	0.488	2.917	−0.800	−2.387
Team4	1	7	−0.344	−2.055	−0.945	−2.823
Team3	1	7	0.646	3.857	−0.656	−1.958
Team2	1	7	−0.113	−0.675	−1.036	−3.094
Team1	1	7	−0.221	−1.319	−0.969	−2.894
Contin4	1	7	−0.181	−1.079	−1.096	−3.271
Contin3	1	7	−0.243	−1.452	−1.048	−3.129
Contin2	1	7	0.349	2.087	−1	−2.987
Contin1	1	7	−0.792	−4.729	−0.473	−1.413
Nor3	1	7	−0.138	−0.824	−0.808	−2.411
Nor2	1	7	−0.067	−0.402	−0.816	−2.435
Nor1	1	7	0.071	0.423	−0.796	−2.376
Afec4	1	7	−0.24	−1.432	−0.768	−2.293
Afec3	1	7	0.075	0.448	−0.916	−2.734
Afec2	1	7	−0.172	−1.027	−0.863	−2.578
Afec1	1	7	−0.351	−2.096	−0.536	−1.601

Table B1. *Constructs' items*

Codes	**Hierarchical Distance** *1 = Completely disagree, 7 = Absolutely agree*
HD1	The vast majority of the bosses' decisions are usually made without first consulting their employees
HD2	Bosses frequently take advantage of their power over their employees
HD3	The bosses hardly ever take into consideration the opinions of their workers
HD4	Bosses avoid having social contact with their personnel outside work
HD5	Personnel never oppose the bosses' decisions
HD6	Chiefs usually do not assign important responsibilities to their workers

	Teamwork *1 = Completely disagree, 7 = Absolutely agree*
Team1	In our organization, the workers' opinion is usually taken into account in decisions. In other words, there is feedback among the members of the work teams
Team2	In our organization, employees often participate in decision-making processes that affect their careers and the organization's mission
Team3	In our organization, employees participate in decisions related to the mission of the organization and their department
Team4	In our organization, we always look for consensus instead of confrontation when we are working as a team
Team5	In our organization, we usually hear the opinion of team members before making decisions
Team6	In our organization, the decisions are not final until all the members reach an agreement

|	**Employees' commitment** 1 = Completely disagree, 7 = Absolutely agree
Code	**Affective commitment**
Afec1	Employees seem to be highly committed to the organization
Afec2	Employees seem to be emotionally attached to this organization
Afec3	Employees seem to perceive the organization's problems as their own
Afec4	Employees really do care about the fate of their organization
	Continuance commitment
Cont1	Employees stay in the organization because they are aware that, by leaving the company, they would lose the general benefits and seniority accumulated until then
Cont2	Employees stay in the organization because some kind of compensation scheme was implemented based on the organization's future success
Cont3	Employees stay in the organization because they are aware that, by leaving the company, they would lose an opportunity for professional development
Cont4	Employees have invested too much of themselves in this organization to consider going elsewhere
	Normative commitment
Nor1	Most people owe a lot to the organization
Nor2	People feel a high sense of loyalty to the organization
Nor3	Employees know, understand and identify with the needs, objectives and values of the company
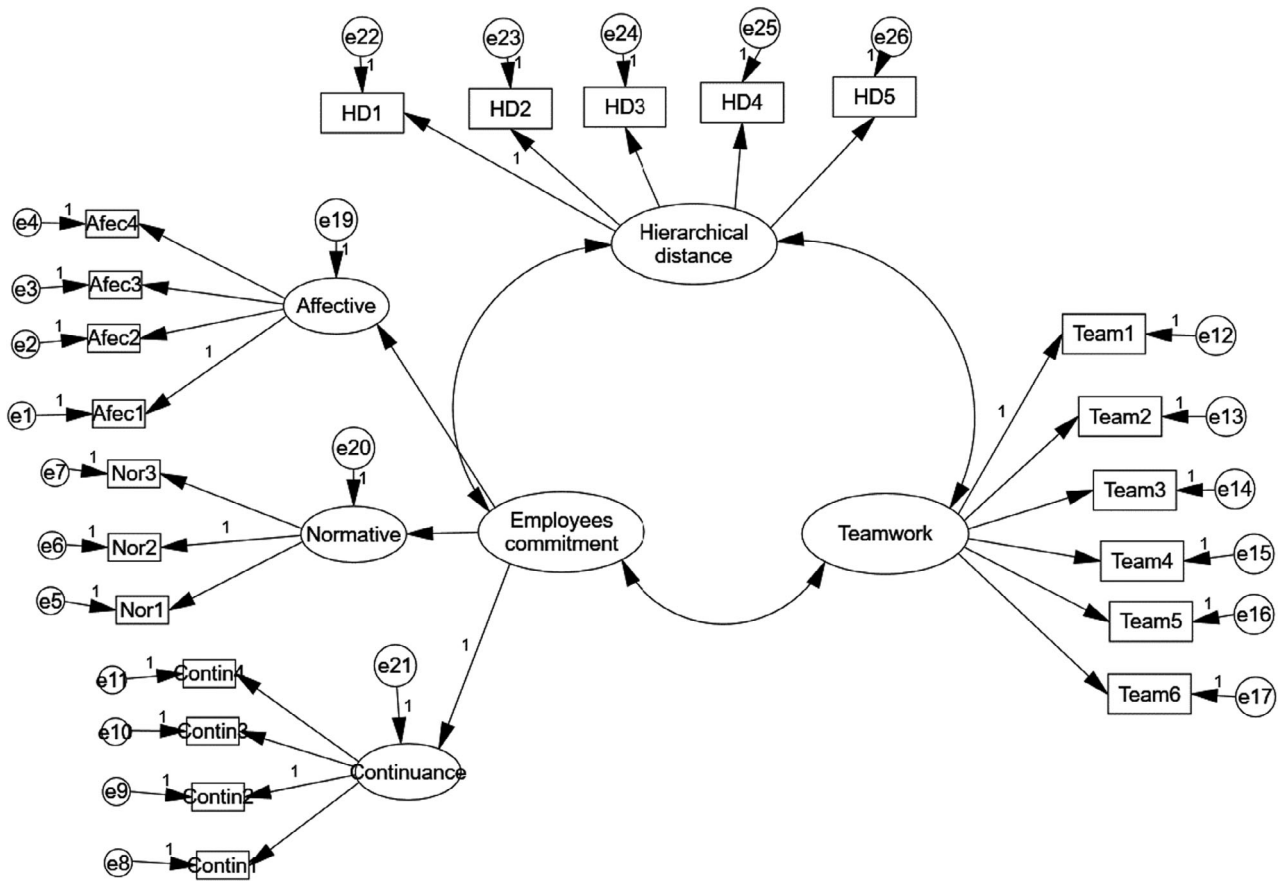
Fig. A1. SEM-measurement model.
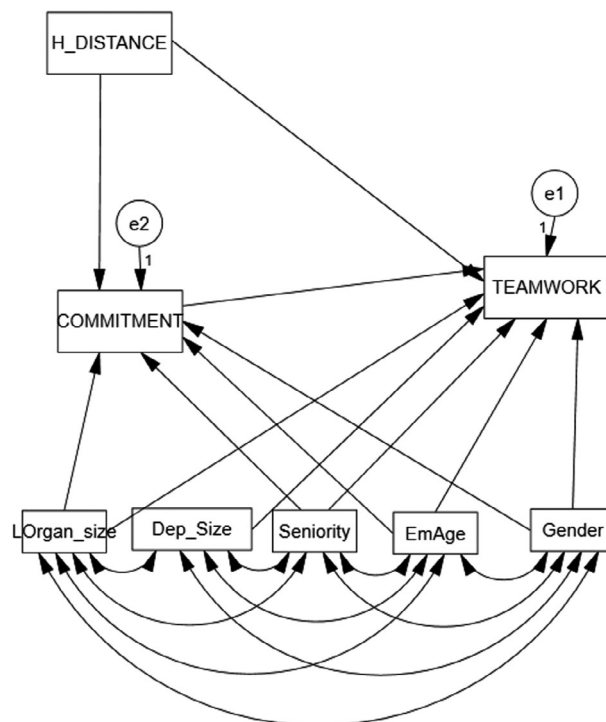
Fig. A2. SEM-structural equation model.