

Human Resource Management Department as Strategic Partner in Organization

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Abstract—The current business environment poses unique challenges for organizations, making them discover the methods of increasing the efficiency of their activities, as well as making them react quickly to changing needs and requirements. The strategic human resource management includes the activities relating to the introduction and implementation of consistent policies and practices oriented on organizations' human resources, their individual and collective knowledge, skills and abilities, and their optimum use for the purpose of contributing to the fulfilment of the objectives of the organization as a whole. The presented article analyses the present state of focus of Slovak organizations on the existence of a human resource management department in the organizations, the content of its orientation, and competence. The outcomes of the research point to a gradual increase in the focus of the organizations on this issue; however the need of a more significant advancement is apparent upon the comparison of the average levels of this focus in the EU countries.

Keywords—*business environment, human resources, Slovak organizations*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Slovak labour market is currently characterized by a severe lack of qualified human resources, resulting in many organizations experiencing difficulties in recruiting suitable personnel [1]. Many organizations have realized that this trend is expected to grow with the emerging 4.0 Industrial Revolution, as 60% of the positions that are currently occupied by less qualified employees will be cancelled in Slovakia, and entirely new positions will be created, necessitating IT qualifications, which will even increase differences in the levels of qualification requirements to be met by employees. How individual Slovak organizations manage to cope with this phenomenon in the future is eminently dependent on their approach to the strategy of human resource management. The activities associated with the recruitment and selection of employees, the education of employees, their remuneration, and employer-employee relations should remain the key functions of traditional human resource management. However, it is essential that in addition to these, also strategic human resource management is focused on, especially including the creation of a formalized personnel strategy and its implementation, and systematic corrections to the organizational culture for the purpose of influencing the

productivity and effectiveness of the entire organization. Strategic human resource management should be largely focused on the development of the competence and knowledge of employees so that the strategies adopted and implemented by an organization in different fields of interest were always supported by quality and knowledgeable human potential. As Kumaraswamy, McDonnell, Urbancová, Hitka, Cagaňová, Stachová state, the prospects of an organization are and will be primarily an outcome of work with its social capital and its development [2]–[7].

Strategic human resource management necessitates the activities relating to the introduction and implementation of consistent policies and practices oriented on organizations' human resources, their individual and collective knowledge, skills and abilities, and their optimum use for the purpose of contributing to the fulfilment of the objectives of the organization as a whole. Human resource management subsequently assumes strategic character depending on the extent to which the personnel strategy will participate in the effectiveness of the organization, as well as on the extent to which it will be fulfilled [8]–[12].

The most frequently occurred barriers preventing HR departments from increasing the efficiency of their work, and from contributing to the fulfilment of organizational strategies include their excessive focus on administrative activities, and their incapability to measure the impact of human resource management activities on the key activities of the organization, thus naturally creating the image of HR departments as only the performers of operational activities, and automatically excluding them from the role of a strategic partner.

Some have opined that specialists in HR issues have both insufficient motivation and capability to look into the distant future of their organization [13]–[19]. Strategic human resource management requires orientation on the needs of both the near and the distant future of an organization. Strategic human resource management has to forecast the direction of an organization for the period of 5 - 6 years, and help it understand phenomena such as the impact of changes anticipated in demographic development on the labour market, and subsequently on the characteristics of future human resources.

Human resource managers thus tend to work at the micro level of their organizations, where they focus on the performance of day-to-day responsibilities in an excessively isolated extent. Many HR specialists view individual human resource management functions as separate activities, and they show no effort to uncover their significance for the functioning of the key processes of the organization as a whole [20]–[22]. In line with the direction of the organization, strategic human resource management should formulate long-term objectives concerning the development of organization’s human resources, incorporating visions so that these objectives are clear and helpful in adopting the organizational strategy [23]–[26]. The fundamental precondition of the fulfilment of this requirement includes the HR specialists understanding business processes to the extent ensuring their ability to make right decisions in their field, to formulate right agenda, to select right procedures, thus gaining complete acceptance upon the establishment of organizational objectives and plans for the upcoming period.

Trends in the models of human resource management departments have sought simplification in terms of the number of roles and the definitions of their activities, while they have become more complex in terms of responsibility for the overall performance of an organization. Theoreticians are seeking inspiration in the living systems, comparing organizations to organisms. The road to long-term competitiveness is conditioned by recognizing relations, by interaction with the environment, and by inspiring employees with the organizational strategy. The competency framework of HR specialists currently includes their creativity, trustworthiness, openness to changes, and the knowledge of business and organizational culture.

The new reality of competition will require entirely new methods of considering the procedures applied in human resource management, changes in HR departments, and changes in the approach of specialists to human resource management. Dvořáková points to the fact that the management of people covers the management of a strategic factor, whose work ability determines the competitive advantages of companies [27]. The issue of strategic approach to human resource management has been dealt with by many authors, who introduced modern models of measuring and recording the effectiveness of human resources with reference to corporate strategies, and who directly proposed an interconnection between corporate strategies and a model of investing in human capital. Based on the human capital theory, people in an organization and their potential are considered to be human capital; this approach applies one of the principles of process-oriented management, in which it is assumed that management is based on measurement. A requirement to transform HR departments to so called business partners has appeared in relation to strategic human resource management. Strategic business partnership, its principles, implementation and functioning were introduced by Ulrich [28]. HR departments are transforming from operational support units to full partners of their internal clients, thus bringing organizations an apparent added value. Strategic business partners are certain representatives responsible for the management of people toward internal clients, who help managers fulfil objectives, and who implement strategies and concepts in interaction and in cooperation with human resources. A strategic business partner is a specialist in the

management of people, who is capable of effective management of value adding processes in a team of an internal customer, e.g. talent or career management. They are valued for their experience and direct interconnection with an internal customer.

Although the development of human resource management has produced much theoretical knowledge of the importance, significance and characteristics of strategic human resource management, the management of human resources in many organizations has not managed to assume the role of a strategic business partner. With regard to vast differences between the traditional and the strategic human resource management, it is understandable that many organizations have difficulties with the transformation, and only a few organizations have successfully implemented the necessary changes and applied the new concept of entire human resource management. Considering that a qualitative change is concerned, the acquisition of the status of a strategic business partner requires a substantial change in thinking. The following research and discussion aimed at an analysis of the present state of the issue in question, and at a comparison of Slovak organizations to the organizations operating in the examined field in other European countries.

II. METHODOLOGY

For the needs of this article, the data obtained from a research repeatedly conducted between 2014 - 2018 at School of Economics and Management in Public Administration in Bratislava were applied, and the top representatives of Slovak institutions were interviewed. The questions were asked through personally delivered questionnaires. The amount of the interviewed institutions was between 573 - 609 every year, while the response rate of comprehensively completed questionnaires was between 60% - 65%.

In order to ensure the representativeness of the research sample, two stratification criteria were determined. The first criterion was the region of operation of the organization based on the NUTS classification, Slovakia was particularly divided according to the NUTS 2 category, while the structure of the research sample was based on the data provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

TABLE I. REGIONAL STRUCTURE OF ORGANIZATIONS WITH MORE THAN 50 EMPLOYEES

Region - NUTS II.	Bratislava Region	Western Slovakia	Central Slovakia	Eastern Slovakia
Districts	BA	TT, TN, NR	BB, ZA	KE, PO
Number of organizations 2014	1,098	904	644	612
Number of organizations 2015	1,105	916	651	613
Number of organizations 2016	1,114	923	649	621
Number of organizations 2017	1,290	932	648	618
Number of organizations 2018	1,352	927	652	627

Source: elaborated based on data of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

The second stratification criterion was a minimum number of employees, determined to 50 employees, which excluded small enterprises from the research sample on the one hand, however the importance of focusing on a formal human resource management system in organizations with 50 and more employees was followed on the other hand.

The data provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic during the monitored period indicated that the number of organizations with 50 and more employees in individual regions was oscillating around similar values, while the particular regional structure of the organizations with over 50 employees in the given years is provided in the following table.

Calculating an optimum research sample from the given base set of organizations, Confidence Level of the research was determined at 95% and Confidence Interval of the results was determined at $H = +/- 0.10$. On the basis of the aforementioned criteria a sufficient or relevant research sample for individual regions of Slovakia was determined in the analyzed years, which is provided in Table 2.

TABLE II. SIZE OF RESEARCH SAMPLE FOR INDIVIDUAL REGIONS OF SLOVAKIA

Region NUTS II.	Bratislava Region	Western Slovakia	Central Slovakia	Eastern Slovakia
Districts	BA	TT, TN, NR	BB, ZA	KE, PO
Number of organizations 2014 - 2018	1,352 - 1,114	904-932	644-652	606-627
Size of research sample	90	87	84	83

Source: Authors

The measured values were statistically processed and assessed by calculated chain indices (values changed since the previous year), and fixed-base indices (values changed since the first year).

III. RESEARCH OUTCOMES

With regard to the fact that modern human resource management departments should participate in the concept and implementation of corporate strategies under the conditions of developed globalization with a strong interconnection, dominated by the potential of worldwide competition, in which the essential conditions are increasing demands for innovation capacity and a short time for marketing, the research was primarily focused on the basic fact of the existence of a human resource management department, or a human resource department, or at least a human resource specialist in organizations. As the research conducted during the last five years indicated, the average of 85% of Slovak organizations declared affirmation.

TABLE III. EXISTENCE OF A HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT, OR A HUMAN RESOURCE DEPARTMENT

Existence of a HRM department, or a human resource department	% of organizations
Share in organizations in 2014	83
Share in organizations in 2015	85
Share in organizations in 2016	86
Share in organizations in 2017	84
Share in organizations in 2018	87

Source: Authors

It was further sought to uncover whether there was a real possibility for the human resource management department to participate in the concept and implementation of corporate strategies, i.e. whether the human resource management department was represented in top management, thus being able to considerably support its influence ability. However, the analysis did not confirm the affirmation. The department of human resource management was represented in top management only in the average of 56% of Slovak organizations.

TABLE IV. REPRESENTATION OF A HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT IN TOP MANAGEMENT

Representation of a human resource management department in top management	% of organizations
Share in organizations in 2014	54
Share in organizations in 2015	59
Share in organizations in 2016	57
Share in organizations in 2017	55
Share in organizations in 2018	56

Source: Authors

In order to ensure that a human resource management department has the status of a strategic partner, or a business partner of an organization, it is necessary to be able to clearly declare and record the effectiveness of human resources with reference to corporate strategies, which indicates that human resource management departments need to define a personnel strategy in line with the objectives of corporate strategies. With regard to the importance of the existence of a personnel strategy, the analysis was focused on uncovering changes in time, therefore the chain and the fixed-base indices were used, while both indices indicated positive development in the given area. The aforementioned clearly showed that the number of organizations without a formulated personnel strategy, whether in a formal written form, or informal verbal form, was constantly decreasing in time.

TABLE V. CHAIN INDEX OF THE COMPANIES FOCUSING ON THE EXISTENCE OF A PERSONNEL STRATEGY

EXISTENCE OF A PERSONNEL STRATEGY	Share of organizations								
	2014	ri15/14	2015	ri16/15	2016	ri17/16	2017	ri18/17	2018
	n		n		n		n		n
Personnel strategy is formulated in writing	148	0.987	146	0.000	146	1.110	162	1.019	165
Personnel strategy is formulated however not in writing	62	1.145	71	1.127	80	0.925	74	1.014	78
Σ	210	1.033	217	1.041	226	1.044	236	1.030	243

Source: Authors

Explanatory notes: ci - chain index - values changed since the previous year

TABLE VI. FIXED-BASE INDEX OF THE COMPANIES FOCUSING ON THE EXISTENCE OF A PERSONNEL STRATEGY

EXISTENCE OF A PERSONNEL STRATEGY	Share of organizations								
	2014	bi15/14	2015	bi16/14	2016	bi17/14	2017	bi18/14	2018
	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n
	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n
Personnel strategy is formulated in writing	148	0.987	146	0.987	146	1.095	162	1.115	165
Personnel strategy is formulated however not in writing	62	1.145	71	1.290	80	1.194	74	1.258	78
Σ	210	1.033	217	1.076	226	1.124	236	1.157	243

Source: Authors

Explanatory notes: bi – fixed-base index - values changed since the first analysed year

In an effort to ensure effectiveness in the fulfilment of human resource management functions and increased requirements on the performance of human resource management departments in the specific areas of employee recruitment and selection resulting from a lack of qualified workforce on the labour market, as well as in the area of employee education and development primarily resulting from the emerging Fourth Industrial Revolution and the related need of human resource development in the area of digitalization, organizations are facing the challenge of ensuring the given needs using own or external sources. For this reason, the identification of trends in the outsourcing of these specific functions of human resource management during the last five years was examined (Tables 7 and 8).

TABLE VII. CHAIN INDEX OF THE COMPANIES IN THE AREA OF OUTSOURCING OF SELECTED HRM FUNCTIONS

OUTSOURCING OF HRM FUNCTIONS	Share of organizations								
	2014	ri15/14	2015	ri16/15	2016	ri17/16	2017	ri18/17	2018
	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n
	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n
Outsourcing of employee education and development	168	1.018	171	1.023	175	1.051	184	1.212	223
Outsourcing of employee recruitment	100	1.100	110	1.081	119	1.168	139	1.094	152
Outsourcing of employee selection	77	1.090	84	1.226	103	1.097	113	1.009	114
Σ	345	1.058	365	1.088	397	1.098	436	1.122	489

Source: Authors

Explanatory notes: ci - chain index - values changed since the previous year

TABLE VIII. FIXED-BASE INDEX OF THE COMPANIES IN THE AREA OF OUTSOURCING OF SELECTED HRM FUNCTIONS

OUTSOURCING OF HRM FUNCTIONS	Share of organizations								
	2014	bi15/14	2015	bi16/14	2016	bi17/14	2017	bi18/14	2018
	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n
	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n
Outsourcing of employee education and development	168	1.018	171	1.041	175	1.095	184	1.327	223
Outsourcing of employee recruitment	100	1.100	110	1.190	119	1.390	139	1.520	152
Outsourcing of employee selection	77	1.090	84	1.337	103	1.468	113	1.480	114
Σ	345	1.058	365	1.151	397	1.264	436	1.417	489

Source: Authors

Explanatory notes: ci - chain index - values changed since the previous year

As the results presented in Tables 7 and 8 show, the interest of companies in the use of services provided by external partners in the key areas of recruitment, selection, education and development of employees was steadily increasing in the monitored period.

IV. DISCUSSION

Trend in strategic human resource management is clearly the need of transformation of human resource departments from operational support units to full partners of their internal clients. The aforementioned brings organizations clear added value, when a strategic business partner in the form of a human resource management department helps the organization fulfil its objectives in interaction with human resources, and implement suitable strategies and concepts in cooperation. The most significant challenge concerning strategic human resource management faced by organizations nowadays is a considerable problem to recruit qualified workforce, and to develop and use the competence of available human resources. This is becoming decisive in terms of the competitiveness of organizations. Labour offices recorded the total of 77,470 job vacancies at the end of March 2018. The number of job vacancies thus achieved record levels, while most of them were recorded in the regions of Bratislava, Trnava and Nitra. Two out of three vacant jobs on average required qualified employees and craftsmen, as well as plant and machine operators and assemblers [1]. This has a direct impact on the competitiveness of organizations, as a lack of quality workforce affects the taken contracts. A survey of Slovak companies conducted by ČSOB [1] uncovered that up to 41% of businesses declared that they had had to decline a contract due to a lack of workforce, mostly in the volume of up to 10%. The influence of the lack of workforce on taking contracts was confirmed in the greatest extent by the representatives of medium-sized enterprises (47.3%) with annual turnover in the amount of EUR 50,000 - 200,000. From the regional perspective, this trend is of the greatest significance in the region of Nitra, where 62% of organizations have experienced a decline of a contract. Almost half of the organizations have experienced this in the regions of Žilina (49%) and Košice (48%). The tense situation on the labour market is not expected to change considerably in the near future. Solid economic growth supports job creation, while a change of qualification or skills requires a certain time.

While the trend of the lack of employees has been forecast for the near future, the more distant future of 5 - 10 years will be primarily influenced by the emerging Fourth Industrial Revolution, which globally assumes that two thirds of the global demand for labour will be concentrated in 15 countries of the world [29]. Robots will replace seven million jobs (mostly in administration and offices), while only two million new jobs will be created. The quick implementation of robotics also jeopardizes the work of qualified employees [30]–[33]. Massive changes in the job structure will occur as a result of Industry 4.0. Numerous positions will be replaced with technical systems. The jobs associated with administration, analysis, or diagnostics will be fully automated. Humans will only perform the tasks the automated production of which is either expensive or technically impracticable so far. From this perspective, people lose their autonomy and sovereignty to technical systems, and they enter the relationship of coexistence with technology. According to some estimates, up to a third of the concerned activities will be automated in industries such as banking and insurance [34]. Adaptation to labour changes presupposes facing new challenges, gaining new knowledge and skills, and accepting new roles and responsibilities by both employees and employers. The key role will be predominantly played by personnel development, which will be responsible for the ability and the motivation of employees to succeed in these challenges. According to the “Digital Agenda 2020” study, conducted in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland in 2015, the greatest restraint in the digitalization process was a lack of qualified employees, problems associated with their professional as well as further education, and gaps in financing digitalization [35]. Employees were also denoted as the key factor of achieving excellence in the area of digitalization in companies by 90% of the participants in the “Digital Excellence” study. The outcomes of the published studies have clearly showed that the issue of digitalization is interconnected with strategic human resource management. Their mutual relationship has two dimensions. On the one hand, strategic human resource management fulfils tasks in the area of employee education and their preparation for handling digitalization processes, on the other hand, the instruments of digitalization have to be used by the strategic human resource management for the optimization and development of own processes. Companies without a specialized department focused on human resource management can hardly succeed in these challenges.

The research uncovered that a majority of Slovak organizations realized this fact, and 87% of them had such a department. Comparison of the values resulting from our research to the findings of the CRANET International Research Network in 2015 [36] indicated that in this aspect, Slovakia was among the countries with higher average levels in the analyzed group.

A precondition of the influence, or the perception of human resource management departments as strategic partners by organizations is the representation of human resource management departments in the top managements of organizations. Positive trend was recorded in this part of our research; however comparison to other EU countries revealed much room for improvement. A department of human resource management was formalized in the highest number of organizations in Sweden (89.0%) and Spain (84.7%), less

than half of the organizations with formal representation were recorded in Austria (48.9%), Romania (30.4%), Cyprus (34.5%), and Latvia (29.9%). According to international research conducted in 2014/2015, 58.8% of Slovak organizations had a department established as a part of top management. An increase to 66.7% was uncovered by research conducted in Slovakia in 2017.

It can be stated on the basis of the outcomes of the analysis that human resource management departments in Slovak organizations realize the need to shape their personnel strategies, which define human resource management systems in line with their corporate strategies, and that they also work with specialized strategic documents dealing with the formation of the labour potential, and with the education and development of employees. As the research showed, the services of external companies are more and more used for this purpose, helping them recruit necessary qualified employees, as well as educate and develop their employees. Many of the analyzed departments also focus on the concepts of business sustainability, and are gradually building a position of strategic partners in organizations.

V. CONCLUSION

Relationships between human resource management practices, and organizations operating in turbulent business environment result in a requirement imposed on HR managers and specialists to intensify their strategic commitment to such an extent that they become equal partners in formulating and implementing organizational strategies. Although this challenge is not new, traditional human resource management only gradually manages to acquire strategic characteristics, as the research of Slovak organizations revealed. Human resource management in many organizations may not have the qualities necessary for such a change, or different forms of persistence are present in them, thus preventing such changes. However, it is necessary to eliminate these deficiencies, and to overcome these barriers in order to introduce and implement strategic human resource management in these organizations.

It took decades before human resource management acquired its present significance and status in organizations, and started to be considered as the key contributor to the fulfilment of corporate strategies at both theoretical and practical levels. Beside the dynamics of organizations' individual subsystems, the concept of knowledge has to emphasise their mutual relationships and the fundamental position of knowledge employees, which necessitates the support of information technology and organizational culture formation [37]–[40]. These requirements imposed on the managements of organizations point to the need of participation of HR specialists in strategic decisions, as well as they encourage human resource management departments to achieve the position of a strategic partner, a partner in creating the added value of their organization [41], [42].

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was supported and funded by APVV-17-0656 titled Transformation of Paradigm in Management of Organizations in the Context of Industry 4.0 and VEGA 1/0412/19 Systems of Human Resources Management in the 4.0 Industry Era.

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