

HUMAN RESOURCE PROCEDURES IN MICROENTERPRISES. BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Abstract: *The current study is focusing on the way human resources management is seen in small companies with less than ten employees. This subject is poorly researched in terms of importance and preoccupation for it as a phenomenon, at least as researched in Romania. Underlining the methodology used, this study embarks on a qualitative and quantitative journey in order to discover the specific practices of human resources management in the small companies. The comparative aspect will consist of the output of a focus-group session and results of a questionnaire. The conclusions of this study state that there is a lack of access to human resource knowledge coming from those who might be interested in getting informed. The results also show that following this lack of knowledge, the managers of these small companies do not find human resource management useful in either way. There is also a dysfunction regarding the importance given to the assessment of the employee, which is neglected, and only leads us to believe that managers are using other methods or standards, perhaps unfair, to evaluate their employees.*

Keywords: human resources management, small companies, human resources practices, employee assessment.

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Introduction

Human resources management is defined by Schermerhorn (2001, apud. Havenga, 2008) as “a process of attracting, developing, and maintaining a talented and energetic workforce to support organizational mission, objectives and strategies”. In other words, the process that Schermerhorn describes is one of assimilation of human resource, a resource of best quality, in order to fulfil the company's objectives.

The purpose of this study is to find the manner in which the human resources management practices are being valued or even used in the microenterprises with less than ten employees. Usually, human resources practices are mostly known as recruiting, selecting the right people for the right job, tasks related to accounting, like the calculation of salary and many others. It is important to know that the practices of human resources management are rigorously structured and based on scientific research that has contributed to the employer-employee relationship and has made this relationship solid over generations. As Pânișoara & Pânișoara (2005) sees them, the practices of human resources management are a “package of procedures” focused on both, the employee and the company itself. One general aspect is that this ”package of procedures” contains well designed guidelines on how to build the correct job description for the right job, recruitment and selection, the importance of integrating the new employee in the company through training, performance evaluation, employee motivation related aspects and organizational culture (Pânișoara & Pânișoara, 2005).

In this study, the main aspects discussed from the “package of procedures” are recruitment, selection, training and performance evaluation and employee motivation.

Recruitment nowadays is more complicated than ever, because employees come and leave from companies with a chaotic frequency and the knowledge of the rate, timing and the intensity of this frequency is a very fine skill. First day of training is a very important step for integrating the new employee into the organization. This training needs to be designed taking into account the specific needs of both parties, the new employee and the company. In the elaboration of the training program, one must take into account the content and learning methods in order to properly achieve ones objectives. Performance assessment is an aspect that many employers enjoy keeping it taboo, hiding behind arguments like quantity or quality importance of a certain service or product, depending on the company`s profile. But as classified as it may be kept, performance evaluation can become a source of high organizational conflict if it is done incorrectly, not to mention law breaking scenarios. This is where the ability of a person who has knowledge of human resources management practices is valued. This is because human resources specialists know when there is a conflict inside a company and when these kind of situations happen they decide if there is a need for personality tests and other scientific methods (Pânișoara & Pânișoara, 2005).

The situation of micro enterprises in the European Union

Our study will continue by reviewing and interpreting data offered by the European Commission and other sources that provide exact information on the situation of micro enterprises in relationship with the human resources management practices. Through the end of this study the data presented will focus on the Romanian population, and will try to extrapolate the area of Bihor County and present an in-depth analysis of the situation in Oradea.

Data from the European Commission Consortium presents a report for 2013, and underlines the reality in which the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are developing and how the number of their employees is rising. Also, the importance of Small Business Act, which has been long ago implemented in order to save small businesses after the economic crisis, is underlined (European Commission, 2013).

In the 2012/2013 annual report on the European SME's, conducted by the European Commission, there is a graphic that shows the total of companies per work sector, on top being the G sector (Wholesale and Retail Trade; Repair of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles, followed by the rest of the sectors in a descending manner). This detail has served in elaborating a database, because having a big volume of companies in a sector requires a proper and correct sampling. According to the European Commission there also exists evidence of small and very small companies on categories that show the number of employees, the turnover and the total balance found in the European Union (European commission, 2013).

Gunter Verheugen, a member of the European Commission, affirmed the importance of small companies, saying that they are a true source for the labour force market and that they represent the "engine of the European economy". (Webquest for Human Resources Management, 2010). These statements can also be explained through the fact that in order to face larger companies' competition, the small and very small ones are constrained to recruit professional staff. This could lead to a higher performance and even profit (Havenga, 2008).

These very small companies would represent 99% within the European Union business field; in fact, there is proof that states that the European Commission is investing in their entrepreneurial success in order to reach a higher potential in the global economy (European Commission, 2015).

Another study named "Les petites et moyennes entreprises: force locale, action mondiale" (Small and middle sized enterprises: local force, global action), study that is focused on the activity of OECD (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) which shows a limit of employees decided by each nation on a global scale. These limits vary from top enterprises with less than 50 employees and reaches the small enterprises that can have a maximum of 5 to 10 employees. However, small and very small companies represent 95% of the total

businesses and 60-70% of the employee's number. (OECD, 2000). Still, it is possible that these numbers may refer to values on a global scale.

What is interesting about the small and very small enterprises is the fact that some researchers that follow closely their activity, as well as the managers of these companies that have an empirical viewpoint on any phenomenon, reach a convergence point. This point is represented by stereotyping small and very small companies, and considering them as companies that behave and evolve just like larger companies or franchises. These large companies have professional managers, who are focused on human resource and that constantly use an efficient human resource management. Caudron (1993, apud, Havenga, 2008) sees businesses with less than 100 employees as being able to survive just nicely "without a full-time personnel or HR manager." There should also be known that family-owned companies have a more informal way of managing the firm and pushes the human resources management practices to compensate through flexibility over personnel training and decision-making (De Kok, Uhlaner & Thurik, 2002).

Although the external perception is negatively reinforced by the empirical observations, a study called "La gestion stratégique des ressources humaines dans les PME françaises: Quelle place et quelle évolution?" (The strategic human resources management in French SMEs: What is the place and what is the evolution?) reaches at the conclusion that for French managers in small and very small companies, the connection between the importance of human resources, management and their strategy does not look very flexible because of certain costs of time. This statement does nothing but create a breach between French managers of small and very small companies with regards to the efficient use of human resources management (Razouk & Bayat, 2010).

However, there is still hope due to the fact that the negative attitude of managers towards human resources management practices comes from the constraint of not having the necessary resources for such an investment. Although, in a very small company, managers are concerned about employees' satisfaction and a good coordination of the human resources management steps: recruiting, selecting, preparing and personnel assessment, even if they aren't open-minded, the initiative to be informed, the time, the money or flexibility in general. Henry (1991, apud. Grigore, 2005) states that the problems of the majority of small and very small companies appeared because of the lack of education and managers' views of human resources management processes as being redundant.

A 2009 study on the population of the United Kingdom and Turkey showed that the most important factors that relate to managers not participating in training sessions is the lack of money, although the very same people who answered this also had answered that they are not interested when they were offered free training sessions (Havenga, 2008).

The conclusion of managers from some small and very small companies is that because of the reduced volume of activities, sales and turnover, a small investment and a small number of employees, there is no actual need to over complicate

something that is simple enough and it is almost going by itself. These managers do not value the education offered by human resources management because they consider it pure theory, with no relevance for their work domain. (Havenga, 2008)

Because micro enterprises have to use as "fuel" the human resource to obtain a quality product or service, in a balanced workspace, they will be constrained to be confronted with the same problems that larger companies faced, at the time that there was no actual knowledge about human resources management.

Dr. Werner Havenga, in his article entitled "Administering human capital in order to assure the competitiveness of SMEs", speaks about the opinion of a photo studio manager regarding human resources management. This manager is seen as being a person who tries to cover the responsibilities of a human resources specialist, but does not see any use in keeping a database of potential employment candidates, this person having always the last word, and assigning the training of new employees to his immediate subordinate (Havenga, 2008).

The access to a database with possible employment candidates can reduce significantly the necessary time in occupying a certain job, and can also avoid reducing the return on some activities. The autocratic attitude, even in these small companies, can destabilize their functionality just because they have a small number of employees. The atmosphere or work environment will be felt in a negative way, especially when the human resource isn't appreciated appropriately. Although informal learning is developed on a longer period of time, the workplace training is very important, and a regulation for this training is even more essential. From norms regarding security at the workplace to practical elements that concern legislation, the step of work training needs to be manifested at a professional standard.

A project of the European Commission shows 20 areas of human resources management for which acknowledgement is essential for any human resources specialist, and even more important to a small and very small company manager. These areas are cited as follows: "communication techniques, negotiations, leadership, job description, employee career planning, employee performance management, key client management, stress management, time management, decision taking, innovation, creativity and strategic thinking, discovering organization's culture and many more"

There is still a question left unanswered. Is there any scientifically supported evidence that could debate this concern for human resources practices on the territory of Romania?

Using the data of a balance sheet from 2005 and a survey, there has been conducted a national study covering 91.47% of small and very small companies. The results of this study (Grigore, 2005) showed that the volume of the company rises with the concern for using mass-media as a source for recruiting personnel, and also with testing the professional knowledge of the personnel. The study indicated that 73% of the managers that did not participate in human resources

training courses didn't build strategies either, and 60% have stated that the manager himself does the training at work. The main strategies that these managers had based their arguments on, were: basic intuition, empirical approach and of course, weighing some work experience in the mix. The personnel motivation can fluctuate according to the position that the small company has regarding the economical market. There is also an interesting fact regarding employee rewarding, and it is stated that only 30% of the companies are preoccupied with satisfying the aspirations and the expectancies of their employees. The most frequent ways of rewarding an employee are holidays, days off, insurance policy (e.g. health insurance) and retirement policy (Grigore, 2005).

Given the data above, this section will conclude: although there is a huge concern coming from the European Union for the microenterprises, there is still work to be done on a local scale and this is something that the results of our research will try to test and compare with the theory behind the earlier studies. Our research will support its explorative approach on human resources management practices in microenterprises and will stay on this course as a descriptive analysis regarding the aspects that will be revealed in detail.

Research methodology

The purpose of this research is to find and understand specific practices of human resource management in small and very small companies, by analyzing a sample of Bihor's population, Romania. First, a qualitative method will be used, followed by a quantitative method. The qualitative method is represented by a focus-group; its design and structure are based on the theoretical background discussed previously.

The first goal is to identify the perception of human resources experts regarding the specificity of human resources management activities which are manifested in these companies. A second goal is to identify the definite aspects that concern human resources management in these small and very small companies from the county of Bihor. And finally, a third goal is to evaluate employers' interest regarding their own knowledge gain on human resources management.

As a first direction, we wanted to explore what is the perception of human resource experts about the specific activities in micro enterprises, compared to the answers provided by the employers of these micro enterprises. Through this, we would have a clearer reflection on the way the human resource management is being put into practice on a local scale. We also want to explore if the expert's perception is reflecting or not the same reality found in the results collected through the quantitative method. Further, our research considers an in-depth analysis of the way the employers are familiar or have any knowledge about human resource management practices and if they use them accordingly. A last explorative direction will focus on the way employers appreciate the usefulness of the information gained from the human resources management sphere of knowledge.

This aspect will help us know if they would be interested in improving the way they implement human resource management practices in their microenterprise.

Our qualitative research is based on focus-group method. The focus group sums a total of ten questions referring to the way specific human resource management practices are applied in very small companies. The participants in the focus-group are four human resources management experts of large and high renowned companies from Oradea. A larger number of experts were approached and invited to participate in this research, but only four answered positively to our invitation. The focus-group was held in a small conference room at University of Oradea and the discussion lasted for about forty-five minutes.

The qualitative approach

Our questions placed human resources experts in a discussion that stimulated their vision on the human resources management procedures that are used in small or very small companies from the county of Bihor. The meeting with the focus group took place at the end of January 2015. The output of the focus group retains the opinions and ideas formulated below.

For the question regarding the type of specific human resources management activities found in small and very small companies, participants have answered that according to the law, the vocational training needs to be implemented every three years in small companies with under twenty employees. They have also stated that the main activities identified were those of recruitment and vocational training. Also, in the majority of cases, the training is present when new equipment or technology is brought. This implies that the experts have identified a very particular habit that places the employers as managers that only do things out of necessity. The participants also think that there are ways of rewarding the employees, which can be non-financial, food product-tickets, discounts on food products or non-food products, small gifts for the holidays.

Debating the critical areas or domains that these companies might encounter, the participants talked about the difficulties that appear when people are getting fired, and when small and very small company managers employ relatives. We found this argument coming from the experts rather intriguing and significant for our research. The participants also state that there are problems concerning the way the job specification document is developed, some tasks being taken by people who have a different job and tasks. The aspects regarding salary are entirely revolving around the accountant department, but there is also a way to externalize this process to outside companies.

Speaking about any forms of evaluation (work, employee or any other) in these firms and how they are made, participants answered that evaluation is formal and there is also a facade of the way they are done. Any other forms of evaluation are found by the managers of these companies as being redundant. The participants stated that these problems concerning evaluation are a consequence of the

communication problem, and that there is a huge distance regarding power on the hierarchy of a company and the owner of the company, who is the one that makes the final decision.

Throughout the focus-group, the participants stated that specific evaluation methods play a very important role because the employee is informed about the regulations and the limits of his/her job. The evaluation at the workplace gains also more importance when a problem surfaces. In the production area or work domain, the workforce is scarce and in that case evaluation is neglected. This last situation is also accompanied by the unemployment rate in the county. Regarding the way recruiting and selection is being handled in these small and very small companies, respondents stated that recruiting is targeted, people who are a relative of the employer are hired. Sometimes they would appeal to an expert or a recruitment agency. Regarding the validity of the evaluation results, the participants answered that unfortunately these results are only valid when the company needs to fire personnel. Evaluation is generally seen in these small and very small companies in a negative way. But it can also have positive results when the employee does not accommodate or does not feel fit for a work environment or a certain job, and needs counselling on finding a more appropriate job for his/her needs or demands. The participants were asked to state their opinion on the matter of solutions that these companies have at their disposal to optimize their human resource management activities. Their answers stated that these managers should at least attend some human resources management classes. They also mentioned the importance of regulations regarding qualification levels that allow you to set up a company in Western Europe. Further, they have stated that it is important to understand the fact human resources are more than the "old personnel", and it's all about communication and activity development in an organizational culture.

As a final item of the debate, the participants were asked about other aspects or problems that might represent a challenge for human resources management in these small and very small enterprises. The participants declared that the attention should be directed towards the people because they are the most important resource of a company. They reinforced their argument by specifying that there should be added a "non-financial" motivation that is known to have a greater efficiency. However, there are also aspects regarding the essential implementation of an actual professional relationship between the executives and the employees, collaborating and involving employees in the process of taking decisions in the company. These aspects have results that stand for a long term, compared to financial forms of motivation. "Non-financial" benefits are frequently used in developed countries and the fact that the experts insisted on mentioning such aspects, reflects their concern for the well-being of these Romanian enterprises. There have been mentioned problems such as the lack of interest towards the human resource management coming from the managers of these small companies. The behavior of these employers is reinforced by taking more and more responsibilities, and tasks which in the end do take a lot of time to deal with and leave no time to get familiarized with management knowledge. There are also

situations when some human resources specialists do not offer their services at affordable prices for the budget of average small and very small companies. As a response to this problem, some participants have declared that this market is developing and that there are services synchronized with the financial needs. Other problems might relate to the fact that an expert might reach a limit, and does not progress, and he/she is not preoccupied anymore to enhance his knowledge as a professional should do.

Another aspect mentioned by the experts was that national legislation has changed so often in the last twenty years that it is imperative to be constantly familiarized with the information regarding human resources management, but not only knowing about it; is important also to understand the correct interpretation of the legislation. We find these answers very significant for their accuracy on spotting the core of most problems nowadays, which are a reflection of legislative misinformed interpretation or ignorance, in many cases. The experts added that there are domains that can't easily reach the human resources management knowledge and these domains are: agriculture and constructions. This is not related to a spatial or geographical point of view, but to other delicate aspects that concur within these domains. It would be a good start if the status of the day worker would be defined by clearer regulations. Another important problem that has been brought up and debated by the participants, regarded the work done without any legal contract or as it is known, illegal labor. Also, the concern for the legal aspect or the professional aspect of security at work, which is manifested only after an accident has occurred, because of the employer. There are situations where the contract that the employee agreed on, only defends the employer. The guilt is falling on the administrator or a different party.

In the end, it is important to remind people the importance of aligning Romanian organizational culture to European level, through lobby directed with the purpose of implementing into legislation the human resources management aspects mentioned in this focus-group. As a part of the focus-group conclusions, we can concur that the main human resources management activities in these small and very small companies are recruitment and technical training. Recruitment is made by gathering candidates from: family, friend's circles and rarely externalized services. Evaluation is perceived in a wrong way, it is formal, valued only when it comes to warnings or penalties. Critical domains are layoffs (hard to make when most of the personnel consists of relatives), the construction and submitting of job description, externalized salary (accountants). Training on good practices in human resources is necessary in places where the employers do not understand the importance of professional procedures benefits.

The quantitative approach

In the quantitative part of this research we collected the data using a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of sixteen closed questions and four open questions regarding: the company, the employer and the employees, the way the recruitment is done, selection, evaluation and motivation activities, perception of the employers

on the usefulness of knowing about the human resource management practices and as a final enquiry, the employers' interest on whether they would want to attend human resources management classes.

The sample was developed using the nature of activity (INS-2013) in all 128 companies from Bihor County. The construction of the questionnaire, the distribution and control system were developed by following procedural steps, such as student training; the questionnaire operators were university students that have offered as volunteers to help with the distribution. Every student received the necessary instructions that a professional "questionnaire operator" should receive and a certain number of questionnaires (0-6 questionnaires). The next step was to distribute the questionnaire and, in the end, it has been delivered to 100 companies from which we could validate only 93 questionnaires in order to be processed in SPSS, using the statistical operations in order to obtain the results of this research. As a final note on this paragraph, the sample selection, questionnaire distribution and data analysis were undertaken between January and May 2015.

Results and discussions

The results of this research shows a structure on activity sectors where "G" represents the commerce sector, automobile repairs (covering a total of 46%) which is also the most widespread, and sectors like D, B, E and J, L and F, which cover a smaller percentage.

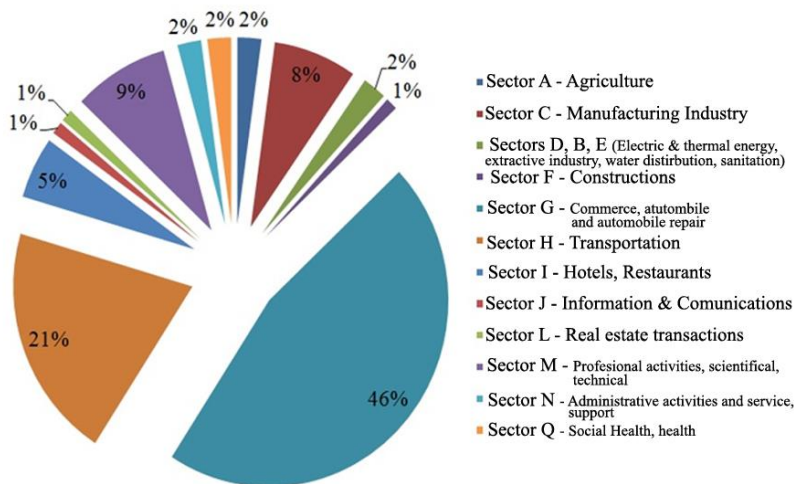


Figure 1. *The structure of all the activity sectors*

The descriptive analysis regarding the specific activities of human resources management shows that the main activities in this sense are salary or payment negotiation, training for security and safety at work, and specific training regarding

job specifications. The vocational training is neglected and so is the needs evaluation for this training.

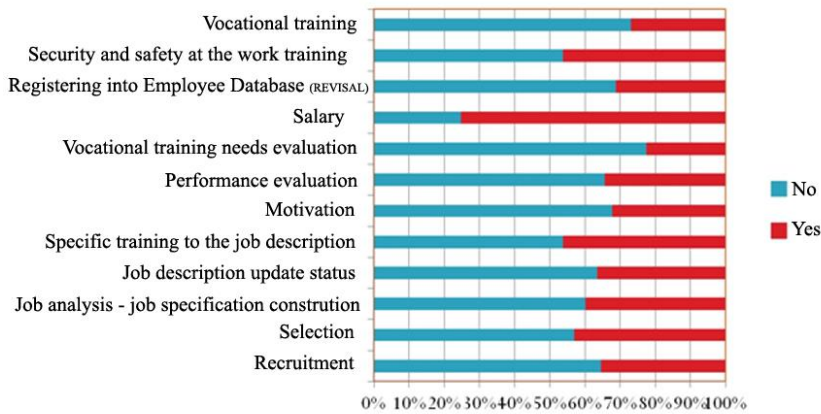


Figure 2. *Specific activities related to human resources management*

The people seen responsible for human resources activities are administrators (52%).

The main recruitment methods involve sources like: family, friend circles or recommendations from acquaintances. Recruitment from sources like schools, or public education, mass-media or job fairs is entirely rejected.

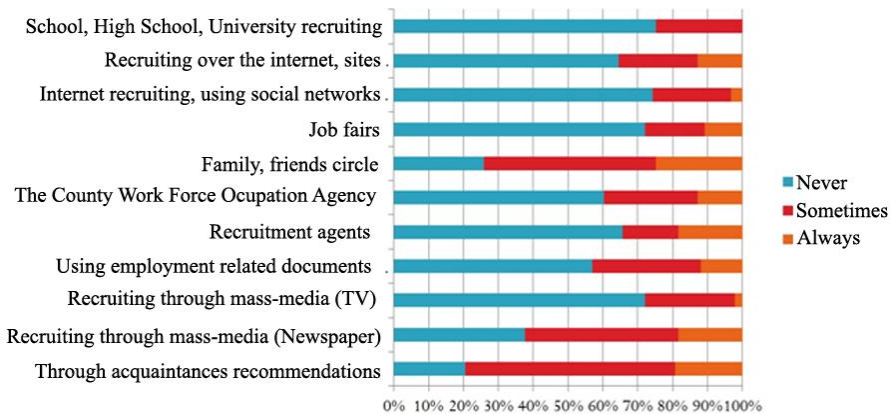


Figure 3. *Recruitment methods graphic*

The relevant aspects concerning the labor market show that, seemingly, employers keep their employees with no effort in their companies, but they find people with no experience or job qualification.

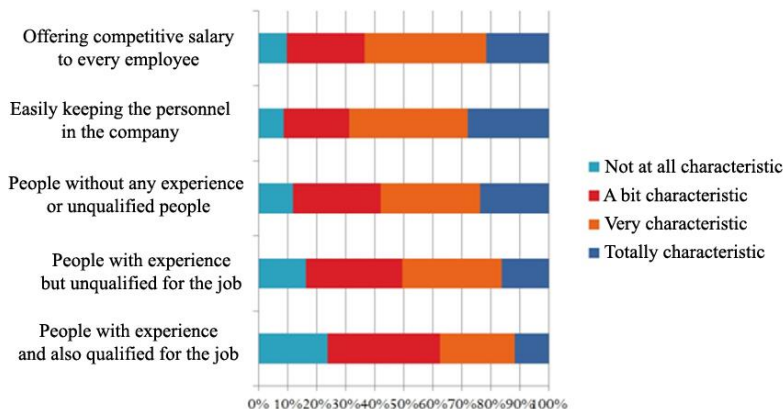


Figure 4. *Relevant aspects regarding labor market*

Moving to another graphic, our results show that in the process of recruitment and selection, employers value a responsible attitude and conscientiousness. Employers do not value the resistance to effort.

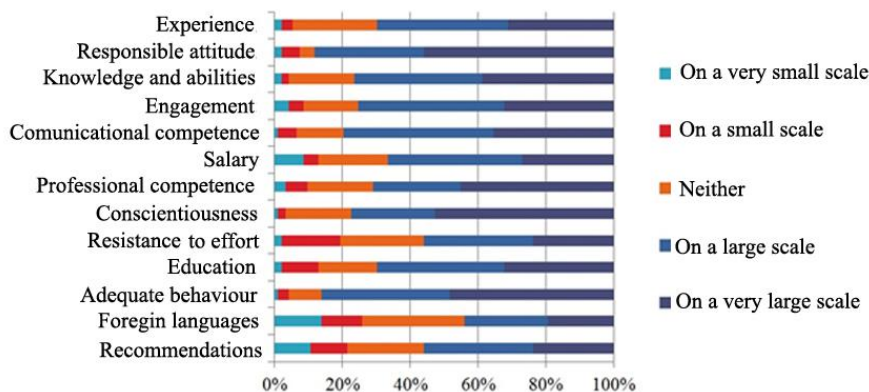


Figure 5. *Recruitment and selection findings*

Regarding the use of employee selection methods, the results show that the employers use mostly practical probations and CV evaluation. They do not go for the personality tests or those that evaluate knowledge. Results from this research also show that in the case of personnel fluctuation, the longest time the employees are spending (hired) in these companies is between 1-3 years. There are also results that show that evaluation is made once a year (46%) and once every 6 months (30%), and the methods of assessment that are used are focusing on measuring the results of the employees (53%), followed by behavior observation (25%).

Other results concerning the values that employers cherish, show that most of them do not seem to be concerned about the results of evaluation, but they do offer bonuses and salary raises to their employees.

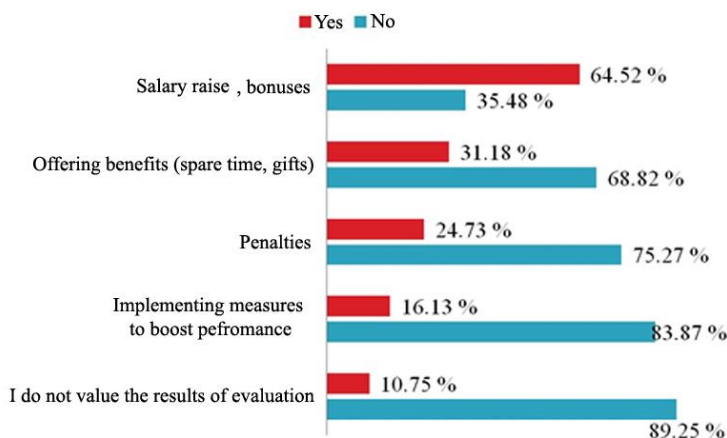


Figure 6. *Value acknowledgement on the evaluation results*

Managers are using, in a massive proportion, the promotions and warnings as a main way of motivating their employees. The employers do not go for methods like offering “profit parts” and neither “bonuses” although, strangely, in a recent illustration (Fig. 6) they opted for “bonuses” as a way of motivating their personnel.

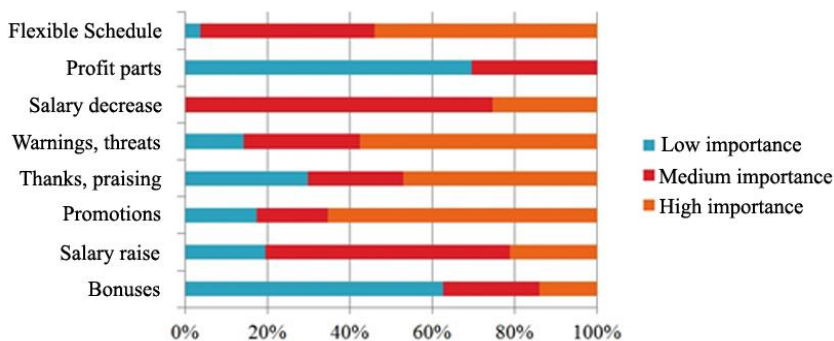


Figure 7. *Motivation methods*

The majority of managers` opinions sum a very clear opposing percentage (59%) towards the usefulness of attending a human resources management class. Regarding the average salary paid in these small and very small enterprises, a large percentage is under 1000 RON (Romanian Currency), but there are small companies that can support paying their employees over 2200 RON (3%). As a final result, we notice that the revenue fluctuation for these enterprises has been the same (38%), but there has also been some revenue growth (36%).

Conclusions

As mentioned before, we were exploring the possibility that the perception of human resource experts on the way human resources management is being handled in microenterprises across the county of Bihor, is identical with the answers given by the employers through the questionnaire. Through the collected results we can observe that employers are interested in human resource management practices, but complain that there isn't an appropriate, informing route regarding the access to these human resources management classes they are being invited to. Employers offer salary increases and bonuses only if the results of the evaluation justify the merit of the employee for such rewards. It is difficult to explain this aspect, because the employers state that they do not value the results of these evaluations, apparently being guided by other evaluation indicators. There is clear evidence that there are informal practices within small companies and that human resource practices are present, but what is unclear are the details behind this "subsystem" within the system (Benmore & Palmer, 1996).

The employers do not use bonuses for work motivation, considering warnings and promotions more useful (offering, by their calculations, perhaps a reward far superior). It is known through Hornsby's & Kuratko's (1990, apud. Bau & Dowling, 2007) research, that large companies offer far greater benefits than smaller ones, but that does not mean that managers should start offering them only if the company reaches a certain employee volume.

Stating again one of the suggestions mentioned in the focus-group, the necessity of non-financial benefits or employee compensation is so much more important when there are studies across the world; such, is the one developed on a sample of India's small companies where results indicate that the only way of rewarding work is through salary (Srimannarayana, 2006).

These employers do not have any knowledge regarding the educational offers related to human resource, but it would be interesting to research whether this attitude of rejection towards the usefulness of these classes comes from ignorance or it comes as a result of a solid point of view. Also, it would be of a tremendous use if there was a way of researching the differences between the small companies under five employees and those that sum up to 10 employees, towards the necessity for human resources management, keeping in mind the fact that there's a theory that shows that (OECD, 2000).

Some limits of our research are found in the fact that there are not enough studies or any kind of literature that can help us accessing interesting instruments or approaches on this issue. Another limit is the low national and local interest regarding the way human resources management practices are being applied. The construction of the questionnaire used to survey the sample did not permit the usage of different statistical methods. It has also been difficult to find other studies in order to correlate our data with.

There are some clear aspects that this research has shown us: informing small and very small companies' managers, providing human resources management classes, and of course assuring a good management, such as the rest of the European Union. The financial part of funding such campaigns regarding human resource management knowledge, awareness, its importance and necessity, should not stand in the way of creating a serious practical approach for it, although the money might come later. Whether it might come with a discount or for free, the contents should answer and apply to each work domain due to the fact that not all small or very small companies face the same problems regarding their way of functioning. And as a final thought, in order to ease the implementation of such best practices within small and very small enterprises, following our case, the country of Romania, there should be a certain kind of lobby manifested either political on a nationwide scale or across Europe.

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