

## EVALUATION OF PROFESSIONALISM IN HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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### **Abstract**

*This paper refers to the specialisation of human resources management. Starting from the idea that, human resources specialists are responsible for a number of activities within organizations, it is necessary that they possess the knowledge and skills required to perform them. HR specialists must be able to apply the principles and practices of human resources to add to the success of their organizations. Beyond these requirements, a specialist in human resources must also be efficient on ethical, communication, consultancy, critical evaluation issues etc. Moreover, the article describes the range of skill that human resources specialists should possess. In addition, nowadays it is a must for human resources specialists to assume certain roles to efficiently perform the activities related to the human resources management.*

*The article also shows the real situation in the specialisation of human resources management in the Republic of Moldova. Therefore, a study was conducted that aimed at linking the studies held by the employees from the human resources division to the importance of human resources management activities.*

**Keywords:** human resources management, human resources specialists/professionals, profession, skills, knowledge.

**JEL Classification:** J44; M12; M53; M54.

### **1. Introduction**

In recent years, a number of specialists in the field of human resource management have demonstrated its impact on the organizational performance. Human resources management performance within organizations largely depends on the professionalism of those working in this field. In order to achieve an efficient management of human resources at the organizational level, it is important for those who manage this area and carry out activities related thereto possess the necessary professional skills. Or, the skills in the field of human resources can be acquired through relevant studies and lifelong professional development. Developing a wider range of activities related to human resources management, extends also the area of skills competence of human resources managers and professionals. In recent decades, the activities in the field of human resource management have become more popular, being metamorphosed into a profession of great importance for the organization.

Regardless of the position held within the human resources subdivision, HR experts must have an initial training in order to perform their tasks and duties related to this field of work. For example, in France, initial training has become an essential criterion for employment in human resources subdivision [5].

Unfortunately, this fact is not valid for organizations in the Republic of Moldova. Being considered as a secondary function within the organization, employees of the HR subdivision were employed at random, without having the necessary knowledge and skills to manage a very important area of the organization. This may be caused by the fact that, over time, specific activities of human resource management within local organizations were more related to legal and regulatory issues.

Taking into account the development of competitive economy and appearance of several foreign companies on domestic market, that have come up with new strategies, policies and

personnel procedures in recent years, many local organizations started to reshape their human resources management. Thus, the specific activities of human resource management are changing or have already passed from traditional personal problems, considering the normative, methodological and legal issues of personnel management, to those that are specific to proper management of human resources. Under these circumstances, personnel subdivisions are required to continuously improve human resource management system and identify new forms of interrelations with organizational subdivisions managers, as well as with trade union representatives of the unionized organizations.

## 2. The general framework of the professionalization of human resources management

Professionalization of human resources management was the topic of discussion and research for many specialists in the field, starting from the idea that the activities related to this field can be enframed in a profession. According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, *profession* is a permanent activity, performed by someone with appropriate qualification [6]. The person exercising the profession must demonstrate certain skills based on theoretical knowledge. At the same time, in 1972 the Hayes Committee stated that a professional is distinguished by the fact that he uses a framework of fundamental concepts co-related with experience [1].

According to a different approach, profession is considered under an ethical aspect, i.e. a professional supposedly exists to serve the others. This creates confusion when it comes to human resources professionals. In this context, Tyson and Fell noted that the human resources manager is encouraged to treat the execution manager as a client, but at the same time try to be the representative of wider social norms and be at the service of employees [1].

Research is an important element in the training of human resources professionals. Thus, Boxall and Burch (2007) stated that higher education in the field of human resource management is important for the efficient execution of roles in the profession. But, according to them, it is essential to gain experience needed to improve skills and personal development [9].

Research regarding the necessary knowledge, skills and behaviors for human resources professionals started in the 70s of XX century and continues to this day. Thus, we highlight the contributions made by Borman Heneman, Burack, Wallace, Ulrich, Brockbank etc. in terms of human resource management professionalization. Interest in human resource professionals is determined by the fact that they are concerned namely with planning and coordination of human resources management. First, the level of perception and implementation of human resource management activities depends on the level of knowledge and professional skills of those working in the human resources subdivision. Secondly, the level of efficiency in the process of assisting functional subdivisions managers on recruitment, selection, training, performance evaluation, etc., depends on the professional training of human resources managers and specialists.

HR professionals are grouped into two categories: generalists and specialists. Generalists are people who are concerned with general and strategic issues regarding human resources, occupying usually positions of HR managers. Specialists are people doing work tasks and take responsibility for a particular area of human resources management. Both, in case of generalists and specialists, professional studies in the field of human resources management are needed for the efficient execution of their activities. However, the CIPD of UK considers that the HR professionals are "performers who think" because they have to think carefully at what they do in their organization and in the framework of a recognized set of theoretical knowledge. They also must be efficient in carrying out their duties by providing recommendations and services that would help the organization in achieving its strategic objectives [1].

### 3. Human resources professional competency framework

The diversity of tasks assigned to human resources managers and specialists requires the elaboration of a framework of skills to be used as a guideline in their professional activity. Professional skills needed to those working in human resources subdivision may be acquired during their studies, but also during professional activity. However, the level of professional skills depends on the position held. In case of a managerial position a set of skills is necessary and in case of an executory position other skills are required. There are several approaches in literature regarding the professional skills of human resources. Brockbank and Ulrich (2003) define the professional competence of human resources as the ability to create added value for the organization and its ability to focus on the development and change of the organization in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. The model developed by Brockbank and Ulrich groups the competencies of HR professionals into five categories: strategic contribution, business knowledge, personal credibility, services related to human resources and set of processes, methods and techniques of human resources [16].

More recently, Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, and Ulrich (2013) identified six groups of HR competencies, including strategic positioner, credible activist, capability builder, change champion, human resource innovator and integrator, and technology proponent [15].

Another study, conducted on 300 human resource practitioners working in different sectors of economy, has identified a set of core competencies for HR professionals. These relate to: leadership style, managerial intuition, functional capabilities and personal attributes [8]. However, Buyens and de Vos (1999) suggest the following basic skills required of HR managers for doing business in an international environment: interpersonal and intercultural skills, ability to learn about foreign cultures, local accountability, transnational flexibility, change and diversity management, ability to work in international teams, coaching and worldwide development [4]. Another approach regarding the professional skills of human resources groups them into two categories: strategic and functional [7]. Strategic skills of human resource are related to the business enabling HR professionals to connect personnel strategies to the organizational strategy. According to M. Armstrong, HR professionals need strategic skills in order to involve in the process of developing the human resources strategy, as part of organizational strategy, but also sectorial strategies of human resources.

In turn, the functional skills in human resources allow the fulfilment of concrete activities – recruitment, selection, professional training, performance evaluation etc. [10]

According to the CIPD in the UK, HR professionals need the following skills: personal drive and effectiveness, people management and leadership, professional competence, adding value through people, continuing learning, thinking and applied resourcefulness, "customer" focus, strategic capability and influencing and interpersonal skills [1].

### 4. Roles of human resource professionals

The diversity of professional competencies held by HR professionals enables them taking some roles in exercising their job duties and responsibilities. According to J. Storey, HR professionals have two roles: *reactive and proactive* [11]. The reactive role assumes that HR professionals do nothing but to provide an activity to meet the needs of internal customers (employees and executive managers). Meanwhile, the proactive role assumes that HR professionals develop integrated personnel strategies, involve, innovate, act as internal consultants and provide advice on matters relating to organizational values and principles. A proactive approach assumes that human resources professionals seek to innovate by introducing new procedures and processes in order to enhance the effectiveness of the organization.

On the other hand, English researcher in the field, P. Reilly mentions several roles that belong to human resources professional: strategist / innovator, administrator / controller and advisor / consultant [2]. According to him, the role of *strategist / innovator* is to make a strategic contribution over a long period of time. The role of *administrator / controller* has a short-term tactical contribution, while the role of *advisor / consultant* is placed between the first two roles.

D. Ulrich et al highlight the four roles of HR professionals: strategic partner, organizational evaluator, leader of employees and promoter of changes. According to them, the role of strategic partner assumes that the activities and responsibilities of professional human resources must be interspersed and integrated with those of senior managers, ensuring its contribution to achieving the strategic objective, having the ability to identify business opportunities and assess the overall situation of the organization [14]. As organizational evaluators, human resource professionals must be involved both in the process of achieving the reengineering of organizational processes and their evaluation. In exercising the role of employee leader, M. Armstrong believes that HR professionals must act as "police" with executive managers, ensuring that implementation of personnel policies and procedures is done in a consistent manner [1]. As a promoter of organizational changes, human resources professionals must not only explain the need for these changes, but to achieve them in the shortest period of time.

The variety of roles assumed by human resources professionals stems from the diversity of organizations and the people they lead. Thus, K. Monks, having made an investigation, has identified four models of HR professionals' roles [12].

- *the traditional / administrative model* – HR professionals have the supporting role, focusing on administrative issues, keeping record and complying with rules and regulations;
- *the traditional / collective labor relations* – human resources practitioners focus more on collective labor relations, paying less attention to other activities;
- *the innovative / professional model* – specialists in human resources are considered professionals, assuming the role of experts. Their goal is to replace traditional practices with improved policies and practices regarding planning, recruiting, development and personnel remuneration;
- *the innovative / sophisticated model* – HR professionals are members of the board of directors, participate in integration of personnel strategies with the economic ones and acknowledge that they have an important contribution to organizational success. They develop and provide sophisticated services in each of the main activities of human resources.

In our view, innovative / sophisticated model is best to be applied under the modern conditions, because competition is much tougher and external challenges succeed faster, with unpredictable effects on the organization. The model in question is quite complex because it stresses the integration of human resource management activities in other activities and processes of the organization, which can help to ensure superior performance.

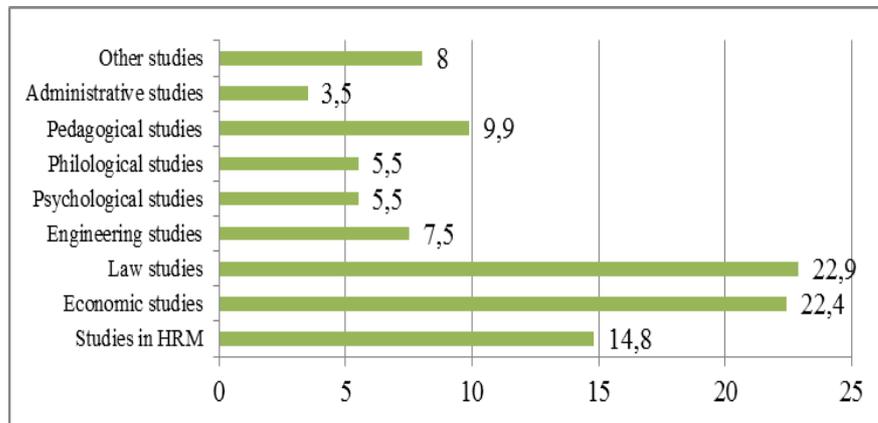
## 5. Hypothesis

The importance of human resource management activities depends on the training of people working in the human resources subdivision.

## 6. Applied methodology

In order to determine the importance of human resource management activities of employees of the HR subdivision, there has been conducted a sociological research by means of a questionnaire which included 115 organizations in Moldova, with more than 75 employees. The

questionnaire ranged 8 activities related to human resources management, and respondents – HR managers – had to determine whether these activities are important for the organization. In order to ensure representativeness, the research included in organizations in all fields. *Figure 1* shows the structure of human resources subdivision managers who participated in the survey, according to their professional training.

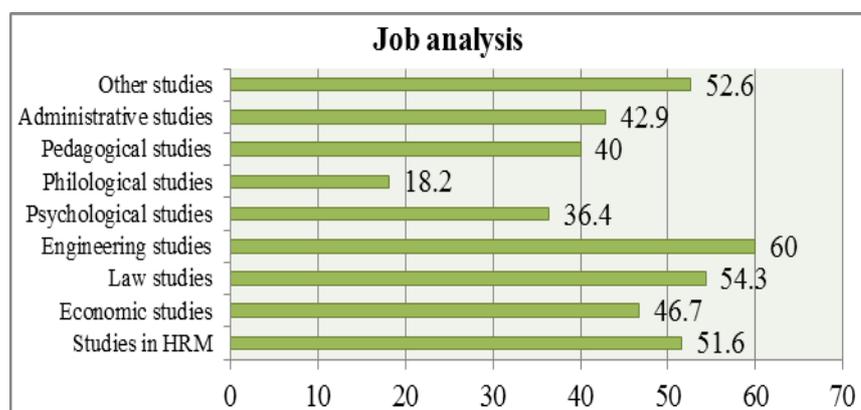


**Fig 1 Structure of HR managers by education, %**

**Source:** Developed by the author based on the investigations.

According to *Figure 1*, the total number of professionals working in human resources subdivisions of the surveyed organizations with more than 75 employees, only 14.8% have a degree in human resource management, representing nearly every 7th specialist. This emphasizes once again that in Moldova there is a shortage of specialists in human resources management, for which local organizations are forced to employ people who hold other studies than required. A great number of local organizations employ as specialist of human resources persons who hold a degree in law, in order to respect the legal framework aiming the labor relations in organizations. This category of people is focused particularly on the implementation and compliance with statutory employment relationships and less on developing policies, strategies, methods and procedures aimed at labor relations in the organization. A more difficult situation is found in organizations where the manager or human resources specialist holds a different degree, other than the required one.

The first activity of human resource management contained in the questionnaire refers to the *analysis of work positions* (*Figure 2*).

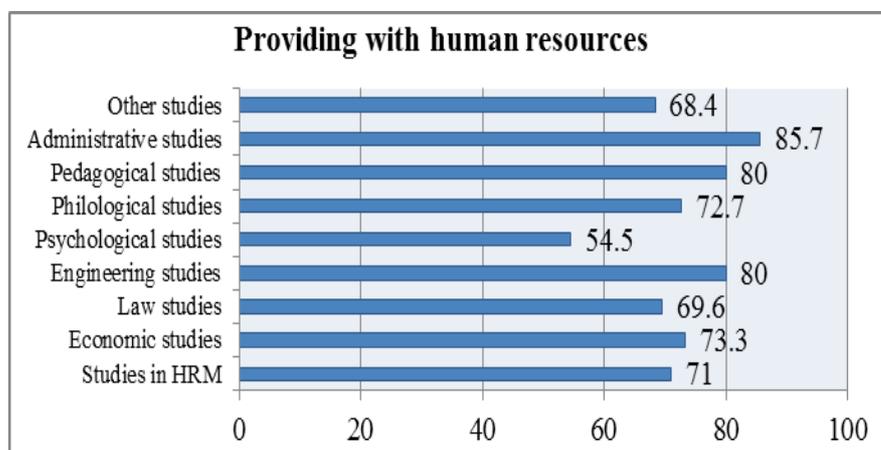


**Fig 2 Importance of job analysis according to respondents' education, %**

**Source:** Developed by the author based on the investigations.

Having processed the data, we can see that this activity is perceived as the most important by managers or HR professionals with technical education – 60.0%, followed by those with law degrees – 54.3%.

*Ensuring HR* is the second activity of human resources management, contained in the questionnaire, and the results are shown in *Figure 3*.



**Fig 3 Importance of providing with human resources based on education of respondents, %**

*Source:* Developed by the author based on the investigations.

According to *Figure 3*, provision of human resources is a fairly important action for all respondent organizations, regardless of the education of those who manage this area because Moldova is facing a shortage of labor. However, as seen from the questionnaire, most respondents who mentioned this fact are HR managers with administrative studies (85.7%) and those with pedagogical and engineering – 80%.

The following activities related to human resources management or supported by managers or HR supervisors was *professional staff development* (*Figure 4*).



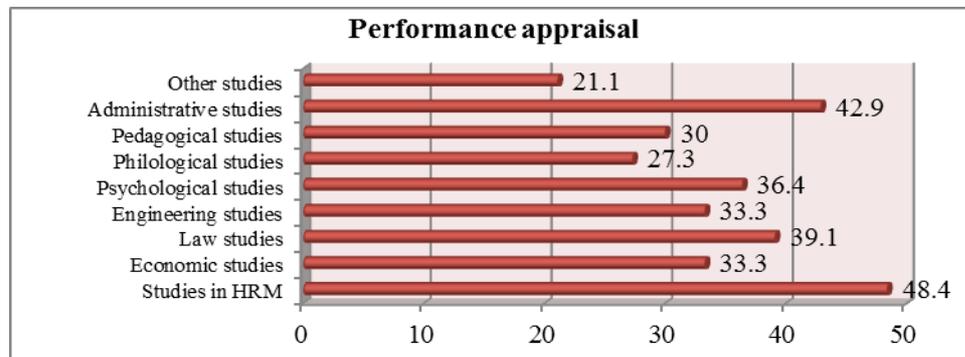
**Fig 4 The importance of professional training and development based on respondents' education, %**

*Source:* Developed by the author based on the investigations.

The results shown in *Figure 4* show that most managers or human resources supervisors within the respondent organizations consider business training and professional development as important, those with philological studies – 72.7%. On the opposite side are the managers or human

resources supervisors with administrative studies. Only 14.3% of respondents consider training and professional development as important for an organization.

The fourth activity of human resource management included in the questionnaire refers to performance evaluation. The results obtained are shown in Figure 5.

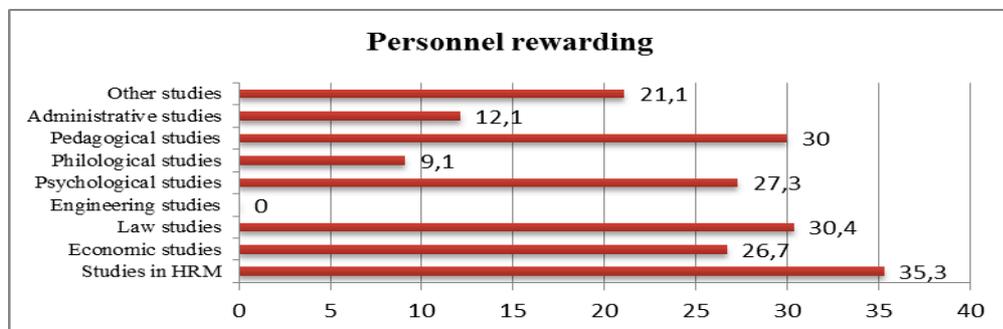


**Fig 5 Importance of performance appraisal based on the education of respondents, %**

**Source:** Developed by the author based on the investigations.

Performance evaluation is considered as important for the organization by respondents with a degree in human resources management. 48.4% of respondents considered this activity as important, followed by those with administrative studies – 42.9%.

*Personnel rewarding* is the next activity related to human resources management, included in the questionnaire (Figure 6).



**Fig 6 Importance of personnel rewarding according to the education of respondents,%**

**Source:** Developed by the author based on the investigations.

Although personnel rewarding in the organization may generate other problems related to maintaining employees, a great number of managers and human resource supervisors who participated in the survey does not consider this activity as important. Those who consider personnel rewarding as important have a degree in human resource management – 35.3%. However, we note that none of the respondents with education in engineering consider personnel rewarding as an important activity. This, given that salary in Moldova is the lowest in Europe.

Another activity included in the survey is related to *occupational health and safety*. The results are shown in Figure 7.

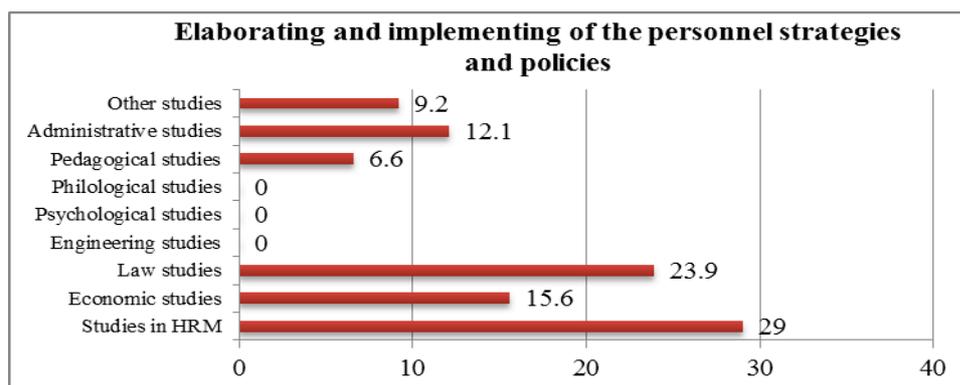


**Fig 7 Importance of occupational health and safety according to respondents' education, %**

*Source:* Developed by the author based on the investigations.

More than 50% of the respondents consider labour health and safety as an important issue, except those with education in engineering. Therefore, ensuring adequate working conditions without affecting the health of employees is a priority for specialists or managers who are concerned with human resource management.

Elaboration and implementation of personnel strategies and policies is the next activity included in the questionnaire. Although it is an important activity, because it is carried by other activities related to human resources management, few of respondents considered it to be important (Figure 8).



**Fig 8 The importance of elaborating and implementing personnel strategies and policies based on respondents' education, %**

*Source:* Developed by the author based on the investigations.

Recognizing the importance of elaborating and implementing personnel strategies and policies depends mainly on the education of those working in this field. The results prove this reality. Those working in the human resources subdivisions, having philological, psychological and engineering studies do not realize the importance of this activity. Most of the respondents who realize the importance of elaborating and implementing a personnel strategy and policy are those who have training in human resource management – 29.0%

## 7. Conclusions

Regardless of the roles undertaken by HR professionals, they are obliged to maintain a dividing line between serving the organization that provides a salary and serving individual employees. Therefore, in their professional activity, human resources professionals should be

guided by certain ethical standards. First, HR professionals must maintain high standards on information and recommendations offered by managers and employees. Second, HR professionals must demonstrate maximum fairness, when dealing with employee issues.

The numerous problems faced by local organizations in terms of human resources are caused by the shortage of specialists in the field. In recent years, the number of specialists trained in human resources management was insufficient to the existing needs in this area. However, survey results show that only 14.8% of people working as manager or human resources specialist have a degree in the field. Lack of specialists in human resources management has led many local organizations to employ people whose professional knowledge and skills do not match the field. This has made human resources management and related activities be interpreted differently by importance by the survey respondents. One of the activities of human resource management – staffing – considered important by most survey participants, regardless of their field of training is determined by the overall situation on the labor force in Moldova. Or, at the moment there is an increasing shortage of labor force and local organizations face difficulties in attracting new employees.

Considering the training of those working in human resources subdivision, we can determine the strategic or operational approach of activities related to human resources management. Thus, we state that most of the respondents who appreciate the importance of elaborating and implementing the HR strategies and policies have training in human resource management.

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