Employees’ perceptions on management policies and practices regarding human resources for economic efficiency in crisis period

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A B S T R A C T

In recent years, there has been a lack of attention to the connection between crisis management and the HR (human resources) department. However, many researchers emphasize the importance of the human resources department in crisis management. The main objective of the research is the analysis of employees’ perceptions regarding measures to improve decision-making when considering the behavior of human capital in terms of maximizing economic efficiency, as well as the analysis of human resources management through the lens of policies and practices intended for management in crisis period. The quantitative method was used to conduct a survey and the qualitative method was used through the interview. These methods were based on aspects developed in the specialized literature and adapted for this context. The results of the study show that human resources management is crucial in Romanian companies, both in a normal context and in critical situations, highlighting a strategic approach to the role of employees in organizational success.

Introduction

According to modern literature, the traditional role of the human resources (HR) department has evolved significantly, moving from recruiting and hiring staff to assuming complex key roles to improve organizational performance. This change requires expanding knowledge and skills from HR to meet the needs of the organization, especially in crisis period. HR is now crucial in anticipating, identifying, preventing and managing potential crises, establishing plans to manage them, even in the absence of crisis situations (Athamneh, 2018). The topic of human capital management in organizations and the relationship between human resource management practices and company performance has developed over time. The results demonstrate that there is a positive relationship, including from the perspective of introducing strategies and innovation (Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). Organizations should implement certain well-established procedures to determine who are the right people to fulfill the objectives. Therefore, it shouldn’t be inferred that a company with extensive quantities of material resources will easily manage and achieve its goals. The definition of human resource consists of the combination of skills and competencies that, put together, give value to the company (Pham et al., 2021). Improving human resource strategies does not only have an effect on employees, but is also an important aspect for the company’s reputation (Suru et al., 2020).

The purpose of the research is to analyze employees' perceptions regarding measures to improve decision-making when considering the behavior of human capital in a crisis period in terms of maximizing economic efficiency as well as human resources management through the lens of policies and practices aimed at managing a crisis situation. Crises present unusual opportunities to demonstrate management flexibility, teamwork strengths, organizational resilience, and even business strategies (Nizamidou & Vouzas, 2021). Implementing a coherent mix of internal human resource management policies and practices has a significant impact on organizational performance. Human resources contribute to increased production performance, firm performance, capability, motivation and business results. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought unique and unprecedented challenges, requiring a
new framework for simultaneously managing the various levels of human resource involvement (Adikaram et al., 2021). Human resource management during the COVID-19 pandemic, from the perspective of safety measures, decreased demand, and government restrictions have created significant problems for companies, including layoffs and disruptions in supply chains (Adikaram et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has caused organizations to fundamentally re-evaluate how they manage their human resources in the early and intermediate stages of a crisis. These phases are characterized by high levels of uncertainty, both during the crisis and afterwards, as organizations and employees adapt to the new normal and sometimes return to the pre-crisis context (Newman et al., 2023). However, crises provide opportunities to highlight management flexibility, teamwork and organizational resilience. Given the increasingly frequent crises, it is essential to address them proactively, because an organizational crisis is an event that threatens the viability of the organization (Nizamidou & Vouzas, 2021). The HR department has a vital role in protecting an organization's human capital and ensuring that employees remain valuable even after a crisis (Athamneh, 2018).

Organizations have revised their work procedures and structures to manage the unprecedented changes brought about by the prolonged lockdowns, with the aim of adapting and providing support to employees in managing stress. Therefore, in various sectors, organizations have invested heavily in implementing human resource management strategies. It has become crucial for all organizations to adopt best practices with the objective of surviving times of crisis and become more resilient (Dubey et al., 2024).

This research focuses on the role of human resources policies and practices in planning the activity and training employees to manage crises while maximizing economic efficiency. The study investigates the function of HR as an integral part of crisis management and aims to highlight the importance of this role and how HR is responsible for ensuring that the organization is well prepared and that staff are properly trained to deal with crises of any type. Therefore, the study is organized based on three research questions:

i. RQ1: Is the human resource perceived as an important resource for Romanian companies?
ii. RQ2: Is human resource an important factor for maximizing economic efficiency in Romanian companies?
iii. RQ3: What are the measures taken by Romanian companies regarding the management of human resources in crisis period, through the lens of policies and practices?

This study uses both quantitative research method through a questionnaire and qualitative research method through the interview. A number of 48 respondents from various fields of activity participated at the questionnaire, while to validate the collected data, two interviews with human resources managers who have experience in crisis management were conducted. The aspects addressed through the questionnaire are organized by items included in distinct sections of the questionnaire. These aim at the respondents’ perception regarding the importance that the company in which they work gives to the management of human resources, from various perspectives: maximizing economic efficiency through specific policies and practices during crisis period, the level of the preparation of the human resources management in crisis period, and the company's attitude on how to prevent crises. It is anticipated that the results of this research will validate the perception that the human resource is recognized as an essential component for companies in Romania and represents a crucial factor in achieving organizational success. In addition, the need to pay special attention to the human resources management is emphasized, regardless of whether it is addressed in typical conditions or in periods of crisis.

This research focuses on identifying gaps in the specialized literature related to maximizing economic efficiency through human resource management, with an emphasis on improving decision-making processes in crisis period. By addressing these aspects, the study makes significant contributions in three major directions: optimizing economic efficiency by highlighting the essential role of human resources, analysing human resources management in critical periods and identifying processes to improve decision-making in the context of crisis awareness. This research also proposes concrete solutions and practical guidelines to fill the gaps identified in the literature, providing a useful framework for informed and effective managerial decisions.

The following sections of this research include: the second section discusses the theoretical elements and sets out the research questions of the study, the third section addresses the research methodology, the fourth section is related to the presentation of the results and their interpretation, and the last section contains the research conclusions, limitations and future research proposals.

**Literature Review**

**The importance that companies attribute to human resource management**

In recent years, attention to the link between crisis management and human resources department (HRD) has increased, recognizing its importance in crisis management (Nizamidou & Vouzas, 2021). HRD plays a crucial role in protecting human capital and preparing employees to respond to future crises, strengthening the company's performance and competitive advantage (Adikaram et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has generated unprecedented corporate responsibility, and previous research highlights the increased importance of HR during crises, with the HR director playing a key role in organizational success during crises, along with the CFO (Plater et al., 2022).

Managing human resources during crises has a significant impact on organizational performance and flexible, efficient and retention-oriented approaches are essential (Adikaram et al., 2021). In the current context, the protection and training of employees is a priority, and human resources have a crucial role in ensuring their security and preparedness in the face of crises. HR has the responsibility
to involve employees in business continuity planning and crisis management (Athamneh, 2018). Therefore, given the approaches in previous literature, the first research question is:

**RQ1:** Is the human resource perceived as an important resource for Romanian companies?

### Maximizing economic efficiency through human resources

Leadership in times of crisis is essential, and COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of strategic leadership. Crisis can become an opportunity for organizations led by strategic leaders who turn challenges into competitive advantages. Strong leadership teams are essential for effective crisis management, and organizations that do not adapt may experience significant difficulties (Plater et al., 2022). Performance management is crucial in crisis situations, and aligning the organization's strategic goals with employee performance is vital. Communication, feedback and maintaining employee performance are essential for survival during crises period (Hamouche, 2021).

Human resource management strategies, as an integrated part of organizational management, influence company’s performance and innovation, generating a competitive advantage (Bouazis & Hachicha, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought important changes in performance management due to complexity and novelty of the situation. Measuring the performance of employees, especially those working remotely, is difficult, and managers need to understand new challenges such as isolation, lack of communication, and occupational stressors (Hamouche, 2021). In line with previous studies, and in order to cover the gaps of scarce consideration for companies in emerging countries during crisis period, the second research question is:

**RQ2:** Is human resource an important factor for maximizing economic efficiency in Romanian companies?

### Human resources management through the lens of policies and practices during crisis

Strategic human resource management involves the link between HR functions and organizational strategy, aiming at the effective use of human resources to achieve the organization's objectives. During crises, strategic agility is needed to adapt management policies and practices and to respond to new challenges (Hamouche, 2021). Applying strategies related to personnel development and resources adjustment may help companies retain talent and minimize the negative impact of crises. In addition, crises may lead to organizational learning and the development of critical functions such as marketing and innovation for operational efficiency (Ma & Zhang, 2022).

Maintaining and improving performance management processes are essential for companies during crises period. Companies should provide regular feedback to employees, evaluate performance, and pay special attention to compensation aiming to maintain and improve performance (Hamouche, 2021). To cope with the crises, many companies have taken cost-cutting measures, including wage cuts and human resource restructuring. These measures may have significant consequences, and HR professionals need to manage the negative impact of these cost-cutting efforts. For example, companies have introduced wage cuts, delayed wage increases and eliminated bonuses to ensure savings (Adikaram et al., 2021). Therefore, the third research question is:

**RQ3:** What are the measures taken by Romanian companies regarding the management of human resources in crisis period, through the lens of policies and practices?

### Research & Methodology

The main objective of the research is to analyze and identify the process of improving decision-making when considering the behavior of human resources in crisis period under the conditions of maximizing economic efficiency. The data analysis methods employed for this research are frequency analysis of scores illustrating the perceptions of respondents for each research item, descriptive statistics shows mean and median scores. Also, in order to triangulate the result and provide evidence for their validity, the answers of interviews of two human resources managers are analyzed and discuss by comparison with the employees' perceptions.

This study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method was used to collect data based on a questionnaire, underlying aspects developed in the scientific literature (Adikaram et al., 2021; Bouazis & Hachicha, 2018; Ma & Zhang, 2022; Nizamidou & Vouzas, 2021) and adapted to the objective of this research.

The sections of the questionnaire include aspects aimed at the opinion of the respondents regarding the importance the company about the importance of human resources for the management, the maximization of economic efficiency through the human resource and the level of company’s preparation of the organization in the management of human capital in crisis situations during crisis period, the company's attitude regarding how to prevent and identify management policies and practices that could help companies to face a crisis situation. Most of the items are measured on a five-level scale (1 = to a very small extent, and 5 = to a very large extent). The respondents could choose only one mark for each question. Also, for the management policies and practices section, a multiple-choice question was included to identify the specific approaches of companies during crisis period. The options for this question are: cost reduction, salary reduction, staff reduction, communication, support, motivation, commitment.

In the second step, respondents provide demographic information such as gender, age, and job-related aspects about position, department, work experience, and industry. The questionnaire is designed based on the analysis of previous research (Adikaram et al., 2021; Bouazis & Hachicha, 2018; Ma & Zhang, 2022; Nizamidou & Vouzas, 2021) on the companies’ management of human resources.
resources in crisis period. The research sample, presented in Table 1, consists of employees of Romanian companies, from various industries, with various positions in the company (CEO/general manager, department manager, manager, supervisor, executive staff and other position).

Table 1: Presentation of Respondents by Department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The position in the department</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department manager</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive staff</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other position</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author

The targeted respondents are Romanian employees with various responsibilities in the company. Data was collected online in May 2023 using a Google Forms tool. The online form was chosen in order to benefit from its flexibility and functionality, as well as to reach the target audience efficiently, saving time. The questionnaire link was sent to respondents via e-mail and via social networks (WhatsApp). Additionally, the participants were asked to share the link with their colleagues or staff members. The invitation included details of the study objectives, instructions for filling in the questionnaire, and confidentiality commitments. All respondents answered the questionnaire voluntarily. A number of 48 responses were recorded.

The qualitative method was used in two interviews with HR managers who have experience and who have managed crisis situations. This method allows to analyze interviewees' experiences providing a broader perspective on crisis management policies and practices. Similarly, Adikaram et al. (2021) review crisis management through human resource management and conclude that there are three closely interconnected elements to dealing with in a crisis period: employees' health and safety, cost reduction, and employees' motivation and engagement.

The human resources department has an important role in mitigating the effects of the crisis period, and through the procedures implemented by the management, the company can return to normality once the crisis is overpassed. This may provide the opportunity to develop competitive advantage and business excellence (Nizamidou & Vouzas (2021).

Table 2 shows the characteristics of the interviewees regarding work experience, organizational position, size of the company they are employed in and the industry the company belongs to.

Table 2: Presentation of Interviewees' Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Company size</th>
<th>Work experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human resources manager 1</td>
<td>HRM1</td>
<td>Retail – retail trade</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resources manager 2</td>
<td>HRM2</td>
<td>Dental services</td>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author

The interviewees were assigned identification codes to preserve their anonymity. HRM1 is the code for the human resources manager who is employed at a retail company and his work experience is 13 years. The company size HRM1 works for is large. The second human resources manager was assigned the code HRM2. He works in a company that provides dental medical services, the company size is medium, and his work experience is 12 years.

Interviews are used to identify and analyze possible human resource management policies and practices regarding crisis management through managerial insight. The items used are similar in the interview and the questionnaire in order to have a coherent view on the research questions. Interview invitations were sent to managers by e-mail, together with information about the objectives of data collection and a consent form regarding confidentiality issues. The interviews were conducted through scheduled meetings with the interviewees, at the headquarters of the company where they work. The duration of the interview varied between 13 and 19 minutes.

Acknowledging the limitations of this study, future research may extend the study by analyzing the results of more respondents, analyzing a specific sector of activity or a specific type of risk. A comparative analysis of the respondents may also be conducted to improve the understanding of the factors that explain the importance of human resource in an organization. Research on the topic of the importance that human resources may have in maximizing economic efficiency should be expanded in order to be brought to the companies’ attention.
Research Results

The results of the research aim to analyze and identify the process of improving the decision-making of human resources management under the conditions of maximizing economic efficiency in periods of crisis, with reference to the three research questions.

The importance companies attribute to human resource management

To answer the research question RQ1. Does human resources represent an important resource for Romanian companies?, two aspects included in the questionnaire were followed through the items:

i. RQ1.I1. To what extent are the human resources important for Romanian companies?

ii. RQ1.I2. To what extent do you think that the organization you work for paid increased attention to human resources during crisis period?

The results presented in Figure 1 show that approximately half of the respondents believe that the organization they work for pays more attention to human resources and also consider them an important resource during a crisis period.

![Figure 1: The Importance of Human Resources for The Employer, from The Employees' Perspective; Source: Author](image)

The first item (RQ1.I1) concerns the importance companies give to human resource management. Thus, the aim is to identify the respondents' perception, both regarding the company's general policy and its particularities during a crisis period. In detail, it is followed whether the human resource is important for Romanian companies. The results presented in Figure 1 show that the majority of respondents gave a score of 5, followed by a score of 4. Detailing, out of a total of 48 responses, 26 of them were given a score of 5, a score of 4 was given by 12 respondents, a score of 3 was given by 6 respondents, a score 2 was given by 3 respondents, while only one respondent gave the score 1. This is explained by the fact that one of the most important elements of a company are employees, essential for successful implementation of its long-term strategies, an aspect highlighted also by Adikaram et al. (2021).

The second item (RQ1.I2) shows the attention that the company pays to human resources during a crisis period. In detail, this item analyzes the importance that Romanian companies give to human resources when a period of crisis occurs. The results presented in Figure 1 illustrate that the majority of respondents gave a score of 5, followed by a score of 4. Detailing, out of the total of 48 responses, 23 of them were given a score of 5, a score of 4 was given by 11 respondents, a score of 3 was given by 9 respondents, score 2 was given by 3 respondents, score 1 was given by 2 respondents. These results are consistent with those obtained by Adikaram et al. (2021) and are explained by the fact that when organizations are forced to resort to severe management practices and activities in order to survive, they tended to minimize the impact on employees as much as possible by adopting appropriate management policies.

The descriptive statistics calculated for the item regarding the importance the company assigns to human resources, presented in Table 3, show a mean of 4.3, and a median of 5. Most of the respondents indicated a score of 4 or 5. From the descriptive statistics for the responses regarding the company's attention to human resources during a crisis period, the mean is 4, and the median is 4, showing that employees perceived that during crisis, the management paid a slightly lower attention to human resources aspects, as compared to typical periods.
Table 3: Frequency Analysis and Descriptive Statistics on The Importance of Human Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>RQ1.I1</th>
<th>RQ1.I2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total answers</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Descriptive statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author

Considering the two items of the section regarding the importance the company attaches to human resource management, combined, the mean score is 4.1, suggesting that organizations in Romania pay a great deal of attention to human resource management practices and policies.

The interviewed managers gave similar answers as those received from the majority of respondents. However, they mention that the organizations in which they work emphasize human resources and pay attention to human resource management especially in periods of crisis.

"The human resource is one of the most important resources in the company where I work and it is the basis of our success. The company paid a lot of attention and importance to the human resource" (HRM 1).

"I believe that the human resource is the basis of the entire activity and without it we could not function. [...] The company paid a lot of attention to human resources during the [COVID19] pandemic" (HRM 2).

The importance that companies give to human resources in the context of maximizing economic efficiency crisis period

To answer the research question RQ2. Does the human resource represent an important factor for maximizing economic efficiency?, five aspects included in the questionnaire were followed through the following items:

i. RQ2.I1. To what extent does the company you work for offer the opportunity to participate in trainings and improvement courses?

ii. RQ2.I2. To what extent do you consider the company you work for offers you performance-based benefits?

iii. RQ2.I3. To what extent do you consider the work schedule adequate for the fulfilment of professional responsibilities?

iv. RQ2.I4. To what extent do you think that the change in the way you work, from onsite to remote/hybrid, has contributed to maximize the economic efficiency of the business?

v. RQ2.I5. To what extent did the company provide compensations for your additional costs during the period of online/hybrid activity?

The results regarding the first three items, shown in Figure 2, show that the majority of respondents consider that organizations in Romania offer their employees the opportunity to participate in training and improvement courses to a great extent, offer a salary based on performance, and, to a very large extent, the work schedule is suitable for the fulfilment of professional responsibilities.
The first item (RQ2.I1) relates to the extent to which the company offers the opportunity to participate in trainings and improvement courses. In detail, this item refers to the importance that Romanian companies attach to the development of human resources within the company. The results presented in Figure 2 show that most of the responses regarding participation in such programmes and the fulfillment of professional responsibilities are marked with a score of 5. Detailing, out of the total of 48 responses, 22 of them are scored with a score of 5, while score 4 was given by 10 respondents, score 3 was given by 5 respondents, score 2 was given by 6 respondents, and score 1 was given by 5 respondents. Results of previous studies (Adikaram et al., 2021) mention that in order to manage the crisis situation companies introduced changes in training to reduce costs.

The second item (RQ2.I2) concerns the benefits granted to employees according to their performance. In detail, this item refers to the importance that Romanian companies attach to the rewards given to human resources for the fulfillment of the company’s objectives. Most of the answers are marked with a score of 4. Out of the total of 48 answers, 18 respondents gave a score of 4, a score of 5 was given by 11 respondents, score 3 was given by 9 respondents, score 2 was given by 6 respondents and score 1 was given by 4 respondents. In a pragmatic approach, human capital reward and reward policy is considered by Wongsansukcharoen and Thaweepaiboonwong (2023) as an asset from which notable performance is expected.

The third item (RQ2.I3) illustrates the appropriate work schedule for the fulfillment of professional responsibilities. In detail, this item refers to the importance that Romanian companies attach to the tasks assigned to each employee and the working time to fulfill them. According to Figure 2, out of a total of 48 responses, 19 respondents gave a score of 5, a score of 4 was given by 15 respondents, a score of 3 was given by 5 respondents, a score of 2 was given by 7 respondents, and a score of 1 was given by 2 respondents.

The results concerning the items RQ1.I4 and RQ1.I5, presented in Figure 3, indicate a score of 5 for most of the responses. This shows that the respondents are satisfied, to a high extent, with the behavior of companies regarding the change of working mode from onsite to remote/hybrid and the settlement of employees’ additional costs during the period of online/hybrid activity.
The fourth item (RQ2.I4) aims at changing the way of working, from onsite to remote/hybrid and maximizing the economic efficiency of the activity during the crisis period. In detail, this item refers to the adaptation conditions in terms of changing the way of working and whether these conditions contributed to the company’s performance. As shown in Figure 3, from the total of 48 responses, score 5 recorded 14 responses, score 4 was given by 10 respondents, and scores 3, 2 and 1 were given by 8 respondents each. In the context of COVID-19 restrictions that have forced employees to work remotely, organizational leaders have been challenged to keep employees engaged and motivated. To manage a crisis effectively, an organization must adopt a coherent set of measures, and HR professionals must be aware of employee needs, maintain constant communication, and provide flexibility in work (Dubey et al., 2024).

The fifth item (RQ2.I5), referring to the settlement of additional costs during the remote/hybrid activity period, returned the scores shown in Figure 3. In detail, this item refers to the importance that Romanian companies attach to the expenses attributed to the new working conditions. Thus, from the total of 48 responses, 16 responses were recorded with a score of 5, followed by a score of 4 given by 13 respondents, a score of 3 given by 10 respondents, a score of 2 indicated by 6 respondents, while 3 respondents gave the score 1. The human factor may be a vital aid to organizations not only in managing the impact of the current crisis, but also in preparing them for possible future crises. Human resource professionals may improve the performance and effectiveness of organizations, human resource department being of particular importance for this purpose (Nizamidou & Vouzas, 2021).

Descriptive statistics related to the second research question (RQ2) are presented in Table 4. For the item RQ2.I1, regarding the opportunity of employees to participate in trainings and improvement courses, the mean is 3.8, while the median is 4.

Table 4: Frequency Analysis and Descriptive Statistics On Maximizing Economic Efficiency Through Human Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>RQ2.I1</th>
<th>RQ2.I2</th>
<th>RQ2.I3</th>
<th>RQ2.I4</th>
<th>RQ2.I5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total answers</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indicators | Descriptive statistics
Mean | 3.8 | 3.5 | 3.9 | 3.3 | 2.7 |
Median | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3.5 | 3 |
Min | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
Max | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |

Source: Author

Descriptive statistics for the responses regarding the policy of granting employees’ benefits based on performance (RQ2.I2) generated a mean of 3.5, and a median of 4. For the responses regarding the adequacy of the work schedule for the fulfillment of professional responsibilities (RQ2.I3), the descriptive statistics show that the mean is 3.8, and the median is 4. Regarding the change in working type, from onsite to remote/hybrid and the correlation of this change with the maximization of economic efficiency (RQ2.I4), the answers reveal a mean of 3.3, with a median of 3.5. Descriptive statistics regarding the compensations provided by the company for employees’ additional costs during the period of online/hybrid activity (RQ2.I5) presents the mean of 2.7, and the median of 3. Considering the results of the descriptive statistics regarding the question aimed at maximizing the economic efficiency regarding the human resource, with the mean of the responses recorded for all five items of 3.4, shows that Romanian organizations could pay more attention to these aspects in order to value the human resource and to maximize economic efficiency from all points of view. Companies may also focus on settling additional costs during online/hybrid activity.

The interviewed managers mentioned that the organizations they work for put a lot of emphasis on the professional development of employees (RQ2.I1) and, at the same time, they believe that the given benefits reflect the efforts that each employee makes to achieve their performance targets (RQ2.I2). From the responses of the interviewees, we can see that they also believe that the human resource has a significant contribution to maximizing economic efficiency.

“We organize training and courses for employees’ improvement that conducted to an even higher performance of human resources. The company where I work offers a competitive salary for the level of performance achieved by employees” (HRM 1).
"In the company where I work, training and development and improvement courses are mandatory and without them we would not be able to function. It is very important that the salary reflects the performance [...] and as each employee validates the skills and results, the salary may increase" (HRM 2).

However, for the item related to the adequacy of working schedule for the fulfilment of professional responsibilities (RQ2.I3), HRM1 mentions a disruption in the relationship between working time and professional tasks, considering that, often, the fulfilment of all tasks to meet the proposed objectives, requires an extended time, while HRM2 considers this link adequate.

"Working time is not always enough. The working hours are often overdue, but we try to give employees time off or compensate them financially" (HRM 1).

"The dedicated work program is sufficient for the fulfilment of responsibilities" (HRM 2).

Interviewed managers have different opinions regarding the change in the way of work, from onsite to remote/hybrid (RQ2.14). The manager from the company activating in retail industry specified that the online/hybrid program was not an issue for maximizing economic efficiency, while the company supported the employees with additional resources. On the other hand, the manager from the medical-dental industry specified that the online/hybrid option wasn’t possible, therefore, no settlement of expenses was involved (RQ2.15).

"With the pandemic, we realized that the onsite work at the office has not such a significant aspect for the performance of the employees. We have left the work option open and we could see that the majority choose the hybrid activity. Thus, we provided the employees with the necessary equipment" (HRM 1).

"In the company where I work, the online or hybrid activity was not possible. Also, there were no statements for these costs because the activity cannot be carried out online" (HRM 2).

The importance given by companies to the management of human resources in crisis period, through the lens of policies and practices

In order to answer the research question RQ3. What are the measures taken by Romanian companies regarding the management of human resources in crisis period, through the lens of policies and practices, a series of aspects included in the questionnaire were tracked with the items:

i. RQ3.I1. How do you rate the HR department's ability to make decisions under pressure?
ii. RQ3.I2. Assess how well HR department monitors and addresses employees’ morale, health and safety?
iii. RQ3.I3. Choose one or more options to identify the management policies and practices adopted by the company you work for, during the crisis period.

The results shown in Figure 4 show that most responses are scored with 4. This demonstrate that respondents are highly satisfied with the HR department's ability to make decisions under pressure and to monitor and deal with employees’ moral support, health and safety.

![Figure 4: The Human Resource Management in Crisis Period; Source: Author](image)

The first item (RQ3.I1) refers to the ability of the human resource department to make decisions under pressure. In detail, this item refers to the adaptability of the human resources department to face crisis situations that may require quick decisions to help the company get through this period. The results show that most respondents gave a score of 4 for this item. Detailing, out of the total of 48 responses, 18 are given a score of 4, a score of 3 was given by 13 respondents, a score of 2 was given by 10 respondents, a score of 1 was given by 3 respondents. Dealing with pressure without falling into burnout requires not only good self-management, but also the implementation of new leadership strategies. Successful leadership depends
significantly on the specific circumstances or context. Effective leaders require contextual intelligence, manifested by the ability to understand social changes and their impact on the organization (Newman et al., 2023).

The second item (RQ3.I2) illustrates how the HR department monitors and addresses employees’ morale, health and safety. In detail, this item refers to the importance that the human resources department attaches to the level of stress, medical conditions and safety of the human resource. Most responses received indicated a score of 4. Detailing, out of the total of 48 responses, 18 are given a score of 4, a score of 5 was given by 13 respondents, a score of 3 was given by 7 respondents, a score of 2 was given by 6 respondents, and a score of 1 was given by 4 respondents. Results support the idea that the ability to adapt to a crisis situation allows the organization to make prompt and appropriate decisions, understanding and quickly reacting to dynamic changes in the environment and effectively allocating available resources. Strong adaptive capacity lays the foundation for the implementation of crisis management strategies. First, a well-adapted organization may apply existing policies and practices to effectively address new problems that arise in crisis situations. Second, the ability to understand the environment and integrate the necessary resources, identified as the two key elements of adaptability, leads companies to continuously understand changes in their operating environment and effectively allocate available resources within the organization (Ma & Zhang, 2022).

The results of the descriptive statistics regarding the management of human resources during the crisis are presented in Table 5. For both items, RQ3.I1, which refers to the respondents' assessment of the ability of the human resources department to make decisions under pressure, and RQ3.I2, regarding the company's attention to monitoring and support the employees' morale, health and safety through human resources department, the mean is 3.6, and the median is 4.

Table 5: Frequency Analysis and Descriptive Statistics Regarding Human Resource Management During The Crisis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>RQ3.I1</th>
<th>RQ3.I2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total answer</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indicators | Descriptive statistics
---|---
Mean | 3.6 | 3.6
Median | 4 | 4
Min | 1 | 1
Max | 5 | 5

Source: Author

Considering these two items developed from the research question (RQ3) regarding the importance that companies give to the management of human resources during the crisis and the identification of management policies and practices, the companies are placed in the middle of the scale with a mean of 3.6, from the perspective of the respondents. Thus, companies should pay more attention to human resource management policies and practices in crisis period.

The importance of human resource management in times of crisis is supplemented with a multiple-choice item (RQ3.I3) to identify the most frequently used management policies and practices during crisis period. A list of possible management policies and practices was offered as responses: cost reduction, salary reduction, personnel reduction, communication, support, motivation and commitment. The results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: The Frequency of Management Policies Adopted by Companies in Times Of Crisis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management policy/practice</th>
<th>Frequency (% of total responses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>32 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost reduction</td>
<td>28 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>22 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>20 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>12 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel reduction</td>
<td>10 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary reduction</td>
<td>6 (13%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author
The most frequently indicated management policy/practice is communication, indicated by 67% of respondents (32 responses were recorded), followed by cost reduction policy, with 28 responses. The lowest rated are policies/practices regarding personnel reduction, with 10 responses (21%), and salary reduction, with 6 responses (13%). Human resource is essential for the success of organizations and employees will be more productive if they are involved in organizational processes. Similarly, previous studies concluded that during the periods of crisis, companies that adopted only cost-cutting initiatives, such as salary and personnel reduction, were encouraged to also use practices such as communication, support, motivation, and commitment to reduce the negative impact on employees (Adikaram et al., 2021).

Similar to the results from the questionnaire analysis, managers' responses regarding decision-making under pressure (RQ3.I1) mention that it is not easy to make the best decisions given the recent pandemic crisis. Moral support, employee health and safety (RQ3.I2) are important in both companies, where the interviewed managers are employed.

"Making decisions under pressure, especially in times of crisis, is difficult. Decisions are not always 100% correct [...] and our reaction time has increased taking into account the multitude of factors that must be taken into account. We have support for all employees, both morally and financially in case of an unexpected situation" (HRM1).

"When we are put under pressure, it is not exactly easy to make a decision in the shortest possible time and to be able to anticipate possible results or if it is the best decision you could made. The company monitors and deals with moral support and employee health and safety to a great extent. [...] It is really very important to provide moral support [...] and to demonstrate that you also care about the human resources wellbeing, beyond that of the business" (HRM 2).

Comparing to the answers recorded based on the questionnaire, the interviewees indicated different management policies and practices adopted during the crisis. HRM1 specifies that the elements that helped the company cope with the crisis situation are communication, support, motivation and commitment. Contrary to the response of HRM 1 and to the responses recorded in the questionnaire, HRM 2 mentions that cost reduction and salary reduction were the basic policies and practices that helped the company to cope with the crisis situation.

"During the crisis, we had no reductions in costs or human resources. Communication, support, motivation and commitment were the key to getting through" (HRM 1).

"Cost reduction, of course, and salary reduction because it was necessary, taking into account that during the most recent period of crisis we went through, the company had to be closed for a certain period of time and then we had to cut salaries. The staff was not reduced. [...] From the point of view of communication, contact was kept with each department, various groups were created on social networks where they communicated very clearly the situation we are in, what to do next, what are the legal aspects. [...] From the point of view of support, motivation, commitment, yes, it was taken into account" (HRM 2).

Conclusions

The main objective of this research is the analysis of employees' perceptions regarding measures to improve decision-making when considering the behavior of human capital in terms of maximizing economic efficiency, as well as the analysis of human resources management through the lens of policies and practices intended to manage a situation of crisis in the context of Romanian companies.

Studies on practices and policies adopted by Romanian companies are still an area of exploration. This study contributes to the expanding literature by examining the bundle of HRM practices that were adopted by organizations to overcome the setbacks caused by the pandemic period. This study contributes to the development of scientific literature by identifying and debating management policies and practices regarding human resources in Romanian companies in the context of economic efficiency in times of crisis. Muchmore, this research helps companies better understand the role of human resources in the context of maximizing economic efficiency. Challenges are addressed, both in general company policy and during crisis period, while practical information for both employees and managers is included. On the one hand, human resource managers can analyze and identify through this study what are the perspectives of Romanian companies regarding the importance of human resources, what is the contribution of human resources to maximizing the economic efficiency of the company and what are the practices and policies adopted by companies during of human resource crisis. On the other hand, company leaders can identify with this study the role of human resources in the company, its importance for the achievement of objectives and the contribution of human resources to the company's performance.

The detailed analysis of the data reveals that, within Romanian companies, approximately half of the respondents believe that organizations pay special attention to human resources, recognizing its importance. Supporting this conclusion, descriptive statistics reflect a positive perception, with a mean score of 4.3 for the importance given to human resources management. The perspectives of the managers interviewed support these conclusions, emphasizing that human resources are the foundation of organizational success. Regarding the maximization of economic efficiency in times of crisis, most respondents appreciate the significant efforts of organizations. However, the shift to online/hybrid activity was assessed differently, with some seeing it as helping to maximize economic efficiency, while others encountering difficulties. Descriptive statistics indicate a mean score of 3.4 for this research question, suggesting that there is an opportunity to improve and fully exploit the potential of human resources in the context of maximizing economic efficiency. The opinions of the interviewed managers confirm these findings, underlining the organizations' sustained efforts in professional development and proportional remuneration of employees. Regarding the management of human
resources in times of crisis through the lens of policies and practices adopted, the respondents generally appreciate the skills of the human resources department, but there is still room for improvement. The policies and practices adopted are varied, with communication and cost reduction being highlighted most frequently. The diversity of policies reflects the specific needs of each company, providing opportunities for adaptations and improvements.

In conclusion, the data suggest that human resource management is crucial in Romanian companies, both in a regular context and during crisis periods, highlighting a strategic approach to the role of employees in organizational success.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References


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