

**SELECTED ATTRIBUTES OF LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF HUMAN  
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE MSP IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP COUNTRIES.  
A SECTORAL PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract**

*Human resource management in the SME segment is a complex process that involves many different factors. The aim of this study is to define the significant attributes of HRM in SMEs and compare attitudes within the three most significant business sectors in the individual Visegrad Group (V4) countries. Empirical research focused on the attitudes of small and medium-sized enterprises was conducted in June 2022 in the V4 countries. Data collection was carried out by the external agency MNFORCE using the Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) research method. Within this research, selected attitudes of SMEs in the field of human resource management in the three most important sectors within the individual V4 countries were examined. The sample size was represented by 995 respondents. Statistical hypotheses were tested using descriptive statistics and Z-scores at a significance level of  $\alpha = 5\%$ . A positive finding is that within the examined sample, SMEs consider people in the company to be the most important capital and perceive human resource management positively in the context of corporate management. As a negative trend, the insufficient evaluation of employee performance by SMEs can be noted, and the level of investment in human capital is significantly limited. The most common differences in SME attitudes were found when comparing manufacturing companies with the service sector and the trade sector, which is determined by the peculiarities of the transformation process in these companies.*

**Key words:**

*human capital, small and medium enterprises, human resource management, worker performance*

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**INTRODUCTION**

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent a basic element of economic systems in the world. The dynamics of their development, their ability to innovate products and services, and their ability to quickly adapt to changing conditions are all essential for maintaining competitiveness.

Human resource management (HRM) represents a significant area of corporate management, as the human factor is extremely important in some business sectors. In the context of the strategic goals of SMEs, it is necessary for SME owners/managers to correctly perceive the importance of human capital, devote adequate management capacity to this area, be able to assess and motivate people in the company to achieve better

results, and invest money into increasing their qualification growth.

SMEs in the countries of the Visegrád Four (V4) operate mainly in the area of services, trade, manufacturing, and tourism.

The originality and excellence of this study lies in the fact that we are studying the attitudes of SME owners/managers in the field of HRM on the basis of our own empirical research, which was carried out in the Visegrád Four countries (V4: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary). The research is focused on identifying differences within the most important business sectors of SMEs in these countries. The focus of attention is the question of to what extent different attitudes and approaches of SMEs to HRM exist in different business sectors.

The structure of the article is as follows. In the first chapter, scientific opinions on the given issue are presented. In the second chapter, the research objective is defined, the methodology used is described, and the data used in the article are described. In the next chapter, the research results and discussion of them are presented. In the conclusion, the basic research results are formulated in an integrated form.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Human resource management (HRM) has some specific characteristics in the environment of SMEs. The company is usually managed by an individual, often the owner of the company or a small group of people without significant specialization. Sometimes, HRM is pushed to the sidelines, even though people, their knowledge, professional skills, and motivation to achieve good results represent a significant source of success for SMEs. Therefore, a suitable approach to HRM in the SME segment represents a significant source of growth and competitiveness for these companies. This is also confirmed by Fejfarová (2016), who argues that HRM is a decisive factor that determines the success of small and medium-sized enterprises on the market, as well as their competitiveness.

The concept of human capital can be found in foreign and scientific literature. According to Alay and Jeppe (2013), human capital is a stock of knowledge and skills contained in the workforce, which is the result of education, work, and gives the workforce its corresponding value. Plaksiuk et al. (2023) refer to human capital as a factor that increases the effectiveness and competitiveness of an enterprise. Enterprises with employees who develop their knowledge and skills have higher growth and profitability than organizations in which employees lack these qualities (Gomezelj and Antonič, 2015). Irwin et al. (2018) refer to this quality as a competitive advantage for an enterprise.

In this context, Atkinson et al. (2022) point out the different ways in which SMEs function. According to the authors, these companies lack HR specialists who should be the bearers of progressive HR approaches, and their role is replaced by owners/managers. The authors also emphasize the importance of strategic HR management in this segment (similar conclusions are formulated by Lee, 2021 in a wider context).

Research on employee engagement has shown that a properly set up HR system is positively correlated with employee engagement (Saks, 2022). According to the author, a system of careful HR procedures (job design, training and development, flexible working conditions, work-life balance, participation in decision-making, health and safety, career development, and health and wellness programs) results in employees' interest in their company and a higher level of their engagement. In this context, Alsafadi and Altahtat (2022) add that the appropriate application of the HR system has a positive impact on improving employee performance as well as on their job satisfaction and its components (stability and enrichment of work). The relationship between HR policy and performance in small and medium-sized enterprises was also investigated by Al Qaydi and Aris (2021). Similarly, Sanchez et al. (2022) demonstrate, based on the results of a survey of 1,136 Spanish small and medium-sized enterprises, that effective HR policies have a positive impact on achieving better performance and results of the enterprise. Li and Rees (2020) examined the factors that influence and interact with each other in the context of the way HR is managed in small and medium-sized enterprises in China. Among the studied determinants, they included the size of the enterprise, sector and area of operation, the presence of an HR department, and the location of the organization.

Ongoing structural changes in economies and labor markets are also significant determinants of human resource management. Technological innovations,

demographic trends, and globalization are influencing the way companies approach the management of their employees. These changes can include new skill requirements, flexible working conditions, and an increasing focus on employee development and engagement, so that organizations can effectively respond to the dynamics of the labor market. Therefore, education and retraining of employees is becoming an important activity in the field of human resource management. Authors Chasovschi et al. (2021) addressed this current challenge in the context of small and medium-sized enterprises in Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine, pointing out that education of human resources must become a priority for this group of enterprises.

The service, trade, manufacturing, and tourism sectors are the basic categories of the economy, which include various types of activities and enterprises. The service, trade, manufacturing, and tourism sectors form the basic pillars of the economy, and each of them is characterized by unique characteristics. (Maliszewska et al., 2020). All of these sectors represent important economic activity that ensures the creation of income and profits for the economy. They provide jobs for a wide range of people and contribute to employment and the growth of the national economy. All of these sectors are equally affected by economic cycles, which can have an impact on their performance and profits. The service sector deals with the provision of non-material services, such as financial and banking services, healthcare and related components, or the education sector. The trade sector deals with the sale and distribution of physical goods, including retail and wholesale. The manufacturing sector focuses on the creation of physical products, with innovation and development being important aspects of this sector. The tourism sector deals with hospitality and the provision of experiences and services for tourists. (Chittithaworn et al., 2011).

For example, the service and trade sectors may be less seasonally affected than the

manufacturing and tourism sectors, which often depend on holiday seasons and climatic conditions (Wahyuni & Sara, 2020). In terms of capital and investment, the manufacturing sector requires larger investments in manufacturing facilities and technologies, while the service and trade sectors may focus on investments in software and infrastructure (Khan et al., 2019).

Regulations also differ between sectors. The manufacturing sector may be subject to stricter regulatory requirements, for example in the area of environmental protection, while the service and trade sectors may be less regulated (Williamson et al., 2006).

Therefore, although these sectors have many common characteristics, their differences are clear in several aspects, from the character of the services provided to the influence of technologies and global factors. Their coexistence and mutual influence contribute to the diversity and dynamics of the modern economy. It is therefore possible to observe how the field of operation and the sectoral focus of companies influence different practices and policies in the field of human resource management.

This study is focused on the examination of the significant factors of HR in SMEs from the point of view of the three most important business sectors in each of the V4 countries.

## GOAL AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of the article was to define the significant attributes of HR in SMEs and to compare attitudes within the three most important business sectors in each of the V4 countries.

Empirical research aimed at identifying the attitudes of SMEs was conducted in June 2022 in the V4 countries. Data collection was carried out by the external agency MNFORCE using the "Computer Assisted Web Interviewing" (CAWI Research Method). The questionnaire could be completed by the owner or top manager of a small or medium-

sized enterprise (SME; hereinafter referred to as the respondent).

In the Czech Republic, the total number of respondents was 347. The structure of respondents in terms of company size was as follows: 45.2% micro-enterprises, 30.8% small enterprises, and 23.9% medium enterprises. The majority of companies operated in the service sector, with 138 (39.8%), followed by manufacturing with 72 (20.7%), and then trade with 60 companies (17.3%).

In the Slovak Republic, the total number of respondents was 322. The structure of respondents in terms of company size was as follows: 51.9% micro-enterprises, 26.7% small enterprises, and 21.4% medium enterprises. The majority of companies operated in the service sector, with 129 (40.1%), followed by trade with 79 (24.5%), and manufacturing with 42 (13.0%).

In Poland, the total number of respondents was 381. The structure of respondents in terms of company size was as follows: 47.2% micro-enterprises, 27.8% small enterprises, and 25.0% medium enterprises. The majority of companies operated in the tourism sector, with 110 (28.9%), followed by manufacturing with 78 (20.5%), and then trade with 56 (14.7%).

In Hungary, the total number of respondents was 348. The structure of respondents in terms of company size was as follows: 50.0% micro-enterprises, 28.2% small enterprises, and 21.8% medium enterprises. The majority of companies operated in the tourism sector, with 110 (31.6%), followed by trade with 69 (19.8%), and services with 52 (14.9%).

In this article, we will evaluate the attitudes of respondents according to the three most important business sectors in each of the V4 countries. In the Czech Republic, these will be the following sectors of the economy: services, manufacturing, and trade. In Slovakia, services, trade, and manufacturing. In Poland, tourism, manufacturing, and trade. In Hungary, tourism, trade, and services.

Within the research, statements were established that appropriately characterize the importance of HR in the SME segment:

ST1: I consider people in the company to be the most important capital.

ST2: I consider human resources management to be the most important area of corporate management.

ST3: I regularly evaluate the performance of my subordinates and motivate them to innovate work processes.

ST4: I invest a lot of money in increasing the qualifications of our employees.

Within the research, the following statistical hypotheses were established:

H1: There are no statistically significant differences in the positive attitudes of SMEs according to the three most important sectors in each of the V4 countries when evaluating ST1.

H2: There are no statistically significant differences in the positive attitudes of SMEs according to the three most important sectors in each of the V4 countries when evaluating ST2.

H3: There are no statistically significant differences in the positive attitudes of SMEs according to the three most important sectors in each of the V4 countries when evaluating ST3.

H4: There are no statistically significant differences in the positive attitudes of SMEs according to the three most important sectors in each of the V4 countries when evaluating ST4.

The statistical hypotheses were tested using descriptive statistics and Z-score at the significance level  $\alpha = 5\%$ . If the p-value is higher than or equal to 0.05, the null hypothesis is confirmed. If the p-value is lower than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. The calculations were made using freely available software on the internet (Z Score Calculator, 2023).

## FINDINGS

The following tables present the research results, scientific hypotheses, including the verification of the individual

Tab. 1: Results of the ST1 research according to the most important sectors in each of the V4 countries

ST1: I consider people in the company to be the most important capital.	CR S/V/O 138/72/60	SR S/V/O 129/42/79	PL CR/V/O 110/78/56	HU CR/O/S 110/69/52
1. I totally agree	71/36/25	66/27/45	64/59/36	70/47/32
2. I agree	50/31/21	51/10/28	37/19/16	27/17/19
Total 1+2/ in %	121/67/46 88/93/77	117/37/73 91/88/92	101/78/52 92/100/93	97/64/51 88/93/98

*Source: own calculations.*

Note: Czech Republic – CR; Slovak Republic – SR; Poland - PL; Hungary – HU; services-S; shop-O; production-V; tourism-CR;

Tab. 2: Statistical calculations of ST1 according to the most important sectors in each of the V4 countries.

<b>Z score: p-value:</b>			
CR: S/V; S/O; <b>V/O</b>	0,226	0,050	<b>0,008</b>
SR: S/V; S/O; V/O	0,624	0,667	0,430
PL: <b>CR/V</b> ; CR/O; <b>V/O</b>	<b>0,010</b>	0,810	<b>0,016</b>
HU: CR/O; <b>CR/S</b> ; O/S	0,322	<b>0,037</b>	0,180

*Source: own calculations.*

H1 was not confirmed. We found that there are statistically significant differences in the positive responses of respondents to ST1 according to the individual sectors. In the Czech Republic, the manufacturing sector significantly agreed with the ST1 statement more than the trade sector (p-value = 0.008, the percentage ratio was 93% : 77%). In

Poland, we found differences between tourism and manufacturing (p-value = 0.010, the percentage ratio was 92% : 100%) and between manufacturing and trade (p-value = 0.016, 100% : 93%). In Hungary, we see significant differences between tourism (88%) and services (only 52% of the respondents agreed).

Tab. 3: Results of the ST2 research according to the most important sectors in each of the V4 countries

ST2: I consider human resources management to be the most important area of corporate management.	CR S/V/O 138/72/60	SR S/V/O 129/42/79	PL CR/V/O 110/78/56	HU CR/O/S 110/69/52
1. I totally agree	40/24/13	42/18/29	36/44/26	45/21/22
2. I agree	64/39/32	71/20/43	58/30/19	45/40/27
Total 1+2/ in %	104/63/45 75/87/75	113/38/72 88/90/91	94/74/45 85/95/80	90/61/49 82/88/94

*Source: own calculations*

Tab.4: Statistical calculations of ST2 according to the most important sectors in each of the V4 countries.

<b>Z score: p-value:</b>			
CR: S/V; S/O; V/O	<b>0,038</b>	0,960	0,064
SR: S/V; S/O; V/O	0,617	0,429	0,904
PL: CR/V; CR/O; V/O	<b>0,039</b>	0,401	<b>0,008</b>
HU: CR/O; CR/S; O/S	0,238	<b>0,035</b>	0,271

Source: own calculations

H2 was not confirmed. We found that there are statistically significant differences in the positive responses of respondents to ST2 according to the individual sectors. In the Czech Republic, the manufacturing sector significantly agreed with the ST2 statement more than the services sector (p-value =

0.038). In Poland, we found differences between tourism and manufacturing (p-value = 0.039) and between manufacturing and trade (p-value = 0.008). In Hungary, we see significant differences between tourism and services (p-value = 0.035).

Tab. 5: Results of the ST3 research according to the most important sectors in each of the V4 countries

ST3: I regularly evaluate the performance of my subordinates and motivate them to innovate work processes.	CR S/V/O	SR S/V/O	PL CR/V/O	HU CR/O/S
1. I totally agree	138/72/60	129/42/79	110/78/56	110/69/52
2. I agree	43/30/19	41/16/33	32/41/23	54/37/30
Total 1+2/ in %	54/33/27	56/21/32	53/25/23	40/24/18
	97/63/46	97/37/65	85/66/46	94/61/48
	70/87/77	72/88/82	77/85/82	85/88/92

Source: own calculations

Tab. 6: Statistical calculations of ST3 according to the most important sectors in each of the V4 countries

<b>Z score: p-value:</b>			
CR: S/V; S/O; V/O	<b>0,005</b>	0,357	0,103
SR: S/V; S/O; V/O	0,078	0,234	0,401
PL: CR/V; CR/O; V/O	0,211	0,465	0,704
HU: CR/O; CR/S; O/S	0,575	0,215	0,478

Source: own calculations

H3 was basically confirmed. We found that there is only one statistically significant difference in the positive responses of respondents to ST3 in the Czech Republic,

namely between services and manufacturing. No differences were found in the remaining V4 countries.

Tab. 7: Results of the ST4 research according to the most important sectors in each of the V4 countries

ST4: I invest a lot of money in increasing the qualifications of our employees.	CR S/V/O 138/72/60	SR S/V/O 129/42/79	PL CR/V/O 110/78/56	HU CR/O/S 110/69/52
1. I totally agree	21/21/9	28/10/20	37/36/31	36/30/22
2. I agree	52/34/24	51/15/34	43/30/12	44/29/19
Total 1+2/ in %	73/55/33 53/76/55	79/25/54 61/59/68	80/66/43 73/85/77	80/59/41 73/85./79

Source: own calculations.

Tab. 8: Statistical calculations of ST4 according to the most important sectors in each of the V4 countries.

<b>Z score: p-value:</b>			
CR: S/V; S/O; V/O	<b>0,001</b>	0,787	<b>0,009</b>
SR: S/V; S/O; V/O	0,841	0,298	0,332
PL: CR/V; CR/O; V/O	0,054	0,575	0,250
HU: CR/O; CR/S; O/S	<b>0,045</b>	0,401	0,337

Source: own calculations.

H4 was not confirmed. We found that there are statistically significant differences in the positive responses of respondents to ST4 according to the individual sectors. In the Czech Republic, the manufacturing sector significantly agreed with the ST4 statement more than the services and trade sectors. In Hungary, we see significant differences between tourism and trade.

The research results can be summarized in the following areas.

The most common differences in responses are found when comparing SMEs operating in manufacturing to SMEs operating in services, trade, and tourism. These are followed by differences in the attitudes of SMEs operating in tourism compared to other sectors of the economy.

The average approval rate for ST1 in the V4 countries was as follows: 94% in manufacturing, followed by 92% in services, 90% in tourism, and 89% in trade. This means that the dominant part of SMEs in the defined sectors in the V4 countries consider people in the company to be the most important capital.

The average approval rate for ST2 in the V4 countries was as follows: 91% in manufacturing, followed by services (86%),

tourism (83%), and trade (83%). SMEs also have a relatively high approval rate for the statement that they consider human resources management to be the most important area of corporate management.

The average approval rate for ST3 in the V4 countries was as follows: 87% in manufacturing, followed by trade (82%), tourism (81%), and services (78%). These results are not very positive, as there is a significant number of SMEs that do not regularly evaluate the performance of their subordinates and do not motivate them to innovate work processes.

The average approval rate for ST4 in the V4 countries was as follows: 73% in manufacturing and tourism, followed by trade (71%) and services (64%). It is clear that this is the area where we see the least positive attitudes of SMEs in the evaluated set. It can be assumed that the level of investment in human capital is significantly limited in the context of SMEs.

The results of this research support the conclusions of the studies by Alay and Jeppe (2013), Gomezelj and Antonič (2015), and Irwin et al. (2018), which emphasize the significance of human capital and its impact

on the economic growth, profitability, and competitive advantage of a company.

At the same time, our results confirm and complement the findings of the study by Atkinson et al. (2022), who highlight different modes of functioning of HRM in the SME segment. According to the authors, a major issue for SMEs is the lack of personnel specialists in companies, or the absence of strategic perspectives on HRM issues (Lee, 2021).

The results of the research point to the importance of the findings by Saks (2022) and Alsafadi and Altahat (2022), which focus on the issue of the proper setting of the HR system in the context of improving employee performance.

## CONCLUSION

Human resource management in the SME segment is a complex process involving various factors. SMEs should carefully consider these aspects and integrate them into their strategy and activities to achieve optimal human capital performance for the preservation of competitiveness and long-term survival.

The aim of the article was to define the significant attributes of HR in SMEs and to compare attitudes within the three most important business sectors in each of the V4 countries.

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Within the research, we defined four statements that appropriately define the HRM domain in the SME segment.

The fundamental findings of the empirical research can be formulated as follows. A positive finding is that, within the examined sample, SMEs consider people as the most important capital in the company and have a positive approach to human resource management in the context of corporate management. As a negative trend, the insufficient evaluation of employee performance by SMEs can be noted, and the level of investment in human capital is significantly limited.

The most common differences in SME attitudes were found when comparing manufacturing companies with the service sector and the trade sector, which is determined by the specifics of the transformation process in these companies and the importance of the human factor in technological processes.

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