

New challenges for human resource management in academic institutions: A qualitative survey of emerging demands in Czech higher education

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Abstract: The effectiveness of academic institutions in achieving educational excellence, advancing research, and addressing societal issues is significantly influenced by the management of their human capital. This includes the qualifications, skills, and development opportunities for both academic and non-academic staff, as well as the systems in place for performance management and career advancement. Unlike corporate HR managers, those in universities often have limited authority over cross-functional areas such as career planning, organizational culture, and performance management. This paper investigates the main challenges and risks that arise from the typically underdeveloped HR management systems within universities. Through a qualitative analysis based on semi-structured interviews with HR managers from Czech universities, the study evaluates their awareness of these challenges and examines the strategies they are considering to address them.

Keywords: Challenges in university HR management, Higher education institutions, HR management, Roles and functions in university HR management.

1. Introduction

Due to their inherently "human capital-intensive" nature, academic institutions place a greater emphasis on human resource management compared to other sectors. This importance is underscored by the fact that, on average, human resource expenditures constitute about two-thirds of academic institutions' current spending (Becker, 1994).

The significance of effective HR management in academia has increased as higher education institutions face intense competition not only from other universities but also from well-managed private corporations with high human capital demands (Bathmaker et al., 2013). Historical advantages such as a strong brand, compelling mission, and a balanced work-life environment are now increasingly being matched by other institutions (Cogan & Derricott, 2014; Szelałowska-Rudzka, 2018).

Additionally, the challenge of managing human resources effectively is compounded by the need to adopt new teaching methods and digitalization of education (Sciarelli et al., 2020).

The overall challenge for the management of human resources of academic institutions, related to the above facts, leads inevitably to changes in the nature of their activities. Mainly, they the need for higher education institutions HR management to go beyond the framework of its traditional tasks and activities, focusing primarily on compliance with labour law and performing rather administrative, organizational or support tasks, usually only partially related to increasing the quality of higher education institutions and their value added. These traditional functions, however important, are no longer sufficient for the effective and competitive management of human resources of academic institutions: conceptual professional tasks associated with the acquisition, development, retention and use of talents, with the management of HR performance, including the application of modern HR

management methods in the conditions of higher education institutions, are becoming more important (Kaiser, et al., 1994).

To obtain this role that often interferes with the habitual running of academic institutions, means to obtain a role similar to the role of human resources management in other corporations in high demand of human capital (Kooli, 2019; Tjahjadi, et al., 2019).

Gradually, the "enlightened" representatives of the academic world, especially university management, are beginning to realize this, and they are beginning to understand that without the strong involvement of modern HR management, including HR management methods and tools that has proven itself in the conditions of private institutions (including private but non-profit higher education institutions), it is not possible modern universities to manage (Abelha, et al., 2020).

This challenge, i.e. the introduction of new HR management concepts, is challenging in any environment (Stickney, et al., 2019). In the conditions of higher education institutions, however, it is all the more challenging, as the framework of traditional powers and responsibilities of personnel management and the application of its new methods occur within the framework of the traditionally decentralized management structures of the academic world. This fact makes the aforementioned task usually significantly more complex than it is sometimes the case in private, "human capital intensive" corporations (Gaus, 2019).

Resisting this challenge can be more difficult also due to the occasional both professional and organizational separation of the HR management functions from the "rest" of the academic environment and their top management (Bowl, 2012).

The lack of connection between human resource management and the rest of academic institutions is one of the traditional weaknesses of the management of these institutions. The paradox, given the nature of these institutions, is that the lack of this connection sometimes manifests itself in areas belonging to the most strategic spheres of human resource management in the academic world, i.e. in personnel and career planning. Unlike similar private corporations, demanding on human resources capital, where human resource directors usually report directly to the general director of the organization, the university "People's Director") is usually not directly responsible to the leading representative of the university or faculty in our environment (Jamali, et al., 2022). Similarly, personnel managers of academic institutions rarely have a university-wide or faculty-wide mandate on topics, which interweave across individual areas of the university, such as the branding of these institutions as employers, modern organizational design, intra-faculty or intra-university career planning, creation of the institution's organizational culture, employee performance management, etc. Some of these highly strategic management activities, primarily or primarily related to human resources, can sometimes even be completely outside the area of personnel management (Goldthorpe, 2007).

On the organizational and often also the "personal level, it often happens that the heads of human resources management of academic institutions are not, in contrast to the managers of similar "people-demanding" private institutions", real partners of university leaders. They usually only have a limited opportunity to participate in the discussions of leading academic staff, dealing with, among other things, the key personnel processes of the given institution (Gallagher, 2022).

Obtaining a mandate - authority and responsibility - corresponding to the modern function of personnel management, especially in "human-intensive" institutions, means obtaining a mandate regarding the creation of a management methodology for individual personnel processes, control of compliance with this consultancy methodology, or coaching in human resources management, provided directly the leader (Jung, 2019). The methods and tools of human resources management in the academic environment are understandably still under the influence of public policy and its regulation, the long-term trend of the development of HR management methods in the public sphere is the approximation of HR management methods and tools to its modern rules, including methods developed and applied in private institutions (Brennan, 2004).

For the personnel management of academic institutions, this implies the need to become familiar with the methods of management and development of human resources used in institutions demanding

human capital, and their adaptation to their „domestic „conditions and the conditions of the academic sphere, as well as an explanation of the meaning and support of these methods in the context of their organization.

The main tool to achieve this goal, in addition to the new human resources management rules, is the development of academic and other staff, including their leaders (Takala, et al., 2015).

2. Theoretical Backgrounds: Literary Research

Although the core functions of higher education institutions—namely, generating and disseminating ideas—have remained relatively stable in recent years, recent economic, technological, and social changes have significantly impacted how many universities operate (Barber et al., 2013; Menon & Suresh, 2020). HR managers who are able to recognize and adapt to these developments can provide a crucial “competitive advantage,” aiding universities in achieving their distinctive missions (Abbas, 2020).

Technology is transforming academic institutions from closed campuses into open online environments accessible from remote locations (García-Peñalvo, 2021). It also accelerates the dissemination of research findings, shifting from lengthy journal publication processes to nearly instantaneous online platforms. Additionally, funding for academic institutions has become more challenging due to rising education costs and shrinking public funding sources, necessitating the exploration of new funding avenues (Benavides et al., 2020). The student demographic is also becoming more heterogeneous, with many pursuing higher education at older ages. The diversity in types and roles of academic institutions is increasing, leading to greater specialization and heightened competition among them (Barnett, 2016).

However, HR management in academic institutions often remains focused primarily on administrative functions such as hiring, payroll, and benefits. Despite the increasing use of technology for these transactions, the role of HR managers remains relatively disconnected from emerging HR roles that emphasize enhancing organizational value (Zabolotniaia et al., 2020).

The challenge for the HR function in academic institutions is to deliver value in four key areas: attracting and retaining talent, enhancing educational capabilities, developing management and leadership skills among university employees, and fostering cultural change within institutions.

This is particularly relevant in higher education, where issues of talent, leadership, and capability are critical to institutional success. HR managers must therefore align talent, leadership, and capability not only with the organization’s strategy but also with external business conditions and key stakeholders (Abad-Segura & González-Zamar, 2021).

2.1. HR Management at Universities

The term "human resources" in academic institutions encompasses all individuals employed within universities and colleges. This includes academic staff—those primarily engaged in teaching, research, or their direct support—as well as administrative personnel who provide career support to students and faculty, and individuals involved in the management and operation of the institution, including maintenance staff. The latter category mainly comprises employees responsible for student services, research management, and the development and application of new teaching methods and technologies, including the HR managers themselves.

However, the traditional division between "academics" and "employees" (often referred to as "faculty" and "staff") is increasingly becoming blurred and oversimplified. While academic staff, who contribute to the institution's mission in scholarship and education, are undeniably critical to the quality of teaching and research, other employees—particularly those in professional or managerial roles—are assuming an increasingly significant role in academic institutions. This shift is reflected in the trend where, despite a global decrease in the number of administrative staff, there is a rise in the number of professionals, managers, and technical staff in academic institutions, with some institutions now employing more non-academic personnel than academic staff (Camilleri, 2020).

Given this evolving landscape, it is essential to explore how HR managers can maximize their value through effective talent, leadership, and culture management. Universities, being complex and dynamic organizations, necessitate a flexible approach to HR management. Although the need for talent management, leadership development, and capability enhancement may be universal across the institution, tailored HR strategies specific to different employee groups are crucial for optimizing outcomes (Aboramadan et al., 2020).

2.2. University HR Management Role in Talent Management

In the domain of talent or HR capital management, it is imperative for HR management to assist academic institution leaders not only in defining, identifying, and recruiting talent but also in motivating, engaging, retaining, and fully utilizing top talent for both current and future needs (Claus, 2019). An HR focus on talent ensures that the right individuals are placed in appropriate roles, equipped with the necessary skills and commitment to effectively utilize those skills (Chun & Evans, 2023).

To address this challenge within academic institutions, HR managers with traditional orientations must navigate the entire talent lifecycle within the organization. Some scholars argue that due to the unique characteristics of academic institutions, HR managers should refrain from direct involvement in talent management issues related to academic staff (Chun & Evans, 2023). Although it may not be advisable for HR managers to set hiring standards, conduct interviews, or develop performance reviews and career planning goals for faculty or research staff, it is beneficial for these managers to impart essential HR knowledge relevant to these areas to the academic sector (Aboramadan et al., 2020).

Despite the centrality of academic staff to a university's core functions and the specialized nature of academic success criteria (such as peer-reviewed research and innovative teaching), conventional HR methods—effective in human capital-intensive sectors outside academia—can still provide value in the academic environment. While academic staff may resemble professionals in other fields, such as doctors, actors, or elite athletes, in terms of talent and performance management, they also require structured and uniform approaches to be effectively vetted and managed.

For university support staff, HR managers typically adopt a more traditional role in talent management (Chapleo, 2011). They work with academic and administrative leaders to establish standards, recruit candidates, conduct screenings, facilitate hiring orientations, perform performance reviews, and manage motivation and remuneration, paralleling practices in other sectors (García-Peñalvo, 2021).

The distinct roles and responsibilities of HR management in handling academic versus support staff necessitate a nuanced understanding of academic talent management. However, the distinction between academic and support staff does not imply that talent and performance management methods need to diverge significantly (Goldthorpe, 2007).

2.3. University HR Management Role in Capabilities Development

Most university educators and lecturers acquire teaching skills through practical experience rather than formal training. While this experiential learning has historically been effective, it may no longer suffice in meeting contemporary educational demands, particularly with the advent of new teaching methodologies and digital innovations. The development of advanced teaching skills is thus crucial and can be significantly enhanced by professional HR managers who are well-versed in the academic environment and processes (Miranda et al., 2021).

Simultaneously, academic management and leadership positions are often filled by faculty members who rotate into these roles. These academic managers typically have established credibility and respect within their departments or colleges and are willing to assume managerial responsibilities for a defined period, during which they may be partially relieved from teaching and research duties. Consequently, many academic leaders learn management through observing previous leaders and through trial and error (Ozkeser, 2019).

Although academically astute and proficient in their disciplines, academic managers may not always possess the management and leadership skills required for effective governance and may be slow to acquire these skills independently (Rehman & Iqbal, 2020). HR managers can assist academic leaders by coaching and facilitating the development of a supportive culture within their departments or colleges. HR managers can gather data on the perception of the academic unit both internally and externally, assess decision-making processes, information sharing, conflict management, and treatment of individuals. Given the variability in departmental cultures and capabilities, often emerging with limited guidance, HR managers who act as cultural custodians can help shape and define the desired culture and implement HR practices that reinforce it (Maurya et al., 2021).

In their managerial roles, faculty members are tasked with setting institutional strategies, including HR management and development, and handling daily HR issues such as hiring, salary adjustments, promotions, and career planning, while coordinating with other university departments. Given that many of these temporary managers lack formal management training, HR managers who work with these individuals can play a crucial, albeit often behind-the-scenes, role in helping them develop leadership skills. They can assist in developing and coaching colleagues, establishing effective review, reward, and promotion processes, and managing staff performance and career development (McCallen & Johnson, 2020).

Furthermore, HR managers can support academic managers in maintaining their credibility by enhancing their communication, social skills, and emotional intelligence. They can also aid in time management and the development of specific leadership and motivational capabilities, including providing emotional support for leadership challenges.

Organizations often gain admiration through distinct attributes: Apple for innovation, Walmart for cost efficiency, Marriott for service excellence, and Disney for guest experience. These external identifiers contribute to an organization's brand or identity. When these external perceptions influence internal employee behaviors, they foster a culture that shapes both organizational reputation and employee conduct (Elezi & Bamber, 2021).

Higher education institutions develop capabilities or cultures at multiple levels. Institutions create overarching identities and cultures centered on scholarship, community service, or student engagement. For instance, one university president crafted the tagline "genius of small" to signal a focus on individual student needs, which translated into a culture of personal attention from faculty. Another president promoted an identity of "serious, engaged, and inclusive," committing to balancing rigorous scholarship with community engagement and inclusivity. While senior leaders ultimately own these institutional cultures, HR managers can significantly contribute by guiding the creation of these identities and designing systems to implement them effectively (Arum & Roksa, 2011).

2.4. University HR Management and Leadership Skills

Leadership encompasses not only managerial functions but also leadership behavior throughout an organization. This implies that decision-makers at all levels are responsible for taking initiative, crafting new visions for their entities, defining and implementing organizational values, and providing support or coaching to their colleagues (Garg & Gera, 2019).

A critical role of HR managers in all organizations, including higher education institutions, is to delineate the expected behaviors and competencies of leaders and assist academics in developing leadership skills that may be unfamiliar to them. HR managers can support academic leaders in articulating the essential elements of an effective HR strategy, anticipating external demands, making key decisions, and formulating actionable plans (Chapleo, 2011).

Additionally, HR managers need to be attuned to the organizational culture and define, outline, and communicate the measures and processes necessary for cultural development or transformation. This involves understanding the institution's strengths, weaknesses, and reputation concerning its culture. In this context, HR managers can aid academic leaders in managing change, fostering accountability, and achieving desired outcomes.

In assisting academic leaders with their leadership development, HR managers can focus on areas such as strategy, execution, talent management, human capital, and personal proficiency, which may be consistent across university departments. Typically, HR managers will function more as coaches than formal trainers, especially when academic leaders already exhibit a clear predisposition for leadership. Nevertheless, formal management and leadership training resources should not be overlooked. HR managers might need to develop specialized leadership training programs and workshops to address the specific demands of new roles. Methods such as case studies and role-playing are generally preferred over traditional training approaches in these instances.

To effectively address these challenges, HR managers must build trustful relationships, support the incremental successes of academic leaders in their new roles, and adapt their coaching styles to the needs of the individuals they support. Ideally, HR managers should be proactively involved in helping academic leaders navigate and excel in their unfamiliar roles (Jamali et al., 2022).

3. Methodology and Data

The analytical segment of this article is dedicated to a rigorous examination of the significance attributed by university human resource (HR) managers and senior HR specialists to emerging challenges within their institutions' HR management practices. This analysis is based on a qualitative methodology, incorporating data from semi-structured interviews conducted with a targeted sample of HR professionals. The primary objective of this study is to elucidate how university HR managers perceive and address new challenges and to explore the implications of these challenges for expanding the scope, competencies, and responsibilities of HR management in higher education. Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

(i) Do university HR managers recognize the emergence of new HR challenges for higher education institutions and their management functions? (ii) If so, what are the principal areas where these challenges manifest, and what actions or measures are being or will be implemented by university HR management to address these challenges? (iii) How do these challenges alter the roles and responsibilities of the HR management function within universities?

Data collection was conducted in November 2023, involving a sample of 56 HR managers and senior professionals from 22 of the 26 public higher education institutions in the Czech Republic. The sample included both HR generalists and specialists with expertise in key HR processes, including recruitment and hiring, employee adaptation, compensation, performance evaluations, training and development, and overall HR administration. This comprehensive approach ensures a robust analysis of the current state and evolving dynamics of HR management in higher education.

4. Results

The analyses of the research answers and statements which followed from the semi-structured interviews showed the following findings:

(i) The HR managers interviewed almost unanimously (89% of them) stressed the importance of the HR new challenges for Czech universities and their HR management. Among other reasons, they emphasised the performance angle: they stressed that while at the beginning of the last decade, the internationally best-rated Czech university was included in the fourth hundreds of the best academic institutions worldwide, this year this university is already in the fifth hundred among the compared universities. In addition, it is located behind relatively small, young and rather regional universities.

This, of course, does not imply that this is the result of the personnel management of Czech universities; in fact, it is the result of the activities of their top management. HR management, however, undoubtedly has the opportunity to contribute to the quality of university management in general and thus also the results of these institutions. This not entirely excellent international position of Czech universities thus represents an indisputable challenge even for their HR management.

- (ii) An important challenge of HR management of academic institutions, according to the 75% of HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research, is the development of management skills of senior employees, especially among academic staff. A frequent shortcoming of academic workplaces is the lack of knowledge, skills and experience of persons leading academic workplaces, especially their skills related to managing and leading people.

The most common reason is that people in these leading positions do not receive (almost) any form of training in this area before they assume leadership. The reason is usually the assumption that an employee who is professionally capable will also be capable as a manager. However, this is very often not the case. The most common reason why new, but professionally experienced employees fail in these roles is not that they lack professional expertise, but that they lack management skills, especially in the area of HR. Sometimes, however, the fact that these people lack certain personal prerequisites or social and communication skills that are necessary in these posts also plays a role.

The task of HR management, according to the 83% of HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research, is to ensure that persons unsuitable for management, including those who are not very interested in their own management of co-workers, do not get into the leading positions of academic workplaces. In practice, this may mean, among other things, that before they take up these positions, they become familiar with the basic activities associated with managing people, i.e. their selection, planning their professional and career development, evaluating colleagues, motivating them, creating teams, managing and rewarding them performance and the roles of leaders in creating the culture of their organization etc.

Part of this task is the creation of at least a basic written methodology for the management and leadership of co-workers (e.g. "Rights and obligations of managers in relation to co-workers", "Rights and obligations of workers in relation to their managers") including specific rules for managing people and human resources valid in the given institution.

- (iii) The same, at least partially, is true of the importance of the new teaching skills development of academic staff. The not-so-favourable international evaluation of domestic universities is manifested to an increased extent especially in the field of teaching, including the application of new teaching methods. The relative backwardness of Czech higher education is at least partly related to the relative inertia of its teaching, especially the slower adoption of its new methods.

University teaching, due to this, according to 67% of the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research, is thus often not only relatively more demanding in terms of personnel, but also often not very effective. The task of university HR management is to take this circumstance into account when selecting or recruiting academic staff, but above all in planning and ensuring their development in this area. The HR management of universities can thus even become experts in the new teaching methods of today.

At the same time, the main directions for improving teaching methods should include the expansion of active teaching methods, especially case studies, joint discussions, teaching based on one's own study or one's own derivation of acquired knowledge. One of the active teaching methods, bringing teaching closer to practice, with the support of personnel management using the know-how of the academic institution, can also be the support of students' own business.

- (iv) Digitization of teaching is also a challenge for the HR management of academic workplaces, related to the development of new teaching methods and the preparation of academic staff for their use. Digitization of learning and teaching, according to 59% of the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research, means not only a change in the way of teaching or providing education in favour of teaching carried out "on-line", or so-called blended teaching (combined teaching), possibly by changing the focus of teaching to meet the requirements of "Industry 4.0". It is no longer just a temporary change or "replacement" of the traditional way of teaching related to the COVID epidemic.

In some areas of higher education, digitalization, according to the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research, has the potential not only to increase the quality of teaching, but also to transform the economy of education, i.e. increase the productivity of teachers, reduce the unit costs of teaching, etc. It is thus a trend that will change the organization, conditions and methods of academic work in the long term, especially the form of contacts between teachers and students, also as a result of the globalization of teaching. As a result, the expectations placed on academics are also changing, to an extent that can be understood as a kind of cultural change. The challenge for the personnel management of academic workplaces is to prevent the rejection of these trends (even among bureaucratic institutions overseeing higher education), and to support their promotion, especially by offering training for academics.

The role of "customer-oriented academics", according to 77% of the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research, who specialize in the preparation, design, or evaluation of new online courses, among other things, in the design of teaching focused on the individual or specific requirements of students, also related to the growing importance of students' own education, is growing. The growth of the role of academics and specialists with the ability to identify and assess the possibilities of artificial intelligence in the context of a given institution, create prerequisites for its use, but also prevent the possibilities of its abuse. Personnel specialists should be among those who understand that the newly created, so-called digital educational space, enables universities to cross their traditional physical and institutional boundaries and engage in interactions with the wider society, including in the interest of their personnel marketing. Their tasks cover supporting training programs for teachers enabling them to change their teaching role, and to move from lectures to creating and organizing digital information platforms and resources, including "computer-assisted collaborative learning" methods.

The aim is to encourage mutual interaction between students, for example by asking each other questions, explaining opinions and reflecting on knowledge, but also to help them carry out their own research, all with the help of "virtual teachers".

(v) With regards to the development of information technology, higher education today faces perhaps its biggest existential threat to date, namely artificial intelligence, according to 87% of the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research. Paradoxically, perhaps primarily because new technologies, and especially AI, mix fact and fiction, making it increasingly difficult to find out what is real. This increases the demands for teaching critical thinking, thinking regardless of the opinion of the majority, the ability to face manipulations, etc., even those that manifest themselves in one's own environment.

In this context, the writing of original student papers also becomes a separate problem: one of the consequences of AI may be a reassessment of the ways of setting requirements for students and their verification. However, artificial intelligence also holds great promise for higher education, helping students with the support of universities to choose the right university, learn more efficiently and enter the job market better prepared. For the higher education environment, AI will very likely mean a further rise in demands for individualized teaching and learning, which these institutions will be forced to face. Thus, the traditional role of the teacher, according to current assumptions, will change into a role similar to that played by Socrates in teaching - the role of a person who does not provide answers, but asks questions and guides based on their unique needs and preferences, which will undoubtedly be a challenge not only for the teacher, but also personnel management of universities.

(vi) Development of marketing and business skills in an academic environment. As far-fetched as this new call for academic staff development may sound, the fact is that the world's leading universities, as well as their individual departments, have been successfully earning extra income by selling their expert services for decades. In this way, they obtain, among other things, funds to increase the number of their students, including doctoral students, as well as to finance their research.

Similar trends have been occurring recently in connection with the limited possibilities of government financing of universities in our country, and this practice has an indisputable importance for bringing universities closer to practice. At the same time, however, higher education often finds itself in a field where it faces certain handicaps. In contrast to various consulting firms that invest not only in the professional quality, but also in the marketing and business skills of their employees, academic workers are often the weakest in this competition, mainly because they lack the necessary skills in this area.

The challenge for the personnel management of academic institutions, according to 71% of the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research, is thus to enable their employees to acquire these skills, often also to explain their meaning or orientation and to motivate them to acquire them. For academic workers, these trainings are also an advantage in that the acquired skills allow them not only to better penetrate the needs of their potential customers, but also to better understand the professional issues that individual industries solve.

(vii) Employee stabilization. The stabilization of workers represents another of the important challenges that the personnel management of today's academic institutions faces according to 79% of the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research. The challenge is related to the already mentioned higher competition on the labour market, to which these institutions turn, but sometimes also to the changing motivational profile of the academic and other workers of these institutions. The solution is to understand the development or changes of this motivation and accommodate them, primarily by analysing the departures of key employees of these institutions, and flexible career planning, sometimes allowing a combination of different career development directions. Analysis of the departures of important employees often shows that the real cause of their departure is not dissatisfaction with financial remuneration, according to 59% of the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research, but rather with the organization of work, workplace equipment, the possibility of international contacts, career prospects or the actions of a direct superior, i.e. with circumstances that are largely under control given institution. The challenge for the personnel management of these institutions is therefore to explain the most common causes of employee departures and the possibilities to counter them, and to advocate for understanding the departures of key employees, at least in part, as a failure of their direct managers.

(viii) Performance management systems. Employee performance management is a key process of people management in almost all organizations, or human resources. Its goal is to achieve harmony between the goals, activities and potential of individual workers on the one hand and the goals and requirements of the organization on the other. The application of employee performance management also in the conditions of academic workplaces therefore represents one of the main challenges of the human resources management of these institutions according to 81% of the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research.

The main components of employee performance management include the definition of the content of jobs, including essential requirements for the knowledge or abilities of the persons who apply for them (e.g. language skills), the determination of the main work and development goals of individual employees, the regular evaluation of their results, which is based on these goals, financial evaluation of employees, including its variable component, based on the evaluation of their work results and longer-term career planning of their work in the organization.

The main requirements for employee performance management include its transparency, concreteness and consistency according to 69% of the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research. On the contrary, its most frequent shortcomings are its lack of understanding, the subjectivity of the evaluation, the changing nature of the evaluation criteria, or the reduced ability of direct managers to conduct evaluation interviews with their colleagues, which also include the self-evaluation of individual employees. The task of personnel management is to create a clear and understandable methodology for managing the performance of employees, including the way

in which the long-term goals of employees should be clearly and concretely determined, and to prevent performance management from devaluing it into a formal procedure. An objective system of managing and evaluating the performance of employees is also an important tool for their development, motivation and stability according to 58% of the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research.

(ix) Creation of organizational and ethical culture. Creating and influencing its organizational culture is an important tool for managing people in every organization. The creation of "methodology" or rather the principles of creation of organizational culture is therefore also an important challenge of personnel management, including HR management of universities, according to 74% of the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research. Corporate culture, however, is not "a set of rules with which the organization's management has decorated its corridors" or a mandatory "dress code" that determines how employees should dress for work.

Organizational culture, however, as some HR managers stated, in many ways resemble the habits of individual people. Not only in the fact that even people are not always fully aware of their habits, but also in the fact that the habits that make up the organizational culture do not have to be (like the habits of individual people) always purposeful and "productive". In a more serious case, if the organizational culture hinders the organization's performance or damages it in the eyes of the public, it can become a significant burden for the organization. The task of personnel management is not to create organizational culture, but to draw attention to it and the circumstances that shape it.

These circumstances, according to the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research, primarily include the actions of managers (who are usually role models for employees and whose behaviour they imitate) as well as human resources management tools, especially the way the organization selects, evaluates, rewards and/or punishes its employees. From these "signals", other employees take an example, follow them and anchor certain habits in the organization, often unconsciously. Therefore, when changing the culture of the organization, leaders need to be informed about the impact of their behaviour including their personnel decisions in important situations. It may not always be easy, according to HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research, and it may take courage, but it is the only way to shape organization culture. Personnel management, according to most of the HR managers interviewed, thus can significantly help improving corporate culture by making the leaders of their organization aware of the importance of organizational culture preferably in the form of workshops.

When it comes to creating an ethical culture, the academic institutions that were the subject of the research now have a number of tools to combat actions that are perceived as unethical. Unfortunately, according to 59% of the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research, this fact does not mean that they always succeed in preventing unethical behaviour. On the contrary, they often maintain certain unethical manifestations that are to a certain extent characteristic of the academic environment, and they even occur more often in them than in other organizations. These are most often various manifestations of behind-the-scenes actions, gossip, influence of cliques or politicking. Enlightened management of academic institutions should realize their inclination towards these unethical manifestations and try to counter them. The challenge for personnel management is to point out these manifestations and create instructions or recommendations on how to respond to their occurrence.

(x) Leadership support. At the head of academic institutions should not be "only" persons equipped with managerial assumptions, but also leaders, i.e. persons who have authority that others naturally respect and tend to follow. These are often people who spread trust, certainty, optimism and mostly a good mood around them, but also people who act morally and if they make a mistake, they are not afraid to admit it. The importance of leaders lies not only in the fact that they give direction, but also in the fact that they act as role models, which is usually all the truer if they are clearly visible in their position, i.e. if they do not hide behind various speakers, committees, etc.

The ability to act as a leader is largely innate. However, it is also a skill that can be learned. Even dealing with leaders has its own rules, and they can therefore be adopted. The challenge for personnel management, according to 76% of the HR managers of academic institutions that were the subject of the research is to draw attention to the importance of leadership in the academic world and to facilitate its acquisition by persons at the head of academic institutions, preferably in the form of training or coaching. In this way, they will help not only these persons, but also their institutions, which will make them more visible and trustworthy.

5. Conclusions

The responses to the research questions reveal that university HR managers widely acknowledge the significance of new challenges facing HR management in Czech universities. A key challenge is the development of management skills among senior employees, particularly within academic staff. A common shortcoming in academic institutions is the insufficient knowledge, skills, and experience of those leading academic departments, especially in terms of people management and leadership. This issue extends to the need for new teaching skills among academic staff. Improving teaching methods should focus on expanding active learning techniques, such as case studies, collaborative discussions, and instruction based on individual research or synthesis of acquired knowledge.

The digitalization of teaching also poses a challenge for HR management in academic settings, necessitating the development of new teaching methods and the preparation of academic staff for their implementation. In some areas of higher education, digitization has the potential to enhance teaching quality and transform the economics of education by increasing productivity, reducing teaching costs, and more.

However, the development of information technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), presents a significant existential threat to higher education. The integration of AI blurs the line between fact and fiction, raising the need for enhanced teaching of critical thinking, independent thought, and the ability to recognize manipulation. This also affects the integrity of original student work, leading to a potential reevaluation of academic requirements and assessment methods. Despite these challenges, AI offers substantial benefits, including improved university selection support, more effective learning, and better preparation for the job market.

Another major challenge for academic HR management is workforce stabilization, which is influenced by increased labor market competition and evolving motivational profiles of academic and other staff. Addressing this challenge involves understanding and adapting to motivational changes, analyzing the departure of key employees, and implementing flexible career planning strategies.

Employee performance management is crucial in aligning individual and organizational goals. In academic settings, this involves ensuring transparency, specificity, and consistency in performance management practices.

Regarding organizational and ethical culture, the institutions studied have various tools to address unethical behavior. However, they often fail to prevent such behavior effectively, and it can be more prevalent in academic environments compared to other organizations. HR management must highlight these issues and develop guidelines or recommendations for addressing them.

Leadership in academic institutions should not be limited to managerial skills but should also include genuine authority and respect. HR management's challenge is to emphasize the importance of leadership and facilitate its development among academic leaders through training or coaching, thereby enhancing their visibility and credibility within their institutions.

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