

# The specific elements of strategic human resources management for competitive business development

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MARIAN NASTASE  
NICOLAE BIBU  
ANCA-IOANA MUNTEANU

ILEANA MIRCIOI (VALIMAREANU)  
MARGARETA STELA FLORESCU

## ABSTRACT – REZUMAT

### The specific elements of strategic human resources management for competitive business development

*The current business environment, characterized by a high degree of uncertainty and unpredictability, has led to a sharp increase in competitiveness. The key to the success of any organization in the current period lies in its human resources, the only ones capable of identifying unique and creative solutions to face the threats existing in the environment and to seize existing opportunities. Emphasis should be placed on transforming them and the Human Resources Department into true strategic partners of organizations and on implementing a strategic human resources management.*

*The present paper aims to identify the extent to which, at the level of the organizations from the Western Region of Romania, such elements have been adopted that will contribute to their competitive development. The textile industry is an important sector that has powerful impact over the economic and social development of a region or country. Its long term development depends not only on the business characteristics, but especially on the strategic decisions and approaches, with direct results in terms of profitability, jobs creation and integration with other economic sectors. Therefore, in our research we introduced in the sample companies from this dynamic field.*

*The results of the study showed that the tendency of appreciation of their existence in organizations is wide spread. In the same time, it was confirmed that the existence of a strategic human resources management in organizations is conditioned by the strategic use of human resources practices, in the long term, in order to contribute to the achievement of the general business objectives. Also, in order for the human resources strategy to bring its contribution to the realization of the general business strategy, there is a need for human resources activities that are aligned with the company's objectives.*

*Without claiming that the study carried out is an exhaustive one, we consider that the information presented are unique and can be useful for those interested.*

**Keywords:** human resources, strategic human resources practices, business strategy, human resources strategy, strategic human resources management, competitive advantage.

### Elemente specifice ale managementului strategic al resurselor umane pentru dezvoltarea competitivă a firmelor

*Mediul de afaceri actual, caracterizat printr-un grad ridicat de incertitudine și imprevizibilitate, a dus la o creștere accentuată a competitivității. Cheia succesului oricărei organizații în perioada actuală constă în resursele sale umane, singurele capabile să identifice soluții unice și creative pentru a face față amenințărilor existente în mediu și să profite de oportunitățile existente. Ar trebui pus accentul pe transformarea lor și a Departamentului Resurse Umane în adevărați parteneri strategici ai organizațiilor și pe implementarea unui management strategic al resurselor umane.*

*Lucrarea de față își propune să identifice măsura în care, la nivelul organizațiilor din Regiunea de Vest a României, au fost adoptate astfel de elemente care vor contribui la dezvoltarea competitivă a acestora. Industria textilă este un sector important, ce are un impact puternic asupra dezvoltării economice și sociale a unei regiuni sau țări. Dezvoltarea sa pe termen lung depinde nu doar de caracteristicile constructive ale companiilor, dar mai ales de abordările și deciziile strategice adoptate, cu rezultate directe în termeni de profitabilitate, creare de locuri de muncă și integrarea cu alte sectoare ale economiei. De aceea, în cercetarea noastră au fost introduse și companii din industria textilă, având în vedere dinamica acestora.*

*Rezultatele studiului au arătat că tendința de apreciere a existenței lor în organizații este larg răspândită. În același timp, s-a confirmat că existența unui management strategic al resurselor umane în organizații este condiționată de utilizarea strategică a practicilor de resurse umane, pe termen lung, pentru a contribui la realizarea obiectivelor generale ale afacerii. De asemenea, pentru ca strategia de resurse umane să își aducă contribuția la realizarea strategiei generale de afaceri, este nevoie de activități de resurse umane care să fie aliniate obiectivelor companiei.*

*Fără a pretinde că studiul efectuat este unul exhaustiv, considerăm că informațiile prezentate sunt unice și pot fi utile pentru cei interesați.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** resurse umane, practici strategice de resurse umane, strategie de afaceri, strategie de resurse umane, management strategic de resurse umane, avantaj competitiv

## INTRODUCTION

Gaining the competitive advantage is an essential objective of any organization. If achieving competitive advantage is a challenge for any organization, maintaining it is a real challenge, a goal that is quite difficult to achieve. In the process of formulating the overall strategy of an organization, it is necessary to carefully analyze the consequences that it has in determining and sustaining the competitive advantage.

To obtain a competitive advantage, it is necessary to consider a large number of situational variables. The most important ones are those regarding the human resources available to the respective organization.

An important source of competitive advantage is innovation having as main characteristic to have it and to use it over a long period of time. However, the source which mostly supports this goal is the human resources of an organization. Over time, employees have proven to be an inexhaustible source of creativity within a company, the only resource capable of ensuring competitiveness through innovation. The key to have competitiveness, the orientation of the industrial environment towards quality, is represented by the human resources of an organization in an era of rapid global changes.

Effectiveness of textile companies' strategies and policies will have directly impact in the productivity and quality of these organizations, influencing to the large extent their market share and profitability.

Consequently, its human resources are the foundation of any success of any organization. Only people, employees have new ideas, create new solutions about solving problems that inevitably arise, or about exploiting opportunities in the external environment. They are the ones who can make the difference through their thinking process, their modality to action and by the degree of involvement in the work processes.

Clark (1996) mentions that in the case of European nations there are three common elements of human resources management that go beyond national borders [1]:

- recognizing the importance of human resources as a source of competitive advantage;
- delegation of responsibility for human resources, the company and/or managers in the field;
- mutual integration and consolidation of human resources strategies and the general strategy.

Therefore, in the current business environment, in Romania, too, the focus should be on transforming the human resources and the Human Resources Department into true strategic partners of the organizations [2]. This is really important for the textile companies that hire many employees, especially women and where the competencies of workforce are the main asset for these organizations [3].

That consists to involve HR specialists in the strategic process at the organization level, to aligning the human resources strategy with the business strategy, to elaborate human resources practices that contribute to the achievement of the strategic objectives,

and into doing the transition towards a strategic human resources management in any organization [4–5].

In the following part, we will focus on presenting the concept of strategic human resources management (SHRM), analyzing its evolution over time [6]. Later, we will try to identify its characteristics at the level of organizations in the Western Region of the country, based on our research.

## CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF “STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT” IN THE SPECIALIZED LITERATURE

The turbulent, uncertain environment, with increasingly rapid changes, since the late 1970s, early 1980s, has led many researchers in the field to go beyond the boundaries of studying human resources management at the micro level, and turning their attention towards a strategic approach. It was the period when a new era began to emerge, that of the strategic management of human resources (SHRM). Walker (1980) provided a first pragmatic description of how human resource planning in a company could be used to ensure that human resources policies and practices were aligned with the organization's business strategy [7].

The first definition of SHRM was given by Devanna, Fombrun and Tichy in 1981 [8]. They support the existence of a relationship between the strategic management of human resources and the business strategy, considering that in order to play a strategic role, the Human Resources Department should be involved in establishing the organization's objectives. This action, in their opinion, leads to an increase in the company's performance.

Miles and Snow [9] were the first to argue that human resource management practices need to be aligned with other organizational activities, especially with strategic decisions within the organization. The two authors stressed that the human resources department should help to implement the different business strategies of the company.

In the same year, 1984, was published the first book focusing on the strategic human resources management [10]. In order to illustrate what the strategic human resources management is and what is its role in an organization, the authors presented numerous examples of companies that have known the many benefits of its implementation.

Armstrong (2006) believes that the strategic management of human resources must try to strike an appropriate balance between the elements of the two subsystem categories of the organization, the “soft” and the “hard” [11]. All organizations aim to achieve a particular purpose and their main concern is to make sure that they have the resources they need to fulfill them, and that they use them effectively. But, according to Armstrong, they should also take into account the human considerations included in the concept of strategic human resources management (SHRM).

Although studies have shown that most often the satisfaction of the elements related to the strategic hard management of human resources takes precedence over those in the soft category, he argues that it is particularly important to take into account in this process of planning the people with all their aspirations. According to Lefter, Marincas and Puia (2007), the strategic management of human resources has to take into account several aspects [12]:

- the existing predictions regarding the economic progress of the field of activity in which the company and clients operate;
- the position of the competitors (the technology they use, the selling price, the market share);
- the short, medium and long term sales policy;
- the uncertain level of sales evolution;
- the investment policy and technologies that will be implemented in the future;
- the production policy that the company will adopt in the future;
- the consequences of various factors that contribute to the emergence of new qualifications and changes in the management of the organization or in the planning of the work.

Uysal and Mayis (2014) approached SHRM through the perspective of the relation between employee performance and the performance of the organization, considering that the performance of the employees affects the performance of the company [13]. The two consider that the performance of the employees is the link between the SHRM and the overall performance of the company. Strategic human resources management aims to increase both employee performance and business performance. They consider that if the management of human resources aims to have an impact on the performance of the company, then it can be said that it is a strategic human resources management [14].

Cristiani and Peiró (2015) have shown that the SHRM is focused on aligning the organization's strategy with its human resources strategy and on the impact it has on the organizational performance [15]. According to the aforementioned authors, in the theory of strategic human resources management, it is considered that individual performances increase the performance of each department in an organization (supply, stocks, logistics, marketing, production, accounting, finance and others) as they work for them and their department performance [16–18]. Consequently, these will implicitly lead to the increase of the firm's performance as a whole [19]. Therefore, it is appreciated that the individual performance has an impact on the performance of the company through the processes they participate in the departments of which they are part [20].

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH ON THE BEST PRACTICES OF THE STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THE WESTERN REGION OF ROMANIA

The investigation sample was made up of large or very large companies (over 250 employees) from the

Western Region of the country, regardless of the nature of the capital (Romanian, foreign, mixed) and regardless of the sector of activity (public or private). We selected only those companies that are independent, with independent decision-making and that are not subsidiaries of a multinational company.

In order to identify the companies with the desired characteristics, we used the database from a specialized site, [www.doingbusiness.ro](http://www.doingbusiness.ro), and subsequently verified on the website of the Ministry of Public Finance. Initially, 137 large or very large organizations were identified in the Western Region of Romania. Next, by eliminating local branches of multinational companies, the sample for our research study was reduced to 65 companies, that is more than half.

In order to obtain the information needed, we have used a survey, the research instrument being the questionnaire.

In order to get the most clear and precise answers from the subjects, we use predominantly closed questions, the possible alternatives of answers being unique and predetermined. Respondents were in a position to either choose the correct answer from several predefined variants or to express their perception on certain aspects by using the Likert evaluation scale, which includes five response levels (not at all = 0, little extent = 1, average extent = 2, to a large extent = 3, total = 4). For the data processing, the program was used in the statistical analysis of data, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

As the subject of the investigation is a complex one, the identification of the characteristics validating the existence of a strategic management of human resources, as well as of the practices used in this regard, has targeted only the managers of these companies. Therefore, the questionnaire was distributed exclusively to managers.

### The type of organization

Of the total respondents from companies, 50% belong to companies with Romanian private capital, 26.67% are employees of companies with foreign private capital, 16.67% belong to companies with majority state capital and only 6.67% do part of companies with mixed capital (table 1 and figure 1).

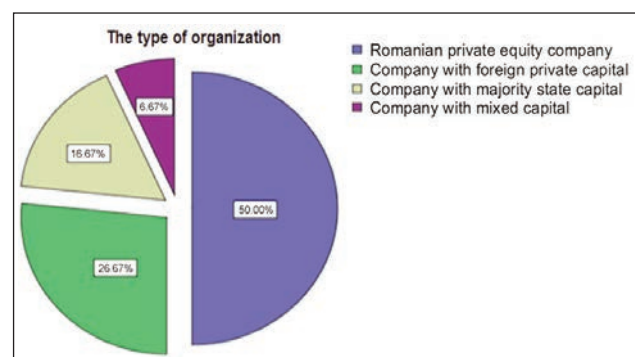


Fig. 1. Distribution of responses regarding the type of organization

Table 1

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES REGARDING THE TYPE OF ORGANIZATION IN WHICH THE RESPONDENTS FROM COMPANIES BELONG				
The type of organization	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulate percent
Company with majority state-owned capital	30	50.0	50.0	50.0
Romanian private equity company	16	26.6666667	26.6666667	76.6666667
Company with foreign private capital	10	16.6666667	16.6666667	93.3333334
Company with mixed capital	4	6.6666667	6.6666667	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	-

Table 2

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES REGARDING THE MAIN OBJECT OF ACTIVITY				
The main object of activity	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulate percent
Another	18	30.0	30.0	30.0
Production of industrial goods, including textiles	18	30.0	30.0	60.0
Transport	10	16.6666667	16.6666667	76.6666667
Services for the population	9	15.0	15.0	91.6666667
Trade, product distribution	2	3.33333333	3.33333333	95.0
Services for companies	2	3.33333333	3.33333333	98.3333334
Construction	1	1.66666667	1.66666667	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	-

### The main object of activity

The respondents were from the most important industries in the western region of Romania, with a focus on production of industrial goods, transportation, services for population and other, representing 91,7% of the sample (table 2 and figure 2).

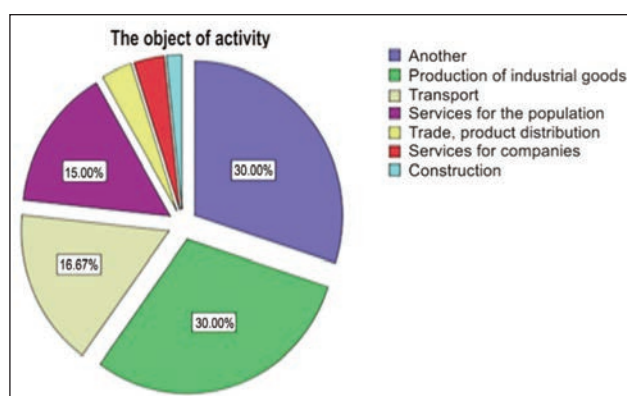


Fig. 2. Distribution of responses regarding the main object of activity

### What is the extent to which you believe that the following statements regarding the human resources strategy are in line with the reality of your organization

These 7 statements refer to components of SHRM such as: vision, mission, values, objectives, resources (1); It is materialized in policies, plans, programs, objectives (2); It is derived from the general strategy (3); It is aligned with the general strategy (4);

Supports the realization of the general strategy by initiating human resources activities that are aligned with the companies objectives (5); It aims to create a match between human resources activities so that they support each other (6); It matches human resources practices with the other systems in the organization (7).

Table 3

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES REGARDING THE HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY CHARACTERISTICS								
Indicators	Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		N	Valid	60	60	60	60	60
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Median		3000	2500	3000	3000	3000	3000	3000
Module		3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
General median		3000						
General module		3.0						

From the analysis of the data (table 3) regarding the distribution of the answers of the respondents from companies, it turns out that most of them have appreciated that there is matching to a large extent of the elements regarding the characteristics of the human resources strategy with the reality of the companies, this being a constant approach among them.

The calculation of the indicators showing the general tendency of the responses, the median and the module, confirms the previously stated ones, demonstrating that the highest frequency, in the case of all the items, was “to a large extent” response alternative.

The results validate the existence of clearly defined human resources strategies, existing at a formal level, materialized in policies, plans, programs, objectives. These are also vertically integrated with the general business strategy (they derive from this, are aligned with it and support it). Also, it has been proven that human resources strategies aim to create a match between human resources activities, so that they support each other and at the same time match them with the other systems in the researched organizations.

Consequently, we conclude that the analysis of the results of our research validates the existence of a strategic management of human resources (SHRM) in the researched companies.

### What is the extent to which the following activities are specific to the Human Resources Department within your organization?

These statements mainly deal with the administrative, operational aspects of Hr department, such as (1); Is involved in making all major, strategic decisions (2); It is given an importance comparable to that of the other departments (3); Is an active participant in the development of the company’s objectives (4); Is an active participant in the implementation of the company’s objectives (5); Formulates/defines the company’s vision regarding human resources (6); Communicates the vision regarding human resources across the organization (7); Anticipates the effects of changes in the internal and external environment of the company on the human resources of the company (8); Communicates the human resources specific goals to all those involved in their achievement, the desired results as well as the achieved ones (9); Supports the organization in achieving its organizational goals (10); Is involved in the design of business strategies (11); Is involved in the implementation process of business strategies (12); Elaborates the human resources strategy (13); Initiates actions in which the human resources strategy supports the

general business strategy (14); Demonstrates the financial impact of human resources activities (15).

From the analysis of the distribution of the answers (see table 4) it appears that in the overwhelming majority of cases the dominant frequency corresponds to the answer variant largely, this being the central tendency. It means that the activities of the Human Resources Department are specific to the analyzed companies to a large measure.

Although the basic activity of the department remains the execution of administrative activities, our research supports the existence of a strategic management of human resources in these companies, the following strengths were identified: participation in the development and implementation of company objectives, formulation and communication of the vision on human resources and of the human resources objectives to all those involved in their achievement, anticipating the effects of changes in the internal and external environment of the company on the human resources of the company, developing the human resources strategy, supporting the organization in achieving the organizational objectives, initiating actions through which the human resources strategy supports the overall strategy. Among the weaknesses identified are: reduced involvement in making strategic business decisions, not giving to the Human Resources Department an importance comparable to that of other departments, its reduced involvement in the design and implementation of business strategies, as well as a low concern for demonstrating the financial impact of human resources activities, these aspects being in contradiction with the appreciation of the department as a strategic partner of the top management.

### The extent to which there is a strategic management of human resources is related to the strategic use of human resources practices (hypothesis 1 – H1)

The premises of establishing hypothesis 1: in the specialized literature we found the idea according to which in order to identify the presence of the strategic human resources management (SHRM), in addition to certain characteristics that must be fulfilled by the human resources strategy, as well as some specific activities of the Human Resources Department,

Table 4

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES REGARDING THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT ACTIVITIES																
Indicators	Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
		N	Valid	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60	60
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Median	4.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	2.00
	Module	4.0	2.0	2.0 <sup>a</sup>	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	2.0 <sup>a</sup>
	General median	3000														
	General module	3.0														

SOMERS'D TEST – VERIFICATION OF HYPOTHESIS H1						
Indicators			Value	Asymptotic Standardized Error <sup>a</sup>	Approximate T <sup>b</sup>	Approximate Significance
Ordinal by ordinal	Somers' d	Symmetric	0.476	0.067	6.455	0.000
		1. SHRM Dependent	0.456	0.070	6.455	0.000
		2. SHRM practices Dependent	0.498	0.071	6.455	0.000

there must also be a strategic use of human resources practices, which must be adopted for the long term, in order to contribute to achieving the strategic objectives of the organization.

The results of applying the Somers' d test showed that there is a medium-level association (0.476), directly and statistically significant (Sig. = 0.000) (table 5 and figure 3) between the measure of the existence of the strategic management of human resources and that of the human resources practices approached in a strategic way. So, the hypothesis 1 is validated, the extent to which there is a strategic human resources management is related to the human resources practices that support the achievement of the organizational objectives, which influence them directly.

**The support provided by the human resources strategy in the realization of the general strategy, implies the initiation of human resources activities that are aligned with the strategic objectives of the company (hypothesis 2 – H2)**

The premises of establishing hypothesis 2: this hypothesis was born out of the desire to verify whether the human resources strategy even supports the realization of the general strategy, by initiating human resources activities, or this aspect exists only at the declarative level. It is compulsory for the human resources strategy to support the overall business strategy.

The application of the Somers' test led to a high value of 0.641 and a value of significance of 0.000 (table 6), which shows that there is a strong association between the variables under test and which is statistically significant (figure 4). Consequently, hypothesis 2 is validated, meaning that the support for the general strategy provided by the human resources strategy

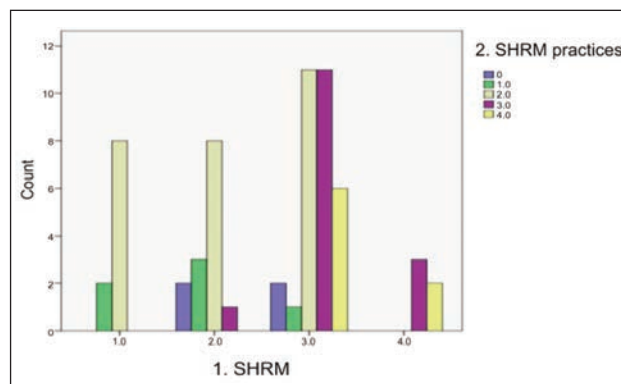


Fig. 3. Concordance between the variables of hypothesis H1

has involved carrying out human resources activities that go in the same direction, are aligned with it and are approached strategically, i.e. in the long term, precisely for this purpose, that of to contribute to the achievement of the general strategy and, implicitly, of the strategic objectives.

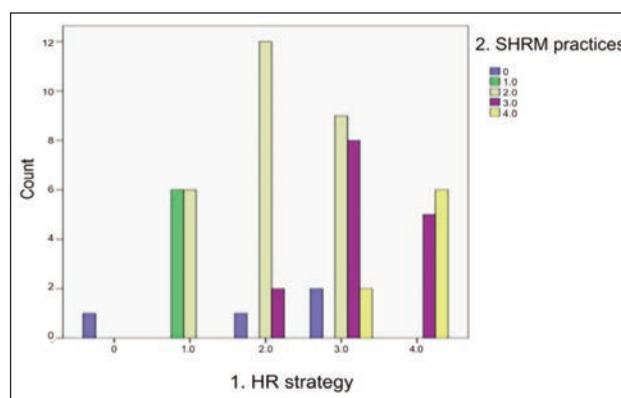


Fig. 4. The concordance between the variables of hypothesis H2

SOMERS'D TEST – VERIFICATION OF HYPOTHESIS H2						
Indicators			Value	Asymptotic Standardized Error <sup>a</sup>	Approximate T <sup>b</sup>	Approximate Significance
Ordinal by ordinal	Somers' d	Symmetric	0.641	0.069	8.159	0.000
		1. HR strategy Dependent	0.658	0.075	8.159	0.000
		2. SHRM practices Dependent	0.624	0.068	8.159	0.000

## CONCLUSIONS

In the given circumstances, human resources have earned a well-deserved position in the top of the importance of the resources available to any company. Their role has become decisive, being the only ones that can ensure the development of an organization or, on the contrary, lead it to the opposite pole, its bankruptcy.

The most striking change in the role of human resources departments is the increasing importance they play in developing and implementing the overall business strategy of the organization, designing and implementing the human resource strategy, and implicitly in making organizational changes and gaining the competitive advantage.

The role of strategic partners granted to the human resources of an organization is essential in this period in which the competitors can quickly copy any strategy of the rivals and the competitive advantage should only be regarded as temporary. Human resources are the only ones that can gain this competitive advantage but also maintain it, being an inexhaustible source of solutions and new ideas.

The performances of textile companies will have direct and propagated effects in other industries and it is going to strengthen the export capacity of a region or country, with strong impact on jobs creation, increasing of living standards and meeting economic and social needs of a community.

Our research indicates that a real transformation can be observed also at the level of the Human Resources Department, whose main tasks, until recently, had a predominantly administrative character (kept records, files, drafted documents, administered the employees of an organization, etc.). Performing these activities is necessary, however in no case are they sufficient for an organization that

wants to be successful and achieve outstanding business performance. The human resources function, with all that it implies should be developed to fulfill a strategic partner role within any organization, regardless of its size or object of activity.

The development of the strategic human resources management, the increase of its role within the organization through a more rigorous implementation and a strategic approach become increasingly important concerns for the Romanian managers. In the face of the new realities in the global, national and regional environment, we conclude that there is a strong trend to shift to another, higher level that is the strategic management of human resources (SHRM).

This research can be considered a topical one, the central theme being a subject that has been approached for many years in the international specialized literature. However, we have found a small number of scientific papers, articles, studies in the field in the Romanian academic literature.

The degree of scientific novelty of the present work resides both in the way of presentation and the nature of the information contained in the theoretical part of the paper, as well as in the reality caught in the applicative part, through the realization of a well planned and executed field investigation, representative for the organizations in the Western Region of the country, in order to identify the aspects described in the first part of the paper.

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#### Authors:

MARIAN NASTASE<sup>1</sup>, NICOLAE BIBU<sup>2</sup>, ANCA-IOANA MUNTEANU<sup>3</sup>,  
ILEANA MIRCIOI (VALIMAREANU)<sup>1</sup>, MARGARETA STELA FLORESCU<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Faculty of Management, Management,  
Piata Romana, No. 6, 010374, Bucharest, Romania

e-mail: nastasem1@yahoo.com, ileanamircioi@gmail.com, margareta.florescu@ari.ase.ro

<sup>2</sup>West University of Timisoara, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Management,  
J. H. Pestalozzi Street, No. 16, 300115, Timisoara, Romania

e-mail: nicolae.bibu@e-uvt.ro

<sup>3</sup>West University of Timisoara, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, East European Center for  
Research in Economics and Business (ECREB), J. H. Pestalozzi Street, No. 16, 300115, Timisoara, Romania,

e-mail: ioana.munteanu@e-uvt.ro

#### Corresponding author:

MARIAN NASTASE

e-mail: nastasem1@yahoo.com