

PhD THESIS

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RESEARCH OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT OF TRANSDANUBIAN AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISES

**INTEREST AND STAKE OF EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS
IN THE TRANSDANUBIAN AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISES**

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1. PREMISES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

Within the context of global trends and tendencies knowledge management have become essential in the past decades. Among organizational resources human resources gained cardinal importance as the managing force of the process of value creation.

The research concerning agricultural enterprises began in 1997 under the aegis of the Institute of Economics and Organization at the Department of Management and Practical Training.

The main goal of the research is to show the primary role of the human factor within the context of economic and social transition. To reach this objective I have empirically tested the validity of the general hypothesis according to which human resource management of Transdanubian agricultural enterprises does not serve the desired organizational aims.

In the course of the research I was intending to follow the events and measures that occurred in connection with personnel management and were concerning individual enterprises.

On the basis of the results I drew conclusions about the relationship towards the human factor in agricultural organizations – which are the policies, programmes, strategies and functions most characteristic of personnel management of the enterprises in question.

2. RESEARCH MATERIAL AND METHOD

To solve the problem I have described in the first chapter I employed the methods of sociological research.

In the phase of secondary research I gathered information from Hungarian and international journals, scientific publications and monographies published in the last decade.

In the phase of primary research I examined functions, processes, tasks and policies playing a role in the field of personnel management of the enterprises in question.

In the process of my research I applied the method of gaining data with the help of questionnaires I have specially designed for this purpose. Fifty agricultural enterprises of legal personality were thus examined (limited companies and joint ventures) and also agricultural cooperatives of the region. Forty-six of the fifty organizations provided relevant data. They represent almost five percent of agricultural enterprises of legal personality of the Transdanubian region.

The sampling was concentrated on all the agricultural enterprises of legal personality of the Transdanubian region. They were then classified by their organizational patterns (limited companies, joint ventures, cooperatives). From the groups thus formed I selected the enterprises that served as samples randomly.

In order to ensure representativity I have concentrated my research on firms employing 50-99 persons (59% of the sample). This number is absolutely necessary from the viewpoint of personnel management.

The data was processed in four principle phases; the control of questionnaires, encoding data, totalising data in tables, demonstrating conclusions in tables.

For evaluation I employed mathematical and statistical methods and computer programs as well (Word, Excel, Power Point).

3. RESULTS

3.1. THE CHANGE OF SOME GENERAL MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EXAMINED ENTERPRISES

3.1.1. Changes of the structure of owners

In the case of all enterprises there has been changes in the structure of owners. Earlier state ownership was characteristic, however it was exchanged by the diverse structures of private property. The research has shown that the most prevalent of these is Hungarian company property.

3.1.2. Changes of management personnel

Parallel with the changes of the ownership structures and the reduction of the organizational framework the number of top managers was decreasing. This could be demonstrated in 96% of the examined cases. The minor part of the former managers still play a role as directors of successor companies.

3.1.3. Changes of the role of the effect of enterprises on the economic and social life of local communities

Although in a decreasing manner, the examined enterprises still play an important role in the economic and social life of local communities. The possibilities of acting with the aim of employing inhabitants of the communities have significantly decreased. Local farmers still have to rely on the help of agricultural companies because of the lack of private capacities.

3.1.4. The change of the number of performers of the market

The significant increase of the number of market partners (more than 100%) shows the search for new opportunities on the market. However, this does not always signify a long term relationship.

3.1.5. Changes in the organizational form and structure

Earlier the scale was characterized by cooperatives (44%), state farms (30%) and state owned companies (26%). Following the transition the dominant forms are the following: joint ventures (39%), cooperatives (31%) and limited companies (30%).

It is characteristic of the structural diagrams that they are of a simpler structure: especially the number of middle and lower management levels have decreased. This is related to the significant increase in the number of staff dismissals and the changing of profile.

3.1.6. Changes in the economic activities of enterprises

The proportions of economic activities have changed during the course of the decade as follows. Plant growing – from 70% to 65%, animal husbandry from 65% to 47%, processing industrial activities from 43% to 39%.

3.1.7. Changes in the internal environment of organizations

The changes of the internal environment of organizations are characterized by the categories I have employed from 1 to 4 in the table below. (Table 1.)

Table 1.: Changes of the internal environment of the examined organizations

Before transition	Categories of internal environment	After transition
Partly sufficient	Organizational strategy	Sufficient
Partly sufficient	Functional or operative goals	Sufficient
Sufficient	Financial conditions	Insufficient
Insufficient	Flexibility	Partly sufficient
Sufficient – Partly sufficient	Quality of applied technology	Partly sufficient
Partly sufficient	Quality of products and services	Sufficient
Partly sufficient	Characteristics of employees	Sufficient
Partly sufficient	Characteristics of work groups	Sufficient

3.1.8. SWOT analysis of the examined enterprises

The figures of the average and typical SWOT analysis are contained by the table below. (Table 2.)

Table 2.: The SWOT analysis of the examined enterprises before and after transition

Strengths		Weaknesses	
<i>Before transition</i>	<i>After transition</i>	<i>Before transition</i>	<i>After transition</i>
Stable market	Dominance of private property	Plan oriented economy	Problems of liquidity and lack of capital
Wide range of economic activities	Strengthening of market orientation	Effects of political ideologies	Reduction of state aids
Extended (integrated) relationships	Increase of flexibility	Inflexibility	Narrowing of the range of economic activities
More capacity	Developments and investments	Restrictions on the market and on the functioning	Outdated technologies
Professional leaders	Stabilization of property structures	Lack of private property approach	Weakening of profitability
Opportunities		Threats	
<i>Before transition</i>	<i>After transition</i>	<i>Before transition</i>	<i>After transition</i>
Financial and market security	Economical farming	Redundant, not motivated work power	Narrowing market, uncertain external economical environment
State aids and other social support	Quality production	Lack of development funds	Lack of capacities
Sufficient work power	Competitive size	Wasteful farming	Strengthening competition
Sufficient technologies	Change of the range of economic activities	Irrational management decisions, unnecessary restructuring	Lack of market economical knowledge
Cheap resources	New management approach, methods and training	Paternalistic management approach	Lack of integrated relationships

3.2.CHANGES OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT OF THE EXAMINED ENTERPRISES FROM 1990

3.2.1.Change of the goals of personnel management

I have analysed the problem through six general categories (Table 3.).

Table 3.: Change of the goals of personnel management

Before transition (%)	Personnel management goals	After transition (%)
83	Sufficient trained work power	78
65	Communication of personnel management objectives	17
4	Fulfilment of company goals	65
74	Employment of local work power	4
4	Optimal use of work power	70
4	Ensuring satisfaction of employees	33

3.2.2. Internal structure of the department dealing with personnel management

Before transition most of the departments dealing with personnel management (52%) belonged to the low level category, while 48 % belonged to the middle level category.

After transition the low level category became even more dominant (78%). The proportion of middle level personnel departments was decreased to 22%.

3.2.3. Changing of the designation and form of personnel management departments

In earlier organizational structures personnel management was generally functioning in the form of a department (78%). A minority was operating in the working group form (22%). After transition this group form disappeared as an individual unit within the structure in 48% of the examined enterprises. The group forms entirely disappeared, thus leaving the departmental form prevalent.

3.2.4. Changes of the number of personnel professional staff

The number of the leaders of the field was decreased by 18,75%, while that of the general staff by 57,23%. The average number of personnel managers before and also after the transition is one person per enterprise. However, the number of the general employees in the field was decreased from 4 to 2.

3.2.5. Personnel management functions before and after transition

While the number of personnel management units and professionals was significantly decreased, the area of personnel management functions was not changing.

From the viewpoint of recruitment and selection professional skills have become decisive.

3.2.6. Change of the working attitudes of employees

In the course of the interviews I evaluated 20 different criteria on a scale from 1 to 5 in the case of managers and general staff respectively.

Both groups showed the same difference between the total averages which was 0,9. The value average change was 0,8 in both cases.

3.2.7. Change of work efficiency criteria

With the evaluation of 11 basic problems I determined the change of work efficiency at the examined enterprises. (Table 4.)

Table 4.: The change of the appearance rate of work efficiency problems

Before transition (%)	Characteristic problems	After transition (%)
65	Disorganization (1)	39
43	Stopping work (2)	35
30	Slowing down working processes (3)	17
74	Disciplinary problems (4)	39
61	Prestige fights (5)	65
61	Interest fights (6)	70
56	Lack of professional knowledge (7)	26
39	Frequent fluctuation (8)	26
61	Frequent absences (9)	4
52	Unfit leaders (10)	4
17	Production of waste (11)	4

3.2.8. Change of the number of staff and educational figures

The number of personnel was decreasing in all of the examined cases. The total loss of personnel was 71% between 1989 and 1999.

The reduction of personnel was most significant in the group of top managers (82%) and least significant in the group of skilled workers (59%).

The number of employees with university or college degrees was reduced by 82%. The other educational categories demonstrated a tendency of decrease by 65-79%.

3.2.9. Change of expectations concerning qualifications as a result of the change of the scope of working activities

In all cases I have observed that a higher qualification is expected from the employees at every position. The reason for this is that the adequate knowledge and skills can secure the optimal use of further resources.

3.2.10. Changes of the motivation system

The examination of the system of remuneration clearly indicated that by the end of the examined decade the number of the elements of the system was increasing.

The most significant increase of the basic rate I have observed in the group of top managers (165%) while the increase was least significant in the case of the administrators (128%) in the examined decade.

Concerning the allowance package the following tendencies shall be described: decreasing in 18 cases, increasing in 6 cases and stagnating in 4 cases.

3.2.11. Evaluation of performances

Evaluation goals were dominantly described as follows: rewarding and motivation of individual efforts (57%), communicating information concerning the capability of the employee towards the work power planning system (57%).

The system of performance evaluation is dominantly represented by the organizational output and results (100%).

The method of evaluation involves first of all work norm (91%) and ranking (74%).

3.3 CHANGE OF EFFICIENCY OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

3.3.1. Change of employees' rights and interests

I have examined the problem through the application of seven categories: competitive wages, career opportunities, working environment, democratic rights, participation and the functioning of representation of employees' interests. These factors were evaluated on a three level scale (strong, medium, weak). With the exception of participation all categories were represented at the medium level before transition and all categories after transition.

3.3.2. Lawfulness

Examining the possibilities of effective representation of employees' interest I came to the following conclusions. In 87% of the enterprises there is no representation of the employees' interest, in 9% of the cases the representation could be considered medium and in 4% strong.

Groups of owners and top managers are characterized by agreements for the sake of the validation of their interests. Conflicts of interest are generally observed in relationships between leaders and general staff.

3.3.3. Satisfaction of employees

The answers concerning this field I have evaluated on a four level scale (weak, medium, sufficient, outstanding). The dominance of the medium level indicates that the economic growth that started in 1995 does not affect the social environment of employees in a significantly positive way.

3.3.4. Absences

Absences show a declining tendency at the observed enterprises. This is due to the increasing appreciation of work opportunities.

3.3.5. Fluctuation

Fluctuation of personnel mostly influenced the group of top managers (18,49%). It is typical that fluctuation was insignificant in the group of skilled workers (9,05). This indicates the revaluation of professional skills.

3.3.6. Work power stability

From the changes of the figures in the course of the observation period one can conclude that personnel management is rather ineffective.

3.3.7. Number of complaints

At the beginning of the observation period (1989-90) most of the complaints were dealing with labour conditions (44,66%). In the course of the decade (1991-99) gradually the issue of remuneration became the most significant topic of complaints (from 45,74 to 51,02%).

3.3.8. Work accidents

From 1989 to 1999 the number of work accidents went through a crucial decrease by 85%. The reason for this is the greater working discipline.

3.3.9. Strikes and other demonstrations

There were no such events at any of the examined enterprises.

3.3.10. Personnel management activities within the context of HRM models

This field was also examined through a five year prognosis given by the observed enterprises with respect to their future plans and activities. (Table 5.)

Table 5.: Personnel management activities within the context of HRM models

Models	Before transition (%)	Present proportions (%)	Future plans (%)
Administrative	39,13	34,78	13,04
Paternalistic	30,43	56,52	13,04
Professional	26,08	4,34	56,52
HRM	0	0	13,04
None	4,34	4,34	4,34

3.3.11. SWOT analysis of personnel management

The figures of the average and typical SWOT analysis are contained by the table below. (Table 6.)

Table 6.: SWOT analysis of personnel management

Personnel management			
Strengths		Weaknesses	
<i>Before transition</i>	<i>After transition</i>	<i>Before transition</i>	<i>After transition</i>
Sufficient work power	Increasing expectations concerning qualifications	Low wages	Decrease in the number of employees, greater fluctuation
Individual organizational unit	Motivated work power	Paternalistic approach, dependency	No individual organizational unit
Professionals	More qualified, experienced work power	Compulsory employment	Few professionals
Extensive functions	Work power as a human value	Lack of professionals	Low wages
Accurate personnel records	Employment of experts and advisers	Selection by political criteria	Reduced remuneration
Opportunities		Threats	
<i>Before transition</i>	<i>After transition</i>	<i>Before transition</i>	<i>After transition</i>
Cheap training possibilities	Less but more qualified staff	Low working morale	Low profitability
More remuneration	Changes of approach	Disorganized HRM functions	Further loss of personnel
Other sources of income	Knowledge management	Excess of work power	Seasonal employment
	Work power as organizational value	Worthlessness of work power	Rare opportunities for other income

4. NEW RESEARCH RESULTS

The diverse ownership structure that is based on private property has become a significant characteristic of the observed enterprises.

The transition of the ownership structure led to an extensive change of the top management personnel.

The organizational structure has become simpler and the importance of enterprises in the social and economic life of local communities was decreasing.

The increase of the number of market performers is the sign of market orientation.

Activities of greater profitability became the real focus of the attention of enterprises. The decrease in the scale of activities was remarkable.

The transformation of the internal environment of organizations demonstrates a progressive tendency, with the exception of financial circumstances.

The area of personnel management retreated to a minor territory and at the same time the number of personnel specialists and units was also decreasing.

The change of the place of personnel management in the organizational structure indicates that the personnel management mechanisms of the observed enterprises follow the solution patterns more characteristic of smaller enterprises.

The insignificant decrease of personnel management functions shows that these roles are still important and indispensable.

The change in the working attitudes of leaders and general staff is in connection with the revaluation of working opportunities. The same applies to the observations with respect to the changes of work efficiency.

The decrease of the number of employees is connected to the recession caused by the changing of the structures.

The expectations concerning higher qualifications are connected to the transformation of the scope of working activities.

Wage levels have represented quite a remarkable diversity during the observation period.

The situation of employees' rights and representation is on a medium level. This is connected with the low wage levels and the relevant social circumstances.

The decreasing number of absences is also connected to the greater appreciation of working opportunities.

Fluctuation and work power stability are in connections with redundancy strategies.

The unsatisfactory remuneration and the lack of strikes and other forms of demonstrative actions connected to the low level of interest representation on the employees' side.

The development of the personnel management structures of the observed enterprises is showing a tendency of moving from the administrative model toward the paternalistic model.

Based on the above research and the SWOT analysis one can come to the conclusion that in the case of Transdanubian joint enterprises, agricultural companies and cooperatives a mixed system of HRM emerged. Special individual models are evolving at each enterprise, which for the moment can only guarantee slow development of the field.

5. SUGGESTIONS

In order to compensate regional and local diversities the importance of the creation of working opportunities is becoming more and more cardinal.

The essential importance of strategic knowledge and the possibility of finding the relevant information make it necessary to provide education and support at the local level by creating information service centres.

The entrepreneurial sector shall be capable of creating working opportunities and to provide some kind of stability on the job market. Reduction of the cost of employment is of cardinal importance. Another important point is that training shall be supported by tax reductions in cases of development of human resources.

It is necessary to increase the flexibility of companies and their employees in order to make the continuous development of human resources possible with respect to the technological changes.

The presence of more qualified, universally skilled employees assists the conservation of working opportunities and the prevention of unemployment.

In conclusion I shall suggest that human resources are the first priorities of the development investments of different levels as this is the only way to ensure the complex execution of these investments.

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