

Employee Retention and Development in Pulp and Paper Companies

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The aim of this paper is to present the opinions of professionals from the pulp and paper industry about employee development, as well as the necessity of competent employee retention. These opinions are different as a result of different expectations of employees and managers. The methodology of the paper is based on the following axiom: managers prioritize the processes of human resources management closely related to key employee retention improvement. To achieve the aim of the study, the largest pulp and paper companies in Slovakia were selected. Human resource managers and other professionals were asked about their opinions and attitudes about developing and retaining employees. Results of the research established that pulp and paper companies in Slovakia are significantly reflecting changes in technology and organization of work in the process of employee development. These companies also adopt the values and impacts of an intercultural environment in human resource management systems. The most important process affecting the development of employees is the possibility of professional training and development of competencies improving the performance. Due to changes in the external and internal environment, it is necessary to periodically review and assess the effectiveness of the policies and procedures affecting the development and retention of the employees.

Keywords: Human resources development; Employee retention; Human resources management; Multinational companies; Pulp and paper industry

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INTRODUCTION

The priority objective of strategic decisions of the senior management of a company is human resource (HR) development, which is aimed at exploring the capabilities of employees, active management, and learning for long-term goals of the company. This is a business-oriented approach that takes into account the needs and interests of the individual (Lesáková *et al.* 2009). The aim of human resource development in a company is to increase the capacity of human resources, in line with the indication that human capital is the main source of competitive advantage (Wright *et al.* 1994; Becker *et al.* 2001; Bryan 2007; Dvořáková *et al.* 2012).

Despite the importance of human resource development for the achievement of corporate objectives and goals for employees, there is no universally accepted definition of what human resource development actually is and what it covers (McGuire 2011). We believe that the development of human resources can be defined in several dimensions. The first hallmark of human resource development is an interdisciplinary dimension. Hatcher (2006) argues that the power of human resource development is in its

interdisciplinary nature and that a one-dimensional view provides only short-term solutions. Similarly, Chalofsky (2008) adds that only human resources studies and corporate studies can accurately describe the contents and nature of human resource development.

The second dimension is changing business and social environment. Historically, the development of human resources reflects changes in the content and organization of labor, value, and impact of different cultural backgrounds (Alagaraja and Dooley 2003). Swanson and Holton (2009) pointed out that the main principles of human resource development are strong confidence in learning and professional development, belief that firms can be improved through training and development, links to the people and human potential, a deep desire to see people develop, and passion for learning. Currently, development of human resources is influenced mostly by institutional differences and differences in the cultures of individual countries and multinational companies because of globalization and international business (Armstrong and Taylor 2014). Management and development of capabilities of expatriates is the main criterion for determining the success or failure of international business (Harzing and Pinnington 2015).

The third dimension is the bond of human resources to the enterprise business strategy and strategic goals. According to Charvát (2006): strategic human resource development aims to create a logical, comprehensive, and coherent framework for the development of people who have the potential and are the key staff for the company. At the forefront is a need to favor selected employees, groups of employees whose knowledge, experience, and aptitude for further development enables a company to progress successfully. Talent management and development and succession planning are effective in terms of professional training and success achievement (Khurana *et al.* 2010; Subba Rao 2010).

As the most discussed dimension, we now consider the fourth dimension, which characterizes the development process and is associated with the substantive and procedural definition. From this perspective, human resource development is not a one-time educational activity but a process that has its inputs, progress, and results (Walton 1999). We agree with that opinion, and to the expected inputs of the process of human resource development, we include carriers of development, *i.e.*, employees having required qualification prerequisites for application, motivation, and personal aspirations for development. One of the inputs from the level of the company management environment is also a possibility to support the targeted development of human resources in line with the strategy, plan, finance, identification of professional training needs, and further development.

The views on the development of human resources vary. Some authors refuse to define the development of human resources because any definition would distort its true essence (Blake 1995; Lee 2001). The resulting dilemma is in the view of management on human resource development. To what extent does the development need to focus on getting the level of education, new knowledge, or performance? Wilson (2005) conceives human resource development as an opportunity to increase the capacity of individuals, groups, and businesses through education in order to improve the performance of individuals and businesses. Potkány *et al.* (2011) highlighted that the money spent on recruitment and retention of competent employees, their motivation and the creation of space for self-expression, regular evaluation of staff performance, and ensuring satisfaction and retention must be comparable with the revenues stemming from the use of these processes in human resource development). For this reason, employers prefer

vocational education. The role of vocational education is to help the company management to achieve its objectives through evaluation of people they employ. Vocational education is associated with an investment in employees to reach better performance and utilize most of their skills and experience in the current job. The content of vocational education is an adaptation (orientation and onboarding) of a new employee, improvement of qualification, retraining, and enhancing skills (Šikýř 2014). If the employee gets a new level (degree) of education, new knowledge, shapes his work skills, personal qualities, and potential, which he will use in current and future occupation, we talk about the development of human resources. The employee has greater freedom of establishment on the labor market than is possible with employment in the current company (Werner and DeSimone 2006; Balakrishnan and Srividhya 2007; Koubek 2007; Armstrong 2007). To summarize, human resource development is an occupational orientation to obtain a broader set of knowledge and skills as required by current occupation and includes a focus on training for the current job and gaining new skills and competences for a better employability on the labor market.

The fifth dimension is the outputs of human resource development. Carriers of the development acquire competencies that enable them to manage workloads more qualified, provide higher work performance, and better appreciate investments made to their development through added value. On the other hand, their market value grows, which may manifest through voluntary turnover or retention in the company. Dependence of human resource development and its retention has been studied by several experts (Branham 2000; Thomas and Lazarova 2014) and creates space for this study.

EXPERIMENTAL

Research Background

Paper production in Slovakia started in the 15th century, after the arrival of German settlers. The first mechanized paper factory was founded in 1880 in Ružomberok under the name of Severoslovenské celulózky a papierne (SCP). Since then, the number of companies has been growing gradually, based on the use of domestic wood raw material and processing of sorted waste paper. The largest producer of paper in the Association of the Pulp and Paper Industry are Mondi SCP Ružomberok, a.s., Metsä Tissue Žilina, a.s., Stredoslovenské Harmanecké papierne Harmanec, and Smurfit Kappa, a.s. Štúrovo. These companies account for nearly 100% of pulp and paper production in Slovakia. The production of other goods from pulp and paper cover more than 80% of production in Slovakia. Paper production fully meets consumption needs in Slovakia, and the majority of pulp and paper is exported abroad. Slovakia cannot compare with the world's foremost producers in China, the USA, Japan, and Germany regarding the volume of paper production. The share on the global production is not even 1%. Thanks to the integration into foreign multinationals, the impact of restructuring measures, new processing technology, savings in the consumption of wood and electricity has been achieved. Adaptation of the security measures, emissions, and odor from operations has been reduced. Paper production uses more than 55% of recycled fibers, while the share of recycled paper consumption is even higher.

Objectives and Research Questions

The aim of this research is to identify the situation in the development and retention of employees in selected companies in pulp and paper industry and the formulation of a combination of processes of human resource management that would result in effective utilization and retention of human resources in the company. Views of employees and managers are taken into account in order to review the importance of existing and desirable processes of human resource management. We respect the dynamics of the process of human resource management, which is flexibly responding to changing market conditions and strategic business goals. The objective will be reached through the following steps:

- a) identification of human resources management processes, that are the most important in the development of human resources with influence on staff turnover via questionnaires,
- b) verification of the processes contributing to the development and retention of employees in the company via sociological interview.

The research is based on the assumption that there is a correlation between the development of human resources and the strategic business objectives of stabilizing competent and talented employees. Through interviews with HR managers and sociological interviews with employees we will evaluate three research questions:

1. Are there any differences in opinions on the development and retention of employees between managers and other employees?
2. Which processes of human resource management leverage the retention of employees in pulp and paper companies most?
3. What is the dependence of employee retention and the length of employment in the enterprise?

Data Collection

The research of development and retention of employees in pulp and paper industry was carried out in four largest companies of pulp and paper industry in Slovakia during the years 2015 and 2016.

The first is Mondi SCP in Ružomberok. Since 2004, Mondi SCP Ružomberok has been a part of the multinational company Mondi Holdings, based in Maastricht, the Netherlands, which owns the majority of shares (51%) and manages the company together with Slovak shareholder ECO-Invest. The main assortment is an integrated pulp and paper production, production of printed wrapping paper, pallets, and side support processes associated with the production of electricity and heat and treatment of waste water for city residents. The company is included among the largest employers, with more than 1,160 job offerings.

The second major company focused on paper manufacturing is Metsä Tissue Slovakia based in Žilina. The production of pulp for paper production started in Žilina in 1905, the production of sanitary paper products (tissue paper) started later, and since 2006, the company has been part of transnational Finnish company Metsä Tissue Oyj. The main product assortment is production and sale of tissue paper and sanitary paper products under the brands Lambi, Tento, Serla, Mola, Katrin, and Saga. The assortment is changing according to the customers' requirements, while the main raw material for the

production is cellulose (50%) and waste paper (50%). The Slovak company employs 325 employees.

According to the evaluation of successful businesses TREND 2015, the third major producer of paper is Stredoslovenské Harmanecké papierne (SHP). Water and forests were the reason for founding the company in 1829 in Harmanec. The company went through several ownership and organizational changes. In 2002, Harmanecké papierne was integrated into the SHP (Slovak Hygienic Paper) Group and changed its original name. SHP Group is a multinational company that consists of a group of industrial and commercial companies in the field of cellulose and papermaking. SHP Group covers eight companies in six European countries. The main production and sales assortment are products of the brand Harmony. The company creates 430 jobs in Central Slovakia region.

The company Smurfit Kappa Obaly based in Štúrovo ranked fourth in the successful pulp and paper producers in Slovakia, according to economic results achieved in 2015. Production of corrugated cardboard and cardboard from corrugated paper-board dates back to 1973. The company became part of the multinational company Smurfit Kappa Group, based in Dublin, in 2006. 45,000 employees work in 370 companies located in 21 European countries and 13 states in the USA. International experience of employees and innovative approach to manufacturing are reflected in sales growth and profitability. More than 150 employees work in the Slovak branch.

To determine the relevant human resources management (HRM) processes and their connection with the development and retention, we compared the theoretical knowledge with results of the research focused on practical experience of HR managers working in multinational companies. Within this project conducted in 2014, we received the answers of 90 human resource managers about all HRM processes in their companies. According to this research, we stated the basis of human resource management processes affecting the development and retention of employees (Vetráková *et al.* 2011). These HRM processes are selection and recruitment, adaptation, vocational education, career development, remuneration for work performance and behavior, employee benefits, rotation of staff, *etc.* Most human resource managers, participating in research mentioned above, recommended to improve employee development and retention by assigning individual development plans, system of employee substitution, succession management, and performance evaluation. From the basis of human resource management processes, we have selected ten of them, which executives of multinational companies designated as having the greatest contribution on the development and retention of employees in a company. Selected processes were subjected to discussion in interviews with human resource managers of pulp and paper industry companies and in sociological questioning with employees and other managers. Because of the nature of work of the companies in pulp and paper industry, and the structure of employees working in non-production and production facilities, the individual development plan typical for managers and new employees in the process of adaptation has been included in the category "others" in our research. This group also includes cooperation with experienced colleagues and the relationship to work. However, the absolute multiplicity does not point out the power of the processes.

The basic methods of gathering information about selected companies were structured personal interviews with human resource managers and sociological questioning in a form of a questionnaire. We interviewed 4 human resources managers (one HR manager from each company) to have a picture of HRM processes design. We

asked open-ended questions about key points of HRM processes. Next, we distributed 250 questionnaires to managers (except of HR managers) and employees of surveying companies. The questionnaire consisted of 3 closed and 1 open-ended questions (except for identification questions). Respondents rated the functionality of educational and development system on the 5 level symmetrical Likert scale (1 - totally agree, 5 – totally disagree) in the questionnaire. Respondents could select up to five HRM processes from totally ten processes in a multiple choice question.

Methods of Research

The subject and scientific issue of the research are development and retention of employees working in multinational companies. We expect that international networking businesses that also affected pulp and paper industry have brought new opportunities and challenges, as well as pressure on efficiency of employees, which affects managers and employees working in the company integrated into a multinational company. Requirements oriented on the work of employees are changing; approaches of parent companies to foreign markets are different, and customary values and practices of employees of one nation are confronted with the specifics of other cultures. Not every employee is able to work in a multicultural and technologically challenging environment. Guarantee of successful progress of the company is in its employees, whose competencies are in line with corporate goals and objectives not only on the national level but also internationally. Development and retention of such staff should be a priority for senior executives. It is expected that the funds invested in education and development will pay back in higher added value. However, any employee who holds his human capital has the right to decide whether and to what extent he will be involved in the company, performing work tasks, increasing his potential or accepting a challenge from another employer and leaving the company. Development and utilization of human capital means working with each employee to motivate him to perform better, develop their natural talent, and stabilize him in the company.

The dependence between HRM processes and employee's development and retention was tested by the Friedman test, which was used to generalize the research results in a total rank of processes. The next step was identification of significance of results variability in a group of HRM processes by the Wilcoxon test. According to the Wilcoxon test we grouped researched process into groups by intensity of influence on development and retention. All data gathered in the research were processed and analyzed by SPSS 19 (IBM, USA) statistical tools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 212 respondents participated in a questionnaire survey (from 250 employees sample); 28.8% of respondents were managers and indirect employees. Almost 38% of respondents were women. Sample groups in the four studied companies were representative in terms of the structure of employees and managers because the proportion of employees in manufacturing plants (blue collar) ranged from 69.8% to 72.3%. Managerial positions are held by foremen, department managers, and functional and top managers of local branches (approximately 16%). The level of education of the interviewees was relatively high; 37.6% had secondary education with school-leaving exam, 34% had a master's or Ph.D. degree, 17% had secondary education without

school-leaving exam, and 9.4% had bachelor education. A total of 69.8% of the respondents worked in the company for more than five years, 18.7% from two to four years, and 11.5% less than one year.

Results of the research showed that with the established system, 24.5% of respondents strongly agreed, 37.7% of respondents agreed with the system, 17% disagreed, and 3.8% strongly disagreed. A total of 17% of respondents were undecided, and negative assessment of the educational and development system was reported by respondents from only one of the researched companies. Finding of the reasons that have a positive impact on an employee's decision to remain in the workforce of the company was also included in the research. A total of 50.9% of respondents considered the current system as functional (of which 11.3% strongly agree) and 20.8% as dysfunctional, while 28.3% of respondents were undecided.

In total, we received 712 evaluations of HRM processes affecting the development of human resources (212 respondents could mark up to maximum 5 processes) and 556 evaluations of HRM processes affecting retention. The output of SPSS 19 – the values of mean rank – are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Human Resources Management Processes Ranked According to the Impact on Employee Development and Retention

HR Process / Area	Development			Retention		
	Absolute multiplicity	Relative multiplicity	Mean rank	Absolute multiplicity	Relative multiplicity	Mean rank
Professional Training	125	17.6%	7.59	85	15.3%	6.90
Relationship and Attitudes Forming	103	14.5%	6.98	112	20.1%	7.60
Orientation and Onboarding	100	14.0%	6.93	54	9.7%	6.07
Employee Performance Management	88	12.4%	6.61	62	11.2%	6.30
Compensation	59	8.3%	5.85	93	16.7%	7.10
Employee Substitution System	53	7.4%	5.69	12	2.2%	5.0.
Employee Benefits	52	7.3%	5.69	79	14.2%	6.74
Employee Hiring	48	6.7%	5.54	8	1.4%	4.90
Succession Planning and Management	36	5.1%	5.22	17	3.1%	5.11
Talent Management	25	3.5%	4.96	19	3.4%	5.17
Job Rotation	23	3.2%	4.93	15	2.7%	5.11.
Total	712	100%	x	556	100%	x

Employees of the studied companies considered vocational education as the most influential process in the development of employees, while experienced colleagues on the workplace and attitude towards work have more influence on the retention of employees. This result was also confirmed by human resource managers.

Coordination of education is carried out from the headquarters of companies. Many courses, especially in communication and managerial skills, are organized regardless of affiliation to a local company. As claimed by one of the managers, human resource development largely depends on who holds the position of General Manager, and specifically, the senior human resource manager, in multinational companies. At the local level, a training activity in the process of adaptation and the course of employment is performed because of local and multinational needs. The main focus, in addition to vocational education and mandatory training, is devoted to talent management and specifically to selected groups of high-performing employees. Two of the researched enterprises have joined the High Potential (HIPO) in the ambition to develop the potential of young and older employees. Preparation of the key employee for the managerial positions in the form of case studies, international projects, and training lasts four years on average. According to the results of interviews, the process of finding and developing talent is the least significant in human resource management processes. The reason is that the structure of employees in the pulp and paper industry is dominated by blue-collar occupations and ancillary works, which requires less skilled workforce without completion of secondary education.

Continuity and career development of capable and willing employees in the company consider managers as an effective motivational and retention tool. One of the best practices in human resource development is a career of manager in one of the pulp-paper industry companies in Slovakia, who after completing secondary education started working as a secretary, and gradually she went through several jobs and trainings in a multinational company, gained college education, and currently holds the position of human resource manager. All researched companies use a wide portfolio of opportunities for education and development of employees both individually and/or in groups.

Performance appraisal, remuneration, and provision of employee benefits were considered by managers as important processes stimulating the development of employees. However, according to the employees, effective incentives for their development are best practices of their experienced colleagues, learning from others and team-building activities. This finding was presented by 112 employees.

The process of adaptation, introductory training, and job position training received 100 positive reviews. According to the three human resource managers, in their companies, they have a sophisticated adaptation plan customized to the content of the particular jobs. Students also undergo initial training and tuition of vocational secondary schools, explains a human resource manager in an interview. Every year, they take 4 to 8 students of vocational secondary schools for a professional practice on a positions of mechanical engineers and electrical engineers. After graduation, the best ones remain to work in the company.

Neither of the human resource management processes earned the highest rating in terms of retention in the company. A total of 52.3% of respondents mentioned the opportunity to work with experienced colleagues and a positive attitude towards performed work. The second process, which positively affects the retention, is remuneration. The average salary of employees in the researched companies is higher by 32% than the average wage in the regions where the companies are located and 40%

higher by comparison to the Slovak Republic average. According to managers, wage assessment is the result of the policy of the company based on the performance management, introduction of the latest technologies in the production, transparent evaluation of work results, and an elaborated system of evaluation. The ranking of the processes affecting the development and retention of employees has been verified by Friedman test. (Fig. 1).

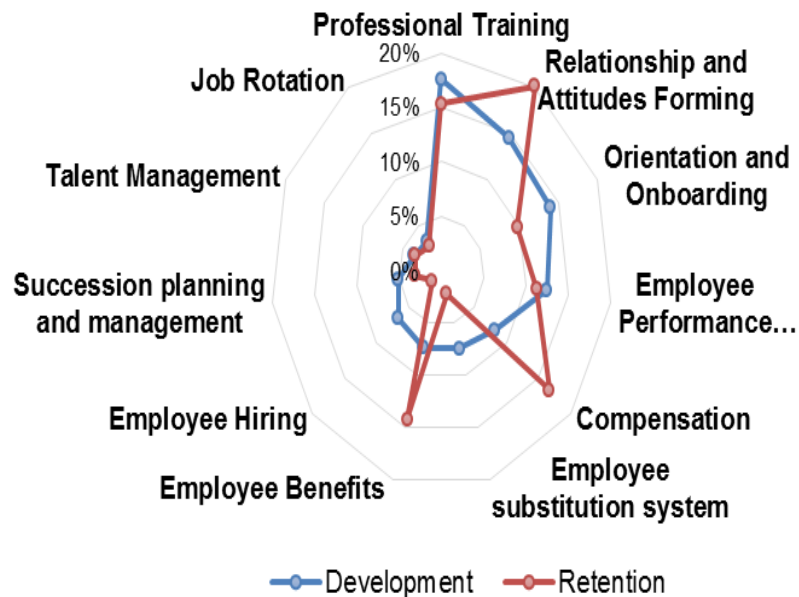


Fig. 1. The significance of HR processes affecting development and retention of employees

The most powerful factor in the development of employees is considered professional training. Secondly is a group of processes: experienced colleagues, the process of adaptation, and performance evaluation (this group of processes was established by the Wilcoxon test; a p-value less than 0.05 confirms there are no significant differences in total ranking of processes according to the Friedman test). The group of processes with the least contribution to the employee development process consists of the system of remuneration, system of substitution, employee benefits, selection and recruitment, succession management, and job rotation. Two related groups emerged from the comparison of the impacts of the processes affecting the retention of employees. The first group with significant weight to the decision of staying in the company includes the impact of the opportunity to work with experienced colleagues, remuneration, vocational education, employee benefits, performance evaluation, and adjustment process. The second group of processes, which consists of talent management, succession management, job rotation, substitution system, and selection and admission, has a significantly lower effect on retention.

The dependence of retention process and the length of employment were tested by the Spearman coefficient of correlation (r_s). The coefficient value close to "0.0" indicates

low, or no dependence of variables. On the other side coefficient values close to “+1.0 or -1.0” indicate strong dependence (Table 2).

From the retention processes, only job rotation showed a weak direct dependence with the length of employment ($r_s = + 0.151$). Conversely, the longer employees are working for a company, the more opposite is the influence of the processes of adaptation, substitutability, cooperation with experienced colleagues, and providing employee benefits to stay in the company. The longer employees work in the company, the lower is the effect of the possibility of cooperation with experienced colleagues to the decision of staying in the company because the employees themselves belong to the category of experienced employees. Dependence of other processes for retention of the employees is statistically insignificant.

Table 2. Testing of Retention Process and the Length of Employment Dependence

	Professional Training	Relationship Forming	Orientation and Onboarding	Employee Performance Management	Compensation	Employee substitution system
Correlation Coefficient	0.095	-0.300	- 0.161	-0.079	-0.025	- 0.245
p-value	0.168	0.000	0.019	0.253	0.713	0.000
Sample	212	212	212	212	212	212
	Employee Benefits	Employee Hiring	Succession planning	Talent Management	Job Rotation	
Correlation Coefficient	- 0.190	- 0.060	- 0.020	- 0.028	0.151	
p-value	0.006	0.384	0.778	0.688	0.028	
Sample	212	212	212	212	212	

CONCLUSIONS

1. Based on this research, it is possible to state that the development of human resources in the pulp and paper industry in Slovakia is significantly reflecting changes in technology and work organization, values, and impacts of an intercultural environment. Training of the local managers of multinational companies is done mostly from the central level, while the opportunity to participate in the training is offered to all employees. The competence of each of the researched companies is to provide education to employees in accordance with the needs and objectives of the local company and the parent company. An important aspect of training and development is to identify and develop those employees who have the potential to become a key, highly efficient staff at the local and international level. The process of identification of the needs and realization of the education is differentiated by the degree of centralization or decentralization of responsibility within multinational companies and institutional (legislative) differences. Our findings have confirmed the views of experts in international management and human resource development presented in theoretical knowledge.
2. The most important human resource management process affecting the development of employees is the possibility of professional training and development of

competencies for the performed work. None of the respondents considered preparation of individual development plans as the preferred development process, while the work with experienced colleagues, process of adaptation to the job position, and performance management has been evaluated positively. On the contrary, human resource managers in the researched companies consider individual development plans as effective in competence development of the employees. Similar results were achieved in the research in multinational companies in Slovakia (Vetráková *et al.* 2015). Differences of opinions between managers and employees result from the structure of the respondents in the pulp-paper industry, where most of the employees perform work in manufacturing plants and not in management.

3. Another interesting observation of the researched companies is low staff turnover caused mainly by natural retirement. According to the human resource managers of the researched companies, employees appreciate the possibility of working in a multinational company and are not thinking about leaving to competitors or to another employer. Positive retention elements are established human resource management processes, especially learning from experienced colleagues (20.1%), who are an inspiration for new employees, remuneration (16.7%), and flexible employee benefits (14.2%). Efficiency of the established processes of retention increases the level of the economy of regions where the companies are located, and their social development.
4. There is an interdependence between the system of human resources development and employee retention affected by the internal and external environment of the researched companies. It is necessary to periodically review and assess the effectiveness of the policies and procedures affecting the development and retention of the employees. Standards adopted by the parent company and the best practice of successful multinationals can be used by local companies in a whole or partly in the application of human resource management processes, while taking into account the home environment, cultural, economic, political, and social differences.

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