Perceptions of Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) and Personal Risk: Findings from the Pilot Study

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore how SHRM (Sustainable Human Resource Management) practices and personal risk management are interpreted by managers across different organisational contexts, and to identify challenges and barriers to implementing these practices. The study focuses on a variety of SHRM approaches in diverse organisational contexts, highlighting the impact of company size, managerial experience, and organisational culture. It also explores the challenges associated with both long-term and short-term SHRM goals and underscores the need for a better understanding and communication of these practices within organisations. The study is based on a qualitative individual in-depth interview (IDI) methodology. The results of the study highlight the

importance of adapting and understanding the unique aspects of each organisation to effectively implement SHRM. The article contributes to the literature by highlighting the need for further research into holistic SHRM models, the management personal risk, the use of new technologies, and the development of advanced measurement methods.

Keywords: personal risk, human resource management, sustainable human resource management, managers

JEL Classification Codes: M12, M14, Q01

Introduction

In the modern knowledge economy, human capital management is becoming a key factor in the competitiveness of organisations. In the business world, the understanding and implementation of sustainability has evolved well beyond traditional approaches focused solely on economic aspects. When analysing the various definitions of sustainability, it is increasingly clear that both social and environmental aspects must be taken into account in business operations. The changing approach to human resource management requires the integration of sustainable practices to achieve organisational goals, which includes promoting environmentally friendly and socially responsible practices (Cohen, Taylor, Muller-Camen, 2012; Armstrong, 2005). Managers, therefore, need to be strategic and consistent in their approach to employee management. This strategic approach includes promoting environmentally friendly practices, ensuring social responsibility, effective talent management, and attention to employee health and well-being (Armstrong, 2005).

Dynamic changes in the business environment, both globally and locally, bring new challenges not only in managing human resources, but also in identifying and countering risks, including personnel risks. In the area of personal risk, managers need to focus on identifying and managing human resource risks, such as the loss of key employees to the organisation or employee health problems, which directly affect business continuity and goal achievement (Dessler, 2011). Paauwe emphasises the need for continuous development and education of managers on sustainability (Paauwe, 2009). Effective internal communication has been highlighted as playing a key role in the implementation of SHRM practices and personal risk management, indicating that managers should be able to effectively communicate sustainability goals and strategies within the organisation. Understanding these complex relationships and adapting to them requires organisations not only to use new tools, but also to have a deeper understanding of the impact of these factors on the overall functioning of the company (Rogozinska-Pawełczyk, Wiktorowicz, 2023). Effective management

also implies the integration of design skills with an understanding of the humanistic and intellectual aspects of the team (Grudzewski, Hejduk, Sankowska, Wańtuchowicz, 2010). The manager's role in managing human resources and personal risk in the context of sustainable development requires a holistic approach, combining technical knowledge with the humanistic skills necessary to effectively shape employee engagement and adaptation to a dynamically changing work environment. Managers must therefore demonstrate not only project management competencies, but also a deep understanding of their team's needs and aspirations, which is crucial for the long-term success and sustainability of the organisation (Epstein, Buhovac, 2017).

Researchers and practitioners agree that personal risk, related, among other things, to inadequate use of management tools or their mismatch with current market needs, can lead to serious short- and long-term consequences for organisations (Bochniarz, Gugała, 2005; Gołembski, 2015). Yet the level of implementation of sustainable HR practices in organisations often remains low, which is increasingly attributed not so much to a lack of HR support as to low awareness among managers (Misztal, Drzewiecka-Dahlke, Marczewska-Kuźma, 2022). Managers' understanding of SHRM principles and their effective application is critical to the future of the organisation. They are the ones who shape the work environment and influence employee engagement, which is essential for the long-term success and sustainability of the organisation. Therefore, the research presented in this article focuses on analysing how managers adapt to these changes and what strategies they employ to effectively manage human resources in a dynamically changing business environment.

The aim of this article is to explore managers' perceptions of SHRM and personal risk. The study focuses on understanding how SHRM practices and personal risk management are interpreted by managers in different organisational contexts. To this end, a series of research questions were formulated to explore different aspects of perceptions of SHRM and personal risk.

1. How do managers across various industries and company sizes perceive sustainable human resource management (SHRM) and personal risk?
2. Are there differences in perceptions of SHRM and personal risk based on managerial experience?
3. What challenges and barriers do organisations face in implementing SHRM practices and managing personal risk?

The methodological section of the article discusses the research methods used, including data collection procedures and the selection of analytical tools. The data coding and analysis process is also described. The results section presents the data collected, focusing on different aspects of managers' perceptions of SHRM and personal risk. The managers' responses were analysed, comparing them in the context of different organisation sizes and sectors. In the discussion and conclusions, the

authors interpret the results, relating them to the existing academic literature and we point out their implications for SHRM theory and practice. We also address potential directions for future research in the area of SHRM and personal risk.

Method and research sample

The pilot study was conducted between June and December 2023, surveying 25 respondents, using qualitative individual in-depth interviews (IDIs), based on a structured questionnaire. The choice of the IDI method was justified by their effectiveness in exploring individual perspectives and opinions, which is crucial when researching complex topics such as human resource management. The choice of this method was also dictated by several additional aspects as a research method in he pilot study, which are in line with the recommendations of the research methodology literature. IDI studies provide a high level of control over the research process, through the use of pre-planned and structured questions, the researcher is able to consistently explore specific themes with each respondent (Bryman, Bell, 2015). They also allow for the exploration of respondents' perspectives and opinions this type of interviewing allows for detailed information to be gained and subtle nuances in respondents' answers to be understood. The choice of this research method was related to the possibility of comparing and contrasting data from different interviews. They allow for a better comparison of data as all respondents answer the same questions, making it easier to identify patterns and trends in responses (Patton, 2015). As part of the survey, care was also taken to create an atmosphere conducive to openness and honesty in responses. To this end, a neutral question technique was used to avoid influencing respondents and to elicit the most authentic responses possible (Kvale, Brinkmann, 2009). This method was chosen for the study, but the researchers are aware that it is not free of limitations. The method of qualitative individual in-depth interviews (IDIs), used in the study of perceptions of human resource management, faces the problem of subjectivity of responses and the difficulty of generalising the results beyond the sample group. The researcher-respondent interaction may inadvertently shape responses, introducing bias into the data collected. The preparation, implementation and analysis of IDIs are time-consuming and financially demanding, limiting their practical application in large-scale research. Purposive survey sampling may also miss important perspectives, reducing the diversity and richness of the data analysed.

The questionnaire consisted of 17 main questions that were developed from existing literature and human resource management theory (Bryman, Bell, 2015). The questions focused on various aspects of sustainable human resource management,

the psychological contract, personal risk, and proactivity. Additionally, the researcher had the option to ask additional questions, in line with methodologists' recommendations for flexibility and the ability to adapt the research process to the context and respondents' answers (Patton, 2015). The research also included a theoretical introduction aimed at orienting the respondents to the issues under study, which is important for providing clarity and context to the interview (Kvale, Brinkmann, 2009).

The selection of respondents for the study group was purposive. The use of the purposive selection allowed for the selective recruitment of managers meeting specific criteria, such as experience in human resource management, a managerial position in the organisation, and activity in specific sectors (Frankfortm-Nachmias, Nachmias, 2001). The structure of the respondent group is described in Table 1.

Table 1. Structure of the respondent group

Category	Subcategory	Number of managers	Percentage (in %)
Company size	Large companies	10	50
	Small and micro enterprises	8	40
	Medium-sized companies	2	10
Industry	IT	7	35
	Finance	5	25
	Higher education	3	15
	Training and development	5	25
Length of service	Under 5 years	7	35
	From 6 to 10 years	6	30
	Over 11 years	7	35

Source: own study based on the analysis of the study group.

The selection was further justified by an analysis of statistical data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS). According to the CSO, the structure of the labour market in Poland is diverse, covering different sizes of companies and a variety of industries. In the study, the authors aimed to provide an approximate picture of the Polish economy. This diversification is crucial to obtain a similar picture of human resource management in different organisational contexts. In addition, the choice of industries such as IT, finance, higher education, and training and development in the pilot study was justified by their significant impact on the Polish economy and the specific challenges of human resource management in each of these fields. The IT industry, widely recognised catalyst for innovation and technological development, plays an important role in shaping the global economy. The revolution in information technology contributes to economic and social transformation on a global scale.

Furthermore, more recent research confirms the importance of the IT industry for innovation and economic growth, highlighting its impact on changes in business models and the functioning of markets (Castells, 2010). The financial sector, plays a key role in mobilising capital and supporting investment, which directly impact on economic stability and development. Recent studies also point to the increasing importance of the financial sector in financing sustainable development and innovation, highlighting its role in the modern economy (Mishkin, 2018). In the area of higher education and training, developing human capital and promoting innovation are essential for economic growth and social development (Nawaz, Durst, Hariharasudan, Shamugia, 2020). Therefore, the selection of industries such as IT, finance, higher education, and training and development industries is justified by their importance to the Polish economy and the specific human resource management challenges these industries present. The selection of managers from companies of different sizes, from micro-enterprises to large corporations, allows us to examine how different sizes of companies adapt and implement sustainable human resource management practices. As Patton, among others, points out, the diversity of the sample allows for a deeper understanding and analysis of the issue under study, making it possible to identify universal as well as group-specific trends and patterns. The methodological approach in this pilot study was consciously designed to gain an in-depth understanding of managers' perceptions on key aspects of sustainable human resource management, personal risk, psychological contract, proactivity. The use of qualitative individual in-depth interviews (IDIs), relying on a structured questionnaire, a purposive sampling method and detailed questionnaire design provided, in the opinion of the researchers, a sound basis for obtaining reliable and valuable information.

The interviews conducted were transcribed, and their content was analysed using thematic analysis. The data collected during the interviews was subjected to a detailed coding process to extract relevant themes and patterns. The qualitative data collected was subjected to vertical. This step was crucial to understanding the deeper perspectives and conclusions of the study (Saldaña, 2015).

Results

A procedure for coding and analysing the results was carried out.

Data preparation and understanding: This stage builds on the tenets of Grounded Theory and emphasises the importance of thorough understanding the data prior to analysis (Glaser, Strauss, 1967). The study began with the collection and careful study of the interview transcripts. At this stage, the focus was on identifying

statements that directly relate to SHRM and personal risk. Managers' statements regarding their experiences of SHRM were analysed, with particular attention paid to their perceptions of different aspects of SHRM. A summary of selected managerial statements relevant to the purpose of the article is provided in Table 2, where statements are marked with a 'W' followed by consecutive numbers.

Table 2. Coding of selected statements

Comment:
W1: "In a small company, it is difficult to focus on SHRM because of limited resources".
W2: "As a manager with 20 years of experience, I see personal risk as a key challenge".
W3: "In our organisation, SHRM is a priority, but it is not always properly implemented".
W4: "In the financial industry, personal risk is often overlooked in favour of financial performance".
W5: "As a new manager, I find it hard to assess the effectiveness of our SHRM".
W6: "SHRM seems to be more developed in large companies than in small ones".
W7: "In the IT industry, constant technological change creates a lot of personal risk".
W8: "SHRM is important, but often conflicts with short-term company goals".
W9: "I work in a small company and I think we manage personal risk well".
W10: "The difference in perception of SHRM between senior and junior managers is stark".
W11: "We often focus only on new technologies, losing sight of the welfare of employees".
W12: "Personal risk is an abstraction for us, what matters are concrete results".
W13: "We understand the importance of SHRM, but we don't always know how to implement it effectively".
W14: "Personal risk is a daily challenge for us in maintaining the quality of training".
W15: "SHRM is well understood and valued by all employees in our company".
W16: "SHRM is often overlooked in our industry, we focus on profits=".
W17: "We try to balance personal risk with student needs".
W18: "Our approach to SHRM is dynamic and market-driven".
W19: "I don't quite understand how to manage SHRM in a context of constant change".
W20: "Personal risk is secondary for us; what matters is financial efficiency".
W21: "Sometimes I feel that we focus on the small things, and the bigger picture escapes us".
W22: "We do all sorts of things for the team, but whether it all makes sense together, I'm not sure".
W23: "We have some cool initiatives, but do they add up to something bigger together? That's a good question".
W24: "In our technology industry, we have our challenges, but I wonder how it is in other places. Because with us, it's a tough market; it's hard to get an employee who wouldn't get fired at the first sign of stress".
W25: "In the banking world, we operate in our own way, you know here you pay attention to risk, but how it looks in other industries, I have no idea".
W26: 'I'm not sure if our activities for employees are similar to those in other sectors. But I think we have the most money for it. It just sometimes feels that it's all HR's doing".
W27: "Company culture has an impact on what it 'catches', but how to measure it is another matter".
W28: "Is the way we operate with the team a result of our unique culture? Possibly."
W29: "I wonder how culture influences our actions, but it's difficult to judge".
W30: "Sometimes I wonder if our actions introduce unnecessary stress for the team".

Comment:
W31: "I am not sure how our decisions affect the wellbeing of our employees".
W32: "Do our actions have any unintended consequences for the team?".
W33: "We are thinking about the future, but what impact will this have on our employees in a few years' time?".
W34: "Will our current activities benefit us in the long term, or is it just a fad, some kind of fad".
W35: "How will our approach today affect the future of my team? Well, because sometimes I think we look at this whole sustainable management thing just as a way to be eco".
W36: "Everyone talks about innovation, but how it really affects our team is less often discussed".
W37: "Changes in technology are moving fast, but does anyone know how this affects our employees in the long run?".
W38: "Everyone talks about wellbeing, but do we really know how our actions affect people in a few years' time?".
W39: "We hear about great strategies, but how it all fits into our daily work is less clear".
W40: "We often hear about new working methods, but few people talk about how all this affects our team".
W41: "Everyone talks about these sustainable practices, but most of us don't understand how it all works in practice. For me it's just the old wrapped in new paper".
W42: "They talk about ecology, but no one explains how this relates to our daily work".
W43: "We hear about new strategies, but honestly, for many of us, they are just fashionable words with no specifics".
W44: "Sometimes I think all these activities are more about the image of the company than the real impact on people".
W45: "They talk about change and innovation, but where is the training to help us understand it all? It's not easy feeling like a child in a fog sometimes".

Source: own study based on statements collected during the interviews.

First cyclical coding: Based on an approach that emphasises the importance of an iterative coding process, allowing for a more thorough understanding of the data (Saldana, 2009). In the first cyclic coding process, each of the managers' statements was analysed in detail to identify key concepts and themes. Labels were assigned to the statements based on their key content. For example, a statement by a manager from a small company about the difficulty of focusing on SHRM due to limited resources was given the label 'Limitations of SHRM in Small Companies'. Similarly, a statement from an experienced manager identifying personal risk as a key challenge was labelled 'Personal Risk as a Challenge for an Experienced Manager'. This step organised the data in a way that facilitates further analysis and interpretation. The result based on the selected statements is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. First cyclic coding of selected citations

Coding
Challenges of SHRM in Small Companies (W1, W9): Focus on limited resources in small companies hindering effective SHRM implementation.

Coding
Experience versus Risk Perception (W2, W19, W34): Experienced managers emphasise the critical importance of personal risk and variability in management.
Implementation vs. SHRM priorities (W3, W8, W13, W18): Discrepancies between the recognition of SHRM as a priority and its effective implementation.
Personal risk vs. Financial performance (W4, W12, W20): Emphasis on financial performance in the financial industry at the expense of personal risk.
Development of SHRM in Large Companies (W6, W14, W17): Large companies appear to be more developed in terms of SHRM.
Personal risk in a Rapidly Changing Environment (W7, W11, W37): Continuous technological change in the IT industry generates personal risk.
Conflicts of Objectives in SHRM (W22, W23, W38, W39, W45): Conflicts between different objectives and activities within SHRM.
Uncertainty and Lack of Understanding of SHRM (W5, W21, W41, W43): Problems with assessing and understanding the effectiveness of SHRM.
Impact of Organisational Culture on SHRM (W27, W28, W29): The impact of a unique organisational culture on the approach to SHRM.
Stress and Employee Wellbeing (W30, W31, W32, W44): Concerns about the impact of decisions on employee wellbeing and stress.
SHRM Long-term Perspective (W33, W35, W40): Reflections on the long-term impact of current SHRM activities.
Industry differences in SHRM (W24, W25, W26, W42): How different industries approach SHRM and personal risk.
Lack of Training and Support (W36, W40): Lack of training and understanding of new practices and technologies in SHRM.

Source: own study based on statements collected during the interviews.

Categorisation of codes: Following Bryman's methodology, where code categorisation helps to organise and structure the data (Bryman, 2012), the process of code categorisation, performed on the basis of the first cyclical coding of managers' statements, used a theory-based approach to organise the data. Each label from the first coding was assigned to a broader category that represents the main theme or issue raised in the statements. For example, categories such as company size and SHRM/personal risk or sectoral differences in perceptions of SHRM and personal risk were created to group similar statements and enable deeper analysis and comparison between different perspectives and contexts. This method allows for a better understanding of the complex relationships and patterns in the perception of SHRM and personal risk.

Theme generation: Based on an approach focusing on thematic analysis of the data and the emergence of key themes (Braun, Clarke, 2006), at the theme generation stage of the IDI survey, conducted as part of the analysis of perceptions of SHRM and Personal risk, categorised codes were synthesised to extract coherent research themes. This process involved the integration of related codes into more complex thematic categories, allowing the main areas of inquiry to emerge. Each identified

thematic category was then developed and analysed to gain a deeper understanding of SHRM and personal risk dynamics in the context of various factors such as company size, managerial experience and sector specificity. The resulting research themes formed the basis for further analysis and interpretation of the data, enabling the formulation of specific conclusions and recommendations. Selected themes are included in Table 4.

Table 4. Creation of themes based on selected quotations

Creation of themes
1. **Differing approaches to SHRM according to company size (W1, W6, W9):** Indicates that in small companies, a lack of resources often limits the development of SHRM, while large corporations have more elaborate SHRM systems. This highlights the need to adapt SHRM strategies to the specific characteristics and capabilities of each company.
2. **Differences in perceptions of SHRM based on managerial experience (W2, W19, W34):** Suggests that experienced managers have a deeper understanding of SHRM and personal risk. New managers may need additional support and training in this area.
3. **The impact of organisational culture on the effectiveness of SHRM (W27, W28, W29):** Indicates the important role of organisational culture in the implementation of SHRM. Different cultural approaches can influence how SHRM practices are perceived and implemented in organisations.
4. **The complex dynamics between long-term and short-term SHRM goals (W33, W35, W38, W39):** Highlights that managers often focus on short-term goals, potentially overlooking the long-term effects of SHRM practices on employees and the organisation.
5. **The need for a better understanding of the complexity of the topic and communication of SHRM in organisations (W5, W21, W41, W43):** Indicates a gap in the understanding and communication of SHRM practices, which may affect their effectiveness and acceptance among employees.

Source: own study based on statements collected during the interviews.

Comparing and contrasting themes: This stage is based on a comparative analysis of the data, which allows patterns and relationships to be identified (Miles, Huberman, 1994). Comparing and contrasting the extracted themes in the IDI study provides an understanding of the complexity and diversity of approaches to SHRM and personal risk. For example, the theme on the impact of company size on SHRM contrasts the approach of managers in large corporations, where there is a tendency to implement complex SHRM programmes, with that in smaller companies, where initiatives are more direct and focused on local issues. Similarly, an analysis of manager experience reveals differences in the perception and management of SHRM between new and experienced managers, and a comparison of sectoral approaches highlights how different industries adapt SHRM and personal risk to their specific contexts.

Integration and synthesis: Based on the idea of triangulation, which allows a multidimensional view of the data and its interpretation (Denzina, 1978). The

integration and synthesis of findings from the IDI survey highlights the complexity of SHRM and personal risk management in different organisational contexts. The combination of themes related to company size, manager experience, and sectoral differences creates a holistic picture of challenges and strategies in SHRM. The synthesis of these themes shows that effective SHRM requires adaptation and understanding of the unique aspects of each organisation, including its size, culture and sector specificities. The study's findings emphasise that managers need to develop flexibility and versatility in their management strategies to respond effectively to changing SHRM and personal risk requirements.

Conclusion

In a study on perceptions of sustainable human resource management (SHRM) and personal risk, significant differences were observed in attitudes towards these areas, depending on a number of factors.

The need to build an SHRM strategy: The differences in approaches to SHRM indicated by managers depending on company size and managerial experience (W1, W2, W6, W9, W19, W34) suggest the need to develop more integrated SHRM strategies that take into account different aspects of people management and are not dependent on such subjective factors as a manager's seniority or personal beliefs.

Research on SHRM in Different Sectors of the Economy: Statements on the IT, finance and training industries (W4, W7, W11, W14, W17) highlight the need for research on SHRM in different sectors in order to better understand the specific challenges and needs of each sector.

Impact of Organisational Culture on SHRM: Statements on the role of organisational culture (W27, W28, W29) indicate the need to take into account cultural differences in SHRM practices, both at the level of the organisation including, inter alia, the employment structure (e.g. age of employees) and cultural external factors.

Understanding the Long-Term Effects of SHRM: Comments on SHRM's short-term goals and long-term effects (W33, W35, W38, W39) suggest that there is a need for research focused on the long-term consequences of SHRM practices for organisations and employees.

Use of New Technologies in SHRM: Statements on the role of technology (W36, W37, W38, W42) emphasise the need for research into the use of modern technologies, such as artificial intelligence and big data, in promoting SHRM and in automating the predictive impact of actions on risk.

Development of Advanced SHRM Measurement Methods: Managers' statements about the difficulty of assessing the effectiveness of SHRM (W5, W21, W41, W43)

point to the need to develop more advanced measurement methods to effectively assess the impact of SHRM on organisations and their employees.

In recent years, sustainable human resource management (SHRM) has gained prominence as a key factor in shaping the future of organisations. However, the literature review reveals gaps in the current state of research. The results of the pilot study highlight similar areas of concern among respondents. The first noticeable gap is the lack of a holistic approach in SHRM research. Many studies focus on single aspects of SHRM, such as ecology, impact on employee wellbeing (Sypniewska, Baran, Kłos, 2023), or organisational innovation (Sulistiasih, Widodo, 2023), but comprehensive models that integrate the different elements of SHRM and explore which strategies and principles may be universal are lacking. In addition, there is limited in research on SHRM in specific sectors, and in cross-sectional studies. Research is mainly focused on sectors such as IT (Nag, Pathak, Rani, Kdv, 2023), leaving gaps in understanding the needs and challenges of other key sectors of the economy. A significant area for further research is the impact of organisational and regional culture on the effectiveness and implementation of SHRM practices. Personal risk associated with SHRM, also remains relatively under-researched. Research focuses on SHRM practices, but rarely links them to the identification and management of risks to employees arising from these practices. Additionally, there is a gap in research on the long-term effects of SHRM. Most current research focuses on the short- to medium-term effects, leaving questions about the long-term consequences of these practices for organisations and employees. In the context of the increasing role of technology, there is a need for a deeper understanding of how new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and big data, can be used to promote SHRM. Although some studies consider the use of electronic human resource management (E-HRM) (Nag et al., 2023), there is a general lack of research on the use of advanced technologies in SHRM. Additionally, there is a need to develop more sophisticated measurement methods to effectively assess the impact of SHRM on organisations and their employees. The identified research gaps point to the need for further research to better understand and effectively implement SHRM. Further research should focus on developing holistic models of SHRM, understanding the impact of cultural differences, identifying and managing personal risk, assessing the long-term impact of SHRM, using new technologies and developing advanced measurement methods. The pilot study yielded a partial understanding of managers' perceptions about SHRM and personal risk, revealing some aspects that are consistent with gaps in the literature. It was discovered that managers interpret SHRM differently, which may be due to differences in company size, managerial experience, organisational culture, as well as the impact of new technologies. Although the survey did not provide a complete picture, it highlighted the existence of gaps in the overall approach to SHRM, the need to understand the

long-term effects of these practices and the need for better communication and education in this area. These findings suggest that managers may need additional support and training in SHRM to implement it more effectively and manage personal risk. This study may be an important step towards developing and improving SHRM practices, highlighting the need for further research in this area.

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