

How Flexible Human Resource Management Systems contribute to organizational resilience of the Russian companies?

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Introduction. In recent decades, companies are increasingly faced with unforeseen events and abrupt changes in the external and internal environment, which can pose a threat to its existence and resilience. Organizational resilience is associated not only with incremental changes in the environment, but also with events that can undermine the stability and security of the organization. (Annarelli & Nonino, 2016). These events include the COVID-19 pandemic, which, on the one hand, has become a serious challenge for HR, on the other hand, has led to an increase in the importance of people management in the organization. Since the 1990s, the scientific literature has been discussing the issue of flexibility in human resource management (HRM) as a necessary condition for the organization's adaptability to a changing environment and uncertainty. (Wright & Snell, 1998; Chang et al., 2013; Kabalina et al., 2019; Lakshman et al., 2020). (Wright & Snell, 1998) (Wright & Snell, 1998) argued that firms require flexible human resource management (HRM) systems to achieve dynamic compliance with the requirements of an uncertain competitive environment. (Wright & Snell, 1998) argued that firms require flexible human resource management (FHRM) systems to achieve dynamic fit with the requirements of an uncertain competitive environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic as a disruptive event has made it clear that organizations need to be more flexible to adapt quickly (Collings et al., 2021). HRM department has the potential to strengthen its role in the company by focusing on flexibility-oriented HRM systems that help to ensure organizational resilience. While much attention has been paid to organizational resilience, little is known about which HRM systems contribute to it.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the relationship between the use of Flexible HRM systems by companies and organizational resilience interpreted as a result of rapid adaptation to external shocks of maintaining development potential.

Hypothesis. HR service has a specific bundle of flexibility-focused resources, tools for implementing and tools for implementing HRM practices that distinguish companies with varying levels of organizational resilience.

Basic concepts and measurements. Previous research has focused on HR flexibility at the individual level (flexibility in employee competencies and behaviors) and at the

organizational level (HR practices that develop these employee competencies). (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). We propose to interpret the Flexible HRM system through the role of HR service as a critical player in organizational resilience. Based on the typology proposed by (Chang et al., 2013), 2 dimensions of Flexible HRM system were identified: resource flexibility and coordination flexibility. Resource flexibility (RFHRM) implies that HR service has a wide range of tools for implementing core HR functions, as well as using flexible forms of employment and digital technologies. Coordination flexibility (CFHRM) includes the presence of a set of strategic and regulatory documents, the distribution of responsibility between the HR service and line managers for the implementation of policies in various areas of HRM, a variety of top-down and bottom-up communication channels, the availability of an information and analytical system and an automated service at the request of employees (employee self-service).

Despite the fact that academic interest in organizational resilience as a research area has been steadily growing in recent years, its conceptualization has not yet been fully developed. Many studies often use a definition of organizational resilience drawn from various scientific disciplines or levels of analysis. There is no consensus on the meaning of sustainability and the elements it contains. As noted by (Carmeli & Markman, 2011), resilience—the ability of a firm to adapt, recover quickly, and then thrive despite a catastrophic event—applies to various managerial constructs. Most studies point to organizational capabilities, resources or processes that appear to be important for resilience (eg Gittell et al. 2006). Resilience is also seen as the result of organizations performing well during a crisis or recovering from disruptions (eg Horne, 1997). A limited number of studies of HRM systems focused on flexibility have shown that such systems are directly or indirectly related to organizational absorptive capacity, organizational ambidexterity, environmental responsiveness, firm performance and innovativeness (Chang et al., 2013; Lakshman et al., 2020; Úbeda-García et al., 2017). In our study, organizational resilience is considered as the result of a company's functioning during a crisis (a disruptive event) and is expressed in maintaining a competitive ability compared to other companies in the industry in terms of such indicators as the quality of the product (services), the level of productivity, profitability and innovation.

Research methodology. The study is based on the use of a mixed methodology. At the first stage, in-depth interviews were conducted with HR managers and specialists from 7 companies representing industries such as metallurgy, chemistry, information technology, finance, scientific and technological development. Materials about companies from open sources were also studied. A thematic analysis of qualitative textual data was carried out with the identification of categories that characterize the interpretation of organizational resilience by HR professionals, as well as the HRM system at the strategic and operational levels and its

contribution to the formation and maintenance of organizational resilience of companies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the qualitative analysis were used to select indicators for the model based on the quantitative survey data.

The second stage of the study was devoted to the formation of an organizational resilience index (ORI) of companies under study and its testing on the data of the Cranet survey, which involved HR managers and specialists from 367 Russian companies. The sample of companies was compiled according to three quota parameters (federal district, number of employees, type of economic activity) based on Rosstat data for 2020. To demarcate companies according to indicators of organizational resilience, a decisive fuzzy function was built to determine the degree of organizational resilience. Model building and calculations were made using Malab™ R2017b.

In order to test whether the RFHRM and CFHRM indicators can reflect the difference in subsamples according to the developed ORI, the Kruskal-Wallis test was applied, based on checking the equality of the medians of several samples using IBM SPSS Statistics 27.

Results. Three groups of companies were identified with different index (level) of organizational sustainability: low (139 companies), medium (108 companies) and high (120 companies). The characteristics of a Flexible HRM system in the companies with a high level of organizational resilience are revealed. In terms of RFHRM, such companies demonstrate the greatest diversity in recruitment, selection and development methods, a high level of digitalization and the use of flexible working hours scheme compared to companies with medium and low levels of sustainability. They can also be characterized by the largest variety of coordination tools (CFHRM), including digital self-service, a variety of formalized regulatory documents and bottom-up communications.

No difference was found between the level of ORI of companies in terms of the variety of reduction practices, the variety of top-down communications and the distribution of responsibility in solving personnel management issues between line managers and the HR service.

Our study **contributes to the existing literature** in several ways.

First, it expands the discussion of the underexplored concept of flexibility-oriented HR systems.

Second, the study developed new approaches to measuring the flexible HRM system and organizational resilience.

Third, the relationship between flexibility-oriented HRM and organizational resilience was assessed. Thus, we propose to expand the scope of the debate on the impact of HRM on

company's performance and include organizational resilience as one of the characteristics of a company's performance in the face of uncertainty and turmoil in the external environment.

Limitations. The study was of an exploratory nature, the measurements of the main constructs was based on the Cranet questionnaire, which was not initially focused on the study of the proposed topic. Associated with this is the limited choice of indicators for both Flexible HRM systems and organizational sustainability. The model was tested on the data of one country. We can assume the presence of distorted information about the company, since the respondents could have a positive attitude towards their organization.

Future research directions may be related to a deeper study of highly resilient companies, the inclusion of expert rating in the analysis of fuzzy sets, and the study of membership functions for input variables in the organizational resilience index.

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