

MODEL OF IMPLEMENTING THE PERSONNEL FUNCTION IN MUNICIPAL HOUSING MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS - A CASE STUDY OF POLAND

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: personnel function, housing property management, municipal housing stock, housing organizations, polish municipalities	Housing plays a crucial role in urban development, and social housing management has become a vital aspect of urban management. The social housing sector has experienced significant changes worldwide in recent decades, particularly regarding housing management. In Poland, this sector mainly comprises municipal housing stock, for which public and private housing organizations provide management services appointed by municipalities or public-private homeowners associations. An essential part of these management services includes personnel management, a topic that is rarely discussed in the real estate literature. The study aimed to identify the model of implementing the personnel function in municipal housing stock management organizations in Poland. Research was conducted using a survey method on a representative sample of such organizations in 2022-2023. The research thesis that the actual model for implementing the personnel function in most surveyed organizations, encompassing many elements of the Human Resource Management concept, aligned more closely with the traditional than the capital model of people management was confirmed. The research has also indicated that improving the quality and efficiency of municipal housing management services from a personnel management perspective requires a greater focus on enhancing strategic-level people management and developing a soft approach in this area.
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1. Introduction

Development of the knowledge-based economy, high competitiveness, and changes in the labor market, as well as ongoing transformations of the content and nature of work and employment structures, force organizations to seek and implement new, more effective concepts and methods in the implementation of the personnel function. This function belongs to the basic functions of organizational management and generally includes all activities related to the employment of employees in the organization. Its scope includes executive, advisory, and regulatory activities related to the functioning of people in the organization, which can be considered in the task (processes, projects), institutional (actors, structures), and instrumental (tools) dimensions. The modern view

of the personnel function is associated with the implementation of the concept of Human Resources Management (HRM), which is regarded as a comprehensive and coherent approach to the employment and management of people. The overarching aim of HRM is to contribute to the improved efficiency of the organization by employees through the application of policies and practices in the areas of designing its development, human resources acquisition, learning and development, performance and remuneration, as well as offering benefits and providing services that improve the well-being of the people employed (Subramony, 2009; Juchnowicz, 2014; Armstrong, 2016; Pocztowski, 2018). This implies the need to change the traditional people management model towards developing a model based on using the

organization's human capital as a key factor in efficiently achieving the organization's goals and building its competitive advantage. These changes are becoming important in the housing industry, especially in housing organizations involved in public (social) housing management. This is because these organizations are, on the one hand, subject to increasing economic pressure under the banner of New Public Management (Priemus et al., 1999; Walker, 2000; Laffin, 2019; Muczyński, 2023b) and, on the other hand, targeted at the most vulnerable sections of the population.

This study focuses on the social housing sector in Poland, which consists predominantly of rental dwellings owned by municipalities that make up the municipal housing stock (MHS). As a result of the restructuring and privatization of municipal property initiated in the early 1990s, the MHS has been divided into two segments. The first segment (S1) includes municipal dwellings in buildings that constitute local authorities' exclusive property. In this segment, housing management activities (including HRM) were predominantly performed by municipal housing management units (MHMUs), which are public organizations operating as self-government budgetary units or establishments and municipal companies. The second (S2) segment of MHS includes municipal dwellings in buildings of mixed ownership that are owned by public-private homeowners associations (HOAs). In this segment, housing management activities regarding common properties are provided by housing property management entities, operating mostly as private property management firms (PPMFs). In this study, the two aforementioned types of organizations (MHMUs and PPMFs) are referred to as municipal housing stock management organizations, abbreviated as housing organizations (HOs). They were studied jointly in a single integrated research procedure.

The main aim of the study was to identify the model of implementing the personnel function in municipal housing stock management organizations in Poland and to indicate the directions of changes in this model to improve the quality and efficiency of housing management services provided by these organizations. The motivation for this research was, on the one hand, the crucial importance of people management in achieving the management goals of organizations in the municipal (social) housing sector and, on the other hand, the relatively long period of evolution of these organizations in response to the significant changes in

their environment that have occurred since the beginning of the transition period in Poland. Furthermore, in the last decade, the problems of people management in MHS management organizations in the Polish housing literature, as well as in the international literature, have not been widely exposed, being treated rather superficially. The few studies on the subject (Tertelis, 2000, 2009; Majchrzak, 2005; Marona, 2018) generally emphasized the need to improve the quality of customer service in public organizations involved in MHS management, including MHMUs and other municipal units, and in particular such people management shortcomings as inefficient motivation, as well as the lack of evaluation and qualification improvement (training) systems for employees, lack of linkage between work performance and remuneration, uneven workload, blurred division of competences and responsibilities, lack of task delegation and inclusion of employees in decision-making processes, the politicization of personnel decisions, frequent and ill-considered organizational changes, overstaffing, etc. Analogous research on personnel function in private MHS management organizations (PPMFs) on a larger scale has not been undertaken in Poland so far. Taking into account general development trends in the implementation of the personnel function in management theory and practice (e.g., Delery & Roumpi, 2017; Boon et al., 2018; Tamunimiebi et al., 2023) and recognizing the specifics of property management in the social housing sector, the following research thesis was set on the way to achieving the main aim of the study: *The real model of implementing the personnel function in most municipal housing stock management organizations in Poland, covering many elements of the Human Resource Management concept, corresponds to a greater extent to the traditional than to the capital model of people management.*

Following the Introduction, this paper contains five sections. The second section outlines the literature review, focusing on social housing management in the European context and the evolution of the HR function in organizational management. The third section covers the material and methods used for achieving the main aim of the study, while the fourth section presents the results of the empirical research, and the fifth section discusses them. Finally, the sixth section concludes the findings and outlines their limitations and implications with recommendations for further research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social housing management from the European perspective

Social housing is one of the housing tenures in national housing systems (Scanlon et al., 2015; Costarelli et al., 2020), which is defined in different ways in individual European countries and evolves (Poggio & Whitehead, 2017; Pittini, 2019). In general, social housing is housing for people whose needs are not met by the open market, and where there are rules for allocating housing to benefit households. It is also seen as a system that provides long-term housing to a group of households defined only by their limited financial resources, using a system of distribution and subsidies (Granath Hansson & Lundgren, 2019). Despite the lack of a common definition in the European context, each country has forms of social housing designed to satisfy the needs of households who cannot compete in the marketplace for housing of an acceptable standard (Oxley, 2009). Nowadays, social housing in Europe is a combination of housing owned and managed by government institutions or local authorities and a variety of voluntary or not-for-profit associations and foundations, public or private not-for-profit companies, cooperative organizations, and private investors that provide social housing (OECD, 2020).

Social housing management is interpreted as the set of all activities to produce and allocate housing services from the existing social housing stock (Priemus et al., 1999). It consists of many activities, including technical management (maintenance, repairs, renovations, etc.), social management (housing allocation, etc.), financial management (housing finance, rent policy), and tenure management (buying, selling). Social housing management has been transformed in response to the reduction of public finance for housing, decentralization and deregulation of public services, as well as the privatization of public housing (since the mid-1970s in Western Europe and since the 1990s in transition countries) (Oxley, 2009; Scanlon et al., 2015; Poggio & Whitehead, 2017; Muczyński, 2023a). Such changes, along with evolving national housing policies and markets, as well as cultural and demographic changes, have had significant impacts on the strategies of social housing management organizations. These impacts have been expressed in the increasing application of business principles within social housing management, including the rising use of business-like approaches to enhance

operational efficiency without changing the social goals of the organization and the increasing market orientation within the business strategy itself, as well as a broadening of services provided by these organizations (Walker, 2000; Chischke, 2009). These changes significantly influence the principles and models of Human Resources Management (HRM) in social housing management organizations; however, this topic has not been extensively explored in the literature. Prominent academic journals in this area focus on issues such as performance management (Gruis, 2005; Manville & Greatbanks, 2020), hybridity and social entrepreneurship (Mullins et al., 2012, 2018), or competition (Oxley et al., 2008; Elsinga et al., 2009; Lennartz, 2016) in the social housing sector. Some authors explore these issues through the lens of the institutional logic theory (Morrison, 2016; Read & Sedgwick, 2023), while others focus on organizational (Muczyński, 2018; van Bortel & Gruis, 2019), social (Costarelli et al., 2020; Muczyński et al., 2022), or technological (Castellano-Román et al., 2022; Corallo et al., 2023) innovations in such housing organizations.

Several studies related to the implementation of the personnel function in social housing management organizations (Chischke, 2009; Gruis et al., 2009; Blomé, 2010) emphasize the need to train staff to adopt a more customer-focused orientation, along with the challenge to be more "business-like" in terms of efficiency and service quality. They also pointed out the need to engage staff in the formulation of organizational strategy and to decentralize decisions to create greater motivation for employees and improve relations between employees and tenants to more easily involve the latter in participating in the analyzed management processes. In addition to developing desired competencies and skills in employees due to increasing market orientation, diversification, innovation, and proliferation of mixed ownership, recurring HRM principles include internal mobility and promotion, social dialogue and engagement, commitment, etc.

2.2. Evolution of the personnel function in organizational management

On the ground of management theory and practice, there is talk about the evolution of the personnel function, where, despite the differences in its development in different countries, industries, or organizations, the general direction of changes in the approach to its exercise is indicated, consisting in the transition from casual activities, through routine administration, to the strengthening and consolidation of it as a full-fledged management domain,

implemented both at the operational and strategic levels (Pocztowski, 2018). In other words, the evolution in people management is a shift from human resources administration, as a service activity to the business, to a process approach in performing key management functions (Juchnowicz, 2014). The main phases in the evolution of personnel approaches corresponded to the major schools and currents of management science. Thus, chronologically, several characteristic concepts (models) in the personnel function development in organizations can be distinguished. Among the most commonly used are (Listwan, 2010; Weiskopf & Munro, 2012):

- 1) *Traditional (Administrative) Model* - core issues are work division, work productivity, physical working conditions, discipline, control, financial (wage) incentives, social care, specialization of managerial work, cooperation, and authority.
- 2) *Human Relations Model* - core issues are social needs of employees, job satisfaction, communication, work extension, steering style, and managerial qualities.
- 3) *Human Resource Model* - basic issues are: creativity, employee and organizational development, management participation, influence on results, responsibility, equal and fair treatment of employees, autonomy, systemic organization, and personnel activities.
- 4) *Human Capital Model* - basic issues are improvement, development, and measurement of human capital, impact on organizational value, talent management, knowledge management, outsourcing, teleworking, virtualization of the HR function, corporate social responsibility, leadership, internationalization, and wide use of ICT technology.

The modern approach to people management is based on the concept of Human Resource Management (HRM). In general, it encompasses shaping strategies, processes, structures, and tools to support the achievement of high work productivity and the enhancement of the quality and value of human capital as a source of value generation for stakeholders. The core assumptions of this model include the following (Pocztowski, 2018):

- a) perceiving HR in the organization as a source of its competitive advantage,
- b) integration of the HR strategy into the general organization strategy,
- c) active inclusion of line managers in the processes of planning, organizing, directing, and

controlling personnel matters,

- d) emphasizing the importance of organizational culture as a basis for HR activities and the progressive individualization of work relationships,
- e) developing direct forms of employee participation in organizational life,
- f) changing the leadership style towards transformational leadership,
- g) customer orientation in relations between employees in the organization.

HRM is considered in the context of organizational strategy, structure, and culture, and is practiced at operational and strategic levels. The operational dimension boils down to the efficient conduct of activities related to planning, hiring, and recruiting staff; managing teams; appraising, rewarding, and training staff; as well as steering productivity and work costs. An important function here is also monitoring the existing personnel system and its improvement. The strategic dimension, in turn, relies on anticipating future human capital enabling competitive advantage through the delivery of stakeholder value, and then developing programs to achieve these objectives.

The implementation of the HRM model is linked to the transition from the traditional view of the personnel function, in which the basic tasks of the Human Resource Unit (HRU) boil down to ensuring order and policing the organization, compliance with regulations, and administration and formalization at the level of work positions, to a new view, where the HRU becomes a strategic partner acting for effective execution of the organizational strategy, starting with participation in the formulation of the general and personnel strategy, through the development and implementation of HRM practices in line with them. In such a model the objectives and tasks of the HRU are realized mainly through five basic HRM processes, which include (Szumowski 2010):

- planning, recruiting, selecting, and placement of HR to provide the organization with the necessary set of competencies in the context of achieving strategic objectives,
- training and development of HR aimed at minimizing the competence gap,
- organizational development that is understood as the orientation of HR systems to ensure the effective achievement of strategic objectives,
- performance management - designing and implementing processes to measure the efficiency of HR activities,

- employee relations management - focusing on the needs and problems of employees and supporting them.

It should be emphasized that various detailed models have been developed within the HRM concept in different countries (Armstrong, 2016; Gerhart & Feng, 2021), such as the Michigan or Harvard models (Tamunimiebi et al., 2023; Beer, 1997). The latter one was recommended (Tertelis, 2000) for application in restructuring processes of public organizations managing MHS in Poland. The HRM concept sets the major trends for the development of the personnel function in organizations, as related concepts such as Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) and Human Resource Development (HRD) have developed from it. The former involves a strong desire to integrate HRM into the strategic management process, while the latter focuses on encouraging staff to acquire new skills through various training programs and learning modalities. Both of these concepts have clear links with HRM, just as their orientation towards the development of human capital is evident (Listwan, 2010).

Due to the rapid development of knowledge management and many other challenges related to the implementation of the personnel function in organizations, the HRM model is evolving towards the model of Human Capital Management (HCM). The HCM model is increasingly being discussed as a new model for people management in an organization. The capital model is nowadays treated as an integral part of business, aimed at building the organization's long-term value, shifting from performing an administrative (service) function to implementing innovative and proactive activities (e.g., Subramony, 2009; Sears, 2010; Delery & Roumpi, 2017; Boon et al., 2018). In this model caring for professional development, managing careers, competencies, and talents, and building employee commitment are viewed as investments with a defined rate of return. It is based on principles such as (Morawski, 2010):

- involving all employees in the organization's affairs,
- offering special programs to the best employees in terms of motivation, development, and work organization,
- creating a strong organizational culture that integrates all employees, strengthens bonds, and encourages cooperation and knowledge sharing,
- introducing coaching leadership styles in the relationship between superiors and subordinates,
- continuous updating of employees'

competencies through training on the job, exchange of experiences, use of company databases or knowledge-sharing platforms, etc.,

- dissemination of the institution of mentors overseeing the staff development,
- moving away from traditional remuneration systems based on strict job definition and moving towards performance-based motivation and competence development.

In the HCM model, efficient leadership focused on building teams characterized by high employee commitment plays an important role. This model also draws attention to the importance of a strategic approach related to *High-Performance Work Systems* (e.g., Boxall, 2012; Hey et al., 2024), which implies linking personnel strategy to the organization's strategy and translating it into HRM practices in areas such as efficient HR acquisition, motivational remuneration, professional appraisal linked to performance, investment in employee development to improve organizational performance through competence development, increased commitment and motivation of employees (Huselid, 1995; Subramony, 2009). Key practices include measures to increase employee participation in existing management and decision-making processes, the intensity of communication, information transfer, and knowledge sharing, which include extensive delegation, the creation of autonomous groups and project teams, and coaching and mentoring. The basis for an organization's choice of specific personnel management practices is the situational context, shaped, among other things, by financial and organizational capabilities and the professionalization degree of organizational management (Zajac, 2014).

3. Material and methods

The primary research method used to collect empirical material to identify the model of implementing the personnel function in MHS management organizations (HOs) in Poland was survey research. The proposal of a model structure for survey research methodology in management sciences (Matejun, 2016) was used to solve the designed research problem. So the applied research procedure consisted of the following stages:

1. Identifying previous research related to achieving the main aim of the study and supporting the verification of the research hypothesis.
2. Conducting a pilot (preliminary) study on purposefully sampled HOs using an initial version of the survey questionnaire as a research

tool.

3. Conducting a proper study on a representative sample of HOs using a verified version of the survey questionnaire with additional support from direct unstructured interviews.
4. Analytical processing of the empirical material obtained, graphical presentation, and discussion of the research results towards verification of the research hypothesis and achievement of the main aim of the study.
5. Formulating conclusions regarding the model of implementing the personnel function in the surveyed HOs with an indication of the limitations and implications of the research and directions for their further development.

After identifying general trends in the evolution of the personnel function in organizational management, particularly in those managing social housing stock (first stage), a pilot study was conducted (second stage). This stage was performed in the last quarter of 2022 on a purposefully chosen sample of 10 MHS management organizations operating in the Warmia and Mazury Province in Poland. An initial version of the questionnaire was used, which took into account the general construction principles (Dyduch, 2015) and the specifics of the research problem. The survey questionnaire was sent after prior phone contact with people responsible for the HR function in the surveyed HOs. In light of the pilot research results, the initial version of the questionnaire was verified and supplemented. The final structure of the questionnaire consisted of two main groups of questions, the first of which related to the general characteristics of the surveyed organization and the second to the solutions applied in the implementation of the personnel function in the organization. The questions in the first group concerned the following characteristics of the surveyed organization: ownership form, organizational and legal structure (single-owner enterprise, civil company, limited liability company, self-government budgetary unit, or self-government budgetary establishment), type of the managed MHS (Segment S1, Segment S2 or both at the same time), location (according to the size of the municipality and the province), average employment and the number of employees in the Human Resource Unit (HRU). The second group included questions on such personnel function issues in the surveyed HOs as (1) the general approach to the importance of people in the organization, (2) the dominant approach to people management, (3) the most important goals of

personnel policy, (4) the dominant features of personnel policy, (5) strategy and procedures of people management in the organization, (6) the importance of personnel processes for the functioning of the organization, (7) the role (8) and core tasks of the Human Resource Unit (HRU) in organizational management, and (9) the instruments (tools) of people management applied in the organization. Three of these questions took the form of a matrix with a five-point (questions 5 - 6) or three-point (question 3) response scale, respectively.

The proper study (third stage) was conducted in two rounds in the first half of 2023. To ensure the high representativeness of the survey, the questionnaire was sent electronically to HOs located in all 302 urban municipalities in Poland. An accompanying letter was attached to each questionnaire, which provided information on the aims of the survey and the use of the results. Depending on the type and size of the surveyed organization, the respondents were either top management representatives, HRU managers, or designated persons responsible for the implementation of the personnel function in HOs. Approximately one-third of the respondents were additionally interviewed to clarify or specify issues raised in the survey questionnaire. A total of 116 survey questionnaires were returned, giving an overall return rate of 38.4%. After eliminating questionnaires filled out incompletely, the survey sample comprised a set of 110 municipal housing stock management organizations (HOs) spread across Poland. Given the size and structure of the survey sample, the obtained empirical material was considered sufficiently representative for the research concerning the identification of the real model of implementing the personnel function in MHS management organizations in Poland. This material formed the basis for analytical processing and discussion of the findings towards verifying the hypothesis and achieving the main aim of the study (in the fourth stage), as well as formulating the conclusions, limitations, and implications of the research (in the fifth stage).

4. Results

4.1. Survey sample

Analytical processing and synthesis of the obtained empirical material in terms of answers to the questions from the mentioned first group allowed us to characterize the emerged survey sample of the surveyed MHS management organizations (HOs) in Poland. Analyzing the ownership structure of the

examined organizations, it was found that 60.0% of the number of all HOs in the sample were municipally owned (MHMUs), 38.2% were privately owned (PPMFs), and only 1.8% were under mixed (public-private) ownership. In terms of the structure of organizational and legal forms, the sample was dominated by self-government budgetary units (32 units), self-government budgetary establishments (28 units), and limited liability companies (24 units). Single-owner enterprises (16 units) and civil companies (10 units) accounted for a much smaller sample share. Taking into account the type (segment) of MHS managed, it was found that the sample was dominated by organizations managing only housing properties owned by public-private homeowners associations (HOAs) (segment S2), the number of which reached 54 units, which accounted for 49.1% of the number of all organizations in the survey sample. In second place were HOs managing housing properties owned exclusively by the municipality (segment S1), with a total of 48 units (43.6%). There were by far the fewest organizations in the survey sample managing both segments of the MHS, as their number reached only 8 units (7.3%). The proper representativeness of the emerged survey sample is confirmed by the locational characteristics of the examined HOs according to the size of the municipality and the province (voivodeship) in which they are situated. Thus, among all HOs included in the survey sample, 21.8% (24 units) were located in urban municipalities with up to 20,000 inhabitants, 34.5% (38 units) in municipalities with 20,000 to 50,000 inhabitants, 27.3% (30 units) in municipalities with 50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants and

16.4% (18 units) in municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. The largest number of HOs were located in Warmińsko-Mazurskie (14 units), Mazowieckie (10 units), and Dolnośląskie (9 units) provinces of Poland. Intermediate places in this regard were occupied by Małopolskie, Pomorskie, Śląskie, and Wielkopolskie provinces (8 units), as well as Łódzkie, Podlaskie, Podkarpackie, and Zachodniopomorskie provinces (6 units each). The fewest number of HOs in the sample came from Lubelskie and Świętokrzyskie provinces (5 units each), as well as Lubuskie, Kujawsko-Pomorskie (4 units), and Opolskie (3 units) provinces. Thus, it follows that the sampled HOs were pretty evenly distributed throughout the whole territory of Poland, and their number was proportional to the number of all urban municipalities in individual provinces. The structure of sampled HOs by average annual employment (Fig. 1) shows that the survey sample was dominated by small entities employing 10 to 24 people (38.2%) and the fewest number of large entities employing more than 100 people and more (9.1%).

The final characteristic of the survey sample resulting from the first group of questions in the questionnaire concerned the structure of sampled HOs by the number of persons employed in the Human Resource Unit (HRU), which in percentage terms was shown in Fig. 2. The data showed that the survey sample was dominated by HOs employing 1 person in their HRU (62.7%), and the fewest were HOs employing more than 5 people in their HRU (3.6%). This structure was related to the employment and ownership structure of HOs in the sample.

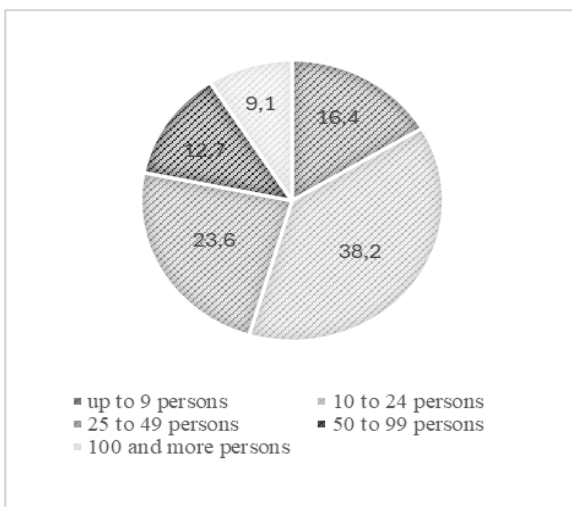


Fig. 1. The structure of sampled HOs by average annual employment (in %). *Source: own study.*

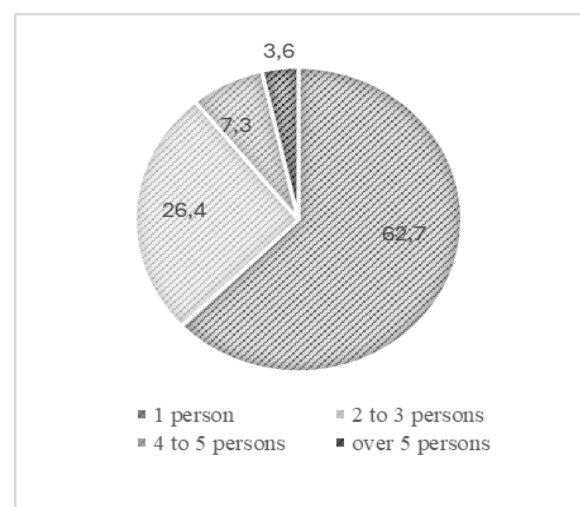


Fig. 2. The structure of sampled HOs by number of persons employed in the HRU (in %). *Source: own study.*

4.2. The real model of implementing the personnel function in the sampled housing organizations

The evolution of the personnel function was closely related to the changes that have occurred in *the general approach to the importance of people in the organization*. Hence, recognizing this approach in sampled housing organizations was the first issue containing detailed questions addressed to respondents in the second part of the survey. After aggregating all the responses in the sample, it was found that the vast majority (60.9%) of HOs declared treating employees as a valuable resource that is an organizational asset to be developed. The traditional approach, in which employees are treated as a source of costs, a resource that should be used effectively in the organization, proved much less popular, as it was shared by 22.7% of HOs. In contrast, the modern (capital) approach, according to which employees are treated as the most valuable resource, capital, an element that builds the organization's value, in which to invest, turned out to be relatively the least popular during the period under review, as 16.4% of HOs opted for it. The second issue in this part of the questionnaire was to investigate the *dominant approach to people management in the organization*, where respondents were asked 8 pairs of in-depth questions with contrasting contents. Considering the percentage of all answers in the sample, the results showed that the majority (68.2%) of HOs confirmed declarations that people are treated as assets or capital of the organization, while 23.6% of them admitted treating people more as a source of costs. However, significantly more HOs emphasized the effective use of HR (65.4%) and meeting the organization's goals and needs (61.8%) than the effective communication, motivation, and leadership (38.6%) or striving to balance the goals and needs of the organization and employees (42.7%). Not surprisingly, creating a climate that promotes work efficiency (63.6%) was mentioned more often than creating an environment that fosters good relationships (40.9%). Significant involvement of employees in decision-making processes was declared by 42.7% of HOs, while minor participation of employees in such processes was admitted by only 31.8% of them. The attitude expressing a willingness to negotiate and compromise on employee issues through dialogue with employee representatives was much more widespread among HOs (51.8%) than that

of little willingness to engage in dialogue on employee issues (21.8%). In addition, limited information sharing with employees prevailed over fully informing them of important organizational matters. Nevertheless, in the practical implementation of the personnel function in sampled HOs, the "hard" (managerial) approach based on existing regulations and procedures (54.5%) still dominated over the "soft" (leadership) approach based on communication and cooperation (39.1%).

In the next step, *the personnel policy's most important goals and dominant features* in sampled HOs were identified. Based on the percentage of all answers in the sample, it was determined that the priority goals of personnel policy included preventing the outflow of competent, valuable employees (67.2%) and recruiting suitable personnel to work in the organization (61.8%). Other less frequently mentioned goals were motivating and increasing employee commitment (54.5%), continuous development of employee skills (48.2%), shaping desirable working relationships (40.0%), and people management that encourages initiative, creativity, and autonomy (33.6%). The findings of the survey showed that the dominant features of the personnel policy were, on the one hand, focusing on long-term employment of employees expressed by the prevalence of contracts for an indefinite period (89.1%), emphasizing the assessment of actual competencies when hiring an employee (66.4%), using simple selection procedures based on the evaluation of core requirements (58.2%), remuneration linked to the evaluation of work performance and competencies (55.4%), defining management roles with strict regulations (54.5%) and using the individualized work model (52.7%) more often than the teamwork model (47.3%). On the other hand, the dominant goals of this policy also include the promotion to managerial positions based on the assessment of competencies and predispositions (51.8%), shaping the organizational culture based on loyalty, commitment, and cooperation (60.9%), as well as putting pressure on employee development through large expenditures on training (50.9%).

Then, *the existing strategies and procedures of people management* in sampled housing organizations and *the importance of personnel processes for the functioning of these organizations* were analyzed. The research results concerning the first issue are presented in Fig. 3. The results presented show that in the majority (58.1%) of sampled HOs, a personnel strategy existed, either in the

form of an official document (33.6%) or in an informal form (24.5%). Taking both forms into account, the most frequently created procedures (sub-strategies) of people management included procedures for employee remuneration (86.3%), evaluation (83.6%), as well as recruiting and selecting employees (75.4%). In contrast, the least popular procedures were the procedure for dismissing employees (43.6%) and for career planning and promotions (33.8%). When examining the importance of personnel processes for the organizational functioning, it was found that high and very high importance was attributed by the largest percentage of sampled HOs to processes, such as personnel administration (89.1%), shaping the

remuneration system (85.4%), hiring (recruitment and selection) of employees (73.6%), or evaluating the results of their work (72.7%), as well as work analysis and employment planning (66.4%). A much smaller percentage of HOs rated the importance of personnel processes as high or very high concerning training and development (58.2%) and employee motivation (54.5%), as well as professional integration (51.8%), employee relationship management (40.0%), and employee dismissal (39.1%). In contrast, the lowest percentage of HOs gave high or very high importance to processes such as employee career planning (32.7%), employee relocation (26.4%), and personnel controlling (20.0%).

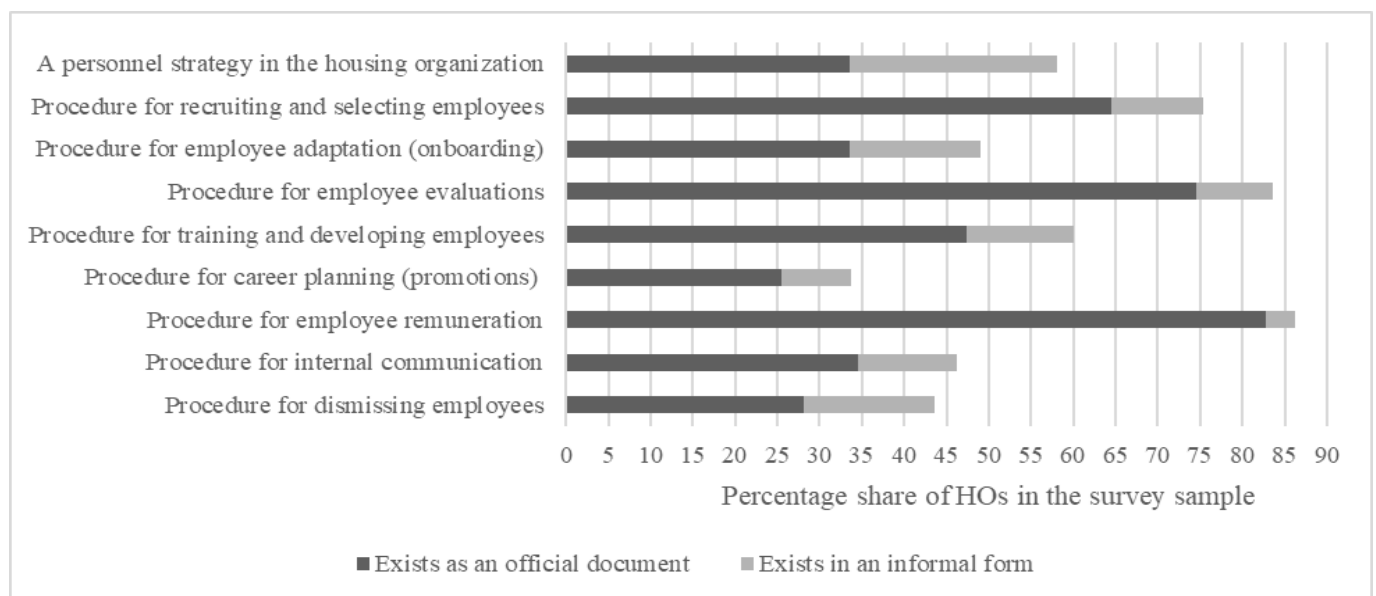


Fig. 3. Existing strategies and procedures of people management in sampled housing organizations. *Source:* own study.

The ongoing transformation of the personnel function often involves redefining *the role and core tasks of the Human Resource Unit (HRU)* in many organizations, which was the research subject in the next step. The results showed that in the percentage structure of sampled HOs, the HRU role was most often defined as similar to other organizational units (41.8%) or as auxiliary, with less importance than other units (26.4%). A much smaller percentage of HOs saw the HRU role as supportive, more important than other organizational units (15.4%), or, on the contrary, as subordinate, with little importance (11.8%). Only 3.6% of the sampled HOs perceived the HRU role as superior to other organizational units. In turn, the survey results concerning the core tasks of the HRU in sampled housing organizations are presented in Fig. 4. The highest percentage of HOs opted for traditional HRU

tasks, such as administering personnel matters (91.8%), developing procedures and documents related to employment (87.3%) or ensuring compliance with labor law and supervising work (83.6%). A much lower percentage of HOs opted for other HRU tasks shown in Fig. 4. The lowest percentage of HOs (less than 50.0%) opted for HRU tasks (not listed in Fig. 4) such as: developing and implementing system solutions in individual fields of HR, keeping labor cost accounts, analyzing and assessing the effectiveness of personnel processes, shaping employee attitudes and organizational culture, or monitoring the market environment, including the situation on the labor market.

In the final step, a wide range of people management elements in the instrumental (tool-based) dimension were surveyed, which have been applied in

sampled housing organizations. Commonly used people management tools in the organizations surveyed were workplace descriptions, which 82.8% of the organizations claimed to have. The majority of sampled HOs (68.2%) declared implementing a system of periodic employee evaluations, within the framework of which 57.3% evaluated work performance and 51.2% evaluated the competencies of their employees. However, the remuneration system on formalized work evaluation systems was declared by 34.5% of HOs, with 56.4% favoring variable remuneration depending on work performance, and 42.7% favoring remunerating

employees depending on work input and seniority. In addition, the motivation of employees in sampled housing organizations was significantly more often based on a system of extra-financial benefits (52.7%) than on a system of non-financial rewards (20.9%). It was also found that the training structure was dominated by training in "hard" skills (knowledge, professional skills), which was carried out by 51.8% of the organizations surveyed. Significantly fewer training courses were organized in "soft" (interpersonal) skills (35.3%), and the least in leadership and management skills (12.7%).

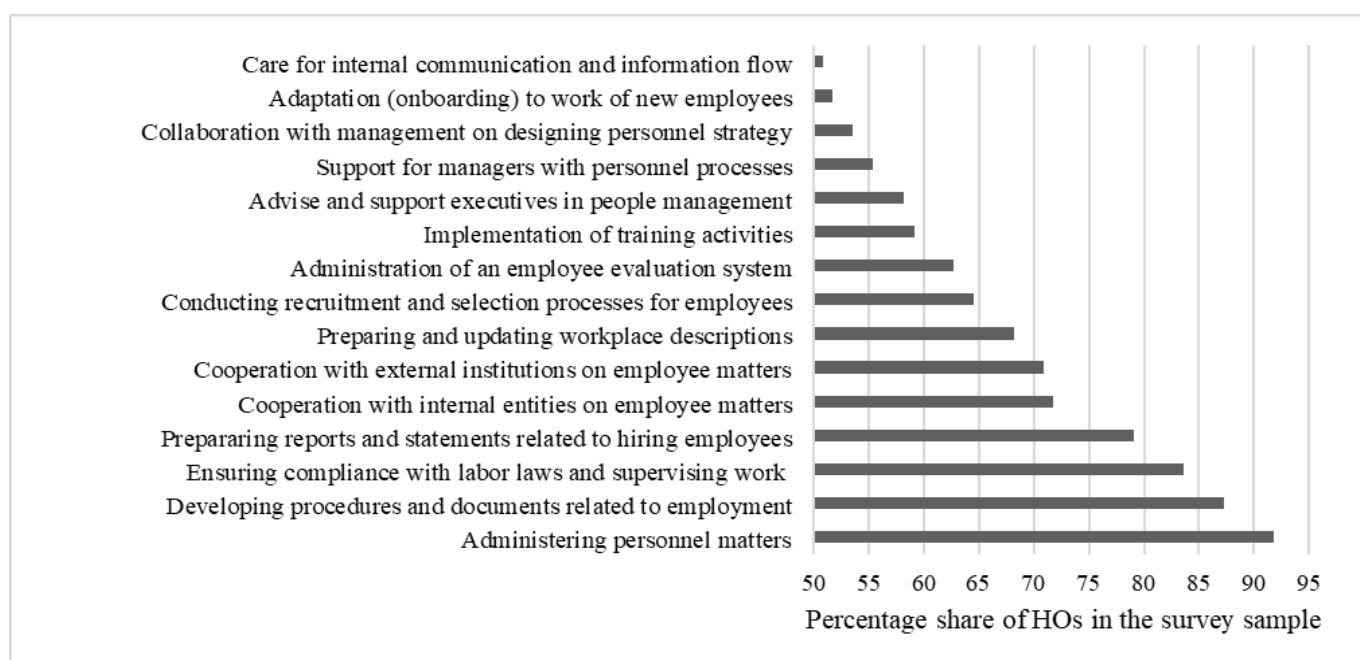


Fig. 4. Core tasks of the Human Resource Unit (HRU) in sampled housing organizations. *Source:* own study.

It was also established that the majority of sampled HOs organized meetings with their employees, including integration meetings (74.5%), informational meetings (66.7%), or consultation ones (54.2%), and 67.3% and 53.6% of them, respectively, used the Internet or Intranet to communicate with their employees. In terms of the percentage of all answers, practices such as involving employees in decision-making processes (39.1%), management by goals (27.3%), or implementing employee feedback programs (22.7%) were much less popular among the surveyed HOs. The rarely used tools included: employee opinion surveys, flexible forms of employment and work time organization, coaching, personnel audit and controlling, or competitions promoting creativity and innovation among

employees. Among the tools that were not applicable in any of the HOs were talent management programs, mentoring, or solutions facilitating work-life balance for employees.

5. Discussion

The synthesis of the presented structural analysis results allowed us to identify the real model of implementing the personnel function in municipal housing stock management organizations in Poland. Despite the existing discrepancies, when attempting to generalize the research results, there were reasonable grounds to claim that the obtained model in sampled HOs covered many elements of the Human Resource Management concept. This was confirmed by the dominant percentage of responses postulating, i.a.

treating employees as a valuable resource, an asset of the organization constituting a source of competitive advantage, as well as an emphasis on the implementation of goals and satisfaction of the organization's needs and on the planning, utilization, and measurement of human resources, evaluation of effectiveness and valuation of work, as well as a focus on creating a climate conducive to work efficiency, building motivation, and employee engagement, while maintaining the advantage of the hard (managerial) approach over the soft (leadership) one. The proliferation of the HRM concept in sampled HOs was also confirmed by the assumptions of the existing personnel policy, including a focus on acquiring and retaining competent and responsible employees, attention to the continuous development of the organization and personnel, and a closer link between remuneration and work performance, as well as the high popularity of developing both strategies and formalized procedures for people management, including procedures for employee remuneration, evaluation, recruiting and selecting.

However, an analysis of the importance of personnel processes and core tasks of the HRU showed that HOs still used a lot of solutions typical for the traditional model of people management, which focused i.a. on administering personnel matters, developing procedures and documents related to employment, ensuring compliance with labor laws, supervising work order and discipline, cooperating with internal and external entities on employee matters, etc. The traditional model was also used by a high percentage of HOs who admitted to treating employees mainly as a source of costs, with little employee participation in decision-making processes, limited employee information, and the dominance of the specialized work model. In the tool-related dimension, this model manifested itself, i.a., through workplace descriptions, simple selection procedures based on the assessment of only core requirements, the dominance of permanent work contracts, wage incentives, training in professional competencies, information and consultation meetings with employees, etc. The study also showed that the HOs surveyed have implemented solutions typical for the capital model of people management. This is expressed, i.a., in numerous declarations of treating employees as social capital that builds the value of the organization for stakeholders, in which one should invest, and in the growing role of HRU and a tendency to negotiate and compromise in employee matters. The spread of this model in surveyed HOs is also evidenced by the focus on

creating a climate conducive to interpersonal relations, shaping an organizational culture based on flexibility, commitment, and cooperation, as well as their emphasis on the continuous development of employees, including interpersonal, managerial, and leadership skills, or the broad use of ICT technology.

The results of the conducted research corresponded with the findings of earlier national and international studies, both in the area of social housing management and in the entire subdiscipline of HRM. Thus, limited employee involvement in the organisation's strategy development, a low degree of decentralisation of decision-making processes, and a moderate focus on social dialogue and creating an environment that fosters good relationships coincided with the research findings obtained by Chischke (2009) and Gruis et al. (2009). In turn, a high proportion of responses declared the use of non-performance-related remuneration, minor employee participation in decision-making, and low levels of task and responsibility delegation, relatively low spending on employee training, and limited information sharing with employees were in line with the findings published by Tertelis (2000, 2009). In addition, the low priority given to people management, which triggered initiative, creativity and autonomy, and to efforts attracting and retaining truly valuable people, confirmed earlier observations made by Majchrzak (2005). Furthermore, the dominance of a "hard" HRM approach based on existing rules and procedures in private HOs, and the prevalence of a "soft" approach based on communication and cooperation in public HOs, reinforced the views presented by Boyne et al. (1999). Furthermore, the results obtained confirmed the existing deficits in strategic thinking and activities in the area of human resource management. These relate in particular to the possession of a personnel strategy and key HRM formal procedures (for employee recruiting, selecting, remuneration, evaluation, training, and development) by housing organizations surveyed, and the position of the HRU in the organization, as well as the use some of the most popular HRM tools, which proved to be generally consistent with the findings presented in the comprehensive study by Poczowski (2018).

6. Conclusions

The research was aimed at identifying the real model of implementing the personnel function in municipal housing stock management organizations in Poland. The obtained model is the effect of the combined impact of both the historical conditions of personnel management in a centrally planned economy and the

experiences gained during the transition to a market economy, as well as the progressive development of the theory and practice of people management and new challenges arising from transformations in the global economy. Consequently, a heterogeneous population of HOs emerged, marked by diversity in terms of ownership structure, organizational and legal form, type of managed MHS, average employment, and number of employees in the HRU. This diversity was reflected in the research procedure through the appropriate sample selection. Moreover, such diversity meant that the people management function in sampled HOs did not develop equally concerning speed and scope in the task, institutional, and instrumental dimensions. Therefore, in many organizations surveyed, the applied methods of solving personnel problems were marked by solutions derived from various people management concepts. Detailed solutions in individual housing organizations were adapted to changes in people management's legal, technical, economic, and socio-cultural conditions.

The key conclusion of the research is linked to the positive verification of the research thesis that the real model of implementing the personnel function in most MHS management organizations in Poland, covering many elements of the HRM concept, corresponded more to the traditional than to the capital model of people management. Research has shown that since the transition to a market economy, there has been tremendous progress in people management in surveyed housing organizations, particularly in terms of changing the approach to the importance and the way people are treated, moving away from functionalism towards result-oriented, improving work efficiency, widespread use of ICT technology, etc. It was also noted that the modern elements of the capital model were emphasized much more strongly at the strategic than the operational level of people management in such organizations. The declarations made in management's task-related and institutional dimensions were not fully confirmed by the results concerning the practical functioning of its instrumental dimension. Research has shown that to improve the quality and efficiency of MHS management services from a personnel management perspective needs to pay greater attention to the importance of a strategic approach to people management, from defining a personnel strategy linked to the general strategy to implementing HR solutions and tools appropriately geared towards implementing this strategy and its priority goals. Much more emphasis should be placed on developing a

"soft" (leadership) model, including competence management, communication building, cooperation, and organizational commitment, in which the use of modern, effective tools tailored to both the organization's goals and the needs of employees could increase the effectiveness of HR and benefit both organizations and their employees. Untapped opportunities also lie in using tools such as flexible forms of employment and work organization, direct forms of employee participation in the organization's life, personnel auditing and controlling, as well as coaching, mentoring, talent management, and work-life balance programs.

The main limitations of this study stem from both the research methodology used and the structure of the survey sample. Methodological limitations occur because respondents were not always able to provide answers that accurately reflected their actual activities in the area of people management within their organizations. This is evident in cases where responses concerning HR strategy and policy were more aspirational than realistic, as they did not fully align with responses in institutional and tool-based areas of people management. Conversely, structural limitations arise from the fact that the survey sample was primarily composed of public entities, where the HR function is highly formalized by legal regulations, and, at the same time, a large proportion of small housing organizations (HOs) with no more than 50 employees, where HR implementation tends to be straightforward, less complex, and more intuitive. Although the survey sample is representative, such a structure may restrict flexibility and innovation in personnel management, including the full adoption of the HRM concept and a comprehensive approach to human capital development. The conclusions and limitations identified point to several key areas for future research in personnel management within housing organizations. These include an in-depth analysis of specific personnel management models used by HOs, a comparative analysis of HRM models in public and private housing organizations, and the development of both a "soft" model and a strategic perspective on personnel management in these organizations. Such research will help develop more effective personnel management strategies and practices in HOs, ultimately improving the quality and efficiency of services provided by these organizations.

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