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The philosophy of personnel management of small and Medium-sized businesses in Slovakia

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Abstract: Aims: The purpose of the research is to form a philosophical and ideological understanding of the small and medium-sized businesses personnel management effectiveness at the local-national (Slovak case) and global (the case of the European Union and the global economic dimension) levels of economic development. The article focuses on the interpretation peculiarities of the management system functioning in different socio-cultural conditions. Slovakia has both its own national and mental human-dimensional identifications of small and medium-sized business systems and is integrating into the pan-European paradigm of human resource management in the economy. The article offers a philosophical and economic justification for the ways of building progressive systems of economic activity involving employees of small and medium-sized businesses, which will be realised faster under conditions of orderly management strategies. **Methodology:** The research methodology included general scientific methods, special methodological approaches of scientific and economic discourse, and philosophical methodological principles that play the role of a correlation factor in building a holistic and multi-vector paradigm of personnel management. **Results:** The results of the study are based on the example of Slovakia and indicate that in the modern economic system of one of the countries of the European Union, two models of management strategies are being coordinated: the nationally oriented and the pan-European. Despite all attempts to unify the system of human resource management in the EU, the socio-economic, cultural, and mental specificity of a region, country or community retains a number of authentic and identifying elements of this cluster of economic activity. **Scientific Novelty:** The scientific novelty of the study lies in the attempt to build a new philosophy of human resource management in the deeply integrated EU economic system, which is not a traditional

attempt to unify the management system in all economic entities of the region but proposes the development of a dynamic paradigm of human potential management. The small and medium-sized businesses, due to the lack of scale of their structures, have more opportunities to implement a dynamic model of human resource management, where the most appropriate economic management characteristics will be actualized in a particular environment. **Conclusion:** The philosophy of human resource management of small and medium-sized businesses is focused on the following dimensions: axiological, creative and epistemological, ethical, socio-philosophical, anthropological.

Keywords: philosophy of economics, philosophy of management, management, management strategy, small and medium-sized business personnel.

Introduction

Human resource management is one of the key issues in modern economic life. Each country or the international community is constantly searching for an effective model of a management paradigm that could be applied in all economic systems. However, today's dynamic world hinders the development of such a universal management model. Economic clusters organise their work in different ways, so the scientific and economic community has recently established a clear position on differentiating approaches to large, medium, small, or individual businesses. The management segment is no exception to this trend, offering separate management models according to the scale of business structures. Small and medium-sized businesses have quite a lot in common in terms of human resources management, so the study presents the management philosophy jointly for these two clusters of the economy.

It is noted that the scientific research does not attempt to formulate a universal model of human resource management but indicates the features that affect management experience in clearly defined conditions: in small and medium-sized businesses localised in Slovakia as a country that is a member of the European Union economic community.

Research Problem

The research problem of the article reveals the content of the philosophical components of managerial activity in small and medium-sized business structures in Slovakia. The philosophy of management does not duplicate the practical and economic principles of the management model, but forms guidelines for their transformation in a dynamic socio-cultural environment. The management requires constant updating of existing mechanisms and tools, as in the modern world there is a constant process of introducing innovative elements into the economic system. Human resources are variable in the economic structure, so managing this segment is becoming more complicated while remaining a crucial task.

Research Focus

The focus of the study is to highlight the peculiarities of the formation and functioning (as well as transformation) of a management model for small and medium-sized businesses in an economically developing European country. The specifics of the national economy and the community mentality (in this case, a combination of global European and authentic Slovak) create interesting conditions for scientific research of management models and practices in Slovakia. At the same time, focusing on the small and medium-sized business segment adds to the research a new understanding of the positioning of management in business structures and the economic system as a whole.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The purpose of the article is to highlight the impact of the philosophical understanding of elements of the management model of small and medium-sized businesses development in Slovakia. The management model has both a global character (generally accepted economic characteristics of management experience, the European version of the management system) and a local character (nationally oriented management elements, local features of management realities). The objectives of the article are focused on two relevant dimensions:

- operational and practical, which defines the direct mechanisms and tools through which human resources management is carried out in small and medium-sized enterprises in Slovakia;
- strategic, in the course of which guidelines (including philosophical and ideological ones) of the management paradigm for the economy as a whole and the SME cluster, particularly, are formed.

Literature Review/Theoretical Overview

The article proposes two approaches to the philosophical interpretation of the HRM model: general and local. A similar format for covering the problem of managerial experience in the system of small and medium-sized businesses in Slovakia has already been used in the European scientific and economic discourse. Namely, Ližbetinová et al. (2019) propose two branches of discussion of the problem of SMEs' HR management in the scientific and economic discourse:

- Practical and operational cluster, which actualises the mechanisms of direct management of personnel in the workplace;
- Strategic vector, its purpose is focused on the formation of generally accepted universal management principles.

Penco et al. (2020) proposed a study on human resource management in medium-sized businesses that are quite actively developing in the European Union. Such studies are relevant to the current research, as they allow us considering the problem of management philosophy from different perspectives. Since its formation, the European Union has been actively working to unify all elements of economic activity, considering this approach to be the best solution to the issue of integration and the creation of a single economic space. Therefore, the principles of unification of management systems in EU countries will always be relevant and in demand.

Since the object of research of the current article is narrowed to the cluster of small and medium-sized businesses, attention is paid to the study by Harney & Alkhalaf (2021), which has actualised the separation of the context of small and medium-sized enterprises from the general topic of human resources management. However, one notes the generally accepted trend in the scientific and economic literature, which considers the philosophy of management in the general paradigm of economic activity, without providing individual business segments with radically different management guidelines.

Ofori-Amanfo et al. (2022) point to the impact of fundamental organisational capabilities on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises. For a long time, the economic model was characterised by an inertial path of development, which led to its linearity. This feature determined the content and format of management models. If taking as a basis the dynamic model of modern economic development, based on innovation, the need for new management mechanisms becomes obvious. It is clear that large multinational businesses are the first to undergo transformations in management, but small and medium-sized nationally oriented clusters are ready to implement progressive management ideas.

Bassi & Dias (2020) present the principles of management in the EU circular economy in the context of nationally oriented economies. Slovakia has successfully integrated into the economic system of the European Union, borrowing progressive ideas of management concepts for small and medium-sized businesses. The effectiveness of the integration of the Slovak economy can be assessed by analysing the growth of national socio-economic indicators, which are the best evidence of the success of the new format of relations in small and medium-sized enterprises.

Research Methodology

General Background

The methodological basis of the study is provided by the interaction of general scientific, scientific-economic, and philosophical-scientific methods, which form the necessary potential for identifying the problematic aspects of management concepts for small and medium-sized enterprises in Slovakia.

One of the methodological approaches that provide a characteristic of the creative and epistemological factor of management philosophy highlighted in the article is the concept of knowledge management (Animesh et al., 2019). Savov & Skočdopole (2021) also propose a methodological principle based on creativity - talent management. The methodological priority of the philosophy of the economy of the future is a balance between the principles of unification and differentiation of assets of any content and format. In terms of management, despite the general trend of unification in the European community, the authentic traditions of running a family or small professional business in Slovakia retain a strong position.

Gallo et al. (2019) propose the use of tools for assessing the quality of the management system - Total Quality Management (TQM) in small and medium-sized businesses, using the example of Slovakia. The issue of quality is relevant in the context of a philosophical and axiological understanding of the development of the management paradigm. The values that guide managers of different levels are transformed in the concepts of individual and collective productivity. Establishing interaction based on the principles of integrity between management and employees is the key to both business development and increasing the level of satisfaction from professional activities.

Loufrani-Fedida & Aldebert (2021) propose the use of a multi-level methodological approach to understanding competence management. This is how philosophical and anthropological guidelines are formed for studying the potential of human resources in business and ways to realise it. Human potential is interpreted as a dynamic variable component in the economic system and requires innovative multi-vector approaches to its disclosure and development in the conditions of functioning of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Data Analysis

The current study faced the problem of data lack (not only analytical but also statistical) on human resource management in the small and medium-sized segment of the Slovak economy. Almost all strategic human resource management (SHRM) models are focused on general economic indicators without differentiating by business scale (Atkinson et al., 2022). If this issue is narrowed down to the national economy, then the difficulty of informing the study is obvious.

Data collection for the current study has several sources. One of them is the materials of International Human Resource Management (IHRM), which form a component of the organisational culture of business (Smerek et al. 2021). It provides up-to-date information on human aspects that are economically interesting. The principles of human resources management, as well as other organisational and personnel elements, form an important segment of a scientific and economic nature.

Other sources of data are of a research nature, such as individual studies that examine the functioning of Slovak SMEs.

Research Results

The management philosophy has become a relevant element of the economic system, as the business organisation requires both the ordering of objective components and the formation of the human dimension of economic activity. Any business structure is a dynamic entity that operates according to pre-programmed socio-economic principles. The uniqueness of the HRM system lies in the fact that it combines both economic and social characteristics. At the same time, the study focuses not on a general understanding of the philosophy of HRM, but on the model of management in a specific environment (Slovak economy, the economic area of the European Union) and in a specific cluster of the economic system (small and medium-sized enterprises).

A key feature of the circular economy, which replaced the linear model, is the exclusivity of acceptable resource use (Levický et al., 2021). At the same time, for a long time, this concept had a more natural and ecological orientation. However, with the philosophical and anthropological renaissance in the modern scientific and worldview picture of the world, the concept of acceptable resource use is being reoriented towards humans. The content of the economy is increasingly gravitating towards human resources rather than natural, technological, or production capacities, which ultimately determines the return to the human dimension of management decisions in business.

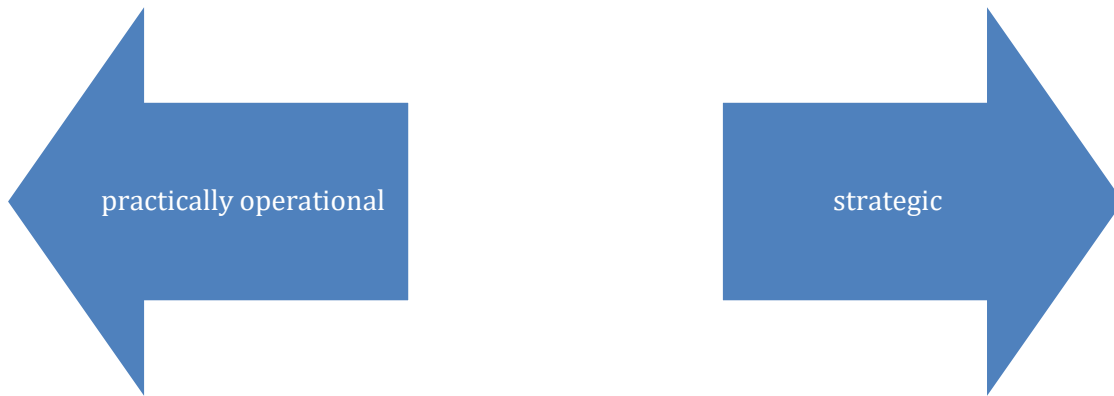
The design is an important issue for every economic model in the modern socio-cultural world. The format that the economic activity is realised is a determining factor for the formation of management decisions (Kumar Dey et al., 2022). The format of Slovakia's current economic model is largely dependent on the trends in economic activity in the European Union. Therefore, small and medium-sized businesses in Slovakia form their management models, balancing between European management innovation and national authenticity of work with personnel.

Recently, innovative elements of an information technology nature that mediate between managers and employees have been significantly strengthened (Niyi Anifowose et al., 2022). Innovation in general significantly improves the interaction between services, technology, and people in economic activity (Maurer, 2021). In the modern economic space, a paradigm is being formed where participants in the production process or the service sector in the structure of small and medium-sized businesses receive a new status and are re-positioned in the system of interconnections. Managers are increasingly delegating their powers to information technology systems that organise and control the work of their staff. Such innovation implies a simultaneous reduction of the subjective factor in managing and evaluating employee performance; on the other hand, it increases the responsibility of the person who is evaluated less biasedly, but more thoroughly by various evaluation programs and systems.

In modern economic models, the management philosophy focuses on two strategies for developing human resources in the structure of small and medium-sized businesses (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Dimensions of management strategies



Source: author's own development

Muñoz-Pascual et al. (2020) note, that there is a distinction between external and internal human resource management. In fact, the realisation that human resources are the most valuable asset for human-oriented small and medium-sized businesses forms the philosophical and axiological principles of working with the subject of the production process or service sector (Bartková, 2021). While big business or transnational corporations are more focused on the objective components of economic activity, for smaller business projects, a person remains the dominant factor where all vectors of organisational work are directed.

Despite the fact that the philosophical reflection touches upon many important aspects of managerial experience, the key issue in the economic dimension remains the problem of benefit or reward (Savov et al., 2022). Effective labour organisation is the key to another important economic indicator - the quality of products or services produced (Litvaj et al., 2023). A successful management model is focused on maintaining a balance in the dichotomy of quantitative performance and qualitative efficiency of economic activity.

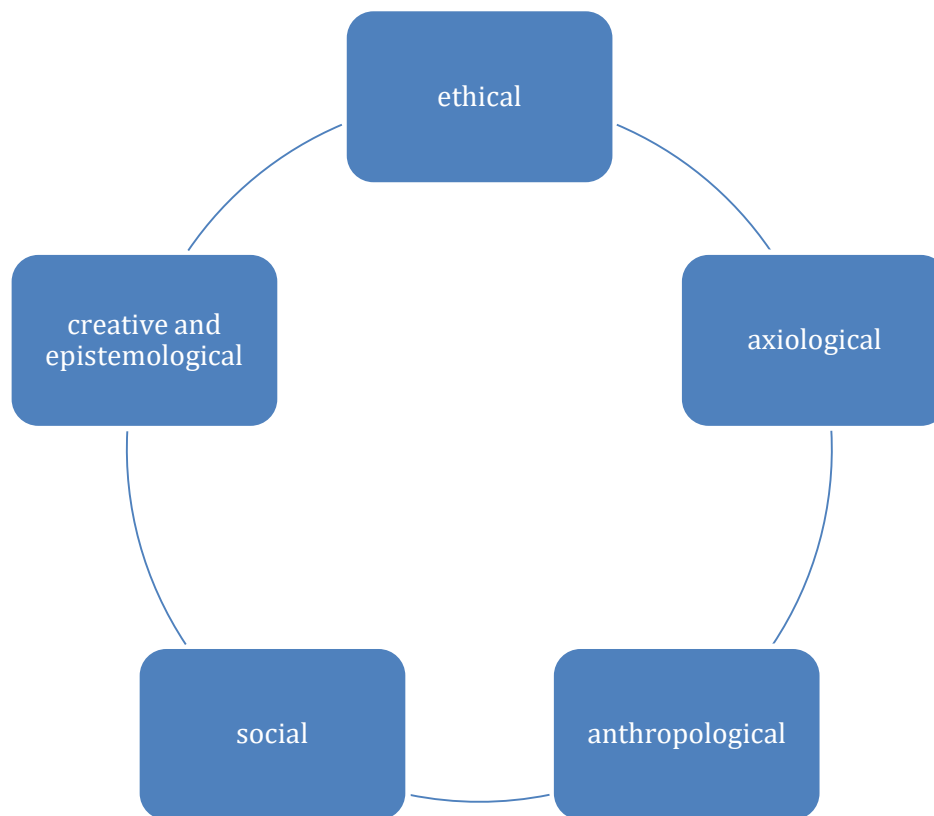
The practical-operational dimension of management involves the use of special tools in everyday business activities that help ensuring an effective management. Uhlík et al. (2022) refer to this type of communication tools. In the modern world, the functioning of small and medium-sized businesses is not limited to an office or production site. The high mobility of business structure participants and the information technology space allows them to be in touch under any conditions. Therefore, HR managers are actively using the ICT segment to organise management in a constant live or online mode.

In the system of small and medium-sized businesses, the results of work are of a practical and everyday nature and are determined in almost real-time, unlike medium-sized businesses, which postpone the results of work somewhat, and large businesses, which have a strategic long-term dimension. In such circumstances, the effectiveness of direct HR management is virtually monitored online.

The management philosophy consists of several main components (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Philosophically oriented elements of management



Source: author's own development

One of the key philosophically oriented aspects is the issue of the ethical factor in management (Lašáková et al. 2021). Adherence to the principles of humanity and integrity contributes to a healthy microclimate in the team and helps to increase labour productivity. Ethical norms act as a regulator in the relations between management and subordinates, forming the basis for a new type of cooperation - interaction rather than confrontation.

The traditional primacy of the controlling and regulatory function of management is gradually losing its relevance. The new management principles focus on building equal relationships with strict adherence to their functional responsibilities. This model is especially relevant for small and medium-sized businesses, where interpersonal relationships play a key role and form the strategy for developing human potential in business. A feature of the Slovak type of small and medium-sized businesses is the family-family model of business structure (Urbaníková et al., 2020). This format actualises the symbiosis of the traditional structure of professional and business relations and innovative transformations of this business segment.

Michulek & Krizanova (2023) note that in the modern economic system, corporate culture has become a strategic component. For large businesses, this format of organising economic activity has already become dominant and decisive. For small and medium-sized businesses, a period of transformation is coming in terms of corporate culture. It is worth noting the peculiarities (cultural, mental) that will make adjustments to the organisation of corporate culture on the ground.

The implementation of the corporate culture model will result in an innovative socio-philosophical dimension of HR management, which will include compliance with the principles of corporate social responsibility (Ubreziouva et al. 2022). This principle of responsibility will be applicable to all economic entities in the business structure. For the management, the key element of responsibility will be the relevance and appropriateness of management decisions (both current and strategic). The

staff, in turn, must adapt to the new management requirements, as direct management will gradually be replaced by other formats that will require more responsibility, initiative, and resilience from employees.

The heterogeneity of small and medium-sized business structures creates additional dangers for corporate social responsibility compliance (Rózsa et al., 2022). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) provide a dynamic (or, in our case, rather, a turnover) of personnel, which requires additional management skills (Kotane, 2022). At the same time, human resources remain the dominant element in the development of SMEs, as these structures lack global models of economic activity and large-scale production facilities or natural resources (Abdul Samad et al., 2021). In order to achieve the effectiveness of management decisions, a clear and understandable system of control over the realisation of human resources potential in business structures should be implemented (Ponisciakova et al., 2019). A problematic point for management in the small business system is a certain staff shortage (Gruenbichler et al., 2021). Focusing on a small or specific production or service model requires a small number of staff with a single manager who combines managerial, managerial, and administrative functions. This organisational structure is typical for small businesses in Slovakia and other countries. With the support of the team, this management model has every chance of success and implementation.

A practical solution is the use of quality management systems that take into account such relevant philosophical and anthropological economic elements as: lack of human resources, inadequate knowledge, and competencies, employee indifference, etc. The task of the human resource management paradigm has clear anthropological guidelines - to increase the level of professional satisfaction of employees of different status (Elmortada et al., 2020). In this context, the philosophical and anthropological potential of the economic system is actualised. The management model only reflects popular trends in the economic space. For Slovakia, as an integral part of the economic life of the European Union, it is important to adhere to the key slogan of the community, which indicates unity in diversity. Therefore, the priority in the management philosophy is to maintain a balance between the needs of the enterprise (pragmatic aspect) and the needs of the employees of this enterprise (human-centred aspect).

Another philosophically oriented component of management strategies is the axiological element. Particularly, value priorities in modern management are concepts with rapidly changing variables, so it is necessary to respond adequately to the challenges of the times. An innovative mechanism in management strategies is the introduction of controlling in a group of small and medium-sized industrial enterprises (SMEs) in Slovakia (Bestvinová, 2022). Management models combine the value elements of national character and the values of the international community (in this case, the European economic principles of development, welfare, and prosperity).

The motivational element remains the main factor in the creative and epistemological component of the management philosophy (Fila et al., 2020). One of the key tasks of small and medium-sized business management in Slovakia is to reduce unwanted process variability and related losses (Potkány et al. 2020). It is noted that two management strategies are designed to prevent the negative impact of the socio-cultural factor: social and development. The idea of managing the staff for the benefit of the staff is a kind of social utopia, as it blocks any chances for the development of the business structure. This creates the illusion of social care for the employee, who is even realised for a while, but as a result, the business fails, and the employee loses his or her job. A fundamentally different version of the coexistence of an employee and a company is proposed in the development strategy, according to which the full potential of labour relations is aimed at the benefit of the business, whose prosperity contributes to the financial, social, and mental benefits to employees. In other words, employees act as a kind of

investors in the business where they are involved. Investments in this case are formed from the honest performance of their duties.

The project-based learning (Maros et al., 2021) is an organisational and logistical priority in the modern economic paradigm. This model is a priority in building a modern management paradigm. However, it requires significant self-organization. Therefore, there is a need for new mechanisms that will ensure the relationship between the management branch and the staff in the system of small and medium-sized businesses. Particularly, Bednárík (2109) pays a special attention to the mechanism of internal communication. The ever-increasing influence of the global economic paradigm with its laws and management principles (which have already been successfully implemented in multinational companies) should not be ignored.

Discussion

Slovakia is characterised by originality in the philosophy of human resources management. The study notes the influence of the global factor (principles of the global economy, peculiarities of the development of the European Union economy). Also, specific views on the organisation of human resources management in small and medium-sized businesses are noted. They are related to the socio-economic and cultural, and mental meanings of Slovak society.

In the scientific and economic discourse, there are views that adhere to the same principles of evaluating philosophical interpretations of management decisions in small and medium-sized businesses in Slovakia. Namely, Smerek et al. (2021) note that these differences can be traced even in relation to the neighbouring Czech Republic, with which Slovakia has long shared a common political and economic system. First of all, the peculiarity lies in the focus on practical and operational processes with a certain degree of elimination of strategic nature for the staff of small and medium-sized businesses. Such examples clearly demonstrate the preservation of the authenticity of organisational and economic life in the country as a whole and the solution of socially oriented problems.

The dynamic model of personnel management outlined in the research perspectives requires a new philosophy of professional relations between participants of economic activity. Particularly, the issue of flexible skills and competencies of both management and executive staff is becoming more relevant. The principle of flexibility in management fully meets the requirements of the dynamism of the economic system.

A similar position on the principles of organising human resources management suggests that human resources are more valuable in economic systems also because they are a flexible component (Lušňáková et al., 2022). While natural resources, economic laws, or business rules are fundamental and transform rather difficult and time-consuming, humans adapt and relatively quickly integrate in dynamic economic realities. Therefore, the human-centred cluster of management activities has much more room for variation. Kucharčíková et al. (2021) also emphasise the flexibility of the intangible asset of human resources. Therefore, it can be confidently stated that the principle of flexibility (soft-skills) has been incorporated into the general model of the modern management paradigm. At the same time, these management solutions are already being successfully applied in the cluster of small and medium-sized businesses in Slovakia.

Continuing the theme of the primacy of flexibility over fundamentality, it is noted that one of the dimensions of the effectiveness of management strategies is the identification of the best qualities in employees and the search for talent in their business area (Tomcikova et al., 2021). An obvious fact in the market conditions of economic development is the differentiation of personnel by skills,

competence, efficiency, and talent. Progressive management models offer flexibility in relation to each specific cluster of personnel.

The problem of implementing innovative formats of management philosophy in the SME segment in countries without a strong economic base (transnational, large-scale systemic enterprises) is still a controversial issue in the scientific and economic discourse. On the one hand, in countries such as Slovakia, small and medium-sized businesses remain the backbone of the economy and require the implementation of innovative management solutions; on the other hand, such countries lack a tradition of innovative management transformations based on the example of large enterprises. Therefore, the task of the scientific and economic community is to develop guidelines for the implementation of innovative management solutions in small and medium-sized businesses, even in the absence of strategic and practical management experience.

Conclusions and Implications

Thus, the philosophy of HR management of small and medium-sized businesses is developing in the context of dynamic economic activity and offers balanced management principles that will be relevant for a country like Slovakia with its peculiarities of socio-economic development:

- The philosophical and anthropological dimension, which indicates that human resources require effective management and the realisation of human potential that in business largely depends on the skilful work organisation.
- Creative and epistemological principle, according to which the interaction between the participants of business structures should be formed based on innovative principles: the introduction of new forms and rules by the management should be synchronised with the capabilities of the staff to master them.
- The axiological aspect provides guidelines according to which the management process should be based on clearly defined values: management decisions and their implementation are correlated with the principles of general economic development in the national economy, a particular industry, the current state of affairs, etc.
- The ethical component unites the moral and business qualities of management and subordinates that should be correlated in accordance with generally accepted human-centred or business values.
- The socio-philosophical element of management forms a socially responsible organisation of work at the enterprise, according to which a clear algorithm of entrepreneurial activity is formed.
- The practice-oriented factor of the HRM philosophy determines the peculiarities of this segment of the economy that are characteristic of a particular country (Slovak case) and business structure (small and medium-sized business segment).
- The strategic factor forms generally accepted norms and monitors progressive trends in the HR management market, regulating relations at the level of manager-subordinate in a synergistic dimension that is common to large and small or medium-sized businesses.

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