PERSONNEL AS A SOURCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL RISK: AN ANALYSIS OF INTERNAL VULNERABILITIES GENERATED BY EMPLOYEES' BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES

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***Abstract**. The article highlights that personnel simultaneously represent a key factor of organizational success and a potential source of internal risk. Based on an empirical survey conducted in nine companies in Romania, the study analyzes vulnerabilities generated by employees' behaviors and attitudes, as perceived by respondents. The primary risks identified encompass demotivation, resistance to change, inadequate staffing for critical roles (with the identification and description of specific warning signals), staff turnover, non-compliance with procedures, and unethical behaviour. The research examined the influence of human resource policies on the level of organisational risk, paying special attention to issues of morality and ethics. This included participants' opinions regarding strategies for preventing and mitigating risks arising from unethical conduct. The study is grounded in a review of the specialised literature and empirical analysis, and it provides an integrated perspective on the mechanisms through which human risk manifests and can be anticipated. The findings emphasise the necessity of proactive human resource management strategies focused on the prevention of risk behaviours, the strengthening of organisational culture, and the monitoring of the internal climate.*

***Keywords**: employee behaviors, demotivation, organizational ethics, ethical infrastructure, human resource management, risk.*

***JEL Clasification:** M12, M14.*

1. Introduction

The success of an organisation is determined by a variety of interdependent factors that contribute to maintaining and strengthening its position in an economic environment characterised by intense competition. Despite the challenges in establishing a definitive hierarchy among these factors, it can be posited that the most salient include: the implementation of contemporary management techniques and tools directed towards continuous performance enhancement, the comprehensive fulfilment of customer requirements within the context of economic efficiency, the calibre of human resources, and the capacity for innovation.

Among these factors, human resources hold a central position, representing a decisive element in shaping the dynamics and progress of organizational activities. The effective management of the workforce is not only an operational necessity but also a strategic imperative. Overlooking the human dimension can undermine even the most carefully designed and efficiently managed projects, as employee behavior—characterized by variability and unpredictability—may give rise to significant organizational dysfunctions.

In the current labor market context, organizations face fierce competition in attracting and retaining well-qualified specialists. This situation is further exacerbated by a series of negative trends, such as the chronic imbalance in the labor market and the projected decline in the active population, both of which contribute to a reduced supply of available labor.

Furthermore, the relationship between organisations and their employees engenders a set of mutual risks, particularly due to the inherent uncertainty of human behaviour. The human factor has the potential to engender considerable risks, with direct ramifications for organisational stability, performance, and culture. It is imperative that personnel-related risk management be integrated into the organisation's overarching risk management framework. This approach facilitates the effective identification, assessment, and control of vulnerabilities stemming from human factors, thereby enhancing the resilience and long-term sustainability of the organisation.

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze organizational vulnerabilities generated by employees' behaviors and attitudes, based on their own perceptions, with the aim of substantiating proactive strategies for the prevention and mitigation of behavioral and ethical risks within organizations.

2. Research methods

In order to achieve the study's objectives, a dual approach was employed, encompassing both a review of the extant literature and empirical research. This methodological combination facilitated the acquisition of an integrated perspective on the mechanisms through which human risk manifests and can be anticipated. As a quantitative method, a survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire designed to collect relevant data on perceptions of organisational risk associated with personnel. The field research was conducted within nine organisations in Romania, selected to provide a sample sufficiently representative of the objectives of the study.

3. Results and discussions

Human resource risk management represents an essential component of the overall business risk mitigation strategy and refers to the identification and addressing of potential threats associated with employee activities. These threats are linked both to employee behavior and to processes of recruitment, retention, and management (Choudhary, 2025).

Nowadays, human resource risk management is emerging as one of the most critical challenges for managers worldwide, with organizations striving to define effective strategies for addressing these risks (Dianti & Zare Zidi, 2017). Personnel risks are associated with insider threats to organizations. They arise when human behaviors deviate from established policies, whether due to malicious intent or simple disregard for security protocols. The types of offenses and abuses linked to insider threats are considerable, with the most severe including espionage, sabotage, terrorism, embezzlement, extortion, bribery, and corruption. Malicious activities may also encompass a broader range of exploitations, such as copyright infringement, negligent handling of classified data, fraud, unauthorized access to sensitive information, and illicit communications with unauthorized recipients. (Greitzer, 2010)

This approach requires the anticipation and planning of potential human resource risks, enabling the organization to implement appropriate preventive and mitigation measures. In doing so, the likelihood of major dysfunctions is reduced, while a stable framework is ensured for the sustainable development of the business. (Fisher, 2025).

3.1. Sample Characteristics

In order to achieve the stated objective, an empirical study was conducted in nine companies in Romania, using the survey method. A total of 715 respondents completed the questionnaire, constituting 38.3% of the total number of employees in the surveyed companies. The respondents' composition reveals certain dominant characteristics that may influence the perception and interpretation of the research topic.

The predominant age category is 41–60 years, with 80% of respondents falling within this group. This finding suggests that the respondents who completed the questionnaire are mature individuals who are currently engaged in their professional careers. A further 9% of respondents belong to the 31–40 age group, representing a younger cohort that is open to learning new things, has time to work and advance professionally, while already possessing a certain level of experience. Meanwhile, 11% of respondents are over 60 years of age. These individuals possess extensive professional experience and can assume the role of mentors for their junior colleagues. It is posited that this configuration of respondents engenders a balanced and consolidated perspective on the research topic, as it encompasses individuals who embody a high degree of professional and personal stability. Furthermore, the elevated age demographic may also be indicative of a more profound experiential knowledge and a more profound comprehension of the issues under investigation.

The majority of respondents (73.3%) are male, a distribution that can be explained by the stronger representation of men in the surveyed enterprises, which operate in fields such as steam and air conditioning supply; plumbing, heating, and air-conditioning installation works; road freight transport; water collection, treatment, and distribution; as well as fire prevention and firefighting activities, among others. This gender distribution may influence, in particular, the attitudes expressed and the experiences reported, depending on the gendered perspective on the subject under analysis.

In relation to professional experience, the data demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of respondents (98%) have accumulated over 10 years of activity in the field. This aspect is of paramount importance for the quality and relevance of the responses obtained, as it provides a solid basis for formulating well-informed opinions grounded in extensive professional practice. Respondents with long-standing experience are generally more familiar with the trends, challenges, and transformations in their field, which adds interpretive value to the analysis.

The vast majority of respondents belong to the category of executive staff (non-managerial employees) — 96.9%, while only 3.1% are managers. This distribution by organisational position is considered appropriate and relevant to the objectives of the research, as the study primarily targets the perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of executive employees, who are directly involved in operational processes or in the implementation of managerial decisions. It is evident that executives possess a comprehensive understanding of organisational practices and are intimately acquainted with both prevailing and potential organisational dysfunctions, a consequence of their direct engagement with the quotidian realities of the workplace. Moreover, the distribution is indicative of an organisational reality, with managerial functions naturally being in fewer number than executive positions. This aspect naturally lends the sample structure a proportional representativeness. Consequently, the emphasis on executive staff is not only methodologically substantiated but also serves to enhance the validity and relevance of the research findings.

3.2. Analysis of Respondents' Perceptions Regarding the Main Risks Generated by Personnel

As previously stated, human resources represent both the most important asset and the most significant source of risk within any organisation. Employee-related risks are diverse and may manifest in a variety of forms, including the risk of losing key staff, insufficient or inappropriate motivation among managerial personnel, inadequate recruitment and selection practices, non-compliant organisational behaviours, deficiencies in employee management, or shortcomings in retention policies. It is imperative for companies to comprehend the various categories of employee risks in order to implement appropriate prevention strategies. Conversely, another perspective asserts that, in the context of employee risks, a behavioural risk analysis should be conducted prior to the evaluation of organisational measures that may facilitate – or even reinforce – risk-related behaviours among employees.. (Nadri & Mehrabi, 2018).

When asked to identify the top three types of risks generated by human resources in their organizations, the majority of responses (608) referred to the risk labeled as "demotivation" (Figure 1)).

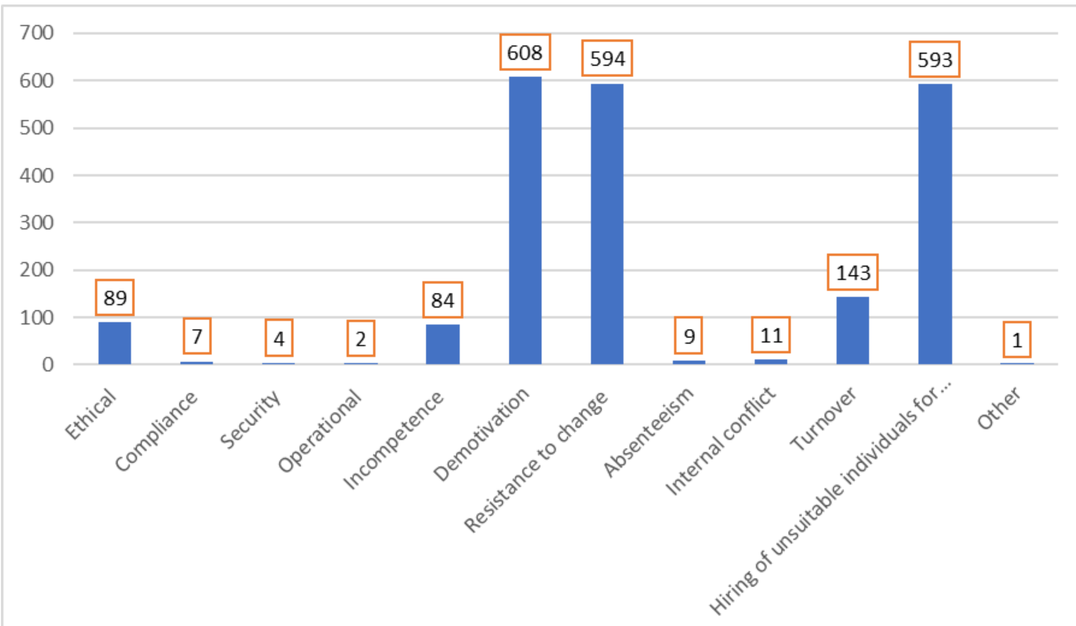

Figure 1. Main types of risks generated by human resources in the organizations where respondents are employed (respondents were asked to select three relevant options)
Source: compiled by the authors from the research findings

Employee demotivation is considered by 85% of respondents to be a significant risk for companies, negatively affecting productivity, work quality, and the overall organizational climate. At the same time, the issue becomes rather complex when attempting to clarify what demotivation actually represents and what the concept itself signifies. A comprehensive review of extant academic literature, encompassing the research contributions of numerous scholars, has substantiated the conceptual intricacy of demotivation. It is undoubtedly a negatively connoted concept, regardless of the specific definition it receives in different contexts (Sandiford & Divers, 2011). The cited authors examined multiple approaches to the concept and concluded that, in organizational settings, demotivation may sometimes be viewed by management as a simplistic pretext to avoid assuming responsibility for employees' poor performance. Thus, the causes of weak professional engagement are often attributed to presumed intrinsic deficiencies of employees—such as lack of willpower or negative attitudes—while overlooking the fact that professional motivation is influenced by a much broader range of factors than the job itself. This suggests that it may be more useful to ask: why is the employee motivated to adopt alternative behaviors, such as avoiding responsibilities, opposing management, or even sabotaging organizational activities?

An important role in addressing the issues outlined above lies with human resource management within the organization. As seen, poor human resource management can lead to employee demotivation, which in turn contributes to high turnover and low morale. This has a negative impact on the company's workforce productivity. Conversely, effective human resource management fosters a motivated and engaged workforce, thereby enhancing productivity and contributing to long-term success. It is therefore crucial for enterprises to invest in effective HR practices to mitigate the risk of low productivity—a challenge that affects all organizations, regardless of sector, including both manufacturing and service-oriented enterprises.

Another significant risk perceived by respondents is the risk of resistance to change, mentioned by 83.1% of those surveyed. This high score is understandable given that the contemporary organizational environment is characterized by frequent and often unpredictable changes driven by economic, technological, social, or political factors. Such an unstable climate demands from employees a high level of flexibility, rapid adaptability, and openness to continuous learning. However, the accelerated pace of organizational transformation may, in certain situations, exceed individual adaptive capacities, generating stress, uncertainty, and a sense of professional insecurity. In this context, employees may become resistant to change, demotivated, and less productive.

Another important risk, mentioned by 82.9% of respondents, concerns the hiring of unsuitable individuals for critical roles within the organization. The findings suggest that a significant share of human resource problems originates in the recruitment of individuals who are ill-suited for the positions they occupy. Such employees may be insufficiently prepared to fulfill the tasks and responsibilities specified in the job description, may lack interest or affinity for the field of activity, or may simply be guided by personal values and interests incompatible with the professional requirements of the role. An unsuitable employee can damage team morale, undermine trust, and reduce productivity due to inefficiency or frequent errors. Moreover, negative interactions with clients may harm the company's reputation, resulting in the loss of business opportunities. Early recognition of the signs of a poor hiring decision is therefore crucial, as it can save a company considerable time, resources, and potential losses.

Human resource specialists highlight several common indicators suggesting that a hiring error may have occurred and which should alert management (Table 1).:

Table 1. Indicators of an Unsuitable Hiring Decision.

Indicators	Description
Insufficient competencies	The employee encounters difficulties in performing tasks that should be compatible with their level of training. This discrepancy is reflected either in an excessive need for additional instruction or in the consistent delivery of performance below expected standards.
Lack of initiative	The unsuitable employee tends to display passivity, waiting for instructions rather than acting proactively to improve their work or to contribute effectively to the team's objectives.
Cultural misfit	The individual does not align with the organization's values, norms, or working style, which creates a sense of isolation and difficulties in integrating into the team

Chronic tardiness	It is manifested through repeated failure to meet deadlines. This may indicate a potential mismatch with the job requirements and can negatively affect team dynamics and organizational efficiency.
Negative attitude	A constant decline in performance and work quality may serve as a clear signal that the employee does not meet the requirements of the position held.
Recurrent conflicts	An increase in complaints from colleagues or evident difficulties in collaboration suggest an integration problem and may serve as an indicator of poor fit within the team.
Need for excessive supervision	If an employee continues to require constant assistance or struggles to work independently after the adjustment period, this may reflect a lack of adequacy to the job requirements.
Decline in team productivity	A noticeable decline in a team's performance or output shortly after the arrival of a new member may suggest that the employee is not contributing effectively.
Integrity issues	The discovery of falsifications in a CV or the observation of unethical behavior in the workplace indicates serious deficiencies in honesty and professionalism, which can directly undermine trust and cohesion within the organization.
Frequent absenteeism	Frequent lateness and extended breaks may suggest a low level of commitment to professional responsibilities.
Resistance to feedback	An inability to accept constructive criticism or a lack of willingness to adapt can represent a barrier to personal growth and team development.
Lack of enthusiasm	An apparent lack of interest in the job or the company may suggest that the employee does not intend to remain in the long term.

Source: compiled by the authors from the research findings

Addressing these warning signs in a timely manner—whether through additional training, mentoring, or, if necessary, termination—can prevent long-term consequences for the organization. It is also essential to periodically review the hiring process in order to identify and correct any systemic issues that may lead to such unsuitable appointments.

One-fifth of respondents consider that the risk of turnover represents a threat to the organization in which they are employed. Staff turnover reflects the average period during which employees choose to remain in a company. Although this phenomenon is inevitable—since employees will always leave in search of better opportunities, to pursue studies, on their own initiative, through dismissals, or upon retirement—a high turnover rate can negatively affect organizational structure. Turnover may be voluntary, when the employee decides to leave the workplace, or involuntary, when the employer terminates the employment relationship for reasons such as poor performance, inappropriate behavior, or restructuring. While employees subject to involuntary turnover do not differ significantly from those who remain in the company, voluntary turnover can be anticipated and managed by taking into account employees' intentions. For this reason, the latter is considered the most important issue on which organizations should focus and take action. (Shandilya et al., 2022).

Employees who voluntarily or involuntarily depart from a company may also pose certain risks, including the potential for diminished team performance, the risk of information transfer, loss of business opportunities, replacement and training costs, loss of talent, and decline in customer satisfaction (Lee-Kelley et al., 2007).

At the same time, this risk is closely connected to those analyzed earlier: a demotivated employee is unlikely to remain in the company for long; an inability to adapt to organizational change will not encourage continued engagement; and poor job fit may contribute to involuntary turnover.

Another risk factor identified by respondents refers to employee incompetence (11.7%). Incompetent employees can generate numerous problems within the team. Other members often experience frustration when they are forced to take over the tasks of weaker colleagues, and this negatively affects both overall performance and the team's image. Inevitably, the negative impact on the team as a whole is also reflected at the individual level..

Another share of respondents (12.4%) consider risks related to employee ethics—or more precisely, lack of ethics—to be important for the organization in which they are employed. Adherence to ethical standards in the workplace is a fundamental responsibility. It is important to clarify from the outset what is meant by unethical behavior. This includes any action that violates moral principles, professional standards, or organizational policies, thereby generating harm or creating unjust advantages (Anderson, 2025). Such behaviors may undermine the efficiency, reputation, values, or objectives of an organization for illegitimate reasons.

At the same time, it should be acknowledged that unethical behavior is not always intentional. Given that each employee acts according to their own system of beliefs and perceptions of morality, it is possible for someone to engage in unethical conduct while believing they are acting correctly. This is one of the reasons why it is essential for companies to establish clear ethical guidelines within the organization in order to reduce ambiguities and misinterpretations..

In order to address unethical behavior within organizations, it is important to understand its underlying causes. These may include unclear policies, pressure (particularly when results are strongly tied to rewards—employees under significant stress to meet objectives or key performance indicators may feel compelled to comply or to violate ethical standards), or a toxic organizational culture, among others. Research on ethical behavior and related concepts highlights the importance of organizational factors in promoting ethical conduct and preventing unethical practices (Porto et al., 2024). To explain how organizational factors shape individual behavior, social exchange theory is frequently applied (Mo et al., 2023). However, there remains a gap in understanding the role of trust in this relationship, which is why recent studies have begun to focus on the concept of ethical infrastructure (Porto et al., 2024)..

The concept of ethical infrastructure encompasses the organizational climate, along with the informal and formal systems (communication, monitoring, and sanctioning) that are relevant to ethics within an organization (Tenbrunsel et al., 2008). Another variable closely related to ethical infrastructure is ethical culture. Research has demonstrated that both ethical climate and ethical culture predict ethical behavior. Organizational culture has also been correlated with multiple outcomes, such as performance, organizational practices and behavior, employees' ethical decision-making processes, their ethical intentions, and their overall well-being..

3.3. Personnel Risk Management

The analysis of respondents' perceptions regarding the main risks generated by personnel revealed a series of significant negative effects on organizations, such as declining performance, increased staff turnover, deterioration of the organisational climate, and damage to institutional reputation. The findings of this study underscore the significance of implementing effective human resource management strategies that incorporate rigorous policies for recruitment, evaluation, training, and employee motivation. Only through careful and proactive management of the human factor can internal risks be prevented and the long-term sustainability of the organization ensured.

Any risk management framework begins with the identification of risks. Once identified, organizations must develop policies and procedures that address the specific threats they face. These policies should be clear, concise, and effectively communicated to employees at all levels.

To capture respondents' perceptions on this matter, the following question was asked: What impact do human resource policies (recruitment, evaluation, compensation) have on the level of organizational risk? The results are presented in Figure 2.

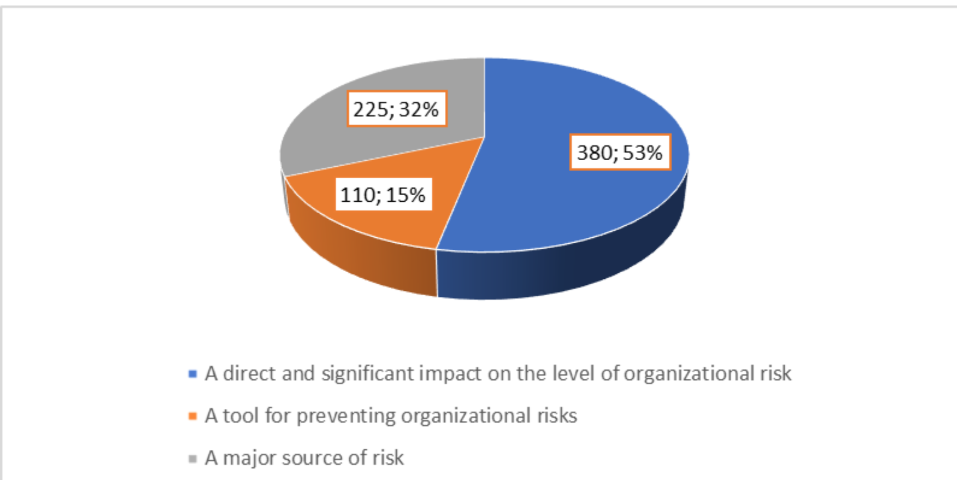

Figure 2. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question regarding the impact of human resource policies (recruitment, evaluation, compensation) on the level of organizational risk.

Source: compiled by the authors from the research findings

More than half of the respondents (53%) recognize the necessity of effective human resource policies, considering their impact on the level of organizational risk to be direct and significant. Fifteen percent believe that such policies are important and serve as an instrument for preventing the occurrence of organizational risks. Thirty-two percent, however, view them as a major source of risk, noting that inefficient company policies in the field of human resources constitute an important source of various risks. The same point is emphasized by Parker (1995) with regard to human resource risk, who argues that this risk refers to company personnel policies such as recruitment, training, motivation, and employee retention.

Respondents referred to:

- the hiring of unsuitable individuals (through inefficient recruitment policies) who are unable to meet job requirements, make mistakes, or negatively affect team morale;

- the incorrect evaluation of performance, which may contribute to the promotion of unsuitable individuals, leading to reduced efficiency and internal conflicts;
- the application of a demotivating or unfair reward system, which may contribute to employee demotivation and, consequently, their departure from the company or a decline in their performance, thereby negatively impacting the overall results of the organization.

3.4. Analysis of Employees' Perceptions of Morality and Ethics Issues and Their Mitigation

Issues related to morality and ethics have gained increasing importance within organizations and the business environment. Corporate failures in the sphere of ethics have highlighted a critical challenge for companies: the need to better understand why ethical standards are often violated and easily tolerated. In daily professional activity, employees frequently face difficult decisions, many involving moral aspects, which can lead to conflicts of interest. In such situations, decision-makers must weigh the significance of universally recognized ethical principles—such as providing safe and high-quality products—against the pressures of a competitive, profit-driven market (De Cremer, 2016). Clear evidence shows that employees are increasingly concerned about unethical, illegal, or fraudulent behavior in the workplace (Mahan et al., 2024). It is essential to prevent or reduce the risks associated with unethical or non-compliant conduct among employees in order to ensure a healthy and effective work environment. If unethical behavior becomes normalized within an organization or certain departments, individuals may be more likely to engage in similar practices. Ignoring such misconduct can have severe consequences, including financial losses, legal sanctions, reputational damage, and the erosion of organizational culture. Conversely, fostering a culture based on ethics and compliance helps build stakeholder trust, enhances employee motivation, and improves the overall performance of the company.

The following question addressed how risks caused by unethical or non-compliant employee behavior can be prevented or mitigated. Respondents' perceptions are presented in Figure 3.

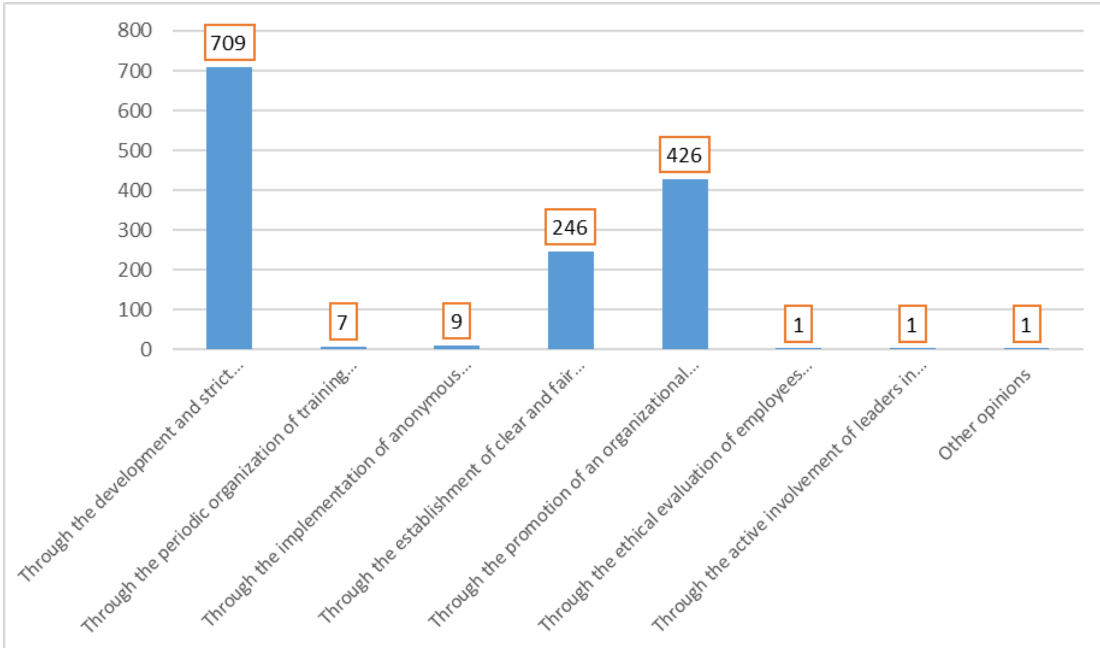

Figure 3. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question: "In what ways can the risks caused by unethical or non-compliant employee behavior be prevented or mitigated?"

Source: compiled by the authors from the research findings

The unanimity of the responses was striking. Respondents were allowed to select one or two answers. A total of 709 respondents—representing more than 50% of all answers provided to this question—believe that the development and strict enforcement of an internal Code of Ethics could prevent or mitigate risks related to unethical behavior. This finding stands in contrast to recent analyses (Lašáková et al., 2022), which highlight the saturation of certain areas of study, such as codes of ethics, compliance programs, internal reporting, whistleblowing, ethics training, and ethical climate. Nevertheless, within the surveyed organizations, this direction appears to remain insufficiently exploited, judging by the respondents' answers.

Another important measure, according to respondents, concerns the promotion of an organizational culture grounded in integrity, transparency, and respect (30.4% of responses). An analysis of research on ethics programs indicates that many studies focus on human behavior, highlighting links between several key factors such as ethical conduct, the organizational environment and culture, ethical leadership, decision-making processes, trust, and unethical behaviors. Interestingly, trust and unethical behavior appear at the margins of the conceptual network analyzed, which may suggest that these two aspects have not yet been sufficiently explored in the scholarly literature. (Lašáková et al., 2022)

The third direction highlighted by respondents refers to the implementation of anonymous mechanisms for reporting misconduct (e.g., ethics hotlines, suggestion or confidentiality boxes). This opinion was expressed in 17.6% of the responses. Organizations can encourage ethical behavior in the workplace by introducing reactive systems that allow employees to report unethical conduct.

However, the most effective way to foster ethical behavior lies in adopting a proactive approach, which should include tools designed to amplify employees' voices, such as opinion surveys and exit interviews. These instruments provide opportunities for employees to express their views and concerns in a structured and consistent manner.

4. **Conclusions:**

The study highlights the crucial role of human resources within organizations, both as an indispensable element for carrying out activities and achieving corporate objectives, and as a potential source of threats to their fulfillment. The analysis of risks associated with human resources underscores the dual role they assume: on the one hand, as a factor of organizational risk, and on the other, as a key agent responsible for managing and mitigating these risks.

Surveying employees from nine companies in Romania provided valuable insights into their perceptions regarding the central issue of risks generated by human resources within organizations and the measures companies should adopt to minimize these risks. Several risks were identified, though they by no means represent the full spectrum of potential threats. A deeper focus was placed on ethical risks, specifically those stemming from employees' lack of ethical conduct. At the same time, it must be emphasized that merely identifying risks is insufficient. Companies need to develop systematic strategies to effectively manage and mitigate them. This process begins with a thorough understanding of the specific risks associated with employees, followed by tailored actions to address them. Achieving success in this regard requires identifying high-risk areas, formulating well-founded policies, fostering a culture of awareness, and leveraging technology to support these efforts.

On the other hand, it is important to emphasize the crucial role of human resources in risk management, which involves identifying potential employee-related risks to the business in order to minimize issues before they arise. Ensuring that all employees are satisfied in the workplace serves as a protective factor for the organization against potential problems. Failure to mitigate employee-related risks can negatively affect revenues, reputation, profitability, and other key aspects of the business.

Therefore, human resource risk management must be directly involved in the rigorous application of specific principles and techniques for the identification, analysis, evaluation, and, above all, the implementation of risk management strategies, as a response to the challenges of the organizational environment, which is inherently characterized by uncertainty and risk.

It is imperative that organisations foster an environment of open communication, implement regular employee training programmes, and institute clear accountability measures. By doing so, they can ensure that risks are identified and addressed in a timely manner. Furthermore, these aspects underscore the necessity of continuous monitoring and evaluation. It is insufficient for an organization to merely have a risk management framework in place; it is important that policies, technologies, and procedures are constantly assessed and updated in order to stay ahead of emerging threats. Regular risk assessments and audits are critical for identifying new vulnerabilities and for ensuring that the employee risk management framework remains robust and effective.

Another critical aspect is compliance, which has become an increasing concern for organizations, particularly as new data protection regulations are being introduced worldwide.

Ensuring that employees adhere to industry regulations and internal policies is essential to avoid legal sanctions, financial penalties, and reputational damage.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that even with the most effective preventive measures in place, no organization is completely immune to employee-related risks. Therefore, it is essential to establish appropriate incident response solutions and capabilities, enabling companies to react swiftly and effectively to potential suspicious activities.

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