

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT OF ECONOMICALLY DEPENDENT SELF-EMPLOYED AND SUBORDINATE EMPLOYEES

Agata MATUSZEWSKA-KUBICZ^{1*}, Izabela WARWAS²

¹ University of Lodz, Faculty of Economics and Sociology; agata.matuszewska@uni.lodz.pl,
ORCID: 0000-0002-5808-4644

² University of Lodz, Faculty of Economics and Sociology; izabela.warwas@uni.lodz.pl,
ORCID: 0000-0001-8066-746X

* Correspondence author

Purpose: One of the significant consequences of changes in the contemporary Polish labor market is the growing importance of flexible forms of employment, including self-employment. A special type of self-employment is economically dependent self-employment (EDSE), in which the entrepreneur provides services exclusively or to a large extent to one entity in a manner similar to the performance of work under an employment relationship. The growing popularity of this type of flexible forms of relations between the employee and the employer prompted us to ask the following questions: What are the similarities and differences between organizations in terms of HRM activities with respect to EDSE and subordinate employees (SE)?

Design/methodology/approach: The researchers used the data from quantitative research (CATI), conducted on a representative sample of 380 business entities from Poland. The objective of the empirical analysis was to group the organizations according to the criterion of differentiating their HRM activities in relation to EDSE and SE.

Findings: The analysis allowed to distinguish three groups: ‘Traditionalists’ focusing on subordinate workers; ‘Transforming’ presenting a similar approach to EDSE and SE, with a slightly greater focus on SE, and ‘Genuinely equal’ having the same approach to EDSE and SE. The organizations mostly or to a large extent apply the principles of equality (i.e. various HRM instruments apply equally to EDSE and SE) or dedicate solutions to SE to a greater extent.

Originality/value: The value of the research is to conduct extensive research on a representative sample of Polish companies on HRM in an increasingly flexible labor market. The research contributes to the growing trend of research on subordinate and economically dependent self-employed workers, extending it to HRM perspective.

Keywords: Economically Dependent Self-Employed, Subordinate Employees, Human Resource Management, HRM Harvard model, labor market.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the changes observed in the modern labor market are related, among others, to the greater flexibility of relations between employers and employees, and thus the greater popularity of non-standard forms of employment. This phenomenon can be confirmed by the fact that the first position in the ranking of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology “Top 10 Work Trends for 2021” was occupied by the “Remote Work and Flexible Working Arrangements” trend, which has a broad array of implications for both employers and employees (SIOP, 2021). The phenomenon of greater flexibility in the labor market is also associated with the concept of gig economy and the growing interest in gig work, which is characterized as short-term, requiring the completion of finite assignments and allowing loose boundaries for when and where people must work (Watson et al., 2021). Furthermore with aging workforce, organizations to retain mature people will need to increase work flexibility or allow part-time work (Stone & Deadrick, 2015). Approximately 150 million people in North America and western Europe now work as independent contractors (Petriglieri et al., 2018). According to IZA World of Labor, the popularity of nontraditional jobs (independent contractors, temporary workers, ‘gig’ workers) is growing and will continue to do so due to the increase in fixed employment costs and the development of technology that allows short-term labor contracting (Oyer, 2020).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic and the global recession also contributed to an uncertain outlook for the labor market (World Economic Forum, 2020). According to the authors of the report ‘Gig Economy 2021’, during the lockdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the benefits of the gig economy became very clear and the gig economy stood its ground and kept the economy running. The pandemic acted as a catalyst for the hidden needs of employees seeking greater flexibility; thus the evolution towards the new ways of working such as the gig economy is clearer than ever (PwC Legal, 2021). The report of the International Labor Organization also indicates that the pandemic is fueling a rise in gig work that is expanding the pool of self-employed contractors (ILO, 2022). Current estimates show that 50% of the American workforce will be engaged in the gig economy by 2027, and the gig economy has tripled its growth rate in the last year (Swigunski, 2022).

2. Economically dependent self-employment

The broad category of gig workers includes, among others, platform workers, sharing economy workers, and also independent contractors. Due to the flexible nature of work, self-employed workers who do not employ other workers can be also classified as gig workers

(Watson et al., 2021). A specific type of self-employment is economically dependent self-employment. The emergence of this group of workers was highlighted in 1999 in a report submitted to the European Commission (European Commission, 1999).

As noted by Williams and Horodnic (2019, p. 4), there is a continuum of employment relationships, ‘from pure dependent employment through more employment-like relationships and more self-employment-oriented relationships to genuine self-employment.’ Economically dependent self-employment is therefore one of the forms of flexible (atypical) forms of employment and is an intermediate form between genuinely subordinate employees and genuinely independent entrepreneurs. These workers are legally independent (i.e., self-employed), but economically dependent (Maloka, Okpaluba, 2019). Therefore, this category is treated as a ‘gray zone’ between employment and self-employment (Millán et al., 2020), as well as a ‘gray area’ between labor law and commercial law (Commission of European Communities, 2006).

There is a consensus among labor market researchers that economically dependent self-employment is an intermediate category between self-employment and subordinate work. There are, however, differences regarding the uniform definition of this atypical form of employment. The discussion primarily concerns various criteria for considering the self-employed as economically dependent. For example, Eurostat takes into account economic and organizational dependency, defined on the basis of the number of clients and the percentage of income coming from a client, as well as in terms of control over working hours (Eurostat, 2018). Thus, according to Eurostat’s 2017 Labor Force Survey, economically dependent self-employed were defined as self-employed without employees who worked during the last 12 months for only one client or for a dominant client, and this client decided about their working hours (Eurostat, 2018). The OECD uses similar criteria (2014), and dependent self-employed workers are defined as “own-account self-employed – i.e. independent contractors without employees who either autonomously produce and sell goods or engage with their clients in contracts for services, regulated by commercial law” (OECD, 2014). Their conditions of work and degree of subordination are similar to employees as they work mainly or exclusively for a specific client-firm (called employers), with limited autonomy and often closely integrated into its organizational structure (OECD, 2014). The International Labor Organization (2016, p. 98) also draws attention to the number of clients, pointing to the fact that dependent self-employers ‘depend on one or a small number of clients for their income or receive detailed instructions regarding how the work is to be done.’ Similarly, according to the Commission of the European Communities (2006), dependent self-employers remain economically dependent on a single principal or client/employer for their source of income. Summarizing the above-presented definitions, it can be assumed that economically dependent self-employers are self-employed individuals, not employing other workers, working for one or a small number of clients on whom they remain economically dependent. Additionally, their working conditions are similar to those of subordinate employees employed by their client.

The current scientific discourse on economically dependent self-employment mainly concerns issues related to labor law seen from the perspective of different countries (Hendrickx, 2018; Rosioru, 2014; Ludera-Ruszel, 2017; Musiała, 2014; Tyc, 2021; PwC Legal, 2021; van Stel et al., 2021), where scientists attempt to set the boundary between self-employment and employment. In this context, the protection of social and labour rights is also examined (Bagari, 2020; Eichhorst et al., 2013), and on the basis of Polish legal conditions, proposals are made for the direction of regulation in this area (Moras-Olaś, 2022; Krajewski, 2022). In this context, the following are also examined: social security protection (Muehlberger, Bertolini, 2008; Quinlan, 2012), parental protection (Bagari, Sagmeister, 2022), stability and security of employment (Stewart, Stanford, 2017), involuntariness of dependent self-employment (Hernanz Martín, Carrasco, 2021) and false self-employment (Nikulin, 2021), as well as differences in the scope of collective bargaining and trade union representation (Quinlan et al., 2009). Therefore, the research undertaken focuses mostly on the legal aspects of employment. Therefore, due to the fact that the modern labor market is moving towards flexibility of time and place of work, as well as the relationship between the employee and the employer, offering a wide range of alternative forms of professional life, the authors of the paper see the need to discuss the subject of human resource management under these conditions. They focus on the activities of the organization within human resource management in relation to economically dependent self-employed and subordinate employees.

3. Human resource management – now and then

HRM is a multidisciplinary concept. As Farndale and coauthors stated (2019), there is some confusion concerning HRM research. HRM as a field of research includes elements of content (what), process (how), and context (why) (De Wit, Meyer, 2010). The core content of HRM is generally well understood and includes the practices organizations adopt, such as recruitment, selection, training, reward, and performance management, either studied as individual practices or as bundles of practices in HRM systems (Farndale et al., 2019). In the paper, we focus on this approach, without analyzing how these practices affect the attitudes and behaviors of employees or the results of the team, business unit, or company, and without focusing on research regarding the context of HRM.

Over the years, debates have been held concerning HRM models. Despite stating in 2000 that the old certainties and paradigms are breaking down, Morgan emphasizes that HRM has developed its own theoretical perspectives, models, issues, and debates. Among some of the best-known HRM models, the Harvard model developed by Beera et al. (1984) is mentioned.

Guest, in turn, states that in the case of the Harvard model (similarly to the models proposed by Kochan, Katz, and McKersie (1986) from MIT), there is an attempt to capture the broad field and to address some of the interrelationships. For Beer et al., this means listing four broad areas of HRM policy and practice and four key outcomes. This approach is essentially descriptive, mapping the field, and classifying inputs and outcomes (Guest, 1997). This model proposes that HRM policy choices are determined by a combination of stakeholder interests and situational factors and have long-term consequences (Prowse, Prowse, 2010).

Truss notes that the soft-hard dichotomy in HRM exists primarily in normative human resource management models and not in what Legge (1995) describes as descriptive-functional or critical-valuing ones. Guest (1987), seeking to define HRM, distinguished two dimensions: soft-hard and loose-tight. Similarly to Storey (1992), he places existing HRM interpretations along two dimensions: soft - hard and weak - strong. Debates on the identification of the Harvard model with soft HRM and the Michigan model with hard HRM (Fombrun et al., 1985) took place only in the British context. The author refers to the works of Hendry and Pettigrew from 1990 (Truss, Gratton, 1994).

Beer and colleagues dwelt on adversarial relations between management and blue-collar/white-collar employees, and the potential for 'mutual' relations. They conceived of HRM as a series of policy choices, comprising human resource flows (selection, appraisal, development, and outflows), reward systems, work systems, and, crucially, employee influence. And they located this in a societal and political context of stakeholder interests, as well as of situational factors. Completing this was a specification of criteria for measuring the short-term effectiveness of human resource practices, commitment and competence of employees, congruence of employee goals with those of the organization (and vice versa), and cost effectiveness, and a reminder that all such policies had longer-term consequences for society, the organization, and the individual (Hendry, Pettigrew, 2006).

Boundarouk and Brewster (2016) note that the Harvard model offers a systems perspective on HRM, consisting of the fact that all the elements interact so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This perspective aims to promote the unity of science and the unity and completeness of HR management. At the same time, changes in HRM and technologies taken together have stretched the geographical boundaries of HRM practices, and distances in and between organizations have become shortened. Due to technological advancements, employers can offer their employees new ways of working by eliminating physical and time barriers and relying on new organizational forms, and employees, supervisors, and managers get directly involved in co-creation of HRM. As a systematic review of the literature on employee engagement has shown, "today, more than ever, organizations understand the importance of their employees and view them as the most important asset to their businesses" (Zeidan, Itani, 2020). Even the notion of 'employees' shows a mismatch with organizational conventional reality, as technological developments stretched contract boundaries and impacted on time, so

it might be more appropriate to talk about ‘workers’, including those who work for but are not employed by an organization’ (Boundarouk, Brewster, 2016).

Guest states that the first key issue is the lack of theory about the nature of HRM practices, and it is not the presence of selection or training, but a distinctive approach to selection or training that matters (Guest, 1997). Both hard and soft models are designed to adapt to the strategic needs of the organization. Furthermore, although human resource management (HRM) practices have changed in almost four decades, this approach remains a good framework for research. Therefore, this study uses the division into four areas of HRM based on the Harvard model, which includes: employee influence, human resource flow, reward systems, and work systems. It is worth noting that the Harvard model was developed in the 1980s in a much less flexible labor market. Therefore, it is worth checking how the elements of this model function in the modern labor market in relation to economically dependent self-employed and subordinate employees. In Poland, subordinate employment remains the dominant form of cooperation with the employer. At the same time, in Poland, at the end of 2018, the number of self-employed amounted to 1.3 million and increased by approximately 8.3% compared to the same period in 2017. Furthermore, a slight upward trend in self-employment has been observed since 2016 (CSO/GUS, 2019).

4. Methodology

The following research question was asked in the framework of the conducted study: What are the similarities and differences between organizations in terms of HRM activities regarding economically dependent self-employed and subordinate employees? To answer the research question, the researchers used the data obtained from previous quantitative research (CATI), conducted on a representative sample of 380 medium-sized and large business entities from Poland ($n = 380$) that cooperate with both subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers. The entities examined were verified in terms of meeting additional criteria. In each of the examined enterprises, min. 10% of the employees are employed on the basis of a full-time employment contract and min. 10% of employees are the economically dependent self-employed. In terms of the type of activity, the structure of the research sample included mostly entities represented by the health care, social assistance, and IT sector. In terms of the form of ownership of the company, the sample structure was almost proportional. Slightly more than half of the respondents (52.1%) represented the private sector, the others the public sector.

To answer the research question, an empirical analysis was carried out, which constitutes a by-product of the above-mentioned primary studies. The aim of the analysis was the clustering of the organizations according to the criterion of differentiating their HRM activities in relation

to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers. The analysis was carried out using a two-stage clustering analysis. This method enables grouping of objects when the variables are expressed on different measurement scales, in particular when they are qualitative (including nominal variables). In this study, the classification was performed on the basis of a set of 31 variables consisting of four areas of human resource management distinguished in the Harvard model (Table 1).

Table 1.

Variables consisting of four areas of human resource management distinguished in the Harvard model

Employee influence	(1) informing employees about issues concerning the organization beyond what is necessary to perform the tasks of the job, (2) the possibility for employees to express their own opinions, present their ideas, proposals, and suggestions, (3) the possibility of realization and implementation of own ideas and projects by employees, (4) having an impact on decision-making/management processes, (5) profit sharing
Human resource flow	(6) the possibility of vertical promotion of employees, (7) the possibility of horizontal promotion of employees, (8) the possibility of freely changing the project or the scope of implemented tasks
Reward systems	(9.1) base salary, (9.2) bonuses (9.3) commissions, (9.4.) awards, (9.5) special duty, (9.6) opportunities to develop competences, (9.7) praise and recognition for employees, (9.8) insurance packages, (9.9) healthcare, (9.10) sports cards, (9.11) vouchers and in-kind prizes, (9.12) modern work tools, (9.13) team building events, (9.14) prevention and well-being programs, (9.15) holiday subsidies, (9.16) additional days off work
Work systems	(10) flexible working hours, (11) task-based working time, (12) remote job, (13) part-time job, (14) fixed-term employment, (15) job-sharing, (16) job-crafting

Source: own research.

In each of those areas, the respondents were asked whether the solution applied equally to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers, or more to one of these groups, or only to one of them. It was also possible to choose 'no' or "such a possibility does not exist/is not used in our organization' or "the nature of the workplace does not allow the application of a given solution'. The method used does not require the normalization of variables. Due to their non-metric nature, the classification was carried out using the reliability ratio metric. In order to assess the quality of the clustering result, a Silhouette measure was used, which measures the similarity of objects, i.e. the distance of each analyzed object in relation to the cluster to which it belongs, taking as a reference the minimum distance between the examined i-th object and all objects in any other distinguished r-th cluster. Values above 0.2 are considered to indicate a correct classification. The quality of the classification is satisfactory; the Silhouette measure is 0.21.

5. Research results

The analysis allowed to distinguish three clusters:

- Cluster 1 ‘Traditionalists’: greater focus on subordinate employees.
- Cluster 2 ‘Transforming’: a similar approach to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers, with a slightly greater focus on subordinate workers.
- Cluster 3 ‘Genuine equal’: equal treatment of subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers.

Conclusions on the differences between the isolated clusters can be drawn based on the basis of the analysis of the data in Table 2.

Table 2.

Comparison of clusters from the point of view of differentiating HRM practices in relation to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers

	Cl.	Only SE	To a greater extent SE	Equally SE and EDS	To a greater extent EDS	Only EDS	N/A
1. Are employees in your organization informed about issues related to the organization that go beyond what is necessary to perform tasks in a given position?	1	11.0%	10.3%	59.4%	1.3%		18.1%
	2	3.2%	6.4%	77.6%			12.8%
	3		2.9%	73.9%		5.8%	17.4%
2. Do employees in your organization have the opportunity to express their own opinions and present their own ideas, proposals, and suggestions?	1	5.2%	18.7%	67.7%	1.9%		6.5%
	2	1.9%	3.2%	92.9%			1.9%
	3			100.0%			
3. Do employees in your organization have the opportunity to realize and implement their own ideas and projects?	1	4.5%	12.9%	61.9%	0.6%	1.3%	18.7%
	2		0.6%	85.3%			14.1%
	3			97.1%			2.9%
4. Do your employees have an impact on decision-making/management processes in the organization?	1	11.6%	18.7%	29.0%	3.9%	2.6%	34.2%
	2	2.6%	1.3%	78.2%			17.9%
	3			82.6%			17.4%
5. Do your employees have the opportunity to share in the profits of the organization?	1	22.6%	9.0%	7.7%			60.6%
	2	7.1%	10.3%	30.1%			52.6%
	3		8.7%	37.7%			53.6%
6. Do employees in your organization have the opportunity to be promoted vertically (e.g., to senior management positions)?	1	58.1%	19.4%	9.0%			13.5%
	2	3.8%	17.9%	69.9%	1.3%		7.1%
	3		11.6%	79.7%		5.8%	2.9%
7. Do employees in your organization have the opportunity to be promoted horizontally (e.g., to nonmanagerial, specialist positions)?	1	53.5%	21.9%	12.9%		1.3%	10.3%
	2	3.2%	13.5%	71.8%	1.3%		10.2%
	3	5.8%	5.8%	85.5%		2.9%	
8. Do employees in your organization have the opportunity to freely change the project or the scope of tasks?	1	11.6%	10.3%	5.2%	2.6%	1.3%	69.0%
	2		1.9%	30.1%	1.3%		66.7%
	3		2.9%	76.8%			20.3%
9.1. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Base salary	1	65.2%	4.5%	27.7%		1.3%	1.3%
	2	53.2%	5.8%	35.3%	1.9%		3.8%
	3	5.8%		87.0%	1.4%		5.8%
9.2. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Bonuses	1	47.7%	14.8%	10.3%			27.1%
	2	37.8%	0.6%	37.2%			24.4%
	3	2.9%		85.5%			11.6%

Cont. table 2.

9.3. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Commissions	1	9.0%	1.3%	8.4%	2.6%	1.3%	77.4%
	2	4.5%		3.8%	1.9%	3.8%	85.9%
	3	2.9%	2.9%	62.3%		8.7%	23.2%
9.4. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Awards	1	58.1%	11.6%	5.8%			24.5%
	2	35.9%	4.5%	30.8%			28.8%
	3			82.6%			17.4%
9.5. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Special duty and seniority allowances	1	55.5%	2.6%	11.6%			30.3%
	2	64.1%	0.6%	25.0%			10.3%
	3	10.1%		37.7%			52.2%
9.6. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Opportunities to develop competences	1	54.8%	7.7%	36.1%			1.3%
	2	36.5%	7.7%	53.8%			1.9%
	3		5.8%	94.2%			
9.7. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Praise and recognition	1	17.4%	2.6%	68.4%			11.6%
	2	4.5%		88.5%			7.1%
	3			88.4%			11.6%
9.8. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Insurance packages, pension schemes	1	38.1%	6.5%	22.6%			32.9%
	2	32.7%	1.3%	29.5%			36.5%
	3	23.2%	5.8%	52.2%			18.8%
9.9. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Private healthcare	1	11.6%	2.6%	17.4%			68.4%
	2	1.3%		5.1%			93.6%
	3	15.9%	8.7%	58.0%			17.4%
9.10. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Sports cards	1	7.1%	4.5%	17.4%			71.0%
	2	5.1%		5.8%			89.1%
	3	11.6%	10.1%	62.3%			15.9%
9.11. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Vouchers and in-kind prizes	1	39.4%	3.2%	11.0%			46.5%
	2	33.3%		6.4%			60.3%
	3	5.8%	5.8%	63.8%			24.6%
9.12. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Modern work tools, comfortable workplace	1	8.4%	1.9%	87.7%			1.9%
	2	1.3%		88.5%			10.3%
	3			100.0%			
9.13. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Team building activities and events	1	9.7%	7.7%	51.0%			31.6%
	2	3.2%		52.6%			44.2%
	3			100.0%			
9.14. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Prevention and well-being programs	1	7.7%	1.3%	7.7%			83.2%
	2			38.5%			61.5%
	3			40.6%			59.4%
9.15. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Holiday subsidies	1	50.3%	2.6%	2.6%			44.5%
	2	65.4%		6.4%			28.2%
	3	10.1%	5.8%	14.5%			69.6%
9.16. Does your organization offer the following monetary and nonmonetary incentives to its employees? – Additional days off work (paid)	1	46.5%	4.5%	7.7%	2.6%		38.7%
	2	32.1%	0.6%	28.2%			39.1%
	3	5.8%		42.0%			52.2%
10. Do employees in your organization have the opportunity to use flexible working hours?	1	9.0%	1.3%	29.7%	11.0%	3.9%	45.2%
	2	3.8%	1.3%	51.9%	4.5%	1.9%	36.5%
	3	2.9%		69.6%	5.8%		21.7%
11. Do employees in your organization have the opportunity to use task-based working time?	1	10.3%	6.5%	9.7%	3.2%	1.9%	68.4%
	2	11.5%	1.3%	20.5%	3.8%	1.3%	61.5%
	3	5.8%	2.9%	68.1%		2.9%	20.3%
12. Do employees in your organization have the opportunity to perform remote work (outside of the designated workplace)?	1	26.5%	3.2%	33.5%	1.3%		35.5%
	2	21.8%	4.5%	25.0%	0.6%		48.2%
	3		2.9%	95.7%			1.4%
13. Do employees in your organization have the opportunity to work part-time?	1	30.3%	4.5%	52.3%	3.9%	2.6%	6.5%
	2	12.8%	1.3%	81.4%	1.9%	0.6%	1.9%
	3	2.9%		85.5%			11.6%
14. Do employees in your organization have the opportunity to have a fixed-term contract?	1	30.3%	2.6%	61.3%	2.6%	2.6%	0.6%
	2	6.4%		87.8%	1.9%	1.3%	2.6%
	3	2.9%	2.9%	82.6%			11.6%

Cont. table 2.

15. Does your organization use so-called job sharing?	1	11.0%	1.3%	17.4%	1.3%		69.0%
	2	1.9%	1.3%	35.3%	1.3%		60.2%
	3		5.8%	31.9%			62.3%
16. Do employees in your organization have the opportunity to use the so-called job crafting?	1	5.8%		11.0%	2.6%	1.3%	79.4%
	2			12.8%	1.3%	1.3%	84.6%
	3			10.1%			89.9%

Cl. – cluster; SE – subordinate employees; EDS – economically dependent self-employed; N/A – this possibility does not exist/is not used in our organization/the nature of the workplace does not allow it. The darker the orange background, the higher the percentage of responses, and the darker the green background, the lower the percentage.

Source: own research.

5.1. Cluster 1 ‘Traditionalists’: greater focus on subordinate employees

Cluster 1 is the most internally diverse. Employers usually apply “equality” principles here (although not in all areas and usually less frequently than in the other groups) or dedicate solutions to subordinate employees; less often they focus on solutions addressed exclusively or mostly to economically dependent self-employed workers. The share of the response: ‘This possibility does not exist/is not used in our organization/The nature of the workplace does not allow it’ is usually greater in their case than in the other groups.

The definitely equal approach (more than 2/3 of the responses for this variant) concerns the area of employee influence (the possibility of expressing their own opinions and presenting their own ideas and suggestions) and some elements of the area of reward system (motivation through modern work tools, as well as praise and recognition). The list of these variables is very short compared to the other clusters.

The solutions in the human resource flow area, i.e. promotions (vertical as well as horizontal), are in the case of the organizations from this cluster definitely dedicated to subordinate employees. In terms of the area of reward system, the organizations mostly or exclusively aim the instruments towards subordinate employees. This applies to instruments such as base salary, bonuses, awards, special duty and seniority allowances, the opportunity to improve competences, holiday subsidies, additional days off work, for which the percentage of responses providing the answer ‘only subordinate employees’ is approximately 50% or more. Modern work tools are definitely addressed to both groups of employees, although 10% of employers in this group (definitely more than in the other clusters) direct them mostly or exclusively to subordinate employees. They usually do not offer commissions, private healthcare, sports cards or vouchers, and any in-kind prizes (if used at all) are dedicated only to subordinate employees. Prevention and well-being programs are an instrument that is usually not used at all, and if it is used (and this is the case for less than 20% of organizations from this group), the self-employed are not distinguished (either they are treated on an equal basis with subordinate employees, or they are covered to a lesser extent or not at all).

None of the organizations in this cluster favors economically dependent self-employed workers (no answer “to a greater extent” or “only economically dependent self-employed”) in relation to the area of employee influence: access to information, the possibility for employees to express and implement their own ideas and projects, the impact on management processes, share in profits, or all analyzed motivation instruments analyzed.

The organizations gathered in this cluster usually do not provide the possibility (due to the specificity of the organizations and workplaces) of profit sharing or freely changing the project or the scope of tasks, job sharing, or job crafting. On the other hand, it is the only group that includes organizations that make job crafting available only to subordinate employees (although the percentage is not too high – 6%), and additionally take into account economically dependent self-employed workers to at least the same degree. They also stand out in relation to job sharing (11% of organizations apply it only to subordinate employees). When it comes to fixed-term contracts, they usually do not delimit the rules due to the form of employment (61% of organizations), but they also exceptionally often (30%) dedicate these contracts to subordinate employees, and less often, mostly or exclusively to economically dependent self-employed workers (5%). Similar conclusions apply to part-time work (52% / 30% / 7% respectively). Remote work is not used at all by about 1/3 of organizations in this group, but the share of only subordinate employees or equally subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers is similar. Flexible working hours is either not possible at all (45%) or equally applies to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers, although this aspect is distinguished (compared to other issues and other clusters) by the relatively high share of organizations that perceive it as a more adequate solution for either economically dependent self-employed (15%) or subordinate employees (10%).

5.2. Cluster 2 ‘Transforming’: a similar approach to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers, with a slightly greater focus on subordinate workers

Organizations that find themselves in this cluster usually apply the principles of equality – various HRM instruments apply equally to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers, while quite often they limit specific solutions mostly or exclusively to subordinate employees, and at the same time rarely or not at all apply solutions dedicated only to economically dependent self-employed workers.

The definitely equal approach (more than 2/3 of the responses for this variant) concerns the area of employee influence (informing employees about issues concerning the organization beyond what is necessary to perform the tasks of the job, the possibility for employees to express their own opinions, present their ideas, proposals, and suggestions, and implementing one's own ideas), as well as motivating through modern work tools, as well as fixed-term and part-time job opportunities. Similarly to the organizations from the first cluster, none of the organizations from this cluster favors economically dependent self-employed workers (no answer “to a greater extent” or “only economically dependent self-employed”) in relation to access to information, the possibility of expressing and implementing their own ideas or projects, their impact on management processes, share in profits and all analyzed motivation instruments.

Promotions (both vertical and horizontal) are equally available to both subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers (70%); in about one in five organizations, they are mostly or exclusively addressed to subordinate employees, although they are also possible for the economically dependent self-employed in individual organizations (which is the specificity of this cluster). These organizations usually do not provide the opportunity to share in profits, although in every third organization subordinate employees have the same opportunities in this respect as the economically dependent self-employed, and in nearly every fifth profit sharing opportunities are mostly or exclusively addressed to subordinate employees. They usually also do not have the possibility of freely changing the project or the scope of tasks carried out, whereas every third organization allows this to the same extent in the case of both groups.

In the area of reward system, individual motivation instruments are either limited to subordinate employees or they can be used equally by subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers. The organizations from this cluster usually do not use (due to the specificity of workplaces) such motivation instruments as commissions, private healthcare, sports cards, vouchers and in-kind prizes, or prevention programs (up to 94% of responses). On the other hand, base salary, as well as special duty and seniority allowances, are almost twice as often used as motivators of subordinate employees. Similarly, the equality approach and preference for subordinate employees were often (approximately 1/3 of responses) applied to bonuses, awards, insurance packages, and even more often the equality approach was applied to enabling the improvement of competences, praise and recognition, modern work tools, and team building events. Prevention and well-being programs are an instrument that is usually not used at all, and if it is used (and this is the case for 1/3 of organizations from this group), it is applied to the same degree to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers.

In the area of work system, in the organizations with this focus, task-based working time, remote work, job sharing and job crafting are usually not possible to use. At the same time, it should be noted that job sharing is available to at least an equal extent to more than 1/3 of subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers, and job crafting to at least an equal extent to 15% of self-employed. In turn, the possibility of remote work is applied equally to both groups of people by one in four organizations, and also by one in four – mostly or exclusively in relation to subordinate employees, in the case of task-based working time, the analogous rates are 21% and 13%. Part-time work, as well as flexible working hours, is equally possible for both groups in half of the organizations from this cluster; part-time job is only available to subordinate employees in the case of 1/3 of employers.

5.3. Cluster 3 ‘Genuine equal’: equal treatment of subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers

Organizations in this cluster definitely apply the principles of equality, as they use various HRM instruments equally in relation to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers.

A definitely equal approach (more than 2/3 of the responses for this variant) concerns many of the HRM aspects studied in the following areas: employee influence (informing employees about organizational issues beyond the scope of tasks necessary for a given position, the possibility of expressing their own opinions, presenting their own ideas and suggestions and implementing their own ideas, having an impact on decision-making processes in the organization), human resource flow (vertical and horizontal promotion, the possibility of freely changing the project and the scope of tasks performed), work systems (fixed-term work opportunities, part-time work, remote work, task-based working time, flexible working time) and reward systems (motivating by the base salary, bonuses, awards, creating opportunities for increasing competences, praise and recognition, modern work tools, and team-building activities/events). Their scope is therefore much larger than that in the other two clusters. Some HRM solutions were declared to equally apply to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers by almost all entities from this group (in other clusters, this did not happen). This applies to: (a) providing the opportunity to express their own opinions and present their own ideas and suggestions, and (b) motivating by modern work tools and team building activities/events. Similarly, in relation to: (a) providing the opportunity to realize and implement their own ideas and projects, (b) having an impact on decision making/management processes, (c) motivating by awards, praises, and recognition, (d) remote work, and (e) part-time work, (f) fixed-term work. In addition to the equality approach, there were (although relatively rarely) organizations that did not apply the solution at all or dedicated it (mostly or only) to subordinate employees.

Slightly more often than others (although also relatively rarely), the organizations from this cluster dedicate specific practices to the economically dependent self-employed (they use them more or only in relation to economically dependent self-employed workers). However, this does not apply to the areas of reward system and work system (remote work, part-time work, fixed-term work, job sharing and job crafting), and in the case of access to information, the possibility for employees to express and implement their own ideas and projects, and having an impact on management processes, they do not favor subordinate employees (the principle of equality is most often applied). Employers in this group usually do not give the opportunity to share profits.

As pointed out, in the area of reward system, the studied organizations do not differentiate access to individual instruments depending on the form of connection with the organization (they can be equally used by subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers). This also applies to reward system instruments usually not used in other organizations: private healthcare, sports cards, vouchers, and in-kind prizes. They usually do not

allow (due to the specificity of workplaces) commissions, special duty and seniority allowances, holiday subsidies, job sharing, or job crafting. Prevention programs and additional days off are instruments that are usually not used at all, and if they are used, they are applied equally to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers.

6. Conclusions

The results obtained from quantitative research can be graphically presented on a continuum from organizations using HRM instruments only for subordinate employees, through those offering them equally to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers, to organizations using HRM instruments only for economically dependent self-employed (Figure 1). Greater dimming of the shape means a higher frequency of occurrence of a given type of organization.

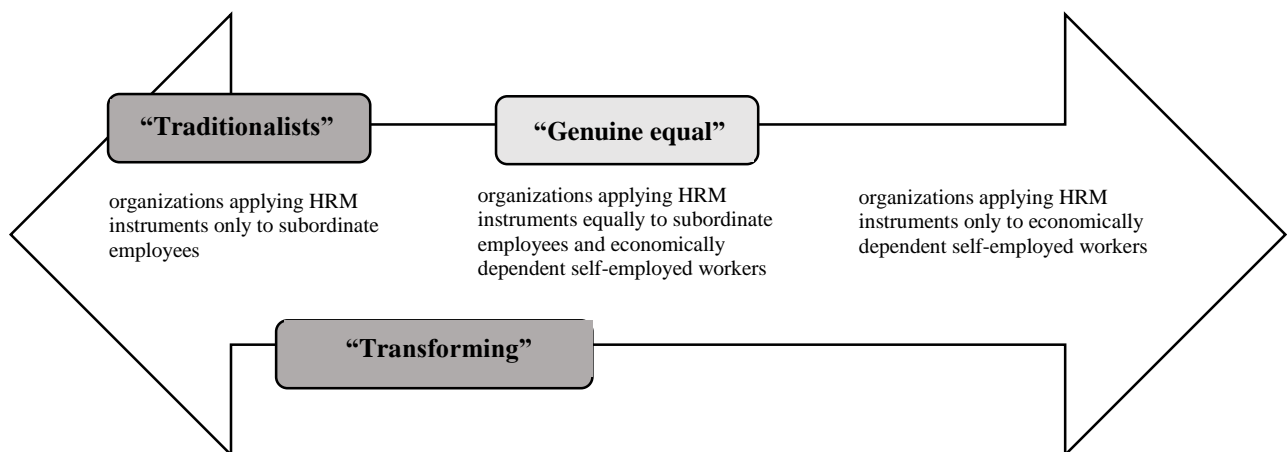


Figure 1. Breakdown of organizations in terms of the application of HRM instruments to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers.

Source: own research.

The surveyed organizations are generally located in the middle and left part of the continuum, which means that they mostly or exclusively apply equality principles (i.e., they apply various HRM instruments equally to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers) or they dedicate solutions to subordinate employees to a greater extent. None of the analyzed HRM instruments is addressed exclusively or predominantly to the economically dependent self-employed. The results of the research allowed us to distinguish three clusters of organizations differing in their approach to the differentiation of subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers in the area of human resources management. The first cluster includes 40.8% of employers, the second – a similar share (41.1%), and the third – 18.2%. (1) The authors described

organizations that focus more on subordinate employees (first group) as “Traditionalists.” These are mainly health care entities, and also quite often construction sector entities, and generally entities quite diverse in terms of industry and job profile. They more often have B2B employees than subordinate employees, while the turnover of employees mainly concerns workers under an employment contract. The length of service of subordinate employees working there is extensive and the length of service of economically dependent self-employed workers moderate. They rarely use a participatory approach to empowering employees. (2) “Transforming” organizations - applying a similar approach to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers, with a slightly greater focus on subordinate employees (second cluster) - are almost exclusively healthcare entities, with Polish capital, more often public than nonpublic, whose advantage is primarily related to intangible resources, in which the length of service of employees under employment and B2B contracts is long (usually over 5 years). In the last year, the turnover of employees in these organizations applied to both forms of employment to a similar extent. The organizations from this cluster employ the most employees (in both formulas), with a B2B dominance. They rarely use a participatory approach to management empowering employees. (3) The same approach to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers (third cluster) is the domain of “Genuine equal.” This approach is used especially by IT and commercial companies, representing professional, scientific, and technical activities, and partly also healthcare - nearly one third of employees occupy IT positions. Companies with foreign capital (usually majority), nonpublic, less frequently large entities, with the lowest average employment but the largest share of B2B and usually over 5 years of service of employees from both groups (with a slightly lower average for B2B) represent this cluster more often than the other clusters. Their advantage is primarily related to intangible resources. They more often give independence and co-decision-making power to their employees, and the turnover in the last year mainly concerned subordinate employees.

The research results may indicate that organizations focusing more and slightly more on subordinate employees (clusters 1 and 2) in the case of some HRM instruments clearly differentiate their availability to employees depending on the form of cooperation. Thus, subordinate employees in these organizations are offered a wider range of opportunities, especially in the field of vertical and horizontal promotions as well as some monetary and nonmonetary motivators. The most equal approach in these two clusters, i.e. the use of HRM elements equally in relation to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers, is applied in the areas of employee influence, work system, and, in the case of non-monetary incentives, within the reward system area. This may partly be due to the fact that, in the case of those HRM instruments which are not linked to additional costs for organizations, companies are more likely to offer the same opportunities to economically dependent self-employed workers as to subordinate employees. On the other hand, in the case of these instruments which require additional financial outlays from the organization (mainly

in the area of reward systems: bonuses, awards, special duty and seniority allowances, vouchers or holiday subsidies), enterprises generally offer them only to subordinate employees. These differences usually do not occur in cluster 3, where organizations strongly apply the principles of equality; various HRM instruments (from each of the four areas) apply equally to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers. It is worth noting that this cluster is dominated by non-public IT, commercial companies, representing professional, scientific, and technical activities. The equal approach of these organizations, i.e., offering the employee similar working conditions regardless of the form of cooperation, may partly result from the greater difficulties of these organizations in attracting competent employees in the labor market and an attempt to create a more attractive offer in order to maintain current employees as well as to compete for highly qualified candidates. The research results are worth comparing with a few similar studies. However, these studies do not relate to the organizational perspective (as in this study), but to the employee perspective of comparing self-employment and full-time work. Millan et al. (2020) compared dependent self-employed, workers, self-employed and paid employed in terms of job control, job demands, and job outcomes. The results show that hybrid work relationships are endowed with the least favorable attributes of both groups: lower job control than self-employed workers, higher job demands than paid employees and, overall, worse job outcomes than both. Other studies, in turn, compared the working conditions of economically dependent self-employed with the genuine self-employed. The results indicate that the economically dependent self-employed have poorer job prospects and less ability to use their skills and discretion than the genuine self-employed. However, in terms of the working time quality, they have better conditions than the genuine self-employed. Both groups have similar working conditions in terms of their physical and social environment and intensity of work (Horodnic et al., 2020). Studies are also being undertaken comparing workers in traditional and non-traditional employment relationships in terms of expressing voice, effectiveness of their voice in influencing management decisions, determinants, and outcomes of their voice (Oyetunde et al., 2021). On this basis, it can be assumed that there is a need for a more detailed understanding of the working conditions of dependent self-employed.

Zhang et al. (2015) note the erosion of the traditional, ‘standard employment relationship’ and point to its inevitable decline in a competitive and changing global economy. However, one can only partially agree with their recommendations that HRM strategies should focus on enhancing the employability and providing employment-friendly HRM practices through offering lengthy notice periods of termination to allow employees to look for new jobs or receive training elsewhere and fostering social security and inclusion. In the case of agency workers studied, priorities and approach on the part of employers are different than in the case of Polish employers, especially those from the third cluster, who are very likely to deal with knowledge workers characterized by very high competences.

The article is also part of a broader academic discourse on HRM practices towards non-traditional workers, including gig workers. Researchers ask questions about the intersections between HRM and the employment of contract-based gig workers (Kuhn et al., 2021). They envisage a significant extension of the HR architecture model (Luo et al., 2021) and propose to extend the HR model by reconsidering the rationale for, and nature of, HRM practices associated with contractors (Keegan, Meijerink, 2023). In the context of the increasing complexity of dynamic HRM systems, HRM practices are constantly changing and need to be reintegrated into coherent and strategically focused systems (Snell, Morris, 2021).

The modern labor market is heterogeneous and subject to many changes. In enterprises, subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers increasingly function side by side. Although legal aspects are quite commonly addressed in research, empirical studies that show similarities and differences in human resource management architecture with respect to these categories of employees are extremely rare. The presented paper addresses this issue by examining human resource management aimed at subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers. At the results same time, the obtained pave the way for future research. It would be interesting to examine the perception and assessment of HRM practices used in particular types of organizations, as well as individual and organizational outcomes, including the motives of employees who decided to cooperate with the employer on a full-time or contractual basis. When analyzing the motives underlying management decisions, it is worth referring to the words of Morgan, who notes that when analyzing publications from recent years, it can be seen that there is a fundamental lack of consideration of some of the changes that have affected contemporary organizations, such as growing globalization, the Internet, regulations, and deregulation, and a different moral climate. Instead, the majority of these publications tend to discuss organizations as if they were still embedded in the traditional model of being a real place where people gather, while with current technological progress, many organizations are virtual ones (Morgan, 2000). Kowalski and Loretto refer to changing workplaces in the context of new challenges for employees and employers, as stakeholders attempt to navigate the introduction of new technologies amidst a dynamic business environment, keeping in mind the need to adapt to the migrant worker population or the ongoing skills shortage (Kowalski, Loretto, 2017). In the Polish context, it would be worth recognizing whether and how virtualization of the working environment, additionally dynamized by the COVID-19 pandemic and the influx of immigrants from war-torn Ukraine, is affecting the optics of Polish employers in the context of the study.

The article also contains practical implications for HR practice. It can provide guidance for organisations that have so far employed only subordinate employees, but changes in the labour market have contributed to greater employment flexibility and to start working with economically dependent self-employed workers as well. The article clearly shows how other organisations differentiate their HRM activities towards these two groups of employees, which can provide a basis for comparing their own organisation's activities. Furthermore, the results

of the survey clearly indicated that organisations applying HRM instruments equally to subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers ('Genuine equal') are only 18.2 %. Thus, the practical conclusion can be drawn that such an equal approach by organisations towards different employee groups can be a strong incentive for potential employees within the Employee Value Proposition and can thus serve organisations in building a competitive advantage in the area of employer branding. This, in turn, can contribute to building employee loyalty and commitment.

The question arises as to whether the results of this research on a representative sample of Polish companies can be useful in a broader European context. It seems that although human resource management in Europe still is not a universal concept (Gooderham, Morley, Brewster, Mayrhofer, 2004; Morley, 2004) this research in each European country can stimulate discussion and future research on the issues. The research carried out for the purposes of this article contributes to the growing trend of research on subordinate employees and economically dependent self-employed workers in Poland, extending it to the perspective of human resources management. The methodological contribution of the paper can matter to a large group of scholars who could apply the methodological framework developed and used in the paper to study approaches in the field of human resource management in other countries, other contexts, and other conditions.

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