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# COMPLEMENTARITY OF RELATIONAL AND STRUCTURAL-PROCEDURAL MECHANISMS IN REDUCING PERSONNEL RISK IN IT DEPARTMENTS: THE ROLE OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT AND BALANCED HRM

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**Purpose:** The aim of the article is to empirically assess the relationship between sustainable human resource management, psychological contracts and personnel risk in IT departments, and to verify whether psychological contracts act as an intermediary mechanism in the relationship between HR practices and personnel risk.
**Design/methodology/approach:** The article is a review and research paper. The empirical part includes a quantitative, cross-sectional survey conducted between January and May 2025 among IT department managers in Poland (N = 100). An original 36-item questionnaire was used, and hypotheses were tested using structural equation modelling with bootstrap estimation of the indirect effect.
**Findings:** Balanced human resource management was negatively associated with personnel risk and positively associated with psychological contract. In the SEM model, the relationship between psychological contract and personnel risk did not reach statistical significance, and the indirect effect was not confirmed.
**Research limitations/implications:** The study is cross-sectional, based on self-report data and a sample of 100 managers. The absence of mediation should therefore be treated as a lack of confirmation in this sample and as a basis for testing alternative conditional and configurational models.
**Practical implications:** The findings suggest that personnel risk in IT departments should be reduced not only through relational HR practices, but also through coherent structural and procedural solutions, including transparent rules, development systems and stable work organisation.
**Social implications:** The study supports a sustainable HRM perspective in which organisational effectiveness is combined with employee well-being, procedural fairness and responsible management of employment relationships.
**Originality/value:** The article proposes a complementary approach in which relational mechanisms are analysed together with structural and procedural mechanisms in reducing personnel risk in IT departments. The lack of confirmation of mediation provides a basis for developing models that take into account parallel channels of HR practices.

**Keywords:** sustainable human resource management, psychological contract, personnel risk, IT departments, mediation.
**Category of the paper:** Research paper; Literature review.

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary organisations, especially in knowledge-based sectors, are increasingly faced with heightened personnel risk, high turnover, difficulties in retaining talent, and an increase in undesirable behaviour from the employer's perspective (Zhao et al., 2022; Ahmic, Smajlovic, 2022). The literature points to the concept of sustainable human resource management (hereinafter: SHRM) as a response to these challenges, which emphasises the long-term balance between organisational effectiveness and employee well-being (Gilal et al., 2024; Ramgolam et al., 2024). At the same time, research is being conducted on the psychological contract, understood as subjective beliefs about mutual obligations in the employee-organisation relationship (Rousseau, 1989, as cited in Bal et al., 2013). Fulfilling the psychological contract is associated with higher levels of trust and reciprocity, as well as favourable attitudes and behaviours among employees (Nassar, 2021). In particular, its relationship with job satisfaction and intention to leave is pointed out, which is directly relevant to personnel risk (Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2020).

Previous studies often explain the impact of HR practices on organisational performance through relational mechanisms, including the psychological contract treated as a mediator (Katou, 2015; Bandyopadhyay, Gupta, 2022). At the same time, in the context of IT departments, there are conditions that may limit explanations based solely on the relational channel. This raises the research question of whether, in the IT department environment, relational mechanisms are indeed the dominant channel through which HR practices influence personnel risk, or whether their role is secondary to structural and procedural solutions. High employee mobility and market pressure mean that decisions to remain in an organisation depend not only on the quality of relationships, but also on structural and procedural conditions and organisational solutions, such as transparency of rules, stability of work organisation, development systems and consistency of procedures (Tiwari, 2023; Mounika et al., 2025). From the perspective of the psychological contract, it is also important that its violation and assessment may be processual, cumulative and sensitive to the organisational context, which reinforces the importance of analysing the mechanisms and boundary conditions of its impact (Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2025).

The aim of the article is twofold. First, the theoretical objective is to synthesise the literature on sustainable human resource management (SHRM), psychological contracts and personnel risk in the context of IT departments, and to propose an approach to the complementarity of relational and structural-procedural mechanisms. Secondly, the empirical objective is to

confirmatively verify the model of the relationship between SHRM practices, perceived fulfilment of the psychological contract and personnel risk, with particular emphasis on the indirect effect test.

The contribution of the article consists in (1) shifting the analysis of HRM towards the perspective of personnel risk in the specific context of IT departments, (2) empirical verification of the relational (mediation) model from a managerial perspective, and (3) interpretation of the results within the framework of the complementarity of relational and structural-procedural mechanisms.

## 2. Literature review and research gaps

Sustainable human resource management (SHRM) extends the traditional HR perspective by introducing a long-term orientation and balancing organisational and employee interests (Gilal et al., 2024; Ramgolam et al., 2024). Rooted in resource-based and stakeholder perspectives, SHRM treats human capital and HR systems as strategic resources and emphasises formalised practices such as competence development, participatory management, work–life balance and transparent remuneration (Barney, 1991, as cited in Gilal et al., 2024; Ramgolam et al., 2024; Kaur et al., 2024; Hassanein et al., 2024). Empirical evidence links sustainable HR practices to higher engagement, stronger loyalty and lower turnover intentions, often assuming that these effects operate through employee attitudes, including the psychological contract (Zhao et al., 2022; Katou, 2015; Bandyopadhyay, Gupta, 2022).

IT departments constitute a particularly demanding context due to high labour mobility and rapid technological change (Tiwari, 2023; Mounika et al., 2025). Turnover generates direct and indirect costs, increasing personnel risk (Pfeffer, 1998, as cited in Ahmic, Smajlovic, 2022). While SHRM may stabilise retention and development, relational mechanisms alone may prove insufficient without procedural coherence and organisational governance (Tiwari, 2023)

Personnel risk refers to employee-related threats to organisational functioning, including turnover, withdrawal and undesirable behaviours (Ahmic, Smajlovic, 2022; Shibly et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2022). From a risk-oriented perspective, such threats are often systemic and linked to organisational shortcomings (Vogus, 2004; Singhal, 2023).

The psychological contract, defined as employees' subjective beliefs about mutual obligations (Höglund, 2012; Bal et al., 2013), is associated with satisfaction, commitment and lower turnover intentions, and is frequently treated as a mediator in line with social exchange theory (Lv, Xu, 2018; Zhao et al., 2022; Nassar, 2021; Blau, 1964, as cited in Zhao et al., 2022). However, as an individual and perceptual construct, it does not directly capture structural conditions. In highly competitive labour markets, trust and reciprocity may not offset the

absence of competitive and procedurally stable arrangements (Vogus, 2004; Li, 2022; Madhumitha et al., 2024; Mounika et al., 2025).

Thus, the key question is whether, in IT departments, the psychological contract constitutes the dominant mechanism linking SHRM to personnel risk, or whether it operates alongside structural and procedural solutions. To address this issue, a model was adopted including a direct SHRM–personnel risk relationship and a potential indirect effect via psychological contract fulfilment.

## 3. Research hypotheses

H1. Sustainable human resource management is negatively related to personnel risk in IT departments.

H2. Balanced human resource management is positively related to perceived fulfilment of the psychological contract in the employee-organisation relationship.

H3. Perceived fulfilment of the psychological contract is negatively related to personnel risk in IT departments.

H4. Perceived fulfilment of the psychological contract mediates the relationship between sustainable human resource management and personnel risk in IT departments.

## 4. Methods

This article is a review and research paper. The theoretical part is a synthetic integration of the literature, while the empirical part is quantitative, cross-sectional and confirmatory. The study was designed as a diagnostic survey conducted in the form of an online questionnaire (CAWI). The logic of the analyses is confirmatory in nature, as hypotheses H1-H4, including the mediation model, are verified. The study covered IT department managers employed in organisations operating in Poland. The inclusion criteria were: (1) holding a managerial position in the IT department for at least 12 months, (2) direct responsibility for managing a team of specialists, (3) active participation in HR processes in the IT department (recruitment, assessment, development), and (4) access to information allowing for the assessment of the department's functioning. The sample was purposively selected with stratification by sector and organisation size, which made it possible to take into account the diversity of organisational contexts.

The data was collected using the CAWI method between January and May 2025. A total of 117 complete questionnaires were obtained, of which 100 were qualified for analysis after applying data quality criteria. Men predominated in the sample (59%), and 65% of respondents declared managerial experience of more than 6 years. Detailed demographic and organisational characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.**
*Demographic and organisational characteristics of the sample (N = 100)*

| Variable | Category | n | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Men | 59 | 59 |
| | Women | 41 | 41 |
| Age | 30-39 | 35 | 35 |
| | 40-49 | 27 | 27 |
| | Other groups | 38 | 38 |
| Management experience | > 6 years | 65 | 65 |
| | ≤ 6 years | 35 | 35 |
| Size of organisation | Medium/large | 61 | 61 |
| | Small | 39 | 39 |
| Sector | Services | 33 | 33 |
| | IT/technology | 25 | 25 |
| | Other | 42 | 42 |

Source: Own study.

The variables in the study are managers' perceptual assessments of: (a) sustainable human resource management practices implemented in the organisation, (b) perceived fulfilment of the psychological contract, and (c) perceived personnel risk in the department.

A proprietary questionnaire comprising 36 measurement items was used. All items were in the form of statements rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire covered three constructs: (1) SHRM, 8 items relating to the perceived maturity and consistency of personnel management practices in the long term; (2) psychological contract, 12 items measuring perceived fulfilment of obligations in the employment relationship; (3) personnel risk, 16 items covering perceived threats to the functioning of the department resulting from staff turnover, loss of key competences and undesirable behaviour.

Content validation was carried out in two stages. In the first stage, a panel of 10 experts representing HRM (n = 3), IT (n = 4) and economics and management (n = 3) was appointed. In the second stage, independent validation was carried out in an extended group of 40 experts (HRM n = 12, IT managers and analysts n = 16, organisational economics n = 12). The experts assessed the content adequacy and linguistic clarity of the items on a five-point scale. Based on the assessments, the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) and Content Validity Index (I-CVI and S-CVI/Ave) indicators were calculated. For the panel of 10 experts, a critical value of CVR = 0.62 was adopted. The results confirmed the content validity of the items: for SHRM CVR 0.64-0.86 and S-CVI = 0.91; for personnel risk CVR 0.68-0.92 and S-CVI = 0.93; for the psychological contract CVR 0.62–0.88 and S-CVI = 0.89. (Lawshe, 1975; Polit, Beck, 2007; Ayre, Scally, 2017).

Internal reliability was assessed using Cronbach's α coefficient (Cronbach, 1951; Kaiser, 1970; Bartlett, 1950; Worthington, Whittaker, 2006). The values obtained were $\alpha = 0.774$ for SHRM, $\alpha = 0.764$ for the psychological contract, and $\alpha = 0.967$ for personnel risk. Prior to factor analysis, the adequacy of the data for factorisation was confirmed, obtaining KMO = 0.907 and a significant Bartlett's sphericity test ($\chi^2 = 2847.3$; $p < 0.001$). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) confirmed the unidimensional structure of each scale, with explained variance: SHRM 45.9% (loadings 0.52-0.78), personnel risk 51.1% (loadings 0.61-0.85) and psychological contract 44.4% (loadings 0.49-0.81). Next, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed for individual scales, obtaining an acceptable fit of measurement models (CFI 0.910-0.940; TLI 0.890-0.910; RMSEA 0.062-0.068; SRMR 0.048-0.052). It should be noted that exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted on the same sample, therefore the obtained fit parameters are preliminary and require replication on an independent sample (Worthington, Whittaker, 2006).

In the first step, descriptive statistics and correlations between variables were calculated. In the second step, the relationship model was estimated using structural equation modelling (SEM) at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, reporting standardised coefficients (β), p-values and 95% confidence intervals. The use of SEM was justified by the need to simultaneously estimate relationships in the mediation model and reduce measurement error compared to single-equation approaches.

The indirect effect, understood as the indirect relationship between sustainable human resource management and personnel risk via a psychological contract, was estimated using SEM. The significance of the indirect effect was verified using the bootstrap method based on 95% confidence intervals; the results of the Sobel test were also presented as supplementary information. Due to the limited power of tests for indirect effects at N = 100, the lack of confirmation of mediation was interpreted cautiously and treated as a result not confirming the indirect effect in this sample. Due to the use of self-reporting in the survey and the simultaneous measurement of variables in a single questionnaire, there is a risk of common method variance (CMV). In order to limit CMV, procedural safeguards were used, including ensuring the anonymity of respondents, neutral wording of items, and separation of blocks of questions concerning independent and dependent variables. Despite the use of solutions, CMV cannot be completely ruled out, which should be treated as a limitation of the study. The adopted model design allows for the separation and independent estimation of the impact of relational and structural-procedural mechanisms. This procedure is a preliminary step to testing conditional (moderational), interactive or configurational models, which require different specifications and greater statistical power. (Preacher, Hayes, 2008; Sobel, 1982; Fritz, MacKinnon, 2007; Podsakoff et al., 2003; Podsakoff et al., 2012).

## 5. Results

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the constructs studied. The highest mean was recorded for the psychological contract (M = 3.94; SD = 0.43), which indicates a relatively positive assessment of the employment relationship from a managerial perspective. The average level of SHRM was M = 3.23 (SD = 0.37), while the average level of personnel risk was M = 2.69 (SD = 0.45).

**Table 2.**
*Descriptive statistics and reliability of scales (N = 100)*

| Construct | M | SD | Skewness | Kurtosis | Cronbach's α |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SHRM | 3.23 | 0.37 | −0.14 | 0.21 | 0.774 |
| Personnel risk | 2.69 | 0.45 | 0.14 | −0.51 | 0.967 |
| Psychological contract | 3.94 | 0.43 | −0.19 | 0.35 | 0.764 |

Source: Own study.

Table 3 presents correlations between variables. SHRM was strongly and negatively correlated with personnel risk ($r = -0.656$; $p < 0.001$) and positively correlated with the psychological contract ($r = 0.553$; $p < 0.001$). The psychological contract showed a negative correlation with personnel risk ($r = -0.376$; $p < 0.001$).

**Table 3.**
*Correlation matrix of the studied constructs*

| Construct | SHRM | Personnel risk | Psychological contract |
|---|---|---|---|
| SHRM | 1.000 | | |
| Personnel risk | −0.656*** | 1.000 | |
| Psychological contract | 0.553 | −0.376*** | 1.000 |

Note. *** $p < 0.001$.

Source: Own study.

The relationship model was estimated using the SEM method, reporting standardised coefficients. The results of hypothesis testing are presented in Table 4. SHRM was significantly and negatively associated with personnel risk (H1: $\beta = -0.268$; $p = 0.016$). SHRM was significantly and positively associated with the psychological contract (H2: $\beta = 0.466$; $p < 0.001$). The relationship between the psychological contract and personnel risk did not reach statistical significance in the SEM model (H3: $\beta = -0.082$; $p = 0.451$). The structural model was similar to the saturated model, therefore global fit indices were not informative; path coefficients with confidence intervals were reported.

**Table 4.**
*Results of hypothesis testing in the SEM model*

| Hypothesis | Path | β | SE | t | p | 95% CI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | SHRM → personnel risk | −0.268 | 0.108 | −2.48 | 0.016 | [−0.481; −0.054] |
| H2 | SHRM → psychological contract | 0.466 | 0.089 | 5.23 | <0.001 | [0.291; 0.641] |
| H3 | psychological contract → personnel risk | −0.082 | 0.109 | −0.76 | 0.451 | [−0.296; 0.132] |

Source: Own study.

The indirect effect, understood as the indirect influence of SHRM on personnel risk through a psychological contract, was not confirmed (H4: $\beta = -0.034$; $p = 0.767$; 95% CI [−0.137; 0.076]). The Sobel test also did not indicate the significance of the indirect effect ($Z = -0.68$; $p = 0.497$). This means that despite the significant relationship between balanced human resource management and psychological contract (H2) and the observed negative correlation between psychological contract and personnel risk, the SEM model did not show a significant impact of psychological contract on personnel risk. Thus, no empirical confirmation of the mediating role of psychological contract in the analysed model was obtained.

Given the limited sample size, the lack of mediation should be interpreted as a lack of confirmation of the indirect effect in this sample. Power analysis indicates that $N = 100$ is sufficient for detecting medium and large effects, but insufficient for reliably detecting small effects, which are typical for indirect paths.

## 6. Discussion

The lack of confirmation of psychological contract mediation (H4) suggests that in the dynamic IT labour market the relational channel does not fully explain the impact of HRM practices on personnel risk. Rather than undermining the theoretical relevance of the psychological contract, this finding indicates that relational mechanisms alone may be insufficient to account for personnel risk understood as a systemic phenomenon (Katou, 2015; Bandyopadhyay, Gupta, 2022). From a risk management perspective, the result is consistent with the assumption that personnel risk requires systemic solutions, not only attitudinal alignment (Vogus, 2004; Ahmic, Smajlovic, 2022).

The findings therefore challenge the dominance of relational mediation models in the IT context and indicate that SHRM may exert a direct, stabilising effect on personnel risk. This supports a complementary framework in which relational and structural–procedural mechanisms coexist, and their relative importance depends on process maturity and labour market conditions.

At the same time, alternative explanations must be considered, including limitations in measuring the psychological contract from a managerial perspective, limited statistical power, potential construct overlap, and the cross-sectional design. Thus, the absence of mediation

should be treated as a direction for further research rather than as evidence of a single dominant mechanism.

In IT departments characterised by high mobility and competitive pressure, relational bonds may not suffice without parallel procedural stability and competitive organisational conditions (Mounika et al., 2025). The results therefore support a risk-oriented interpretation of SHRM, in which systemic maturity and procedural coherence constitute key components of personnel risk reduction.

## 7. Summary

The analysis integrates a review of the literature with the results of a quantitative survey among IT managers. The results confirmed that SHRM practices are directly and significantly associated with lower personnel risk (H1), promote higher perceived fulfilment of the psychological contract (H2), and that fulfilment of the contract showed a negative relationship with personnel risk, but this path did not reach statistical significance in the SEM model. At the same time, the mediating role of the psychological contract in the relationship between SHRM and personnel risk (H4) was not confirmed. This means that in the sample studied, the impact of SHRM on personnel risk was not primarily explained by the relational path.

In theoretical terms, this result supports the development of models integrating relational and structural-procedural mechanisms. The psychological contract remains useful for explaining attitudes and behaviours at the individual level, but in the analysis of systemic phenomena such as personnel risk, its role should be considered in conjunction with the architecture of organisational processes, the maturity of HR functions and the quality of procedural governance (Katou, 2015; Vogus, 2004; Li, 2022). Incorporating a risk management perspective into research on HRM allows for a better understanding of the function of HR practices not only as motivational tools, but also as stabilising and protective mechanisms (Ahmic, Smajlovic, 2022; Shibly et al., 2025). Excessive investment in relational practices without procedural stability can lead to unstable employee retention outcomes in IT departments. In this article, the concept of synergy is understood as the complementarity of relational and structural-procedural mechanisms, rather than as an empirically tested interactive effect. Conclusions about potential conditional effects should therefore be treated as a theoretical proposal resulting from the integration of literature and empirical observations concerning the lack of mediation. The lack of significance of the mediating path indicates the need to explore alternative configurative models. Future research should verify the moderation hypothesis, in which the psychological contract acts as a boundary condition (e.g., it enhances the impact of procedures only when trust is high), and analyse parallel mediating paths.

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