
Knowledge and Aptitudes of Students and Graduates of Culinary Schools for Human Resources Management*

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the article is to present the results of the research conducted to diagnose the level of knowledge and preparation of students and graduates of catering schools for human resources management in catering industry organizations. In addition, it contains an indication of issues that should be introduced into the curriculum at catering schools or specialist courses in the field of HR.

Design/ methodology/approach: The research was conducted using the diagnostic survey method by the aid of a questionnaire.

Findings: The obtained research results made it possible to learn the level of knowledge of students and graduates of culinary schools, majoring in chefs, in terms of their preparation for managing a team of employees. Both strengths and deficits in knowledge in the area of human resources management were diagnosed.

Practical implications: The suggested issues that should complement teaching programs or be prepared as courses, provide an opportunity to create steady task-oriented teams and reduce employee turnover in the catering industry. Moreover, they will contribute to improving knowledge in the field of building lasting and effective relationships between an employee and his superior.

Originality/ value: The conducted research and its results draw attention to the need to equip students and graduates of vocational catering schools with issues in the field of human resources management. Knowledge and skills in working with people apply to everyone who works in task-oriented teams. Therefore, access to knowledge in the field of human resources management should also be available to students and graduates of vocational and secondary vocational schools.

Keywords: Human Resources Management, knowledge, catering industry

JEL Codes: M5, L8.

Paper type: Study research.

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1. Introduction

Topic of Human Resources Management (HRM) is an ongoing challenge for both theoreticians and practitioners. Nowadays, effective human resources management is undoubtedly a key element of organizational management due to which it is easier to achieve success and business goals (Huyhn, Minh, and Sang 2024). At the time of continuous discussion about employee market, skillful recruitment and retaining an employee in the organization becomes quite a challenge.

Additional difficulty is the presence of Generation Z representatives on the labor market, who are characterized by five features, this generation is: digital, global, social, mobile and visual (McCrindle and Ashley, 2019). Representatives of Generation Z expect their employer to share their value system, show understanding of their life priorities, and what is important support employees in their non-professional activities, social, civic and charitable (Kaczmarczyk 2023).

Therefore, retaining young employees is difficult for employers, often even more difficult than self-employment. Difficulties related to employee management in the catering industry could be observed during the COVID-19 pandemic (Grochowicz, 2020; Bressan, Alonso, Vu, Tran, and Tran, 2022). The issue of Human Resources Management in the catering sector pose a research gap, especially the issue related to the preparation of people to play the role of a manager or a chef. Matters not previously discussed in the theory of management discipline find their place in practice.

HRM issues are faced every day by staff managing kitchens, restaurants and other catering facilities. This is complemented by the lack of an educational offer addressed to management staff in the catering industry, as well as HRM classes in the school curriculum at the level of vocational and secondary schools. It turns out that this situation is not an isolated for other countries, for instance, Italy and Germany (Sienkiewicz, 2021). The research was aimed at checking the level of knowledge and predispositions to human resources management of students and graduates of vocational and secondary schools majoring in cooking.

The research question was what knowledge of human resources management do students of catering schools and their graduates have, and to what extent are students and graduates prepared to manage human resources in workplace?

The student research was aimed at finding out the strengths and deficits of students and graduates, and thus identifying specific issues that ought to be included in the curriculum.

2. Human Resources Management in Literature

Referring to the resources of various scientific disciplines, it should be stated that HRM is undoubtedly interdisciplinary in nature. Taking management into account, it is worth quoting Armstrong's definition here, which defines it (HRM) as a coherent and strategic approach to the management of assets considered to be the highest value of the company, i.e., its employees (Armstrong, 2000).

The above definition emphasizes the importance of employees in the organization and suggests taking care of their needs in order not to lose their potential. Another definition is provided by H. Bieniok, who defines resource management as making decisions and actions aimed at the effective use of human resources in order to provide the organization with a competitive advantage, which ultimately leads to long-term development while meeting the needs of employees (Bieniok, 2006).

This approach is even more important when there is a generation of young workers on the labor market who manifest their needs and expectations towards employers (Konkel, 2023). The concept of human resources management has many definitions.

However, in the source literature it is difficult to find items that directly address the issue of knowledge and preparation for performing managerial position and managerial functions in the catering industry. Despite of the gap in this area, available in terms of literature, note that an important aspect today is the level of knowledge, as well as "cultural differences and the inability to overcome barriers (insufficient management of scientific teams - lack of knowledge) which result in a waste of unique qualifications that could help achieve a competitive advantage in organizations (Janowska, 2015).

This statement is not isolated, because one of the most valuable resources is knowledge and skills (Pocztowski 2003). It is similar in managers' case. Knowledge about HRM applies not only to the personnel function, but to everyone who plays a management role (Edvardsson, 2008). Therefore, the need to possess knowledge in the field of HRM also applies to the catering industry. The problem of employee turnover in catering industry was highlighted during the crisis that effected the entire world, which confirmed the theory that HRM is influenced by the external and internal environment of the organization (Górski, 208).

Taking into account the fact that human resources management is a complicated concept, it may be difficult for students and graduates of culinary schools to learn. Therefore, regarding the catering industry, and more specifically, catering industry employees who perform managerial roles and have graduated from vocational and secondary schools, attention should be focused on basic issues, namely management itself.

The term "management" is also defined in various dimensions. R.W. Griffin assumes that, *management is a set of activities (including planning and decision-making, organizing, leading, i.e. managing people and controlling), directed at the organization's resources (human, financial, material and information), performed with the intention of achieving the intended goals of the organization in an efficient and effective manner* (Griffin, 1998).

Recalling in R.W. Griffin's definition a set of activities including planning and decision-making, organizing, leading, i.e. managing people and controlling, are identical in the management functions indicated by H. Fayol.

He distinguished five basic functions, i.e., planning, which is closely related to forecasting, organizing, which does not refer only to administrative activities, coordinating all resources and activities, including human resources, leading, i.e. dictating, giving orders, leading to plan execution), controlling the implementation of the plan (Fayol 1916).

Due to the fact that functions are sine qua non of management, including human resources management, the study focused on these functions. H. Fayol stated that management is a skill that can be acquired, not an innate gift (Fayol 1930). Thus, it can be assumed that students and graduates should acquire knowledge in the field of management, or more precisely, the essence of management functions, and then transfer them to issues related to human resources management.

3. Methodological Assumptions and Course of Research

A review of the literature allows us to assume that no research has been conducted so far on the level of knowledge and preparation of students and graduates of vocational schools in the field of human resources management. Therefore, it was assumed that the research would have a diagnostic purpose and would concern learning the level of knowledge and predispositions in the field of human resources management possessed by students and graduates of catering schools specializing in chefs.

The research questions generate hypotheses that it is assumed that the knowledge of student and graduates in the field of HRM is negligible. A similar assumption was made regarding the preparation of students and graduates for human resources management - it is not sufficient.

The research method used in the study was a diagnostic survey (Robinson, 2018). The research technique used was a survey, and a survey questionnaire was used as a research tool. The tool used included open and closed questions. The questions contained content strictly related to human resources management, as well as skills related to planning, organizing, leading (motivating) and control. This approach was intentional. It was considered that having these skills gives the right to assume that the examined person has predispositions to generally understood management.

The research tool also included questions regarding interpersonal competences, including: communication, conflict resolution. This, in turn, indicated the ability to cooperate in a team, which is crucial in HRM (Król, 2013). The survey was conducted among representatives - student and graduates of catering schools (chef majors) in Germany, Italy and Poland, in the period from April 15, 2024 to June 30, 2024. The selection of the sample was purposeful. An additional criterion for participation in the study was completing an apprenticeship or taking up professional work within two years of completing education.

The developed survey questionnaire was translated and distributed to partners in Germany and Poland. The survey was carried out by the project team, which consisted of project partners, i.e., Uckermarkischer Bildungsverbund gGmbH from Germany, ENAC Ente Nazionale Canossiano ETS from Italy and the project leader, TOP-PROJEKT-AKADEMIA Spółka z o.o.

The research was carried out in two phases - pilot and research studies. Pilot studies showed difficulties and misunderstanding of the issues addressed to respondents. Therefore, the survey has been simplified.

The study involved 172 students of culinary schools: 72 from Germany, 51 from Italy and 58 from Poland. The largest age group was 15-18 years old - 41.7%.

Table 1. *Age of respondents*

No	Age	Poland	Italy	Germany
1.	15 - 18 years	34,00	27,00	13,00
2.	19 - 30 years	14,00	24,00	59,00
3.	31- 40 years	4,00	0	0

Source: *Author's calculations.*

The next category examined was the gender of the respondents. The majority of respondents were women (57%).

Table 2. *Gender of the respondents*

No	Gender	Poland	Italy	Germany
1.	Female	34,00	21,00	43,00
2.	Male	17,00	30,00	29,00

Source: *Author's calculations.*

The following category characterizing the research group was education. However, due to the different vocational education systems in all countries that participated in the study, it was impossible to clearly indicate the type of school the respondents graduated from.

Therefore, generalizing the research results, it should be stated that in the case of Poland, the number of people with primary and basic vocational education was at the same level - 18 people. Eighteen respondents had secondary education. They all study at culinary schools.

In the case of Germany, the group of respondents included people who study at a professional school (basic vocational school) (Berufsschule), 66 students and 6 in secondary school. Unfortunately, not all respondents marked this answer. Regarding Italy, in vocational training centers (Formazione professionale (centri di formazione professionale) study 26 respondents, and in secondary school (Secondaria di primo grado (scuola media) – 22.

The condition for participation in the study was met because the respondents attended or graduated from vocational schools with a gastronomic profile in a given country.

4. Analysis of Research Results

The substantive questions began by checking the respondents' knowledge of managing a team of employees. All respondents answered this question. It is worth noting that in the original survey questionnaire the question concerned Human Resources Management. However, it has been simplified to the term of managing a team of employees.

Table 3. Sources of gaining knowledge in the field of HRM

No.	What classes on managing a team of employees have you participated in?	Poland	Italy	Germany
1.	I did not attend any classes	22,00	24,00	29,00
2.	Activities organized by the school	17,00	15,00	25,00
3.	Courses organized by a training company	0	0	0
4.	Activities organized by the employer	10,00	10,00	15,00
5.	Webinars, online courses	0	0	0
6.	Other, what?	2,00	2,00	3,00

Source: Author's calculations.

According to the respondents, they have knowledge about managing a team of employees. However, it should be noted that a large percentage of respondents (43.6%) believe that they have no knowledge of HRM. What draws attention is that knowledge is provided to respondents primarily by school - 33.1%, but also by employers - 20.3%. It is worth pointing out that schools do not have HRM in their

curriculum in any or the surveyed countries, so it was certainly the school's own initiative - perhaps the class teacher. In regard to employers, it can be assumed that it was learning through practice, i.e. observing managers in the workplace. What is interesting is that the respondents show interest in the issue of HRM, but do not show their own initiative to acquire knowledge. This may be related to the characteristics of Generation Z or the lack of awareness of the need to have such knowledge.

This question was complemented by a request for the respondents to try to develop the abbreviation HRM; in the case of respondents from Italy and Germany, this abbreviation was formulated appropriately for linguistic purposes. It can be said that the abbreviation in most cases - 83% of respondents, indicates knowledge of this abbreviation.

However, it should be noted that there were cases where the written answers were crossed out or corrected. This indicates a lack of certainty about the term itself. It is probable that the respondents supported each other in completing the survey questionnaire.

The next question included in the survey questionnaire was one regarding the topic of managing a team of employees: What topics have you encountered regarding managing a team of employees? It should be noted that the answers included, among others: answers regarding the HRM process. It turns out that respondents have encountered the terms mentioned, but there are some that were chosen more often by respondents.

These include motivation (26.1%), which seems to be a very popular category in general. This is certainly also due to the fact that each of the respondents is motivated in some way by their relatives, teachers or employers. The next category was work planning (17.44%). This term, like motivation, can be considered commonly known, occurring in relation to planning one's own work.

Table 4. *Knowledge of HR issues*

No.	Which topics have you encountered regarding managing a team of employees?	Poland	Italy	Germany
1.	Motivating employees	12,00	14,00	19,00
2.	Delegating tasks	9,00	7,00	8,00
3.	Recruiting employees	1,00	0	4,00
4.	Team building	4,00	5,00	5,00
5.	Employee evaluation	1,00	0	7,00
6.	Feedback	2,00	3,00	3,00
7.	Conflict resolution	8,00	7,00	3,00
8.	Teamwork planning	8,00	8,00	14,00
9.	Enforcing results	1,00	2,00	7,00
10.	Setting team goals	3,00	4,00	1,00

11.	Setting individual employee goals	0	1,00	1,00
12	Other, what?	2,00	0	0

Source: *Author's calculations.*

The results of these studies show that respondents refer to their educational or professional experience, because the most frequently indicated categories - motivation and work planning - belong to those that refer not only to professional work, but also to other areas of life. Certainly, those people who indicated categories that are specific to HRM, e.g., employee motivation, employee evaluation, provide greater credibility in their knowledge of issues such as feedback and performance enforcement.

Later in the study, the respondents were asked about their own experience as managers of a group of people. First of all, the aim was to indicate the skills of the person managing/ cooperating with other people. It appears that generally all respondents have experience in this area (75%). It can be said that all of them have aptitude for leading a team of employees because they have experience in cooperation. Moreover, people who indicated the role of a volunteer (23.8%) seem to have a high level of empathy.

Table 5. *Functions and roles performed by respondents*

No.	Which of the following functions did you perform?	Poland	Italy	Germany
1.	Class/ school president	11,00	13,00	19,00
2.	Deputy leader or other position in the school/ class council	1,00	10,00	17,00
3.	Captain of the sports team	10,00	10,00	15,00
4.	Scout leader/ replacement leader	3,00	2,00	5,00
5.	Another role in scouting	2,00	0	0
6.	Volunteer	9,00	16,00	16,00
7.	Other, what?	15,00	0	0

Source: *Author's calculations.*

Performing formal and informal functions during education helps develop HRM skills. During this time, it is also possible to realize how predisposed you are to lead a team. The research results show that the respondents have experience in serving as chairman or captain of a sports team. This allows us to assume that they can become good bosses in their organizations.

The next question in the survey questionnaire concerned communication skills. Issues related to communication, the way of selecting words, the forms of transmitting messages that are of great importance in the HRM process. The obtained research results indicate two categories of activities: listening when someone speaks and trying to understand him (33.72%), ordering others and telling them what to do (29.06%).

You might say that both categories are in "antagonism" to each other. The ability to listening comprehension is one of the most difficult activities, but in the context of HRM it looks highly promising and indicates the characteristics of a good manager.

In turn, giving orders to others indicates some misperception of the role of a manager and it can be assumed that having power/ performing a superior function for other people may be abused. This certainly suggests the need to include effective communication between the supervisor and the employee, but also between all team members.

Table 6. *Forms of communication*

No.	Which of the following activities comes easily to you?	Poland	Italy	Germany
1.	Ordering others and telling them what to do	12,00	16,00	22,00
2.	Negotiating with others and arguing your points	9,00	7,00	17,00
3.	Distributing tasks and coordinating the work of others	2,00	4,00	8,00
4.	Listening when someone talks and trying to understand them	20,00	18,00	20,00
5.	Asking others for help	2,00	1,00	3,00
6.	Providing feedback	4,00	1,00	1,00
7.	Resolving conflicts between employees	2,00	4,00	1,00

Source: *Author's calculations.*

During the research, reference was also made to management functions namely: planning, organizing and control. The respondents were asked about their skills in all the functions mentioned. The research results indicate that all respondents have skills in each of the areas, planning, organizing and control.

Table 7. *Planning skills*

No.	How do you evaluate your planning skills?	Poland	Italy	Germany
1.	I can plan the number of people needed for work	12,00	11,00	15,00
2.	I can indicate the qualifications, skills and competences that employees will need	9,00	7,00	17,00
3.	I can indicate the goals that the team and employees are to achieve	2,00	4,00	8,00
4.	I can plan tasks to be completed	20,00	18,00	20,00
5.	I can plan financial and material resources to complete tasks	2,00	1,00	3,00
6.	I know work planning tools and I can use them	4,00	1,00	1,00

Source: *Author's calculations.*

All planned response proposals in the planning area were selected by the respondents. The first three answers were chosen most often: *I can plan the number of people needed for work* - 27.9%, *I can indicate the qualifications, skills and*

competences that employees will need - 24,4%, I can plan tasks to be completed - 23.3%. The following answers refer to the respondents' experiences. Theoretical issues - I can plan financial and material resources to complete tasks - 6,3%, I know work planning tools and I can use them - 4,6% were chosen least often. This indicates a lack of theoretical and practical foundations in the designated area.

Table 8. Supervising skills

No.	How do you evaluate your ability to control task implementation?	Poland	Italy	Germany
1.	I can supervise the work of other people	11,00	14,00	21,00
2.	I can identify the risks of completing tasks	9,00	10,00	20,00
3.	I can supervise the standards and quality of tasks performed	7,00	9,00	15,00
4.	I can introduce corrective actions in the work process	6,00	3,00	8,00
5.	I can diagnose the state of work and relate it to the assumed goals and work progress	8,00	12,00	9,00
6.	I can react quickly in difficult situations	10,00	3,00	0
7.	I know the tools to control the implementation of tasks and I can use them	0	0	0

Source: Author's calculations.

The respondents show that they can carry out inspections in various areas. Most respondents indicated the ability to supervise the work of other people (26.7%). Similarly, as it was indicated previously - this response raises the risk of an authoritarian approach to subordinates or the use of power. A valuable feature is the ability to indicate the risk of task implementation (18.02%). This also allows us to assume that a person who can identify risks has a chance of possessing the ability to plan solutions in crisis situations.

Table 9. Organising skills

No.	How do you evaluate your organising skills?	Poland	Italy	Germany
1.	I can select people for the team in terms of specific goals	19,00	22,00	30,00
2.	I can create and implement an organizational structure	7,00	9,00	13,00
3.	I can assign tasks to an employee/ team	14,00	15,00	16,00
4.	I can set goals for individual employees and the team	7,00	2,00	9,00
5.	I can build and implement a task accomplishment process	3,00	3,00	4,00

Source: Author's calculations.

Organization is a valuable skill. Properly organized work, selection of employee and their competences for specific tasks guarantee efficiency in the implementation of tasks, as well as employee satisfaction that they can carry out activities in which

they feel comfortable. This organising skill - selecting people for the team in terms of the specified goals - was indicated by the majority of respondents (41.27%) The next skill indicated by respondents was assigning tasks to an employee/ team (26.16%). All HRM skills indicated here are purely declarative. As it was mentioned before, they can only refer to individual's own experiences and are subjective.

However, the research results point the necessity to introduce issues from the field of HRM into the education process of students of catering schools. The last question asked to the research participants is a confirmation of this statement. It was opinion-forming in nature and concerned the position of introducing HRM into the school curriculum.

Table 10. *The validity of introducing HRM into the curriculum*

No	Which of the following statements do you agree with?	Poland	Italy	Germany
1.	It is necessary to educate students and graduates issues related to HRM	25,00	30,00	48,00
2.	It does not matter whether HRM issues are discussed at school or not	22,00	19,00	20,00
3.	In general, HRM issues should not be included in vocational schools	3,00	2,00	4,00

Source: *Author's calculations.*

The majority of respondents indicate the need to introduce issues related to HRM into the learning process - 59.88%. Only a small number of people were definitely against it - 9 which constitutes 5.23% of respondents. Therefore, it is justified to make an effort to develop teaching programmes in the field of Human Resources Management for students and graduates of catering schools and faculties.

5. Conclusion

The conclusions resulting from the research on the level of knowledge and personal qualities of students and graduates of culinary schools in the profession of a chef in the field of Human Resources Management are of great importance for the further development of educational programmes in this field. Data analysis indicates a significant need to integrate HRM issues into curriculum of catering schools. It was found that a significant percentage of respondents had gaps in knowledge regarding HRM.

Most respondents did not participate in training or courses focusing on this topic, which may indicate the lack of appropriate educational offers in vocational schools. In cases where students and graduates had some understanding of HRM, their knowledge often came from informal sources, such as observing workplace practices, which did not provide comprehensive and systematic preparation for effective human resource management.

Despite these gaps in formal education, many study participants had experience in leading teams, demonstrated by performing leadership roles in various groups or communities. This reveals the potential that can be developed through appropriately constructed teaching programmes.

Skills such as motivation, work planning and conflict resolution were considered by respondents to be crucial in the context of human resources management. These abilities play a fundamental role in effective management as well as in creating employee teams, which emphasizes the need for their systematic development in the process of professional education. Due to the above, the integration of issues related to human resources management (HRM) into curricula becomes necessary to enable adequate preparation for performing management functions in the catering sector.

6. Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations can be made regarding the development of activity programmes:

- Curricula ought to include basic management issues (definition, management functions)
- Every aspect of a HRM course should include elements of effective communication, emphasizing its importance in people management
- HRM curricula for students and graduates of culinary schools should include:
 - selection of employees
 - work planning
 - conflicts resolution
 - distributing tasks
 - team building
- Every aspect of a HRM course should include elements of effective communication, emphasizing its importance in people management
- During classes, reference ought to be made to students' experience in conducting classes.
- It is worth using the Kolb Cycle method here: experience, reflection, conceptualisation and experimentation.
- Incorporating positive examples of people managing work teams into lesson plans to illustrate effective management practices and understand the responsibilities and skills required at various levels of management.
- This will enrich educational content but may also inspire students to develop management competences.
- Increasing cooperation between schools and local catering enterprises in order to better adapt educational programmes to the realities and needs of the labor market.

- Implementation of practical classes, workshops and case studies that will allow students to understand better the realities of human resources management based on real problems and professional situations.
- Supplementing curriculum with topics such as the role and functions of a manager/coordinator/supervisor or including the figure of a manager/supervisor should be taken into consideration.
- The catering schools ought to develop and include specialized courses in human resources management in their curricula, which will increase students' competences in effective management and leadership.
- It is necessary to draw attention to careful preparation of instructional training for teachers who will conduct classes with students in the field of HRM. The idea is not to rely only on your own experience, but also to equip the course participants with the latest tools in the area of HRM and to indicate the regularities and trends of contemporary HRM.
- Drawing attention to the service role of supporting subordinates, showing the principles of building the authority of a superior.
- It is worth supplementing the classes with management styles, indicating the benefits and losses as well as the circumstances of using particular styles.
- Due care should be taken in selecting teachers to conduct HRM classes. It is important that these people understand the essence of HRM.

7. Summary

The article discusses the knowledge and predispositions of Human Resources Management among students and graduates of culinary schools with a major in cookery. The impetus for undertaking the research was the turnover of employees in the catering industry during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This highlighted the deficits in human resources management among leaders and managers of the catering industry. The article presents the results of research conducted in Poland, Italy and Germany. The obtained research results allowed for the formulation of recommendations regarding the preparation of teaching programmes in the field of HRM in the catering industry.

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