



THE PRACTICE OF EMPLOYEES' TRAINING IN SERBIA BASED ON CRANET RESEARCH

Nemanja Berber

University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Economics Subotica, Republic of Serbia

✉ berber@ef.uns.ac.rs

Agneš Slavić

University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Economics Subotica, Republic of Serbia

✉ slavica@ef.uns.ac.rs

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Abstract: In a contemporary environment which is characterised by global competition and radical economic changes, human capital, with its knowledge, competencies, and experiences, is becoming more and more important factor for gaining sustainable business performances. The aim of this paper is to explore the development and current state of the training practices in human resource management in Serbian organizations. The subject of the research is the employees' training process. The methodology of the research included the analysis of available literature and the exploration of the empirical data on employees' training in organizations from Serbia. The analysis is based on the comparison between two research periods in which the authors gathered the data. 160 organisations in 2015 and 50 in 2008 were examined during the Cranet project. The results indicate slight improvements in training practice in Serbia. Also, organisations that invest more in training in Serbia gained higher levels of productivity and service quality.

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1. Introduction

In a contemporary environment which is characterised by global competition and radical economic changes, human capital, with its knowledge, competencies, and experiences, is becoming more and more important factor for gaining sustainable

business performances. Organisations that understood the importance of employees for organisational financial and operational performances usually invest in their training and learning activities with the aim of increasing those knowledge, skills, and competencies that are valuable and important for the specific organisation. The aim of this paper is to explore the development and current state of the training practices in human resource management in Serbian organisations. The subject of the research is the employees' training process. The methodology of the research included the analysis of available literature and the exploration of the empirical data on employees' training in 210 organisations from Serbia. The analysis is based on the comparison between two research periods in which the authors gathered the data. 160 organisations in 2015 and 50 in 2008 were examined during the Cranet project.

The paper consists of three main parts. In the first part, the authors presented leading theoretical thoughts and issues on the training of employees and its importance for contemporary organisations. Methodology and description of the Cranet project were presented in the second part of the paper. At the end, the authors presented research results and discussed several implications of the paper.

2. Theoretical Background

Human resource management is focused on the development of human and social capital. Scientists around the world have dedicated a lot of attention to the examination of the relationship between HRM and organisational performance, where it is found that an adequate human resources management enables an organisation to achieve competitive advantage (Albrecht et al. 2015; Berber et al. 2014; Pološki Vokić & Vidović 2008; Lado & Wilson 1994; Schuler & MacMillan 1984). Human resource management includes all activities that have an impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of operation and directing employees towards achieving organisational goals, thereby balancing between the objectives of employees and organisations. Human resources management framework consists of the most important activities such as planning and attracting new employees, training and career development, performance measurement, creating a rewarding mechanism, motivation and retention of staff, and the like.

For this work of special importance is the training activities of employees, which is also the subject of the research. Training is a learning process that involves the acquisition of skills, adoption of the rules and the formation of attitudes. Training can be seen as a set of planned and systematic activities aimed at acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSA). Effective training includes instructions, demonstrations, practice, and timely diagnostic feedback from trained people. The aim of the training is to create sustainable change in behaviour and understanding so that individuals possess the necessary competence to do the job

(Salas et al., 2012, p. 77). Training refers to the planned attempt of the company to improve the process of acquiring knowledge, skills or abilities of employees. Companies change training methods to improve their competitiveness. This includes the use of high-leverage training, the establishment of educational organisations and continuing education (Štangel Šušnjar & Zimanji, 2006).

As jobs become more global, competition imposes a need for skilled manpower. When the system of education at the state level does not provide the necessary training for employees then the burden of education falls on employers. According to the previous research of the Cranet network, it was found that the average cost invested in the training and development of employees amounts to 3-4% of the total fund of salaries in the European countries (Poór et al., 2012, p. 278). The world percentage of these costs can exceed even 10% of the total wage fund. These companies are called *leading companies* because the training and development are *treated as investment* in the future, and not as a *cost* to be reduced, i.e. training of its own staff must be understood as the development of *property* and not as a cost to be decreased. If the training is strategically planned, it can help organisations achieve a competitive advantage through the development of competencies, the specific skills required organisation and knowledge creation (Hirt & Ortlieb, 2012).

In a period of global competition and radical economic changes a development of a national competitive capability has been linked to organisational learning processes (Tregaskis & Heraty, 2012). Morley et al. (2016) found that the better developed training practice contributes to the performances expressed by service quality, productivity, profitability and rate of innovations in the CEE region. Also, they found that the internationalisation significantly influences the companies' training practice in CEE region. It was proved that companies focusing on the international market use more extensive and effective training practice than companies focusing on the local market.

Grossman and Salas (2011, 104) state that "effective training can yield higher productivity, improved work quality, increased motivation and commitment, higher morale and teamwork, and fewer errors, culminating in a strong competitive advantage". On the other hand, a "poorly trained workforce can lead to errors, injuries and even legal issues, all of which can be extremely costly" (Grossman & Salas, 2011, 104). Newman et al. (2011) highlighted the importance of training as a tool for enhancing organisational commitment and reduction of turnover. Poór et al. (2012) analysed training practice in Central and Eastern Europe countries through the following indicators: *the importance of training and development* (T&D) expressed by the ratio of the annual training budget in the total payroll costs, *extensiveness of T&D function*, characterised by annual training days per year among different type of employees and *the effectiveness* aspect described by

the most often used techniques for evaluating the T&D function. These indicators will be used in this research, too.

2.1. HRM in Serbia

The HRM practice in Serbia in the past was influenced by the Socialist model of development and the political and economic situation in Serbia. Usually, researches were performed in only several enterprises, without comparative approach, which is quite important for contemporary HRM (Slavić & Berber, 2016). Personnel function was the predominant form of department that took a role in managing human resources, usually related to the activities of maintaining personnel records, administering the employment and placements, keeping records on compensation and benefits, maternity leave and other issues required by the Labor Law of Serbia. Also, this function was usually a part of legal unit and support operations unit within the same department and employed often only one person with a university degree (in law) and many clerical staff lacking appropriate HRM competencies (Bogićević Milikić et al., 2008). HR manager or personnel manager was not present in top management board, there was no strategic approach to the HRM, HR activities were related only to administrative ones, while more strategic and important ones like staffing, performance management, compensation and benefits, training, career development and expatriation were neglected.

“The HRM in Serbia went through several phases, from poor administrative function in the 1950 and 1960, personnel function with the influence of the strong Communist Party in the 1970 and 1980, and offices for human and material resources in 1990, to the HRM in the sense of management function important for overall organisational success nowadays (Kohont et al., 2015; Bogićević Milikić et al., 2008; Slavić et al., 2012; Štangl Šušnjar & Leković, 2009). In the previous period, HRM in Serbia has not been given the importance, and this function was established as a centralized function in an enterprise, without power or authority for decision making on employees’ questions. HR/personnel managers did not have enough competencies, knowledge, and even formal education in the field of human resources. With the changes in the political and economic system from 2000 Serbian HRM started to develop in more Anglo-Saxon manner” (Slavić & Berber 2016, 288).

Milikić et al. (2012) found some positive changes in Serbian HRM. The HR function was organised within the separate department, with the HR manager who possesses a university degree in subject areas other than Law. HR departments are included in making major policy decisions regarding HR issues, written policies in several HR areas exist in organisations, more HR staff has university degree instead of clerical staff, etc. In 2007 the Faculty of Economic from the University of Novi Sad joined the Cranet network, which was the turning point for the development of HRM in Serbia. Based on the systematised comparative data on

HR practices from Cranet research in 2008 and in 2015, Serbian HRM was explored in more detailed way.

3. Methodology of the Research

In this research the authors used the methodology of CRANET research. Cranet is a network of scientific institutions from different countries that collect unique and mutually comparable data on the policies and practices of HRM. This network, which was founded in 1989, conducts the largest survey of HRM practice around the world and has a current picture of the state of the practice in the Member States. Coordination of activities is carried out by Centre of European HRM in Cranfield School of Management in the UK. Currently, the organisation has about 40 members worldwide (Slavić & Berber, 2016).

“The purposes of the survey are to provide high-quality data for academics, for public and private sector organisations, as well as for students of the field, to inform research and to create new knowledge about human resource management across the world. Despite the limitations of the survey methods, and the methodological constraints, the Cranet network’s surveys are providing large-scale empirical data since 1990. Doing so, contributing meaningfully both to the description and understanding of the developments of HRM practices in a continuously growing number of countries and to the theoretical developments in comparative HRM” (Karoliny et al., 2009; Slavić & Berber, 2014). “The questionnaire is divided into six sections: HRM activity in the organisation, staffing practices, employee development, compensation and benefits, employee relations and communication, and organisational details. The questionnaire contained closed questions and respondents were requested to make their choice from sets of alternative, pre-formulated answers largely covering the specific areas of HRM to be studied” (Berber, Slavić, 2016). Faculty of Economics in Subotica conducted this research in Serbia for the second time. As the only member of the international scientific network in this country, Faculty of Economics in 2008 participated in Cranet project for the first time with 50 analysed organisations. In 2015, the authors examined 160 organisations from the territory of Serbia. The answers to the questionnaire were given by HR managers or executives in organisations with more than 50 employees (Leković et al., 2015).

For the purpose of this paper the authors decided to explore training practice in Serbia based on Poor et al. (2012) training indicators:

- *The importance of training* expressed by the ratio of the annual training budget in the total payroll costs (training costs),
- *The extensiveness of training*, characterized by annual training days per year among different type of employees and

- *The effectiveness of training* described by the most often used techniques for evaluating the T&D function.

Table 1. Structure of the sample according to the size of organisation in Serbia in two research periods (%)

Size of organisation	2008		2015	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1-249	29	58.0	96	60.0
250-1000	17	34.0	43	26.9
1000+	4	8.0	21	13.1
Total	50	100.0	160	100.0

Source: Authors' analysis based on Cranet research data

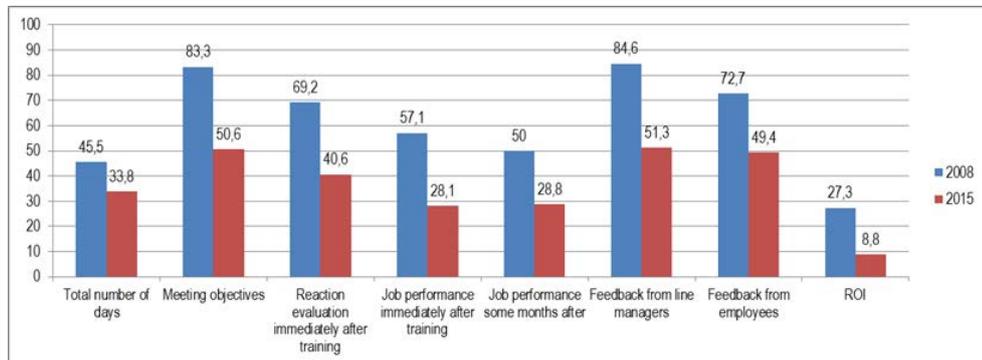
According to the data from Table 1 the largest share of the sample in Serbia in 2015 was the SME sector, 60%, like in 2008 sample. There are 27% of large organisations and 13% of very large, with more than 1000 employees. In 2008 there were 34% of large organisations and only 8% of very large, with more than 1000 employees. The sample of 2015 research consisted mainly from organisations from private (66%) sector, like in 2008. In 2015 about 37% of analysed organisations were from production sector, and 63% of organisations are from the service sector, while in 2008 the Serbian sample consisted of 60% organisations from production and 40% from the service sector. In both research periods, the majority of analysed organisations are from food production, trade, telecommunication, and IT (Leković et al., 2015).

The analysis of the data was processed by SPSS software version 21. The authors used descriptive statistics and non-parametric tests (Spearman's correlation, Mann-Whitney test, and chi-square test) in research because there was no evidence of the normality of distribution in the research sample (according to the values of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p \neq 0.200$) and the Shapiro-Wilk test ($p < 0.05$)).

4. Results of the Research

The results of the research are presented in tables below. First, the authors explored the differences between organisations that evaluate the effectiveness of their training practice in two successive research periods of Cranet project in Serbia. Also, there have been explored the usage of different techniques for evaluation of training practices.

Figure 1. Techniques used to evaluate training effectiveness



Source: Authors’ analysis based on Cranet research data

Data from Figure 1 pointed to the changes in the usage of the evaluation techniques in training. In 2008, in Serbia organisations mostly used informal feedback from managers to evaluate training and meeting objectives set out in training and development plans (more than 80% of organisations). In 2015, there it is an evident decrease in the usage of all techniques for training evaluation, although now there are more organisations that claim that they evaluate their training process (Table 2). It is obvious that the same techniques are still mostly used in organisations that operate in Serbia-informal feedback from managers and meeting objectives set in training and/or development plan.

Table 2. Differences between the effectiveness of the training practice in Serbia in two research periods (%)

		Do you systematically evaluate the effectiveness of training of personnel?		Total
		No	Yes	
Year	2008	63,6	36,4	100,0
	2015	41,8	58,2	100,0
Total		46,5	53,5	100,0

Source: Authors’ analysis based on Cranet research data

Data from Table 3 and 4 show that there is a statistically significant association between the percentage of organisations that evaluate the effectiveness of their training practice regarding and two research periods (Pearson Chi-Square=6,613; p=0,010).

In 2015, there were more organisations (58,2%) that systematically evaluate the effectiveness of their training practice than in 2008 (only 36,4%). The strength of the association, measure by Phi coefficient, is weak (Phi=0,181).

Data from Table 5 and 6 show that there is statistically significant differences between the percentage of the annual payroll costs spent on training between two research periods (Mann-Whitney $U=1630,000$; $p=0,041$). In 2015 there was a slightly higher percentage of costs invested in training (Mean rank=96,75) than in 2008 (Mean rank=74,37).

Table 3. Chi-square tests of the differences between the effectiveness of the training practice in Serbia in two research periods (%)

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6,613	1	,010		
Continuity Correction	5,763	1	,016		
Likelihood Ratio	6,641	1	,010		
Fisher's Exact Test				,011	,008
Linear-by-Linear Association	6,580	1	,010		
N of Valid Cases	202				
Phi	,181		,010		

Source: Authors' analysis based on Cranet research data

Table 4. Differences between the importance and extensiveness of the training practice in Serbia in two research periods

	Year	Mean	SD	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Training costs	2008	2,64	4,123	74,37	2008,00
	2015	2,65	2,081	96,75	15383,00
Approximate number of days Managers receive training	2008	11,50	18,462	96,48	2701,50
	2015	6,62	5,344	88,20	13229,50
Approximate number of days Professionals receive training	2008	8,16	8,560	95,05	2946,50
	2015	6,40	4,859	90,77	13706,50

Source: Authors' analysis based on Cranet research data

In the case of the extensiveness of training measured by a number of days that managers and professionals spent on training, there were no statistically significant differences in two research periods. Although there are no statistically significant differences in this area, it is obvious that there is a decrease in a number of days spent on training in both groups of workers – managers and professionals.

Table 5. Mann-Whitney test of the differences between the importance and extensiveness of the training practice in Serbia in two research periods

	Training costs	Approximate number of days Managers receive training	Approximate number of days Professionals receive training
Mann-Whitney U	1630,000	1904,500	2230,500
Wilcoxon W	2008,000	13229,500	13706,500
Z	-2,049	-,793	-,422
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,041	,428	,673

Source: Authors' analysis based on Cranet research data

Very interesting part of the analysis was dedicated to the exploration of the relationship between the importance and extensiveness of the training and business performances measured by the rating of service quality and productivity. According to the data in Table 7, there are statistically significant correlations between analysed variables.

Table 6. Spearman's correlation between the importance and extensiveness of training and productivity and service quality as performance measures in Serbia in two research periods

		1	2	3	4	5
Rating of service quality (1)	rho	1,000				
	p					
Rating of level of productivity (2)	rho	,675**	1,000			
	p	,000				
Training costs (3)	rho	,186*	,161*	1,000		
	p	,012	,030			
Approximate number of days Managers receive training (4)	rho	,200**	,247**	,149	1,000	
	p	,007	,001	,053		
Approximate number of days Professionals receive training (5)	rho	,176*	,157*	,196**	,678**	1,000
	p	,018	,037	,010	,000	

Source: Authors' analysis based on Cranet research data

In the case of productivity, as one of the most important performance measures, there are positive statistically significant correlations with the following training indicators: training costs (Spearman's rho=0.161, p=0.030), approximate number of days managers receive training (Spearman's rho=0.247, p=0.001), and approximate

number of days professionals receive training (Spearman's $\rho=0.157$, $p=0.037$). Regarding service quality as a performance measure it has positive statistically significant relations with following variables: training costs (Spearman's $\rho=0.186$, $p=0.012$), approximate number of days managers receive training (Spearman's $\rho=0.200$, $p=0.007$), and approximate number of days professionals receive training (Spearman's $\rho=0.176$, $p=0.018$). Also, the authors found positive statistically significant correlations between the importance of the training, measured by the training costs, and the extensiveness of the training measured by a number of days professionals receive training (Spearman's $\rho=0.196$, $p=0.010$).

Table 7. Differences between the importance and extensiveness of the training practice regarding systematic evaluation of training practice in Serbia in two research periods

	Do you systematically evaluate the effectiveness of training of personnel	Mean	SD	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Training costs	No	2,03	1,906	76,83	6223,50
	Yes	3,15	2,758	104,82	10796,50
Approximate number of days Managers receive training	No	5,19	4,735	72,36	5427,00
	Yes	9,17	10,756	100,49	10149,00
Approximate number of days Professionals receive training	No	5,23	3,827	77,15	6017,50
	Yes	7,93	6,582	99,93	10092,50

Source: Authors' analysis based on Cranet research data

Data from Table 7 and 8 show that there is statistically significant differences between the training costs between organisations regarding the usage of systematic evaluation of training effectiveness (Mann-Whitney $U=2902,500$; $p=0,000$). Organisations that evaluate their training effectiveness have a higher percentage of costs invested in training (Mean rank=104,82) than organisations that do not use such evaluation (Mean rank=76,83). This means that organisations that use evaluation of training invest more in training of employees. In the case of the extensiveness of training measured by the number of days that managers and professionals spent on training, there were also statistically significant differences regarding this question. There are statistically significant differences between the percentage of the number of days used for training of managers and professional workers, regarding the usage of systematic evaluation of training effectiveness (Managers: Mann-Whitney $U=2577,000$; $p=0,000$; Professionals: Mann-Whitney $U=2936,500$; $p=0,000$). Organisations that evaluate their training effectiveness use more days for training of their managers (Mean rank=100,49) and professional

workers (Mean rank=99,93). This means that organisations that use evaluation of training offer longer training for their staff.

Table 8. Mann-Whitney test of the differences between the importance and extensiveness of the training regarding systematic evaluation of training practice in Serbia in two research periods (%)

	Training costs	Approximate number of days Managers receive training	Approximate number of days Professionals receive training
Mann-Whitney U	2902,500	2577,000	2936,500
Wilcoxon W	6223,500	5427,000	6017,500
Z	-3,630	-3,676	-2,988
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,003

Source: Authors' analysis based on Cranet research data

5. Conclusion

Training of employees, as one of the most important activities of human resource management in modern organisations, unequivocally leads to the improvement of the work of employees, their productivity and thus the success of the organisation as a whole. Training is a learning process that involves the acquisition of skills, adoption of the rules and the formation of attitudes. Organisations that continuously invest in the training of their employees and which are oriented to the concept of life-long learning certainly increase their chances to survive in the modern business environment. In terms of more frequent and intensive changes and innovations in all fields of business, organisations must invest in training of their employees so that they can adequately and in the right time react to these changes and use them for the success of their organisations. If employees' training is not conducted on time, in scope or for those that require training, new ideas and skills will not be adopted and employees will not be able to follow the requirements of the market. Many organisations, whose training programmes were unsuccessful, now face with problems of employees who are unhappy, unproductive, often absent from work or even leave their organisations.

Results of this research pointed to the several conclusions. In 2008 and in 2015 in Serbia organisations mostly used informal feedback from managers to evaluate training and meeting objectives set out in training and development plans. In 2015 there were more organisations that systematically evaluate the effectiveness of their training practice than in 2008. Also, there are differences between the training costs between two research periods. In 2015 there were slightly higher percentages of costs invested in training than in 2008. In the case of the extensiveness of training

measured by a number of days that managers and professionals spent on training, there were no statistically significant differences in two research periods. Although, there is a decrease in a number of days spent on training in both groups of workers. The authors found positive correlation relationship between the importance and extensiveness of the training and business performances measured by the rating of service quality and productivity. Regarding the relations between extensiveness, importance, and extensiveness, the authors found that the organisations that use evaluation of training invest more in training and offer more days for training for their employees.

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OBUKA LJUDSKIH RESURSA U SRBIJI NA BAZI CRANET ISTRAŽIVANJA

Apstrakt: U savremenom okruženju koje se odlikuje globalnom konkurencijom i radikalnim ekonomskim promenama, ljudski kapital, sa svojim znanjem, kompetencijama i iskustvima, postaje sve važniji faktor za ostvarivanje održivih poslovnih performansi. Cilj ovog rada je da istraži razvoj i trenutno stanje obuke u upravljanju ljudskim resursima u srpskim organizacijama. Predmet istraživanja je proces obuke zaposlenih. Metodologija istraživanja uključuje analizu dostupne literature i istraživanje empirijskih podataka o obuci zaposlenih u organizacijama iz Srbije. Analiza je zasnovana na poređenju dva istraživačkih perioda u kojima su autori prikupili podatke. 160 organizacija u 2015. i 50 u 2008. godini je ispitano tokom projekta Cranet. Rezultati ukazuju na postepena poboljšanja u praksi obuke u Srbiji. Takođe, organizacije koje ulažu više u trening u Srbiji ostvarile su viši nivo produktivnosti i kvaliteta usluga.

Ključne reči: menadžment ljudskih resursa, obuka zaposlenih, Srbija, Cranet

Authors' biographies

Nemanja Berber, PhD, is a Senior Research Assistant at the Faculty of Economics, the University of Novi Sad, the Republic of Serbia. He works in the areas of human resource management, organisational behaviour, urban management, and organisation of communal enterprises. His research interests include human resource management practice in Serbia and Central and Eastern European region, especially employees' compensation, benefits, and training. He participates in CRANET (The Cranfield Network on International Human Resource Management) and CEEIRT (The Central and Eastern European International Research Team) projects on HRM and IHRM.

Agneš Slavić, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Economics, the University of Novi Sad, the Republic of Serbia. She works in the areas are human resource management, organisational behaviour, urban management, and international human resource management. Her research interests include human resource management practice in Serbia and Central and Eastern European region, especially employees' satisfaction, training and development, and compensation. She participates in CRANET (The Cranfield Network on International Human Resource Management) and CEEIRT (The Central and Eastern European International Research Team) projects on HRM and IHRM.