

# TALENT DEVELOPMENT IN TIME OF COVID-19 PREVENTION MEASURES IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

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**ABSTRACT.** Nowadays, the work with talented employees has become one of the most important components of HRM and is gaining more and more attention, especially from organizations that strive for a highly professional workforce. The issue of talent development is arising, especially due to the introduction of anti-pandemic measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the Slovak Republic. These restrictions prevent employees from participating in full-time training programs. These programs, therefore, had to be changed and adapted to reflect the current situation. The aim of this study is to identify the level of satisfaction of talented employees with talent development programs offered by their employers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research sample consisted of 123 talented employees. The methods of descriptive statistics, Kruskal-Wallis test, and Spearman's correlation coefficient were used to achieve the goal of this study. The results showed that despite covid-19 prevention measures, the issue of talent development is still important for employers who secured talent development programs for their talented employees to enrich the portfolio of their knowledge and skills. The satisfaction level of talented employees with talent development programs was according to this research very high, especially within employees in charge.

**Keywords:** talent management, talent development, covid-19,

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## Introduction and literature review

The literature in the field provides very few outputs regarding talent development and education and global development which would set a deal with the issue of talents as high-performing employees put it into perspective. It is widely acknowledged that development and education are important parts of global talent management (Cook, 2010). Haskins and Shaffer (2010) talk about talent development and training, where each approach accepted by an organization supports four challenges. Talent-building efforts exercised by organizations should aim at the integrated future and also deliver measurable results. Pruis (2011) states that talent development does not bring out the best only in organizations. The employee input largely complements organizational needs. However, information on education and development can give us insight into why investing in talent education and development is so important. The competitive advantage which leads to valuable, rare, inimitable changes in human resources can be divided into two groups: training as an integral part of human resource management and training related to talent retention. Schraeder (2009) states that sufficient time needs to be devoted to the development and training of employees so as to integrate them into the organization's strategy. However, the demand for alternative methods of development and education is coming to the fore. Trends in employee training in the current labor market point to the development and training of employees who are capable of increasing efficiency and improving the quality of services. This results in the need to change from planned to prompt and unplanned education, such as online courses and e-learning in order to acquire and gain knowledge and experience (Stachová and Stacho, 2013). It has been proven that education and development encourage employees to create an atmosphere of sustainable development only when the training needs of employees are aligned with the needs of the organization (Sojka and Tej, 2019). Human resource management practices can have a positive effect not only on knowledge, skills, and motivation but also on the retention of talent in organizations (Sirková et al., 2014). Reducing the gap between the current competencies of employees at different levels of management is a key goal in employee training, as it creates conditions for the effective performance of the tasks through effective and sustainable training of the workforce (Cagaňová et al., 2014).

Today's talent management methods often do not meet the needs of corporate executives who are concerned about the lack of talent in their organizations and whether there are opportunities to produce more talent. Even when there are answers to the questions of how to develop talents that will be ready for use, they cannot imagine transforming this knowledge into results. Enterprises and educational institutions around the world are rapidly adopting talent development methods and training systems at the enterprise level to keep their talented employees and students at the latest technological trends (Bednářová et al. 2014; Burgerová, Adamčíková 2016; Cimermanová 2018). The group of advisers and consultants B.K.S. (2018) considers the creation of a talent development program (TDP) to be a key point for the development of talents in a company, according to the following points: 1. defining goals, results, and outputs (these most often focus on maintaining one of the most important employees in the company, maximizing their performance, or preparation for another job position); 2. after defining the goals and the target group, there is a specification of the method of identification of this group, defining the content, forms and methods of work; 3. finally, an evaluation of the whole effort and the follow-up to the program. The next step is to determine the target group and development goals for the group. We most often encounter approaches aimed at: 1. development of future leaders - a vertical shift of a talented employee; 2. development of a group of experts - horizontal transfer of a talented employee; 3. a combination of both groups (Haskins, Shaffer, 2010).

Employee development and training are always very important for a company. Not only that they increase the skills, knowledge, and expertise of the workforce, they also increase and decrease fluctuation. Corporate leaders are currently exposed to a huge mass of people working from home, trying to adapt to the current situation and ensure that their companies can withstand these challenging times. On the other hand, employees see this as an opportunity to reassess yesterday's priorities and plan for the future according to what they really care about. Given how the work and private lives are changing, it is the employees who have the imaginary helm in their hands. Education and development should not be seen as a cost - it is an investment. If it is done correctly, we can expect organizations to receive a strong positive return on this investment. After all, it is the best way to increase the value of your most valuable assets to organizations. Fortunately, there are many ways to continue developing, managing, and educating during the COVID-19 crisis. Just because we can't send people to class doesn't mean we can't develop them. Baum et al. (2020) note that the most important concept in implementing plans may be the 70/20/10 rule, then the current crisis in fact offers many opportunities for exemplary

development experiences. Model 70-20-10 was first published by Morgan McCall and his colleagues at the Center for Creative Leadership over 30 years ago. After studying successful executives, McCall and his colleagues found that 70% of what we know and how to do is based on real-world experience. 20% come from other people (coaching and mentoring). The remaining 10% comes from classroom instruction. So even though we cannot send people to (personal) classrooms at the moment, 90% of our development should still come from other methods. What can the development of 70-20-10 during this crisis look like?

Haak-Saheem (2020) emphasizes that the most important part of this trinity is experiential learning. Not only it is still possible, but the crisis also offers many opportunities for experience planning that contributes to employee learning and optimizes work performance. Companies that manage people are increasingly thinking about how to redirect people in a way that will help them do their work and provide people with development opportunities to gain new experiences and new skills. Learning from others is an important part of developing each person's portfolio. The fact that most employees currently work from home does not mean that coaching and mentoring relationships cannot be established. However, too many mentoring relationships tend to be informal and often of little value over time. As in all aspects of staff development, coaching and mentoring should take place with a view to future planning. Each coaching or mentoring program should be accompanied by specific goals and milestones.

Allen (2020) states that most people think about learning and development, but few organizations actually practice it. It is important to think that the rule 70-20-10 tells us that classroom learning is only a small (but vital) part of our developmental portfolio. Fortunately, the virtual world gives us as many (if not more) educational opportunities. Many experts claim that the 70-20-10 learning model is outdated because more employees will start devoting themselves to e-learning or stop interacting so much at work for a reason flexible plans and remote opportunities. They claim that the percentages of the model are incorrect and should adapt to the current nature of the workforce and the way people learn using technology. However, it could also be argued that technology does allow the model remains completely intact. Although employees may use it in the course of their work technology, they are gaining more and more powers to learn on their own, to devote themselves to development and career advancement, seek their own answers, cooperate with your collaborators through chat windows and social panels, etc. Even if it will maybe the numbers in the learning model 70-20-10 need to be slightly updated or adjusted, it seems that the model itself still has some strategic weight in terms of both employees and managers understanding and implementing training and development during the quarantine of COVID-19 (Kuckertz et al. 2020). Experience from education shows that it is more important than the exact percentage The share of education is the fact that education (talent) takes place permanently even in complex the current situation of companies and brings its results.

Online training is the easiest way to bring a more personal approach to each employee, set their studies, and monitor their progress. Hybrid education can also be a suitable way for companies that want to educate. It will continue to play an important role in it online. Especially thanks to the easy implementation and easy access to the lecturer content.

Here are some advantages of online training:

**Time flexibility.** Video courses can be taken anytime, anywhere, and are designed concisely. Thanks to short lessons, the student will better retain attention and remember the content. Therefore, employees can complete some topics in the comfort of their home, with the possibility of adjusting their time.

**Measurability.** Online education includes statistics that show the success of courses. For the employer, it is a great way to monitor the involvement of its employees and evaluate the effectiveness of the investment in training.

**Financial simplicity.** There are several costs that cannot be avoided during on-site training. Lecturer costs, travel, rental space, or food. Studying online is less demanding in this regard.

## Methodology

The aim of this paper was to identify the level of satisfaction of talented employees with the talent development programs (TDP) offered by their employers during the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to the imposed restrictive measures. Data were collected in February 2021 by the online self-administered questionnaire by the platform Google Forms. The sample consisted of 123 employees who

were identified by their HR managers or direct superiors. The replies to the items were formulated in the form of closed statements. The statements were to be evaluated by the respondents on a 5-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree; 2-disagree; 3- neutral stance; 4- agree; 5- strongly agree). The results of the questionnaire survey were processed in Excel. The results were assessed in MS Excel and SPSS Statistics 20. Tests such as the Kruskal-Wallis test and the Spearman correlation coefficient were used to analyze the data obtained and to identify statistical significance between variables. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. In the first part, the respondents answered demographic questions aimed at identifying their age, gender, attained education. This was followed by information on the number of years worked in the organization and the question of whether the respondent has subordinates. The aim of the second part of the questionnaire was to determine talent development programs (TDP) and their opportunities to the talented employees during the COVID-19 pandemic based on the following closed items:

During the COVID-19 pandemic and given the restrictive measures to curb the spread of the virus, my organization:

1. gave me the opportunity to participate in a TDP in order to learn and gain new skills.
2. offered me participation in a TDP to help me grow professionally.
3. offered me participation in a TDP that helped me grow personally.
4. gave me time and space to take part in advanced educational activities and training.
5. offered me the TDP where I get knowledge, which helps me to do my job better.
6. provided me a time to engage in training despite my workload.
7. provided me with all the information needed about the offered TDP.
8. in addition to mandatory training, provided me and educational activities on my own initiative.
9. has tried to get information about my satisfaction with the TDP.

## Results

The self-administered questionnaire was distributed to 161 recipients. The return rate was 76.4%, i.e. 123 respondents took part in the research. Regarding demographics, the following characteristics were determined: the sample consisted of 83 men (67.5%) and 40 women (32.5%). The results of the research given in Figure 1 indicate that the youngest respondent was 21 years old, the oldest was 60, while the median age was 41 years.

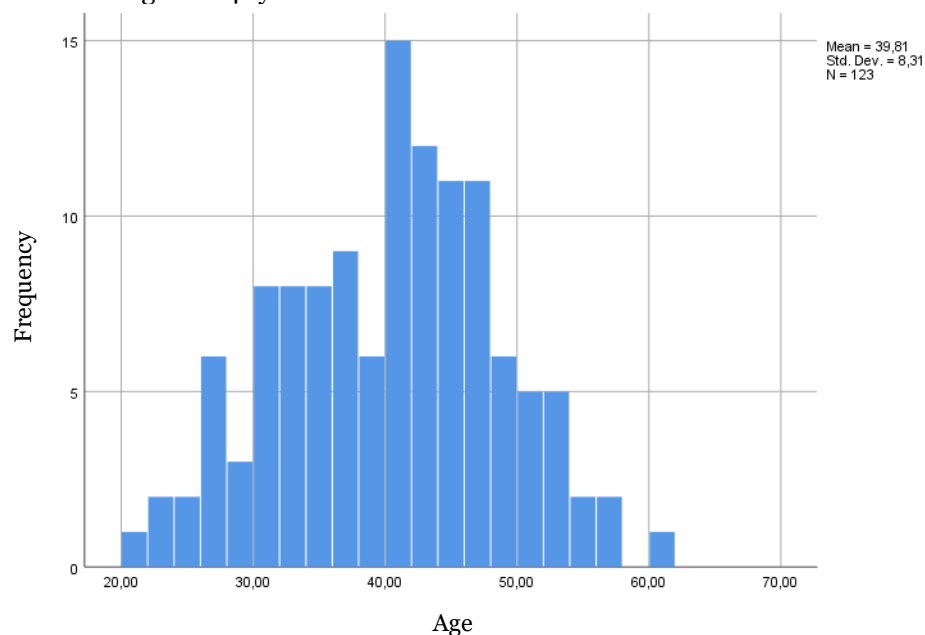


Figure 1. Age of respondents

Source: own data elaborated by the authors

Based on the information on the highest education attained, it can be stated that high school graduates (68.3%) dominated, followed by university graduates (MA) (26.8% of respondents). The questionnaire also inquired about the job position and whether the respondents had any subordinates, with 22% of respondents stating that they hold such a position. The minimum number of years worked at the organization was 0, although only one respondent picked this answer (it was probably a newly recruited talent from the external environment), the maximum was 35 years. As we can see from Figure 2, the median value of the number of years worked at the organization reached 9 years.

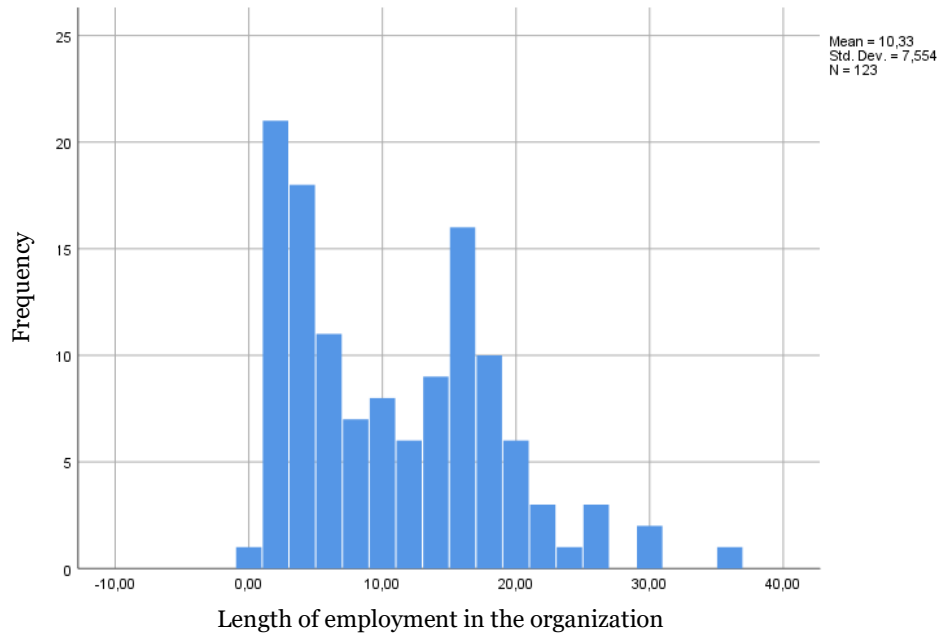


Figure 2. Length of employment in the organization of respondents

Source: own data elaborated by the authors

Table 1 shows the evaluation of the data obtained through the questionnaire using descriptive statistics tests. As many as 96.8% of respondents stated that during measures imposed by the government to curb the spread of COVID-19 their organization gave them the opportunity to participate in a TDP in order to learn and gain new skills. In the second item, respondents expressed a high degree of agreement with the statement that TDP helps them gain the knowledge necessary for their professional growth (this is the main purpose of talent development activities carried out by organizations).

The fourth item inquired whether the organization provides employees with sufficient time and space to take part in advanced educational activities and training (where the average score was 4.12 and the most frequently selected statement was “agree”). In comparison with the fourth item, the sixth item failed to generate such a high score. Despite the fact that the organization creates a space for training, the statement whether the employees “have time to engage in training despite their workload” generated a score of 3.8. On the other hand, 93.5% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed with statement no. 7. The most common reply was strong agreement. It can be stated that training courses and their forms were clearly defined.

The eighth item inquired how active were employers in providing educational activities in addition to mandatory training to their talented employees. By the application of the Kruskal-Wallis test, it was found that there is a significant difference in the expression of consent between employees who are in charge and those who are not in charge ( $p = 0.0218$ ). Based on the results of descriptive statistics, it can be stated that employees who are in charge take a more active approach towards training and educational activities. The last item in the questionnaire inquired the level of employee satisfaction with offered TDP. Using the Kruskal-Wallis test, the existence of a significant difference in the level of satisfaction was identified between the groups of employees who are in charge and those who are not in charge ( $p = 0.0449$ ), where talented employees in charge were significantly more satisfied with the TPD organized by their employer.

Table 1. The results of descriptive statistics measures

Variables	Mean	Median	Modus	SD
Item 1	4.50	5	5	0.59
Item 2	4.46	5	5	0.68
Item 3	4.25	4	4	0.74
Item 4	4.12	4	4	0.81
Item 5	4.50	5	5	0.55
Item 6	3.80	4	4	0.85
Item 7	4.41	4	5	0.64
Item 8	3.50	4	4	0.99
Item 9	4.34	4	4	0.63

Note: developed by the authors

The Spearman correlation coefficient was used to identify the dependencies of the ordinal variables. The Spearman correlation coefficient takes values -1 to 0 or 0 to 1. As with other measures of the association, the closer the coefficient is to 1, the stronger is the direct order dependence between the variables X and Y (Hanák, 2016).

Regarding the results of the Spearman correlation coefficient, only those values where the interdependence  $r \geq 0.5$ , which according to Cohen (1988, In: Rimančík (2007), p. 73) is a large dependence were interpreted. The maximum value of the correlation coefficient reached level 0.6290. Therefore, it could be stated that we could not observe a very large (value range 0.7-0.9) or even perfect dependence (value range 0.9-1) between the variables.

The values for statements number 3 and 4, where  $r = 0.6290$ , correlate most strongly, the same is true for statements number 2 and 4, where the coefficient  $r$  has stabilized at 0.5370. There is a strong correlation between the level of agreement on whether the organization offers the respondent TDP which helps them grow professionally and personally and the level of agreement on the item inquiring whether the organization creates space and time for the talented employee to take part in TD activities.

A strong correlation was observed in statement number 2 - whether the organization offers TDP that allows the respondent to grow professionally, with statement number 3, while the value of the correlation coefficient  $r=0.6231$ . Similar replies to both items may be related to the organization's efforts to create work-life balance and ensure that employees can focus on their personal growth, too.

Furthermore, it has been found that statements number 5 and 7, i.e. "the knowledge I gained thanks to TDP helps me to do my job better and effective" and "my organization provided me all the information needed about the offered TDP" correlate positively at the coefficient  $r = 0.5996$ . 71 respondents chose the same reply in both items.

A high degree of interdependence ( $\geq 0.5$ ) is also present between statement number 4: "the organization gave me time and space to take part in educational activities and training" and the statements: "I still have time to engage in training despite my workload" ( $r = 0.5022$ ) and "the knowledge I gained during the training helps me to do my job better" ( $r = 0.5001$ ).

Table 2. The results of Spearman's correlation coefficient

Var.	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9
Item 1	1.0000	0.0773	0.0267	-0.0865	0.1001	-0.0146	-0.0452	-0.0729	0.0061
Item 2	0.0773	1.0000	0.6231	0.5370	0.4539	0.4420	0.3571	0.2917	0.2060
Item 3	0.0267	0.6231	1.0000	0.6290	0.4438	0.3901	0.2471	0.2536	0.1109
Item 4	-0.0865	0.5370	0.6290	1.0000	0.5001	0.5022	0.3910	0.3387	0.2123
Item 5	0.1001	0.4539	0.4438	0.5001	1.0000	0.3649	0.5996	0.3832	0.3191
Item 6	-0.0146	0.4420	0.3901	0.5022	0.3649	1.0000	0.3894	0.2996	0.2237
Item 7	-0.0452	0.3571	0.2471	0.3910	0.5996	0.3894	1.0000	0.2702	0.4604
Item 8	-0.0729	0.2917	0.2536	0.3387	0.3832	0.2996	0.2702	1.0000	0.2866
Item 9	0.0061	0.2060	0.1109	0.2123	0.3191	0.2237	0.4604	0.2866	1.0000

Note: developed by the authors

## Discussion and Conclusion

Due to the investment in employees as potential talents, many managers are afraid that they will lose these employees sooner or later. However, it is worse than investing in staff training and education and losing them than not investing in their education and development and trying to keep them. One of the key tasks of an organization in an ever-changing market is to retain talented employees in organizations that strive to innovate and thus achieve competitiveness (Wang and Wang 2012). Talent development together with human resource management should provide the organization with the prerequisites through which it will want to be able to cope with the tasks it sets itself and those that result from the rapidly changing external environment.

The employees' time, either used by the organization or the employees themselves, appeared to be the most important factor influencing satisfaction with TDP provided during the time measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 were in place. By addressing this issue, employers can affect the employee perception of personal and professional growth and training provided. The time factor, perceived as a negative factor influencing satisfaction with TDP, was reported mainly by talented employees who are not in charge. These employees also expressed a significantly lower level of satisfaction with the way training is organized and a lower willingness to proactively seek TDP. Schraeder (2009) states that sufficient time needs to be devoted to talent development for employees to be able to integrate into the company's strategy. We assume that by changing the behavior of managers, emphasizing effective time management, or promoting delegation of tasks and powers organization might increase satisfaction with these factors and also motivate employees to seek further career development through the options offered. In this case, the implementation of training focused on time management, delegation, clear identification of responsibilities in case of unavailability of an employee could help. At the same time, superiors could ensure collaboration between departments in case an employee is unavailable. An employee present at the all-day on-site training should not be required to perform other tasks for other departments at the time of training. With regard to the results of our research, we conclude that the level of satisfaction of talented employees with the availability of education and training at the organization they work for during the time measures aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19 reached high levels. It is crucial for talented employees at lower positions to have the opportunity to set aside time to take part in training programs with an emphasis on the development of their talent. Future research could focus on identifying aspects and factors affecting the satisfaction of these employees with the organization of training (form of training, time, and place of training, etc.) in order to increase the interest of talented employees in training. The main limitation of this research is the limited geographical territory - the Slovak Republic.

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