

## HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE'S JOB WITHDRAWAL INTENTION IN THE COVID-19 ERA: JOB SATISFACTION AS A MEDIATOR

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### **Abstract**

*Pillars of the global labor market's permanence were not only partially shaken, but completely demolished in the first wave of the Coronavirus pandemic. A worldwide workforce was deeply distressed when global turmoil occurred. Organizational viability was seriously compromised. The first post-crisis actions included a review of recent organizational navigation practices (primarily, HRM practices) that were used for the purpose of protecting resources of strategic importance. The narrower focus was set on elucidating perceptions and attitudes towards organizations built by employees. To endorse an empirical investigation of this issue, the aim of the research was to determine and elaborate the influence HRM practices had in the cognition process of forming a strong employee's job withdrawal intention in the COVID-19 era, along with examining the existence of mediating role employee's job satisfaction had in this relationship. The theoretical part of the research integrated the method of literature content analysis, implying the collection of knowledge from relevant sources closely related to the scientific field of interest. The empirical part integrated the survey method, collecting primary statistical data from employed workers in the national (Serbian) economy during the first half of 2022. An electronic survey questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. Data were processed using econometric systems SmartPLS 3.0 and IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0, and following software procedures. Usage of the statistical-econometric method, i.e., Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique, was also recorded. Research findings provided support for the main research hypothesis and the initial assumption that HRM practices have a statistically*

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*significant, negative impact on employee's job withdrawal intention, whilst job satisfaction mediates their relationship ( $\beta=-0.566$ ,  $t=9.829$ ,  $p=0.000$ ).*

**Key words:** *HRM practices, work-related attitudes, intention to quit, Coronavirus, PLS-SEM.*

## Introduction

The most recent health pandemic reduced the organizational resistance to zero. The economic recession was widespread shortly after the outbreak of the Coronavirus crisis, making even the world's largest organizations with carefully nurtured corporate-sustainability cultures non-immune. Employees have borne the burden of initial economic decline, while core management functions, manifestly, did not respond "triumphantly" to increasing unemployment rates. As an aftermath, labor market participants became embittered and disaffected (as confirmed by the studies of Elsafty & Ragheb, 2020; and Mwita, 2020), which caused working morale to plummet. The depth of these changes requires an exigent organizational strategy for quality workers' long-term retention, followed by systematic action in the coming years. Yet, in order for life and work to continue now, it is important to look back at the "mistakes" made in the recent past.

Human resource (HR) departments are familiar with a promising solution that has the potential of gradually and unobtrusively guidance of future employee behavior - videlicet, human resource management (HRM) practices. What we are interested in investigating is how the employees experienced those practices during the times of the Coronavirus crisis, how mentioned practices affected their satisfaction with the work they were performing at that moment, and finally, whether on that basis they subsequently developed (or not) the desire/need/drive to leave the organization.

Motivation for the research involves the aspiration to collect useful information in order to reduce post-crisis risk in human resource management and investments. Additionally, motivation for the research comes from the desire to see the "other side of the coin". Human resource managers have been questioned on this issue quite a few times so far. Their views are mainly directed towards the claim that their organizations (and therefore themselves) handled the COVID-19 situation and crisis well. Coin's other (more significant) side overview should provide insight into how employees perceive those "self-praised" HRM practices and organizational protection that were offered to them over the past two years. Therefore, the conduction of research is justified by the need of understanding future attitudes and potential behavior (primarily withdrawal from job) from a stressed, unprotected workforce.

The subject of the research is an overview of relations between HRM practices, employee's job satisfaction and employee's job withdrawal intention in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic and hurried crisis management. The main objective of the research

is to determine the influence that HRM practices have in the process of forming a strong employee's job withdrawal intention, along with examining the existence of mediating role of employee's job satisfaction in the aforementioned relationship during the Coronavirus crisis.

Research's aim is twofold - to examine perceptions from the employee's standpoint about HRM practices' influence on their personal withdrawal intention, and to examine job satisfaction mediating role in the relation *perceived HRM practices-withdrawal intention*. The main research hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) assumes that HRM practices have a statistically significant, negative impact on the surveyed employees' job withdrawal intention, while job satisfaction has a mediating role in their relationship. This assumption is built on the basis of previous research carried out by the reference authors (Froese et al., 2018; Mudor & Tooksoon, 2011; Guchait & Cho, 2010; Haines et al., 2010; Li et al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2018; AlBattat & Som, 2013; Santhanam et al., 2017; Kim, 2012; Shuck et al., 2014; Jolović & Berber, 2021; Basnyat & Lao, 2020; Hom & Kinicki, 2001; Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Rubel & Kee, 2015; etc) and, as such, will serve the purpose of our questioning.

Research's starting point is an investigation of direct links between the three aforementioned variables, with more than ample space left for examination of the existence of indirect relations between them. This "examining gap" primarily refers to the study of the mediation role employee's attitude - job satisfaction, has in the relationship between the observed organizational "creation" (HRM practices) and the predictor of employee's behavior (intention to withdraw from job/organization/career) on the selected sample. A contribution that this scientific research will generate, therefore, arises from the necessity to create a comprehensive conceptual model that will explore both direct and indirect relations between three significative variables included in the research.

## Theoretical background

Retaining the most valuable organizational asset - human resources, as the only factor of production that is vulnerable and intolerant of business temptations, seems impossible without establishing adequate HRM practices (effective recruitment, impartial selection, competitive compensation, attractive incentives and rewards, available career development opportunities, flexible job design, etc) (Juhdi et al., 2013). These practices originate from management activities, they can have a considerable influence on shaping employees' attitudes and intentions, as well as the potential to prevent possible (from the standpoint of the organization) unwanted work behaviors.

As Delery and Doty argue (mentioned in Otoo, 2019), HRM practices are a set of internally consistent policies and practices designed and implemented to ensure that organization's human capital contributes to the achievement of its business goals (Otoo, 2019). They are recognized as communicators, i.e., information transmitters from the

employer to the employee (Li et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020). All HRM practices are highly interdependent and may not be construed as independent factors (Santhanam et al., 2017).

It is generally agreed that effective HRM practices, including recruitment of the right staff, provisioning competitive compensation and benefit plans, creating egalitarian organization, permanent offering of career development opportunities and training in relevant skills, ensuring security and good information flow, and handling employee's grievances efficiently lead to positive employee outcomes, increase employee's level of commitment and trust on the organization, motivation and satisfaction with the job, help improve the overall service quality and brand image of the organization, employee's knowledge, skills and abilities, and may reduce employee's turnover intention/increase productivity/improve organizational performance/etc. (Basnyat & Lao, 2020; Santhanam et al., 2017; Yamamoto, 2013).

Authors Bowen and Ostroff (mentioned in Li et al., 2019) emphasize the value of perception-oriented research formulation, which should involve employees' indication of the extent to which they feel HRM practices are utilized in the organization, as well as the extent to which employees feel they have personally experienced these practices (Li et al., 2019; Guchait & Cho, 2010; Kehoe & Wright, 2013). With that logical sequence, the perceptions of employees were chosen as the initial basis of this research.

On the other hand, job withdrawal intention finds its foothold in the employee turnover phenomenon. As authors Weisberg, Kirschenbaum, Loi, Hang-Yue and Foley claim (mentioned in Guchait & Cho, 2010; BaniMelhem et al., 2018), employee turnover as a "salient outcome variable" (Yousaf et al., 2018) is one of the major concerns of any organization in terms of: the loss of talent, institutional memory, its direct impact on the financial costs associated with loss of investment in human capital, additional recruitment and training, and the adverse effects on productivity. Scholars Arnold, Feldman, Steel, Ovalle, Ghiselli, La Lopa and Bai (mentioned in Guchait & Cho, 2010) have extensively studied the importance of behavioral intention (turnover intention, i.e., intention to leave the organization, i.e., withdrawal intention) as a significant predictor of actual turnover. Their and similar conceptual and theoretical studies have considered withdrawal intention as the single best predictor of turnover (Guchait & Cho, 2010; Huang & Su, 2016).

Withdrawal intention, as Mowday, Porter and Steers defined (mentioned in Guchait & Cho, 2010), implies the subjective estimation of an individual regarding the probability of leaving an organization in the near future. This behavioral intention may arise from various factors, some of which are internal (employees may have full or partial control over them) and some external (employees may have little or no control at all over them). The existing literature generally agrees that continual displeasure with the current employment, exposure to or emergence of alternative employment possibilities, and lack of goals and value congruence between organization and employee are some of the most

important factors that influence employee's withdrawal intention, and consequently, lead to actual turnover for many. Apart from listed, withdrawal intention and actual turnover may arise from several sources, including poor working conditions, inadequate compensation and benefits, lack of supervisory support, age-tenure and inter-role conflicts (Basnyat & Lao, 2020; AlBattat & Som, 2013).

From the administrative and financial standpoint, a high turnover of employees increases recruitment, training and replacement costs; and from the sustainability standpoint, team dynamics, organizational performance and operations are often compromised. On the flip side, lower turnover rates help organizations to sustain their competitiveness and achieve long-term developmental objectives (Basnyat & Lao, 2020; Long & Perumal, 2014). Therein lies the key importance of regulating this parameter in the organizational ranks.

Job satisfaction, as already appreciated nexus of HRM practices and withdrawal intention in the literature, is referred to as the state in which employee's needs and work outcomes match well. Job satisfaction represents a combination of cognitive and affective employee reactions to the actual state and its previous matching perceptions and standards (initial employee wishes compared to actually received gains) (Mudor & Tookson, 2011; Hassan et al., 2013).

According to the literature (Fletcher et al., 2018; AlBattat & Som, 2013), lack of job satisfaction can directly lead to withdrawal (intention) of employees. Dissatisfaction-departure route explained by Hom & Kinicki (2001) is direct and confirmed in many studies following this one. Findings of relevant studies (Santhanam et al., 2017; Li et al., 2019; Kim, 2012; Shuck et al., 2014; Jolović & Berber, 2021; Haines et al., 2010; Aburumman et al., 2020) also suggest that HRM practices influence employee's withdrawal intention, but as Meyer, Smith, and Agarwala assume (mentioned in Guchait & Cho, 2010), this relationship might not be direct.

In general, previous research (Mudor & Tooksoon, 2011; Basnyat & Lao, 2020; Shuck et al., 2014; Haines et al., 2010; Hom & Kinicki, 2001; Kim, 2012; Li et al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2018; Santhanam et al., 2017; Froese et al., 2018; Aburumman et al., 2020; Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Rubel & Kee, 2015) indicate that both HRM practices and job satisfaction are negatively related to the employee's withdrawal intention, and that individually, these variables may influence its (dis)appearance. Additionally, according to the relevant literature (Mudor & Tooksoon, 2011; Froese et al., 2018), HRM practices and job satisfaction are positively correlated variables.

All these putative positive and negative, direct and indirect relations will be examined below. With the following auxiliary hypotheses (carefully elaborated in accordance with the previous knowledge from the literature and earlier stated main research hypothesis ( $H_0$ )), all passing relations will be clarified in detail:

- The first auxiliary hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) assumes that there is a direct, statistically significant, negative relation between HRM practices and job withdrawal intention of the surveyed employees;
- The second auxiliary hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ ) assumes that there is a direct, statistically significant, positive relation between HRM practices and job satisfaction of the surveyed employees;
- The third auxiliary hypothesis ( $H_{03}$ ) assumes that there is a direct, statistically significant, negative relation between job satisfaction and job withdrawal intention of surveyed employees;
- The fourth auxiliary hypothesis ( $H_{04}$ ) assumes that job satisfaction has a mediating role in the relationship between HRM practices and job withdrawal intention of the surveyed employees.

## Methodology

The conducted research has a twofold character - the theoretical and empirical part are its constituents. The theoretical part integrated the method of literature content analysis, implying the collection of knowledge from top journals with international importance closely related to the scientific field of interest. The empirical part integrated the survey method, collecting primary statistical data from employed workers in the national (Serbian) economy during the first half of 2022 (in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis). An electronic survey questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection (the first segment of the questionnaire included questions related to general information about the survey respondents - employees, as well as information about the respondents' position in the organization, while the second segment examined respondents' perceptions of HRM practices offered/carried out during Coronavirus crisis by management of organizations, noted employees' specific work attitude, as well as behavioral intention). Data were processed using econometric systems *SmartPLS 3.0* and *IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0*, and following software procedures. Usage of the statistical-econometric method (technique) Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was also recorded. A five-point Likert scale of psychometrics was used for noting the answers of 99 respondents on the attached statements.

As an instrument for the measurement of variables included in the research model, the electronic survey questionnaire integrated scales developed by reference authors, as follows:

- The HRM practices variable was measured through the *Individual perceptions of Human Resource Management Practices Scale*, developed by authors Gould-Williams & Davies (2005), which consists of 8 questions;

- The Job satisfaction variable was measured through the *Short Satisfaction Instrument*, developed by author Tsui and co-workers (1992), which consists of 6 questions;
- The Employee's withdrawal intention variable was measured through the *Employee Intention to Quit Scale*, developed by author Farh and co-workers (1998), which consists of 4 questions.

### 3.1 Sample overview

Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia's national data (2022) on registered employment for 2021 recorded 2,273,591 people that had the status of an employed person. This represents the research population. As already explained, the responses of 99 employees from the Serbian labor market were collected through an electronic survey questionnaire. This represents the research sample.

Table 1: Research sample overview: General information about the survey respondents

	Variable	Periodicity	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	47	47.5
	Female	52	52.5
	<b>Overall sample</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Age group</b>	Younger than 18	2	2.0
	18-35	47	47.5
	36-50	31	31.3
	51-65	18	18.2
	Older than 65	1	1.0
	<b>Overall sample</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Level of education</b>	Primary education	0	0.0
	Secondary education	15	15.2
	Upper level of education	8	8.1
	Bachelor's level of education	42	42.4
	Master's level of education	32	32.3
	Doctoral level of education	2	2.0
	<b>Overall sample</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Region of residence</b>	Vojvodina	0	0.0
	Belgrade	15	15.2
	Southern and Eastern Serbia	39	39.4
	Šumadija and Western Serbia	43	43.4
	Kosovo and Metohija	2	2.0
	<b>Overall sample</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Calculation of authors via SPSS software

Using Table 1 and Table 2, an overview of the research sample is provided. General information about the survey respondents and information about the respondents' position in the organization are presented respectively. The majority of the survey respondents are characterized by the following characteristics - they belong to the female gender (52.5%), they are 18-35 years old (47.5%), they have Bachelor's level of education (42.4%), and they have a place of residence in Šumadija and Western Serbia region (39.4%) (Table 1).

The survey respondents' position in the organization is, in the majority of cases, characterized by the following features - their form of contractual agreement is permanent (42.4%), their state of employment is full-time (70.7%), their work position is specialist (39.4%), and their monthly income amounts to EUR 251-500 (44.4%) (Table 2).

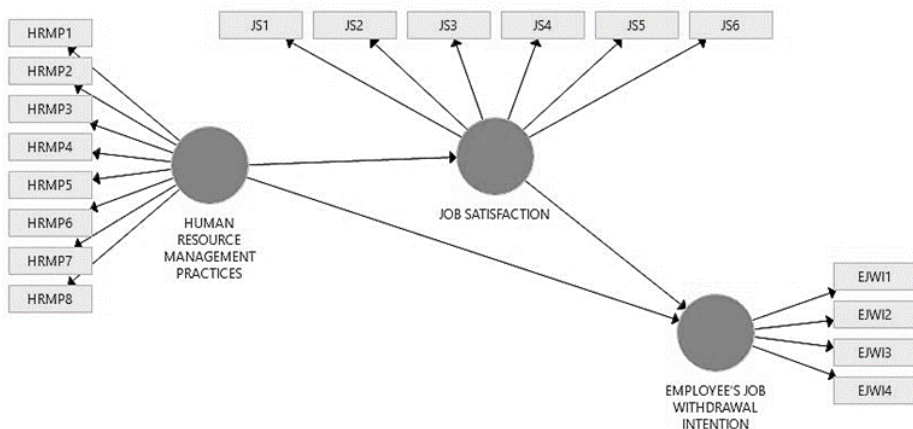
Table 2: Research sample overview: Information about the survey respondents' position in the organization

	Variable	Periodicity	Percentage
<b>Form of contractual agreement</b>	Permanent contract	42	42.4
	Non-permanent contract	28	28.3
	Out-of-employment work	14	14.1
	Without-a-contract work	15	15.2
	<b>Overall sample</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Form of employment</b>	Full-time	70	70.7
	Part-time	29	29.3
	<b>Overall sample</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Work position</b>	Owner	10	10.1
	Manager	7	7.1
	Specialist	39	39.4
	Technician	3	3.0
	Bureaucrat	10	10.1
	Service worker/tradesman/artisan	23	23.2
	Laborer	7	7.1
	<b>Overall sample</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Monthly income</b>	Up to EUR 250	18	18.2
	EUR 251-500	44	44.4
	EUR 501-750	15	15.2
	EUR 751-1,000	8	8.1
	Over EUR 1,000	14	14.1
	<b>Overall sample</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Calculation of authors via SPSS software



Using Graph 1, an overview of the research model is provided. It is possible to notice from the display that the statistical-econometric method Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used for the research's purposes. As claimed by author Hair and co-workers (2019a; 2019b), PLS-SEM is nowadays widely applied in many social science disciplines, including organizational and human resource management. As these authors argue, PLS-SEM is a causal-predictive approach to SEM that emphasizes prediction in estimating statistical models, and whose structures are designed to provide causal explanations. PLS-SEM is widely applicable as it enables the estimation of complex models characterized by many constructs, indicator variables and structural paths, all without imposing distributional assumptions on the data used and requirements regarding (large) sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019a; Wong, 2013). These are just some of the reasons for which the named model was applied in our study.



Graph 1: Research model overview: Constructs, indicator variables and structural paths

Source: Illustration by authors via SmartPLS software

As illustrated above (Graph 1), the research model includes three constructs (HRM practices, Job satisfaction, and Employee's job withdrawal intention), and in total, 18 indicator variables (8 for the first, 6 for the second, and 4 for the third variable), as well as structural paths between them.

## Results and discussion

The evaluation of the results of the PLS-SEM model begins with the examination of the measurement models, and only if they meet all the required criteria, it will be possible to reorient to the examination of the structural model (Sarstedt & Cheah, 2019). The criteria are different for reflective and formative measurement models, and it will be

implemented as follows, in accordance with the fact that in our research the reflective connection between variables in the reflectively constructed model was considered.

The first stage starts with the presentation of reflective indicators' Outer loadings, aiming to test their reliability. Criterion is set on 0.7 and higher for each indicator value, which would mean that if the indicator registers a specified value, by the specific research construct is explained more than 50% of the indicator's variance (Hair et al., 2019a; Ringle et al., 2020). The literature allows and, in some cases, strongly advocates lowering this limit to 0.6 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Our research took into account the criterion of 0.65 (Jolović & Berber, 2021).

Table 3 presents the results of reliability testing of research indicators (Outer Loadings results). Not all indicators met the reliability criteria of 0.65, so for that reason some of them were excluded from the further calculation. Precisely, the indicators HRMP3 (0.440), HRMP5 (0.506) and JS3 (0.565), which according to the results did not meet the established reliability criteria, were eliminated from further phases of the research. The ones that did are listed in the aforementioned table.

*Table 3: Reliability testing: Indicators loadings (only the indicators that met the reliability criteria are presented)*

Constructs Indicators	Employee's job withdrawal intention	HRM practices	Job satisfaction
EJWI1	0.761		
EJWI2	0.857		
EJWI3	0.768		
EJWI4	0.781		
HRMP1		0.754	
HRMP2		0.687	
HRMP4		0.709	
HRMP6		0.675	
HRMP7		0.691	
HRMP8		0.810	
JS1			0.660
JS2			0.670
JS4			0.751
JS5			0.870
JS6			0.906

*Source: Calculation of authors via SmartPLS software*

The second stage starts with the evaluation of the internal consistency reliability of each construct measure, using Composite Reliability, Cronbach's Alpha and Rho\_A

criteria. According to Hair and co-workers (2019a) and Ringle and co-workers (2020), the criterion for all of these three metrics is set on 0.7 and higher (till 0.95, because when this value is exceeded, there may be polemics about the existence of indicator redundancy) for each construct reliability value to be marked as acceptable for research.

The third, follow-up stage starts with the evaluation of the convergent validity of each construct measure, using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) metric. According to Hair and co-workers (2019a) and Ringle and co-workers (2020), the criterion is set on 0.5 and higher, which would mean that if that value is reached, constructs explain at least 50% of the variance of their items.

Table 4 presents the results of internal consistency reliability and convergent validity testing of research constructs (Construct Reliability and Validity results). All constructs met all proscribed criteria (of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively), so for that reason, all of them are included in the further calculation.

*Table 4: Internal consistency reliability and convergent validity testing: Constructs*

Constructs	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho_A	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
<b>Employee's job withdrawal intention</b>	0.871	0.810	0.838	0.629
<b>HRM practices</b>	0.867	0.819	0.833	0.522
<b>Job satisfaction</b>	0.883	0.832	0.860	0.605

*Source: Calculation of authors via SmartPLS software*

The fourth stage starts with the evaluation of the discriminant validity of each construct measure using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. According to author Hair and co-workers (2019a), this criterion should show the extent to which a single construct is empirically distinct from all other constructs included in the research model (each construct's AVE should be compared to the squared inter-construct correlation of that same construct and all other reflectively measured constructs in the structural model; the shared variance for all model constructs should not be larger than their AVEs) (Hair et al., 2019a).

Table 5 presents the results of discriminant validity testing of research constructs (Fornell-Larcker Criterion results). All constructs met the previously explained criterion, which means that they all have discriminant validity and that within the research they can be viewed as separate entities.

Table 5: Discriminant validity testing: Constructs

Fornell-Larcker Criterion			
Constructs	Employee's job withdrawal intention	HRM practices	Job satisfaction
Employee's job withdrawal intention	0.793		
HRM practices	-0.566	0.782	
Job satisfaction	-0.607	0.723	0.778

Source: Calculation of authors via SmartPLS software

As previously explained, once the estimation of the measurement model is satisfactory, the next stage of the PLS-SEM results' gradual interpretation is the assessment of the structural model. Collinearity is what should be examined first in a structural model in order to ensure that it does not affect the regression results. In this process, the latent variable values of the predictor constructs in the partial regression are used to calculate the VIF values (Hair et al., 2019a). According to author Hair and co-workers (2019a), the criterion is set on 5 and lower (values above 5 indicate likely collinearity problems among the predictor constructs; in the ideal case, the VIF values should be close to 3 or even lower).

Table 6 presents the results of collinearity testing in the structural research model (Inner VIF values results). All constructs met the previously explained criterion of 5 (and even 3), which means they do not have collinearity issues (they are independent of each other/change in one does not affect the other variables, and inversely).

Table 6: Collinearity testing in the structural research model: Inner VIF values

Inner VIF values	Employee's job withdrawal intention	HRM practices	Job satisfaction
Employee's job withdrawal intention	-	-	-
HRM practices	2.579	-	1.000
Job satisfaction	2.579	-	-

Source: Calculation of authors via SmartPLS software

Before the final estimation is done, given that our primary intention was to examine direct relationships between the three variables included in the research, we will first approach the statistical significance and relevance of all path coefficients in the research model testing (precisely, all direct effects in the research model). Table 7 offers an insight into the results (Path Coefficients results) obtained through the Bootstrapping procedure

and the t-test for the 5% significance level. The Bootstrapping procedure was run using 5,000 iterations.

As presented below, there is no direct statistically significant relation between HRM practices and Employee's job withdrawal intention ( $p=0.065$ , unfulfilled criterion of  $p<0.05$ ). Yet, the relation (1) between HRM practices and Job satisfaction, as well as the relation (2) between Job satisfaction and Employee's job withdrawal intention are direct, and statistically significant ( $p=0.000$  in both cases, fulfilled criterion of  $p<0.05$ ). These last positive results allow us to observe and note the potential mediating effect that Job satisfaction variable (common linking factor) can have in the relationship between HRM practices variable and Employee's job withdrawal intention variable.

*Table 7: Statistical significance and relevance testing of all path coefficients in the structural research model: Direct effects*

	Original Sample	Sample Mean (now is Standardized Beta)	Standard Deviation (now is Standard Error)	T Statistics	P Values	Hypothesis
<b>HRM practices -&gt; Employee's job withdrawal intention</b>	-0.236	-0.238	0.128	1.846	<b>0.065</b>	<b>H<sub>01</sub> is not confirmed</b>
<b>HRM practices -&gt; Job satisfaction</b>	0.782	0.787	0.051	15.270	<b>0.000</b>	<b>H<sub>02</sub> is confirmed</b>
<b>Job satisfaction -&gt; Employee's job withdrawal intention</b>	-0.423	-0.438	0.121	3.501	<b>0.000</b>	<b>H<sub>03</sub> is confirmed</b>

*Source: Calculation of authors via SmartPLS software*

Finally, the results presented in Table 8 unequivocally confirm that the variable Job satisfaction has a mediating effect in the relationship between variables HRM practices and Employee's job withdrawal intention, as well as that this effect is statistically significant ( $p=0.002$ , fulfilled criterion of  $p<0.05$ ).

*Table 8: Specific indirect effect testing in the structural research model: Mediating effects*

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values	Hypothesis
HRM practices -> <b>Job satisfaction -&gt;</b> Employee's job withdrawal intention	-0.331	-0.347	0.106	3.132	<b>0.002</b>	<b>H<sub>04</sub> is confirmed</b>

*Source: Calculation of authors via SmartPLS software*

As the last but not the least important activity in structural research model evaluation, it is worth considering the overall registered effects (results presented in Table 9). The total effect of HRM practices on Employee's job withdrawal intention is negative and statistically significant at a significance level of 5%, and even 1% ( $\beta=-0.566$ ,  $t=9.829$ ,  $p=0.000$ ;  $p<0.05$  and  $p<0.01$ ).

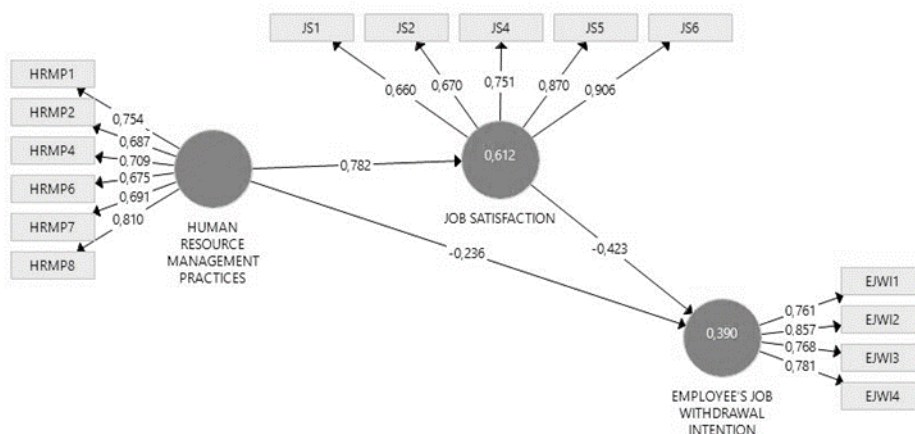
Thanks to these findings, the initial research assumption given in the form of the main research hypothesis  $H_0$  - HRM practices have a statistically significant, negative impact on employee's job withdrawal intention, while job satisfaction mediates their relationship, could be marked as proven. According to results presented in Table 7 and Table 8, auxiliary hypotheses  $H_{02}$ ,  $H_{03}$  and  $H_{04}$  may also be marked as proven, whilst hypothesis  $H_{01}$  may be marked as unproven.

*Table 9: Total effects in the structural research model*

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Value	Hypothesis
<b>HRM practices -&gt;</b> <b>Employee's job withdrawal intention</b>	-0.566	-0.585	0.058	9.829	<b>0.000</b>	<b>H<sub>0</sub> is confirmed</b>

*Source: Calculation of authors via SmartPLS software*

The research results shown in the previous tables are also illustrated graphically for the sake of transparency. Graph 2 offers insight into an overview of the structural research model results.



Graph 2: Overview of the structural research model results: Constructs, indicator variables and structural paths

Source: Illustration by authors via SmartPLS software

The final estimation of the complete structural model's suitability, correctness and strength could be done through constructs' Coefficients of determination (R Square -  $R^2$  and R Square Adjusted -  $R^2$  Adjusted). According to author Hair and co-workers (2019a), these coefficients measure the variance which is explained in each of the endogenous constructs - i.e., they measure the structural model's explanatory power. R Square ranges from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate a greater explanatory power (values of 0.25, 0.5, and 0.75 indicate weak, moderate, and significant explanatory power of the model, respectively).

Table 10 presents the results of coefficients of determination for constructs Employee's job withdrawal intention and Job Satisfaction. R Square results for construct Employee's job withdrawal intention amount to 0.390, meaning that the used research model has weak to moderate predictive power for this variable. R Square results for construct Job satisfaction amount to 0.612, meaning that the used research model has moderate to highly significant predictive power for this variable.

Table 10: Coefficients of determination of constructs: R Square

	<b>R Square</b>	<b>R Square Adjusted</b>
<b>Employee's job withdrawal intention</b>	<b>0.390</b>	0.377
<b>Job satisfaction</b>	<b>0.612</b>	0.608

Source: Calculation of authors via SmartPLS software

## Conclusion

Economists around the globe are concordant - the ramifications of the Coronavirus pandemic reflected primarily in the human resources domain. The organizational “glass bell” that protected employees broke overnight under the crisis pressure. Nobody was spared. Left to themselves, unprotected employees became anxious and, worse, dissatisfied. HR departments are called to urgent strategical action to preserve the remaining resources for the future (post-Coronavirus times). In order to achieve this, it is necessary to learn from the past.

For research purposes, HRM practices were extracted from all frameworks and viewed as a unique entity that had and will have an impact on employee’s satisfaction when it comes to the work they perform, representing an essential component of their organizational allegiance and long-term retention. Job satisfaction was recognized as a potential “bridge” that connects perceived employees’ attitudes about HRM practices (i.e., quality of HR department involvement in crisis times) and withdrawal intention. In order to learn about this issue, the research used a target group where 99 Serbian labor market participants were involved. Their perceptions (about HRM practices), work-related attitude (job satisfaction), and behavioral intention (withdrawal intention) were examined in consequent order during 2022.

The research findings indicated that:

- There is no direct, statistically significant, negative relation between HRM practices and employee’s job withdrawal intention (unconfirmed auxiliary hypothesis  $H_{01}$ , results available in Table 7);
- There is a direct, statistically significant, positive relation between HRM practices and job satisfaction (confirmed auxiliary hypothesis  $H_{02}$ , results available in Table 7);
- There is a direct, statistically significant, negative relation between job satisfaction and job withdrawal intention (confirmed auxiliary hypothesis  $H_{03}$ , results available in Table 7);
- There exists a partial mediating role of job satisfaction in the conceptual model, i.e., in the relation *perceived HRM practices–withdrawal intention* (confirmed auxiliary hypothesis  $H_{04}$ , results available in Table 8).

Acceptance of the three auxiliary research hypotheses and Total effects results ( $\beta=-0.566$ ,  $t=9.829$ ,  $p=0.000$ ;  $p<0.05$  and  $p<0.01$ ; presented in Table 9) consequently allow further interpretation - confirmation of the main research hypothesis  $H_0$  and the initial assumption that HRM practices have a statistically significant, negative impact on employee’s job withdrawal intention while job satisfaction mediates their relationship. To clarify, good HRM practices (and, more importantly, perceived as such) make employees more satisfied with the job they are performing in the organizations, and this increased



level of satisfaction subsequently reduces their withdrawal intention. The developed structural research model has been rated as weak to moderate (for Employee's job withdrawal intention variable,  $R\text{ Square}=0.390$ ), and moderate to highly significant (for Job Satisfaction variable,  $R\text{ Square}=0.612$ ), when it comes to its exploratory power.

With presented insight, research expanded literature's incremental knowledge and provided a foundation for future ideas. The conducted study confirmed the findings of previous research (which included relations between the same variables, but reviewed observations in different contexts), such as ones realized by Mudor & Tooksoon, 2011; Guchait & Cho, 2010; Haines et al., 2010; Li et al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2018; AlBattat & Som, 2013; Santhanam et al., 2017; Aburumman et al., 2020; Kim, 2012; Shuck et al., 2014; Jolović & Berber, 2021; Basnyat & Lao, 2020; Hom & Kinicki, 2001; Froese et al., 2018; Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Rubel & Kee, 2015; etc. All these studies made a recommendation consensus - employee perceptions of HRM practices should be constantly observed (in crisis and regular times) as the nucleus towards which managerial attention should be directed in order to achieve long-term retention of quality personnel. The conducted research also stands behind such a recommendation.

The research, carried out on a decent sample in an environment from which such observations did not originated before (making a remarkable contribution to the modest national literature), confirmed once again that especially in crisis times employees' perception of organizational "self-investment" in the process of preserving their mutual agreement - work for mutual benefit, always comes to the fore with its importance. All managerial actions (practices, policies) directly affect employee's job satisfaction, and via this indicator indirectly their withdrawal intention.

Therefore, presented observations have the potential to direct policymakers within organizations to adopt correct and well-articulated HRM practices influencing employee behavior, all for the sake of establishing effective human capital and profitable operations that bring competitive advantage. Changes in practices (especially in times of crisis) may prompt employees to reconsider their position, and give them hope that the organization will (if not already) begin to behave more responsibly and appropriately.

The conducted research provided a genuine initial emboldening, too. When it comes to the trajectory for other studies, further empirical endeavors should include elucidation of other employee's attitudes (organizational commitment, for example) on the relation between perceived HRM practices and withdrawal intention, including not only the changes caused by Coronavirus but also the upheavals caused by the latest global crisis - the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Research has also noted certain limitations. The shortcomings are reflected in: the relatively small size of the sample (due to technical limitations regarding data processing), the exclusive observation of the national labor market so that research findings can not be generalized (a regional perspective could have been taken into account), an uneven number of respondents of different demographics, living and working conditions (which,

as a disadvantage, is linked to the modest size of the sample), the use of an electronic survey questionnaire (an interview method could also have been used in order to obtain a more accurate summary of the employees' opinions, their personal stances and work-related attitudes; yet, due to the pandemic that was in full swing at that moment, such a thing was not possible after all), etc. Finally, it is important to note that if the pros and cons of the conducted research were put on the scale, the pros would still prevail.

To make a final point arising from this research - it is mandatory for the HR departments to learn how to adapt to a "new normality" turbulent environment, as well as how to adjust their own managerial practices (with chaotical results due to crisis downturns) to employees so that they can continue to produce and perform effectively at work. HR managers must be aware of an indisputable fact - a satisfied employee does not leave his workplace.

### Acknowledgments

The realization of the research was supported by the funds of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia through the Project of the Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, entitled "Innovative Scientific and Artistic Research in the Field of Activity of the Faculty of Technical Sciences" (project number: 451-03-68/2020-14/200156), and through the Scientific Research Program 2019-2023 of the Institute of Economic Sciences in Belgrade.

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