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ESG-ORIENTED STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS REPUTATION: RESILIENCE FACTORS OF IT-COMPANIES IN THE CONTEXT OF HUMAN RESOURCE CRISIS

ESG-ОРІЄНТОВАНЕ СТРАТЕГІЧНЕ УПРАВЛІННЯ ПЕРСОНАЛОМ ТА ДІЛОВА РЕПУТАЦІЯ: ФАКТОРИ СТІЙКОСТІ ІТ-КОМПАНІЙ В УМОВАХ КАДРОВОЇ КРИЗИ

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The article examines how ESG-oriented strategic human resource management and business reputation jointly support the resilience of IT companies under conditions of a human resource crisis in Ukraine. The purpose is to determine the role of human resource management and reputation management instruments in preserving human capital and sustaining the activities of IT companies during prolonged uncertainty. The study is based on the analysis and synthesis of academic publications, comparative assessment of existing approaches, and qualitative case studies of SoftServe and Genesis using secondary data from open sources. The authors systematise three groups of resilience factors and identify key ESG-oriented human resource management and reputation tools. The practical value lies in providing IT managers and HR professionals with a framework for designing HR and communication policies that enhance crisis preparedness, stakeholder trust, and long-term competitiveness.

Keywords: ESG-oriented strategic human resource management; ESG concept; business reputation; company resilience; IT company, human resource crisis.

Стаття присвячена з'ясуванню як ESG-орієнтоване стратегічне управління персоналом у поєднанні з інструментами управління діловою репутацією підсилює стійкість ІТ-компаній в умовах кадрової кризи та тривалої невизначеності воєнного часу. Метою дослідження є з'ясування як узгоджена система HR-практик та інструментів управління діловою репутацією дає змогу зберігати людський капітал, підтримувати безперервність бізнес-процесів і зміцнювати довіру стейкхолдерів до компанії. Методи дослідження, застосовані авторами, включають індукцію, дедукцію, узагальнення, аналіз ESG-орієнтованого стратегічного управління персоналом та діловою репутацією, а також елементи кейс-аналізу практик провідних ІТ-компаній. У результаті авторами узагальнено три групи факторів стійкості компанії: управління талантами та розвиток персоналу, корпоративна культура й добробут працівників, бренд роботодавця та зовнішні комунікації; деталізовано набір ESG-узгоджених HR-інструментів і засобів управління діловою репутацією, що забезпечують адаптивність компаній до кадрової кризи. Запропоновано концептуальну модель взаємодії стратегічних HRM-практик і репутаційних інструментів, яка пояснює, яким чином вони трансформуються в стійкість компаній на мікро-, мезо- та макрорівнях. Практична цінність дослідження полягає в тому, що запропоновані висновки й рекомендації можуть бути використані керівниками ІТ-бізнесу та HR-підрозділів під час



розроблення політик управління персоналом, зокрема, систем мотивації, програм корпоративної соціальної відповідальності та нефінансової звітності, а також при формуванні ESG-стратегій, орієнтованих на збереження важливих компетенцій, посилення конкурентоспроможності та підвищення інвестиційної привабливості українських IT-компаній. Отримані результати формують підґрунтя для подальших емпіричних досліджень впливу відмінностей працівників різних поколінь, досвіду міграції, мобільності й дистанційної зайнятості на сприйняття ними ESG-орієнтованої HR-політики, практик корпоративного управління та репутаційних стратегій компаній.

Ключові слова: ESG-орієнтоване стратегічне управління персоналом; концепція ESG; ділова репутація; стійкість компанії; IT компанія, кадрова криза.

Statement of the problem. In the condition of war, high migration, and intense security risks, Ukrainian IT companies have found themselves in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, the IT sector is one of the most dynamic and export-oriented segments of Ukraine's economy; on the other, its long-term development is constrained by a deepening human resource crisis. A shortage of talented employees, high staff turnover, and war-induced emotional burnout trigger this crisis. High level of global competition for qualified employees hinders the ability of Ukrainian IT companies to sustain innovative development, meet client expectations, and retain key personnel. Under such conditions, the question of what exactly ensures the resilience of an IT company – beyond financial stability and technological capabilities – becomes particularly acute.

Previous research has identified individual elements of crisis-oriented human resource management and called attention to the importance of business reputation for attracting and retaining staff; however, the interaction between ESG-oriented strategic human resource management and reputation management remains insufficiently explored. In particular, there is a lack of studies demonstrating how HR practices aligned with ESG principles (such as well-being programmes, inclusive career development, transparent corporate governance, and effective communication with employees) strengthen a company's business reputation and, consequently, enhance its resilience in the face of a human resource crisis.

Accordingly, the key problem addressed in this article is to clarify how ESG-oriented strategic human resource management and business reputation can be jointly employed as a system of resilience factors for IT companies operating under conditions of prolonged uncertainty and scarce human resources. Solving this problem is crucial both for deepening the theoretical understanding of organisational resilience within the ESG paradigm and for developing practical recommendations for IT managers and HR

professionals who design HR and communication policies under war in Ukraine.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Contemporary research confirms a systemic personnel crisis in the Ukrainian IT industry, exacerbated by the war and global economic shifts. Sirosh and Didur argued that "staff shortages have long-term effects – slowing economic growth, reducing business competitiveness, and weakening the country's investment attractiveness – and call for a comprehensive response that combines education reform, state programmes to encourage migrants' return, production automation, and better working conditions" [13].

Analyzing the war-time transformation of the Ukrainian IT labour market, Bratus, Karbovska, and Mazur noted that "effective HRM is a decisive factor of competitiveness" [3]. Reverenda, Smirnov, and Kharaton stressed "high turnover and staff shortages, pointing to HR digitalisation, corporate informal education, and optimised retention as key responses" [10]. Prib systematised "anti-crisis approaches (retrenchment, expansion, stabilisation)" [9], while Parii and Klymenko show that "in the context of digital transformation, strategic human management and innovative HR technologies – together with the development of digital literacy – are important tools for company resilience" [8].

Bardoel E., Pettit T., De Cieri H. & McMillan, L. have shown that "environmental uncertainty moderates relationships between resilience-enhancing HRM practices and outcomes for employees and organizations" [2]. Yu J., Yuan L., Han G., Li H., & Li P. discovered that "self-efficacy plays a mediating role in the relationship between strategic HRM and organizational resilience" [16].

Alkema V., & Sumets O. systematized "the personnel risks of IT companies and developed an integrated model of communicative personnel management with mechanisms for adaptation to crisis conditions" [1]. Panchenko V. systematized "flexible forms of employment as a strategic tool for overcoming staff shortages, developing their

typology and a model for the transformation of HR processes" [7]. The importance of a socially sustainable approach was empirically confirmed by Caputo A., Tron A., Sasseti S., Giakoumelou A. & Colantoni F., who demonstrated that "investments in the well-being, health, and safety of employees positively affect the financial performance and market value of companies" [4].

Mihus I., & Liashenko, O. defined "business reputation as an asset formed based on the perception of the company by key stakeholders, which allows personnel to be viewed not only as a resource but also as an active participant and bearer of reputation" [6]. Concurrently, Sari F., Iskandar S., and Fitriadi Y. demonstrated that "strategic personnel management, particularly talent agility and leadership development, significantly increases organizational resilience, while transformational leadership and an adaptive culture enhance a company's ability to adapt to uncertainty and crises" [12].

Sanders K., Nguyen P., Bouckenoghe D., Rafferty A. & Schwarz G. revealed how "a company's reputation influences managers' communication during a crisis; "the severity of the crisis and a high company reputation enhance the clarity and consistency of information provided to personnel, while cultural factors such as uncertainty avoidance strengthen this effect, and high power distance weakens it" [11].

Relying on these findings and considering the specific challenges of the Ukrainian IT sector under wartime conditions, this article proposes an ESG-oriented framework for strategic HRM and business reputation management as key drivers of IT companies' resilience.

Formation of the objectives of the article (task statement). The article aims to scientifically substantiate how human resource management and business reputation influence the resilience of IT companies under the conditions of a personnel crisis.

The research methods include analysis and synthesis, comparative analysis, and systematization. All of these contribute to achieving the article's intended aims.

In examining the cases of Ukrainian IT companies SoftServe and Genesis, we rely on a qualitative analysis of materials available on their official websites, focusing on ESG communications, HRM practices, and non-financial reporting.

Summary of the main research material.

In this study, the strategic human resource management and business reputation

instruments that enhance an IT company's resilience are defined as an ESG-oriented set of interrelated HR practices and reputational mechanisms aimed at sustaining human capital and strengthening the organisation's reputational capital, thereby ensuring the stability of key business processes under conditions of prolonged crisis.

The multiplicative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, "the war, military mobilization, large-scale external and internal migration, population ageing, the destruction of production capacities, accelerated technological development, and the mismatch between the education system and labour market needs in Ukraine have led to a reduction of human capital in the 15–70 age group by more than one quarter compared to 2021, exacerbated structural unemployment, and generated a critical shortage of qualified personnel in strategically important sectors" [11], including companies in the IT sector.

Based on an analysis of scholarly literature [1; 3; 9] and a study of the practices of leading Ukrainian IT companies, particularly Genesis and SoftServe, the authors have systematized three groups of factors that influence a company's resilience amid a human resource crisis.

The first group is talent management and personnel development. This group combines tools aimed at the continuous professional growth of personnel and the effective utilization of the internal talent pool. It includes corporate learning systems on proprietary educational platforms, internal mobility programs, the creation of personalized development paths, and succession planning. HR managers complement this set of tools with flexible work arrangements and initiatives that stimulate the innovative activity of teams, as well as mediation and conflict-resolution practices aimed at maintaining a healthy work climate.

The second group is corporate culture and employee well-being. These factors transform the company from a mere workplace into a supportive and safe environment for employee self-realization. A crucial role is played by mental health support programs, the relevance of which sharply increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and the war to prevent burnout. Important elements include a flexible work environment (combining flexible schedules and an open communication policy) and Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives that unite teams around shared values. Comprehensive well-being programs, covering

physical, mental, and financial health, fulfill the basic employee security needs.

The third group is employer brand and external communications. This area focuses on building a positive company reputation in the labour market to ensure a stable talent attraction at minimal cost. An effective tool is the creation of proprietary educational ecosystems, such as IT schools, which serve as a channel for selecting the best candidates, improving their loyalty, and acquainting them with the corporate culture before they are hired. Close collaboration with universities naturally enhances this effect. Furthermore, leadership in professional employer ratings and the active promotion of achievements in media and social networks transform a company's successes into a powerful recruitment tool.

The resilience of an IT company under conditions of long-term uncertainty – in the case of Ukrainian IT companies, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine – directly depends on the ability of its employees

to maintain professional effectiveness and socio-psychological resilience. Therefore, in our subsequent analysis, it is methodologically appropriate to draw on the approach of Bardoel E., Pettit T., De Cieri H., & McMillan L. [2], who identify a set of HRM practices aimed at strengthening employee resilience (Figure 1). The HRM practices they proposed – "work-life balance, social supports, flexible arrangements, reward and benefits systems, risk management, employee assistance, employee development, health and safety, and diversity management" [2] – strengthen employee resilience, which reduces staff turnover, lowers the risk of burnout, and increases employee activity and loyalty. As a result, the ability of an IT company to maintain the stability of its operations and product quality in times of crisis is enhanced, which strengthens its overall resilience, including financial resilience. At the same time, these practices provide a concrete expression of the social and governance components of ESG by ensuring the responsible treatment of employees and



Figure 1. A set of HRM practices to strengthen employee resilience

Source: compiled by the authors based on [2]

transparent, accountable HR processes. It contributes to strengthening the employer brand and the company's business reputation and, consequently, further enhances its long-term resilience in times of crisis.

"Employees only exert their maximum effort to achieve overall corporate results when their individual goals are aligned with the company's goals. Therefore, the company should pay particular attention to employees' career development plans and the satisfaction of their intrinsic needs to ensure alignment between the company's strategy and the work they perform and to guarantee that their work corresponds to their inner needs" [16]. This contributes to strengthening the employer brand's business reputation, which, in combination with an effective strategic HRM policy, enhances the company's resilience in times of crisis.

IT companies should avoid HRM practices that undermine their organizational resilience. One such practice is a cost-reduction approach, which is often implemented through large-scale re-certification processes followed by employee layoffs aimed at minimizing costs and preserving profitability. These measures tend to reduce productivity, disrupt social relations within teams, and contribute to increased tension and intra-organizational conflict.

Another significant threat to IT companies is the practice of excessive performance monitoring, typically pursued in the name of maximizing efficiency. In such settings, any employee deviation from target performance indicators may result in disciplinary action or punitive sanctions from the employer. This management environment stifles initiative and erodes motivation among talented and responsible employees, ultimately weakening the organization's long-term resilience. It also leads to higher employee turnover, increased recruitment and onboarding costs, and resistance to the company's innovative development.

The application of such HRM approaches increases the vulnerability of IT companies in both the labour market and the broader competitive landscape. Neglecting ESG values, particularly their social and governance components, undermines not only the development of human capital but also the business reputation of the IT company. Therefore, HR managers should exercise caution and balance when developing and implementing management practices, ensuring a balanced integration of both cost-saving and effectiveness-enhancing elements.

These statements are consistent with the findings of other Ukrainian scholars. Alkema V., and Sumets O. have shown that "personalised retention programmes, structured onboarding, regular feedback, and the automation of HR communications are important HRM instruments that strengthen the resilience of IT companies under wartime conditions and high uncertainty" [1]. Prib K. has demonstrated that "an organisation's resilience depends on its ability to flexibly combine cost-saving and development measures, invest in human capital, and adapt managerial practices during periods of crisis" [9]. Mihus I. and Liashenko O. explained that "financial reporting, official disclosures, and industry publications provide the basis for assessing a company's long-term sustainability, whereas social media, online reviews, and real-time analytics are essential for tracking the dynamics of stakeholder perceptions and for the early detection of reputational risks" [6].

We identify the following effective strategic HRM instruments that strengthen the resilience of IT companies under conditions of a human resource crisis and are ESG-oriented:

- 1) strategic workforce planning – forecasting demand across all categories of personnel, building a talent pool for key positions, and conducting scenario planning for cases of mobilisation, relocation, and the destruction of office infrastructure as a result of the war;

- 2) talent acquisition and retention systems – recruitment practices that support the achievement of strategic HRM objectives, competitive compensation programmes, staff development programmes, career management, adherence to the principles of inclusiveness and non-discrimination, hybrid forms of employment, and internal mobility;

- 3) corporate learning and development – ensuring equal access for staff to internal and external training programmes, as well as individual development plans aligned with the company's strategic needs;

- 4) performance management systems and HR analytics – clearly communicating to employees the policy on the use of KPI/OKR, providing regular feedback, "ensuring alignment between employees' individual goals and the company's strategic development objectives" [16], monitoring employee engagement, loyalty, and turnover, ensuring safe working conditions, and conducting systematic monitoring of HR-related risks;

- 5) well-being and support programmes – psychological support, stress-prevention

initiatives, conflict mediation, support for the relocation of employees and their families, and policies of financial support for staff in crises caused by the war;

6) business reputation and employer branding instruments – anti-corruption and ethical codes, a zero-tolerance policy towards harassment, employee participation in managerial decision-making, the formation of an ESG-oriented Employee Value Proposition, employee involvement in ESG initiatives and CSR projects that enhance internal trust, as well as transparent internal and external communications and systematic work with stakeholder feedback.

ESG-oriented strategic human resource management in an IT company performs primarily a socio-economic function rather than being reduced to the purely economic objective of profit maximization. It reflects the company's deliberate efforts to attract, retain, and develop talented employees, as well as to ensure working conditions that enable them to create competitive products in response to new technological challenges and market needs. As a result, the company's business reputation is strengthened, business risks are reduced, and profit growth is supported. At the same time, ESG orientation is manifested in the systematic consideration of social aspects (working conditions, employee well-being, and development), the transparency of corporate governance practices, and responsible relationships with stakeholders. Taken together, this explains why strategic human resource management is one of the key instruments for implementing a company's ESG strategy and for ensuring its long-term resilience.

We also identify the following business reputation management instruments of an IT company, which are consistent with the strategic HRM tools proposed above and are aimed at strengthening corporate resilience:

1) employer branding – an Employee Value Proposition supported by concrete practices (training and development, hybrid forms of employment, internal mobility, and support in crisis situations);

2) ESG-oriented policies – environmental responsibility (e.g., “green offices”), social initiatives (e.g., mentoring and sponsoring the education of talented orphans), ethical corporate governance, and process transparency that enhance the trust of employees and other stakeholders;

3) transparent communications – regular informing of staff about risks, plans, and the company's performance results;

4) corporate social responsibility and volunteering – participation in socially significant projects and support for employees in the context of war and other crisis events;

5) crisis PR and feedback management – continuous monitoring of the company's reputation on employer platforms and in social media, as well as a set of measures aimed at restoring stakeholder trust in the event of adverse incidents in the company's activities.

Figure 2 presents the authors' conceptual model of how ESG-oriented strategic HRM and business reputation instruments jointly shape the resilience of IT companies.

An analysis of SoftServe's activities [14] has revealed that the IT company consistently integrates ESG principles into both human resource management and business reputation management. The company implements climate- and resource-saving initiatives (environmentally friendly offices, reduction of harmful emissions, “green” operating standards), combining them with a strong social agenda that includes employee well-being, development and inclusion, as well as with concrete elements of sound corporate governance – internal codes and policies, a risk management system, and regular non-financial reporting (Sustainability Report, CSR Report). For instance, “SoftServe's decarbonization services help integrate Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions into a centralized platform, thereby supporting more efficient emission reduction” [14]. This enables the company to position itself as an IT company that meets the ESG expectations of its stakeholders, while its environmentally and socially oriented HR policy has become a robust component of its reputational capital and a source of long-term resilience.

For the IT company Genesis [5], the ESG approach in HRM and in the reputational dimension is implemented mainly through the social (S) and governance (G) components. Reputation management and HRM are focused on ensuring employee safety and well-being under wartime conditions, on educational initiatives, and on large-scale humanitarian projects in support of Ukraine's defence, which are implemented in the form of social responsibility programmes and funds and are publicly communicated. This forms the image of a socially responsible and values-oriented IT company and strengthens its resilience by fostering the trust and loyalty of its stakeholders. It should be noted that the environmental (E) component in Genesis's publicly declared HR and reputational practices

is only weakly articulated and remains a reserve for the further development of its ESG practices.

We have concluded that the SoftServe case demonstrates a relatively balanced integration of all three ESG dimensions, with the environmental, social, and governance components being well developed both in the sphere of human resource management and in business reputation management. In contrast, the Genesis case reveals a particularly strong orientation toward the social and governance aspects in the company's HR and reputational practices, whereas the environmental dimension remains only weakly represented in the public domain (on the company's website and in social media) and therefore constitutes a reserve for the further development of the environmental component of its ESG approach and for the more adequate communication of this component to society.

Conclusions. Our study has made it possible to substantiate that, under the conditions of a human resource crisis in the Ukrainian labour market, ESG-oriented strategic human resource management and business reputation management jointly form a set of interrelated factors that enhance the resilience of IT companies.

The originality of this study lies in the development of an ESG-oriented framework that links strategic HRM practices and business reputation instruments to the resilience of IT companies, and in its application to the cases of leading Ukrainian IT firms, SoftServe and Genesis.

At the micro level, HRM practices that support employee well-being, development, and engagement enhance individual and team resilience, reduce staff turnover, and contribute to the preservation of the company's human

capital and core competencies. At the meso level, transparent corporate governance mechanisms and a strong employer brand transform these practices into stable relationships with internal and external stakeholders, mitigating the impact of reputational shocks. At the macro level, the cases of SoftServe and Genesis have shown that, even under wartime conditions and substantial outflows of human capital from Ukraine, ESG-oriented HR and reputational policies can be firmly embedded in the management system and used as a source of competitive advantage and long-term sustainability, enabling these companies to maintain – and, in some market segments, to strengthen – their leading positions in the IT services market. Taken together, the findings confirm our initial assumption that ESG-oriented strategic HRM and business reputation management are not ancillary functions, but key factors underpinning the resilience of IT companies in periods of protracted crisis, thereby providing a basis for the further discussion of theoretical conclusions and practical recommendations.

This study is limited to the use of secondary data from official company websites and two illustrative case studies of market-leading IT service companies, which may not capture the full diversity of ESG and HRM practices in the Ukrainian IT sector. In future research, this approach can be supplemented with empirical data from surveys or interviews with HR managers and employees of market follower IT companies.

Future research will focus on identifying how generational differences and mobility experiences create employees' perceptions of ESG-oriented HR policies and corporate reputation, and how these perceptions affect their trust, commitment, and intention to remain with the company during crises.

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