

CUSTOMER VALUE-ADDED AS AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF HRM STRATEGY

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Abstract

The focus on customer value-added (CVA) concepts in human resource management (HRM) is increasingly vital for maintaining competitiveness and sustainability in today's dynamic environment. This study evaluates the current implementation and future expectations of CVA in HRM within Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, comparing these findings with practices in Western Europe (WE) and globally. The primary objective is to analyze the extent of CVA integration in HRM systems and assess the sustainable competitiveness of CEE enterprises. The study aims to understand the current state of CVA in HRM and its projected importance for sustainable business strategies. Data was collected through a survey conducted across the CEE region, involving 1107 company representatives. The survey assessed both the current application and future relevance of CVA concepts using a five-point scale. Analytical methods included non-parametric pairwise Wilcoxon tests, Mann-Whitney U tests, and Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA, supplemented by effect size metrics to evaluate significant findings. The study highlights the importance of adapting HRM practices to local conditions in CEE to achieve competitive performance levels comparable to WE. It also underscores the varying challenges and opportunities across different sectors, particularly in the context of technological and organizational adaptability. A nonparametric pairwise comparison of ratings of the CVA concept in HRM showed that respondents rated the expected state significantly more positively than the current state.

Implications for Central European audience: The presented research results in this paper will help businesses with the implementation of the CVA concept, focusing on increasing customer value throughout the entire human resource management. It will direct their attention to regular monitoring and evaluation of the level of CVA concept implementation and its impact on customer satisfaction and overall organizational performance. By adopting these steps, organizations can enhance their competitiveness and better adapt to a dynamic market.

Keywords: Customer value-added; Human Resource Management; Central and Eastern Europe; organizational competitiveness; sectoral analysis

JEL Classification: J24, M12

Introduction

The concept of focusing businesses on added value for the customer is becoming key for maintaining competitiveness, success, and sustainability in the rapidly changing environment. The academic literature provides various definitions and approaches to this concept. It focuses on providing benefits and satisfying customer needs that go beyond the basic functionality of the product or service (Bridger, 2018). There are several factors that contribute to added value for the customer, including product quality (Adapa et al., 2007), customer service (Meyer, 2014), innovation or environmental impact (Tokarčíková & Kucharčíková, 2015), and personalization (Vermeeren et al., 2014).

High-quality products and services that meet or exceed customer expectations are a key source of added value. Companies that invest in research and development and the sustainability of their products and services are thus better able to meet customer needs (Lukáč et al., 2022; Dinçer et al., 2019). Moreover, if companies can offer higher value for the same or lower price, they have an advantage in the market and can attract and retain more customers (Meyer, 2014; Skorupińska et al., 2024; Anderson & Wynstra, 2010). Investments in the area of developing added value for the customer thus become a key area for maintaining competitiveness in the long term.

Effective HRM can significantly contribute to added value for the customer. Employee training, motivation, and reward systems not only increase employee productivity but also enhance stability and service quality, leading to higher customer satisfaction and better relationships with them (Vermeeren et al., 2014; Vetráková et al., 2021; Blšťáková et al., 2019).

The authors of the submission perceive the focus on targeted human resource development to increase added value for the customer as a fundamental prerequisite for maintaining long-term business competitiveness. This study evaluates the current implementation and future expectations of CVA in HRM within Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, comparing these findings with practices in Western Europe (WE) and globally. The primary objective is to analyze the extent of CVA integration in HRM systems and assess the sustainable competitiveness of CEE enterprises. The study aims to understand the current state of CVA in HRM and its projected importance for sustainable business strategies.

This article is divided into several main sections. The "Literature review" section provides an overview of existing literature and theoretical foundations for research focused on customer value-added within human resource management. The "Materials and Methods" section describes the research design, methods used, and data collection in detail. The research results are presented in the "Results" section, where findings from the survey are analyzed. Finally, the "Discussion and Conclusions" section interprets the results, discusses their significance, and provides conclusions and recommendations for practice and future research.

1 Literature review

The concept of added value for the customer is often perceived in the literature as an area of marketing, or at best, an area of product or service innovation. However, the quality of

services and products that customers receive is directly dependent on the skills, knowledge, motivation, and engagement of employees. The development of the CVA concept through HRM involves organizations leveraging their human resources and culture to maximize the value delivered to customers. A key aspect is to create an environment where employees understand and actively support customer values. Effective human resource management ensures that employees receive necessary training, are motivated and engaged, which directly contributes to higher quality services and thus to higher added value for customers. This process leads to increased customer satisfaction and the establishment of long-term relationships, thereby granting companies a competitive advantage (Uvet, 2020; Yen et al., 2020).

HRM can significantly contribute to the development of Customer Value (CVA) through several key steps. First, recruiting customer-oriented employees while considering cultural fit ensures that staff understand and support the company's values. Second, training in customer orientation (Hitka & Ližbetinová, 2023) and the development of soft skills enhance employees' abilities to respond to customer needs (Abdelhamied, 2019). Additionally, fostering employee engagement through motivational programs (Sibonde & Dassah, 2021) and a customer-centric culture is crucial. Finally, encouraging process improvement and innovation allows employees to propose enhancements that provide more valuable solutions for customers.

Research by Elrehail et al. (2019) and Hitka and Ližbetinová (2023) confirms that access to training is positively associated with service quality. Effective HRM programs that focus on training and developing employees in customer service lead to higher customer satisfaction because they receive fast and qualified solutions to their problems. According to Shen and Tang (2018) and Perotti et al. (2024), employee training is one of the most important factors influencing customer service excellence. Training in effective communication, active listening, and empathy improves employees' ability to understand and respond to customer needs, leading to more effective interactions and higher customer satisfaction (Martyn & Anderson, 2018; Vnouckova et al., 2016). Training in conflict resolution and emotional intelligence helps employees better manage challenging situations, thereby strengthening positive relationships with customers and customer loyalty (Abdelhamied, 2019). According to Burns (1997), it is essential for training programs to cover both soft and hard skills. Soft skills, such as active listening, empathy, conflict resolution, and communication, are key to positive interactions with customers. Hard skills, such as product knowledge and internal processes, enable fast and accurate responses, building customer trust (Lyu & Liu, 2021). Regular and tailored training ensures that employees are well-prepared and motivated to provide high-quality customer service.

Sibonde and Dassah (2021) in their study confirmed a positive relationship between employee motivation and the quality of services provided. According to them, employee motivation directly affects their ability to provide high-quality services, leading to higher customer satisfaction. This is also confirmed by research from Riyanto et al. (2021), according to which motivated and engaged employees exhibit higher productivity and better performance. As a result, organizations that invest in motivational programs and reward systems can increase employee engagement. Vermeeren et al. (2014) in their study

confirmed that training and development, teamwork, job design, and employee autonomy have a positive impact on their performance, which is reflected in better services for customers.

If HRM practices include creating an environment that supports creativity and the ability to innovate, it leads to the development of unique and improved products and services (Easa & Orra, 2021). On the other hand, a lack of creativity or innovative behavior is often perceived as one of the fundamental reasons for organizational failures (Yapp, 2009; Potkany et al., 2016). According to Frankova (2011), it is therefore necessary to create and maintain an organizational culture supporting innovation and creativity.

Multiple studies have consistently shown that strategic HRM, which includes training, development, and employee engagement programs, is key to creating an innovative climate within organizations (Jotabá et al., 2022). Successful innovative organizations enhance their competitiveness and innovativeness by investing in technologies on the one hand (Lucas-Estañ et al., 2018; Stasiak-Betlejewska & Ulewicz, 2016), and investing in the development of human resources to manage work with new technologies on the other hand (Hitka et al., 2018; Stachová et al., 2019). Research by Easa and Orra (2021) suggests that the manufacturing sectors face greater challenges in implementing innovations due to the need to adapt existing technological systems. Conversely, the service and IT sectors often implement new HRM practices more rapidly due to more flexible organizational structures and a culture oriented towards quick market adaptation. This finding is further supported by Pillai and Srivastava (2024), whose research indicates that technology-dependent industries, such as IT and e-commerce, can implement Smart HRM 4.0 practices more swiftly due to their existing technological infrastructure and a culture that fosters innovative ideas and rapid adaptation to changes. Based on the aforementioned, the authors of this paper have decided to examine whether the extent of CVA implementation in HRM is also related to the industry in which the company operates. The framework for developing capabilities, motivation, and using opportunities to improve these attributes among employees leads to higher innovative performance (Jotabá et al., 2022), which can be directly reflected in better services for customers and thus in added value for customers. Successful implementation of knowledge management becomes a decisive factor in business success (Brunet & Martinez, 2018).

Organizations that support a positive and customer-oriented culture through HRM initiatives create an environment where employees naturally focus on the needs and expectations of customers (Cho & Choi, 2021). Such a culture leads to higher added value for customers because their experiences are positively influenced by the engagement and proactivity of employees (Metz et al., 2020).

HRM strategies focused on building a customer-oriented culture include measuring customer-oriented behavior of employees, implementing customer feedback, and linking employee performance evaluations with customer satisfaction metrics. These practices ensure that employees understand the importance of customer satisfaction and are motivated to provide exceptional services. This way, a culture is created where the customer comes first, and employees are actively involved in improving customer experiences (Madhani, 2018).

Another equally important attribute is stability and low employee turnover, which can be ensured by effective human resource management since long-term employees have deeper

knowledge of customers and their needs, contributing to the creation of stronger and more valuable relationships.

Proper setting of HRM activities such as job design, job analysis, participation programs, information sharing, employee evaluation, and performance-based remuneration or participation programs significantly contribute to creating a stable work environment (Fahim, 2018), which contributes to employee retention (Alajlani & Yesufu, 2022) and thereby more effective development of their talents (Tej et al., 2021; Straková et al., 2016; Urbancová & Vnoučková, 2018). On the other hand, properly set talent management itself affects employee retention by creating commitment.

The mentioned studies clearly show that high-quality human resource management, which includes training, motivation, employee creativity development, support for a positive and customer-oriented culture, and reducing employee turnover, has a fundamental impact on the quality of services and products provided. As a result, there is higher customer satisfaction and better perceived value of the services provided, which in turn enhances competitiveness.

Scholarly studies confirm that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often lack comprehensive human resource management systems (Novo et al., 2023). Key reasons include limited financial resources, restricted access to specialized HR professionals, and a preference for informal or ad-hoc solutions that are simpler and more cost-effective (Adla et al., 2020). While such approaches allow for greater flexibility, they may also hinder the strategic development of HR capabilities (Heilmann et al., 2020). Based on these findings, the authors decided to investigate whether enterprise size influences the degree of implementation of the CVA concept through HRM.

In current research on business competitiveness, customer orientation and the use of digital transformation tools to enhance customer experience are being explored. However, there is a gap in the implementation of human resource management (HRM) practices within the context of customer value added (CVA), as well as in the consideration of future trends and visions regarding this area.

To ensure the competitiveness of enterprises operating in the economic space of CEE countries, it is essential that they swiftly implement HRM models in the context of increasing customer value. The results of the study by Festing and Sahakiants (2010), titled "Compensation Practices in Central and Eastern European EU Member States—An Analytical Framework Based on Institutional Perspectives, Path Dependencies, and Efficiency Considerations", suggest that Central and Eastern European countries tend to adopt practices from Western Europe and subsequently adapt them to local conditions. In light of the aforementioned considerations, the authors have decided to investigate whether the concept of CVA implementation through HRM is adopted by companies from abroad based on the initiative of foreign owners. However, there is a gap in the current research regarding the competitiveness of these enterprises from the perspective of the current implementation of HRM practices in the context of CVA, as well as from the perspective of future trends and visions.

In light of the aforementioned, the authors of the article sought to determine the extent to which the CVA concept is implemented in HRM within the work systems of organizations in Central and Eastern European countries. To fulfill the research goals, the authors formulated the following research questions:

- Do participants view the implementation of the CVA concept in organizational work environments as more crucial for future development than its current actual implementation?
- Is there a relationship between the actual implementation of this concept and the size, economic sector, or ownership structure of the company?
- Does the perceived importance of this concept correlate with the company's size, sector, and/or ownership?

2 Materials and Methods

The data for this study were collected using a research instrument designed to evaluate both the current implementation levels and future expectations of the CVA concept in HRM. The survey, which aimed to identify trends in human resource management linked to the digital transformation of enterprises, was conducted through Google Forms from January to December 2023, across the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region. The target population consisted of managers and company representatives operating in various industries within the CEE region. Respondents from various companies assessed the actual application and the significance of the CVA concept in HRM for their future business strategies. The evaluation used a five-point scale, where 1 indicated the least level of current implementation or future relevance, and 5 indicated the highest. The survey included closed-ended and Likert scale questions related to the adoption of modern tools and concepts in HR management systems amidst the rise of Industry 4.0. Specifically, the following questions were utilized:

Do you currently have the customer value-added concepts already integrated into your HRM system?

- Not implemented
- Not yet implemented, but planned in the near future
- Unable to assess the level of implementation
- Partially implemented
- Fully implemented

Do you expect the customer value-added concepts to be integrated into your HRM system in the near future?

- Very low—The integration of customer value-added concepts into HRM is not expected in the near future.
- Low—The integration is expected but is not a priority in the near future.
- Moderate—There are plans to implement customer value-added concepts in HRM in the near future.
- High—The integration of customer value-added concepts into HRM is expected to happen soon and is a priority.
- Very high—The work system is expected to fully incorporate customer value-added concepts into HRM in the very near future.

To ensure the validity of our instrument, we conducted a pilot study with a small subset of companies before the main survey. The feedback from the pilot study was used to refine the questions for clarity and relevance. Additionally, the survey instrument was reviewed by HRM experts to confirm its content validity. To analyze the data, the researchers employed non-parametric tests, including pairwise Wilcoxon tests, Mann-Whitney U tests, and Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA to contrast expected and actual levels. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used to compare the differences between paired samples, requiring two related samples or matched pairs, and evaluating the differences in rankings between these two related groups. The Mann-Whitney U Test compared differences between two independent groups by ranking all observations and comparing the sum of ranks between the groups, requiring two independent samples. The Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA compared differences between three or more independent groups by ranking all observations and evaluating if at least one sample stochastically dominated the others, requiring three or more independent samples. Significant findings were further analyzed using effect size indices. The authors used R software (version 4.1.2) for all statistical analyses and the ggplot2 package for generating plots. The results of these tests are presented along with effect size metrics to provide a comprehensive understanding of significant findings.

To ensure a representative sample, we employed a stratified random sampling strategy based on the size of the companies and their regional distribution. The findings and conclusions of this study are derived from an analysis of data from 1,107 company representatives operating in Central and Eastern Europe. This selection was based on both regional distribution and the size of the companies, measured by employee count. The research involved 1,548 managers from the private sector companies approached for the survey. Of these, 1,107 returned completed questionnaires, yielding a response rate of 72%. The demographic breakdown of the respondents, including the number of employees, business sectors, and predominant ownership structures, is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 | Structure of respondents to the 2020 survey

Number of companies by business area	
Production	364
Services	489
Other	254
TOTAL	1,107
Number of companies by number of employees	
1-9	324
10-49	239
50-249	242
250-more	302
TOTAL	1,107
Number of companies by majority ownership	
Foreign majority ownership	428
Domestic majority ownership	679
TOTAL	1,107

Source: Authors' own elaboration

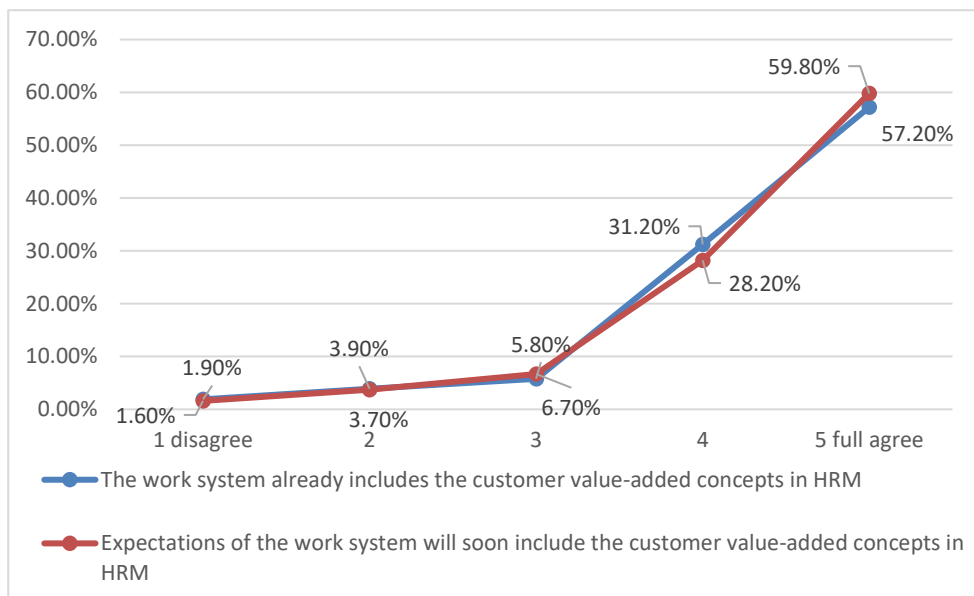
Based on the identified research questions, the authors have formulated the following hypotheses:

- *Hypothesis 1:* Manufacturing sector companies are rated lower in terms of the current implementation of the observed concept compared to companies in the service sector and other sectors.
- *Hypothesis 2:* Companies with predominantly foreign ownership demonstrate higher assessments of the current implementation of the CVA concept in HRM compared to those with predominantly domestic ownership.
- *Hypothesis 3:* Companies with a higher number of employees exhibit higher ratings for the current implementation of the CVA concept in HRM than companies with a lower number of employees.
- *Hypothesis 4:* Organizations perceive a greater future necessity for emphasizing the CVA concept in HRM than is currently evident in practice.

3 Results

Within the research questions focused on the CVA concept in HRM in the work environment, respondents were able to express their opinions on a five-point scale, where a value of 1 represented disagreement with the statement and a value of 5 represented complete agreement with the statement.

Figure 1 | The respondents' ratings of the CVA concept in HRM in the work system of the organization



Source: Authors' own elaboration

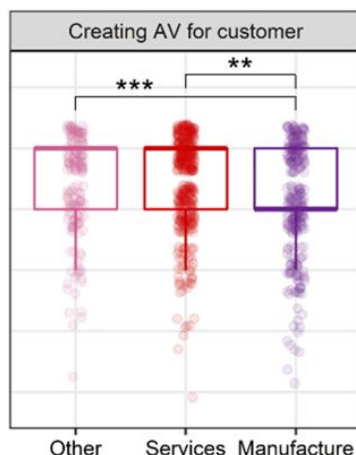
The illustration demonstrates that 57.2% of respondents recognize the implementation of CVA concepts in HRM within their organization's operational systems, and 59.8% anticipate its adoption shortly. Considering that the respondents are organizational representatives, these findings reflect a favorable progression towards future integration.

To evaluate the hypotheses, the researchers utilized a series of pairwise, non-parametric Wilcoxon tests to assess the discrepancies between the anticipated and existing implementations of the CVA concepts in HRM. The influence of majority ownership on these states was analyzed using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test. Subsequent to identifying significant effects, the study augmented these analyses with effect size metrics (r , η^2).

Furthermore, to investigate the associations between the present and projected states of the CVA concept in HRM and variables such as organizational size (quantified by employee count) and industry sector, the researchers conducted a non-parametric one-way Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA. Where significant disparities were detected, the ANOVA findings were elaborated with multiple comparisons applying Holm's correction to adjust significance levels.

The business sector had a significant effect on the evaluation of the CVA concept in HRM, $H(2) = 17.789$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.019$. The production sector showed slightly lower ratings than other business sectors ($p_{Holm} = 0.006$) and the service sector ($p_{Holm} < 0.001$) (Figure 2).

Figure 2 | The business sector and current state evaluation of the CVA concept in HRM



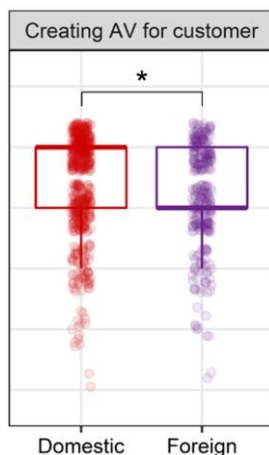
Note: ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Based on the results, we can confirm Hypothesis 1: Manufacturing sector companies are rated lower in terms of the current implementation of the observed concept compared to companies in the service sector and other sectors.

In the comparative analysis of the CVA concept in Human Resource Management (HRM), a marginal yet significant difference was observed. Enterprises with domestic majority ownership received higher ratings compared to those with foreign majority ownership, as evidenced by $U = 87373.0$, $p = 0.019$, and $r = 0.089$ (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 | Majority ownership and the rating of the current CVA concept in HRM



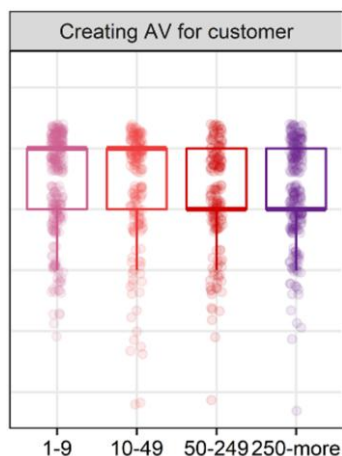
Note: * $p < .05$

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Based on these results, we must reject Hypothesis 2: Companies with predominantly foreign ownership demonstrate higher assessments of the current implementation of the CVA concept in HRM compared to those with predominantly domestic ownership.

The nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA revealed that the number of employees has a significant yet marginal impact on the evaluation of the current added value concept for customers in HRM, with $H(3) = 8.658$, $p = 0.034$, $\eta H^2 = 0.007$ (see Figure 4). However, subsequent multiple comparisons did not detect any significant differences in creating CVA ($p_{Holm} > 0.072$). This indicates that while there is a statistically significant impact of organizational size, the differences between the groups are not pronounced.

Figure 4 | Size of the company and rating of the CVA concept in HRM



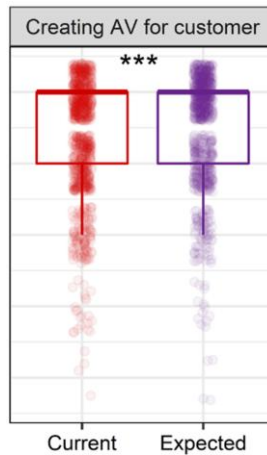
Source: Authors' own elaboration

Specifically, the mean ranks for the number of employees were as follows: small companies (1–9 employees) had a mean rank of X , medium companies (10–49 employees) had a mean rank of Y , and large companies (50–249 employees) had a mean rank of Z . The largest companies (250+ employees) had a mean rank of W . Although these rankings suggest a trend where larger companies rate the current implementation of the CVA concept higher than smaller companies, the differences are not statistically significant according to the post-hoc analysis.

This nuanced finding suggests that while company size does play a role in how the CVA concept is perceived and implemented, the variations among different size categories are not strong enough to be deemed significant. According to the results, we can confirm Hypothesis 3: Companies with a higher number of employees exhibit higher ratings for the current implementation of the CVA concept in HRM than companies with a lower number of employees.

Non-parametric pairwise comparison of ratings of CVA concept in HRM showed that respondents rated the expected state significantly more positively than the current state ($W = 6,034.0$, $p < 0.001$, $r = 0.512$).

Figure 5 | Ratings of expected and current state of the CVA concept in HRM



Note: *** $p < .001$

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Based on the results, we can confirm Hypothesis 4: Organizations perceive a greater future necessity for emphasizing the CVA concept in HRM than is currently evident in practice.

This section may be divided by subheadings. It should provide a concise and precise description of the experimental results, their interpretation, and the experimental conclusions that can be drawn.

Discussion and Conclusions

Koubek (2009) evaluates the effectiveness of HRM in the context of transforming CEE economies and compares it with Western countries, emphasizing the need for adaptation to local conditions to achieve similar performance levels. The authors of this paper also find it essential to analyze the current state of implementing contemporary HRM trends in CEE conditions and assess the competitiveness of enterprises operating in this economic area compared to those in Western Europe or the global environment. Our results indicate that 57.2% of respondents recognize the implementation of CVA concepts in HRM within their organization's operational systems, and 59.8% anticipate their adoption shortly. Since the respondents are organizational representatives, these findings reflect a favorable progression toward future integration. This is positive as it suggests increasing awareness and willingness among organizations to integrate customer-oriented approaches in HRM.

To evaluate the hypotheses, the researchers utilized a series of pairwise, non-parametric Wilcoxon tests to assess the discrepancies between the anticipated and existing implementations of the CVA concepts in HRM. The influence of majority ownership on these states was analyzed using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test. Subsequent to identifying significant effects, the study augmented these analyses with effect size metrics (r , η^2).

Furthermore, to investigate the associations between the present and projected states of the CVA concept in HRM and variables such as organizational size (quantified by employee count) and industry sector, the researchers conducted a non-parametric one-way Kruskal-

Wallis ANOVA. Where significant disparities were detected, the ANOVA findings were elaborated with multiple comparisons applying Holm's correction to adjust significance levels.

The business sector had a significant effect on the evaluation of the CVA concept in HRM, $H(2) = 17.789$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.019$. The production sector showed slightly lower ratings than other business sectors ($p_{Holm} = 0.006$) and the service sector ($p_{Holm} < 0.001$). This is a negative finding for the production sector, as it indicates that it is less effective in implementing customer-oriented approaches in HRM compared to the service sector; however, this aligns with the research by Easa and Orta (2021), which suggests that manufacturing sectors face greater challenges in implementing innovations due to the need to adapt existing technological systems. Conversely, service and IT sectors often implement new HRM practices more quickly due to more flexible organizational structures and a culture oriented towards rapid market adaptation. This is also somewhat supported by the research of Pillai and Srivastava (2024), whose findings indicate that sectors heavily reliant on technology (such as IT and e-commerce) can implement Smart HRM 4.0 practices more swiftly due to existing technological infrastructure and a culture that fosters innovative ideas and rapid adaptation to changes.

In the comparative analysis of the CVA concept in HRM, a marginal yet significant difference was observed. Enterprises with domestic majority ownership received higher ratings compared to those with foreign majority ownership, as evidenced by $U = 87,373.0$, $p = 0.019$, and $r = 0.089$. This is positive for enterprises with domestic majority ownership, as it suggests they are more effective in implementing these approaches. However, this contradicts the study by Festing and Sahakiantz (2010), "Compensation practices in Central and Eastern European EU member states—an analytical framework based on institutional perspectives, path dependencies and efficiency considerations", which suggests that CEE countries adopt practices from Western Europe and subsequently adapt them to local conditions.

The non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA revealed that the number of employees has a significant yet marginal impact on the evaluation of the current CVA concept in HRM, with $H(3) = 8.658$, $p = 0.034$, $\eta^2 = 0.007$. However, subsequent multiple comparisons did not detect any significant differences in creating CVA concepts ($p_{Holm} > 0.072$). This is a rather neutral finding, as despite the statistically significant impact of organizational size, the differences between groups are not pronounced.

A nonparametric pairwise comparison of ratings of the CVA concept in HRM showed that respondents rated the expected state significantly more positively than the current state ($W = 6,034.0$, $p < 0.001$, $r = 0.512$). This is a positive finding, as it indicates that organizations have optimistic expectations regarding the future implementation of these concepts and believe in their benefits.

Proposal for the Implementation Concept of HRM Tools Supporting the Development of Customer Value Added (CVA):

Customer-Oriented Employee Recruitment

- During recruitment, HR should focus on individuals with empathy, problem-solving skills, and a customer-centric mindset. Such employees are more likely to understand the value the company delivers to its customers.

- It is equally important to recruit employees who align with the company's values and possess an understanding of customer expectations from the brand.

Employee Training and Skill Development

- It is essential to ensure that all employees (not just those in direct contact with customers) receive training on the importance of customer value and satisfaction.
- Training focused on developing soft skills, such as communication, empathy, and conflict resolution, enables employees to respond effectively to customer needs and provide valuable solutions.
- Comprehensive education about the company's products and services is crucial for employees to provide relevant information and solutions to customers.

Fostering Employee Engagement

- Employees motivated through incentives, such as bonuses for positive customer feedback or exceptional resolution of customer issues, are more engaged in enhancing customer value.
- Building a customer-oriented culture through HR initiatives (e.g., performance evaluations, training programs, and reward systems) is vital.
- Employees who go "above and beyond" for customers should receive public recognition or rewards. Such acknowledgments set positive examples and reinforce customer-oriented behavior.

Feedback and Continuous Improvement

- HR can implement systems allowing employees to regularly receive feedback from customers. This feedback serves as a foundation for improving their approach and service quality.
- Employees who are consistently informed about how their work impacts customer satisfaction develop a clearer understanding of the added value they bring to customers.

Process Improvement and Innovation

- Encourage employees to propose ideas for better delivering customer value. This may include innovative approaches to problem-solving or offering personalized solutions.
- Involve employees who interact directly with customers in improving customer processes, as they often identify enhancements that can significantly boost customer value.

The authors of the research propose this concept as a potential guide for small and medium-sized enterprises seeking to enhance the customer value of their businesses through the effective application of human resource management tools.

A limitation of this study is its specific focus on CEE countries. For future research, we plan to expand the respondent database to include Western European countries, enabling us to compare results and draw broader conclusions. We also recognize the limitation of relying on a one-time data collection; therefore, we are currently conducting a second round of data collection that includes respondents from Western European countries.

Acknowledgement

The result was created in solving the VEGA (No. 1/0038/22) Application of competitive digital games for the team cohesion development and social adaptation of Generation Z and the

project (KEGA 012UCM-4/2022) Human Resources Management in a Digital World – A Bilingual (Slovak-English) Course Book with E-learning Modules based on Multimedia Content.

Conflict of interest: The authors hereby declare that this article was not submitted or published elsewhere. The authors do not have any conflicts of interest.

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The research article passed the double-blind review process. | Received: 19 August 2024; **Revised:** 12 December 2024; **Accepted:** 30 January 2025; **Available online:** 15 December 2025; **Published in the regular issue:** 18 December 2025.