

ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL CLIMATE AND LABOR RELATIONS IN A RAILWAY COMPANY

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ABSTRACT

The importance and timeliness of identifying current and prospective requirements for management of employment relations in rail transport is due to the increasing complexity of the actions carried out by transport companies in the context of the development and diversification of human resources management tools used to manage economic, social and institutional variables, at country level. All these developments rethink the strategic role of human resources at the level of the organizations, as people are seen as the main competitive advantage available to them. The issue of this work is one of the current scientific concerns about the efforts of rail and maritime transport organizations in improving the social climate and improving employment relations. The area of research undertaken includes specific activities and analysis methods in the field of rail transport management, methodologies underpinning organizational excellence models in order to improve processes and increase the effectiveness of transport organizations, but the results presented are also applicable in a wider context, with regard to other standardized management systems or other types of organizations.

Keywords: human resource, management, rail transport, infrastructure.

1. INTRODUCTION

Of all categories of management system inputs, it is the human resource that best expresses and synthesizes the specificity of organizational management as a type of human activity. Therefore, one of the important features of human resources management is to place the human factor at the heart of its concerns, in all its complexity as a subject and as an object of management, and in close interdependence with the means and resources of the systems in which it is integrated in the light of its objectives.

The question arises as to whether the success and sustained growth of transport activities, whatever their form, can be achieved if they do not match the quality of service of the employees in the industry. The issue of ensuring sufficient staff, at the appropriate level, in the right posts at the right time, with a focus on integration and orientation activities for new employees is emphasized.

A special place in effective human resource management should be the process of integrating new employees into transport companies as a prerequisite for achieving the organization's objectives and improving performance.

Transport in all its forms is one of the most complex segments of an economy, but also a factor of great influence on quality of life, which is why the current concerns of international bodies are directed toward measures aimed at developing efficient and environmentally compatible transport systems.

Most of the research into the social and economic requirements concerning labor relations and social climate was carried out on the activities of the traffic Division within the branch of CFR Constanta, because it is the largest organizational structure in terms of number of staff and contains posts, various functions and tasks in the railway operation activity, which allow analysis and synthesis of human resources management, with a high degree of generalization at the level of the regionally and the company at national level.

2. GENERAL FRAMEWORK AND STEPS OF THE ANALYSIS

Constanta branch of CFR Constanta with its headquarters in city, Albastrelor Street 10, Romania, is organized in a central structure that coordinates the entire activity and local subunits, on branches of activity, namely lines, installations and traffic, which are located in the four counties in the south-east of the country where the regional center is responsible for its activity: Constanta, Tulcea, Calarasi and Ialomita. The Constanta branch of CFR manages the public railway infrastructure and organizes the circulation of freight and passenger trains on the traffic sections of the Bucharest 8-Constanta railway line.

In the research carried out at the Branch CFR Constanta to analyze the employment relations and social climate in the railway company, the methods and techniques presented in Table 1 were used, in correspondence with the two sides of the research: Quantitative and qualitative. The questionnaire for the analysis of labor relations and social climate in the railway company CFR Constanta was created to implement such a complex methodology.

The value of the information thus obtained depended on the analyst's talent to choose the right instrument and adapt it to the analyzed issue.

The problems, misunderstandings, the difficulties that have arisen have been assessed on a scale from one to five, in which the number one has the correspondent very rarely and five always. After describing the cooperation relationship, in the second part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to refer to possible problems existing or likely to arise within the institutional and organizational framework of employment relations, and to fill in the following headings: describe the problem, identify possible causes, describe common solutions and propose desired or ideal solutions.

Table 1. Summary of qualitative and quantitative elements of the methodology used in the conduct of research.

Research Type	Methods	Techniques	Instruments
Quantitative	Investigation	Questionnaire, Semistructured Interviews	Own questionnaire for analysis of labour relations and social climate, applied to employees with executive functions and managers of the CFR Constanta Branch
<i>Quantitative</i>	Office research	Study of documents	Collection and structuring of secondary data and information from the records, reports or databases of the Human Resources Service, Traffic Division and Economic and Financial Division
<i>Quantitative</i>	Observation		Direct observation of operations carried out by operating personnel in the stations studied
Qualitative	Panel studies	Focus grup	Simultaneous panels of railway experts and managers
Qualitative	Investigation	Deep interviews	Direct individual interviews with managers from the CFR Constanta Branch and

			from the Constanta-Mangalia stations
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3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND ASSUMPTIONS

In order to assess the prospective requirements regarding the importance of labour relations in maintaining an adequate organizational climate, was carried out in the framework of Branch CFR Constanta, an exploratory and explanatory study identifying the options of railway staff for possible threats to the management of the branch, with announced staff restructuring.

The general objective of the study was to analyse the existing employment and cooperation relationships at the regional level of the public rail infrastructure manager, in order to highlight the opportunities that could be exploited in this area of human resources management.

The formulation of the research issue is summarized by applying the following assumptions:

- a) The human resources policy developed by the management of the railway company is inadequate in terms of improving employment relations.
- b) The system of remuneration and compensation for human resources in transport the rail state is inflexible and rigid
- c) The dissatisfaction of railway staff, in particular operating and specialized staff, with the methods used by the management of the regional, to ensure the maintenance and operation of the safety equipment, may create conflicts that affect the integrity of working relations and the organizational climate

3.2 Research methodology

The test of the assumptions, the preliminary analysis of the organizational climate and the employment relations within the national company CFR SA, the Branch of CFR Constanta was carried out by means of a questionnaire survey and the direct observation method between August and December 2020, on the Both employees in execution functions at all railway stations in the Constanta – Mangalia branch and a part of the managers in the branch's central management unit.

The formulation of the questions of the questionnaire followed the establishment of six objectives to be investigated:

- personnel policy;
- inter-personal relationships;
- the working climate within the social group in the stations and in the regional center;
- the importance of communication in the organization of the work process;
- remuneration and reward;
- the supply of materials, calculation techniques and training employees in their efficient use

The analysis of the data of the investigation was carried out from 1-31 January 2021. Out of the 230 questionnaires handed out, 210 questionnaires were recovered. The survey was carried out on a representative sample of 210 employees of the branch, comprising 94,7% of all the staff of Constanta-Mangalia branch and 30% of the employees in management positions.

At 2020 level, the population investigated accounted for 11,2% of the average annual number of staff, covering all categories of staff with operational execution functions and most management positions by sector of activity, which ensured representativeness in order to extrapolate the findings on all staff in the branch. In order to gather further information and to clarify some questions to which the respondents could not answer due to the limited nature of the questionnaire, the informal interview was used only for managers in the central branch, giving the operator the freedom to change the order of questions, explain their meaning, and add additional questions.

The investigation and analysis procedures involved four consecutive steps:

1. The collection of data from primary sources was done by applying the data collection tools, following the following sequence:

- conducting interviews with heads of departments with a general description of their functioning and defining communication-collaboration relationships;
- completion by the heads of the departments concerned, at any hierarchical level, of an interview guide, which has made it possible to obtain descriptions of the analysed processes and participants in social networking;
- application of the questionnaire to all employees described in the previous form as being involved in collaboration-networking relationships.

2. The analysis of data from secondary sources aimed at consulting databases and personnel records in the archives of the Human resources Service. The general socio-occupational climate has been identified as particularly important for the assessment of employees' attitudes and opinions, the general "mood", as a pre-condition for promoting important changes in the structure and organization of the branch.

3. The diagnosis of the socio-professional climate by analysing the data obtained from the interpretation of the results of the questionnaires followed the gathering of general information and highlighted the positive or dysfunctional aspects of work organization, interpersonal relations, driving styles, motivation system in the railway company. The interpretation of the results was done by ranking the key points of the questionnaire, with the frequency of the replies being based on criteria and by reporting overall impressions on the responses to the questions asked in the case of interviews.

4. Meetings with the Heads of responsible departments and the Regional Director took place on the validation of the recommendations provided as suggestions for improving work in the area where a major problem was found.

The research tool used was the "questionnaire for analysis of labor relations and social climate in the CFR Constanta branch", which contains fifty-seven closed and open questions structured in six parts corresponding to the relevant research directions.

In the first part, the respondents were asked to describe their professional relations with their subordinates or superiors in the subunit in which they operate, as well as with the staff of other public or private rail transport operators with whom they interact in the work processes. In this part, the questionnaire contains four headings covering:

- the persons involved in the cooperation relationship, with an indication of their position and position;
- the purpose of the relationship;
- problems arising in employment relationships;
- current solutions and resolutions.

4. Interpretation Of The Results Of The Questionnaire

Given the high number of respondents (210 people) and the content of the questionnaire (57 closed and open questions), sustained structuring and analysis work was needed to interpret the answers.

Before the detailed presentation of the results of the study, we specify that the values of the organizational climate were positive, with the Branch Office CFR Constanta being described in favorable terms by more than 75% of the respondents. In the structure of the questionnaires, I asked the respondents to identify possible weaknesses, problems, dissatisfaction, counting on the fact that this information can allow the construction of strategies to continuously optimize the company's activity. On these negative aspects identified in employment relations in the constant rail transport sector, we will insist on recommendations that allow their elimination and improvement of working conditions.

The results obtained from the interpretation of the questionnaires allowed us to conclude that, at the level of the group of employees on the Constanta-Mangalia division, although the psychosocial climate is functional, characterized by high self-confidence and direct hierarchical leaders, a good ability to adapt, normalize and prepare themselves, there are problems of communication and networking between the members of the station authorities, but also between the station staff and regional leaders. There is no shortage of tensions and even conflicts within groups of individuals in railway stations, and in some cases managers do not encourage the open expression of ideas and initiatives by the staff in charge.

Human relations are judged from the perspective of productivity, as this is the purpose of work regardless of the workplace. The majority of respondents, 52, 9%, consider the quality of human relations as a substitute for professional performance or as a factor of poor performance mediation, which is not a pleasing thing for the management of the company, which does not like such an attitude.

As for the type of climate in the social group, in three of the nine stations of Constanta – Mangalia, the existence of the autocratic or structured climate was identified, characterized by close control in which the station heads demand punctuality, order and efficiency. In the other six stations of the traffic department, the permissive climate has been identified, characterized by a free and easy driving style; the station manager does not intervene, rarely controls and imposes restrictions only sometimes. As for the group of managers in the central part of CFR Constanta branch, the climate identified is democratic.

In view of the shortcomings found in the analysis of inter-personal relationships, our recommendations are as follows:

- making analyzes of the relationships between employees both for those in the sub-units and for those in the central structure;
- support for building a strong vertical relationship with the head of the direct and sustainable development of horizontal relations with colleagues, essential to the success of the company;
- the implementation of a system of consultation and information of employees on the planned restructuring and dismissal measures, in order to prevent major conflicts.

In view of the communication, analysing the results achieved by questioning the subjects, the following specific problems have been identified:

- Poor communication, 70% of station staff and 68,7% in the regional center, due to a lack of inter-knowledge among all members, the tendency of operational managers to turn the dialog into a monologue, the use of high tone, lack of attention or ability in the management and control of dialog;
- difficulties in connecting staff, 72,5% of station staff and 58,7% of the branch, which are determined to be caused by the difference between the skills and habits of each individual, differences in opinion, preferences, individual or group aspirations.

In relation to the organization of work and the lack of communication, we consider that two recommended courses of action are needed for people with managerial positions:

- carrying out a complete analysis of the production flow with the subunits heads in the territory;
- carrying out a study of the analysis of the communication flow in the central structure.

5. DETAILED PRESENTATION OF THE DATA IN THE INTERPRETATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES

When asked about the need and extent of the change, in order for the CFR Constanta branch to function better, most employees considered that no major changes were needed or were in favor of rapid and medium-scale changes (56,4%). 31% of the population surveyed estimated that major, far-reaching changes are needed and only 9,4% believe that a radical and complete change is needed.

The major conclusion of the research is that the analysis of the general socio-occupational climate is not a common practice of the management of CFR Constanta branch, nor in terms of the regular gathering of employees' opinions and suggestions, nor is it that employees are

consulted whenever changes are necessary in the organization or functioning of the institution. In addition to a collective description of the existing situation, the assessment of the problems, their causes and consequences and the provision of suggestions to solve them, analysis of the socio-professional climate has made it possible to anticipate possible problems or difficulties and to find strategic options for action in the event that such problems really arise.

The organizational climate depends on the quality of the measures taken to ensure physical and social environmental conditions without organizational and functional malfunctions, namely the way in which the micro-groups of work are set up and structured, the quality of working relations and the social environment at work, the system of appreciation of work, existing measures for improvement and promotion, style and management methods.

In the light of these considerations, the strategy for solving the problems identified, which we propose, aims to optimize the organizational climate by improving inter-personal relationships and communication, regardless of the type of individual behavior, starting from the idea that interpersonal relationships within the working group and communication can be developed positively through group gaming and dynamic exercises.

Objectives of the problem-solving strategy identified:

1. Improve interpersonal relationships within the group by reducing existing tensions.
2. More effective communication by means of appropriate inter-knowledge between members of the group and the acquisition of communication skills.
3. Assessment of the impact on the psycho-social climate at group level.

The place of implementation: CFR stations on Constanta - Mangalia branch, because the training that takes into account the usual social environment is more likely to change the behavior of the members of the group, and to apply to all sections and levels of the Constanta branch, depending on the results obtained.

Trainers: Experts in group dynamics, trainers from CENAFER or other specialized bodies.

6. CONCLUSION

The study on labor relations and social climate analysis in CFR Constanta branch was carried out in 2020 and the research results were taken into account by publishing articles in the participation in international scientific conferences. Starting with the results of this research, we

launched new scientific research in early 2021 on how to build on the recommendations provided. This action also allowed us to assess the current situation of some human resources management activities, following the successive measures in 2019 and 2020 regarding the restructuring of the rail transport system and the staff cuts in CFR SA Company.

The research directions addressed at the regional level of the railway company have enabled the identification of best practices in the decision-making process for the selection of railway managers and a comparative analysis of human potential in the period 2018-2020, in terms of ensuring and using it efficiently.

In conclusion, the primary direction of research in the future will focus on the major problems faced by transport organizations in the analysis of employment relations and the social climate, which must be addressed in the shortest possible time so that they do not become more acute.

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