

## Absence of Strikes as a Criterion of Efficiency of Staff Security Costs Management at Industrial Enterprises

MISHCHUK IEVGENIIA<sup>1,a</sup>, MELIKHOVA TETIANA<sup>2,b</sup>, MELIKHOV YEVHENII<sup>3,c</sup>,  
SHURUPOVA KATERYNA<sup>4,d</sup>, PASICHNYK SERHII<sup>3,e</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Accounting, Taxation, Public Management and Administration,  
Kryvyi Rih National University,  
11 Vitalii Matusevych Str., Kryvyi Rih, 50027,  
UKRAINE

<sup>2</sup>Department of Accounting, Analysis, Taxation and Audit,  
Potebnia Engineering Educational and Scientific Institute of Zaporizhzhia National  
University, 66 Zhukovskoho Str., Zaporizhzhia, 69600,  
UKRAINE

<sup>3</sup>Department of Information Economy, Entrepreneurship and Finance,  
Potebnia Engineering Educational and Scientific Institute of Zaporizhzhia National  
University, 66 Zhukovskoho Str., Zaporizhzhia, 69600,  
UKRAINE

<sup>4</sup>Department of Vocational and Socio-Humanitarian Education,  
Kryvyi Rih National University,  
11 Vitalii Matusevych Str., Kryvyi Rih, 50027,  
UKRAINE

<sup>a</sup>ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4145-3711>

<sup>b</sup>ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9934-8722>

<sup>c</sup>ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9856-9291>

<sup>d</sup>ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2957-4185>

<sup>e</sup>ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2452-8105>

*Abstract:* - The article is devoted to studying the possibility of using the absence of strikes as a reliable criterion for measuring the efficiency of staff security cost management at industrial enterprises. The authors proved that the threat of losing a job due to an industrial downturn and economic instability creates conditions under which the interest of employees in protecting enterprises and their owners is higher than the benefits of initiating a labor dispute with them. Based on the results obtained, it is established that despite a low level of social standards in most Ukrainian enterprises, including wage arrears and a low wage level, the number of strikes in Ukraine is scanty. In 2018-2020, there was not a single strike in Ukraine. In 2021, 11 strikes were recorded in the field of education, with the total number of participants accounting for 700 people. Since 2022, strikes in Ukraine have been banned due to the martial law introduction. The article introduces the concept of “employees’ forced loyalty” and elaborates on the classification of loyalty types. The authors proposed the matrix for determining the situations, in which the absence of strikes is a criterion for the efficiency of staff security costs at Ukrainian industrial enterprises. It is grounded that the relationship between employees and employers in Ukraine can be described by the term “neo-feudalism”. The authors systematized the negative consequences of neo-feudalism for labor productivity and staff security. Having considered the results of the study, the authors proposed a list of measures aimed at minimizing and eliminating those consequences.

*Key Words:* - employees, industry, costs, criteria, neo-feudalism, staff security, unemployment, wage arrears, strikes.

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## 1 Introduction

Generally, strikes occur as a result of dissatisfaction of enterprises' staff with working conditions, wages, social guarantees, etc. A long conflict period can significantly affect the level of costs, reduce production efficiency, and damage the competitiveness level of an enterprise.

At the same time, the absence of protest actions is traditionally believed to characterize high efficiency in ensuring the socioeconomic interests of an enterprise's staff, which can result from competent planning of financial resources for labor remuneration, social programs, professional development, etc. Scientists and practitioners consider the strikeless state as a criterion for effective settlement of conflict situations occurring at enterprises, timely response to problems, and prevention of their escalation into mass actions.

Moreover, it is considered that the absence of labor conflicts indicates a high level of relationship harmonization between management and employees, the existence of productive dialogue between the parties as well as consideration of employees' needs and views when making managerial decisions. This harmonization of relationships contributes to the development of the triad of the staff security components: increase in staff motivation, reduction of staff turnover, and growth of labor productivity.

Thus, the absence of strikes can be an important criterion of efficiency of staff security cost management at industrial enterprises since it indicates the harmony in the relationship between management and employees, rational use of resources, ensuring of the production process stability, and strengthening of staff security.

The article aims to verify the absence of strikes as a criterion of efficiency of staff security cost management at industrial enterprises.

In the research, the authors used the following main methods: analysis and synthesis – to determine the ensuring of employees' economic interests in staff security cost management; induction and deduction – to determine the role of neo-feudalism in the absence of strikes at Ukrainian industrial enterprises; questionnaires – to conduct a survey among employees of industrial enterprises for measuring the level of their satisfaction with working conditions; tabular and graphic methods – to visually present the results of the study.

## 2 Problem Formulation

At first glance, it seems that the problem of using the absence of strikes as a criterion of efficiency of staff security cost management at industrial enterprises lies in the fact that such a criterion does not take into account the completeness and objectivity of the assessment of the labor safety level within the production process. In this sense, the "no strikes" criterion may not be sufficient to reflect some aspects of occupational safety, namely occupational risk, psychological climate, and social working conditions. However, in this case, we should emphasize the fact that in numerous economic studies, the concept of staff security is not related to occupational health or safety at work. These studies are presented in the works of many scientists. In particular, the scholars [1], considering personnel security to be a factor of stability at an enterprise, associate it with minimizing or leveling employees' negative impact and overcoming their resistance to changes. A fairly broad approach defines staff security at work [2], identifying it with the totality of personal safety concerning employees' life and health, their professional, property, and anti-conflict safety. Similar to it is the view given by the authors of the work [3], who emphasize the creation of comfortable working conditions and career development. An interesting viewpoint is presented in the work [4], in which staff security is defined as a complex involving, along with other determinants, a counteraction to the risks of the BANI world, but the security essence in this work is still characteristic of the safety of employees. However, not all scientists have taken into account the fact that not only do employees need safety, but also they can pose significant threats to the enterprise's activities and its owners [5]. At the same time, modern realities increasingly confirm the thesis about antisocial guidelines of owners put forward in [6]. In this context, it is important to note the research [7], which thoroughly examines and reveals the differences between staff security and the security of the enterprise's interests regarding personnel. We share the viewpoint of the scientists who primarily associate staff security with high labor productivity. To its fullest, this approach is presented in the work of the following scientists [8].

Therefore, no matter what views scientists adhere to, the study of staff security will always remain important, given its significance in such areas as personnel management [9], public administration [10], and even military personnel policy [11].

The relationship between the level of labor productivity and the absence of strikes is obvious: the strikeless state contributes to increasing labor productivity due to the stability of production processes, improving the emotional and psychological climate among the staff of enterprises. Therefore, if the interests of staff are violated (both economic and social, as well as environmental and others), there arises a threat of strikes, and consequently a decrease in labor productivity. In this context, it is hypothesized that the unsatisfied economic interests of staff are the grounds for strikes. However, the experience of Ukrainian industrial enterprises' functioning does not confirm this hypothesis. All the above-stated determine the relevance of further research in this area.

### 3 Problem Solution

#### 3.1 Observance of Employees' Economic Interests in Staff Security Cost Management

Within the framework of international law, the right to strike is classified as one of the basic collective labor rights of employees. It is enshrined in such documents as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [12], the International Covenant on Political, Economic and Social Rights [13], the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms [14], and the European Social Charter [15]. In Ukraine, the right to strike is one of the essential socioeconomic rights, which is provided for by the Constitution [16]. Therefore, Ukrainian legislation allows employees to apply for collective remedies in case of unresolved labor disputes to protect their rights and interests.

Regarding the observance of the economic interests of employees at Ukrainian enterprises, it should be noted that the level of their satisfaction is low. Staff of industrial enterprises often face problems in the field of social protection. A lack or insufficiency of health insurance, unavailability of an adequate pension program, and a low level of social guarantees endanger the financial stability of employees and their families. A lack of adequate support in cases of injuries and occupational diseases also exacerbates the problems faced by employees at Ukrainian industrial enterprises. However, one of the most important reasons for the low level of satisfaction of economic interests is the low level of wages, which often does not correspond to the complexity and volume of work performed. In

addition, the problem of wage arrears is a serious challenge to economic stability and the socio-psychological climate of Ukrainian enterprises. Late and incomplete payment of wages adversely affects the level of staff security. Due to the staff's inability to meet basic needs, there is a reduction in labor productivity. Simultaneously, this situation can decrease the motivation of employees and worsen their attitude toward work, which threatens the enterprise's ability to achieve its goals and further reduces labor productivity. Underpayment of wages may affect the company's reputation as a socially responsible employer. Long-term wage arrears adversely affect the overall efficiency and competitiveness of enterprises. Therefore, the problem of wage arrears can be referred to as the main catalyst for strikes. For employees, the payment of wages is not only a source of income but also a symbol of recognition of their labor value and social status. The absence or delay of this payment is considered a direct violation of the contract between the employee and the employer, which intensifies protest actions. The employer's insufficient ability to provide for the employees financially can also indicate inefficient management of staff security costs.

Below, we shall consider the level of wage arrears in Ukraine for the period from 2010 to February 2022 (Table 1).

Table 1. The size of wage arrears in Ukraine (as of month 1st, mln, €)

Year	January	February	May	August	November
2010	32,88	37,90	37,79	34,82	28,60
2011	26,93	29,61	28,16	26,12	25,98
2012	21,64	22,86	22,38	21,65	19,72
2013	19,62	22,14	23,52	21,87	21,89
2014	17,80	17,69	23,84	25,65	52,15
2015	31,21	34,65	35,36	46,43	46,59
2016	44,46	49,47	43,71	48,37	46,38
2017	42,34	45,10	51,66	56,20	58,10
2018	55,99	59,94	58,48	64,63	68,17
2019	62,53	61,81	61,83	64,77	81,28
2020	71,74	71,73	70,85	80,39	89,64
2021	61,74	70,26	84,34	93,65	94,74
2022	75,82	72,63	x	x	x

Source: [17]

For a better visual perception of the wage arrears size, the amounts presented in Table 1 were converted to the euro as of May 2024 at the official

exchange rate of the National Bank of Ukraine. From the table, we can see a steady increase in the wage arrears during the period under analysis. From January 2010 to January 2022, the amount of wage arrears increased 2,31 times: from €32,88 mln. to €75,82 mln. The largest amounts of arrears were recorded in November 2019 – €81,28 mln., and they remained at a high level over the following years.

Thus, only within the year and two months preceding the war in Ukraine, the wage arrears went up by 17,64%, from € 61,74 mln. in January 2021 to €72,63 mln. in February 2022. According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, in February 2022, the largest amounts of wage arrears were recorded at industrial enterprises – 72,7% of the total amount of wage arrears to employees of all employment fields in Ukraine. Furthermore, over 51% of the wage arrears fell on 3 out of the 24 Ukrainian oblasts: Donetsk – 22,1%, Kharkiv – 16,3%, and Dnipropetrovsk – 12,9% [17]. This is because the major industrial enterprises, which employ large numbers of people, are mostly located in these oblasts. The numbers of the labor force in these oblasts account for 827,6 thousand people, 1269,6 thousand people, and 1482,9 thousand people respectively, which makes up 20,6% of the total labor force in Ukraine in the pre-war period [17]. The same period in Ukraine is characterized by inflation processes, and devaluation of the Ukrainian currency causing a decrease in purchasing power, which, in turn, resulted in a reduction of demand for products of Ukrainian enterprises, including industrial ones.

An increase in the utility tariffs should be also mentioned among the extremely adverse factors. Since 2016, the prices (tariffs) of water, electricity, and gas supplies as well as housing have tripled or even quadrupled. The increase in prices (tariffs) is also significant for industrial enterprises. This is especially true for the tariffs set by Ukrzaliznytsia, JSC, which is a state monopolist in transportation, as well as tariffs for electricity supply and various fuel types.

Moreover, we should point out the negative trends the industry has seen over the past decade, namely a decrease in production on average, from 7% in the energy sector to 14% in the extractive industry and quarrying [17]. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated and deepened the negative phenomena in the economy and industry. However, even before the coronavirus outbreak, employees of Ukrainian enterprises suffered from being transferred to part-time and reduced working week schedules, which can be seen in Table. 2.

The data presented in Table 2 show a gradual decline in the number of part-time employees. In particular, for the period from Q4 2017 to Q4 2021, the number of part-time employees decreased from 102,7 thousand people to 68,3 thousand people. We should also note that within the period from 2017 to 2020, the share of employees transferred to part-time/reduced working week schedules in the average number of full-time employees remained steady, at the level of 5,5-5,1%.

Table 2. The data on the number of employees at Ukrainian enterprises transferred to part-time/reduced working week schedules for economic reasons

Activity area	Q4 2017		Q4 2018		Q4 2019		Q4 2020		Q4 2021	
	Thousand, persons	% to the average registered number of full-time employees	Thousand, persons	% to the average registered number of full-time employees	Thousand, persons	% to the average registered number of full-time employees	Thousand, persons	% to the average registered number of full-time employees	Thousand, persons	% to the average registered number of full-time employees
Industry	102,7	5,5	96,1	5,2	93,1	5,1	90,4	5,1	68,3	3,9
Extractive industry and quarrying	3,7	1,8	0,8	0,4	5,6	2,9	4,0	2,2	2,8	1,6
Processing industry	79,2	6,3	75,6	6,1	81,9	6,6	78,8	6,6	59,5	5,1
Supply of electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning	9,4	3,2	9,8	3,4	5,1	1,8	6,9	2,4	5,4	1,9
Water supply; sewerage, waste management	10,3	9,0	10,0	8,7	0,5	0,4	0,7	0,6	0,6	0,5

Source: [17]

It was in 2021 when this percentage decreased to the level of 3,9. Compared to Q4 2017, when the largest share of transferred employees was seen in the field of water supply, sewerage, and waste management (9%), starting from Q4 2018, the processing industry was in the lead, with the percentage of transferred employees fluctuating from 6,1% in 2018 to 5,1% in 2021 respectively. In the economically developed countries of Europe and the United States, such a trend could develop due to objective reasons, including stabilization of the economic situation and gradual resumption of economic growth, government measures (tax incentives, credit programs, and other forms of state support), improvement of working conditions and pay rise, whereas in Ukraine these are fundamentally different reasons.

Given the fact that automation of business processes in Ukraine still has not been widely introduced, the most typical reasons are as follows: an increase in the number of people forced by the enterprise's management to take leave without pay (to save labor costs, which hides the real state of work under part-time conditions) [18], as well as mass bankruptcy of enterprises and growth of unemployment (Figure 1).

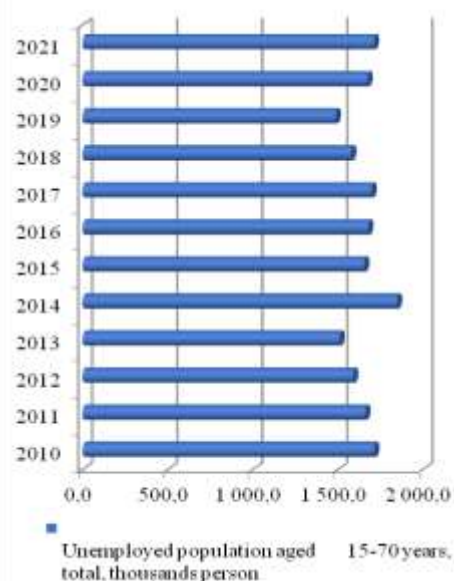


Fig. 1: The statistics of the unemployed population in Ukraine  
Source: [17]

Despite some fluctuations, we can state that the number of unemployed has been constant for more than a decade: in 2010 it accounted for 1713,9 thousand people; in 2021 – 1711,6 thousand people. By way of contrast, such a large number of unemployed people as that existing in Ukraine can make up an entire country; in particular, the above-

mentioned figures are almost the same as the total population numbers in such countries as Latvia, Bahrain, and exceed the population of Estonia, Cyprus, Montenegro, and others.

Due to various economic and social mechanisms, unemployment and staff security at an enterprise are closely related phenomena. The existence of a large number of unemployed people affects an increase in the competition for jobs. The people already employed are trying to sustain their employment at all costs since it is the only source of income for most of them. All these result in employees' decreased requirements for working conditions.

In this context, enterprises can reduce labor costs and social guarantees, which temporarily improves their financial performance, but simultaneously poses a threat to staff security in the long term, despite the current forced loyalty of employees. In addition, in conditions of high unemployment, businesses may invest in staff development and training less actively, which can lead to long-term negative consequences for their competitiveness.

Let us consider the concept of “employees' forced loyalty” introduced in this article. It characterizes a situation in which employees only show signs of loyalty to the enterprise (employer) because of necessity but not satisfaction with their work due to factors such as the fear of losing their jobs and lack of alternative employment opportunities. This concept is fundamentally different from the traditional understanding of loyalty, in which the main factors are the economic and socio-psychological aspects of satisfaction with a job.

Therefore, we suggest an improved classification of employees' loyalty to the enterprise (employer):

- voluntary loyalty that includes economic and socio-psychological loyalty;
- forced loyalty.

### 3.2 The Role of Neo-Feudalism in the Absence of Strikes at Ukrainian Industrial Enterprises

The threat of losing a job amid the industrial downturn and economic instability creates conditions under which employees' interest in protecting enterprises and their owners is higher than the benefits of initiating a labor dispute with them. That is the reason why, despite a low level of social standards in most Ukrainian enterprises, including wage arrears and their low level, the number of strikes in Ukraine is scanty (Table 3).

Table 3. The number of strikes in Ukraine and the number of employees involved in them

Activity area	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
The number of businesses and organizations, at which strikes took place / The number of employees involved in strikes, thousand people / The average number of hours off work per striker						
Total	0	23/ 2,1/66	0	0	0	11/0,7/4
Industry	0	23/2,1/66	0	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0	0	0	0
Transport, warehousing, postal and courier activities	0	0	0	0	0	0
Real estate transactions	0	0	0	0	0	0
Administrative and support services activities	0	0	0	0	0	0
Education	0	0	0	0	0	11/0,7/4

Source: [17]

Thus, the conducted research allows us to propose a matrix for determining the situations, in which the absence of strikes can be considered as a criterion of efficiency of staff security cost management at industrial enterprises, as well as the situations, in which this criterion is inappropriate (Table 4).

Table 4. The matrix for determining the situations, in which the absence of strikes is a criterion of efficiency of staff security cost management at Ukrainian industrial enterprises

Economic unemployment rate	Inflation rate	Strike occurrences at the enterprise per year	Using the absence of strikes as an unambiguous criterion of efficiency of staff security cost management at the enterprise
High	High	+/-	No
Medium	Medium	+/-	No
Low	Low	+/-	Yes

Source: Developed by the authors

To identify the level of economic unemployment, we suggest using the experts' research (including work [19] and others), thus establishing the low rate at 1-3%, the medium rate at 3-6%, and the high rate at over 6% respectively.

Based on the research of some scholars, including [20], [21], [22] and our research, we suggest identifying the inflation rate as follows: low – up to 10% per year; medium – 10-50% per year; high – over 50% per year.

Obviously, in real economic conditions, there may be different options: for example, when a medium inflation rate is accompanied by a high unemployment rate, etc. Therefore, the priority factor that should be relied on when verifying the

absence of strikes as a criterion of efficiency of staff security cost management at industrial enterprises is the unemployment rate in the country. It is necessary to stress the inefficient management of these costs at the enterprise, whose employees are on strike when there is a low unemployment rate in the country. A similar conclusion can be made in the opposite situation: workers decide to go on strike when the unemployment rate in the country is medium or high. However, if there are no strikes occurrences when the unemployment rate is medium or high, further research is needed to make the conclusions. Like in feudal society, when peasants viewed their feudal lord as a defender, and in case of any external threat they hid in his castle, nowadays in Ukrainian reality, workers prefer to support their employers, as their interests are mostly in the hands of “coal barons”, “metallurgical magnates” and “gas kings” – owners of industrial enterprises and, in many cases, simultaneously representatives of the central and regional authorities in the country [23]. Such a social organization is called neo-feudalism by politicians, economists, public figures, and other experts [23], [24], [25].

Neo-feudalism in modern Ukraine has led to enormous consequences in labor productivity, affecting various aspects of labor processes and socioeconomic conditions. One of the most significant negative factors is a decrease in motivation. The conditions, under which resources and power are concentrated in the hands of an exclusive group, create a sense of injustice and hopelessness in employees. A lack of prospects for material improvement and a lack of significant investment in human capital development result in apathy, decreased interest in work, and a lack of initiative. A lack of opportunities for professional training and professional development restricts employees' ability to master new technologies and methods of work, which is critical in the context of rapid technological progress. This is especially



important in the context of global competition.

In addition, neo-feudalism creates unfavorable conditions for the implementation of effective management practices. When decisions are made by a narrow circle of people, there is often a lack of transparency and accountability in management processes. This can lead to inefficient use of resources, corruption, and poor management quality, which negatively affects productivity and, consequently, staff security. Not only does insufficient involvement of employees in decision-making decrease their motivation, but it also reduces the sense of responsibility for the results of their work.

To eliminate the above-mentioned unfavorable conditions, special measures should be introduced. The authors propose to reduce economic inequality among employees of industrial enterprises based on an integrated approach, which includes the measures taken simultaneously at the state, corporate, and individual levels. In Ukraine, there exists an urgent issue of introducing a progressive tax system that allows redistribution of income and promotion of social justice. In addition, it is advisable to encourage investment activity that will include public and private programs to finance training initiatives, especially in the field of technology and innovation, thus providing employees with opportunities for career growth and economic progress. Increasing the level of social security is an equally significant system of measures to be taken. The measures should encompass both technical and organizational areas, as well as active participation of the state, employers, and employees. In particular, social security provides for the existence of effective mechanisms of social insurance against unemployment, and temporary disability. In this context, the role of the state in regulating social standards and monitoring their compliance, as well as in ensuring the financial stability of the relevant social insurance funds, is of utter importance. Another important line of activity is related to maintaining the psychosocial well-being of employees, which also affects labor productivity, and therefore staff security. It is also important to ensure access to health services and rehabilitation programs for workers who have suffered occupational diseases or injuries. We should also note that the level of social protection of employees is affected by their participation in making decisions concerning working conditions and social protection. This can be achieved through the creation of employee representation bodies, such as trade unions, job security committees, etc. Active participation of employees in the activities of these

bodies will contribute to more effective protection of their interests.

## 4 Conclusion

Thus, the labor market in Ukraine is characterized by a deterioration of working conditions and a decrease in social guarantees. Business owners, having a significant influence on the political and economic processes in the country and/or regions, can dictate working conditions that are often unfavorable for employees. Unstable forms of employment, insufficient social protection, violation of labor rights, and limited possibilities for trade unions to protect the interests of employees adversely affect the degree of satisfaction of employees' economic interests, which, in the long run, leads to a deterioration in staff security. However, despite this very unfavorable external environment characterized by high levels of unemployment and inflation, employees are forced to protect the interests of their employers as the only source of income. It is proved that under such conditions, the absence of strikes cannot be a reliable criterion of efficiency of staff security cost management. The expediency of applying this criterion is shown in the matrix developed by the authors.

The practical significance of using the proposed matrix is to create an efficient system of staff security management. The use of this matrix will allow enterprises' managers to identify the potential threats of labor conflicts and take measures in advance to neutralize them. The absence of strikes has a positive effect on the stability of production processes and ensures continuity of production, which helps to reduce unforeseen costs associated with equipment downtime and productivity losses. The efficiency of staff security costs assessed in the absence of strikes allows enterprises to optimize financial resources aimed at maintaining social stability. The introduction of the system for monitoring and analyzing potential conflict situations helps to reduce the level of dissatisfaction among employees, which, in turn, reduces the risk of strikes. This approach will allow enterprises to focus on long-term investments in the development and modernization of production facilities, product quality improvement, and development of new sales markets. In addition, the application of this matrix is an important aspect of building a healthy corporate climate, which, in turn, will contribute to increasing the involvement of employees in the production process and genuine, rather than forced, loyalty to the enterprise, which should ultimately affect the

enterprise's overall efficiency.

Based on the research conducted, it is revealed that modern Ukraine is experiencing neo-feudalism in the relationship between employers and employees. Its complex long-term negative consequences for staff security of enterprises are established; they are manifested in an employee motivation decrease, insufficient level of professional development, deterioration of mental and physical health, as well as inefficient management practices. To overcome these challenges, it is necessary to implement system changes aimed at reducing economic inequality, increasing the level of social protection of employees, investing in their professional development, and implementing effective management practices. The development of state measures in these areas is the direction of our further research.

#### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

During the preparation of this work the authors used Grammarly for language editing. After using this service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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