Motivators and employee turnover in the context of Employee Value Proposition in Slovak companies

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Abstract

Research background: Currently, companies are facing a growing need not only to recruit but, above all, to retain qualified employees. In this context, employer branding has a significant role in building an attractive employer image. An important part of this strategy is the Employee Value Proposition, i.e., the elements and working conditions that serve as motivation for employees. As a result, more attention is being focused on the overall picture of the relationship between the Employee Value Proposition, motivation, and turnover.

Purpose of the article: The research aimed to analyse which elements of the Employee Value Proposition are emphasised by companies in Slovakia in their communication with employees, which motivators are perceived as the most important, and what specific measures companies use to reduce staff turnover. The intention was also to compare the approaches of small and medium-sized enterprises with large companies and to identify their common features or differences.

Methods: The secondary data obtained were analysed using qualitative analysis, specifically thematic analysis, which consisted of several steps: data collection, sorting, file creation, axial coding, and evaluation.

Findings & Value added: Research has shown that small and medium-sized enterprises emphasise flexibility, freedom, and cultural engagement, while large enterprises prefer stability, innovation, and systematic benefits. In terms of motivators, small and medium-sized enterprises rely on non-financial values, while large companies rely on stability, benefits, and international opportunities. The key retention tools are work flexibility and employee development. The study contributes to the identification of different approaches of companies to EVP, motivation, and possible measures against employee turnover.

Keywords: employer branding; employee value proposition; motivation; turnover; retention

JEL Classification: J28; J63; M12

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1. Introduction

In today's dynamic and competitive business environment, retaining a skilled workforce is becoming one of the key priorities for companies (Rodrigues and Sousa, 2024). Currently, it is very important for companies not only to recruit new employees but also to stabilise the talent they have acquired and trained (Barbulescu et al., 2024). The labour market has recently been experiencing turbulent movements in the turnover of individual employees, a change in employee values, and a change in their focus in terms of the benefits they seek. With the arrival of a new generation of employees, not only are employees' views changing, but so are companies' views on the benefits and needs they offer (Ahad et al., 2024).

The concept of Employee Value Proposition (EVP) is highly important in this regard, as it focuses on the values, benefits, and working conditions that individual companies offer their employees (Pawar and Charak, 2014). EVP is closely related to creating an overall attractive view of the company as such (Ada et al., 2023), so it can be seen as a strategic tool for companies to retain talent, motivate employees, and prevent staff turnover (Savov et al., 2022).

Empirical studies confirm that a strong EVP can significantly contribute to reducing turnover and strengthening employee engagement. For example, research published in IJSRM found that employer branding, EVP, and employee engagement have a significant impact on an organisation's retention effect (Pradita et al., 2024).

In the Slovak environment, companies are also aware of the constant need to improve their EVP (Ahmad et al., 2019) and create attractive incentives that would attract new employees and encourage the stabilisation of current employees, thereby preventing turnover and the outflow of talent from companies (Vetrakova et al., 2020a; Menezes et al., 2025).

The EVP strategy also varies depending on the size of the company itself. The characteristics of the EVP must be reflected in the corporate and employer brand (Pawar et al., 2023).

The purpose of this article is to examine the strategic role of the Employee Value Proposition (EVP) within Slovak organisations and its influence on employee motivation and retention. The study aims to identify which EVP elements are most frequently communicated by employers, determine the motivators perceived as most significant by employees, and assess the measures implemented to mitigate staff turnover. In addition, the research contrasts the approaches adopted by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and large corporations, emphasising both their commonalities and distinctions.

A thorough understanding of EVP and its components is essential for HR managers and business leaders operating in today's competitive labour market. A well-crafted EVP not only attracts talent but also fosters engagement and reduces attrition, thereby enhancing organisational performance and cost efficiency. By uncovering how SMEs and large firms diverge in their strategies, this article offers actionable insights for tailoring HR policies to organisational size and resources. These findings enable managers to optimise retention initiatives, personalise motivators, and align EVP with employee expectations, ultimately ensuring long-term sustainability and competitive advantage.

2. Literature review

The literature review provides an overview of EVP, motivation, and employee turnover in companies. Although global research offers a broad view of EVP and retention strategies, results from the Slovak environment are rare, which highlights the need for analysis.

Human resource management has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, not only as a result of globalization and technological progress, but especially due to the changing expectations and needs of employees. Employer branding and EVP have become strategic tools for attracting and retaining talent in a competitive labour market (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Although EVP is associated with improved engagement and reduced turnover, empirical evidence

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is more prevalent at the global level, and results within individual countries, such as Slovakia, are limited, which is the reason for this study.

2.1. Employee value proposition

EVP is a powerful element of business management (Zaware, 2019). EVP is defined as a unique set of benefits and rewards that organisations offer to attract and retain talented employees (Liptakova, 2025). Recent studies suggest that an attractive EVP can significantly increase employee engagement and reduce the intention to leave employment (Joshi and Khullar, 2024; Taufan and Rachmawati, 2023; Raj, 2021). In addition, organisations that align their EVP with employee expectations, such as career development and work-life balance, tend to foster a more engaged workforce (Taufan and Rachmawati, 2023; Azhar et al., 2024; Keppeler and Papenfuss, 2022). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) emphasise EVP as a cornerstone of employer branding, yet research rarely examines how SMEs and large corporations differ in applying these principles, a gap that forms the basis for the present study.

According to Mortensen and Edmondson (2023), a modern EVP should include four key components: material offers, development opportunities, a sense of belonging, and meaningful work. It is the balance of these elements that is important for the sustainability of employee engagement and retention (Chompukum and Vanichbuncha, 2025). To achieve an effective EVP, companies should personalise it according to the different needs of individual employee groups, as personalisation ensures employee satisfaction and lower turnover (Gartner, 2025; Tai et al., 2025).

2.2. Motivators and employee motivation

Employee motivation is one of the key elements of behavioural economics and management (Ryan and Deci, 2020). When motivating employees, a distinction is made between internal motivators (e.g., satisfaction, meaning of work, work environment) and external motivators (e.g., financial remuneration, benefits, bonuses), which are of great importance to every employee (Guo, 2023; Marjerison et al., 2025). The EVP strategy points to the greater importance of internal motivators, which contribute to employee satisfaction and increased engagement (Bronlet et al., 2024; Viterouli et al., 2025). The importance of motivators also varies depending on the industry in which the company operates. Therefore, managers should consider the specific characteristics of the industry and their employees when designing incentive strategies and shaping EVP (Ahmed et al., 2023).

2.3. Turnover of employees and their retention

The terms 'turnover' and 'retention' refer to closely related concepts. While turnover refers to the rate at which employees leave an organisation, retention focuses on the organisation's ability to retain its talent. The low ability of companies to retain their skilled workers points to the destabilisation of the internal environment and incorrectly set EVP values (Vetrakova et al., 2020b). An unsatisfactory internal environment, which includes, for example, inadequate financial remuneration, weak management, or an unsatisfactory corporate culture, is an important component of EVP that greatly influences employee satisfaction and their desire to remain in the work environment (Bronlet et al., 2024). Properly designed retention strategies are a major factor in retaining employees. It is important to focus on soft aspects such as recognition, a fair remuneration system, open communication, and, last but not least, good interpersonal relationships (Igbinoba et al., 2022).

Global studies (Hausknecht et al., 2009; Allen et al., 2010) highlight that retention strategies must be tailored to organisational size and culture, yet evidence from Slovak companies remains limited. This research therefore aims to fill this gap by comparing SMEs and large corporations.

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3. Methodology

The research in this article was based on secondary information collected about companies located in the Slovak Republic. The information was obtained from publicly available sources such as company websites, press releases, and interviews with company representatives. The research focused on 15 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and 15 large corporations. The companies were selected based on their size and industry, ensuring their diversity within the entire Slovak business environment.

The data obtained was analysed thematically in both groups and coded according to the main points mentioned in the interviews in three main categories: EVP, main motivators, and measures against turnover. It can be noted that all the information obtained provides an insight into the communicated EVP values, motivations, and retention from the perspective of managers of individual companies. The EVP identified the values and offers that companies present to their employees, while the motivators focused on factors influencing employee satisfaction and overall engagement. Additionally, company initiatives aimed at retaining their current employees played a crucial role in measures against turnover.

The research applied a qualitative approach based on thematic analysis, which is widely used for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data. The methodology consisted of several structured steps.

3.1. Data collection and creation of tables

Based on data collected from a range of available sources, two main tables were created. This approach was taken to group information about SMEs and about large corporations. The information was divided into three key analytical categories: EVP, main motivators, and measures against turnover. This structured categorisation provides deeper insight into the different strategies that individual segments of companies use to attract and retain talent.

All collected information was systematically organised into two separate datasets: one for SMEs and one for large companies. Each dataset was constructed into three analytical categories: (i) EVP elements; (ii) main motivators; and (iii) retention strategies. This categorisation allowed for a clear comparison between company sizes.

Tables showing the selection of SMEs and large enterprises regarding their EVP, key motivators, and retention factors are shown in Appendix A.

3.2. Thematic and axial coding of texts according to the occurrence of keywords

Both thematic and axial coding were used to ensure a structured and in-depth analysis. First, the texts in individual columns (EVP, motivators, retention) were read and manually segmented into meaningful units. These units were represented by keywords or short phrases (e.g., flexibility, autonomy, well-being, benefits, and professional growth). This initial step involved thematic coding, where the aim was to identify and label recurring patterns and themes across the data. Subsequently, axial coding was applied to explore relationships between these themes, clustering them into broader categories and subcategories. This process ensured consistency and reduced subjectivity in interpretation.

3.3. Tabular processing of the number of codes in individual categories

Based on axial coding, tables were created with the frequencies of keywords generated for each category analysed in this article. The tables also compare the frequency of individual phrases in the SMEs' and large corporations' categories. This quantitative element within qualitative research provided an overview of dominant themes and allowed for pattern recognition.

Within the EVP category, five keywords were analysed, the frequency and use of which can be seen in Table 1.

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Table 1: Codes of EVP

Code	Frequency (SMEs)	Frequency (Large companies)	Characteristics of use
Work flexibility	7	5	SMEs emphasise flexibility as a value Large companies as a benefit
Innovation and technology	4	7	Key element for large companies
Corporate culture	6	3	SMEs focus on harmony Large companies do not take this into account
Autonomy	5	1	Typical for SMEs
Stability	2	9	Dominant for large companies
Well-being	5	6	Significant for both types
CSR	2	4	Especially for companies with public influence

Source: own elaboration

Table 2 presents the second category, motivators, which focuses on eight keywords identified through axial coding.

Table 2: Codes of motivators

Code	Frequency (SMEs)	Frequency (Large companies)	Characteristics of use
Professional growth	8	10	Universal motivator
Flexible working hours	7	6	Universal motivator
Autonomy and creativity	6	2	Significant benefit for SMEs
Stability	3	9	Motivation for longer employment, especially in large companies
Benefits	4	10	Large companies: extensive benefit packages SMEs: basic benefits
Well-being	3	6	In large companies linked to corporate programme
Company values	5	2	Strong motivator in SMEs
International projects	2	7	Large companies attract with a global reach

Source: own elaboration

The last category, retention, focused on measures used by companies to prevent employee turnover. The research identified the eight most common measures used by SMEs and large companies. All measures, their frequency, and characteristics of use are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Codes of retention

Code	Frequency (SMEs)	Frequency (Large companies)	Characteristics of use
Benefits and wages	5	11	Large companies use systematic packages SMEs tend to offer supplementary benefits
Internal training	7	8	High incidence in both categories
Flexible working hours	6	6	Universal method
Thorough employee selection	4	1	Strong among SMEs
Employer branding	3	7	Strong among large companies
Well-being programmes	3	6	Large companies use systematic programmes
Company events	5	2	SMEs use community spirit
Mentoring and coaching	2	8	Used mainly in large companies

Source: own elaboration

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3.4. Qualitative interpretation

The final step involved interpreting the coded data to identify differences and similarities between SMEs and large corporations. The interpretation focused on strategic priorities in EVP, motivators, and retention measures, highlighting how company size influences HR practices. All interpretations are written in section four, titled Results.

The applied approach enabled the identification of patterns in EVP communication and retention strategies. The coding process revealed differences in motivators and measures between SMEs and large enterprises, forming a solid basis for subsequent results and discussion.

4. Results

Thanks to axial coding and subsequent tabular data processing, it was possible to determine the frequency of key information on the issue. For each partial component of employer branding (EVP, motivation, and retention), it was possible to point out the differences, but also the similarities, in the focus of large corporations and SMEs. The combination of thematic coding and axial coding ensured that the analysis was not limited to identifying keywords but also captured the relationships among categories, thereby enhancing analytical depth and validity.

The analysis of EVP highlighted how companies position themselves to potential employees. As shown in Table 1, SMEs build their EVP particularly through soft values such as work flexibility (7 occurrences), freedom of access (5 occurrences), and cultural identification with the company (6 occurrences). SMEs base their EVP primarily on internal values that can strengthen overall creativity, engagement, and a sense of belonging. On the other hand, large companies present an EVP grounded in security and scale. Large companies focus more on stability (9 occurrences), new technologies and innovations (7 occurrences), ensuring a work-life balance (6 occurrences), and the meaning of work for society (4 occurrences). This analysis focused on EVP identified during thematic coding, reveals two contrasting approaches: SMEs adopt a relational and culture-driven strategy, whereas large corporations employ a systematic and structure-oriented model.

Motivation (shown in Table 2) in SMEs and large enterprises is clearly differentiated. In SMEs, motivation is more value-oriented, as they focus more on flexibility (7 occurrences), creativity (6 occurrences), and cultural integration into the company (5 occurrences). It can be seen that SMEs focus more on non-financial motivators and intrinsic motivation. Large enterprises use more structural and extrinsic motivation, as they focus more on stable positions, financial benefits, well-being, and the opportunity to participate in international projects. In both categories, career growth and professional development are equally important, motivating employees in companies of all sizes (in SMEs with 8 occurrences and in large companies with 10 occurrences). This suggests that although SMEs do not have sufficient financial capacity to compete with large corporations, they compensate for this by offering autonomy, creativity, and cultural anchoring. Conversely, large corporations emphasise predictability and rewards, which is attractive to employees seeking long-term stability and global reach.

In terms of retention strategies (Table 3), SMEs and large companies have both similar but also distinct positions. SMEs focus heavily on their employees from the moment they join the company and try to select employees who will fit into the internal culture of the company and contribute to overall team compatibility. Similarly, companies focus on more frequent joint meetings to strengthen interpersonal relationships (5 occurrences). SMEs clearly focus more on the individual and their connection to the company when it comes to measures to combat staff turnover. Large companies use measures such as benefits, wages and employee awards (11 occurrences), a variety of company well-being programmes (6 occurrences), and various mentoring or coaching sessions (8 occurrences). Despite these differences, there are also notable similarities. Key element that supports the fight against staff turnover in both groups is the option to work from home and flexible working hours (6 occurrences each). Internal training is also highly frequent in both

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categories (7 occurrences in SMEs and 8 occurrences in large companies). These shared strategies suggest that regardless of company size, professional development and work-life balance are key elements in combating staff turnover. Consistency on these points indicates that certain practices have become universal standards in the Slovak labour market that exceed the size of the company.

The overall results point to two basic strategies used by companies in employer branding in Slovakia:

- The agile-human approach: SMEs focus more on people and their development, flexibility, and involvement in the corporate culture. They attract talent through freedom and retain it through relationships and careful selection.
- The system-stability approach: Large companies focus more on the central system of the company. Their strategy relies on stability, systematic benefit packages, and international opportunities. They attract talent through security and technology and retain it through financial incentives and structured career paths.

These findings point to strategic implications for practice, the cultural duality of the Slovak labour market, and future trends that will shape employer branding strategies. SMEs can increase their competitiveness by formalizing procedures such as training and employer branding, while large companies should personalize their approach to their employees more. The Slovak labour market combines authenticity with systemic stability, balancing tradition and modern ambitions. Digitalization and remote work will bring convergence in terms of flexibility and development, but differences in resources and scope will remain.

5. Discussion

The presented research identifies EVP as a strategic tool for companies to retain qualified employees and increase their motivation (Pawar and Charak, 2014; Savov et al., 2022). The importance of EVP in companies confirms the importance of setting the right internal strategies to reduce employees' intention to leave their jobs and increase their engagement and satisfaction (Joshi and Khullar, 2024; Taufan and Rachmawati, 2023). The survey results point to significant differences in the approach of SMEs and large companies.

The research pointed to different approaches to building EVP in SMEs and large companies. Since SMEs cannot compete with large companies in terms of financial benefits, they strategically use their corporate culture and personalised approach, as confirmed by Barbars and Dubkevics (2010). SMEs must strive to create an attractive image of the company and EVP through appropriate attractive internal practices (Labelle et al., 2025). These findings are also confirmed by Aldabbas et al. (2023), who also state that intrinsic motivators prevail in small and medium-sized companies, while large companies use extrinsic forms because their organisational structure often does not allow for an individual and personalised approach.

Professional growth and internal training were universal methods of retention and motivation in both groups of companies, which is in line with the global trend of the main pillars of modern EVP (Bolden-Barrett, 2018). Verma et al. (2022) emphasise that investing in employee education and development increases employee satisfaction, as employees perceive it as an opportunity for self-improvement. Ali et al. (2024) and Gagne et al. (2025) point to training, remuneration, and a supportive work environment as factors that influence effective measures against turnover. Company employees must perceive the company's interest in their development and career growth, which increases their engagement and reduces their desire to change their work environment (Gartner, 2025; Ahmad et al., 2019).

When it comes to measures against staff turnover, the approach of SMEs and large companies differs. While SMEs proactively seek to reduce staff turnover from the very beginning of the recruitment process, large companies use reactive measures in the form of coaching or mentoring. Hausknecht et al. (2009) point to this phenomenon in their study of small and medium-sized enterprises, where SMEs select candidates who fit in with the culture and values of the company in

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an effort to prevent them from leaving later. On the other hand, Igbinoba et al. (2022) emphasise the use of formal approaches to addressing turnover in large companies.

The research also points to the adaptation of both categories of companies to the constantly changing and dynamic labour market through the offer of flexible working hours. (Pulman and Fenge, 2024) The ability to manage one's working hours and privacy, and thus create one's own work-life balance, is an important condition in the labour market (Verma et al., 2022; Sirgy and Lee, 2018).

6. Conclusions

The research provided an overview of EVPs, motivators, and measures against employee turnover in Slovak companies, with an emphasis on the different approaches of small and medium-sized enterprises and large companies. The research found that EVP is a strategically differentiated set of values that is used by companies to attract, but especially to retain, their talented and skilled employees.

The study confirms that EVP management within human resource management differs based on company size. Empirical evidence shows that SMEs focus on their strong corporate culture and individual approach. On the other hand, large companies emphasise their benefit packages and the possibility of a more stable job. Companies' approaches to addressing turnover are also equally different. SMEs focus on a preventive approach to measures against turnover, while large companies use emergency solutions to address turnover.

The findings of the survey provide managers and company executives with various guidelines for creating an EVP. Within SMEs, companies should focus more on more formal (external) motivators, while large companies should focus more on an individual approach.

Despite its benefits, the study has several limitations. The main limitation is that the perception of EVP is obtained only from the perspective of managers and not from the perspective of the employees themselves. The second limitation is that the survey is limited to the Slovak environment. Based on these barriers, it is recommended that future research also survey company employees and compare the views of management and employees. Subsequently, future studies could expand the analysis to include quantification in terms of correlation and regression analysis to confirm the link between EVP and motivators with the prevention of turnover.

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Appendix A

Table A1: SMEs on the Slovak market

Company	Industry	EVP	Main motivators	Measures against turnover
1	IT	Innovation, technological challenges, attractiveness for talent	Hybrid work, development, company awards	Employer awards; talent retention activities
2	Gaming industry	Creative environment, teamwork, autonomy	Creativity, flexibility, education	Internal development programmes, community events
3	IT	Remote first, profit sharing, freedom at work	Remote, flexibility, profit sharing	Profit sharing, company activities
4	Marketing	Autonomy, unlimited vacation	Autonomy, responsibility	Responsibility model, independent decision-making
5	Power engineering	Flexibility, work-life balance, ecological values	Flexibility, value-aligned team	Selection of candidates based on personality
6	HR	„Put employees first" – emphasis on internal development	Professional growth, common projects	Internal training, reassignment
7	IT	Well-being, internal communication, health podcasts	Well-being, education	Podcasts, internal education, wellbeing programmes, company events
8	Production	Family culture, pride, selective hiring	Culture, stability	„Fit or leave" policy
9	IT	Dynamic environment, flexibility, growth, friendly culture	Development, benefits, freedom	Working from home, extra days off, internal growth
10	E-commerce	Authenticity, community spirit, meaning of work	Stability, culture, human approach	Team events, feedback, engagement
11	IT	Leadership, ethics, CSR	Professional growth, projects, international reach	CSR projects, benefits, flexibility
12	Telecommunications	Work-life balance, presentation of IT culture	Benefits, flexibility, development	Health programmes, flexible forms of work, company events
13	IT	Diversity, creativity, opportunities for initiative	Development, international projects	Internal campaigns, workshops, adaptability
14	Manufacturing	Stability, corporate culture	Stability, international connections	Team involvement, benefits, feedback
15	HR	Reliability, professional approach	Client reputation, internal culture	Internal culture, benefits, feedback

Source: own elaboration

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Table A2: Large corporations on the Slovak market

Company	Industry	EVP	Main motivators	Measures against turnover
1	Transport	Culture of respect and performance, international opportunities	Development, mobility, globalisation	Systematic human resources programmes, awards
2	Retail	Stability, extensive benefits packages	Multisport, extra vacation contributions	Investments in salaries and benefits
3	Tabacco industry	#MakeHistory, meaningful work	Diversity, support, global projects	Employer branding campaigns, awards
4	Finance	Well-being, 4-day week	Work-life balance, mental health	Well-being programmes, awards
5	Banking	Development, internal mobility, mentoring, innovation, stability, strong market position	Long-term growth, stability	Systematic HR strategies, Top Employer certificates, focus on improving employee conditions, regular evaluations
6	Retail	Stability, fairness, equality, benefits	Equal benefits for all, stability	Significant investment in salaries and benefits, Equal Salary certificate
7	Power engineering	Significant social impact, innovation	Security, regional importance	Benefits, internally communicated conditions support for education
8	Power engineering	Stability, regional contribution, infrastructure	Job security, regional presence	Regional benefits, communication of culture in the region
9	IT	International projects, modern working environment	Career growth, hybrid forms of work	Development programme flexibility, benefits
10	Power engineering	Technological innovation, stability, benefits model	Development, prospects, social responsibility	Financial benefits, allowances, wellness, investment in corporate culture
11	Industry	Stability, strong market position, technological challenges	Job security, professional growth, stable job	Focus on sustainability and environmental protection
12	Postal services	Stability, public sector	Work safety, stable job	Focus on innovation in delivery; testing of autonomous vehicles for parcel delivery in Bratislava
13	Automotive industry	Innovation, sustainability, strong market position	Technological challenges, professional growth, stable job	Focus on reducing environmental impact
14	Power engineering	Innovation in energy infrastructure, stability	Technological challenges, professional growth, stable job	Focus on increasing the capacity and efficiency of the transport network
15	Automotive industry	Innovation, sustainability, strong market position	Technological challenges, professional growth, stable job	Innovation, increasing efficiency, interest in the future

Source: own elaboration