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Generations between Adaptation and Performance

In contemporary times, society faces a complex picture of generational diversity. This diversity, with all its benefits and challenges, creates an interconnected web of interactions, influences and cultural changes. Over the decades, each generation has been characterized by distinct traits, whether we are talking about Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials or Gen Z. While some discussions focus on the disparities between these generations, it is important to recognize that each brings valuable contributions and that the relationship between adaptation and performance is a key element in understanding intergenerational dynamics.

To better understand this dynamic, it is crucial to examine how each generation adapts to cultural, technological and social change, and how this adaptation influences individual and collective performance. Baby Boomers, for example, have witnessed significant transformations, from the Technological Revolution to social movements such as civil rights and the feminist movement. Their adaptation to these changes has been crucial to the performance and evolution of society as a whole. At the same time, Generation X has been characterized by a more pragmatic approach, adapting to a changing world through flexibility and resilience. These traits have contributed to their performance in areas such as business, technology and culture.

However, perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the relationship between adaptation and performance is seen in the context of younger generations such as Millennials and Gen Z. These generations have grown up in an environment dominated by technology and rapid social change. Their adaptability to new digital environments and socio-economic challenges is remarkable. However, assessing their performance needs to take into account new paradigms. Instead of measuring their success strictly in traditional terms, such as job stability or economic growth, we should consider their contributions to innovation, sustainability development and addressing global issues.

On the other hand, it is important to recognize that each generation faces its own challenges in adaptation and performance. For example, Baby Boomers may find it difficult to adopt new technologies or adapt to rapid cultural change, while Generation Z may face intense performance pressures in a highly competitive and digitally connected world.

Within organizations and institutions, managing generations is an essential skill for creating a productive and harmonious working environment. Approaches that encourage intergenerational collaboration and recognition of the value of each generation can lead to innovation and increased performance. In addition, fostering an environment that facilitates the sharing of knowledge and experience between generations can help increase organizational adaptability and improve long-term performance.

In conclusion, generations are in a continuous process of adaptation and evolution, and performance is the result of the interaction between the two. Each generation brings unique perspectives, skills and values, contributing to a complex cultural and social mosaic. By recognizing and valuing intergenerational diversity, we can create a society and organizations that are fairer, more productive and more resilient to future change.

Prof. Ph.D. Paul Marinescu

Empowerment and Engagement: The Role of Autonomy and Feedback in Fostering Employee Motivation

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Abstract: *This article examines the interplay between non-financial factors and employee motivation within contemporary workplaces. Guided by a primary research question exploring how intrinsic motivational elements impact employee enthusiasm and productivity, the study leverages a qualitative research approach, analyzing responses from 53 participants through thematic analysis. The core hypothesis postulated that employees who are integrally involved in decision-making, receive constructive feedback, and enjoy autonomy in task management exhibit higher motivation levels. The empirical evidence confirms this hypothesis, echoing the theoretical perspectives of renowned scholars like Daniel Pink and aligning with Self-Determination Theory's emphasis on autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The research demonstrates that the motivational power of autonomy and meaningful feedback far surpasses that of extrinsic rewards, reshaping managerial approaches and highlighting the necessity for cultivating a supportive and empowering workplace culture. By integrating these intrinsic motivators, organizations can elevate employee engagement and overall workplace satisfaction.*

Keywords: Intrinsic Motivation, Employee Autonomy, Constructive Feedback, Decision-Making Involvement, Workplace Culture

JEL Classification: D23, J24, M12, M54

Introduction

The study of employee motivation within organizational behavior encompasses an increasingly complex landscape, marked by the evolution of workplace dynamics and the multifaceted nature of workforce expectations. This research paper embarks on a broad exploration of employee motivation, focusing on the pivotal role of intrinsic motivators beyond the traditional realm of financial incentives. As organizations navigate the challenges of fostering a motivated workforce, the shift towards non-financial motivational strategies has become a subject of significant academic and practical interest.

Employee motivation is undeniably critical to achieving organizational objectives, encompassing a vast array of internal and external factors that drive individuals to excel in their roles. Historically dominated by extrinsic rewards such as salaries, titles, and bonuses, the motivational landscape is undergoing a transformation. Emerging evidence underscores the enduring benefits of non-financial incentives, advocating for a strategic investment in intellectual capital to attract and retain talent through intrinsic motivators. This paradigm shift finds its theoretical foundation in the seminal work of Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, particularly their Autonomy Theory, which emphasizes the importance of cultivating an environment that supports autonomy and self-direction.

This paper aims to highlight the criticality of intrinsic motivation for both employees and managerial staff. The pursuit of performance excellence within organizations has revealed the limitations of conventional reward-based motivational strategies, necessitating a nuanced understanding and application of alternative motivational approaches. By examining the impact of non-financial motivators, such as effective communication, timely feedback, autonomy, and employee involvement in decision-making processes, this study employs a qualitative research methodology to delve into the subtleties of employee motivation.

Structured to provide both a theoretical overview and an in-depth empirical analysis, the research is divided into two main chapters. The next chapter offers a comprehensive literature review, presenting key findings from a wide range of scholarly works, articles, and online databases such as JSTOR, ProQuest, and SpringerLink. This foundational chapter lays the groundwork for the subsequent empirical investigation. The empirical analysis is done as a qualitative analysis, which probes into specific scenarios where employees have encountered excessive workloads, aiming to understand their perceptions and reactions to such situations.

At the core of this research is the objective to illuminate the factors that genuinely influence employee motivation in the workplace, emphasizing the potential of intrinsic motivators. Highlighting examples of successful implementations in notable companies, such as Google's approach under the stewardship of Laszlo Bock, the study advocates for a collaborative approach between scientific research and business practices to secure long-term advantages for both employees and companies. The discussion extends to the exploration of modern intrinsic factors, including feedback, autonomy, psychological safety, and participatory decision-making, aiming to provide actionable insights into fostering a motivational environment that nurtures creativity, autonomy, and expressive freedom in task performance.

Addressing the research questions: "How can organizations effectively motivate employees

and prospective employees through non-financial means in the current context?" and "What are the contemporary and effective forms and tools of employee motivation?", this study endeavors to capture a comprehensive understanding of employee and prospective employee perceptions. This exploration into employee motivation seeks to offer a nuanced perspective on the efficacy of modern motivational practices, highlighting their significance in the evolving workplace landscape.

Literature review

The conceptualization of motivation has been a focal point of scholarly inquiry, with numerous experts offering definitions that illuminate its multifaceted nature. Abraham Maslow's seminal hierarchy of needs outlines a progression from physiological needs to self-actualization, emphasizing the stepwise fulfillment of human desires (Maslow, 1943). Frederick Herzberg extends this conversation, identifying motivation as influenced by factors leading to worker satisfaction (Herzberg, 1959). Victor Vroom introduces expectancy theory, highlighting the roles of goal valuation, effort perception, and success likelihood in motivation (Vroom, 1964). Edward Deci and Richard Ryan further refine our understanding by proposing that motivation is driven by three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and social connection (Ryan, Deci, & Richard, 1985). Daniel Pink adds to this by identifying autonomy, mastery, and purpose as core elements of motivation (Pink, 2009).

The quest to elucidate human behavior has led specialists to propose various theories of motivation, recognizing its critical role in enhancing workplace performance. Often the success of an organization is directly influenced by its ability to innovate, adapt, experiment and change, in some cases representing even a condition for maintaining itself in the business environment (Berar & Minciu, 2019). Companies that invest in motivating their employees are shown to reap substantial benefits (Gallup, 2020; Duflo, Banerjee, Kremer, & Trautmann, 2019; Rousseau & Khazanchi, 2007). Maslow's theory has faced criticism, prompting alternative models like Clayton Alderfer's ERG theory, which categorizes needs into existence, relatedness, and growth, offering a more dynamic interaction between needs (Alderfer, 1970). Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y provide contrasting managerial perspectives on employee motivation, suggesting a broader complexity beyond basic needs fulfillment (McGregor, 2006). Herzberg's two-factor theory critiques Maslow by distinguishing between hygiene factors and motivators, emphasizing the distinct roles they play in workplace motivation (Herzberg, 1959). David McClelland's Theory of Needs focuses on achievement, affiliation, and power as key drivers of human motivation, critiquing the universal applicability of Maslow's hierarchy and suggesting that needs are culturally and experientially variable (McClelland, 2010).

Victor Vroom's Expectancy Theory posits that motivation is a function of valence, expectancy, and instrumentality, arguing for the optimization of these factors to enhance employee motivation (Vroom, 1964). John Stacey Adams' Equity Theory emphasizes the need for fair rewards, underscoring the importance of distributive, procedural, and interactional equity in motivation (Adams, 1965). Deci and Ryan's Autonomy Theory argues for the superiority of intrinsic over

extrinsic motivation, suggesting that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are key to sustaining motivation (Ryan, Deci, & Richard, 1985). Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory describes a state of deep engagement and enjoyment in activities, characterized by focused immersion and a loss of self-consciousness, leading to fulfillment and creativity (Csikszentmihalyi M. , 2008).

These theories have profoundly influenced management practices, guiding efforts to foster environments where employees are more motivated, thereby achieving individual and organizational goals. Collectively, motivation theories have contributed to creating more productive and satisfying workplaces, enhancing both employee well-being and organizational performance.

Given the rapidity with which changes occur in the business environment often the experience gained in the past by managers, as well as employees, is often no longer a source of information because the situations that arise are completely new (Minciu, Dobrea, Staiculescu, & Stoica, 2020). Understanding employee motivation is crucial for fostering a productive and satisfying workplace. This literature review delves into the evolution of motivational theories and practices, spotlighting the shift from extrinsic rewards to intrinsic motivation, particularly in the context of contemporary business environments, where the consumers' needs to feel better informed and educated (Purcărea et.al, 2021).

Daniel Pink's pivotal work, "Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us", serves as a cornerstone for modern motivational theory. Pink delineates the historical trajectory of human motivation, from survival instincts to a complex interplay of rewards and punishments, and ultimately, to the nuanced landscape of intrinsic motivation that characterizes the current era. He critiques the conventional business reliance on extrinsic motivators, arguing that such approaches often undermine creativity, performance, and behavior. Instead, Pink advocates for a focus on intrinsic motivation—rooted in autonomy, mastery, and purpose—as more congruent with the needs of today's workforce and the overarching goals of modern organizations (Pink, 2009).

Building on Pink's insights, Neel Doshi and Lindsay McGregor's "Primed to Perform: How to Build the Highest Performing Cultures Through the Science of Total Motivation" introduces a taxonomy of motivational elements: play, potential, and purpose. These elements emphasize the intrinsic enjoyment of tasks, the opportunity for personal growth, and finding meaning in work, respectively. Doshi and McGregor argue that fostering these intrinsic motivators can lead to sustained high performance and employee satisfaction (Doshi & McGregor, 2015).

Daniel Coyle, in "The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups", emphasizes the critical role of psychological safety and shared vulnerability in team dynamics. His research suggests that creating an environment where team members feel secure enough to take risks and share challenges is key to fostering innovation and collective success (Coyle, 2018).

Laszlo Bock's insights from his tenure at Google further illustrate the limitations of extrinsic rewards. In "Work Rules!", Bock shares Google's findings that non-financial motivators—such as appreciation, career development, and mutual support—play a more significant role in driving employee motivation and productivity over the long term (Bock, 2016).

Theoretical frameworks like Victor Vroom's Expectancy Theory also inform this discussion. Vroom posits that motivation is a function of valence (the importance of outcomes), expectancy (the belief that effort will lead to performance), and instrumentality (the belief that performance

will lead to rewards). This theory underscores the complexity of motivational processes and the importance of aligning organizational rewards with individual goals and perceptions (Vroom, 1964).

Further enriching the conversation, Richard Barrett's work on the evolution of consciousness outlines seven fundamental human needs that, when fulfilled without harming others, allow individuals to operate from a fully integrated consciousness. Barrett's model adds depth to our understanding of motivation, suggesting that it is intertwined with personal growth and societal contribution (Barrett, 2015).

The research presented in this review highlights a critical shift in motivational theory and practice, from a reliance on extrinsic rewards to a nuanced appreciation of intrinsic motivators. As the business landscape continues to evolve, understanding and leveraging these motivational dynamics will be crucial for organizations seeking to attract, retain, and engage a modern workforce.

In the contemporary workplace, the creation of an environment where employees collaborate and engage in projects together is pivotal. Thus, managers of organizations no longer have to act only on risky situations that could threaten the objectives of the organization, they must promote continuous learning throughout the employees and create a participatory work environment where employees are included in the decision-making process (Dumitru, Florea, & Minciu, 2023). Research on a group of elementary students, whose essays were corrected and given feedback, revealed that not all feedback types were effective. Only feedback that communicated psychological safety and group belongingness improved performance. This highlights the importance of feedback that fosters a sense of security and belonging, enhancing employee performance significantly (Yeager, Garcia, Brzustoski, Hessert, & Cohen, 2014).

Amy Edmondson and Pentland discovered that maintaining continuous signals of safety and belonging is crucial for psychological safety in a group. The human brain, sensitive to threat, requires constant reassurance of safety to foster team connection. This finding underscores the brain's need for continuous safety signals to foster collaborative and innovative work environments (Gallo, 2023).

Pentland's studies indicate that a team's performance is influenced by multiple factors: equitable speaking and listening contributions among team members, energetic conversations and high eye contact, direct communication among colleagues rather than solely through a manager, side conversations within the team, and encouragement of periodic breaks and external explorations to bring new information into the team dynamic. These elements contribute to a high-functioning, collaborative, and innovative team environment (Pentland, 2023).

Edmondson teaches that psychological safety can be cultivated by consistently monitoring for tension and changes in team interactions. Daniel Coyle provides fourteen strategies to establish psychological safety, ranging from demonstrating active and uninterrupted listening, being open about mistakes and encouraging others to actively contribute to their resolution, particularly for leaders, to showing gratitude excessively to team members. A study by Grant & Gino (2010) demonstrated that even a small expression of gratitude could significantly increase people's willingness to offer assistance (Grant & Gino, 2010). Another critical component is

establishing a rigorous recruitment process to maintain team harmony by removing destructive behaviors (Coyle, 2018).

Laszlo Bock emphasizes that Google's culture provides employees with psychological safety to speak freely without reservations. Google's management style eschews formal authority to foster an innovative environment (Bock, 2016). Google has also created a one-page performance document for employee-manager discussions, making these interactions more efficient and prepared (Bock, 2016).

The motivation through rewards and punishments, while effective for ensuring work is done correctly and timely, does not foster creative and adaptable behavior. This extrinsic motivation has its place in routine, well-defined tasks but fails to inspire creativity and innovation necessary for adapting to market changes (Pink, 2009).

A study on 684 open-source developers revealed that their participation in projects was driven not by external rewards but by the intrinsic pleasure of the work and the creative freedom it offered. This intrinsic motivation leads to a state of "flow," enhancing productivity and creativity (Lakhani & Wolf, 2005).

Economists argue that extrinsic motivation is outdated. Bruno Frey, a behavioral economist, advocates moving beyond the Homo Oeconomicus model to recognize that human economic behavior cannot be solely stimulated by rewards or punishments. Instead, intrinsic motivation plays a crucial role in economic activity (Frey B., 1997; Frey & Stutzer, 2002).

Teresa Amabile posits that while rewards and punishments can work for tasks with well-defined rules, tasks requiring creativity demand a different approach emphasizing intrinsic motivation, allowing for freedom in task execution (Amabile, 2018).

External rewards become less necessary when the activity itself is intrinsically pleasing. Deci's research shows that adding extrinsic rewards for intrinsically motivated activities can often decrease motivation, leading to reduced performance (Pink, 2009).

Daniel Pink identifies three major issues with extrinsic motivation: it does not align with how businesses operate in the current economy, it contradicts how economists view economic evolution, and it is incompatible with the creative nature of contemporary work requiring autonomy (Pink, 2009).

If basic needs are not met at work, attention shifts to the injustice of deficiencies. This cannot be resolved through extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. When basic needs are satisfied, relying on external rewards can negatively impact workplace performance by creating counterintuitive outcomes (Pink, 2009).

The "Sawyer Effect," as discussed by researchers Dan Ariely, George Loewenstein, and Drazen Prelec, illustrates the psychological impact of extrinsic factors on intrinsic motivation. This effect demonstrates that while extrinsic factors can initially enhance the perceived value of an activity, they can ultimately diminish intrinsic motivation, stripping the activity of its inherent pleasure (Ariely, Gneezy, Loewenstein, & Mazar, 2005).

Despite the known negative impacts of reward/punishment motivation, many companies are hesitant to shift towards intrinsic motivation (Pink, 2009). An experiment in India with three groups offered increasingly large rewards showed that the group with the largest reward

performed equal. This demonstrating that higher rewards do not always lead to better performance. This finding suggests that extrinsic incentives, such as monetary rewards, do not always enhance team performance, and in some cases, may even hinder it (Ariely, Loewenstein, & Prelec, 2006).

Scientific research has revealed that external rewards can lead to undesired outcomes, including a decrease in intrinsic motivation and creativity, challenging the effectiveness of traditional business practices that rely heavily on extrinsic motivation (Pink, 2009).

Extrinsic motivators can help focus employee attention on specific objectives. However, this focus might negatively impact complex task performance by encouraging employees to opt for the quickest route to rewards, potentially leading to unethical or suboptimal task execution (Pink, 2009).

Economist Anton Suvorov explored the “principal-agent theory,” which explains the effects of workplace rewards and other contexts. He found that rewards can create a dependency similar to that of addictive drugs, offering initial pleasure that quickly dissipates, requiring increasingly larger and more frequent doses to maintain the same level of satisfaction. This analogy highlights the risk of dependency on external rewards for task completion, leading to demands for ever-greater rewards to maintain performance (Suvorovy, 2013).

At Google, employee motivation is primarily intrinsic, avoiding extrinsic motivators to stimulate performance. Laszlo Bock notes that Google’s extrinsic motivations adhere to four principles: ensuring salaries are paid fairly; celebrating achievements, not compensation; fostering an environment where love can be shared; and carefully considering failure. This approach underlines the shift towards intrinsic motivation, emphasizing recognition, professional development, mutual support, autonomy, and decision-making freedom as key to a motivating work environment where employees remain productive over the long term (Bock, 2016).

The modern workplace demands a shift from traditional extrinsic rewards to a focus on intrinsic motivation. Studies suggest that intrinsic motivation—driven by autonomy, mastery, and purpose—leads to higher performance, creativity, and job satisfaction. Companies like Google have successfully implemented strategies that prioritize intrinsic motivators, demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach.

This comprehensive examination of motivation at work underscores the complex interplay between extrinsic and intrinsic factors. As the workforce evolves, businesses must adapt their motivational strategies to foster an environment that emphasizes personal growth, meaningful work, and community. By doing so, they can unlock the full potential of their employees, driving innovation and success in the contemporary business landscape.

Research methodology

The research methodology employed in this study is anchored in a qualitative approach, meticulously constructed on the scaffold of an extensive literature review and the insightful analysis of 53 interviews. This methodological structure is specifically tailored to explore the complex domain of employee motivation, leveraging both the theoretical constructs offered by scholars

and the nuanced, real-world insights captured through empirical data. The crux of this qualitative inquiry is thematic analysis, a robust and flexible method that facilitates the identification, examination, and reporting of patterns (themes) within the data, enabling a profound understanding of the intricacies of motivation beyond the surface level insights often afforded by quantitative research.

Initiating the process, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, designed to tap into the rich tapestry of experiences and perceptions related to motivation. The diversity among participants ensured a comprehensive exploration of motivational factors across various organizational contexts, enriching the dataset with a spectrum of perspectives. Following the data collection, the interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity and depth of the participants' expressions and experiences.

The subsequent phase of coding was approached with rigor and reflexivity. Initial codes were generated through a detailed examination of the data, identifying content segments relevant to the multifaceted nature of motivation. These preliminary codes served as the building blocks for potential themes, which were meticulously grouped to reflect broader patterns emerging from the dataset. Through an iterative process of review and refinement, these themes were honed to accurately represent the complexities captured in the data. This involved scrutinizing the alignment of themes with the coded extracts and the dataset as a whole, culminating in the distillation of themes that offer a nuanced understanding of employee motivation.

This thematic exploration was enriched by the scholarly perspectives introduced in the literature review, including seminal works and contemporary studies that frame motivation within both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions (Deci, Ryan, & Koestner, 2001; Pink, 2009; Maslow, 1943). The empirical findings from the interviews not only resonated with these theoretical insights but also extended the discourse, presenting a layered understanding of motivation that transcends traditional dichotomies.

By weaving together theoretical insights with empirical findings, this study advances the understanding of employee motivation, bridging theoretical gaps and offering practical insights for organizational management. The qualitative research methodology, especially the use of thematic analysis, proves instrumental in uncovering the dynamic interplay of motivational factors, offering a rich, detailed perspective that enhances both academic and practical engagements with the concept of motivation. So, the methodological approach of this study emphasizes the synergy between literature and empirical data, underscoring the value of thematic analysis in dissecting the complexities of motivation. It highlights the importance of integrating diverse scholarly perspectives with real-world experiences, thereby contributing significantly to the fields of organizational behavior and management. Through this meticulous methodological execution, the study not only enriches the academic discourse on motivation but also provides actionable insights for enhancing motivational dynamics within contemporary organizations.

Results and discussions

The qualitative research aspect of this study focuses on employees' perceptions regarding the volume of tasks at the workplace. This approach employs an unstructured methodology to derive detailed verbal accounts of specific behaviors, attitudes, situations, or beliefs to ascertain the impact of the issue or phenomenon under study. Such a method is deemed a prerequisite for the execution of quantitative research, providing a foundation for understanding complex issues in greater depth (Andrei, Chivu, Ioan-Franc, & Sima, 2020).

Qualitative research is pivotal for several reasons: it facilitates a detailed comprehension of the research question, enabling researchers to form a comprehensive view of the subject matter. It unveils new aspects of the topic that may be considered in subsequent quantitative research and aids in developing hypotheses that can be tested within a quantitative framework. Essentially, the value of qualitative research in scientific endeavors lies in its ability to provide a nuanced understanding of research problems, often yielding unexpected insights that enrich hypothesis development (Scârneci, 2006).

In this study, the questionnaire linked a closed question about feeling overwhelmed with work tasks to an optional open-ended query for those willing to elaborate: "If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, please briefly describe the context." This connection aims to garner detailed information necessary for understanding the situations and factors contributing to excessive workloads.

Utilizing these questions, the research intends to test the qualitative research hypothesis H1: "Employees who feel more involved in decision-making processes, receive constructive feedback, and enjoy greater autonomy in managing their tasks are more motivated at work." Thus, the relationship between the closed and open questions seeks to elucidate the circumstances and factors leading to excessive task loads at work.

To conduct an accurate analysis of the responses provided to the open-ended question, thematic analysis was employed. This method, used in qualitative research, identifies, organizes, and visualizes themes within a dataset from a specific viewpoint (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Following the methodology outlined by researchers Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, the thematic analysis was structured into six stages: familiarizing with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming the themes, and compiling the report based on the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

For the analysis of the 53 responses, the NVivo software was utilized, renowned for its efficacy in qualitative research. Given the limited resources available, a comprehensive analysis of the data was conducted. The initial stage involved an in-depth reading and re-reading of responses, followed by their entry into NVivo for data analysis. Coding was applied to parts of sentences, entire sentences, and phrases. The creation of a word cloud facilitated orientation towards the central themes embedded within the collected data.

This in-depth qualitative analysis, supported by a rigorous methodological framework and the innovative use of NVivo software, reveals significant insights into employees' perceptions of their workload and its consequential effects on motivation. The findings from this analysis will not only contribute to the testing of the proposed hypothesis but also add a rich layer of

understanding to the complex dynamics of employee motivation in relation to workload management, further enriching the discourse within this scholarly article.

Figure 1: Word cloud



Source: own research, exported from NVIVO program

The word cloud presented above is a vivid depiction of the primary concepts and themes that have emerged from the qualitative analysis of employee perceptions regarding workload at the workplace. At its core, the prominence of terms such as “responsabilități” (responsibilities), “muncă” (work), “lucru” (work/task), “sarcini” (tasks), and “colegii” (colleagues) points to the multifaceted nature of employees’ daily work life, where managing tasks, fulfilling responsibilities, and interaction with colleagues are central experiences.

The word “managerul” (manager) suggests a focus on the role of managerial practices in influencing employees’ sense of motivation and involvement. This aligns with the research hypothesis, hinting that the management approach could be a crucial determinant in how employees perceive their workload and autonomy.

The recurrent term “deadline” highlights the time-bound pressure that employees encounter. Deadlines are a concrete representation of the demands placed on employees and can be a significant source of stress. However, when balanced with “autonomie” (autonomy) and positive “feedback”, which are also noticeable in the cloud, it suggests that such pressures might be mitigated by empowering practices and supportive communication.

“Multitasking” appears as a central concept, reflecting the current work environment’s complexity, where employees often juggle multiple tasks simultaneously.

This could indicate that the ability to multitask is perceived as a valuable skill or, conversely, as a challenge to effective work management.

Significant terms such as “lipsa” (lack), “necesare” (necessary), and “program” (program/schedule) suggest themes around the resources available to employees and how structured their work schedules are. These factors can contribute to how employees assess their work environment and could play a role in influencing their motivation.

Interestingly, the term “momentul” (the moment/time) implies the importance of timeliness and could be interpreted as employees’ awareness of the importance of seizing the right moment to act, which requires both decision-making involvement and autonomy.

The presence of “personale” (personal) in the cloud reflects the intersection between employees’ personal agency and their professional roles. It supports the notion that employees value the opportunity to bring their personal expertise and discretion to their work, which is a form of intrinsic motivation.

In interpreting this word cloud in the context of the research hypothesis, it can be surmised that employees’ motivation is multifaceted, influenced by their roles, the tasks at hand, managerial style, and the interplay between personal autonomy and structural demands.

The data visualization seems to corroborate the hypothesis that factors like decision-making involvement, constructive feedback, and autonomy in task management are integral to employee motivation. This interpretation aligns with modern motivational theories that suggest employees are more engaged and motivated when they have control over their work, receive relevant feedback, and perceive their responsibilities within the scope of meaningful and manageable tasks.

Figure 2: „Task” - tree



Source: own research, exported from NVIVO program

The attached image appears to be a thematic analysis tree focused on the term “sarcini” (tasks), which provides a deeper insight into the qualitative data pertaining to employees’ perceptions of their workload.

At the heart of the diagram is the central theme of “tasks,” branching out to various sub-themes that reflect the employees’ experiences and challenges. Phrases like “Sarcini multe” (Many tasks) and “Foarte multe” (Very many) immediately convey a sense of overwhelming workload. This could indicate that employees feel overburdened by the sheer quantity of tasks they are expected to manage, which aligns with the feeling of being overloaded that was discussed earlier.

The branches extending from “prea multe” (too many) elaborate on the consequences of this overload. For instance, “Întârzierea îndeplinirii” (Delay in fulfillment) suggests that an excessive number of tasks can lead to delays in meeting deadlines or completing projects, which may impact the overall productivity and timelines.

“Perioada de realizare a toate părțile” (The period of realization of all parts) implies that the completion of tasks is not just about quantity but also about the distribution and scheduling of workload over time. The fragmented task management can cause delays and inefficiency, further exacerbating stress.

“Apariția unor trece peste orice bariere” (The appearance of some that go beyond any barriers) might indicate that some tasks are perceived as particularly challenging or difficult to manage, crossing beyond the normal scope of the employees’ roles or abilities.

On another branch, we see phrases like “fără un termen limită foarte îndepărtat” (without a very distant deadline) and “într-un timp scurt” (in a short time), which suggest tight deadlines. This is a common source of pressure in the workplace, where employees must complete tasks within a limited timeframe, often feeling rushed and possibly compromising the quality of their work.

The statement “Multe sarcini într-un timp scurt” (Many tasks in a short time) encapsulates the crux of the problem: the combination of high volume and limited time can lead to significant stress and a decline in motivation.

“Deadline-urile sunt comunicate prea târziu” (Deadlines are communicated too late) touches upon organizational communication issues, where employees may be informed about deadlines later than is ideal, limiting their ability to plan and manage their workload effectively.

The diagram seems to confirm the earlier discussion and adds layers of nuance, showing how not just the quantity of tasks, but their organization, communication, and the time allowed for their completion, can significantly impact employee motivation. This graphical representation reinforces the importance of managerial practices in setting realistic goals and deadlines, communicating them timely, and providing employees with the necessary autonomy to manage their tasks effectively, which is essential for sustaining intrinsic motivation and overall workplace satisfaction.

The qualitative data collected through open-ended survey questions reveal a landscape of employee experiences where the term “sarcini” (tasks) dominates the discourse, painting a vivid picture of the pressure and challenges faced in the workplace. The high frequency of the term

within the responses underlines a collective sentiment of excessive workload and perceived imbalance between responsibilities and personal capabilities or resources.

The thematic analysis of the responses, facilitated by NVivo, allowed for the distillation of key themes. The initial codes developed—“Cantitate mare de sarcini” (Large quantity of tasks), “Relația cu managerul-colegii de muncă” (Relationship with manager-co-workers), and “Timp limitat de realizat” (Limited time for completion)—reflect the core issues that contribute to employee dissatisfaction.

In their narratives, respondents’ express concerns over the sheer volume of tasks they are expected to manage. This quantity, often perceived as excessive, is coupled with tight deadlines that create an environment rife with stress and potential burnout. The thematic tree surrounding “sarcini” visually encapsulates the centrality of task overload in the employee experience. The respondents recount instances of last-minute task assignments and the burden of an unmanageable number of duties falling on a single individual, leading to an inability to complete tasks within scheduled times.

Moreover, the data points to organizational shortcomings, with employees highlighting a lack of support and resources from management, which hinders the execution of tasks. There is also an apparent mismatch between assigned responsibilities and employees’ own skills or knowledge, further contributing to a sense of incapacity and inefficacy. Such a disconnect not only hampers individual performance but can also erode team dynamics, undermining the collective efficacy and potentially fostering a toxic work environment.

In interpreting the word cloud and thematic tree in conjunction with the previously established codes, we arrive at a nuanced understanding of the qualitative dataset. The dominant presence of “sarcini” underscores a universal grievance: employees feel overtasked and under-supported. This imbalance signals the importance of managerial awareness and intervention. Managers should strive to ensure that task allocation aligns with employee capabilities and available resources, and that deadlines are communicated and negotiated in a manner that respects employees’ time constraints and work-life balance.

The high volume of tasks, when compounded by inadequate managerial support and resources, appears to be a significant detriment to intrinsic motivation, which resonates with the research hypothesis. Employees who do not feel involved in decision-making processes, who lack constructive feedback, or who do not enjoy a degree of autonomy in managing their tasks are likely to exhibit lower motivation levels. This finding emphasizes the need for organizations to adopt strategies that empower employees, offer meaningful support, and promote a healthy and sustainable work culture. Such strategies may include transparent communication, shared decision-making, acknowledgment of employee efforts, and the provision of resources and training that equip employees to handle their tasks competently and confidently.

Conclusions

The comprehensive analysis illuminates the dynamics between modern employee motivation and the structural and relational aspects of the workplace.

The primary research question probed into the non-financial motivational factors that influence modern employees' motivation levels. Our hypothesis, H1, postulated that "Employees who feel more involved in decision-making processes at work, receive constructive feedback, and have greater autonomy in managing their tasks are more motivated." The qualitative findings substantiate this hypothesis, revealing a clear nexus between intrinsic motivation and the practical implications of autonomy, feedback, and participative decision-making.

The qualitative research results resonate profoundly with the theoretical concepts advanced by Daniel Pink in "Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us." Pink's assertion that autonomy, mastery, and purpose are the cornerstones of intrinsic motivation is vividly reflected in employees' accounts of their work experiences. The sentiments of overburdened tasks and inadequate time, as narrated by respondents, underscore the pivotal role of autonomy—as without it, employees are less able to achieve mastery and align their efforts with a greater purpose.

Moreover, the empirical data reinforce Pink's notion that intrinsic motivation is more potent and enduring than extrinsic motivation. This concept is evident in respondents' expressions of dissatisfaction when faced with excessive workload without a corresponding sense of purpose or autonomy. Their narratives about the impact of positive managerial relationships and supportive feedback highlight the significance of constructive interpersonal dynamics, paralleling Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, where both 'hygiene' and 'motivator' factors are key to employee satisfaction and motivation.

A particularly striking parallel emerges between the qualitative data and Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Consistent with SDT's emphasis on autonomy, competence, and relatedness, the research participants' reflections suggest that their motivation thrives when they experience a sense of volition (autonomy), efficacy (competence), and connection (relatedness) with their managers and colleagues.

In sum, this article provides an insightful synthesis of the qualitative research outcomes and the established theoretical underpinnings within the domain of employee motivation. It underscores the practical exigency for organizations to transcend traditional carrot-and-stick motivational approaches in favor of fostering a workplace culture that empowers employees with choice, nurtures their growth, and imbues their roles with meaning.

The alignment between theory and empirical evidence in this article points to a transformation in managerial practices. By facilitating a work environment that prizes autonomy, ensures consistent and positive feedback, and involves employees in the fabric of decision-making, companies can not only enhance individual motivation but also pave the way for a collectively enriched organizational culture.

These findings exhort businesses to integrate these intrinsic motivators into their strategic frameworks, recognizing that the modern workforce is driven by factors far beyond financial incentives. The modern employee's motivation is multifaceted and deeply rooted in the psychological need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness—a narrative echoed across the testimonies

of the 53 respondents and substantiated by the academic literature. Through such an integrated approach, organizations can aspire to higher levels of employee engagement, productivity, and overall workplace wellbeing.

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Exploring Generation Z's Vision of the Ideal Employer

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Abstract: This research delves into the contemporary and engaging topic of “The Ideal Employer Profile from Generation Z’s Perspective,” exploring key facets that define the expectations and needs of this generation in the workforce. Through an in-depth analysis of Generation Z, known for their digital prowess and creative aptitude, this study sheds light on their distinct preferences shaped by the digital era. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating empirical findings with a review of existing literature to draw connections between Generation Z’s workplace expectations and broader trends in human resources management, organizational culture, and technology adoption. The findings underscore the significance of communication, listening, and creativity as crucial attributes of the ideal employer, aligning with Generation Z’s desire for a flexible, dynamic, and supportive work environment. Emotional intelligence emerged as a paramount quality, reflecting the generation’s emphasis on empathy, understanding, and effective emotion management within professional settings. The study also reveals a balanced valuation of financial and non-financial benefits, highlighting the importance of comprehensive benefit packages in attracting and retaining young talent. Moreover, the research challenges traditional recruitment methods, suggesting a preference for innovative approaches that leverage technology to showcase candidates’ skills and personality more effectively. This inclination towards digital solutions extends to workplace practices, where Generation Z expects employers to demonstrate adaptability and innovation. The study provides a nuanced portrait of the ideal employer according to Generation Z, combining essential skills, emotional intelligence, a mix of benefits, and a tech-savvy approach to recruitment and workplace design. These in-

sights offer valuable guidance for organizations looking to align their practices with the expectations of the upcoming workforce, facilitating the creation of an attractive and conducive work environment for Generation Z employees.

Key words: Generation Z, The Ideal Employer Profile, Expectations, Labor Market, Employee Behavior, Human Resource Management, Emotional Intelligence

JEL Classification: J24, M12, M54, O15

Introduction

In recent years, both career development and employment landscapes have undergone significant transformations, paralleling the rapid evolution of technology and societal shifts. Central to this dynamic environment is Generation Z, a cohort deeply ingrained in the digital age and possessing distinct expectations from their predecessors regarding employment opportunities. This study delves into the aspirations and criteria of Generation Z for the ideal employer, a concept that has grown in complexity and significance.

The impetus for choosing this research topic stems from a desire to decode the preferences and necessities that Generation Z seeks in the workplace. Representing a pivotal group entering the workforce, their unique perspectives offer valuable insights for businesses aiming to refine their recruitment and employee engagement strategies. This study posits that understanding the ideal employer's profile is crucial for individuals' career development, facilitating informed career choices and enhancing job satisfaction.

A distinctive expectation of Generation Z is the prioritization of mental health and well-being within the workplace, advocating for employer-provided psychological support. This preference underscores a broader recognition of mental health's role in employee performance and overall well-being. Furthermore, material incentives remain a significant factor for this generation, highlighting the importance of tangible rewards in employee motivation and retention.

This generation also champions work environments that offer personal fulfillment and uphold diversity and inclusion, signaling a shift towards more holistic and equitable workplace cultures. For organizations, aligning with these values is not merely a strategy for talent acquisition but a fundamental aspect of fostering innovation, creativity, and a sense of belonging among employees.

This introductory exploration sets the stage for addressing the core research question: "What are the key expectations of Generation Z regarding the skills, benefits, digital infrastructure, and competencies of the ideal employer?" Subsequent inquiries focus on identifying specific skills deemed essential for employers and how these competencies contribute to fulfilling employees' needs and expectations.

By investigating these aspects, the research aims to elucidate the profile of the ideal employer from the perspective of Generation Z, offering actionable insights for organizations to attract, engage, and retain this emerging workforce. Through a series of hypotheses examining the importance of communication, emotional intelligence, non-financial benefits, and recruitment practices, this study endeavors to provide a comprehensive understanding of Generation

Z's employment aspirations, thereby informing strategies for building productive and fulfilling workplace environments.

Literature review

The study of human resources encompasses a broad array of concepts that underline the collective talents, endeavors, and capabilities of employees within an organization. This field, rich in terminology variations such as "personnel," "workforce," or "employees," fundamentally revolves around the core notion that all individuals actively contributing to an organization's missions are integral to its operations. Joshi (2013) delineates the distinction between "workers," typically associated with manual labor, and "personnel," who engage in non-manual tasks, emphasizing the importance of effectively managing these human resources to benefit both the organization and the individual employees. This management involves fostering robust relationships throughout the workforce to harmonize organizational goals with employee welfare (Joshi, 2013).

The instability of the business environment and the pressure for change in organizations, in order to improve the quality level of the services offered is a priority for managers today (Berar, Minciu, & Wu, 2022). In the evolving landscape of organizational leadership, traditional authoritarian models have given way to more dynamic and participatory approaches. Leadership today is conceptualized as a continuous, adaptable process dedicated to marshaling resources towards shared goals, necessitating a leader's role to extend beyond mere command to that of guidance and inspiration (Wollmann, Kühn, & Kempf, 2020). This shift reflects in the enumeration of management's quintessential functions: planning, organizing, staffing, leading, and controlling. These functions encompass comprehensive activities essential for organizational efficacy, ranging from goal setting and procedural development to staff motivation and performance evaluation (Dessler, 2013).

The primary objective of human resource management, as outlined by Graham (1978), is the strategic coordination of the workforce to leverage their skills for maximal organizational benefit while ensuring employees are rewarded both materially and through satisfaction and recognition of their efforts (Graham, 1978). Storey (2007) expands on this by characterizing human resource management as a distinct approach aimed at securing competitive advantage through the strategic cultivation of a skilled and engaged workforce, employing techniques that span organizational culture, structural design, and personnel policies (Storey, 2007).

The discourse on human resource management has also highlighted the dichotomy between soft HRM and hard HRM models, reflecting divergent strategic orientations within the field. Soft HRM emphasizes employee development, involvement, and commitment, focusing on human relations aspects that enhance workforce quality and motivation. Conversely, hard HRM prioritizes strategic objectives, viewing human resources as a means to achieve organizational goals through rigorous cost management and operational efficiency, often manifesting in workforce downsizing, salary adjustments, and intensification of work (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007).

Most of the time, projects previously carried out within organizations no longer provide so much information for the current situation as the priorities no longer coincide with those of the

present (Minciu, Berar, & Dobrea, 2021). The imperative of globalization has underscored the criticality of adept human resource management in maintaining competitiveness in a rapidly evolving marketplace. Senyucel (2009) notes that in the face of global market pressures, fostering a developmental and adaptive workforce is paramount for sustaining a competitive edge (Senyucel, 2009). This perspective is complemented by historical observations of human resource management's evolution from transactional functions towards more strategic roles within organizations, signifying a broadened scope encompassing employee development, strategic planning, and organizational alignment (Tyson, 1995).

Both managers and other employees have to adopt decisions that have a major or minor impact on the activities carried out within the organization every day (Minciu, Berar, & Dobrea, 2020). Innovation and technological acumen have emerged as indispensable elements for organizational agility and success in fluctuating markets. Lochmahr et al. (2019) stress the necessity for continuous innovation and creativity in pursuing digital transformation (Lochmahr, Müller, Planing, & Popović, 2019), while Wolan (2020) underscores the significance of managerial comprehension of technological trends and their potential economic impacts (Wolan, 2020). Griffin (2013) further delineates the critical managerial functions—decision-making, planning, organizing, leading, and controlling—as foundational for effective resource allocation and strategic direction, aimed at achieving organizational objectives (Griffin, 2013).

The influence of emotional intelligence on workplace dynamics has garnered increasing attention, highlighting its role in enhancing employee performance and interpersonal relations. Emotional intelligence, as conceptualized by Goleman (2017), encompasses a spectrum of skills including self-awareness, emotion regulation, motivation, empathy, and social proficiency, pivotal for leadership efficacy and team cohesion. Studies affirm that individuals possessing high emotional intelligence tend to excel in roles requiring nuanced communication and complex interpersonal interactions, underscoring the potential for emotional intelligence development through deliberate practice and experience (Goleman, 2002).

Organizational structure and culture are also pivotal in shaping innovative capacities and overall organizational health. A vibrant organizational culture that values creativity, risk-taking, and resilience in the face of failure fosters an environment conducive to innovation, as evidenced by companies renowned for their innovative organizational climates (Businessweek, 2009).

Moreover, the concept of organizational health, characterized by clear management, open communication, and alignment with organizational values, is posited as a critical determinant of business success, outstripping the influence of strategy or individual talent alone (Lencioni, 2012).

In the context of attracting and retaining Generation Z talent, the strategic importance of a strong, inclusive, and dynamic corporate culture cannot be overstated. Generation Z places significant value on workplaces that champion diversity, offer continuous professional growth opportunities, build an agile culture and adapt to the next normal, and support a healthy work-life integration, making the cultivation of such a culture a strategic imperative for forward-looking organizations (Flamholtz & Randle, 2011)(Purcărea et.al, 2022).

Research Methodology

This study embarked on an examination of employees' and potential hires' perceptions through a quantitative research approach, engaging a sufficiently large sample to ensure representativeness and elicit insights into employee expectations and competencies through qualitative analysis.

At the core of the quantitative methodology was the analysis of employees' perspectives on several fronts:

- Expectations from employers, including direct interactions,
- Essential competencies for the ideal employer,
- Valued benefits and facilities provided by employers,
- Preferences for interview processes and evaluation methods.

A questionnaire, meticulously designed to target Generation Z participants aged 18 to 23 years, served as the primary tool for data collection.

The design aimed at an efficient data gathering process, with a maximum estimated completion time of five minutes and accessibility through mobile devices and laptops. This approach was intended to facilitate participation without inducing respondent fatigue.

The questionnaire included 10 questions, crafted to uncover Generation Z's specific needs and expectations concerning employers. These inquiries spanned from the characteristics of the ideal employer to the importance of various employer-provided benefits and preferences for the hiring process. The intent was to illuminate the attributes and skills necessary for fostering a positive and motivating work environment.

Employing a quantitative research method allowed for the collection of pertinent, quantifiable data on Generation Z's workplace perceptions and preferences. Quantitative analysis, as described by Weathington et al. (2012), involves a systematic approach to data collection through observation, questionnaires, interviews, or experiments, followed by numerical conversion for statistical analysis (Weathington, Cunningham, & Pittenger, 2012).

The selected instrument for this empirical study was a questionnaire, constructed and disseminated via Google Forms. According to Chelcea (2007), a questionnaire is a series of written queries, potentially accompanied by symbolic or illustrative images, arranged logically to elicit precise and consistent feedback from respondents (Chelcea, 2007).

This study's questionnaire was divided into three parts:

- consent for data processing,
- introductory remarks with questions,
- and respondent classification data.

The questions were bifurcated into categories evaluating single and multiple factors, with a particular focus on the ideal employer's profile and preferred job interview dynamics. A control question at the end assessed the earnestness of responses, establishing a linkage between questions on desired employer skills to filter for consistency and accuracy.

Before beginning the questionnaire, participants were briefed on the study's purpose and assured of response anonymity, encouraging genuine and thoughtful participation. The study spanned from January 23 to January 29, 2023, drawing from the University of Bucharest's student

body, yielding 430 valid responses.

Demographically, the response pool was diverse, with a significant representation of Generation Z. Utilizing the Likert scale for seven questions enabled a nuanced assessment of attitudes and perceptions. However, the inherent challenges of ensuring internal validity with Likert scale data were acknowledged, necessitating sophisticated statistical analyses to maintain the integrity of the findings (Grant, 2018; Toutenburg & Heumann, 2008)).

In addressing the study's hypotheses, analytical techniques such as factorial analysis, ordinal regression, and statistical tests, including Cronbach Alpha, were employed using SPSS. These methodologies facilitated a thorough examination of ordinal variables derived from Likert scale responses, ranging from total disagreement to complete agreement.

Factorial analysis was particularly instrumental in managing the extensive variable sets related to employee expectations, complemented by qualitative analysis to ensure comprehensive insights were achieved. The objective of regression analysis mirrors that of all regression types, which is to identify the model that accurately delineates the relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. (Ionescu et.al., 2023) This multifaceted approach underscored the study's commitment to robust, methodologically sound research into the preferences and expectations of Generation Z in the workplace.

Results and Discussion

The consistency of the questionnaire and the measurement scale utilized was assessed using the Cronbach Alpha test for the 38 variables involved in the study.

The Cronbach Alpha coefficient, which ranges from 0 to 1, was utilized to gauge the extent to which each questionnaire item shares common traits or a similar psychological construct. A Cronbach Alpha value above 0,70 is typically deemed suitable for most research of this nature, indicating higher reliability and result precision as the value approaches 1. (Purcărea et. al, 2021)

The observed Cronbach Alpha value of 0,964, nearing the maximum value of 1, underscores the excellent reliability of the measurement scale used in this dataset, as shown in the SPSS-generated table below:

Table 1: Cronbach Alpha Test for 38 Variables

Cronbach Alpha	Number of Variables
0,964	38

Source: own research, exported from SPSS program

The summary table generated via SPSS reflects the analysis of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient's variation and includes the number of respondents, with all responses deemed valid and no exclusions:

Table 2: Summary of Cronbach Alpha Test

		N	%
Cases	Valide	430	100
	Excluded	0	0
	Total	430	100

Source: own research, exported from SPSS program

Descriptive statistics were employed to describe, interpret, and analyze the datasets collected from the questionnaire responses. This approach facilitated the extraction of valuable insights, aiding in the comprehension of the data. Each question analyzed had 430 respondents, with the questions being mandatory. The minimum and maximum values for each variable analyzed ranged from “1- Not at all” to “7- Extremely.”

For the variable “calm and permissive attitude,” the descriptive statistics are as follows:

Mean: 5,72, indicating a high importance placed on the employer’s permissive and calm attitude by the majority of respondents.

Standard Deviation: 1,439, showing that responses are relatively close to the mean, indicating a consensus on the importance of these attributes.

Variance: 2,072, suggesting responses are closely clustered around the mean.

The “Meal Vouchers” variable showed a mean of 5,27, highlighting its importance as a benefit from employers. The standard deviation of 1,59 and a variance of 2,527 indicate a slight variation among responses, but overall, a consensus exists on the value of this benefit.

Regarding “Psychological Assistance,” the mean response was 5,15, suggesting a moderate importance attributed to this benefit by respondents. The standard deviation of 1,627 and a variance of 2,646 reflect diverse perceptions on the necessity of workplace psychological support, influenced by demographic factors such as age, gender, and employment status.

The “Communication and Listening” variable revealed a mean of 5,75, underscoring the significance respondents place on these skills in an ideal employer. The standard deviation of 1,597 and a variance of 2.550 suggest consistent and coherent responses, emphasizing the importance of effective communication and listening abilities.

Finally, the “Emotional Intelligence” variable, with a mean of 5,79, demonstrates the high value respondents place on emotional intelligence in employers. The standard deviation of 1,495 and a variance of 2,234 indicate a general agreement among respondents, recognizing emotional intelligence as a crucial competency for the ideal employer.

These analyses demonstrate that respondents seek a work environment offering comfort and a pleasant atmosphere, with employers who inspire respect and tolerance. Furthermore, the importance of benefits like meal vouchers and psychological assistance indicates a desire for supportive workplace practices. The emphasis on communication, listening, and emotional intelligence skills further delineates the profile of the ideal employer as perceived by the respondents.

The factorial analysis conducted through SPSS integrated 38 variables, which span a comprehensive range of aspects related to the ideal employer, including attitudes, competencies, benefits, digital amenities, interview interactions, evaluation methodologies, and inherent employer skills.

The analysis successfully distilled these variables into eight distinct components, each capturing a facet of the ideal employer from the perspective of the respondents. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity affirmed the dataset's adequacy for such an analysis, yielding a KMO value of 0,963—indicative of a highly suitable dataset for factor reduction—and a Bartlett's test result significant at the 0,000 level, reinforcing the data's suitability for factorial decomposition.

Interpretation and Implications of Components:

1. Abilities and Benefits (45.998% of Variance Explained):

Core Variables: Communication and Listening (0,895), Creativity (0,809), Emotional Intelligence (0,821), Recognition of Results (0,852), Meal Vouchers (0,643), Technology (0,805), Welcoming Space (0,796), CV (0,651), Listening (0,870), Trust (0,869).

This component underscores the multifaceted nature of the ideal employer, valuing a blend of personal competencies and tangible benefits. The high loading of Communication and Listening reflects the paramount importance of interpersonal skills, while the inclusion of Meal Vouchers and Technology emphasizes the balance between personal growth and practical benefits in the workplace.

2. Social and Health Benefits (6.431% of Variance Explained):

Core Variables: Gym Facilities (0,777), Canteen (0,716), Café (0,663), Psychological Support (0,511).

Highlighting the growing awareness and importance of health and well-being in the workplace, this component suggests that respondents highly value employers who invest in their employees' physical and mental health, with Gym Facilities and Canteen being particularly significant.

3. Recruitment Methods (4.064% of Variance Explained):

Core Variables: Cover Letter (0,672), Video CV (0,845), Elevator Pitch (0,848), Recommendations (0,554).

Reflecting a preference for innovative and personal recruitment methods, this component indicates a shift towards more dynamic presentation formats like Video CVs and Elevator Pitches, allowing candidates to showcase their skills and personalities beyond traditional applications.

4. Digital Facilities (3.652% of Variance Explained):

Core Variables: Laptop or PC (0,546), Phone (0,752), Tablet (0,754), Internet (0,515), IT Support (0,577).

This component acknowledges the critical role of digital tools in the modern workplace, with a notable preference for mobile devices like Phones and Tablets for their convenience and versatility, suggesting that the ideal employer is expected to provide a robust digital infrastructure.

5. Demographic Factors (3.515% of Variance Explained):

Core Variables: Environment (-0,644), Age (0,722).

Demonstrating the influence of demographic factors on workplace preferences, this component highlights how age significantly impacts expectations, with younger respondents likely valuing different aspects of employment compared to their older counterparts. The negative loading for Environment suggests varied expectations between urban and rural respondents.

6. Gender Differences (2.786% of Variance Explained):

Core Variable: Gender (0,894).

The singular focus on Gender within this component signifies profound gender-based differences in perceptions of the ideal employer, indicating diverse needs and expectations that employers must acknowledge to foster an inclusive workplace.

7. Career Preferences (2.727% of Variance Explained):

Core Variables: Meeting the Ideal Employer (0,764), Position (0,653).

Addressing the aspirational aspect of employment, this component suggests that encountering the ideal employer is a pivotal career preference, with the nature of one's current position influencing these aspirations.

8. Selection Process (2.648% of Variance Explained):

Core Variable: Interview Process (0,910).

With a strong emphasis on the Interview Process, this component illuminates its crucial role in the selection process, underscoring the need for a thoughtful, well-structured interview approach to identify and secure the best candidates.

Through this detailed exploration of the factorial analysis, we gain a nuanced understanding of the various dimensions that constitute the ideal employer from the respondents' viewpoint. These insights not only delineate the specific attributes, benefits, and practices valued by potential and current employees but also provide a roadmap for organizations aiming to attract and retain top talent, especially within Generation Z.

The comprehensive interpretation of these components suggests a few key takeaways for employers:

- The emphasis on communication, listening, and emotional intelligence across components highlights the critical importance of interpersonal skills in leadership. Employers should prioritize the development of these skills within their leadership training and recruitment criteria to foster a more engaging and supportive workplace.
- The notable importance placed on health and well-being benefits—such as gym facilities, canteens, and psychological support—underscores a growing expectation among employees for employers to play an active role in supporting their overall health. This trend suggests that companies offering comprehensive health benefits may have a competitive edge in attracting and retaining employees.
- The emphasis on digital facilities, particularly the preference for mobile devices and robust IT support, reflects the digital native characteristics of Generation Z. Employers should ensure their digital infrastructure meets the flexibility and connectivity demands of the modern workforce, enabling efficient and mobile work environments.
- The preference for dynamic recruitment methods, such as Video CVs and Elevator Pitches, indicates a shift towards more personalized and creative approaches to hiring. Employers should consider integrating these methods into their recruitment processes to attract innovative and forward-thinking candidates.
- The impact of demographic factors like age, gender, and environment on employment preferences highlights the need for employers to adopt more personalized engagement and

retention strategies that consider these differences. Tailoring workplace policies and benefits to accommodate a diverse workforce can enhance inclusivity and employee satisfaction.

- The significance of meeting the ideal employer and the execution of the interview process suggests that candidates value transparent, respectful, and informative recruitment experiences. Employers should strive to create positive interactions during the selection process, as these early experiences can significantly impact a candidate's perception of the organization.

The factorial analysis provides a wealth of information on the preferences and expectations of potential and current employees regarding their ideal employer. By understanding and addressing these aspects, organizations can develop more effective strategies for attracting, engaging, and retaining the talent necessary for their success in an increasingly competitive and dynamic labor market.

The first hypothesis posited that "Communication and Listening" and "Creativity" skills are paramount for shaping the ideal employer profile according to respondents. The factorial analysis indicated that "Communication and Listening" had a loading of 0,895, and "Creativity" had a loading of 0,809, both situated within the most significant component, which explained 45.998% of the variance. This component's prominence underscores the critical value respondents place on these skills for the ideal employer. The high loadings suggest that effective communication, active listening, and creativity are considered essential attributes, reinforcing the hypothesis that these skills are vital in forming the ideal employer profile. This finding aligns with contemporary workplace dynamics, where clear communication and innovative problem-solving are increasingly valued.

The second hypothesis asserted that "Emotional Intelligence" is crucial for the ideal employer. This variable, with a loading of 0,821 within the primary component, illustrates its importance. Given this component's substantial influence (45.998% of total variance), the high value associated with "Emotional Intelligence" substantiates the hypothesis. It highlights Generation Z's preference for employers who can understand and manage emotions effectively, fostering a supportive and empathetic workplace culture. This insight aligns with research emphasizing emotional intelligence as a predictor of organizational performance and employee satisfaction.

The third hypothesis suggested that non-financial benefits, such as "Psychological Support" (loading of 0,511), are prioritized over financial benefits like "Meal Vouchers" (loadings of 0,643 and 0,532 across two components). While "Meal Vouchers" appear to be highly valued, the presence of "Psychological Support" in the health and social benefits component highlights its significance. However, the comparative analysis of loading values suggests a nuanced preference landscape. Respondents value both types of benefits, with a slight emphasis on financial ones. This partial affirmation of the hypothesis indicates a complex valuation of employer benefits, where non-financial benefits are important but not necessarily at the expense of traditional financial benefits.

The fourth hypothesis contended that respondents prefer submitting a Letter of Intent over a Video CV during the recruitment process. However, the loadings for "Letter of Intent" (0,672) and "Video CV" (0,845) within the recruitment methods component demonstrate a stronger preference for the latter. This finding contradicts the hypothesis, revealing a trend towards more

dynamic and visually engaging presentation methods. The higher valuation of Video CVs suggests respondents' desire for innovative approaches that allow for a more comprehensive and personal showcase of their skills and personality, aligning with digital age preferences.

The analyzed hypotheses offer a multidimensional understanding of Generation Z's expectations for the ideal employer. The findings emphasize the importance of communication, creativity, emotional intelligence, and innovative recruitment methods. While non-financial benefits are valued, financial benefits maintain their significance, indicating a balanced approach to employer evaluation. The preference for Video CVs over Letters of Intent highlights a shift towards more interactive and personal recruitment practices. These insights provide valuable directions for organizations looking to attract and engage Generation Z employees, underscoring the need for a holistic approach that combines emotional intelligence, creativity, comprehensive benefits, and modern recruitment strategies.

Conclusions

This research venture delved into the contemporary and engaging topic of "The Ideal Employer Profile from Generation Z's Perspective." By exploring the key aspects that define the expectations and needs of this generation in relation to the job market, this study has illuminated how the gathered insights can aid businesses and employers in aligning with the evolving preferences of future employees.

The analysis of Generation Z underscores a unique set of preferences shaped significantly by the digital era. This generation's prowess in technology and creativity is pivotal for understanding the characteristics of the ideal employer. These findings are in harmony with the literature that highlights the importance of adapting recruitment and retention practices to meet the demands of a digitally fluent generation, emphasizing communication, flexibility, and creativity.

Human Resource Management (HRM) transcends the recruitment and retention of employees; it encompasses understanding and addressing the diverse needs and expectations of the workforce. Effective HRM can significantly enhance employee satisfaction and overall organizational success, a notion supported by the literature review which stresses the holistic management of human resources for organizational efficacy.

The increasing importance of emotional intelligence in the workplace, which includes understanding, using, and managing one's own emotions and those of others, was validated by our research. The study supports the literature's view that employers should prioritize the development of emotional intelligence across the organization to foster a supportive and empathetic work environment.

This research also touched upon managerial styles within an organization, concluding that Generation Z favors managers who can effectively communicate and stimulate creativity, aligning with literature that associates leadership styles with organizational perception and employee engagement.

The organizational culture, comprising norms, values, and expectations that guide employee behavior, significantly impacts employee satisfaction and retention. Our findings suggest that a

culture promoting communication, creativity, and emotional intelligence aligns with Generation Z's expectations, echoing the literature's stance on the influence of organizational culture on employee outcomes.

These skills are deemed exceptionally valuable by respondents, confirming that employers can better align with Generation Z's expectations by fostering these abilities. This confirms the literature's assertion that soft skills are increasingly critical in the modern workplace.

This research validated the hypothesis that emotional intelligence is a crucial attribute for the ideal employer, resonating with Generation Z's desire for empathetic and understanding leadership.

While psychological support is valued, respondents placed greater importance on financial benefits like meal vouchers. This partial affirmation of the hypothesis indicates a balanced approach to employee benefits, suggesting employers should not overlook the significance of financial incentives.

The preference for Video CVs over traditional Letters of Intent reflects Generation Z's inclination towards technological solutions in recruitment, underscoring the need for employers to embrace digital tools and platforms for engaging potential candidates.

In an era marked by rapid technological and digital advancements, it is crucial for employers to remain adaptable and receptive to change. Generation Z expects employers to be innovative and capable of leveraging technology creatively, an attribute that can be a significant advantage for attracting this generation's talents.

The study offers a comprehensive profile of the ideal employer from Generation Z's viewpoint, integrating attributes such as communication and listening skills, creativity, and emotional intelligence. It also highlights the importance of both financial and non-financial benefits and the tendency towards utilizing technology in recruitment processes. Organizations can use these insights to tailor their culture and practices more closely to the needs and expectations of this new generation of employees. Understanding Generation Z's preferences can contribute to creating a more favorable and attractive work environment.

In conclusion, the results of this research indicate that Generation Z has specific expectations from their employers, which significantly differ from previous generations. Addressing these expectations could be key to success for employers aiming to attract and retain this new workforce.

Reflecting on the validated hypotheses, we conclude that communication and listening skills, creativity, and emotional intelligence are highly valued by employees for considering an employer as ideal. This confirms that these competencies are at the forefront of employee expectations. While the third hypothesis was only partially affirmed, it underscores a significant emphasis on financial benefits, revealing a new dimension of employee requirements for the ideal employer. The refutation of the fourth hypothesis highlights the shift away from traditional recruitment methods, emphasizing the importance of adapting recruitment processes to new technologies.

These findings underscore the complexity of Generation Z's expectations and outline the necessity for an ideal employer who can effortlessly adapt to the rapid changes characterizing today's world.

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Innovation Over Price: Understanding Generation Z's Preferences in the Smartphone Market

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Abstract: The Fourth Industrial Revolution has ushered in a new era marked by significant technological advancements and profound changes in consumer behavior, particularly among Generation Z. This article explores the implications of these shifts for marketing strategies and product development, focusing on the evolving expectations and preferences of consumers in the digital age. Through an in-depth literature review, we examine the transformative impact of digital technologies, such as the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and blockchain, on economic and social systems. The study further delves into the characteristics of Generation Z, highlighting their demand for rapid interactions, personalized services, and technology-driven solutions. Utilizing a combination of factorial analysis and statistical testing, we verify hypotheses concerning Generation Z's prioritization of technological innovation over price, the significance of brand and specific product features in their purchasing decisions, and the paramount importance of battery life and charging speed in smartphone selection. Our findings reveal a complex relationship between income levels and purchasing intentions, emphasizing the need for companies to adapt their marketing strategies to meet the nuanced demands of this demographic. This research underscores the necessity of continuous adaptation and innovation in marketing to successfully navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Key words: Fourth Industrial Revolution, Generation Z, Consumer Behavior, Marketing Strategies, Technological Innovation, Smartphone Preferences.

JEL Classification: D12, M31

Introduction

In the context of modern society, where technology, particularly smartphones, has become ubiquitous, the decision to purchase these essential devices, both personally and professionally, is a subject of great interest and relevance. This paper aims to explore in detail the factors influencing the decision to purchase smartphones, with a particular emphasis on the ideal features valued by consumers, especially those from Generation Z, in selecting such a device. Generation Z, raised in an era dominated by rapid technological advancements, plays a crucial role in the dynamics of the smartphone market, being among the most active participants in the acquisition and use of these devices.

The importance of smartphones in everyday life and in the business field has exponentially increased, allowing for efficient communication, rapid access to information, and optimal management of daily activities. The widespread use of mobile phones in the professional sphere further underscores their indispensability, transforming them into essential tools for business people and professionals. The evolution of the mobile phone from a device with limited functions to an advanced instrument offering instant global connectivity highlights the significant changes they bring to human interaction and professional activity.

To address the complexity of the subject, this paper is structured into several chapters, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of Generation Z consumers' behavior regarding smartphones. By formulating and testing specific hypotheses based on a thorough review of existing literature and empirical observations, the study aims to provide a fresh perspective on the dynamics of purchasing decisions in the context of continuous technological advancements.

Exploring the factors influencing the decision to purchase smartphones and their relationship with Generation Z's consumer behavior offers a valuable contribution to the specialized literature, while also providing relevant directions for manufacturers and retailers of mobile devices in developing and promoting their products in an increasingly saturated and competitive market.

This paper seeks to answer the research question: What are the main factors influencing the purchase decision for smartphones, and what is their relationship with the new type of consumer behavior in the context of evolving user behavior?

In attempting to address this question, the paper is guided by the following hypotheses:

H1: Generation Z is more interested in the performance/technical features of a smartphone than its price.

H2: Brand and phone features are significant factors in the decision to purchase smartphones.

H3: Charging duration and battery capacity expectations are important factors for many smartphone users.

H4: There is a connection between respondents' income and the likelihood of immediate purchase if their needs are met.

Literature review

The Fourth Industrial Revolution, as described by Schwab (2017), symbolizes a fundamental transformation marked by innovation and technology, redefining economic and social systems (Schwab, 2017). It brings to the forefront four major changes: the shift in customer expectations towards personalized and digitally integrated services, product enhancement through data analysis, the necessity of forming new strategic partnerships, and the evolution of organizations towards digital operating models, all underscoring the importance of emerging technologies such as IoT, AI, and blockchain.

Today's world is in a constant state of change, requiring organisations to become increasingly proactive and they are often forced to update their strategies to successfully manage all the changes (Minciu, Dobrea, & Loghin, 2022). In this new context, consumer behavior has undergone significant changes. Social media platforms, as Anuja (2019) illustrates, have become an essential element in digital marketing strategies, highlighting the crucial role of the online environment in shaping consumer expectations and behavior (Anuja, Shivam, Chandrashekhar, Reema, & Yogesh, 2019). Mefert (2000) emphasizes the importance of understanding key factors influencing consumer decision-making processes, including how they are affected by various marketing tools and the surrounding environment (Mefert, 2000).

All the challenges and transformations in the business environment of course also have an effect on consumers because they change their perceptions, their desires, so organizations are determined to produce products and provide services at a high quality (Minciu, Dima, Pacurari, & Manta, 2021). Generation Z, described by Koulopoulos (2016), stands out for specific expectations related to constant feedback and social engagement, favoring quick interactions and easy access to information and services (Koulopoulos & Keldsen, 2016). Mefert (2000) categorizes consumer behavior into four main types: rational, habitual, impulsive, and social, highlighting the diversity and complexity of the motives underlying purchasing decisions. Particularly, the impulsive behavior of Generation Z, accentuated by direct access to technology and the online environment, demonstrates a tendency towards spontaneous purchases influenced by factors such as social pressure and rapid product accessibility (Mefert, 2000).

The role of beliefs in the decision-making process is essential, with Mefert (2000) arguing that they significantly contribute to shaping preferences and buying behaviors (Mefert, 2000). Kroeber-Riel (2003) details the impact of cognitive and emotional processes on individual perception and consumer behavior, highlighting how beliefs, emotions, and instincts interact to influence consumer decisions (Kroeber-Riel, 2003).

The Fourth Industrial Revolution and associated changes in consumer behavior reflect the need for continuous adaptation of marketing strategies to meet the evolving expectations of consumers, especially those of Generation Z. A profound understanding of these dynamics is essential for success in an ever-evolving economic and social landscape.

Value generation and consumer satisfaction are crucial elements in the success of any product or service. Albrecht & Zemke (2002) emphasizes the importance of understanding consumer reactions, noting that dissatisfied customers can have a significantly negative impact by spreading their negative experiences to a large number of people. This underscores the need for marketing

strategies to pay particular attention to customer satisfaction (Albrecht & Zemke, 2002).

Products, defined by Kotler (2000) as any offer capable of satisfying a need or desire, are essential in fulfilling individual needs. Modern marketing focuses on creating value and meeting consumer needs, allowing them to make informed choices based on the ratio of benefits received to costs incurred (Kotler, 2000).

The marketing mix, described by Kotler (2000) and detailed through McCarthy Jerome E.'s four Ps: product, price, place, and promotion, remains a fundamental tool in creating effective strategies (Kotler, 2000; McCarthy & Perreault, 1984). This model has been extended by Robert Lauterborn (1990), who introduced the corresponding four Cs of customers, providing a consumer-oriented perspective (Lauterborn, 1990).

The impact of technology on the consumer behavior of Generation Z is significant, with changes in ethics, behaviors, attitudes, and motivations, highlighted by comparisons between Generations Y and Z and previous ones (Prakash & Rai, 2017). The intensive use of social media platforms by this generation emphasizes the need for constant and informed involvement in social interactions (Aho, 2011). Additionally, internet dependence has become a major concern, with negative effects on mental health and involvement in daily activities (Espinoza & Junvonen, 2011).

Therefore, value generation and meeting consumer needs, especially those of Generation Z, require an integrated approach that considers the impact of technology on consumer behavior and the importance of effective communication through digital channels. These aspects underscore the importance of continuously adapting marketing strategies to efficiently respond to market dynamics and consumer expectations. Despite this, even in a changing and often chaotic business environment, policies promoted by companies need to take into account economic, social and environmental aspects within their projects in order to be competitive in the market (Minciu, Berar, & Dobrea, 2021).

Brand image, as described by Kroeber-Riel (2003), represents the visual and descriptive representation of a brand, encompassing both objective and subjective characteristics, allowing consumers to form a coherent and concise perception. This perception is essential for the rapid and efficient evaluation of products and services in a saturated consumer environment (Kroeber-Riel, 2003).

Leberenz (1996) emphasizes that brand image comprises a mixture of perceived characteristics that help the consumer make quick purchase decisions based on relevant information and connections (Leberenz, 1996). Papadopoulos (1993) adds that brand image facilitates the evaluation of stimuli from the surrounding environment, thereby contributing to the formation of a concise perception of the product or service (Papadopoulos, 1993).

David A. Aaker (1996) defines brand equity as the set of resources and liabilities associated with the name and symbol of a brand, which add or detract from the perceived value of a product or service. It includes brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations, all of which profoundly influence consumer purchasing decisions (Aaker, 1996).

Technological advancements and market dynamics underscore a profound transformation in the concept of branding, shifting from the control of producers to increased power in the hands

of consumers, as indicated by trends observed in the late 1990s. In this context, the effectiveness of traditional marketing is often questioned, with many new products failing to stand out and become strong brands in the minds of consumers.

However, strong brands such as Coca-Cola, Harley-Davidson, Apple Computer, Singapore Airlines, and BMW demonstrate that success depends on offering a distinctive benefit and building a strong brand image in the minds of consumers. Lindstrøm and Kotler (2005) highlight the unique importance of such brands, which clearly differentiate themselves from the competition by offering unique values and experiences (Lindstrøm & Kotler, 2005).

The Apple Store exemplifies an innovative approach to creating a shopping experience, combining personalized service with digital technology to provide a unique consumer experience, facilitating product testing and seamless integrated payments. This strategy, as described by Fromm & Read (2018), places Apple ahead of competitors, strengthening its reputation and attractiveness among consumers, including those of Generation Z (Fromm & Read, 2018).

This section underscores the importance of building and maintaining a strong brand image that responds to the continuously changing expectations and needs of consumers in a dynamic and competitive market landscape. A profound understanding of these dynamics is essential for any organization aspiring to consolidate its market position and create lasting value for its consumers.

Research Methodology

To better understand consumers' perceptions regarding the purchase of smartphones, we opted for a quantitative research methodology. This approach allowed us to collect specific numerical data to assess consumer trends and preferences objectively. The focus was on aspects such as the timeframe for phone replacement, brand and price preferences, preferred operating system, important criteria in purchasing decisions, and consumer behavior in the context of acquiring a new smartphone.

The chosen tool for data collection was the questionnaire, described in the literature as an efficient means of gathering information from a large number of respondents in a structured manner (Chelcea, 2007). To ensure ease of response and logical organization of information, the questionnaire was carefully designed and implemented through Google Forms, comprising closed-ended questions to facilitate data analysis and an open-ended question to allow respondents to express their opinions freely.

The questionnaire structure was designed to maintain respondents' engagement by alternating between simple and more complex questions. This helped maintain participants' interest and gather precise and relevant responses. Before widespread distribution, the questionnaire was tested on a small group to ensure a reasonable completion time, with preliminary results indicating that the average completion time did not exceed five minutes.

Participant confidentiality was a priority, with all assured of the anonymity of their responses and informed about GDPR consent from the beginning of the questionnaire. Data collection took place from January 23rd to January 29th, with participation from students at the University

of Bucharest, resulting in a total of 424 complete and valid responses.

Respondent demographics reflected a variety in terms of gender, age, and occupational status, with the majority being students aged between 19 and 21 years old. This diversity of the sample provided a broad insight into the perceptions and behaviors of Generation Z regarding smartphone purchases.

Through this methodology, the study aimed to gain a deep understanding of the factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions, thus contributing to the existing literature in consumer behavior and marketing practices oriented towards meeting their needs and preferences.

The data collected through the questionnaire were subjected to multiple analyses to confirm or refute the hypotheses proposed for quantitative research. The analysis methods used included factorial analysis, ordinal regression, Chi-square test, and Cronbach Alpha statistical test. These methods were applied using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program. The Likert scale was used to measure respondents' preferences, allowing for sufficiently accurate responses in a simple and unpretentious manner for respondents.

In 1951, Cronbach's Alpha test was developed to evaluate the internal consistency of a test or scale. This internal consistency is represented by a numeric coefficient ranging from 0 to 1. This measure of internal consistency directly reflects the extent to which all items of a test measure the same concept and is closely related to the correlation between the different items included in the study (Mohsen & Reg, 2011).

For data to have internal validity, they must be processed in a structured and clear manner. The Cronbach Alpha test was used to overcome this problem, which requires equal intervals between all points on the scale. To ensure equal intervals on the scale, it was chosen to be sufficiently wide.

As it reflects this relationship between the items of a test and its internal consistency, Cronbach's Alpha test is recognized as a significant and essential method for evaluating the reliability of a measurement scale (Sreejesh, Mohapatra, & Anusree, 2014).

Whenever factorial analysis is used, it is recommended to compare Cronbach's Alpha coefficients with the average correlation between variables (Strang, 2015).

Variables associated with different consumer expectations were grouped using factorial analysis. Since the number of variables considered was large enough, the resulting components could be compared with aspects found in the specialized literature.

As defined in the literature, factorial analysis is "a technique of interdependence that aims to define the relationship between the variables in the analysis" (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

Factorial analysis is a whole set of statistical techniques used to transform a set of variables into a smaller set of hypothetical variables known as "components" (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

Factorial analysis was selected from the available analyzes in the SPSS program and was used to verify the existence of a correlation between the studied variables. This was followed by selecting the coefficients and correlation matrix option, which can help understand the existing relationships between variables. With this information, we could identify the direct or indirect

connections between variables and evaluate how close this correlation is. These data are fundamental for studying relationships between variables and understanding better the influence of the studied variables on the results.

For all survey questions, a Likert scale was used. For the question where multiple factors were provided for evaluation, the scale used was from one to seven. For this question, "one" represented "not important at all," and "seven" represented "extremely important." Thus, for quantitative analysis, only closed-ended questions were used that tested respondents' (consumers') perceptions of the expectations regarding the "ideal phone" and the attributes needed to create the optimal product.

Respondents respond to Likert scales by evaluating how much they agree or disagree with a series of statements presented to them. They express their perception and attitude towards the presented variables. The respondent chooses a numerical value for each statement that expresses their level of agreement or disagreement. Therefore, these values are used to understand individual perception but also the entire selected sample (Sreejesh, Mohapatra, & Anusree, 2014).

Over time, there have been a series of discussions regarding the Likert scale, especially regarding its internal validity (Grant, 2018). This discussion does not focus exclusively on the Likert scale but rather on the ordinal variables it provides. When variables are non-numeric, fewer statistical methods can be applied, and they must be carefully selected to ensure that the study results are not skewed.

In the methodology applied for analyzing the data collected through the questionnaire, a series of statistical methods were used to evaluate and interpret the responses, aiming to confirm or refute the established hypotheses. Using the SPSS program, an essential tool in social research for statistical analysis, we applied factorial analysis, the Chi-square test, and the Cronbach's Alpha test to measure the internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire.

The Likert scale was used to evaluate respondents' preferences, providing a simple and direct way for participants to express their opinion on various aspects related to smartphones. The Cronbach's Alpha test, as described by Mohsen & Reg (2011), allowed us to estimate the reliability of our scale, providing a measure of the internal consistency of the questionnaire. This approach is fundamental to ensuring the internal validity of the collected data (Mohsen & Reg, 2011).

Through factorial analysis, we were able to group the variables associated with different consumer expectations, providing us with a solid foundation for comparison with the specialized literature in the field (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). This method helped us identify and define the relationships between the variables in our study, facilitating understanding of the complexity of consumer behavior in the context of smartphone choice.

Using the Likert scale for all questionnaire questions allowed for a coherent and uniform evaluation of respondents' perceptions, with a range from one to seven for questions involving the assessment of multiple factors, thus providing a detailed picture of the importance of various smartphone features from consumers' perspectives.

Results and Discussions

In the results and discussions section, the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire was conducted in SPSS, aiming to verify the established hypotheses. The studied population, predominantly from Generation Z, showed a familiarity and predisposition towards intensive use of technology, especially in the realm of social networks and mobile devices. These characteristics are essential for understanding their behavior as consumers, particularly in the context of choosing and using smartphones.

The analysis began with the application of the Cronbach Alpha test to evaluate the reliability of the measurement instrument. The Cronbach's Alpha test indicated a value of 0,836, suggesting a high internal consistency of the questionnaire set of questions. A value above the threshold of 0,70 is considered adequate for scientific research, indicating that the questionnaire items are coherent and effectively measure the targeted concepts. This high internal consistency demonstrates that the measurement instrument is robust and reliable, allowing further analysis of the collected data.

Table 1 Summary of Cronbach's Alpha Test

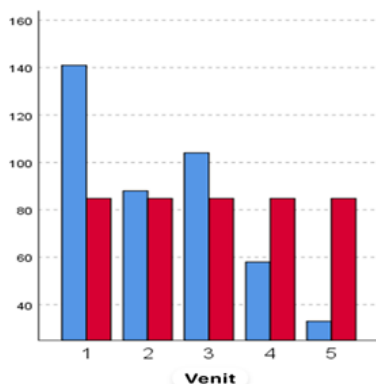
	N	%
Valid cases	424	100
Excluded	0	0
Total	424	100

Source: own research, exported from SPSS program

The next step of the analysis involved using factor analysis to identify the main components reflecting the expectations and preferences of consumers regarding smartphones. This method allowed grouping the data into 7 main components, reflecting various consumer expectations and preferences.

Chi-square analysis provided additional insights into how income influences the likelihood of purchasing a smartphone. By examining the detailed relationship between declared incomes and preferences for smartphone features, it was observed that Generation Z significantly values advanced features, regardless of budget constraints.

Figure 1: Respondents' Income Categories



Source: own research, exported from SPSS program

Figure 1 shows the number of respondents in different income categories. These were correlated with the results of factor analysis to analyze how different income intervals correlate with respondents' preferences for smartphone features. Thus, even though most respondents have lower incomes, they demonstrate a strong preference for phones with advanced technical features, demonstrating that aspects such as battery performance and storage capacity are prioritized in the purchasing decision, at the expense of price considerations.

Principal component analysis, an essential element of factor analysis, clarified how different expectations and preferences are grouped together, forming distinctive factors that influence the choice of a smartphone. These components, ranging from technical specifications to brand and technology, provide a comprehensive perspective on consumers' selection criteria.

Table 2 Component Matrix - Factor Analysis on Dataset

	Components						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Preferred brand		0,823					
Preferred operating system		0,842					
Price							
Battery capacity	0,882						
Storage	0,877						
4G/5G technology	0,875						
Camera performance	0,874						
Screen size	0,826						
Design	0,838						

Operating system	0,895						
Brand importance	0,780						
Phone age	0,805						
Testing possibility	0,717						
Fast charging	0,878						
Thickness	0,667						
Battery life expectations						0,671	
Testing							0,946
Consumer behavior statements					0,712		
Characteristics					0,650		
Next immediate purchase			0,669				
Income			0,680	↖			
Age				0,759			
Environment						0,670	
Occupation					-0,671		
Gender					0,543		

Source: own research, exported from SPSS program

This table highlights the components identified through factor analysis, emphasizing the essential features that respondents value when choosing a smartphone. The interpretation of these components provides guidance for manufacturers in developing products that meet the needs and preferences of Generation Z consumers.

Detailed analysis of consumer preferences showed a clear trend towards valuing technological innovation and user experience. Generation Z, being highly connected and digitized, places particular emphasis on the performance of mobile devices, including connectivity speed, camera image quality, and battery life.

The results obtained from the data analysis underline the necessity for smartphone manufacturers to focus on innovation and adaptation to the continuously changing market demands. A deep understanding of Generation Z consumer preferences offers valuable opportunities to develop products that meet their expectations, enhancing satisfaction and brand loyalty.

The importance of advanced technical specifications, user experience, and the possibility of product testing before purchase are key aspects to consider in product development and marketing strategies. This analysis, through the integration of advanced statistical methods and careful data interpretation, contributes to a better understanding of the smartphone market dynamics and identifies future directions for innovation and meeting the needs of Generation Z consumers.

Based on the results obtained using statistical tools, the evaluation and validation of each proposed hypothesis in this research were carried out. Thus, Hypothesis 1 assumes that Generation Z is more interested in the performance and technical characteristics of a smartphone than its price. To verify this hypothesis, factor analysis and Cronbach's Alpha test were used to assess the consistency and relevance of the dataset.

Factor analysis revealed seven main components, of which the first component focuses on essential technical features appreciated by Generation Z: battery capacity (coefficient 0,882), camera performance (0,874), 4G/5G technology (0,875), and fast charging (0,878). These values, significantly above the acceptability threshold, indicate a strong preference among consumers for advanced technical specifications, highlighting the importance they place on innovation and product performance.

The Cronbach's Alpha test value of 0,836 for the set of 26 analyzed variables confirms a high internal consistency of the measurement instrument. This suggests that questions related to preferences for technical characteristics versus price considerations are cohesive and capable of efficiently measuring consumer orientations.

Placing these data in the context of Generation Z consumer behavior, a clear trend towards valuing innovation and quality over cost is observed. This result is corroborated by the demographic data of the study, which shows that the majority of respondents fall into the income category of 1000-3500 lei, indicating that even under moderate income conditions, preferences for advanced features remain predominant.

The detailed analysis of Hypothesis 1 demonstrates that Generation Z prioritizes the quality and technological innovation of smartphones over the purchase price. This finding has significant implications for smartphone manufacturers and retailers, suggesting that marketing strategies and product development should focus more on improving and highlighting technical specifications and innovative features to attract and maintain the loyalty of consumers in this demographic cohort.

This in-depth analysis of Hypothesis 1, based on statistical data and careful evaluations, provides valuable insights into the dynamics of the smartphone market and the consumption behavior of Generation Z, highlighting current and future trends in consumer preferences.

Hypothesis 2 suggests that the brand and specific features of a smartphone play a significant role in the purchasing decision process of Generation Z. To validate this hypothesis, both factor analysis and interpretations of data resulting from the chi-square test were used to understand the importance of these factors.

Factor analysis revealed that brand existence and preferred operating system were among the factors with significant importance, with extraction coefficients of 0,780 for brand and 0,720 for the operating system. These values indicate a clear preference and orientation towards certain brands and operating systems, highlighting their crucial role in choosing a smartphone.

Additionally, other characteristics such as battery capacity and camera quality, which were associated with brand preferences in the data analysis, emphasize that consumers not only follow a certain brand but also have specific expectations from the products of these brands.

This marked preference for certain brands and the associated characteristics underscores that Generation Z highly values brand identity and reputation, alongside the technological innovations they offer. It is evident that these consumers are well-informed and have precise expectations when it comes to choosing a new smartphone, seeking not only a product that meets specific functional criteria but

Validation of Hypothesis 2 provides valuable insight into the strategies smartphone manufacturers must adopt to attract and maintain the loyalty of Generation Z. Emphasizing the building and maintenance of a strong brand identity, along with continuous development of innovative technical features, proves crucial for success in this competitive market. Thus, manufacturers

must focus their efforts not only on improving the technical aspects of their products but also on reinforcing brand perception to effectively meet the needs and expectations of this demographic cohort.

Hypothesis 3 suggests that charging duration and battery capacity expectations are significant factors for smartphone users, especially for Generation Z. This hypothesis is based on the premise that device autonomy and charging efficiency are essential in the fast-paced lifestyles of young consumers.

Factor analysis highlighted the particular importance placed on battery-related characteristics, with significant coefficients for battery capacity (0,882) and fast charging (0,878). These values indicate a clear priority of Generation Z for phones that offer extended autonomy and quick charging solutions, thus validating Hypothesis 3.

Respondents ranked battery capacity and fast charging among the most desired features of a smartphone. This trend reflects the need for high device autonomy to support intensive usage, characteristic of the lifestyle of young consumers who are constantly on the move and rely on their mobile devices for a wide range of daily activities.

The results of the analysis underline the opportunity for smartphone manufacturers to invest in the development and promotion of innovative battery technologies and fast charging solutions. Increasing device energy efficiency and reducing the time required for a full charge can serve as focal points in marketing strategies, emerging as crucial differentiation factors in a competitive market.

Hypothesis 3 is clearly supported by the analysis data, demonstrating that charging duration and battery capacity are among the most valued characteristics of smartphones by Generation Z. This finding offers valuable directions for innovation in mobile device design and technology, highlighting the need for manufacturers to pay increased attention to the development of efficient and rapid energy solutions that meet the demands and expectations of young consumers.

This detailed analysis of Hypothesis 3 contributes to understanding the complexity of consumer preferences in the digital era, guiding mobile device manufacturers towards prioritizing technological innovations that bring significant improvements in autonomy and charging efficiency.

Hypothesis 4 advances the idea that there is a significant relationship between consumers' income levels and their likelihood of making immediate purchases of smartphones, assuming that products meet their specific criteria and needs.

The analysis revealed a distinct component called "Purchase Potential," which directly correlates respondents' income levels with their buying intentions. The income variable had a significant value in this component (0,680), suggesting that while economic factors influence purchasing decisions, there is a clear predisposition among respondents with higher incomes to invest in smartphones that meet their high standards of quality and performance.

This finding emphasizes that, despite a wide spectrum of incomes among Generation Z, quality and compliance with specific needs are predominant factors in the decision-making process. Even respondents with lower incomes demonstrate a tendency to value the advanced features of products, indicating that the purchasing decision is less influenced by budget constraints when the product meets personal expectations and technological needs.

For smartphone manufacturers and retailers, these results suggest the need to segment and personalize offers according to different income levels of consumers, with a particular emphasis on meeting specific needs and providing clear added value. This may include flexible financing

packages, loyalty programs, or personalized offers that facilitate access to advanced technology for all income segments.

Hypothesis 4 is supported by data, demonstrating that the relationship between income and purchase intention is complex and not solely determined by financial capacity. Prioritizing the needs and expectations of consumers, regardless of income level, is a key strategy to attract and maintain customer loyalty in a continuously evolving technological landscape. This analysis provides valuable insight into how smartphone manufacturers can address different market segments, emphasizing the importance of adapting offerings to the diverse requirements of Generation Z consumers.

Conclusions

The article has deeply explored the transformations brought about by the Fourth Industrial Revolution in consumer behavior, with a particular focus on Generation Z. The transformation of customer expectations, product enhancement through data analysis, formation of new strategic partnerships, and the evolution of organizations towards digital operating models underscore the crucial role of emerging technologies in redefining markets.

The detailed analysis of Generation Z consumer behavior has revealed specific preferences for quick interactions, easy access to information and services, as well as a tendency towards spontaneous purchases influenced by social factors and technology accessibility. These characteristics emphasize the need for continuous adaptation of marketing strategies to meet the changing expectations of this demographic cohort.

The validation of the research hypotheses has confirmed several key points:

1. Generation Z prioritizes the quality and technological innovation of smartphones over the purchase price, requiring manufacturers to focus on improving technical specifications and innovative features.
2. The brand and specific characteristics of a smartphone play a significant role in the decision-making process, highlighting the importance of brand identity and reputation.
3. Charging duration and battery capacity are critical aspects in choosing a smartphone, indicating the need for the development of battery technologies and fast charging solutions.
4. The relationship between income and purchase intention is complex, and prioritizing the needs and expectations of consumers, regardless of income level, is crucial for attracting and maintaining customer loyalty.

These conclusions emphasize the need for companies to implement marketing strategies that recognize and respond to changes in consumer behavior, especially those of Generation Z. Integrating technology into marketing strategies, as well as developing products that reflect consumers' values and expectations, becomes essential for long-term success.

Furthermore, building and maintaining a strong brand image that responds to the continuously changing expectations of consumers is vital for attracting and retaining customer loyalty. An integrated approach, taking into account the impact of technology on consumer behavior and the importance of effective communication through digital channels, will be decisive in generating value and meeting consumer needs.

This research highlights the importance of continuous adaptation and innovation in the digital era, with a special focus on understanding and meeting the needs of Generation Z, to successfully navigate the continuously evolving economic and social landscape.

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The Analysis of Health Infrastructure in the Public Health System in Romania

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Abstract: Public health infrastructure plays a crucial role in the health of a population. The delivery of population health capabilities, such as allocating resources based on a community health plan, analyzing data on preventive services use, and engaging community stakeholders in health improvement planning, is associated with increased public health system strength. Population health approaches, which aim to enhance the health of whole populations, have been successful in improving health outcomes and reducing health inequalities. An effective public health infrastructure is developed through several important factors. Strong institutional capacity, including public health laws that are responsive to contemporary public health issues, a skilled and empowered workforce, and an infrastructure capable of continuous monitoring, are among these important factors. A strong public health infrastructure and the implementation of population health strategies are essential for improving the health of a population. The main objective of this study is to analyze the health infrastructure in Romania's public health systems using a spatial distribution of the number of doctors, hospitals, and hospital beds. The data were collected at the county level using the National Institute of Statistics - Tempo online database for the period 2014-2021. The results reveal disparities in the availability and quality of health infrastructure in different regions. These challenges highlight the need for integrated systems to improve the management strategies or plans for healthcare service allocation, they must ensure fair access and overcome spatial inequities.

Key words: Health Infrastructure, Public Healthcare, Healthcare System, Health Planning.
JEL: I18, I15, I10

1. Introduction

The population's health should be improved as a health system's main goal. Instead of focusing on healthcare services, which mostly treat the symptoms of illnesses that have already appeared, governments must prioritize disease prevention and health promotion in order to achieve this aim (Brouwer et al., 2006). To put it another way, a successful health system must be focused on promoting public health in order to eradicate disease's fundamental causes and prevent avoidable morbidity and expenses. The common objective of promoting health is advanced when public health and health care are both prioritized and resources are distributed in accordance (Shi, 1995).

Access to healthcare is a fundamental human right that should be enjoyed by every individual at the highest attainable standard (CESCR, 2000). Health is a complex term and can be defined in various ways; the World Health Organization (WHO) defines it as a state of physical, mental, and social well-being (Sherif, 2007). A healthy society can support social and economic development by promoting good mental and physical ability and high social well-being among individuals, leading to their increased productivity and effectiveness.

Economic growth and healthcare have a close association. Governments offer fair and balanced healthcare that satisfies the requirements of all members of society when the rate of economic expansion grows. Economic growth, however, may not always facilitate the provision of equitable healthcare for a variety of reasons, including a lack of available health resources and insufficient preparation and implementation of short- and long-term plans for allocating healthcare services across areas with varying population densities (Drissy, 2015).

Achieving spatial equality in healthcare access requires an understanding of spatial planning and its role in offering an effective and fair healthcare system (Mokgalaka, 2014). Nonetheless, spatial planning refers to a set of techniques employed to deal with the arrangement of individuals and activities in diverse locations and timeframes (Dallhammer et al., 2016).

To be more exact, it is a series of purposeful acts that may be carried out at one or more geographical scales (national, regional, or local) within a defined timeframe. Spatial planning makes use of a variety of techniques and approaches to maximize the long-term utilization of existing natural and human resources. The spatial planning of the healthcare system involves detailed policies for providing healthcare services to individuals, such as programs and projects aimed at achieving optimal health levels for both individuals and society within a specific time period. These policies aim to make optimal use of available materials and human resources (Sherif, 2007).

The healthcare system encompasses organizations, institutions, and resources focused primarily on enhancing public health. Such a system should offer services that meet current and future demands and are equally accessible to all individuals. However, healthcare systems in both developing and developed countries face several issues. The most crucial problem is inadequate utilization and access to healthcare services among certain population groups due to the failure of healthcare service planning to consider the principle of equality. Improving the spatial performance of the healthcare services system in general can be achieved through standards-based spatial planning to address the inequality in the spatial distribution of healthcare services (Sherif, 2007).

2. Literature review

One of the service industries where the primary focus is on providing high-quality services is the medical industry. However, sustaining excellence in the new medical contexts is a challenging problem. In the present market context, medical advancements and high-quality treatment are essential, which fuels fierce competition amongst service providers (Moshood et al., 2020).

One of the most complex systems each of us faces in society is the healthcare system (Orr and Sankaran, 2007). Healthcare is a multidisciplinary environment in which physicians, specialists, pathologists, nurses, radiologic technologists, laboratory technicians, social workers, respiratory therapists, psychologists, counselors, pharmacists, and other healthcare professionals make decisions (Schubert et al., 2012).

Hospitals, clinics, clinic administrators, financial managers, pharmaceutical firms, human resources, ministries of health, health insurance companies, activist groups, educational organizations, and research communities comprise the healthcare sector. The increase in chronic diseases is the main driver of healthcare costs.

Monitoring and defending the public's health depend greatly on the health infrastructure. It is made up of reliable information and communication technology (ICT), skilled employees, and efficient organizations (Budillon et al., 2021). Building learning health systems, which include informational, governmental, and cultural infrastructures, is crucial for enhancing health outcomes (Vinson, 2021). Public health and infrastructure policy are intertwined, and making health and well-being the primary considerations when making infrastructure decisions can aid in achieving sustainable development objectives (Harris et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought attention to the necessity for robust and ready health systems that are equipped to identify, monitor, and react to health catastrophes (Dixon and Grannis, 2020). Overall, maintaining the health of all people and communities depends on a robust and resilient health infrastructure.

Infrastructure refers to the internal framework of a system or organization, the "substructure" that supports the "superstructure", and the overall foundation that supports the entire structure. This establishes the system's competence and ability to carry out its fundamental responsibilities and fulfill its core mandates, as well as the commensurate level of care and ease of access to healthcare in society (Okafor, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) has advised that the infrastructure for healthcare be "formal and enduring," necessitating a defined strategic emphasis that is sustained throughout time. This is necessary to ensure the delivery of high-quality services. It is expected that formal and long-lasting infrastructure would be sustained and maintained by the government on a regular basis, rather than on an as-needed or fragmented basis.

Both qualitatively and quantitatively, the word "health infrastructure" refers to the level of accessibility and care provided inside a country. It is assessed based on the quality of the physical, technological, and human resources that are accessible at a certain time. Within the healthcare surroundings, physical structure refers to the buildings and other permanent structures like pipe-borne water, excellent access roads, power, and so on, whereas technology refers to the equipment designed expressly for hospital usage, including procedures (Erinosho, 2006). This also includes technological equipment and supplies, whereas human resources are formed up

of healthcare personnel including physicians, pharmacists, nurses, midwives, laboratory techs, administrators, accountants, and other varying staff members. When all of these factors are considered, they provide the framework for healthcare delivery in any society and the factors that determine its infrastructure.

According to Adebayo and Oladeji (2006), the idea of the health system as its entirety includes the health policy, financial allocation, implementation, and monitoring. In terms of diagnosis, treatment, and compliance, this is more comprehensive and larger in concept than a combination of facilities and medical consultation. Additionally, it involves the recipients of healthcare as well as other elements or adjuncts to healthcare delivery.

In addition, according to these all-encompassing requirements, health infrastructure involves individuals, groups, and the legal system working together in a structured manner to mobilize and distribute resources expressly for disease management, sickness prevention, and injury treatment. On the one hand, it can be deduced that the organization of healthcare delivery is closely linked to the caliber of medical staff, effective administration, successful finance, and effective communication.

Because of advances in medical technology and population aging, global healthcare spending as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) is often increasing more quickly than total economic growth (Chernew and Newhouse, 2011). The hospital system is a significant factor in rising healthcare expenses and accounts for the majority of health spending in many nations in order to reduce costs and improve the value of health spending, reforms have focused on hospitals (Docteur and Oxley, 2003).

The demographics, medical knowledge, and budgetary restraints all continue to change, forcing public hospital systems to adapt. In general, during the past 20 years, hospitals have grown more effective and cost-conscious, and their role in the wider healthcare system has shrunk. The number of hospitals and hospital beds are on the decline (OECD, 2012).

Hospitals continue to consume a significant percentage of healthcare spending in middle- and low-income nations. Health expenditure has changed, nevertheless, as a result of access to cutting-edge or expensive technology, modifications to institutional structures for the delivery of healthcare, changes in clinical recommendations, and the prevalence of certain diseases. Recent patterns in high-income nations show that inpatient care expenditure - which is mostly supplied in hospitals - represented a lesser proportion of the rise in health spending than in OECD countries with lower incomes. This shows a shift in health spending in wealthy nations from hospitals to other services like long-term care.

3. Research methodology

The purpose of this study is to analyze the health infrastructure in the public health systems in Romania using a spatial distribution of the number of hospitals, number of doctors and the number of hospital beds. The data used are at the county level using the National Institute of Statistics - Tempo online database and several spatial analysis tools were applied to measure the optimal distribution of the number of hospital beds in relation to the Romanian population.

Study area

The study area is represented by the 42 counties of the 8 development regions of Romania (as shown in Figure 1).

Figure 1: Study area - Romania



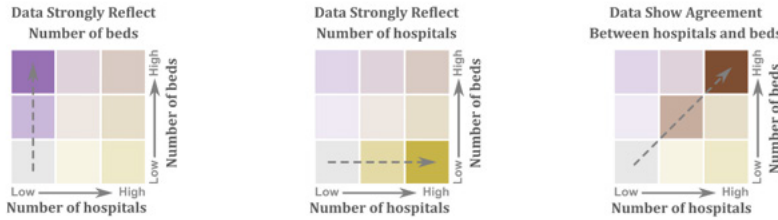
Source: Data provided by <https://www.naturalearthdata.com/>

Spatial analysis

The data used were distributed over the 42 counties of Romania and a conventional spatial analysis was performed on them. A database was created containing the number of doctors, the number of hospitals, the number of hospital beds and the population at the county level. The spatial analysis was performed on the data sets for the period 2014-2021 as follows: specific intervals were created for each type of data studied and a group of 8 different maps was developed for each type of data, although in the content of the article there are only 3 representative maps: the year 2014 (the first year of the analysis) and the last 2 years - 2020 and 2021 (beginning and period of the pandemic crisis).

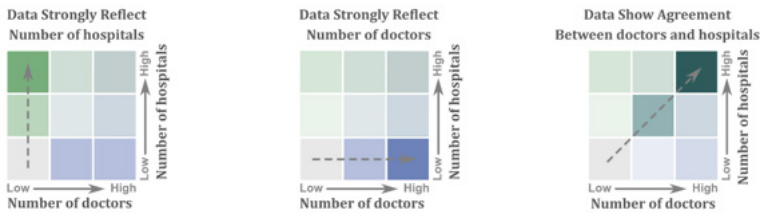
The graphical representation method used is called a bivariate choropleth and types of sets have been made. In the first set, the first variable is represented by the number of hospital beds, vertically oriented in the legend (see Figure 2) with values from low to high (up@down), and the second variable is represented by the number of hospitals, horizontally oriented in the legend with values from low to high (left@right). In the second set, the first variable is the number of hospitals, oriented vertically in the legend (see Figure 3) with values from low to high (up@down), and the second variable is the number of doctors, oriented horizontally in the legend with values from low to high (left@right). In the third set, the first variable is the number of hospital beds, oriented vertically in the legend (see Figure 4) with values from low to high (up@down), and the second variable is the number of population, oriented horizontally in the legend with values from low to high (left@right). The aggregation of the variables can be seen in the Data Show Agreement. The color of the map is given by the number of classes resulting from the aggregation of the variables. QGIS (spatial analysis) and Inkscape (vector graphics) were used for the maps.

Figure 2: Bivariate Choropleth map legend for correlating the number of hospitals and the number of beds



Source: Authors' own research contribution

Figure 3: Bivariate Choropleth map legend for correlating the number of hospitals and the number of doctors



Source: Authors' own research contribution

Figure 3: Bivariate Choropleth map legend for correlating the number of hospitals and the number of doctors



Source: Authors' own research contribution

4. Results and discussions

The right to health, as the right to health care, is the most expensive social right in Europe and has a significant financial impact on the budgets of all Member States, whether they have universal health care systems or insurance-based health care systems.

The correlation between the number of hospital beds at the county level and the spatial distribution of hospitals depicts the state of healthcare in Romania (Figure 5). In 2014, Bucharest had the highest number of registered hospitals (50), followed by Cluj and Iași counties, each having

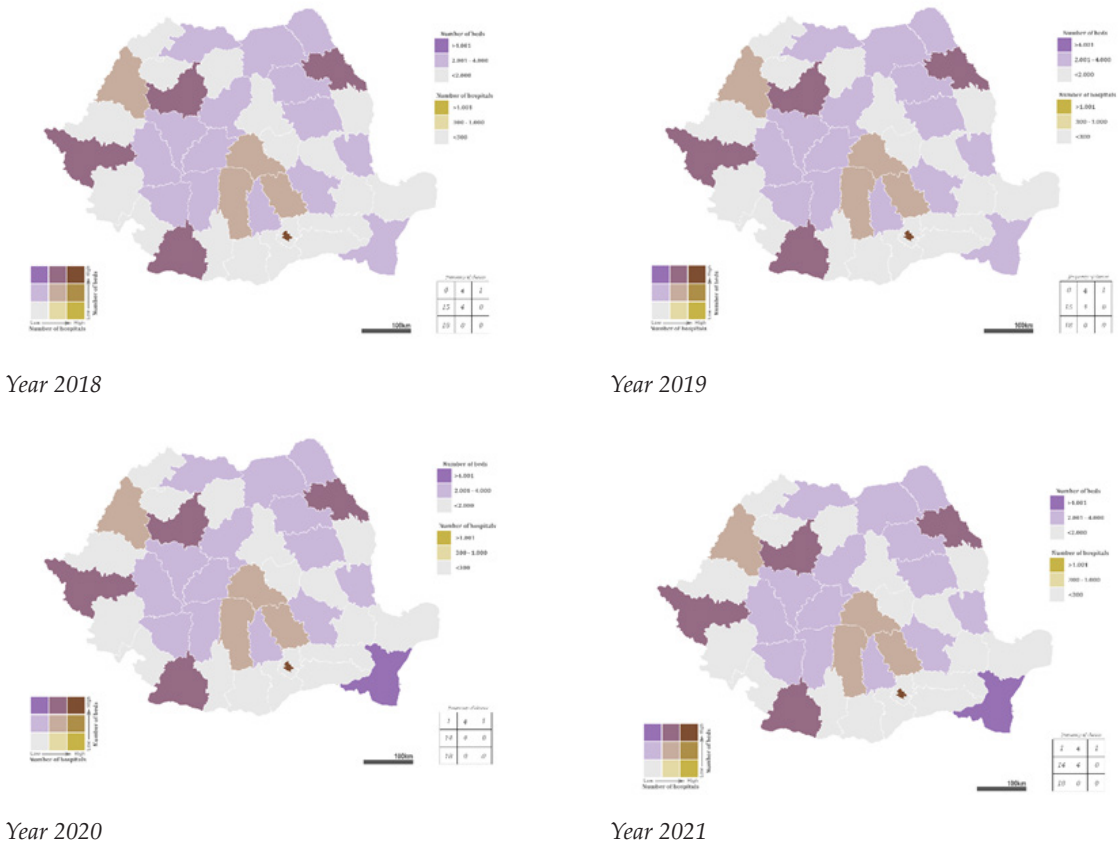
19 hospitals. Prahova County had 16 hospitals, and Arges County had 15 hospitals. As of the end of the analysis period, the situation remained the same. Bucharest has 50 hospitals, while Iasi County, Cluj County, Prahova County, and Arges County each have 19 or 15 hospitals.

In 2014, Bucharest registered the highest number of hospital beds with 19,862, followed by Iasi County with 6,715, Cluj County with 6,392, Timis County with 5,238, and Dolj County with 4,488. In 2021, Bucharest recorded the highest number of hospital beds at 20,447, followed by Iasi County with 6,903 hospital beds, Cluj County with 6,361 hospital beds, Timis County with 5,305 hospital beds, and Dolj County with 4,493 hospital beds. These same counties consistently reported the highest number of hospital beds throughout the analyzed period.

The correlation between the number of hospitals and beds reflects the significant spatial regions and the changes in the indicators over time.

Figure 5: Spatial distribution of the number of hospitals and the number of beds per county in Romania for the period 2014-2021

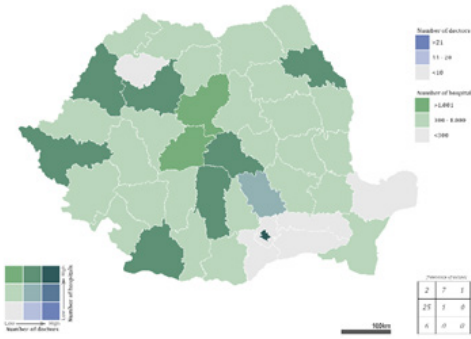




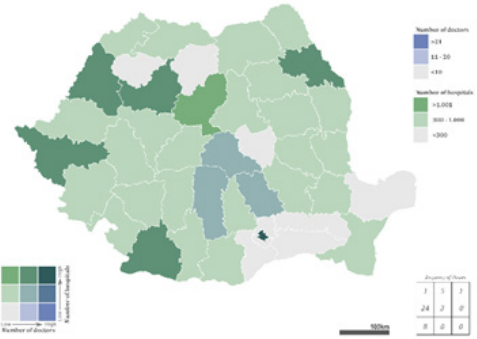
Source: Data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INS)

The distribution of doctors throughout the country is noteworthy (Figure 6). In the initial year of analysis, it was found that the regions with the most doctors are as follows when viewed spatially: In 2021, Bucharest has 11,034 doctors followed by Cluj County with 3,674 doctors, Iasi County with 3,688 doctors, Timiș County with 3,324 doctors, and Mures County with 2,330 doctors. Previously, Bucharest had 7,076 doctors and Cluj County had 2,891 doctors, while Iasi County, Timiș County, and Dolj County had 2,779, 2,304, and 2,143 doctors, respectively.

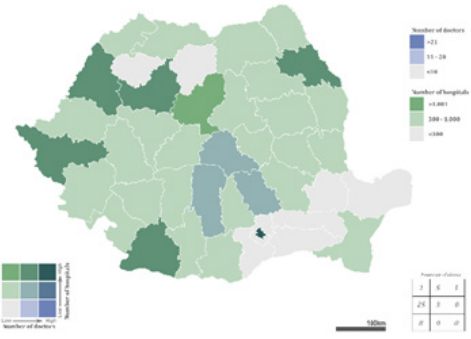
There are remarkable spatial patterns as well as temporal shifts in the correlation between the number of hospitals and the number of doctors.



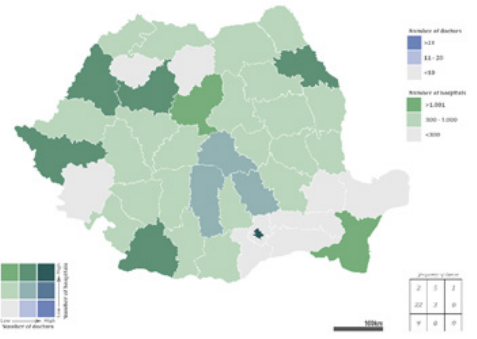
Year 2014



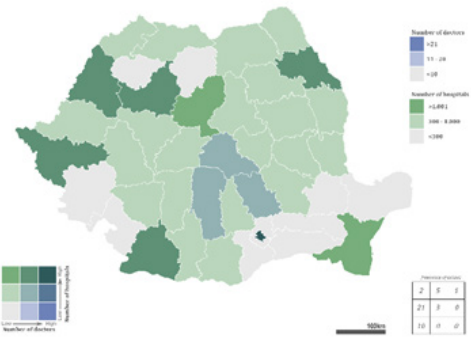
Year 2015



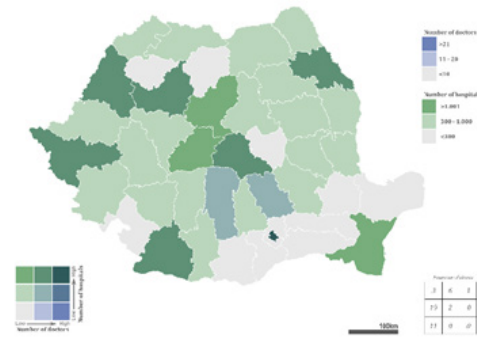
Year 2016



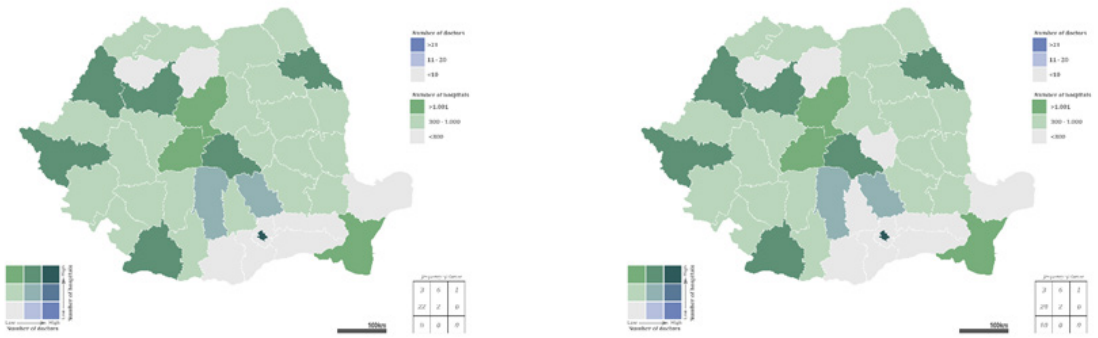
Year 2017



Year 2018



Year 2019



Year 2020

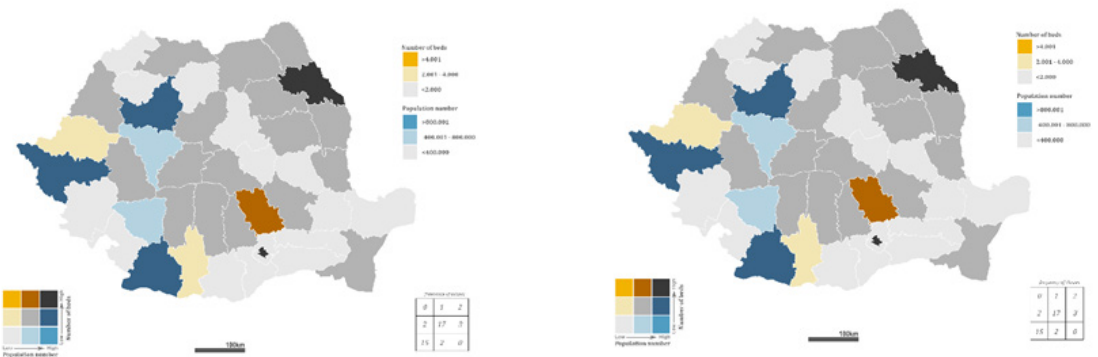
Year 2021

Source: Data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INS)

Correlating the spatial distribution of hospital beds with the national population presents a controversial situation (Figure 7).

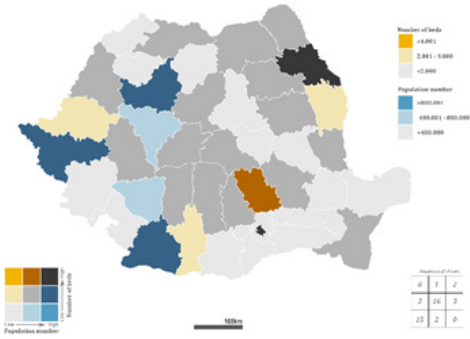
There are regions with inadequate hospital bed coverage, causing issues within the health-care system. Significant bed numbers are located within Bucharest Municipality, Iasi County, Cluj County, Timis County, and Dolj County in both 2014 and 2021. The most populated areas, including Bucharest Municipality, Iasi County, Prahova County, Suceava County, and Constanta County, also have large agglomerations.

Figure 7: Spatial distribution of the number of beds and population number per county in Romania

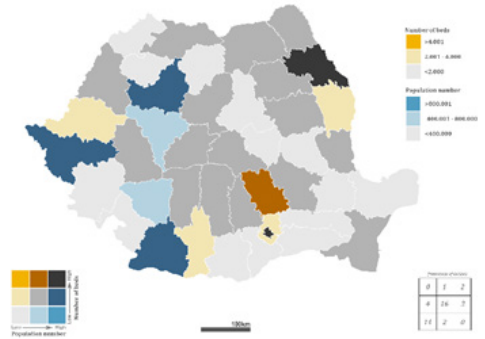


Year 2014

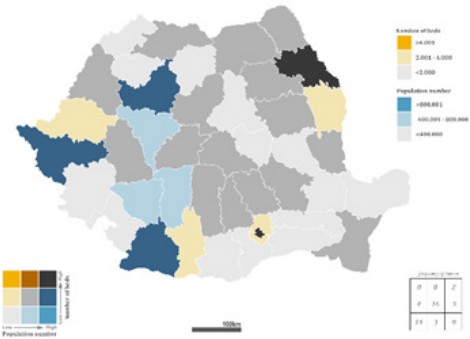
Year 2015



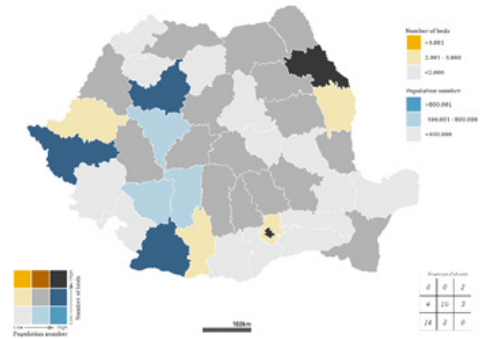
Year 2016



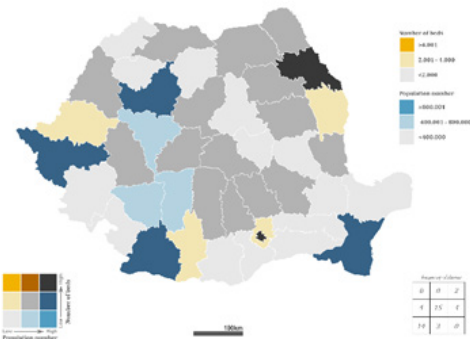
Year 2017



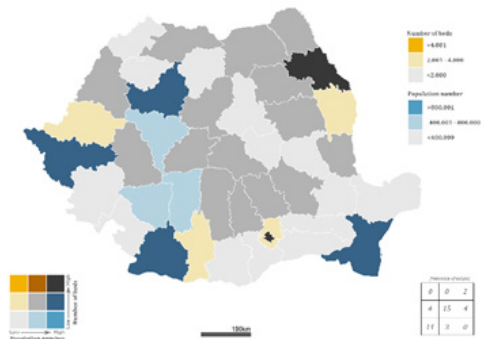
Year 2018



Year 2019



Year 2020



Year 2021

Source: Data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INS)

To make health infrastructure more equitable and accessible, there is a need to focus on interactions across urban and rural areas, addressing trade-offs and synergies, decision-making, institutional arrangements, and effective co-production of knowledge (Pearsall et al., 2021). The decentralization mechanism should be implemented to synergize healthcare across states and ensure equal distribution of physical health infrastructure and public health resources (Rymbai and Thangkhiew, 2022). A multidimensional and complex public health infrastructure is required to achieve health equity, which should be responsive to current and emerging priorities and capable of providing the foundation for health initiatives (Dean et al., 2016). Infrastructure should integrate hospitals into the broader healthcare system, promoting accessibility and societal buy-in, and supporting effective health promotion, prevention, and self-care for the whole population (Luxon, 2015).

Hospitals face the challenge of reducing their expenses while the demand for healthcare services continues to rise. To maintain a high quality of care, entities are consistently searching for chances to decrease their costs and enhance their operational efficiency (Rais and Viana, 2011; Yanamandra, 2018). Hospitals receive and handle a wide range of goods that are directly related to patient care, such as pharmaceutical products, medical consumables, sterile items, blood, laboratory samples, food, and linen (Landry and Beaulieu, 2013; Volland et al., 2017).

5. Conclusions

The healthcare system is made up of different components, such as infrastructure, medicines, medical products, financing, and human resources for health. According to general consensus, effective leadership and governance are critical and relevant to address these factors, including the interaction between different components.

Health infrastructure plays a crucial role in improving health system performance and child health outcomes. Studies have shown that different types of infrastructure, such as transport, electricity, and ICT, have a significant positive impact on population health outcomes, including reducing under-five mortality and improving maternal and infant health (Osakede, 2022; Gillani, 2022). However, there are disparities in the availability and quality of health infrastructure across different regions. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the weaknesses in public health infrastructure, emphasizing the need for targeted implementation of high-value population health capabilities to strengthen the public health system and improve health outcomes (Hogg-Graham, 2022).

Improving health infrastructure in developing countries faces several key challenges. Limited health care facilities and high population densities contribute to healthcare access issues, exacerbated by manual processes and affordability concerns. The COVID pandemic has further overwhelmed already scarce health systems, particularly impacting the poor and vulnerable members of society. However, the pandemic also presents an opportunity to utilize information technology to enhance access to healthcare services, considering the high penetration of mobile technology in developing countries. Additionally, the quality of health services in many developing countries is poor, with weak incentives for public sector health workers. Reforms that

strengthen incentives show promise, but institutional details are crucial. The number of hospitals and doctors are the main indicators of accessibility. Traditionally, the number of hospitals and beds have been the main capacity indicators for healthcare organizations.

Life expectancy is increasing, technology is developing, and the availability of treatments is growing quite quickly. Health should be seen as an investment in both society and the economy, a driver of growth for circular prosperity between technology suppliers (companies), the use of technical devices during an emergency and routine care (hospitals and medical professionals), and the benefit of those (the patients).

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Building Bridges to Success: The Role of Career Management and Education for Emerging Employees

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Abstract: In the rapidly evolving landscape of the global job market, the ability to effectively manage one's career has become increasingly vital. This article delves into the essence of career management skills among Business Administration students at the University of Bucharest, aiming to illuminate the pivotal role these competencies play in shaping the professional destinies of emerging employees. Drawing upon a comprehensive survey of 257 students, this research seeks to evaluate the current state of career management education, identify the key skills and resources deemed essential for success, and assess the demand for further specialized training in this domain. The foundational premise of this study is rooted in the acknowledgment of career management as a crucial determinant of professional development and success. Through a methodical analysis that integrates empirical data with theoretical insights from renowned scholars in the field, such as Lemeni, Miclea, Schein, and Holland, the article aims to bridge the gap between academic preparation and real-world business challenges. By examining students' perceptions, experiences, and as-

pirations regarding career management, this research endeavors to offer actionable recommendations for educational institutions to enhance their curricular and extracurricular offerings in support of students' career aspirations. Furthermore, this article investigates the hypothesis that a robust foundation in career management skills significantly contributes to professional success and satisfaction. It also explores the role of digital and interactive resources in modern career planning and development strategies. Ultimately, this study not only highlights the critical importance of career management skills but also underscores the need for continuous learning and adaptability in the face of an ever-changing professional environment. Through this exploration, the article aims to contribute valuable insights to both the academic community and business professionals, fostering a deeper understanding of effective career management practices.

Key words: Career Management, Professional Development, Business Education, Lifelong Learning, Job Market Adaptability, Digital Learning Resources.

JEL Classification: I23, J24, M12, M54

Introduction

In today's dynamic and increasingly complex job market, the imperative for robust career management strategies has never been more pronounced. As industries evolve and new professions emerge, individuals are faced with the challenging task of navigating their professional paths amidst a landscape characterized by uncertainty and rapid change. This reality underscores the significance of career management skills, particularly for students poised to enter the workforce. Among these, Business Administration students at the University of Bucharest (UniBuc) represent a cohort for whom such competencies are not merely advantageous but essential. These students stand at the cusp of entering the business sector, a realm where the ability to adapt, plan, and strategically manage one's career trajectory can markedly influence professional success and personal fulfilment.

The relevance and timeliness of this theme stem from the ongoing shifts in the global economy, technological advancements, and the changing nature of work itself. These factors collectively amplify the demand for individuals who are not only academically proficient but also adept at steering their careers with acumen and agility. Moreover, the increasing emphasis on lifelong learning and the continuous development of professional skills further accentuate the need for effective career management as a critical component of long-term career resilience and satisfaction. Within the framework of the fourth industrial revolution, succinctly referred to as "Industry 4.0", economies worldwide encounter significant challenges that span across all sectors of economic activity. The rapid and extensive changes ushered in by this new digitalization era affect not only corporate entities but also the everyday lives of individuals (Veith & Costea, 2019).

This article, therefore, seeks to explore the intricacies of career management skills among Business Administration students at the University of Bucharest, offering insights into how these future professionals perceive, value, and seek to enhance their ability to manage their careers. By shedding light on the specific skills, resources, and training deemed essential by this demographic, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on preparing graduates for the complexities of the modern business environment. Additionally, this research endeavours to provide

actionable recommendations for educational institutions to better support their students in developing the requisite competencies for successful career management.

Literature review

The field of career management is vast, encompassing an array of definitions, theoretical perspectives, and empirical studies that contribute to our understanding of career development within organizational contexts. This literature review aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the evolving nature of career management, integrating the contributions of seminal authors and their implications for both individuals and organizations.

Career management has historically been perceived as the progression or advancement within a specific field, aiming for higher positions, rewards, and influence. However, this conception has undergone significant transformation. As highlighted by Lemeni and Miclea (2010), career management now encompasses a broader scope, recognizing the importance of personal development across various occupations and the entire organizational landscape. This shift reflects a deeper understanding of career as not merely a linear path but a complex journey marked by personal growth, adaptability, and the accumulation of diverse experiences.

The literature presents several perspectives on career development, each offering unique insights into the nature of career progression:

- Career as Advancement: Traditionally focusing on upward mobility within an organizational or professional hierarchy.
- Career as a Profession: Distinguishing careers from jobs by categorizing certain occupations as careers based on their status, required qualifications, or societal value.
- Career as a Series of Positions: Viewing career as a succession of roles an individual undertakes throughout their professional life, emphasizing the diversity of experiences.
- Career as Roles Related to Experience: This perspective, rooted in management theory, adopts a subjective approach to career, focusing on an individual's work experience history, personal concepts, aspirations, successes, or failures.

Lemeni and Miclea (2010) offer a definition of career that synthesizes these perspectives, describing it as "a succession of an individual's work roles" and "a series of separate, but inter-related experiences." This conceptualization underscores the importance of viewing a career as a sequence of roles and experiences, thereby highlighting its comprehensive and sequential nature.

Douglas T. Hall expands the conceptual framework of career by incorporating both subjective elements, such as experiences and roles played, and objective elements like attitudes and behaviors exhibited (David, 2014). This dual focus proposes a dynamic framework within which individuals navigate their career paths, reflecting on personal qualities, actions, and encountered events. In a volatile business world, managers need to adapt their leadership style and become proactive so that they can manage any difficult situations that arise in a timely manner (Minciu, Berar, & Dobrea, 2020).

Two pivotal theories in understanding career development and management are highlighted:

- Holland's Career Choice Theory: Focuses on the match between individuals' personality types and their career choices.
- Schein's Career Anchors: Identifies core values and motivations that guide individuals in their career paths and decisions.

These theoretical frameworks offer essential insights into the factors influencing career choices and the principles underlying career development paths.

The review further explores the lifecycle of career development, drawing on Schein (1978), who identifies seven stages of career development, each presenting distinct challenges and opportunities for growth. This segmentation is crucial for understanding the dynamic nature of career progression, emphasizing the significance of transitions that often necessitate reassessment and realignment with evolving self-concepts and life circumstances (Serbanescu, 2011).

In an increasingly complex business environment, influenced by the development of technology and the exchange of information, new skills, such as critical thinking, become more and more required in the labour market (Dumitru, et al., 2023). Jansen (2007) underscores the complexity of lifestyle changes within the context of career management. This approach calls for a nuanced understanding that recognizes the impact of external factors such as the social environment, support levels, resources, and personal adaptability on career paths. This perspective is vital for appreciating the diverse and individualized nature of career development.

Addressing common misconceptions, Duta O. (2012) challenges several myths surrounding career planning and development, including the beliefs that careers are linear and that hard work alone guarantees success. This discussion is crucial for fostering a realistic understanding of career development, emphasizing the need for resilience, adaptability, and continuous learning.

Career management is described by Jansen (2007) as a complex process that aligns individual career goals with organizational needs. This strategic approach involves formulating goals, strategies, and plans to meet the human resource needs of an organization while assisting individuals in achieving their career objectives. Mironov (2017) echoes this sentiment, describing career management as a process that designs the development of individuals within the organization, taking into account both organizational needs and individual preferences.

The literature outlines the primary objectives of career management, including promoting appropriate career development policies, integrating individual aspirations with organizational goals, and developing career plans that support both employee growth and organizational objectives (Cristea, 2012). These objectives serve as a guideline for effective career management practices.

Career planning emerges as an essential component of career management, involving the identification of objectives, exploration of career options, development of competencies, and strategic decision-making (Pescaru, 2021). This process is integral to achieving career success and satisfaction. Furthermore, understanding the job market and aligning individual skills and qualifications with market needs are highlighted as critical aspects of career planning (Jigau, 2001). To capitalize on emerging business opportunities, embracing automation and digitalization while cultivating new markets, production methodologies, and products is imperative. The advent of Industry 4.0 has demonstrably enhanced productivity and efficiency. Although it has led to a contraction in employment within certain industrial segments, it has concurrently fostered the creation of more highly skilled and productive positions within the information technology sector (Veith, 2018).

Pânișoară and Pânișoară (2010) emphasize the interrelationship between individual career

aspirations and organizational development strategies. This synergy underscores the organization's role in facilitating professional development and creating an environment conducive to learning and growth.

Unpredictable changes in the business environment, such as economic instability, difficult forecasting of future activities and the increasing number of factors that need to be taken into account in the development of investment projects are causing essential modifications in organisations (Minciu, Berar, & Dobrea, 2021). Organizational career planning entails identifying employees, determining career paths, allocating responsibilities, and developing individual plans (Negovan, 2010). This structured approach is essential for guiding career development within the organizational context, ensuring a match between organizational needs and the potential of employees (Vlăsceanu, 2002). A crucial facet concerning the impact of digitalization on the growth of remote professional activities is the competencies required for employees to sustain their positions over the long term (Veith, Isbaita & Marinescu, 2021).

This literature review has provided a detailed examination of career management, integrating key theoretical perspectives, empirical studies, and practical insights. The discussions underscore the complexity and dynamism of career development, highlighting the importance of adaptability, continuous learning, and the alignment of individual aspirations with organizational goals. As the field continues to evolve, the insights garnered from this review contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying effective career management and planning.

Research methodology

This research, conducted through a questionnaire aimed at Business Administration students from the University of Bucharest, with 257 respondents, sets a foundation for exploring the emerging needs in career orientation and professional training. It also seeks to gather information on best practices and resources utilized in career management. The utilization of SPSS software to analyse the data with the chi-square test enriches the research by providing a robust statistical basis to assess the relationships and trends within the collected data, thereby offering valuable insights into the effectiveness of career management competencies development and its impact on employment opportunities and industry requirements understanding.

The choice to process the collected data using SPSS with the chi-square test is pivotal for several reasons:

- Statistical Rigor because SPSS provides a comprehensive platform for statistical analysis, ensuring the reliability and validity of the research findings.
- The chi-square test is particularly useful for examining the relationship between categorical variables, making it an appropriate tool for evaluating the objectives set against the formulated hypotheses.
- This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how career management skills development impacts professional success and satisfies individual needs in this domain.

By focusing on the objectives that directly relate to the research hypotheses, the study aims to:

- Assess whether a formal framework for career management skills development exists in the target country and its implementation within the educational system.
- Evaluate the participants' level of knowledge regarding career management and identify the competencies deemed relevant in this context.
- Determine if these identified competencies are incorporated into the participants' education system and if activities promoting these competencies are being conducted.

The research hypotheses are designed to test the impact and effectiveness of career management skills development:

Hypothesis 1: The development of career management skills positively affects professional success.

Hypothesis 2: The provision of specialized programs and resources in career management meets the needs and requirements of individuals in this area.

The methodology, including the collection of data through a questionnaire and its subsequent analysis using SPSS and the chi-square test, serves multiple purposes:

- It ensures that the research objectives are directly aligned with testing the formulated hypotheses, providing a clear path to evaluating the study's aims.
- By analysing the data from 257 students, the research can offer detailed insights into the current landscape of career management needs among young professionals and students.
- The statistical analysis provides evidence-based conclusions on the effectiveness of career management programs and resources, supporting or refuting the research hypotheses with empirical data.

This methodological approach enhances the study's ability to provide actionable insights into the development of career management competencies, the role of specialized programs and resources, and their impact on individuals' professional success and satisfaction. Through this research, the study aims to contribute valuable knowledge to the field of career management and education, offering guidance for future initiatives and programs designed to support individuals in navigating their professional paths successfully.

Results

By applying the chi-square test through SPSS, this study has meticulously analysed responses to the first five questions of the questionnaire, shedding light on the perspectives and experiences of 257 participants regarding official frameworks, sector involvement, educational system implementations, knowledge levels, and requisite skills for career management.

1. Official Framework for Career Management Skills Development

The findings indicate a mixed awareness and acknowledgment of an official framework for career management skills development within the country. While nearly half of the respondents (49.1%) affirm the existence of such a framework, a significant portion (45.6%) is unsure, pointing to a gap in communication or accessibility to this information. This variance in responses underscores the need for clearer dissemination of information regarding career management resources and frameworks.

2. Sector Utilization of Career Management Activities

The data reveal that career management activities span various sectors, with a notable emphasis on the educational sector, including "School" (17.5%) and "University" (64.9%) sectors. This indicates a significant focus on developing career management competencies within the educational framework, suggesting that institutions of learning are pivotal in equipping students with necessary career management skills. The inclusion of other sectors like "Public Employment Service" (21.1%) and "Adult Education" (19.3%) highlights the broader applicability and necessity of career management activities beyond traditional educational settings.

3. Implementation of Career Management Skills Activities in the Educational System

A substantial majority of respondents (61.4%) acknowledge the implementation of career management activities within the educational system, suggesting an active effort to integrate career management into educational curricula. However, the fact that 19.3% of participants are either unaware of such activities or believe they are not implemented indicates potential areas for improvement in program visibility and accessibility.

4. Knowledge Level Regarding Career Management

The assessment of respondents' self-reported knowledge levels reveals a broad spectrum of familiarity with career management, from very low to high. The distribution of responses suggests a diverse understanding and engagement with career management principles among participants, emphasizing the need for targeted educational efforts to enhance awareness and knowledge across the student body.

5. Skills Deemed Important in Career Management

Participants highlight several key skills essential for effective career management, including self-image development, work-life balance, adaptability, self-awareness, and support building for career choices. These responses point to a comprehensive view of career management that extends beyond mere job-seeking strategies to encompass personal development, emotional intelligence, and continuous learning.

The results from question one to five underscore the significance of career management skills development as a multifaceted endeavour that is recognized and valued across different sectors, particularly within the educational system. The varied awareness of official frameworks and the diverse assessment of personal knowledge levels indicate both the successes and challenges in current career management education and support structures. The identification of essential skills for career management reflects a holistic understanding of the competencies needed to navigate today's dynamic job market, emphasizing the importance of personal development, adaptability, and lifelong learning in achieving career success.

These findings lay the groundwork for further analysis and discussions regarding the remaining questionnaire items. They also provide a basis for evaluating the research hypotheses concerning the positive impact of career management skills development on professional success and the adequacy of specialized programs and resources in meeting individual career management needs.

6. Implementation of Career Management Skills in Education

The findings reveal that a majority (57.9%) of respondents acknowledge the implementation of career management competencies within their education system, indicating active efforts

to foster these skills among students. However, the presence of respondents who are either unaware of such initiatives (24.6%) or believe they are not implemented (17.5%) suggests a need for increased visibility and communication of these educational efforts.

7. Activities Promoting Career Management Competencies

The data presents a balanced view on the existence of activities aimed at promoting career management skills, with 49.1% of respondents affirming their presence. This suggests a concerted effort within certain educational settings to enhance career management competencies through various programs and initiatives. However, an equal percentage of respondents (50.9%) perceive a lack of such activities, indicating potential gaps in program implementation or awareness.

8. Preferred Activities for Competency Development

Respondents highlighted several key activities they utilize for developing career management skills:

- Maintaining a positive self-image and adapting behavior to fit various contexts were both cited by 47.4% of participants as crucial for career competency development.
- Making appropriate career decisions was identified by 50.9% of respondents as a primary activity for skill enhancement.
- Maintaining confidence, resilience, and a learning attitude in challenging situations was mentioned by 49.1% of participants.
- Understanding the interplay between personal, professional, community, and societal interactions was noted by 22.1% of respondents.

These findings underscore the importance of attitude, adaptability, informed decision-making, resilience, and self-awareness in career progression and management.

9. Role in Supporting Skill Development

A significant portion of respondents (63%) do not identify with a specific role in supporting the development of career management skills, indicating a perceived division of responsibility among various stakeholders in the educational and career guidance ecosystem. However, a small segment of participants identifies as career guidance teachers (8.8%) or teachers of other subjects (8.8%), suggesting that educators across different disciplines contribute to the development of these competencies, albeit to a limited extent.

The questions six to nine underscore the essential role of the educational system in embedding career management skills and highlights the diverse range of activities employed by individuals to develop these competencies. The balanced distribution of responses regarding the promotion of these skills points to both the achievements and challenges within educational and professional settings in adequately supporting career development.

The acknowledgment of specific roles in supporting skill development, although limited, suggests a broader ecosystem involving educators, career counsellors, and external resources, contributing to the cultivation of career management abilities. This multifaceted approach to career skill development emphasizes the need for a collaborative effort to enhance the visibility and effectiveness of career management programs and initiatives.

These insights provide a basis for further exploration into the remaining aspects of the questionnaire, aiming to deepen the understanding of how career management competencies are

developed, promoted, and supported across different sectors and by various actors within the educational system and beyond. This examination is crucial for validating the research hypotheses and for contributing to the development of more integrated and effective career management strategies.

From question ten, the focus shifts to how career management activities are delivered within the learning process, the desire for further training in providing career management programs, the necessary training resources to support career management skills development, and the perceived value of these skills among respondents. This analysis aims to deepen our understanding of the practical application and significance of career management competencies in professional development.

10. Delivery Methods of Career Management Activities in the Learning Process

The data reveals a diverse approach to delivering career management activities, with 38.6% of respondents engaging in extracurricular activities, 49.1% relying on self-learning processes, and 21.1% participating in specific career management lessons. This diversity highlights the importance of a multifaceted approach to career management education, allowing individuals to choose methods that best fit their needs and preferences. The emphasis on self-learning and extracurricular activities suggests a proactive engagement by students in shaping their career paths beyond the traditional curriculum.

11. Desire for Additional Training in Career Management Program Delivery

A significant majority (70.2%) express a desire for further training to enhance their ability to deliver effective career management programs, underscoring the recognition of continuous professional development as key to improving career management skills. This strong interest in further training indicates a widespread acknowledgment of the complexities involved in career management and a commitment to acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate this domain effectively.

12. Training Resources Necessary for Supporting Career Management Skills Development

Respondents highlight the importance of competency-matching software (54.4%) and career databases/directories (52.6%) as essential training resources for supporting career management skills development. These preferences indicate a leaning towards digital and information-rich resources that offer personalized recommendations and access to comprehensive career information. The lesser importance placed on workbooks (24.6%) suggests a shift towards more interactive and technologically driven learning tools in career management education.

13. Valuation of Career Management Skills

The valuation of career management skills is highly positive among respondents, with 47.4% rating these skills as extremely valuable (grade "5"). This high valuation reflects a broad recognition of the critical role that effective career management plays in achieving professional success and personal fulfilment. The responses indicate a strong awareness of the benefits associated with mastering career management competencies, including enhanced employability, career progression, and personal growth.

This final part of the results chapter illuminates the varied approaches to career management education, the strong desire for further professional development in this area, the preference for

technologically enabled learning resources, and the high valuation of career management skills among participants. The findings suggest that while there is a clear recognition of the value and importance of career management skills, there is also a call for more innovative and accessible training resources to support their development. The expressed desire for additional training and the specific resources deemed necessary for skill development highlight the need for tailored educational programs and tools that can effectively address the diverse needs of learners in the field of career management.

Moreover, the data underscores the critical role of personal initiative and self-directed learning in acquiring career management skills, alongside the value of structured educational programs. As such, there is an evident need for a balanced approach that combines self-learning with formal education, leveraging digital resources and personalized learning experiences to equip individuals with the competencies required for successful career management.

These insights offer valuable implications for educators, career advisors, and policymakers in developing and implementing effective career management education strategies. By understanding the preferred learning modalities, desired training opportunities, and the high value attributed to career management skills, stakeholders can better support individuals in navigating their career paths and achieving their professional goals.

Discussions

The analysis of data collected from respondents reveals a pronounced valuation of career management skills, highlighting their perceived importance for achieving professional objectives and career success. This discussion extends the initial observations, offering a deeper examination of the implications drawn from the presented results.

A significant majority of respondents recognize career management skills as crucial for navigating the complexities of the professional world. With over 75% rating these skills as highly valuable (4 or 5 out of 5), it's clear that effective career management is not merely a beneficial attribute but a necessity for professional advancement and success. This strong valuation underscores the consensus among participants regarding the critical role these competencies play in personal development and career progression.

The expressed desire by more than 70% of respondents for additional training or perfection in career management skills underscores a widespread acknowledgment of the continuous nature of professional development. This recognition reflects an awareness that enhancing career management competencies can lead to substantial benefits, including better career planning and progression. It highlights a proactive stance among individuals towards seeking opportunities for skill enhancement and professional growth.

The preference for specialized resources, such as competency-matching software and career databases/directories, by over 50% of respondents, points to a growing demand for tools and information that support the career management process. These resources are valued for their potential to facilitate decision-making and to provide structured guidance in navigating career paths. This indicates a shift towards leveraging technology and digital platforms to enhance

career planning and development efforts.

The minimal endorsement of workbooks as valuable resources for career management skill development suggests a broader preference for dynamic and interactive learning methods over traditional, static tools. This preference may reflect the evolving landscape of educational resources and the increasing accessibility of digital and personalized learning experiences that offer more relevance and engagement in the context of career management.

These conclusions highlight a clear recognition of the value of career management skills and a demand for targeted resources and training in this area. Respondents' preferences and needs present an opportunity for organizations and educational institutions to respond with relevant programs, tools, and information designed to support the development of career management competencies. By addressing this demand, these entities can play a pivotal role in facilitating individuals' professional success, offering programs that not only enhance career management skills but also align with the dynamic requirements of the modern workforce.

To effectively cater to these needs, a collaborative approach involving educators, career advisors, policymakers, and technology developers is essential (Adăscăliței, 2021). Together, they can develop and implement innovative solutions that integrate the latest technological advancements and educational methodologies. Such initiatives could range from online platforms offering personalized career guidance to workshops and seminars that focus on developing specific competencies required in various industries.

Ultimately, the insights from this research underscore the importance of a strategic focus on career management skills development as a fundamental component of lifelong learning. By investing in specialized resources and fostering a culture of continuous professional development, organizations and educational institutions can empower individuals to achieve their career aspirations and navigate the challenges of an ever-changing professional landscape. Training for the entire workforce engaged with diverse cultures is essential. Since 1986, scientific literature has emphasized that such training ought to encompass skill development, adaptation, and performance enhancement to navigate cultural differences effectively (Veith, 2020).

Conclusions

Career management emerges as a pivotal element in the professional development and success of individuals. The empirical results of this research not only validate the critical role of career management skills highlighted in the literature review by authors such as Lemeni and Miclea (2010) but also reinforce the necessity of these competencies in navigating the modern business landscape, aligning with the theories of career adaptability and resilience discussed by Schein (1978) and the importance of continuous learning and self-improvement emphasized by Holland's career choice theory.

The overwhelmingly positive valuation of career management skills among respondents supports the first hypothesis that the development of these skills has a positive impact on professional success. This finding aligns with Lemeni and Miclea's (2010) discussion on the importance of adaptability and continuous learning in career development, suggesting that a solid

foundation in career management can prepare individuals to face challenges and deepen their understanding of the business world.

The empirical evidence indicating a strong desire for further training and the high valuation of digital resources for career management, such as competency-matching software and career databases, corroborates the second hypothesis. This reflects the theoretical perspectives offered by Holland, which emphasize the alignment of individual competencies with career opportunities. The preference for dynamic and interactive learning tools over traditional methods, such as workbooks, further illustrates the evolving nature of career development strategies and the critical role of technology in facilitating career planning and decision-making processes.

The findings that highlight the significance of extracurricular activities, self-learning processes, and specific career management lessons in the learning process resonate with Schein's (1978) theory of career anchors. They underline the necessity for educational institutions to provide diverse and flexible learning opportunities that cater to the varied needs and aspirations of students. This supports the idea that effective career management involves understanding and leveraging one's strengths, values, and preferences in making informed career choices and planning for future development.

In conclusion, career management is crucial for the professional growth and success of all students. By assessing competency levels, setting realistic and measurable career development objectives, and enhancing career management skills, students can lay a strong foundation for achieving their professional and personal aspirations in the business field. The research findings advocate for a comprehensive approach to career management education that includes offering specialized training programs, utilizing digital resources, and facilitating mentorship and networking opportunities.

Educational institutions are encouraged to respond to these needs by:

- Collaborating with industry professionals and organizations to provide practical learning experiences through internships and workshops.
- Leveraging online platforms and digital tools to offer up-to-date information and self-assessment capabilities for career planning.
- Establishing mentorship programs that connect students with experienced business professionals for guidance and support.

Furthermore, the importance of regular feedback collection and analysis cannot be overstated. By continually assessing the effectiveness of career management programs and adapting them based on student needs and industry trends, Universities can ensure that its students are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of the business world and achieve their career goals.

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Adapting Motivational Strategies for Generation Z: Integrating Intrinsic and Extrinsic Factors

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Abstract: This article conducts a systematic literature review to explore the evolution of motivational strategies in response to the emerging workforce dynamics, particularly with the integration of Generation Z into the global labor market. It examines how intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors are perceived across different generational cohorts, with a focus on the unique attributes and expectations of Generation Z. The study highlights the necessity of adapting workplace motivational practices to accommodate generational differences and the increasing importance of flexibility, technological proficiency, and meaningful work in motivation strategies. It also discusses the influence of cultural and individual diversity on motivation, emphasizing the need for personalized approaches to enhance job satisfaction and retention. Through a comprehensive review of current literature, this article provides insights into effective motivational strategies that are responsive to the diverse needs of a multi-generational and culturally varied workforce, suggesting a paradigm shift in how organizations motivate their increasingly diverse employees.

Key words: Employee motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, generational differences in the workplace, Generation Z characteristics, cultural influences on motivation, and personalization of motivational strategies.

JEL Classification: J24, J28, M12, M54

Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of the global workforce, understanding and enhancing employee motivation remains a pivotal challenge for organizations aiming to thrive in a competitive market. The study of employee motivation is critical because it directly impacts productivity, job satisfaction, employee retention, and overall organizational success. As workplaces become increasingly diverse and multi-generational, with a rapid infusion of technological advancements, the traditional motivational strategies that once proved effective are being called into question. While generation Y comprises students and fresh and already experienced employees and entrepreneurs, this is particularly pertinent with the rise of Generation Z—the latest cohort entering the workforce, bringing with it new values, expectations, and work styles that differ significantly from previous generations. (Ionescu et.al, 2023)

The importance of adapting motivational strategies to fit the unique needs of different generational cohorts cannot be overstated. Each generation—Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z—brings distinct characteristics and preferences that influence how they respond to various motivational factors. For instance, while older generations might value job security and structured work environments, younger generations, like Millennials and Generation Z, often prioritize flexibility, meaningful work, and a strong alignment between their personal values and those of their employer.

Moreover, the globalization of business has introduced further complexity with cultural variations that influence motivational strategies. What motivates employees in one cultural context may not be as effective in another, necessitating a more nuanced and culturally aware approach to motivation in international and diverse workplaces.

Given these dynamics, this article aims to explore how intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors can be integrated to cater to a diverse workforce, with a particular focus on Generation Z. By systematically reviewing the literature on motivational theories and their applications across different cultural and generational contexts, this study synthesizes insights into effective strategies that can lead to higher job satisfaction and retention rates.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to guide leaders, human resource managers, and policymakers in developing more effective motivational practices that not only boost individual and organizational performance but also foster an engaging and satisfying work environment for all employees, irrespective of their generational or cultural background.

Literature review

The concept of motivation

The term “motivation” derives etymologically from the Latin word “movere”, which means “to move”. As defined in the field of psychology, motivation is “the dynamic combination of factors influencing an individual’s behavior” (Larousse, 2000). Research by neurophysiologists like K.S. Lashley and ethologists such as K. Lorentz and N. Tinbergen has shown that behavior is influenced by internal changes, such as neuroendocrine shifts, and external stimuli, like the environment, acting on the brain (Thorpe, 1954). Thus, motivation can be considered the initial chronological aspect of behavior, given its crucial role in the organism’s survival and its persistence until tension is alleviated.

According to Andrei Cosmovici, motivation encompasses a totality of reasons and their structuring, as these reasons do not all exist on the same level. In his view, a motive is “the psychological phenomenon that plays an essential role in initiating, directing, and modifying behavior.” Given its degree of influence and behavior modification, we can infer the significance of motivation in our actions and its role in propelling those actions (Cosmovici, 1996).

From a behaviorist perspective, motivation is seen as a learned response associated with an external stimulus. This approach might limit behavior and the spirit of initiative. However, Brown posits that motivation is a psychological factor influencing our behavior, thereby underscoring its importance in our actions. The diversity in defining motivation makes a unified approach to this phenomenon challenging. Nonetheless, while perspectives vary, they are also complementary, each contributing uniquely to understanding motivation’s complexity and diversity (Brown, 1961).

Freud views motivation as an energy stimulation and discharge, represented by the quantity of libidinal energy bound or invested in each representation of the “consumption object,” or the pleasure obtained from previously satisfying a need. Psychophysicist Hebb agrees, defining motivation as a spontaneous action energizing the organism and explaining the transition from rest to action (Zlate, 2000). By defining motivation merely as the energizing part of our actions, Freud and Hebb reduce its function to behavior initiation. Freud, always focused on a mono-valent and hedonistic interpretation of impulses, was compelled to support a near-complete conflict between the cognitive principle of reality and the motivational principle of pleasure (Furnham, 2008).

Nuttin approaches motivation as a dynamic aspect of the subject’s relationship with the world, involving the active orientation of behavior toward a preferential category of situations or objects. His theory states that motivation is active and selective. Nuttin believes that motivation is not an energy quantity, as Hebb thought, but a cognitive-dynamic structure that orients action toward specific goals, due to cognitive functions governing the dynamics of the subject-world relationship. The goal largely regulates this direction. Motivation is seen as a set of internal circumstances influencing behavior, considering that behavior focuses more on a certain category of objects than on another (Nuttin, 1984).

According to Roşca, motivation is the totality of internal factors determining behavior, whether they are innate or acquired, conscious or unconscious, linked to simple physiological

needs or abstract ideals (Roşca, 1943). Both Roşca and Nuttin assert that these internal factors or motives drive behavior and lead people to actively choose activities based on cognitive processes. These factors are essentially the internal stimuli prompting a person to make decisions and undertake certain actions, whether they involve seeking, approaching, or avoiding and rejecting objects.

Various and multiple forms of motivation can be applied within an organization, collected according to specific criteria, thus forming distinct types or forms of motivation. Typically, motivation types are organized in pairs to highlight the contrast between them (Nicolescu & Verboncu, 2007). The main ways to classify motivation include:

Extrinsic motivation indicates a type of motivation arising from external factors, such as rewards, punishments, or other incentives. It means that the motivation to engage in a particular behavior or activity is not driven by personal interest or pleasure but rather by the expectation of receiving an external benefit or avoiding negative consequences. Common examples of extrinsic motivation include monetary rewards, grades, and praise from others. While extrinsic motivation can be effective in stimulating behavior, it does not necessarily lead to sustained interest or pleasure in the activity or behavior itself (Benabou & Tirole, 2003).

Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in a behavior or activity for its inherent satisfaction, pleasure, or interest, rather than for external rewards or pressures. Intrinsic motivation is often associated with a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as individuals feel a sense of control over their actions and a connection to the activity or task. Examples of intrinsically motivating activities might include hobbies, creative endeavors, and learning for personal growth or interest (Benabou & Tirole, 2003).

Positive motivation is based on encouragement, praise, and rewards; it contributes to raising morale and personal development of the employee, creating a favorable work environment with high performance. Positive motivation seeks to increase involvement and employees' contribution to achieving organizational goals, by enhancing the satisfactions generated by the performed activity and fulfilling the tasks assigned, considering their level of difficulty and accessibility to most employees. At the same time, the motives aim at increasing incomes, raising morale, and the professional status of the salary, so as to match their expectations.

Negative motivation characterizes the use of negative consequences or punishments to motivate or influence behavior. This can involve the threat of punishment or the actual application of a punishment, such as reprimands, demotions, or even termination of employment. The idea behind negative motivation is that by creating an unpleasant consequence, people will be encouraged to avoid it and change their behavior accordingly. However, negative motivation can have harmful effects on the individual, such as decreased job satisfaction, reduced productivity, and increased stress levels.

Economic motivation is a type of extrinsic motivation that involves the use of financial incentives to encourage desired behaviors or performance. It is based on the idea that people will put more effort into their work and perform better if they are financially rewarded for their efforts. Examples of economic motivation include bonuses, commissions, profit-sharing plans, and stock options.

Moral-spiritual motivation expresses the impulse to act in accordance with personal values, beliefs, and ethics. It involves the desire to do what is right or moral, even if there are no immediate material or tangible benefits. This type of motivation is often associated with the desire for personal growth and self-actualization. Creating a framework that facilitates employee involvement and participation in resolving various crisis situations that arise will make decision-making processes more transparent and add value to the organization (Berar, Minciu, & Wu, 2022). People who are motivated by moral-spiritual values may prioritize their work based on how much they can contribute to society, how much they can help others, or how much they can achieve in terms of personal development. This type of motivation can be particularly powerful and long-lasting, as it is driven by a sense of purpose and meaning that transcends monetary rewards or external pressures. At the workplace, employers can encourage moral-spiritual motivation by aligning the company's values and goals with those of the employees, offering opportunities for personal growth and development, and recognizing and rewarding employees who demonstrate strong ethical behavior.

Cognitive motivation highlights the impulse to acquire knowledge, learn new skills, and understand complex ideas. It is driven by the inherent desire to understand the world around us, to find meaning and purpose, and to seek new challenges and opportunities for growth.

Affective motivation refers to the impulse to engage in an activity or behavior based on the emotions and feelings associated with it. It is a type of intrinsic motivation driven by an individual's emotional response to a particular activity, rather than by external factors or rewards. For example, a person may be motivated to engage in an activity because it brings them joy, satisfaction, or a sense of achievement (Straulat & Furdui, 2017).

The scientific management theory of Frederick Taylor and Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Y are examples of first-generation theories. They are considered limiting because they focus solely on a few extrinsic factors such as work conditions, punishments, or threats, which motivate human behavior at work. This realization prompted a deeper examination of motivation from both a content and process perspective, leading to the development of second-generation theories categorized into process theories and content theories.

In order to adapt quickly to changes in the business environment, special attention is paid to the employees of organisations who need to constantly adapt their behaviour and acquire new skills (Berar & Minciu, 2019). Content theories concentrate on identifying internal forces, needs, and desires that control human behavior, attempting to explain the forces that motivate human behavior. Process theories, on the other hand, aim to explain why and how human behavior is directed towards certain choices and actions and are the parameters that others, like managers, need to influence to steer behavior in a particular direction. AI is transforming intelligent workflows within organizations, enhancing the experience of customers, employees, and partners through personalized learning systems and effective human-technology collaborations that support ongoing reinvention (Purcarea et.al, 2021). These theory categories are not contradictory but complementary, offering different perspectives on work motivation.

All companies, whether medium-sized or large, make various forecasts that require a series of practical and tactical decisions to be taken in order for employees to be coordinated and

organized (Minciu, Berar, & Dobrea, 2020). Abraham Maslow's psychological theory, known as Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), posits that human needs are structured in a hierarchy, with basic physiological needs at the bottom and higher-level needs at the top. The levels, from lowest to highest, are physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. According to the theory, individuals must satisfy lower-level needs before progressing to higher-level needs. Once a need is satisfied, it no longer motivates behavior, and the individual moves to the next level of needs (Kanfer, 1990). Maslow believed that humans have an inherent desire to grow and develop, and it's this desire that motivates behavior. He suggested that when an individual's needs are not met, they experience tension or discomfort, driving them to take action to satisfy those needs (Poston, 2009).

Maslow acknowledged that individuals might sometimes skip needs levels or focus on several levels simultaneously (Kirmanen & Salanova, 2010). He emphasized that self-actualization is not a fixed end point but a continuous process of growth and development, noting that only a small percentage of individuals achieve self-actualization, as most are focused on satisfying lower-level needs.

Clayton Alderfer reclassified Maslow's needs into three categories: existence needs, relatedness needs, and growth needs (Furnham, 2008), allowing for the possibility that all three categories of needs can be experienced simultaneously, albeit with some hierarchical dominance assumptions (Dinibutum, 2012). The ERG theory is particularly interesting for its implications regarding both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivators satisfy existence and relatedness needs, while intrinsic motivators fulfill growth needs. Alderfer suggests that it's possible to satisfy all three categories of needs at the same time, making the possibility of fulfilling development needs through engaging and challenging work a source of motivation even when existential needs are not fully met.

The role of motivation in HR – Management

According to David McClelland, human behavior is influenced by three fundamental categories of needs: the need for achievement, the need for power, and the need for affiliation. Each individual has a certain combination of these needs, influencing their behavior towards achievement, power, or affiliation, and the intensity of these needs can vary depending on the situation. McClelland believed that this combination could be modified through training, allowing managers to help employees set objectives and be mindful of the impact of their efforts on performance (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017).

Frederick Herzberg's two-factor theory differentiates between hygiene factors, which influence job dissatisfaction, and motivating factors, which contribute to job satisfaction (Robbins, 2009). Hygiene factors are extrinsic and prevent dissatisfaction, whereas motivational factors are intrinsic and lead to satisfaction and motivation. Herzberg highlighted that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are distinct dimensions, with hygiene factors corresponding to Maslow's lower-level needs and motivational factors to higher-level growth needs.

Content theories are crucial for understanding motivation and job satisfaction, highlighting the complex sets of needs that can vary from one individual to another or within the same

individual at different life stages. Effective managers must identify and meet the unfulfilled needs of their staff, requiring sophisticated tools for assessing job satisfaction that can classify needs into various levels or categories. These theories also emphasize the potential for the evolution of motivation structures over time, suggesting that applying stereotypical motivation solutions or measures from one organization to another without prior evaluation can negatively impact staff satisfaction, as harmful as a lack of employee motivation (Johns, 1998).

Human Resource Management (HRM) signifies the process of leading and managing workforce in an organization with the objective of maximizing employee performance to achieve organizational goals and objectives. It encompasses various practices and policies adopted by organizations to attract, develop, motivate, and retain talented employees. HRM involves a range of activities, including recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, compensation and benefits, and employee relations. The ultimate goal of HRM is to create a motivated and committed workforce that contributes to organizational success (Mathis & Jackson, 2008).

Motivation can be defined as the driving force that compels an individual to take action towards a specific goal or objective (Lai, 2011). In the workplace, motivation is crucial as it drives employees to achieve their goals, perform at their best, and contribute to organizational success. As a human resource manager, understanding different types of motivation and how to leverage them is key to improving employee engagement and retention.

Motivation plays a critical role in the workplace, having a direct impact on employee interest, productivity, and job satisfaction. Motivated employees show greater involvement in their tasks, leading to improved performance and increased organizational productivity. Moreover, when employees are motivated, they tend to feel more satisfied with their jobs, resulting in lower staff turnover rates and improved retention within the organization (Joynt & Morton, 1999).

To be an effective manager, understanding the factors that motivate employees in their roles is necessary. Among all the responsibilities a manager has, motivating employees is one of the most complex. This is largely because employee motivations are continually changing. For instance, once employees' income levels increase, financial factors no longer serve as a source of motivation, making it necessary to identify other non-financial factors to motivate them.

Every aspect of professional activity can play a role of varying importance in motivation, overshadowing the importance of other factors in terms of overall satisfaction. If a certain aspect is not important to an employee, it will not produce any feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction but rather a feeling of indifference. However, if a specific aspect of work becomes very important to someone, a deviation from the optimal significance attributed to that aspect will lead to variations in the level of satisfaction.

A range of factors, both intrinsic and extrinsic, contribute to achieving motivation and professional satisfaction, including:

- Responsibility and the ability to control one's work can increase employee commitment to company goals and make them feel more involved and accomplished professionally. Through their sense of active involvement in the company's development process, they are not just simple executors.

- Professional achievement refers to completing work tasks that are interesting and challenging, as well as recognizing one's own efforts and engaging in new activities. To increase workers' satisfaction with their professional performance within the organization, it's important for managers to clearly communicate each employee's exact role in the company and delegate responsibilities to subordinates.

- Recognition for achievements is an important factor for job satisfaction, involving receiving acknowledgment from superiors, colleagues, or clients for efforts made. The way this recognition is given is essential, as every individual needs appreciation for their work. Within organizations, recognition can take various forms, such as acknowledgment of results by hierarchical superiors, awarding honorary titles, participating in profit, or granting individual bonuses periodically for remarkable achievements (Fuhrmann, 2006).

- Opportunities for career advancement can stimulate motivation at work by providing signals regarding personal value and creating a career future outlook. These signals can be both material, such as salary increase, and social, such as organizational gratitude and community recognition. There are cultural and personal differences in how people view a promotion system. While some employees prefer a system based exclusively on seniority, others favor one based solely on performance. For career advancement, it's crucial for each employee to have clearly defined criteria and requirements necessary to occupy a certain position. This offers transparency and direction regarding the steps one needs to take to progress within the organization.

The work itself is an issue, closely related to activities that offer competition possibilities and those that bring intrinsic satisfaction through performance in that activity. Employees have different perceptions of the work itself, so those with a higher academic qualification may find a routine activity less satisfying than those with a lower level of education. The more interesting a work activity is for the employee, the greater the sense of responsibility and satisfaction. In some companies, to prevent monotony, job rotation within the department or the company is practiced.

Personal and professional development involves the creation of specialized training programs for various professional categories, with the main goal of developing the skills and abilities necessary for fulfilling responsibilities at the highest possible level.

Adherence to employees' values and beliefs by the company refers to the fact that each organization follows its own values and principles dictating behavior both within the organization and in relations with others. Employees who share the same values as their organization are much more satisfied with their work than those who have different values. Additionally, companies tend to hire people with values similar to those of their organization. It's important for an employee's values to be congruent with those of their hierarchical superior.

The leadership style of the hierarchical superior can be influenced by the physical and psychological characteristics of the leader, as well as the methods and techniques applied to enhance employee motivation. Also, the way the leader collaborates with subordinates can be a significant factor. Supervisors who hold a strong influence in the organization and are permissive with subordinates can generate a higher level of satisfaction than those who have a reduced influence and adopt an authoritarian and non-permissive leadership style, which can cause dissatisfaction among employees (Constantin, 2004). In today's rapidly evolving economic landscape, certain

attributes of female leadership styles—such as flexibility, intuition, communication skills, attention to detail, and notably, the ability to motivate and advance staff—are essential for effective management (Veith & Costea, *Industry 4.0 – A challenge or a risk for the involvement of women in management and business*, 2019).

Workplace relationships with colleagues is a good reason for an employee to stay or to leave the company. When an employee successfully integrates into the workgroup, developing harmonious and cohesive relationships with their colleagues, this significantly contributes to improving their job satisfaction. Being well integrated into a cohesive workgroup and their attachment to other members are essential factors for maintaining motivation and professional satisfaction.

A pleasant group atmosphere is important in a work environment, as it can promote a positive, dynamic, and healthy team culture. In this sense, a pleasant and positive work atmosphere can be beneficial for both parties, both employees and the employer, as it can increase efficiency and productivity within the organization.

Organizational policy is influencing the employee's motivation mostly when it is not developed correctly. The process of developing and implementing policies is rarely continuous and often is not aligned with the organization's evolution. Each organization has its own standards and policies governing employees, customers, products, and work relationships, differentiated based on the number of employees, the level of development reached, and the field of activity. For example, some organizations have a policy of lower remuneration than the market average but offer excellent opportunities for employees to gain experience and build a reputation in their field, while others offer salaries above the market average to retain well-trained employees.

Job role ambiguity can have a negative influence on employees. Sometimes, employees do not fully understand the purpose of their tasks and how they contribute to achieving the organization's objectives, which can lead to a feeling of isolation and a lack of motivation to be part of a team working together to achieve the same goals.

Work conditions include providing an adequate and safe work environment, supplying appropriate equipment and spaces, as well as a motivating and challenging work atmosphere. For some employees, the quality of work conditions is as important as that of living conditions, and their inadequacy can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction and unhappiness.

Work schedule can be an important aspect in increasing employee motivation. In addition to salaries, freedom of expression and action, maintaining a balance between intellectual effort, physical effort, and leisure time can be essential for employees. A flexible schedule offers more responsibility and autonomy in organizing work time, which can increase satisfaction and commitment among employees. In the long term, for some individuals, the satisfaction offered by an important position can be reduced due to the maximum exploitation of their capacity for analysis, planning, and negotiation, which is why they may choose to reorient themselves towards their own business or accept a work contract with a lower salary but with a more leisurely work schedule.

Rewards are still an important instrument of motivating people. For some employees, financial rewards in the form of salary, bonuses, cars, phones, or trips are an important source of motivation. However, for others, professional satisfaction comes from the support offered by

the company in developing their professional competencies and abilities. Different preferences regarding remuneration are evident, especially in the case of overtime work, where some employees are willing to work extra hours to earn more money, while others prefer to avoid such demands.

Participation in decision-making is for the new generation a must. Organizations that do not involve subordinates in the decision-making process, but leave this task exclusively in the hands of management, can generate a sense of dissatisfaction among employees. This approach can be viewed as an impossibility to express opinions, to use the experience accumulated within the organization, and to participate in the decision-making process.

Workplace safety is an important issue, which importance grow also because of the Covid-19 crises, but is it not limited to that. So, this is representing one of the most serious issues faced by employees, job insecurity can have significant negative consequences on them. When reorganization or staff reduction occurs, employees tend to experience an increased level of stress, internal and external conflicts, as well as a decrease in performance (Cristea, 2004). The pandemic has hastened the digitalization across various sectors. As a result, numerous individuals began working from home, which became the sole option to maintain continuity of work during the state of (Veith, Isbaita, & Marinescu, Factors influencing trust in remote teams, 2021).

Internal communication refers to how people communicate in the company. Many companies have found that a well-established internal communication system and motivated staff can significantly reduce the number of sick leave days and production errors. Employee satisfaction means an interesting job, good performance, and a pleasant work environment that makes them feel comfortable. But all these require communication and good interpersonal relationships. Thus, information circulation is a necessary condition for motivation and fulfillment at work. Transmitting information is important for both employees and the company. The company can benefit from this situation in several ways: informed employees know what they are doing and, especially, why. They understand the company's objectives and how they can meet them more efficiently. Informed employees are aware of their personal and professional value and are more responsible.

Motivating employees can be a challenging task for human resource managers due to the various factors they encounter.

Key Factors in Motivating Generation Z Employees

Generational differences in motivation are related to the fact that different generations have different values, work styles, and expectations. For example, millennials may value work-life balance and career development opportunities, while baby boomers may prioritize job security and stability. To address this challenge, human resource managers can adapt motivational strategies to meet the specific needs and expectations of each generation. This could involve offering flexible work arrangements or training and development programs that align with the objectives of each generation (Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008).

Cultural differences can influence what motivates employees. For example, in some cultures, recognition from a superior may be more important than financial incentives. To address this challenge, the human resources department can adopt a culturally sensitive approach to

motivational strategies. This could involve collecting feedback from employees and customizing motivational strategies that align with the values and norms of the culture.

Individual differences in motivation, which means that each employee has unique motivators and demotivators. For example, one employee may be motivated by recognition, while another may be motivated by autonomy. To address this challenge, the manager can adopt a personalized approach to motivation. This could involve conducting regular performance assessments and collecting feedback from employees to identify their individual motivators and demotivators so that motivational strategies can be customized to align with the unique needs of each employee.

To address these challenges, human resource managers can use various motivational strategies, such as:

Recognition and rewards: Employees are more likely to be motivated when they feel appreciated and are rewarded to encourage their achievements and contributions.

Training and development: Offering training and development opportunities can help employees feel invested in their careers and can also improve their performance.

Career advancement opportunities: Employees are more likely to be motivated when they see a clear path for career advancement. The human resources department can offer career development programs that help employees advance within the organization.

Feedback and communication: Regular feedback and open communication channels can help employees feel their importance within the organization.

A generation represents a collective of individuals who emerged and developed in the same chronological era and who share certain cultural, social, and historical experiences that shape their identity, beliefs, and values. Generations are usually defined by the events and trends that took place during their formative years, such as significant historical events, technological advancements, and social movements (Mannheim, 1952).

Generation Z represents the most significant generational transformation the workplace has ever seen. It will present profound challenges for leaders, managers, supervisors, human resource leaders, and educators in every sector of the workforce (Tulgan, 2013).

Generation Z is the group of young people born between the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2010s, making them the most recent demographic cohort both in the workforce and in society. These young individuals grew up in a period characterized by accelerated technological transformations, globalization, and social movements, with Generation Z being shaped by a unique set of cultural, economic, and political factors that distinguish them from previous generations. From digital fluency and global vision to their commitment to social justice and the environment, Generation Z is making its mark on the world in new and dynamic ways. This generation is often characterized as independent, entrepreneurial, and innovative, with a strong sense of individualism and a desire to have a positive impact on the world. As they continue to come of age, Generation Z's influence is expected to grow and shape the future of society and the economy (Dolot, 2018). To seize new business opportunities, we need to adopt automation and digitalization while exploring new markets, production processes, and products. Industry 4.0 has demonstrated its ability to enhance productivity and efficiency. Although it has led to fewer

job opportunities in certain industry sectors, it has simultaneously generated a greater number of highly skilled and productive roles within the IT industry (Veith, *Industry 4.0 IT: Solutions in the Romanian Food Industry*, 2018).

Being called “digital natives,” Generation Z is the first cohort of individuals to grow up in an environment completely immersed in technology and the internet (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). They use and rely on technology for socializing, learning, and working. Generation Z is the first generation to grow up with social networks as an omnipresent part of their lives. They are adept at creating and consuming content on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Because they have had an active presence on social media, they have a shorter attention span compared to previous generations, meaning they prefer to consume information in smaller chunks (Berkup, 2014).

Generation Z is the most diverse generation to date, with a high level of tolerance for people of different races, genders, and sexual orientations. They are often advocates of social justice and equality. They reject traditional gender roles and stereotypes. They feel comfortable with fluid gender identities and support the LGBTQ+ community (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

They also play a very active role in addressing environmental and sustainability issues. They are concerned about the impact of climate change and are more likely to prioritize eco-friendly choices in their personal lives (Chillakuri & Mahanandia, 2018).

Generation Z is more open to discussing mental health and prioritizing self-care than previous generations. They are more likely to seek therapy and support for mental health issues.

As Generation Z enters the workforce, employers need to recognize that they have a distinct set of values, expectations, and motivations. Unlike previous generations, “digital natives” prioritize meaningful work, flexible work arrangements, and a strong sense of purpose. To attract and retain top talent from this generation, employers need to create an environment that encourages motivation, engagement, and a sense of belonging (Benitez-Marquez, Sanchez-Teba, Bermudez-Gonzalez, & Nunez-Rydman, 2022).

Motivation plays a vital role in achieving success at work and is particularly important for the emerging workforce from Generation Z. They have grown up in a world of rapid technological change, social networks, and instant gratification. As a result, they have unique expectations and values when it comes to work and what motivates them.

One of the main motivators for Generation Z in professional activity is meaningful work. Unlike previous generations, who might have been satisfied with a steady paycheck and job security, Generation Z prioritizes work that aligns with their principles and offers a sense of purpose. They want to have a positive impact on the world and feel that their work has a positive impact on society (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018). Employers can leverage this motivation by communicating the broader mission and purpose of the organization and offering opportunities for Generation Z to contribute to social or environmental causes important to them.

Another important motivator for Generation Z at work is flexibility (O’Boyle, Atack, & Monahan, 2017). This generation values the balance between professional and personal life and wants the freedom to work on their own terms. They are accustomed to using technology to stay connected and productive and expect their work arrangements to reflect this. Flexible work

arrangements, such as remote work options, flexible schedules, and unlimited vacation time, are likely to attract and retain Generation Z talent.

This generation values diversity and inclusion and wants to work for organizations that share these values (Ortega, Aguado-García, Rodríguez-Barroso, & De Miguel-Calvo, 2019). They want to feel part of a team working towards a common goal and want to be recognized and appreciated for their contributions. Employers can promote this sense of community by creating a culture of transparency, communication, and collaboration and offering opportunities for socialization and team building.

In addition to the motivators mentioned above, Generation Z values opportunities for growth and development. They are eager to learn and improve their skills and knowledge and want to work for organizations that offer training and development programs.

Moreover, they have a developed entrepreneurial spirit and value autonomy at work. They want to have a say in decision-making processes and be given the freedom to explore their own ideas and projects (William, 2016).

Although there are many factors that motivate those in Generation Z to stay at work, there are also some obstacles that can hinder their motivation. One of the most challenging obstacles is boredom and lack of challenge (Schmitt & Lancaster, 2019). Generation Z has grown up in a world of constant stimulation and is accustomed to multitasking and quickly switching between tasks. They need opportunities for learning and development and the assignment of varied and challenging tasks. They can become disengaged and unmotivated if they feel their work is too repetitive or does not challenge them.

Another obstacle to motivation for Generation Z is the lack of feedback and recognition. This generation wants feedback and wants to know how they are doing on a regular basis. They also want to feel that their contributions are recognized and appreciated.

Methodology

This study adopts a systematic literature review methodology to investigate existing theories and empirical findings related to employee motivation, focusing on the integration of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, the influence of generational, cultural, and individual differences on motivation, and the specific characteristics of Generation Z. The review aims to synthesize findings from diverse sources to form a comprehensive understanding of how modern workplaces can adapt to meet the evolving needs of their workforce.

The data for this literature review were sourced from academic databases such as JSTOR, PubMed, Google Scholar, and specific HR and organizational behavior journals. Key search terms included "employee motivation," "intrinsic and extrinsic motivation," "generational differences in the workplace," "Generation Z characteristics," "cultural influences on motivation," and "personalization of motivational strategies". The time frame for the publications considered spans from 1990 to 2023 to cover both foundational theories and the most recent research, emphasizing developments relevant to Generation Z.

Articles selected for review were required to meet the following criteria:

- Published in peer-reviewed journals or respected academic publishers.

- Focused on theories of motivation or empirical studies of motivational strategies in organizational settings.
- Included clear relevance to generational studies, particularly focusing on Generation Z, or provided insights into cultural and individual variability in motivational dynamics.

The collected articles were analyzed through content analysis, focusing on identifying common themes, discrepancies, and gaps in the current literature. This analysis helped in understanding the consensus among scholars regarding motivational strategies and highlighted areas needing further investigation or application in practice.

Based on the comprehensive literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: "Employee motivation is optimally enhanced when organizational strategies effectively integrate both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, influencing not only the initiation but also the persistence and quality of work behaviors."

H2: "Implementing HRM practices that equally address intrinsic factors (such as recognition and career advancement) and extrinsic factors (like compensation and work conditions) leads to higher job satisfaction and employee retention compared to practices that emphasize one type over the other."

H3: "Generation Z's unique values and technological adeptness require organizations to adopt more dynamic, inclusive, and flexible motivational strategies to enhance workplace engagement and retention effectively."

Results and discussion

The concept of motivation in the organizational context encompasses a complex interplay of factors that drive human behavior towards achieving specific goals. Drawing upon the diverse viewpoints presented in the literature review, this essay critically examines the hypothesis (H1) that a balanced integration of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors significantly enhances employee motivation, impacting both the quality and persistence of their behaviors in the workplace.

The roots of motivation can be traced back to the etymology of the term itself, derived from the Latin word "movere," which means "to move" (Larousse, 2000). This fundamental notion of motivation as a movement-initiating force is a recurring theme across various psychological theories. For instance, early neurophysiological and ethological studies by figures like K.S. Lashley and K. Lorentz indicated that both internal changes (e.g., neuroendocrine shifts) and external stimuli significantly influence behavior, laying the groundwork for understanding the dual nature of motivational forces (Thorpe, 1954).

Andrei Cosmovici's insights into the structure of motivation highlight the heterogeneity of motives, suggesting that motivations encompass a variety of psychological phenomena that play crucial roles in initiating, directing, and modifying behavior (Cosmovici, 1996). This aligns with behaviorist views where motivation is seen as a learned response to external stimuli, albeit often criticized for underestimating the role of internal desires and aspirations (Brown, 1961).

Freud's and Hebb's theories further complicate our understanding by suggesting that motivation is not merely a reaction to external stimuli but also a spontaneous and intrinsic drive that

energizes individuals from a state of rest to action, tying closely with the concept of libidinal energy and the pleasure principle (Zlate, 2000; Furnham, 2008). These perspectives emphasize the energizing role of intrinsic factors in motivating behaviors.

Nuttin's theory provides a valuable framework for integrating intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, proposing that motivation is an active and selective process driven by a cognitive-dynamic structure (Nuttin, 1984). This notion suggests that motivation is not merely about energy but about how cognitive functions channel this energy towards specific, goal-oriented actions. Similarly, Roşca defines motivation as the totality of internal factors that drive behavior, whether conscious or unconscious, innate or acquired (Roşca, 1943).

The literature also distinguishes between types of motivation applied within organizational settings, such as extrinsic motivation driven by external rewards and intrinsic motivation driven by personal satisfaction and the inherent pleasure of task completion (Benabou & Tirole, 2003). While extrinsic motivators like monetary rewards or punishments can effectively initiate and direct immediate behavior, they do not necessarily promote long-term engagement or satisfaction.

In practice, organizations that successfully integrate both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational strategies are likely to see not only an initial boost in productivity but also a sustained increase in employee satisfaction and loyalty. This balanced approach addresses both the immediate rewards that encourage the initiation of activities and the deeper, more personal motivations that sustain long-term commitment and innovation.

The hypothesis (H2) posits that the most effective motivational strategies in the workplace are those that encompass a holistic approach, integrating both the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence human behavior. This integration not only promotes a more dynamic and committed workforce but also aligns employee actions with organizational goals in a more meaningful and sustained manner. As such, organizations are encouraged to develop motivational strategies that are as complex and multifaceted as the human behaviors they aim to inspire.

The integration of motivational theories within Human Resource Management (HRM) is essential for fostering an environment that not only attracts but also retains high-performing employees. The literature presents a multifaceted view of motivation that incorporates both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, each playing a distinct role in influencing employee behavior and organizational outcomes.

David McClelland's theory emphasizes the fundamental human needs for achievement, power, and affiliation, which vary between individuals and can be shaped by organizational practices (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017). These needs suggest that motivation is not a one-size-fits-all process; rather, it requires a nuanced approach that considers individual differences in motivational drivers. HRM practices that provide opportunities for achievement and recognize individual contributions could satisfy the need for achievement and affiliation, addressing intrinsic motivations.

Frederick Herzberg's two-factor theory further supports this by distinguishing between hygiene factors that prevent dissatisfaction and motivating factors that enhance job satisfaction (Robbins, 2009). Hygiene factors, such as salary and work conditions, are necessary but not sufficient for motivation—they prevent dissatisfaction but do not foster an engaged and motivated

workforce. Motivating factors, such as recognition and personal growth opportunities, directly contribute to job satisfaction and are intrinsic in nature.

The application of content theories within HRM practices highlights the importance of understanding and addressing the diverse needs of employees. Effective managers must recognize that these needs can vary not only among individuals but also for the same individual over time, necessitating flexible and adaptable HRM practices. The need for sophisticated tools to assess and address these varying needs is critical for enhancing job satisfaction and reducing turnover (Johns, 1998).

HRM encompasses a broad range of practices designed to optimize employee performance and organizational success (Mathis & Jackson, 2008). Practices such as recruitment, training, and performance management are instrumental in aligning employee motivations with organizational goals. By ensuring that these practices address both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, organizations can create a more motivated workforce.

Motivation plays a pivotal role in the workplace by influencing employee interest, productivity, and satisfaction. Motivated employees are more involved in their tasks, perform better, and are more likely to remain with the organization, leading to lower turnover rates and better retention (Joynt & Morton, 1999). Understanding what motivates employees—whether it be the work itself, the work environment, or the rewards associated with the work—is crucial for managers to effectively lead and inspire their teams.

The hypothesis (H2) posits that HRM practices that balance intrinsic and extrinsic motivational strategies are more effective in promoting job satisfaction and retention. This balance is crucial because while extrinsic factors like pay and job security are fundamental to preventing dissatisfaction, they do not cultivate loyalty or drive performance to the same extent as intrinsic factors like career development and recognition.

The integration of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors within HRM practices is crucial for achieving higher job satisfaction and employee retention. By understanding and implementing strategies that cater to both sets of needs, organizations can ensure a more dynamic, committed, and productive workforce. This approach not only aligns with the theoretical frameworks provided by McClelland and Herzberg but also responds to the practical demands of managing a diverse and ever-changing workforce.

The hypothesis (H3) posits that the evolving generational landscape, particularly the entrance of Generation Z into the workforce, necessitates a shift in how organizations approach motivation. This shift is critical due to the distinct characteristics and preferences of Generation Z, as identified in the provided text. This discussion will explore how well the hypothesis aligns with the generational, cultural, and individual motivational factors described, focusing on Generation Z's impact on motivational strategies within the workplace.

Generation Z, having grown up in a period marked by rapid technological advancements and significant cultural shifts, exhibits preferences that distinctly contrast with those of previous generations, such as Millennials and Baby Boomers. Notably, Generation Z values meaningful work, flexibility, and inclusivity, and has a strong commitment to social and environmental issues (Dolot, 2018; O'Boyle, Atack, & Monahan, 2017). These preferences suggest that traditional

motivational strategies centered on stability and long-term job security, which appealed to Baby Boomers, are less effective with this new generation.

Moreover, Generation Z's reputation as "digital natives" indicates a preference for workplaces that leverage technology not only for efficiency but also for creating flexible and employee-centered work environments. This generational trait suggests that motivational strategies should include digital tools for collaboration, remote working options, and digital learning platforms for professional development, aligning with their technological proficiency and lifestyle (Seemiller & Grace, 2019).

The text also highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity in motivational strategies. Given Generation Z's diversity and global awareness, motivational approaches must be culturally adaptable. This could involve more personalized recognition programs that respect cultural differences in how appreciation is expressed and valued (Ortega, Aguado-García, Rodríguez-Barroso, & De Miguel-Calvo, 2019).

Individual differences within Generation Z further complicate the motivational landscape. As noted, what motivates one employee might not motivate another, underscoring the necessity for organizations to develop flexible and highly personalized motivational strategies. This could involve regular feedback mechanisms and the use of analytics to tailor motivational strategies to individual preferences and performance metrics, ensuring that each member of Generation Z feels uniquely valued and understood (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018).

To address these nuanced needs, HR managers are encouraged to implement a range of motivational strategies that reflect the values and preferences of Generation Z. These strategies might include:

- Implementing peer-to-peer recognition platforms that allow immediate and public acknowledgment, catering to Generation Z's need for instant feedback.
- Designing career paths that are flexible and allow for lateral moves, project-based roles, and rotations across different functions, appealing to Generation Z's desire for diverse experiences and rapid growth.
- Offering microlearning and digital training opportunities that can be accessed on demand, aligning with their preferences for fast-paced, technology-driven learning environments.

The hypothesis (H3) is supported by the discussion, affirming that traditional motivational strategies are insufficient for engaging Generation Z effectively. The characteristics of Generation Z necessitate a reevaluation of motivational approaches to emphasize flexibility, personalization, and the integration of technology. By adopting these strategies, organizations can not only enhance engagement and retention among Generation Z employees but also foster a workplace environment that is adaptable to the evolving expectations and technological advancements that define this new generation.

Conclusions

This article has systematically explored the diverse facets of employee motivation through a comprehensive review of the literature, with a focus on generational shifts particularly concerning

Generation Z. The conclusions drawn from this study highlight the complex interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors and the significant impact of generational characteristics on motivational strategies. Findings from the reviewed literature were synthesized to map the landscape of current knowledge on employee motivation, distinguishing between theoretical insights and practical applications. The synthesis aimed to integrate diverse perspectives on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, cultural and generational differences, and the unique attributes of Generation Z.

Effective motivation in the workplace is not solely about balancing intrinsic and extrinsic factors but also about integrating them in ways that align with the employees' values and expectations. This integration is crucial for fostering a workplace where employees feel genuinely motivated and engaged in their roles.

Each generation brings unique values and expectations to the workplace. The arrival of Generation Z has introduced new dynamics that emphasize flexibility, technological integration, and meaningful work. Organizations must adapt their motivational strategies to these emerging preferences to enhance engagement and retention among this cohort.

Motivational strategies must also account for cultural and individual differences within the workforce. Personalization of motivation, driven by a deep understanding of these differences, can lead to more effective management practices and improved employee satisfaction.

As workplaces continue to evolve, so too must the strategies used to motivate employees. Continuous research and adaptation are necessary to keep pace with technological advancements and the global integration of markets. Future research should explore innovative motivational strategies that leverage technology to meet the growing demand for flexibility and autonomy, particularly among younger generations.

For practitioners, the findings suggest that a dynamic approach to motivation—one that is flexible and responsive to the needs of a diverse workforce—is essential. This involves not only rethinking traditional practices but also continuously engaging with employees to ensure that motivational strategies remain relevant and effective.

Motivating a modern workforce requires a blend of tradition and innovation, necessitating that organizations not only understand the foundational theories of motivation but also remain agile in their application. As the workforce grows more diverse and the pace of change accelerates, the ability to effectively motivate employees across generational divides will be a definitive factor in organizational success.

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ICT and Continuous Innovation: Transforming Organizational Strategies for a Digital Era

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Abstract: This article examines the strategic integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) within organizational processes, focusing on the implications for strategic management and operational efficiency. Through an empirical survey and the application of well-established theoretical models such as the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI), Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE), and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the research validates the critical role of strategic clarity in the effective adoption and utilization of ICT. Data collected from a variety of organizations indicate that clear ICT strategies are strongly correlated with enhanced market competitiveness and operational efficiencies. Furthermore, the study explores the concept of continuous innovation through ICT, revealing its significant impact on organizational adaptability and sustained business success. By linking ICT adoption to strategic management practices, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how technology can be harnessed to drive corporate strategy and competitive advantage.

Key words: Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Romania, Strategic Management, Operational Efficiency, Technology Adoption, Continuous Innovation

JEL Classification: L86, M10, M15, O32

Introduction

In today's interconnected world, globalization and the subsequent shifts in the economic environment provide a plethora of business opportunities for companies considering internationalization. The global business environment tends to foster international economic growth, enhance the profitability of investments, and positively impact international performance. However, along with these advantages, there are also drawbacks and risks associated with globalization and the process of internationalization itself.

For many years, the Uppsala model has been a cornerstone in the field of internationalization, supporting businesses in the midst of expanding globally by helping them understand this process as a sequential series of actions with step-by-step development. Nevertheless, companies have increasingly deviated from the traditional Uppsala model in response to changes in the global environment from the 1970s to the 1980s, which affected both domestic and international contexts.

Not long ago, the key to commercial success was predominantly focused on domestic production and sales. Exporting to foreign markets was considered a significant profit source for most companies, and until the mid-1990s, corporate success did not necessarily depend on the use of the internet to maintain social connections. However, in the current era, globalization and the internationalization of markets and corporations have radically altered how modern businesses operate.

To achieve economies of scale, ensuring reduced production costs and competitive pricing is crucial. Companies now increasingly adopt the concept of a "global market" in place of a "national market." As globalization impacts multiple industries, strategic management has become increasingly crucial for monitoring international developments and positioning a company advantageously for long-term competitive gains.

In an organisational environment where change is occurring at a very high speed, it is necessary for managers and employees of organisations to develop new skills to effectively manage all the problematic situations that arise (Dumitru, et al., 2023). In the fiercely competitive current business environment, there is widespread reliance on and dependence on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to enhance strategic and operational performance across global organizations. Information technology services have now become a strategic asset, with organizations investing substantial resources in developing, supporting, and managing ICT services to gain a competitive edge in service delivery. Consequently, organizations with extensive investments in ICT have witnessed increasing performances, measured by enhanced service provision and return on investment (Smith, 2016).

This strategic role of ICT necessitates close attention and oversight from senior management to deliver ICT in a dynamic, efficient, and service-oriented manner. As measured by Iden and Eikebrokk (2014), enterprises expect IT departments to act as a key driver in the disciplined and systematic provision of IT services. Consequently, service-oriented thinking in delivering ICT through Information Technology Service Management (ITSM) has emerged as a preferred and suitable practice toward proactive and strategic IT services.

Recently, the development of the business environment in Romania has drawn significant attention and demonstrated considerable importance in researching the role of electronic

technologies, according to official reports. However, academic research in this area is scant in developing countries.

A wealth of information on technology adoption research has been conducted in developed countries, along with empirical data and models derived from these economies. This creates a gap, as these regions and economies do not particularly represent the Romanian economy. To ensure the relevance of existing literature and conceptual models to the Romanian economy, this study examines the role of electronic technologies in enhancing business growth. It further explores business people's perceptions of the applicability and adaptability of innovations in Romania's unique business environment. The literature review indicates that electronic business concepts and models have not been customized to meet the needs of the Romanian business environment.

Information system research has largely leaned towards quantitative approaches, but in this study, mixed research methods were used to generate maximum relevance and the overall strength of the strategy.

ICT practitioners have shifted the focus of academic research along specific lines of electronic applications, such as the use of email in business, internet usage, against a generalization of e-business. This breaks down sophisticated studies into several objectives, numerous studies relevant to making explicit inferences. Enhancing strategies will stem from these studies and will accelerate the adoption rate of e-business. Further developments, for example, on the internet, such as cloud computing, will enhance internet reliability.

Business strategies have represented the other focal point in research based on firm sizes, financial abilities, and resource engagement. This has been a factor in the adoption of technologies. More relevant research focuses on a specific industry and a special line of technology applicability to provide practical models and theories that match empirical data. Efficiency can only be achieved if the focus is placed on certain aspects of delivery services.

Literature review

The role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is substantial, responsible for designing, implementing, and maintaining numerous controls over an organization's business processes. The critical function of ICT in collecting, processing, and storing data that are summarized and reported in financial statements has been noted by Cannon and Crowe (2004). As ICT progresses, traditional internal audit values are increasingly challenged, with the relevance of conventional auditing being questioned due to the rapid technological changes (Tongren, 1997). Auditors must now keep pace with these technological advances and their impacts on data processing systems and audit procedures.

Internal audit functions view technology as a means to enhance organizational productivity and risk management processes. The advent of technology has enabled internal audit departments to automate and adopt best practices in audit and assurance processes, leading to the release of internal audit professionals to lend their expertise in other high-impact areas. Traditionally, internal audit controls testing was performed on a retrospective and cyclical basis, often months after

the business activities had occurred. Testing procedures typically relied on a sampling approach and included activities such as reviewing policies, procedures, approvals, and reconciliations. Unfortunately, this approach has limited internal auditors to a narrow scope of assessment, often too late to be of real value to business performance or regulatory compliance. However, some organizations have utilized technology to perform continuous auditing, a process that automatically performs control and risk assessments more frequently (Tongren, 1997).

Continuous auditing transforms the audit paradigm from periodic reviews of a sample of transactions to ongoing audit procedures that test 100% of transactions. The strength of continuous auditing lies in its ability to conduct smart, uninterrupted testing of controls and risks, resulting in timely notifications, tracking, and remediation of gaps and weaknesses. By shifting the general approach in this manner, auditors develop a better understanding of their business environment and potential risks to their company, supporting compliance and driving business performance (Tongren, 1997).

Audit management software, such as TeamMate, has enhanced the efficiency and productivity of the entire internal audit process, including risk assessment, scheduling, planning, execution, review, report generation, trend analysis, committee reporting, and storage. Computer-Assisted Audit Techniques (CAATs) are computer programs and data auditors use as part of audit procedures to process audit-significant data contained in an entity's information systems. These can include transaction data on which auditors perform control tests or substantive procedures or other types of data. Auditors use CAATs to review files to obtain evidence of the existence and functioning of certain controls. CAATs may consist of package programs, specially written programs, utility programs, or system management programs. Some audit procedures may not be manually feasible because they rely on complex processing (e.g., advanced statistical analyses) or involve volumes of data that would overwhelm any manual procedure. In addition, many computer information systems perform tasks for which no paper evidence is available, making it impossible for auditors to perform the tests manually. Moreover, many systems accomplish tasks for which no paper evidence is available, thus making manual testing of these systems impossible.

In organisations, it is not only the large number of influencing factors that put managers in difficulty, but also the interdependencies that exist between them, often with a minor change in one factor leading to chain changes (Minciu, et al., 2021). Knowledge is the fundamental engine of productivity growth and global competitiveness, and innovations in ICT have provided a platform for businesses to operate on a global scale. ICT refers to technologies used for collecting, processing, storing, retrieving, disseminating, and transmitting information. This encompasses the use of electronic devices or applications, including radio, television, mobile phones, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as videoconferencing and distance learning. The widespread use of ICT is transforming how businesses operate.

Hipp and Grupp (2005) regard ICT as a critical tool for innovation in this current era. While in the past the majority of organisations updated their strategy or certain processes when a crisis situation arose, this is no longer effective (Minciu, et al., 2022). The advantages of ICT for a firm include saving inputs, overall cost reductions, greater flexibility, and improved product quality.

Mouelhi (2009) adds that ICT plays a significant role in networking and communication, as firms use these technologies to facilitate communication among employees and to reduce coordination costs. ICT enhances the production process in organizations, as monitoring technologies could be used to reduce the number of supervisors needed in the process. ICT has primarily been important in collecting and disseminating information, inventory control, and quality control, with ICT facilities used for strategic management, communication and collaboration, customer access, managerial decision-making, data management, and knowledge management, as they contribute to providing an efficient system of organizational productivity and service delivery. The application of ICT in businesses leads to fundamental changes that can provide powerful strategic and tactical tools for organizations if applied and used appropriately. This could have a significant impact in promoting and enhancing organizational competitiveness.

Mouelhi (2009) argues that while organizational cultures and business strategies shape the use of ICT in organizations, more often, the influence is stronger in the reverse direction. ICT significantly affects strategic choices and creates opportunities and challenges that managers must address in many aspects of their business. The key impact of technology and its implications for management include: ICT creates new opportunities for innovation in products and services. Services that were delivered in person can now be delivered through networks. Among the key levers are: researching which involves the parallel processing of databases, simultaneity; providing instant information in multiple systems, extending time; this involves offering 24-hour-a-day; 365-day-a-year service, portability; which brings services and products closer to the user, and finally, reusability; using information captured for one purpose (e.g., transactions) and using it for others e.g., targeting towards customers. Newer types of ICT, such as email and groupware programs, create significant changes in how information flows around and between group articles and their customers and suppliers. From a managerial perspective, retailers are rapidly adopting trusted AI to gain consumer trust and enhance shopping experiences by addressing key frustrations, offering personalized services, and utilizing technologies like mobile apps, voice assistants, and drones. (Purcarea et al, 2021). It may hasten the development of more open and innovative cultures, as system developers have not been culturally sensitive to the departments or group items in which the new systems are to be used (Rastrick & Corner, 2010).

For many years, it was argued that ICT would enable longer spans of control and the flattening of group articles. This has finally happened, but as much due to initiatives such as Business Process Reengineering (BPR) and the drive to cut costs. Research on whether ICT encourages the centralization of decentralizations has produced ambivalent results. Many companies have centralized operations (for efficiency), while decentralizing activities. Now it seems clear that ICT allows a greater variety of structures. In particular, it allows more flexible and fluid structures - network structures, dispersed teams, and teams that come and go as needs change. ICT is rapidly moving into an era where it supports unstructured management processes, as well as highly reused business processes. It provides more efficient ways of accessing information from multiple sources, including the use of external information on databases and the Internet.

However, group decision support systems that operate in a meeting room can help improve decision-making but need someone who is an expert facilitator to help the group master the

technique of structured discussion. ICT dramatically changes the nature of professional work. Rastrick, K., and Corner, J. (2010) add that there are few offices where professionals do not use personal computers, and in many jobs involving extensive information and knowledge-based work, computer use is often a central activity. Becoming efficient not only requires traditional skills of organization, thinking, writing, etc., but knowing how to optimally use the power of ICT for researching sources, accessing information, connecting to experts, communicating ideas and outcomes, and packaging knowledge for reuse. One aspect of this is the need for hybrid managers - people who are competent both in their discipline and in IT. The way ICT diminishes the effect of distance means that it creates a variety of options for reorganizing the workplace. At a basic level, it can provide more flexibility in the office, allowing office sharing and some degree of location independence within a building (this will develop as Computer Telephony Integration (CTI) and wireless computers become more firmly established. At another level, it allows the dispersion of work teams, thus saving relocation and travel costs. It has also created the mobile professional and allows people to work efficiently from home (Tidd, Bessant, and Pavitt, 2005).

The incorporation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in business processes has dramatically transformed traditional operational models, particularly in the courier industry, where the management of extensive commercial data is crucial. As outlined by Mouelhi (2009), companies in this sector heavily rely on interconnected databases for managing customer activities, billing, and payroll information. These databases are crucial for automating billing processes, which are directly charged to customer accounts and are instrumental in the marketing and promotion of services using state-of-the-art promotional materials, thereby providing a competitive edge.

Communication modalities have undergone significant transformations with the advent of email and other instant messaging platforms facilitated by ICT, becoming indispensable tools for business operations. ICT enhances communication among various stakeholders in courier companies and provides a written record of communications, which is crucial for operational transparency and accountability. Rastrick and Corner (2010) noted that advancements in this domain have also utilized generic confirmation messages to keep customers informed upon the completion of services. Furthermore, mobile employees in the field can easily stay in contact with their office counterparts, enhancing operational efficiency and security of parcels in transit with tracking systems that document the custodians of deliveries.

However, the adoption and maintenance of ICT infrastructure come with considerable costs, as noted in various IT applications across the service industry. Systems, databases, and machinery entail significant initial and ongoing financial outlays, necessitating substantial investments from courier companies (Khosrow-Pour, 2006). Additionally, the installation and maintenance of these systems often require inputs from IT professionals, adding to the operational costs.

Operational disruptions are another challenge inherent to any ICT infrastructure. In the courier industry, where most information is stored in databases and ICT systems, services such as tracking and billing are significantly impacted by service outages (Sauer, 1993). Despite the vast benefits that ICT has conferred upon the business world, it continues to present several challenges and issues. Nevertheless, ICT has become an instrumental part of competitive business practices.

The definition of e-business has evolved and diversified over time, reflecting the rapid progression of technology and its implications for business practices. Cunningham and Rowley (2010) describe e-business as a phenomenon that encompasses various technological concepts, making it challenging to pin down a precise definition. E-business is defined as the online utilization of digital applications by a company, anytime and anywhere, to facilitate commercial activities on the internet. Others view it as electronic channels that ease business operations or transactions conducted using computers (Damanpour and Damanpour, 2001).

E-business focuses on using ICT as a facilitator in communications and relationships, both internally within firms and externally with other businesses or industries. ICT also involves external factors affecting business operations (Beynon-Davies, 2013). E-business operations include placing purchase orders, checking inventory against prices, communicating over long distances, conducting online offices and meetings, analyzing production data, managing payroll, and many other functions (Ghobakhloo, Arias-Aranda, and Benitez-Amado, 2011). This broad definition encompasses the dynamic scope of e-business but does not comprehensively cover all possible definitions.

The UK's Department of Trade and Industry has developed a simple progressive model for adopting technology step-by-step, illustrating that organizational changes escalate as technological changes and e-business improvements occur. Initially, technology might only be considered for efficient email communications, but as the web market develops, the scope expands to include online ordering and payments, integration of the supply chain, and eventually a networked organization with the capability to share information widely (Gloet and Terziovski, 2004).

The progressive relationship scale emphasizes the technological evolutions and their contributions to business practices. In a typical setting, technological changes such as information systems are based on business knowledge management and affect operations, meaning the availability of technology is important, but its suitability is even more significant in determining business performance (Veith & Costea, 2019).

Technological advancements have significantly increased, and individuals have become adept at using the Internet and devices like laptops, tablets, or smartphones. Digitalization has become an integral part of daily life, showcasing both its benefits and drawbacks (Veith, et al., 2021). The e-business adoption ladder highlights the key benefits and corresponding organizational changes required for the sequential integration and processing of innovations in e-business. These benefits range from efficient communication, starting with the adoption of email at the lowest level, to achieving global market reach through websites, online ordering and payments with e-commerce technology, and eventually adopting supply chain technologies up to the top-level knowledge exchange that occurs when an organization embraces the digital ecosystem (Gloet and Terziovski, 2004). However, a visible limitation of this model is its implication that business benefits from ICT as the organization changes, suggesting that an increase in ICT is a result of organizational change, which may not always be the sole means for successful adoption (Taylor and Murphy, 2004).

The academic focus within Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has recently shifted towards specific electronic applications such as email usage in business contexts and the

general use of the internet, moving away from a broad generalization of e-business. This shift has fragmented complex studies into multiple targeted objectives, leading to numerous relevant studies that contribute explicitly to making inferences. Enhancements in strategic approaches derived from these studies are expected to accelerate the adoption rate of electronic business. For instance, advancements such as cloud computing have significantly increased the reliability of the internet (Veith, 2018).

Business strategies have become another focal point in research, particularly concerning firm sizes, financial capabilities, and resource allocation. This focus has been a critical factor in technology adoption. More pertinent research is now concentrating on specific industries and unique lines of technology applicability to provide practical models and theories that align with empirical data. True effectiveness is achieved only when focus is concentrated on homogeneous sections within industries.

Among the commonly used models and theories to explain the adoption of e-business within organizations, the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) model seems particularly relevant in the business context. Despite various limitations, these models and theories have laid the groundwork for more pertinent research and justified new research methodologies.

The emphasis of this model is on factors influencing an organization to adopt the latest available technology. Insights from this model classify these factors into technological, organizational, and environmental categories (IaCovou et al., 1995), which have been applied to study the adoption of ICT technologies by organizations. Identifying management benefits was a key phase covered in the study, among others. It demonstrates the relationship between managerial adoption and gaining customer trust. The Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework qualitatively improves trust and efficiency in senior management's implementation strategies and decision-making. Improved employee and leadership interactions are achieved. TOE tends towards industry-specific studies rather than national ones.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) focuses on the perceived utility of technology. This model predicts intentions and expected responses. Some limitations of this model include ignoring the policies and cultures that control individuals' responses, aside from factors like competition and customer preferences (Parker and Castleman, 2009). The applicability of this model is limited to internal innovations, for instance, investigations of internet-based information systems within a company (El-Gohary, 2012). The effectiveness of TAM is based on the breadth of study covering an industry or a cross-section of sectors.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) predicts stakeholder behavior based on attitudes and the culture of business (Ajzen, 1991). TPB does not account for the effects of social interpersonal relationships on the adoption process. Inferences from prior studies using this model show that responses to new technologies are norm-dependent. More accurate conclusions are made where TAM and TPB are utilized.

Resource-Based Theory (RBT) analyzes business competitiveness through the adoption of technologies as key resources. This theory values creating a competitive advantage through the strategic use of resources. Although research has found that key resources for a business are finances, human, and IT, this theory can utilize both tangible and intangible resources to

create capabilities. However, small enterprises do not have easy access to all resources, as supply channels favor larger companies. Capabilities derived from integrating various resources and information technology can create a competitive advantage, as they cannot be easily replicated (El-Gohary, 2012). Businesses exhibit heterogeneity in resources, impacting the success of this theory in explaining adoption phenomena.

Issues in decision-making by small enterprises are not addressed. There is an assumption of external factors affecting decision-making and implementation processes. No model fully explains and mitigates the differences in businesses concerning how technological transformations occur. Some firms do not always maximize technology engagement due to a lack of entrepreneurial drive.

This suggests that an adequate framework to guide the adoption and innovation of e-business within businesses is far from being achieved. Considering the various theories related to the subject, DOI seems most appropriate, with the greatest potential to explain and enhance the adoption of e-business in businesses. This is due to DOI providing not only insights into technology adoption but also explaining the influence of social systems and time on the diffusion of innovations such as e-business technologies.

Methodology

This research article employs a dual-methodology approach consisting of a systematic literature review and an empirical survey analysis. This design is chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the integration of electronic technologies in Romanian businesses and to identify how these technologies influence organizational performance over time.

Following the guidelines advocated by Bryman and Bell (2011), the literature review begins with a well-defined research question that acts as a roadmap to navigate through the existing body of knowledge. This structured approach helps in identifying the interconnections between various variables and key elements within the business and management domain. The literature review specifically focuses on how electronic technologies are integrated within Romanian businesses and the resultant outcomes. This phase is crucial for establishing a theoretical framework that informs the empirical research.

The empirical part of the study involves a quantitative survey designed to capture data across two distinct periods, reflecting different socio-economic and political contexts. This longitudinal approach allows for an analysis of temporal changes in technology adoption and its impacts.

The survey used in this research contained a total of twenty-two questions, divided into two distinct categories: five demographic questions and seventeen questions addressing multiple factors impacting business strategies. The demographic questions helped in creating a profile of the respondents and provided vital contextual information for analyzing the strategic implications of the responses. These demographic data—age, gender, education level, occupation, and geographic location—enabled the segmentation of responses, shedding light on how different demographic groups perceive and interact with business strategies.

Understanding demographic influences is crucial for tailoring business strategies. (Ionescu et. Al 2023) For instance, younger respondents might show a preference for technology-driven strategies, while older individuals might lean towards traditional approaches. Higher education levels might correlate with a greater interest in sustainability and corporate social responsibility within business strategies.

The remainder of the survey comprised closed-ended questions, facilitating efficient data processing. This approach was chosen over open-ended questions to ensure data uniformity and ease of analysis. The Likert scale was utilized across these questions, asking respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement with various statements regarding business strategies (Krausz & Stegar, 2007). This method helped in quantifying perceptions and attitudes towards specific business strategies discussed within the survey (Sreejesh et al., 2014).

For more complex questions that involved multiple factors, various groups of variables were analyzed. These included business objectives over a two-year period, organization size, and specific demographic variables like age and employment status, which were essential for classifying respondents into relevant groups.

The survey was conducted between November and December 2023, targeting employees of firms that agreed to participate and students from the University of Bucharest. A total of 150 complete and valid responses were collected, with 76% from female respondents and 72.7% from employed individuals, showing a significant representation of young professionals, which are critical to understanding contemporary business strategies in a technological environment. The survey was distributed online, enabling participants to respond at their convenience.

Data collected were analyzed using various statistical methods, such as factor analysis, descriptive analysis, and various statistical tests, to examine multidimensional aspects of the collected data. This comprehensive approach allowed for addressing the quantitative research objectives effectively. Tools such as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) were employed for data processing and analysis, providing robust statistical tools and methods suitable for social science research.

To ensure the reliability of the findings, Cronbach's Alpha test was utilized to measure the internal consistency of the survey questions. Additionally, factor analysis was performed to group variables related to employee expectations and identify underlying patterns in the relationships between these variables, further enhancing the validity of the survey structure.

This methodology section has outlined the comprehensive approach taken in designing and conducting the empirical part of the study, emphasizing the importance of methodological rigor and ethical considerations in handling respondent data. The combination of systematic literature review and empirical analysis provides a robust framework for understanding the impacts of electronic technologies on business strategies in the Romanian context. The study was guided by the following hypotheses:

H1: Organizations with a clear and differentiated strategy perform more frequent competitive analyses, achieving a superior market position.

H2: The clearer a business's strategy, the more profitable it becomes.

H3: A clearer strategic vision correlates with long-term business success.

Results and discussions

In this section, we delve into the empirical results to examine how they validate the proposed hypotheses concerning the impacts of strategic clarity, market differentiation, and organizational success on various operational metrics. The results of the survey, meticulously collected and analyzed, reveal significant insights into the internal dynamics and strategic maneuvers within organizations, specifically highlighting areas such as strategic clarity, market differentiation, employee utilization, and the overall alignment with organizational goals.

The internal reliability of our survey tool, measured by Cronbach's Alpha, yielded an impressive result of 0,857. This high value indicates that the survey items are consistently measuring the same constructs across different responses, thereby providing a robust basis for our analysis. Such a high level of reliability underpins the validity of the conclusions drawn from this data set. Out of an initial 181 responses, 150 were deemed valid and free from significant errors, ensuring that the data analysis was based on sound and reliable responses.

The first hypothesis posited that organizations with a clear and differentiated strategy engage more frequently in competition assessments and achieve superior market positioning. This was strongly supported by the empirical data:

- Notably, 35.9% of the respondents identified "Profit" as their primary objective, highlighting the focus on financial sustainability and competitive positioning.

- The data further revealed that organizations with clearer strategies are more proactive in monitoring competitive actions. A significant number of respondents reported that their organizations frequently analyze competitive dynamics to maintain or enhance their market positions.

The second hypothesis suggested that a well-defined business strategy correlates with higher profitability. This hypothesis was corroborated by the survey findings:

- Strategic clarity in business goals, including market share and revenue expansion, was prevalent among the respondents, with 11.0% and 19.9% highlighting these goals, respectively.

- Moreover, 37.3% of the participants indicated that their organizations are highly engaged in forming and utilizing profitable partnerships, which suggests a clear linkage between strategic definition and operational success.

The third hypothesis asserted that a clear strategic vision is integral to long-term business success. The responses supported this hypothesis through various indicators:

- A significant portion of the organizations reportedly utilizes human resources strategically to achieve long-term objectives, with 38% of respondents acknowledging that their organizations significantly leverage personnel as a key asset.

- Additionally, 39.3% of respondents perceived their organizations to excel in differentiating their product capabilities from competitors, which points to effective strategic implementation and competitive advantage.

The analysis further explored operational efficiency and the role of innovation in organizational success. The findings indicated:

- A robust digital strategy is reflected by 32.7% of respondents reporting a very high number of online sales outlets, highlighting effective digital market strategies.

- Nonetheless, 10.7% of respondents noted a limited online presence, suggesting areas for potential growth and emphasizing the need for increased digital engagement strategies.

Finally, the importance of strategic communication and alignment within the organization was underscored by the data:

- Approximately 36% of participants found their organization's strategy to be very clear, yet 18.7% perceived some lack of clarity, suggesting the need for improved communication and alignment strategies to ensure that all members understand and are committed to the organizational goals.

These empirical findings provide a comprehensive view of how well-defined strategies and clear operational goals contribute significantly to organizational profitability and market competitiveness. The evidence underscores the critical role of strategic clarity in enhancing competitive positioning and operational efficiency in today's dynamic market environment.

A substantial portion of the survey respondents, approximately 39.3%, perceive their organization's product differentiation as superior, indicating that these organizations have successfully managed to carve out a niche for themselves in the competitive market. This level of differentiation allows them to offer unique products or services that stand out, potentially drawing a loyal customer base and achieving a robust market position.

However, not all feedback was overwhelmingly positive. About 4.7% of respondents view their organization's strategic differentiation as unsatisfactory, pointing towards a significant disparity within the same industry sectors where some entities excel at branding and differentiation, while others lag behind. This variation may stem from differences in understanding market needs, the agility of the organizational response to market changes, or the effectiveness of communication of the value propositions.

Turning to innovation, the data suggests a proactive engagement with customer-centric innovation strategies. 32% of participants noted that their organizations highly encourage customer innovation through their product offerings, reflecting a strategic alignment towards fostering an innovative culture and enhancing customer interaction. This not only helps in retaining customers but also in attracting new ones who are seeking novel solutions that address their needs more effectively.

Despite these positive indicators, there are areas of concern. A smaller yet significant percentage of respondents indicated a gap in the utilization of human resources, with 17.3% feeling that their organization only moderately utilizes its human capital. Such a scenario suggests potential underutilization of talent and capabilities, which could impede the organization's ability to innovate and respond adaptively to market or technological changes.

Regarding strategic planning, 36% of respondents indicated that their organization's strategic planning is very clear, supporting effective decision-making and cohesive action across departments. However, 18.7% of the participants pointed out a lack of clarity in strategic planning, which could lead to misalignments and inefficiencies. This mixed feedback underscores the crucial role of clear and coherent strategic communication in ensuring all members of the organization understand and work towards common goals.

The survey also shed light on the organizations' online presence, a critical facet in today's digital-first marketplace. While 32.7% of the respondents reported a robust online presence, indicating a strong strategic push towards leveraging digital sales channels, 10.7% noted a scant

online presence. This contrast highlights a disparity in the adoption of digital strategies, which could significantly affect the ability of organizations to reach wider markets and tap into new customer segments.

Additionally, the survey explored how organizations leverage their workforce to achieve strategic objectives. A notable 38% of the respondents felt that their organization makes excellent use of human resources as a strategic asset, indicating effective management practices that align employee roles and contributions with broader organizational goals.

The gathered data paints a picture of a complex landscape where organizations are variably succeeding in aligning their strategic initiatives with market demands and internal capabilities. While many are excelling in creating differentiated products and fostering an innovative culture, others still face challenges in strategic planning and digital engagement. The insights from the survey illuminate the varied strategies and operational approaches deployed across different organizations, providing a reflective mirror for industry benchmarks and internal assessments.

Conclusions

In this comprehensive analysis, integrating the literature review insights with empirical findings has provided a rich understanding of the interplay between Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and strategic business management. This convergence underscores a dynamic where strategic clarity, technological adoption, and organizational adaptability coalesce to foster competitive advantage and operational efficiency.

The empirical data collected echoes the theoretical frameworks discussed in the literature review, particularly emphasizing the pivotal role of ICT in redefining business processes and audit procedures. According to Cannon and Crowe (2004), ICT is critical for managing business processes efficiently, an assertion that is vividly supported by the high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha of 0.857) observed in our survey responses, indicating that organizations are effectively implementing ICT strategies that align with their operational needs. This mirrors the literature's assertion that as ICT progresses, it challenges traditional audit values and necessitates a shift towards more integrated and technologically advanced audit processes (Tongren, 1997; Rezaee and Reinstein, 1998).

The importance of strategic clarity in leveraging ICT is further underscored by the empirical data, where organizations with well-defined ICT strategies demonstrate superior market positioning and enhanced competitive analysis capabilities. This aligns with the insights from the TOE framework and the DOI theory, suggesting that clear strategic directives facilitate the adoption and effective utilization of new technologies. For instance, 35.9% of respondents who identified "Profit" as their primary objective highlight a strategic orientation towards financial sustainability, leveraging ICT for enhanced data processing and decision-making capabilities.

The role of e-business in utilizing ICT for operational and strategic gains is significant, as discussed by Cunningham and Rowley (2010). Our findings show that organizations actively engaging in e-business practices are more likely to report improvements in operational efficiency and market reach. Specifically, 37.3% of participants noted high engagement in forming and utilizing

profitable partnerships, underscoring e-business's role in expanding operational capabilities and enhancing market presence. This reflects the literature's view that ICT facilitates a broader scope of business operations, transforming traditional business models and enabling global scalability.

Our analysis highlights that organizations adept at integrating ICT into their strategic framework are not only more efficient but also more adaptable to market changes. The empirical evidence suggests that continuous auditing and real-time data analysis, facilitated by ICT, allow organizations to maintain a competitive edge by rapidly responding to environmental changes and internal dynamics. This capability for continuous innovation is critical in today's fast-paced business environment, where technological advancements frequently alter the competitive landscape.

Furthermore, the interaction between ICT and organizational culture is profound, as ICT not only supports existing strategic orientations but also actively shapes them, creating new strategic pathways and operational paradigms. This dynamic is evident in the data showing varied organizational responses to ICT integration, with large organizations utilizing ICT for extensive data management and smaller firms focusing on agility and rapid response to market changes. This finding is consistent with Mouelhi's (2009) argument that while organizational cultures shape the use of ICT, the influence often runs stronger in the reverse direction, with ICT significantly affecting strategic choices.

The synthesis of our literature review and empirical research findings illustrates that ICT is a crucial lever in modern business strategies, enhancing not only operational efficiencies but also providing strategic advantages that can lead to sustained competitive superiority. As organizations continue to navigate the complexities of digital transformation, the strategic clarity in ICT adoption, coupled with an adaptable organizational culture that embraces continuous innovation, will be pivotal in achieving long-term success. Businesses are encouraged to foster environments where technology and strategy are intertwined, ensuring that ICT investments align with broader business objectives and drive substantial value creation. The strategic integration of ICT is not just about technological investment but about embedding technology within the fabric of organizational strategies to enhance decision-making, operational agility, and market responsiveness.

By employing frameworks such as the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI), Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE), and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), this research not only underscores their relevance but also tests their applicability through empirical data. This dual approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how ICT can be effectively leveraged within organizations to enhance strategic objectives. The study's use of Cronbach's Alpha to ensure the reliability of the survey instrument further solidifies the validity of the findings, making a strong case for the strategic integration of ICT based on both theoretical and empirical grounds.

Another distinguishing feature of this research is its focus on strategic clarity as a critical determinant of ICT utilization and its subsequent impact on organizational success. This study highlights that organizations with clear, well-defined strategies regarding ICT adoption are better positioned to utilize these technologies to achieve superior market competitiveness and operational efficiency. This finding is particularly original as it bridges the gap between ICT

capabilities and strategic management practices, offering insights into how organizations can align their ICT initiatives with broader strategic goals to foster a competitive advantage. The empirical data indicating that organizations with coherent ICT strategies exhibit better market performance and profitability substantiates the argument that strategic clarity is not just beneficial but essential in the technology-driven business landscape.

The article explores the concept of continuous innovation and adaptability facilitated by ICT, which is a relatively underexplored area in existing literature. The study delves into how technologies such as continuous auditing and real-time data analytics transform traditional business practices by enabling ongoing operational adjustments and immediate responsiveness to market dynamics. This aspect of the research is particularly original and valuable as it demonstrates the practical implications of ICT in enhancing not only the efficiency but also the adaptability of organizations. The empirical findings showing that firms embracing continuous innovation through ICT are more likely to maintain and even expand their market presence are pivotal. This underscores the necessity for organizations to not only adopt ICT but to do so in a manner that promotes continuous learning and flexibility.

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