THE EXPECTATIONS OF GRADUATES FROM EMPLOYERS IN THE NORTH-EAST ROMANIA REGION

DANIEL-FLORIN DĂNILOIA, MARIA VIORICA BEDRULE GRIGORUȚĂ

Abstract: Graduates' expectations regarding employers are often the subject of many discussions among human resources specialists and managers. The use of human resources strategies adapted to these expectations can lead to an increase in organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Following the collection of data from a number of 650 graduates from the North-East Region of Romania, through a questionnaire, relevant information was obtained regarding the actions taken by graduates to find a job, the characteristics taken into account when choosing an organization and the benefits expected from employers.

Keywords: job expectation, university graduates, motivating factors, generation.

JEL Classification: M12

1. INTRODUCTION

Graduates' expectations regarding the workplace are often different from what the labor market offers regarding the specifics of the workplace. Motivation at the workplace and staying at a stable workplace are often influenced by the difference between the expectations of the graduates and what the workplace actually offers.

It is essential for company management to understand that demographic and technological changes have an important impact on changes in attitude, social trends and mentality of new generations of employees (McCrindle, 2006).

(Kupperschmidt, 2000) defines a generation as an identifiable group or cohort that shares birth years, age, location, and significant events at critical developmental stages. Each generation is influenced by external forces (parents, peers, media, 

1 Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Iaşi, Romania, daniloaiadaniel@gmail.com
2 Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Iaşi, Romania, maria.bedrulegrigoruta@uaic.ro
critical social and economic events, popular culture), which create the system of common values that differentiate them from people who grew up in other times. Meglino and Ravlin (1998) while generations are characterized by specific values and organizations are characterized by values and constantly communicate these values. Miller and Yu (2003) studies show the existence of consistent differences between generations regarding personality traits, attitude, behaviour and even mental health. Thus, differences influence the workplace environment (Twenge, 2010).

Although there are studies that believe that the differences between generations can be attributed to age or career level (Smola and Sutton, 2002) in a study carried out on different generations at the same age, it emerged that these differences exist because of the generation and not of age or development level.

Considering the fact that the generations of graduates can also be grouped into generational cohorts with different specifics due to different environmental factors, the expectations regarding the workplace must be treated particularly in order to have some motivated employees. In the following pages, the graduates' expectations regarding the workplace will be presented. Graduates of 2021 from the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University from Iasi.

The following approach to graduate expectations covers several important aspects of the employee's life. Answering the following research questions:
- What actions do they take in order to find a suitable job?
- What aspects do they look for in an organization when applying for a job?
- What are the most important criteria when choosing the organization to work in?
- Which are most wanted extra-salary benefits by graduates?

The foundation of the criteria and specifications of the workplace is based on the specialized literature in the field of motivating the new generations at the workplace.

2. EXPECTATION GAP BETWEEN PERSPECTIVE OF GRADUATES AND THE VISION OF EMPLOYERS – A CONSTANT ISSUE

In the report made by (iCIMS Insight, 2022) on a sample of 500 professionals in the field of human resources and 1000 college graduates from the USA, a consistent gap was identified between the requirements of the new generations of graduates and what employers offer. While over 54% of employers say they intend to hire more college graduates, 43% of graduates say they followed a different career path than what they studied in college conform according to a study made by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), iCIMS report
summarized through this research the main differences between the expectations of graduates and the conditions in the labour market: 69% among graduate’s grads would like their job to accommodate some remote work, according to 32% employers, graduates have unrealistic expectations about working remote also they believe that graduates have to high expectations about their starting earnings. 49% of graduates say their views on work-life balance have changed and working from 9 to 5 is not anymore key successful career. Also 41% believe that their employer must engage in social causes that they value, 66% of them say that there must be an alignment between the company's mission and their personal values before applying for a job. (Blaga, 2021) confirms the fact that there is a positive connection between intrinsic motivation and the development of social entrepreneurial activities, values that motivate intrinsic can have the personal values that intrinsically motivate people, can have a very important role in the workplace stability of the new generations, so organizations must take this aspect into account.

In international survey led by (Deloitte, 2021) based on interviews with more than 9,000 students and college graduates from 19 countries from Europe including Romania they found that there is major change in expectations of graduates from previous reports from 2013, 2015 and 2018.

Most important values in their life are for 78% happy family, 83% good health and professional work is very important for 39% of respondents. When choosing an employer, 42% respondents, regardless of gender, see individual plans and opportunities to develop their careers as most important. Salary continues to be an important consideration when choosing an employer, being second most important priority at job. Main reasons to leave an employer according to report are insufficient appreciation of work, negative relationships at work, insufficient opportunities for professional development and low salary/better financial offer by another employer. Also, they found out that 73,3% from respondents are motivated by opportunity to learn something new and acquire new know-how and experience, 43% are motivated by developing and expanding their expert knowledge, 44,6% believe without benefits (promotion, raise, bonuses) can’t be motivated.

An important similarity between the study conducted in the USA and the one in Europe is given by the high percentage of those who consider that a full-time job is not the key to success, in Europe the percentage is lower than in the USA, of approximately 33% of respondents compared to 41%.

Analysing these reports, we can see that there is a change in the approach to the workplace by the new generations, this fact is also generated by the Covid pandemic and the technological changes that have influenced these generations.
Considering the economic context in Romania, influenced by the brain drain phenomenon, researchers are interested in identifying methods and strategies to stop this phenomenon.

The studies carried out regarding the expectations of the young generations of students are also of interest in Romania. In a study carried out by (Matei et al., 2016) using the questionnaire as a research tool, applied to a number of 230 students in the 3rd year of studies, the following desires from job and demotivating factors were identified among students.

Top 3 dissatisfaction of young employees found in this research are:
- Demand of previous experience for entry level jobs, 82% of respondents,
- Lack of importance of academic importance, 65% of respondents,
- Insufficient pay for work, 59% of respondents,

Top 3 desires of young employees from employer:
- Better wage amount, 78% of respondents,
- Less focus on previous experience 67% respondents,
- More importance on academic performance from employers, 59% of respondents.

The main result of this study is given by the inconsistency between what employers offer and what the new generations of graduates want from a job.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is quantitative research. This method was chosen in order to have a more accurate picture of the main characteristics that are desired by a graduate from a job. At the same time, the research is based on another research report carried out by the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University from Iasi within the Service for Students and Graduates in 2017.

3.1. Survey Design

The research tool used is an adaptation of the tool used in 2017 by the Service for Students and Graduates to identify the expectations of graduates and employers (Onofrei Mihaela et al., 2017). The adaptation was carried out according to the new research objectives, the research was carried out within the project "Equal opportunities for education – equity in society! (SE3S)", project code CNFIS-FDI-2021-0489, carried out by the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iasi.

The questionnaire includes 34 items, the vast majority of items were of the closed answer type. In this article, only the answers regarding the graduates'
expectations from future employers are analysed. Answering the research questions from the previous pages.

3.2. Application of the research instrument

The research was carried out within the project "Equal opportunities for education – equity in society! (SE3S)", project code CNFIS-FDI-2021-0489, carried out by the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iasi.

A number of 650 answers were obtained from UAIC graduates, the data collection was carried out by submitting the online questionnaire through the Google forms platform. The data collection was carried out in 2 stages, July 2021 and September 2021, the questionnaire was sent to graduates of bachelor's and master's studies.

3.3. Data analysis

The data were analysed using the SPSS and Excel programs, using descriptive statistics in order to observe the overall perspective on the research variables.

From 650 respondents, 56% they graduated with a bachelor's degree and 44% master’s degree.

![The cycle of studies followed](image)

*Figure 1* Respondents cycle of studies followed

Taking into account the delimitation of generations according to the specialized literature, we have the following distribution of respondents by generation. 526, 80,09% respondents from the generation Z, born between 1996-2002, 63 of respondents accounting for 9,6% of respondents are born between 1981-
1995 and are part of the generation Y (Millennial’s), 61 of respondents are born between 1957 and 1980, part of The Baby Boom Generation (born between 1946 and 1965) and Generation X (born between 1966-1980), respondents are 24% men and 76% women. Distribution of range respondents and generation can be seen in the following figures:

**Figure 2 Generations of respondents**

**Figure 3 Age intervals of respondents**

In order to respond research question, what actions they take in order to find a suitable job, graduates they were asked what actions do to find a job, the question allowed multiple answers. Most done action was to search on job platforms 546 of
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respondents, second was to access website of company, section careers 319 of them. The frequency of actions among graduates can be seen in the figure below:

![Figure 4 Actions done for finding suitable job](chart)

Asking friends action is made by many graduates. This aspect shows us that informal factors can be very important in terms of attracting talent within companies. It is necessary to constantly carry out employee branding actions in order to obtain results through informal recruitment channels.

For responding research question what aspects do they look for in an organization when applying for a job? the respondents had to select which are the criteria they consider when choosing an employer, the question allowed multiple answers.

As can be seen in the following figure, the most often considered criteria regarding a job are attractive salary, flexible work schedule and the possibility to advance in the career. But the other criteria based on specialized literature have a high frequency of occurrence.
The top 3 most important criteria in choosing an employer are attractive salary package, flexible working hours, and balance between professional and private life. Recognition of merits gets a high score regarding importance. Making a correlation between the importance for the recognition of merits and the most important motivating factor, namely the attractive salary level, we identify the similarity with the study carried out by (Uriesi, 2017). In this study it appears that there is a positive impact on the organizational performance of a performance-based payment. According to this study, in Romania, a performance-based payment system is considered fair by employees.
An important point for employees is extra-salary benefits. Extra-salary benefits are very often used by employers to increase the motivation of employees. Given the fact that there is a lower level regarding the taxation of these benefits in Romania. The graduates had to choose the 5 most important extra-salary benefits. In the following figure, you can see the classification of benefits according to importance.

![Figure 7 Top extra-salary benefits](image)

**Figure 7** Top extra-salary benefits

### 4. Conclusion

Although there are substantial differences between the socio-economic environment in the countries of Eastern Europe and the West of the continent, the new generations of graduates share common expectations regarding working life. As it appears from the report made by iCIMS and Deloitte, the new generations of graduates consider that health, balance between personal and private life, attractive salary are the main factors to be motivated at work.

From our research, some key aspects emerge for understanding the way in which the new generations of graduates interact with the labor market:

The most frequently performed actions for obtaining a job by graduates are: using recruitment platforms, accessing company pages (career section), applying with a CV at the company headquarters, asking friends about jobs, using professional social media platforms. Except for the classic actions in the first 3 places, the question of friends about the job is used by a significant number of respondents, this aspect can be viewed through the lens of a cultural aspect, but also through the lens
of the increased need to use proactive employer branding strategies. (Wilden et al., 2010) demonstrates the importance of employer branding strategies in the ability of organizations to attract young talents.

The criteria used by the new generations in choosing an organization are diverse, for all the criteria included in the study there are a significant number of respondents who use them. Considering the diversity of their training, being graduates from 15 different faculties, it influences the chosen criteria.

The top 3 most important criteria are attractive salary, flexibility regarding the work schedule, there is a balance between professional and personal life. These findings are in full correlation with the studies and reports regarding these generations of graduates mentioned in this article.

Attractive salary is the main decision factor also taken into account by other generations of employees in Romania, but the mix with the flexibility of the program and balance between personal and professional life can actually be the main gap between the expectations of graduates and what employers offer at this moment. The existence of a shortage of qualified labor in several sectors of activity puts pressure on employers to increase many times the number of hours worked, rigidity regarding the program to be able to meet the needs of stakeholders leads to an imbalance. Employees from Romania have the highest productivity in relation to the salary level in the European Union and it is the country with the highest increase in labor productivity in the last 15 years at the level of the European Union according to several studies (Cornea Ramona, 2022; Guga Ștefan & Spatari Marcel, 2019; Pele Alexandra, 2022).

Extra-salary benefits are a means very often used by organizations to increase the degree of motivation of employees, these benefits are tax-favored, being easier to offer than net income. However, the mix used by employers can be the key to success in attracting and retaining employees. The 3 most desired extra-salary benefits by the graduates who responded to this research are: private medical insurance, professional courses paid by the company, meal vouchers and the possibility to work from home. the concern for the state of health is also observed in the previously mentioned studies. The orientation of this generation of graduates in terms of professional development stems from their preference for the opportunity to participate in professional courses paid for by the company. Meal vouchers are a ubiquitous extra salary benefit offered by employers to employees.

In this article, the results were presented regarding the expectations of graduates from employers, with the aim of increasing awareness of these expectations, in order to increase motivation and retention at work.
5. RECOMMENDATION

Our recommendations are addressed to human resources specialists, entrepreneurs and managers, considering the specifics of the new generations of graduates, greater attention is needed in order to create a working environment that meets their expectations. Salary payment remains in the first place as a motivation factor among the younger generations, but the flexibility of the schedule and the way of working is a very important factor. Human resources strategies should take into account the different specifics of employees who are part of the same team. Making an optimal combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors can help organizations reduce costs with human resources and increase organizational performance.

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