



Journal of HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

www.jhrm.eu • ISSN 2453-7683

Barriers to work motivation of generation Z

Jana Fratričová, Zuzana Kirchmayer

ABSTRACT

Generation Z (born after 1995) has started to enter the labour market and in the decades to come, it is going to run the world. Naturally, researchers aim to understand unique characteristics of the generation to help employers prepare for the new 'cohort'. While there are many research efforts to separate factors that would help Generation Z feel good at work, less attention has been paid to factors that might present barriers to work motivation. Our study aimed to fill the gap by identifying and exploring factors that possibly create barriers for Generation Z in their work context. Using the narrative data collection method of empathy-based stories (MEBS) on a sample of 235 business students we collected 703 unique items of perceived barriers to work motivation, that were further analysed, coded, grouped into a set of 26 factors and finally organized according to their relationship to three dominant themes (employee, job, and organization) into 6 clusters presenting different intersections of these themes. According to our results, the most prevalent barriers to work motivation emerging from respondents' stories are: not enjoying the content of the work, bad team climate, workload, and having no sense of purpose in the job. We also aimed to identify dichotomic factors i.e. those which were identified as motivation drivers and barriers at the same time. A prominent list of dichotomic (overlapping) factors in both motivators and barriers indicates that most respondents do not separate motivation drivers and barriers in two isolated groups. Enjoying one's work and team climate were also the top two factors accounting for both states of mind at work (positive work motivation as well as lack of it). The most frequently occurring factors cited in surveys on Generation Z such as options of career advancement and continuous learning/growth, generous rewards and chances of making a positive impact were all replicated in our study as well.

KEY WORDS

generation Z, work motivation, MEBS, Slovakia, motivation drivers, motivation barriers

JEL Code: M120

Manuscript received 25 August 2018,
Accepted 3 November 2018

1 INTRODUCTION

Examining generational differences has gained popularity and importance since the beginning of the new millennium. Academic and popular journals have been fixated with the topic of generational characteristics, many times emphasizing generational differences rather than searching for mutual connections. There are three prevailing generations in the current workplace - Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y (Tapscott, 2009). Two decades ago, most people in their mid-60s would slowly leave the labour market to enjoy retirement. However, statistics of the World Health Organization show that global population aged 60 years could expect to live another 20.5 years on average in 2016. According to OECD, "in an era of rapid population ageing, many employment and social policies, practices and attitudes that discourage work at an older age have passed their sell-by date and need to be overhauled. [...] Employment at older ages will need to increase further to ensure adequate pensions for many people." (OECD, 2017).

It's no wonder that not being able to enjoy retirement is what most bothers Generation X (Bresman & Rao, 2017), who are now turning almost 40 to 60 with birth years ranging from 1961 to 1981 (Erickson, 2010). Longer life span and generally better health are not the only factors that contribute to people staying at work longer than they once used to. In addition, there is a need to offset financial losses from the economic crash of 2008 (Bejtkovský,

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Jana Fratričová / Comenius University in Bratislava / Slovakia / jana.fratricova@fm.uniba.sk

Zuzana Kirchmayer / Comenius University in Bratislava / Slovakia / zuzana.kirchmayer@fm.uniba.sk

2016). As a result, for the first time in history, five generations will soon be working side by side (Knight 2014) with Generation Z slowly entering the world of work. Individual studies on the youngest Generation Z (further also referred to as 'Gen Z') report some level of variation in terms of definition of its birth years. Some authors state Generation Z birth rate as 1995 – 2009 (McCrinkle, 2014), 1995 – 2010 (Bencsik et al., 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Koulopoulos & Keldsen, 2016), or simply "after 1997" (Bresman & Rao, 2017).

Nowadays, Gen Z is slowly converging onto the labour market and in the decades to come, it is going to run the world. It is obvious that the impact of this generation on workplace practices is going to be tremendous. It can hardly be denied that five different generations sharing a workplace of 21st century will increase complexity and make managerial work more challenging than ever. While intergenerational tension at the workplace is a topic on its own (e.g. Kupperschmidt, 2000; Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Parry & Urwin, 2011; Parry & Tyson, 2011), in this article we focus on Gen Z characteristics that can have potential implications for management and HR.

2 THEORETICAL INSIGHTS

A generational cohort refers to an "identifiable group that shares birth years, age, location and significant life events at critical developmental stages" (Kupperschmidt, 2000:66). "Differences between generations are theorized to occur because of major influences in the environment within which early human socialization occurs; influences that impact on the development of personality, values, beliefs and expectations that, once formed, are stable into adulthood" (Macky et al., 2008:858). Research on generations suggests that individuals belonging to the same generation also have similar values and personality traits that differ from those of previous generations (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Generational differences also affect other aspects of people management, e.g. training and development (Berl, 2006), career development (McDonald & Hite, 2008) or working arrangements and rewards (Carlson, 2004).

The unique historical context shaping Generation Z is widely linked to technologies and digital age. Besides Generation Z, terminology describing this generational group thus includes terms "digital integrators" (McCrinkle, 2014) or "digital natives" (Friedrich et al., 2010) emphasizing that technology has been weaved into the early lives of Generation Z as if it was their sixth sense. Technologically fluent, always connected, using mobile phones, tablets and instant communication, the technological trait of this generation has been largely described already. "This Internet-savvy technologically literate generation has been shaped to multitask. They move quickly from one task to another, often placing more value on speed than accuracy. They have only known a wireless, hyperlinked, user-generated world where they are only ever a few clicks away from any piece of knowledge" (McCrinkle, 2014:66). While being used to instant online communication, there is some evidence that Generation Z are more concerned with privacy and safety than the previous generation of Generation Y, and more drawn to private social networks (Lanier, 2017).

As for the economic pattern shaping the generational cohort, Generation Z has had numerous chances to watch their parents go through difficult times. Their potential pragmatic view of the world may result from the fact that they were growing up during the period of economic recession and ever-present signs of a financial downturn. In 2016, Jericho Chambers and the CIPD created a work collaboration program for 24 people from Generation Z. Experience from this initiative suggest that some generational characteristics stood out as particularly pronounced. Above all, Generation Z is practical. "With formative years shaped by recession, terrorism, rising house prices and corporate scandal, Gen Z are likely to be worse off than their parents — and they know it." (Harris, 2016).

2.1 A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW OF GEN Z WORK PREFERENCES

As we outlined in literature review of our recent paper (Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2018), research agenda regarding Gen Z has focused on five different research streams so far. Two of these streams are at the core of managerial implications of Generation Z entering the workplace. First, it is the research on unique features of Generation Z that make this generation different from the previous ones (e.g. Friedrich et al., 2010; McCrinkle, 2014; Meret et al., 2018). The other one comprises what we call the "business aspect", i.e. how Gen Z might affect the management, employment and HR practices in organizations (e.g. Schwabel, 2014; Bencsik et al., 2016; Meret et al., 2018; Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2017).

As for the work preferences of Generation Z, research is largely powered by the effort to separate factors that would help Gen Z feel good at work. Naturally, employers believe that recognizing aspects that matter to the generation which is just about to start work will help them align business needs with employee needs and prepare for the new 'cohort'. This would also explain why some surveys on Gen Z work preferences are carried out by prominent consulting companies around the world.

For example, a 2014 worldwide study presented three dominant work motivators of Gen Z – advancement, more money and meaningful work (Schwabel, 2014). According to Meret et al. (2018) who conducted their research on a sample of high school students, factors that count most when Generation Z are deciding about their jobs are possibilities for learning and development, trust and job security. A Robert Half survey (2015) revealed that Gen Z consider career opportunities as the top factor when selecting a job. Followed by generous pay and making a positive impact, the survey showed top three of Gen Z job search priorities. A study by Deloitte (2018) disclosed that the aspects of financial rewards, positive workplace culture, flexibility and opportunities of continuous learning are the top factors that Gen Z consider when searching for a new job. Furthermore, our 2017 survey of work preferences of Gen Z business students in Slovakia showed that the nature of job along with work-life balance matter the most in search for a potential future employer among Gen Z. However, job security, flexibility of work and opportunities for training and development were also considered important (Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2017).

Albeit some methodological differences, the underlying concept in most surveys on Gen Z work preferences is usually that of ranking a list of motivation factors so to recognize which of them matter most to Gen Z in the process of searching for a new job or at work itself. The level of consistency in survey results is remarkable, although the pattern on top three motivating factors tends to be somewhat versatile. The growth factor and opportunity for further development seems to be an overlapping factor identified as very important for Gen Z in most of the studies.

The survey approach that asks respondents belonging to a certain generation to rate their opinion of their own work preferences is for sure useful in mapping similarities and differences across generations. Still, we need to keep in mind the necessity of removing potential impact of age or data collection period before speaking of generation-specific distinctive features or generational gap. However, it is important to let members of individual generations express their feelings and perceptions without providing a qualitative menu of intended generational characteristics. Our current work within Gen Z intends to excavate the traits of Gen Z itself prior to any cross-generational work. Also, studying the work motives of Gen Z we need to remember that the great deal of its members are yet in the process of education and it can be expected that some new generational traits will emerge as they will move on to the labour market.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This article aims to explore barriers to motivation as seen by Generation Z business students in Slovakia. Our main research question was: *What are the factors, which Generation Z students perceive as barriers to work motivation?* The results presented in this article are part of a broader preliminary study on motivation preferences of Generation Z in Slovakia (see also Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2018). Our study was based on the works of Kultalahti and Viitala (2014; 2015), who examined motivation preferences of the previous generation (Generation Y, which is referred to as “Millennials”) in Finland using qualitative data collection method of empathy-based stories (MEBS). It is important to emphasize that our research was not aimed to map the strength of factors provoking negative work feelings. Instead, the intention was to generate the list of items that would frame the existence, scope and range of themes, which Gen Z perceive as important for their future work. Revealing these factors provides ground for future quantitative research on Gen Z.

Method. MEBS, often also referred to as passive role-playing (Eskola, 1998) is a method considered to be positioned between surveys and interviews (Juntunen & Saarti, 2000). Although rarely used in management (Eskola, 1998), the method is well suited for conducting exploratory research or mapping out a research area as it can help reveal issues or topics the researchers were not aware beforehand or provide valuable insights into the topic and deeper understanding of respondents’ concerns and ideas around it (Juntunen & Saarti, 2000, Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014). MEBS uses at least two simple background stories to be interpreted, explained or completed by respondents. In these stories, one factor is varied in order to make comparisons. (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014:573).

In our research on Generation Z, respondents were provided with one positive and one negative story regarding work motivation and engagement of an employee named Samuel and asked to explain why Samuel felt the way he did. We used the stories written and used by Kultalahti and Viitala (2014; 2015). The stories were translated to Slovak language and the wording was slightly adjusted to describe the situation naturally to Slovak readers. In this paper, we only present the results of the negative story, which read as follows:

Imagine that one day Samuel comes home from work. He feels tired, and he cannot seem to find any enthusiasm for his work. He does not feel like going to work again tomorrow in the morning and he is looking forward to the weekend, so that he does not have to go to work. Why does Samuel feel so negative about his job and why does he lack enthusiasm?

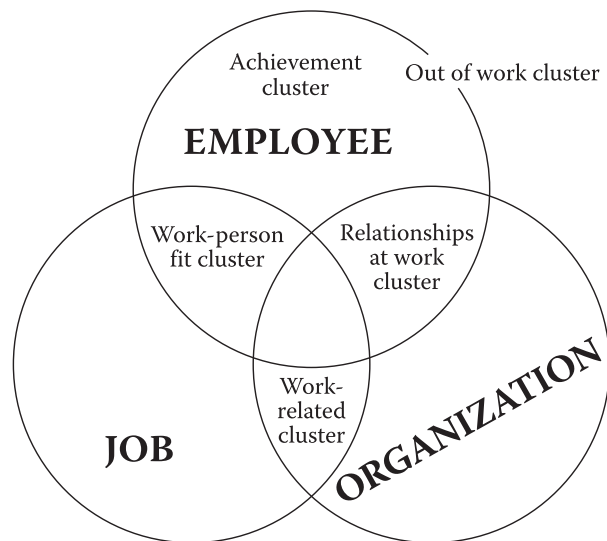
Data collection and sample. The data collection was performed among Generation Z management students at Comenius University in Bratislava in 2017. While aware that Generation Z grew up with technology at their hands, we insisted that data collection was performed on paper. We wanted to make sure to arrange for conditions of data collection as much alike for all respondents as possible. Providing extra time after seminars for respondents who wanted to participate, we tried to eliminate disturbances and impact of situational factors that possibly go with electronic data collection. Both stories were printed on one sheet, leaving enough space for respondents to express their understanding of why the suggested situation was happening.

Our sample consisted of 235 Generation Z members – students born between 1995-1998 studying towards their bachelor's degree in management, where the majority was born in 1997. Females counted for 55% (N=129) and males for 45% (N=106) of our sample. Most of our respondents (85%; N=200) stated they had a work experience in a form of part-time job, internship, or even full-time position.

On average, a respondent provided 3 different reasons why Samuel seems to lack enthusiasm for his work. All collected data were listed for further analysis, generating a list of 730 items in total. Then, all items were checked and in case a single respondent recorded more items that were equal in content or representing the same theme, they have only been coded once. Thus, 27 items were excluded from the list. Most repeated themes of Samuel's negative feelings were related to "work enjoyment" and "lack of interest" in his job. Finally, after excluding duplicated items, the total sample consisted of 703 items. Using content analysis, we have coded all of them into 26 unique factors, each of them comprising items that were equal or similar in terms of their meaning.

The next step in our analysis was to group the emerged factors into clusters based on their nature. Similarly to our previous results on (positive) motivational factors (Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2018), the same three main themes (employee, job, and organization) and their intersections emerged (Figure 1). All factors were finally grouped to six different clusters: work-person fit, relationships at work, work-related factors, achievement, out of work factors, and organizational factors.

Figure1: Model of factor clusters



Source: Kirchmayer & Fratričová (2018)

4 RESEARCH RESULTS

Classification of items generating in data collection into factors allowed us to calculate frequencies by items as well by respondents as shown in Table 1 below. Since many respondents stated multiple items, we report both types of frequencies in Table 1 below. Two main themes seem to resonate more than others in prompting negative work emotions and a lack of enthusiasm. First, it is the theme of **'not enjoying one's work'** that was specified by 57.02% of respondents (19.06% of items) using very consistent wording. The second factor provoking negative feelings was **team climate** reported by 48.94% of respondents (16.36% of items). Here, the range of items classified in this factor was somewhat wider including bad relations with his colleagues, 'unpleasant' peers or work climate and peer pressure.

Next, the theme of **workload** appeared in the stories of 21.70% of respondents (7.25% of items). They ascribed Samuel's lack of enthusiasm to his exhaustion due to a terrible workload or mentioned that the work expectations placed upon Samuel are too high. Having **no sense of purpose** in his job was the fourth most frequent theme

appearing in the stories of 20% of respondents (6.69% of items). Here the items ranged from not being able to see the purpose of his job, to not identifying with it.

The theme of insufficient reward appeared in two different contexts and was therefore coded in two separate factors. The major difference in the stories was in how the respondents perceived that Samuel's reward is low – whether they just stated it as a matter of fact, or they argued that this state is not fair to Samuel. The items in which Samuel's low reward was attributed to the general pay level in his job (meaning this was a normal situation in the job, but it was low in general), were classified in the factor of **low pay**, which ranked the fifth most frequent (17.87% of respondents; 5.97% of items). However, insufficient reward was also mentioned in a way that there is a discrepancy between how Samuel should be paid according to his job, performance, or compared to others and his actual reward. These items, in which the respondents argued that Samuel's **pay is unfair** or inadequate, were found in the stories of 9.79% respondents (3.27% of items).

The sixth position on the list of barriers to motivation was taken by **no interest in work** (15.74% of respondents; 5.26% of items). It consisted of items explaining that Samuel is not interested in the job at all, he only works to earn some money (without any further reference to how much it was). Some respondents explained that he was forced to work to earn money, others stated that his only motivation was to earn the money that is paid for the job (without the condition that he had to work), but no interest in the work itself was common denominator in both cases.

Next, 14.04% of respondents (4.69% of items) attached Samuel's negative emotions to his **poor performance** at work. This factor included items suggesting that Samuel's work results were objectively not good enough to feel satisfied at work, he lacked skills or knowledge needed for the job, or received a poor job evaluation and therefore was not feeling happy about his work. This factor was followed by having a job which is **not his work of interest**. A typical narrative in this case was that Samuel works in an area that does not suit him. Unlike items coded in previously stated factors (especially "poor performance", "no sense of purpose", or "no interest in work") responses coded in this factor were not dealing with Samuel's performance, the actual quality or purpose of the job he was holding, or his motivation to work. They simply stated that no matter what the job was, it was not "the job" for Samuel and therefore his motivation was low.

The theme of **leadership** appeared in terms of **relationship** (10.21% of respondents; 3.41% of items), and in terms of being a **bad leader** in general (8.94% of respondents; 2.99% of items). While the "leadership: relationship" comprises items referring to Samuel's poor quality of relationship with his immediate superior, or perceived lack of understanding or support from his leader, "bad leader" factor refers to having a leader, who does not know how to lead the team in general or does not do it properly for some reasons.

Some respondents believed that the barrier to Samuel's motivation lied in the **monotonous** and repetitive character of his work (8.94% of respondents; 2.99% of items), or that his **physical work conditions** were unsatisfiable, unhealthy, unsuitable or unfriendly (8.09% of respondents; 2.70% of items). It was followed by **conflicts with co-workers** (7.23% of respondents; 2.42% of items), **career stagnation** occurring either for objective or subjective reasons (6.81% of respondents; 2.28% of items), and **lack of recognition** described in terms of lacking any work feedback or feeling unseen by superiors (5.96% of respondents; 1.99% of items). For 5.11% of respondents (1.71% of items) the reason for Samuel's negative feelings were not tied to work itself but originated from his **private problems** he was dealing with.

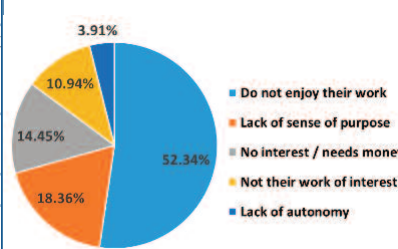
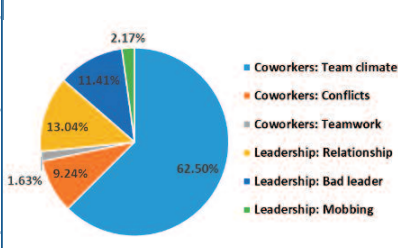
More factors occurred in the stories, including Samuel's **lack of autonomy** as there were strict rules and procedures he had to follow in his job, current or regular work **stress**, not being satisfied with his **work time**, being a part of a team that does not cooperate well and thus having poor **teamwork**, or being a subject of **mobbing**. However, the reasons for Samuel's situation were also seen in his **laziness**, **negative outlook** or just having a **bad day** in general. Finally, working for an organization with a bad reputation, or other major problems preventing it from being a good employer was seen as a problem, too.

Table 1: Most prevalent negative factors (barriers) emerging from respondents' stories

Factors of motivation	Nominal item prevalence (N=703)	% of items (N=703)	% of respondents (N=235)
Does not enjoy his work	134	19.06%	57.02%
Co-workers: Team climate	115	16.36%	48.94%
Workload	51	7.25%	21.70%
Lack of sense of purpose	47	6.69%	20.00%
Reward: Low pay	42	5.97%	17.87%
No interest in work / only works for money	37	5.26%	15.74%
Poor performance	33	4.69%	14.04%
Not his work of interest	28	3.98%	11.91%
Leadership: Relationship	24	3.41%	10.21%
Reward: Unfair pay	23	3.27%	9.79%
Leadership: Bad leader	21	2.99%	8.94%
Monotonous work	21	2.99%	8.94%
Physical work conditions	19	2.70%	8.09%
Co-workers: Conflicts	17	2.42%	7.23%
Career stagnation	16	2.28%	6.81%

For grouping the factors based on their relationship to employee, job and organisation characteristics or their intersections (Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2018), six different clusters were needed. Clustering factors enabled us to better understand the areas of employee-job-organisation relationship where barriers to motivation are seen by Generation Z. As shown in Table 2 and Figure 2, more than a third of all items related to work-person fit (36.42%), followed by relationships at work (26.17%), work-related factors (23.76%), achievement (8.96%), out of work factors (4.13%), and organisation (0.57%).

Table 2: Factors and clusters of barriers to motivation

Factors and clusters of motivation	A brief factor descriptor	% prevalence	Number of items (N=703)
Work – person fit <i>Cluster factors breakdown:</i>		36.42%	256
Does not enjoy his work	He does not like or enjoy the work content itself. He does not like what he does on a daily basis.		
Lack of sense of purpose	He does not see the purpose in his job, the job is not fulfilling. He does not identify with the job purpose.		
No interest in work / only work for money	He is no interested in the job at all. His only motivation for working is to earn money.		
Not his work of interest	He works in an area that does not suit him.		
Lack of autonomy	He feels he cannot use his creativity within the job or do it his way. He is forced to follow strict procedures and he does not like it.		
Relationships at work <i>Cluster factors breakdown:</i>		26.17%	184
Co-workers: Team climate	The general team climate is not good. He does not feel good among his colleagues.		
Co-workers: Conflicts	He is in conflict with one or more co-workers.		
Co-workers: Teamwork	The team is not performing well. One or more colleagues are not working or cooperating enough and the team outcome is thus unsatisfactory.		
Leadership: Relationship	The quality of relationship with his immediate superior is poor. He does not feel his manager understands or supports him.		
Leadership: Bad leader	The manger is a bad leader in general – he/she either does not know how to lead his team or does not do it properly for some other reasons.		
Leadership: Mobbing	He is mobbed by his manager.		

Work-related factors <i>Cluster factors breakdown:</i>		23.76%	167
Workload	He has a terrible workload and is exhausted. The work expectations placed upon him are too much.		
Reward: Low pay	The pay for his job is low in general.		
Reward: Unfair pay	He feels his pay is not adequate or fair. There is a perceived discrepancy between his pay and the work content. He is paid unfair compared to other peers.		
Monotonous work	Work content is monotonous and repetitive. He is doing the same things for a long time.		
Physical work conditions	The work environment is unsatisfiable. The physical space is unhealthy, unsuitable or unfriendly.		
Stress	He is stressed by his work either now or on regular basis.		
Work time	He has to "sit at work" although all his work is done. He has to work long hours.		
Achievement <i>Cluster factors breakdown:</i>		8.96%	63
Poor performance	His work results are objectively not good enough to feel satisfied at work. He lacks skills or knowledge needed for the job. He received poor job evaluation.		
Career stagnation	There is no prospect for career advancement either for objective or subjective reasons.		
Lack of recognition	He lacks positive (or any) feedback on his work. He feels unseen by his superiors.		
Out of work factors <i>Cluster factors breakdown:</i>		4.13%	29
Private problems	He feels uneasy about some private issues (regarding health, family members, friends, etc.).		
Bad day	He's just had a really bad day. Something bad happened to him (not necessarily at work).		
Negative outlook	He is a negative person always being dissatisfied with everything.		
Laziness	He does not want to work at all. He is lazy.		
Organisation <i>Cluster factors breakdown:</i>		0.57%	4
Organisation	The organisation has a bad reputation, major problems, or is otherwise not a good employer.	0.57%	4

The **work-person fit cluster** comprising was the most prevalent one in respondents' narratives. More than one third of all items (36.42%) were proposing that the core of Samuel's negative feelings lied in his incompatibility with the nature of his job – be it a work content he does not enjoy, job purpose he does not see or find interesting, job area that does not suit him, or having no personal interest in work at all. Lack of autonomy was also included in this cluster. According to the narratives, items coded in this factor pointed out to the disharmony between Samuel's desire to be more creative in his work and the actual work procedures that had to be followed (not the job content in general). Therefore, it was included to work-person fit cluster rather than work-related factors cluster.

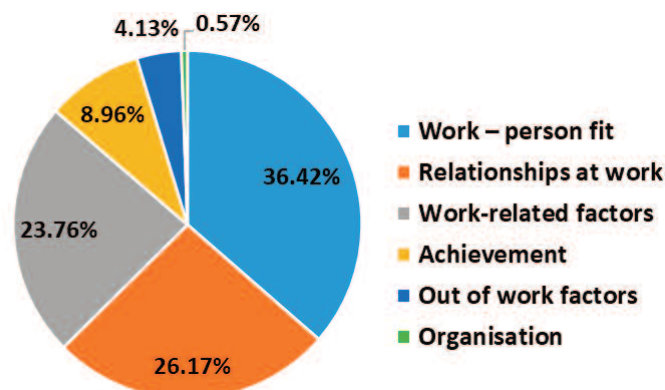
The **relationships at work cluster**, which covers more than a quarter of all items (26.17%) includes barriers to motivation arising from problems with Samuel's co-workers (such as bad team climate, conflicts, or bad teamwork) and leaders (having a bad relationship with a leader, having a manager who does not lead his team properly, or being mobbed). Interestingly, almost three quarters of items within this cluster (73.37%) deal with co-workers and only 26.63% ascribe Samuel's lack of enthusiasm to problems with leadership.

Work-related factors accounted for 23.76% of all items. Within this cluster, having a terrible workload and being exhausted was the most frequent theme (30.54%), followed by low pay (25.15%), and unfair pay practices (13.77%). However, Samuel's lack of enthusiasm was also assigned to having a job with a monotonous and repetitive work content (12.57%), unsatisfiable physical work conditions (11.38%), having a stressful job (4.79%), and having to work long hours (1.80%).

In **achievement cluster** (8.96% of items), poor performance was the most frequent reason for Samuel's bad feelings (52.38% of items within the cluster), followed by non-existent prospects for career advancement (25.4%), and lack of recognition from his peers or immediate superior (22.22%).

The remaining two clusters were represented less frequently. Factors grouped into **out of work cluster** accounted for 4.13% and covered reasons for Samuel's unhappiness that lied outside his work reality, such as private problems he had to solve, having a bad day, and being a negative or lazy person. **Organisation cluster** (0.57% of all items) consisted of only one factor pointing to organisation having a bad reputation or being a bad employer as a source of barriers to Samuel's motivation.

Figure 2: Percentage of factor clusters for negative work motivation



5 DISCUSSION

As mentioned in literature review, a substantial part of existing empirical research on Gen Z deals with underlying characteristics of the generation in work context and its career preferences based on quantitative research. As if following a general premise, most research questions are merged around the determination to specify factors that motivate Gen Z at work and enumerate their strength. To our best knowledge, the question of what does *not* motivate Gen Z has not received much academic/practitioner attention so far. Perhaps the reason for exploring mostly positive aspects of motivation is the belief that the *lack* of these factors will generally decrease the level of motivation. The research question of motivation/demotivation, satisfaction/dissatisfaction and other constructs working across the continuum as opposed to being at two different ends of a continuum has a very long academic tradition including classical works by Herzberg (1959; 1968).

On the contrary to the prevalent uniscale survey approach, our work aimed for generating unique factors that possibly create barriers for Gen Z in their work context and have not been linked to Gen Z so far. **The list of items, factors and clusters generated from research data collected** through MEBS should be considered more significant than actual frequencies of their occurrence. Items reported by respondents as triggers of negative emotions related to work and lack of motivation/enthusiasm were generated intuitively, providing no guidelines or options to select from. The idea was to observe how Gen Z students construct their thoughts of motivation barriers when they are not guided by the popular survey approach.

The exploratory stage of our research explains why we believe that **conclusions should not be drawn from cluster rankings at this point**. Still, we set the presented cluster ranking of ‘negative’ factors against our previous work on motivation triggers that was also based on MEBS (Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2018) in order to outline potential overlaps. The most influential cluster in both positive and negative stories is that of work-person fit. While positive stories reported in this cluster mostly emphasized the link between enjoying one’s work and work motivation, negative stories depicted the lack of sense of purpose and the state when one does not feel fulfilled by his work.

When we sorted positive clusters of factors leading to work enthusiasm top-down by frequency, the battery of work-related cluster ranked second (Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2018) comprising factors like reward, personal development, workload, work time and freedom at work. In motivation barriers though, the work-related cluster was overtaken by relationships at work including team climate, teamwork and various aspects of leadership. One possible interpretation that requires further research is that the negative effect of absence of healthy and pleasant relationships at the workplace possibly outgrows their benefits. Perhaps the toxic impact of perceived disharmony with peers or manager overrides the gains that come with pleasant co-workers and a good boss. The achievement cluster in both drivers and barriers included equal themes of performance achievement and career advancement. Naturally, these themes were specified in negative connotations on the barriers’ side, i.e. poor work performance and career stagnation. Out-of-work factors were at the bottom of both rankings, mostly related to private happiness/problems or situational factors such as having a good/bad day.

Table 3: Factor ranking by frequency

Motivation drivers	Motivation barriers
Enjoys work	Does not enjoy his work
Co-workers	Co-workers: Team climate
Reward	Workload
Achievement	Lack of sense of purpose
Career advancement	Reward: Low pay
Personal development	No interest in work
Recognition	Poor performance
Workplace	Not his work of interest
Leadership	Leadership: Relationship
Work of interest	Reward: Unfair pay
Good day	Leadership: Bad leader
Private happiness	Monotonous work
Impact	Physical work conditions
Other factors	Co-workers: Conflicts
	Career stagnation
	Lack of recognition
	Private problems and other factors

Source of motivation drivers list: Kirchmayer & Fratričová (2018)

Note: Top dichotomic factors in bold.

On top of cluster frequencies, we looked deeper into both motivation drivers and barriers (Table 3). The key question was to what extent are factors causing work (de)motivation of Gen Z relevant to just motivation or just demotivation. Does each side of the (de)motivation scale relate to isolated factors or do some factors work across the continuum? At this point, we analysed overlaps between motivation barriers and motivation triggers reported before. Above all, we aimed to identify dichotomic factors i.e. those which were identified as motivation drivers and barriers at the same time.

By frequency, **top two factors accounting for both states of mind at work (positive work motivation /enthusiasm as well as lack of it) are enjoying one’s work and team climate (relationship with peers)**. On the barriers side, chances are that these factors account for majority of work frustration that the respondents have lived through or witnessed so far.

Enjoying one’s work appears to be the most dichotomic factor on the list. On one hand, it was the most often quoted factor accounting for positive work motivation (64.70% of respondents, Kirchmayer and Fratričová 2018). In its absence, on the other hand, 57.02% of respondents think of it as a trigger of missing work enthusiasm.

The theme of reward also has a twofold character. It was described in many stories as a powerful motivation driver (with strong emphasis on financial reward, though) (Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2018). On the other hand, low or unfair reward is a clear motivation barrier to many respondents.

The list of factors which appeared on both sides of the motivation continuum includes achievement, too. To many, outstanding performance was a source of work enthusiasm and motivation, while poor performance was often seen as a source of frustration. Similarly, career advancement and space for personal development were mentioned in both groups.

A prominent list of dichotomic (overlapping) factors in both motivators and barriers indicates that most respondents do not separate motivation drivers and barriers in two isolated groups. This is in line with the findings of Kultalahti and Viitala (2014) who found several dichotomies when exploring (de)motivation factors in Millennials.

Although due to exploratory stage of our research we need to interpret factor frequencies with caution, it is interesting to see that **the theme of leadership was surprisingly not among the top frustration factors.** One potential reason is that university students do not yet have enough empirical experience to comprehend potential impact of the direct superior on their motivation. This would clarify why most items reported in the leadership theme were rather unspecific in terms of explaining why exactly the leader is a source of Samuel's demotivation. Some of the less frequent factors, such as lack of recognition or career stagnation will have to be explored with equal attention in the future since the actual importance of individual factors to Gen Z can potentially differ from the results of our preliminary research.

Surprisingly, the MEBS approach has not generated too many new unique aspects of motivating Gen Z. Most of the reported stories related to factors which were also identified as important to Gen Z members using a standard survey approach outlined in literature review above. The most frequently occurring factors cited in surveys on Gen Z such as options of career advancement and continuous learning/growth, generous rewards and chances of making a positive impact were all replicated in our study as well.

6 CONCLUSION

Nowadays, Generation Z presents the youngest pool of talent entering the world of work and thus is gaining a lot of attention in the business environment. Understanding their unique motives, and attitudes to work-related issues might be crucial for attracting and retaining young talent in the coming years.

Our study aimed to understand what factors are seen as barriers to work motivation by Generation Z. As the motivation patterns of generational cohorts are usually researched in terms of (positive) motivation, we wanted to look at them from a different angle to see to what extent they are overlapping. In order to generate a set of unique factors that might be otherwise hidden behind the scenes, we adopted a method of empathy-based stories that has been rarely used both in management as well as in the region of Central Europe. Not enjoying the content of the work, bad team climate, too much workload, and having no sense of purpose in the job seem to be the most prevalent barriers to work motivation. Although the MEBS approach has not generated too many new unique aspects of motivating Gen Z, the study revealed important themes regarding work motivation and provided a compact set of items for further quantitative research.

Naturally, there are some limitations to our study that must be addressed. The first limitation lies in the size and character of our sample. The sample consisted entirely of business students and its size was not big enough to come up with generalized conclusions. Further studies are needed to see if the motivational patterns remain unchanged across different fields of study. Second, the method of empathy-based stories works with projections of one's beliefs and motives on an imaginative stranger, which might not reflect the respondent's patterns perfectly. Therefore, it is likely that some factors remained still uncovered. Third, the work experience of our respondents is very limited due to their young age and thus their perception of the work situation might not be comprehensive. Although most of our respondents stated they had a previous work experience, it is reasonable to assume that the real full-time work experience is yet to come. Fourth, some of the findings might not be generation-related but age-related. To distinguish between generation-related motives and those that are tied more to age than to a generational cohort, a future research examining the same cohort at different age and life stage is needed.

To conclude, future studies are needed to fully understand Generation Z work motives and unique characteristics. A further quantitative study might be useful in uncovering the intensity of the factors identified in this study. However, it is hard to predict which work preferences and motives remain unchanged over time. It is vital to get back repeatedly to the generation at different ages to see what characteristics remain unchanged and thus really set Generation Z members apart from the others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank Patrícia Šíková for valuable assistance with data collection.

REFERENCES

- Bejtkovský, J. (2016). The employees of baby boomers generation, generation X, generation Y and generation Z in selected Czech corporations as conceivers of development and competitiveness in their corporation. *Journal of Competitiveness* 8(4), 105-123.
- Bencsik, A., Horváth-Csikós, G., & Juhász, T. (2016). Y and Z generations at workplaces. *Journal of Competitiveness*, 8(3), 90-106.
- Berl, P. (2006). Crossing the generational divide. *Exchange*. March/April, 73-76.
- Bresman, H., & Rao, V. D. (2017). A survey of 19 countries shows how generations X, Y, and Z are - and aren't - different. *Harvard Business Review*, 95(4).
- Carlson, H. (2004). Changing of the guard. *The School Administrator*, August, 36-39.
- Crumpacker, M., & Crumpacker, J.M. (2007). Succession planning and generational stereotypes: should HR consider age-based values and attitudes a relevant factor or passing fad? *Public Personnel Management*. 36(4), 349-69.
- Deloitte Millennial Survey. 2018. [online], Retrieved October 3, 2018. Available at: [https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/sk/Documents/Publikcie/gx-2018-millennial-survey-report%20\(1\).pdf](https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/sk/Documents/Publikcie/gx-2018-millennial-survey-report%20(1).pdf)
- Erickson, T. J. (2010). The leaders we need now. *Harvard Business Review*, 88(5), 63-66.
- Eskola, J. (1998). *Eläytymismenetelmä sosiaalitutkimuksen tiedonhankintamenetelmänä*. [The method of empathy-based stories as a method of acquiring data in social research]. University of Tampere: TAJU.
- Friedrich, R., Peterson, M. Koster, A., & Blum, S. (2010). The rise of Generation C: Implications for the world of 2020, Booz & Company. [online], Retrieved March 20, 2018. Available at: http://www.strategyand.pwc.com/media/file/Strategyand_Rise-of-Generation-C.pdf
- Harris, E. (2016). Gen Z on the future of work — the WikiWorkLab. [online]. Retrieved September 10, 2018. Available at: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/changing-work-views/future-work/thought-pieces/wikiworklab-gen-z-future-work>
- Herzberg, F., Mausner, B., & Snyderman, B. (1959). *The motivation to work*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Herzberg, F. (1987). One more time: How do you motivate employees? *Harvard Business Review*, 65(5), 109-20. (originally published in 1968).
- Juntunen, A., & Saarti, J. (2000). Library as the student's cornerstone or obstacle: Evaluating the method of empathy-based stories. *Libri* 50(4), 235-240.
- Kirchmayer, Z., & Fratričová, J. (2017). On the verge of generation Z: Career expectations of current university students. *Education Excellence and Innovation Management through Vision 2020*, IBIMA, Vienna, pp. 1575-1583.
- Kirchmayer, Z., & Fratričová, J. (2018). What motivates generation Z at work? Insights into motivation drivers of business students in Slovakia. *Innovation Management and Education Excellence through Vision 2020*, IBIMA, Milan, pp. 6019-6030.
- Knight, R. (2014). Managing people from 5 generations. [online]. Retrieved August 28, 2018. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2014/09/managing-people-from-5-generations>
- Koulopoulos, T., & Keldsen, D. (2016). *Gen Z effect: The six forces shaping the future of business*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kultalahti, S., & Viitala, R. (2014). Sufficient challenges and a weekend ahead – Generation Y describing motivation at work. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 27(4), 569-582.
- Kultalahti, S., & Viitala, R. (2015). Generation Y - challenging clients for HRM? *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 30(1), 101-114.
- Kupperschmidt, B. (2000). Multigenerational employees: Strategies for effective management. *Health Care Manager*, 19(1), 65-76.
- Lanier, K., (2017). 5 things HR professionals need to know about Generation Z. *Strategic HR Review*, 16(6), 288-290.

- Macky, K., Gardner, D., & Forsyth, S. (2008). Generational differences at work: Introduction and overview. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23(8), 857-861.
- McCrandle, M. (2014). *The ABC of XYZ: Understanding the global generations*, 3rd ed., Bella Vista: McCrandle Research.
- McDonald, K., & Hite, L. (2008). The next generation of career success: Implications for HRD. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 10, 86-103.
- Meret, Ch., Fioravanti, S., Iannotta, M., & Gatti, M. (2018). *The digital employee experience: Discovering generation Z. Digital Technology and Organizational Change*, Springer International Publishing.
- OECD (2017). Pensions at a glance 2017. OECD and G20 indicators. [online], Retrieved March 20, 2018. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/pension_glance-2017-en
- Parry, E., & Urwin, P. (2011). Generational differences in work values: A review of theory and evidence. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13(1), 79-96.
- Parry, E., & Tyson, S. (Eds.) (2011). *Managing an age-diverse workforce*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Robert Half (2015). Get ready for Generation Z. [online]. Retrieved September 12, 2018. Available at: https://www.roberthalf.com/sites/default/files/documents/rh_0715_grph_1330x3433_genzinfographic_can_eng_sec.pdf
- Schwabel, D. (2014), Gen Y and gen Z global workplace expectations study. [online], Retrieved March 20, 2018. Available at: <http://millennialbranding.com/2014/geny-genz-global-workplace-expectations-study>
- Seemiller, C., & Grace, M. (2016). *Generation Z goes to college*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
- Tapscott, D. (2009). *Grown up digital, how the Net generation is changing your world*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Professional.
- Twenge, J.M., & Campbell, S.M. (2008). Generational differences in psychological traits and their impact on the workplace. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23(8), 862-77.
- World Health Organization. *Global health observatory (GHO) data*. [online]. Retrieved September 10, 2018. Available at: http://www.who.int/gho/mortality_burden_disease/life_tables/life_tables/en/