

STRATEGIC POLICIES IN TALENT MANAGEMENT AND HIGH PERFORMING EMPLOYEES

MIHAELA GHICAJANU *

ABSTRACT: *Human resources represent the main revenue-generating asset for achieving goals and fulfilling the mission of any organization, regardless of its size or field of activity. In an increasingly dynamic competitive environment, employers seek to find the most suitable employees who can contribute to the company's growth and help differentiate it from its competitors. At the same time, employers are concerned with finding the best methods to retain employees and motivate them in their continuous professional and personal development. The question arises: "How can we retain and motivate high-performing employees who are talented and possess skills and competencies for their jobs that exceed the company average?" In this paper, I will present several mechanisms and tools used by companies to motivate young, high-performing talents, and how much effort companies invest in appreciating and retaining them long-term. The purpose of this research was to identify these mechanisms or policies, understand how they are applied, and how they contribute to the professional development of employees - as well as how these employees, in turn, contribute to the company's development and reputation.*

KEY WORDS: *employee, performing, professional, programs, education, training, development, practices, policies.*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *M10, M16, M21.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Today's labour market is increasingly dynamic and competitive, and attracting young talents - and in general, high-performing and talented employees - has become a priority for companies looking to stand out and thrive.

Professional employees, with their energy, creativity, and digital skills, are considered "essential assets" (<https://be-ambassador.com/>) for any company aiming to innovate, remain competitive, and excel in its field.

*Assoc. Prof., Ph.D., University of Petroșani, Romania, ghicajanumihaela@yahoo.com

Employees with high training and professional experience, innovation skills, and the ability to learn and adapt quickly represent more than just a resource or production factor - they are the driving force of the company, role models, and often the visible faces that can attract other valuable employees or even embody the company image. Examples include Apple (Steve Jobs), Amazon (Jeff Bezos), Microsoft (Bill Gates), Facebook (Mark Zuckerberg), Google (Larry Page), and American television's Oprah Winfrey, among others.

Talented employees value learning and professional development opportunities. If a company offers programs for professional development, mentoring, and continuous training, it is highly likely that top-performing employees will stay long-term. This is especially important for Gen Z talents, who are characterized by increased flexibility and no longer wait years to be promoted or learn new things.

The ability to develop skills and advance in a career is a strong incentive for attracting young talent. Additionally, implementing internal job rotation programs, which allow employees to explore different areas of the company and gain an overall view of its operations, enables individual employee recognition and optimal contribution to the organization.

This section will explore motivational policies for high-performing employees, beginning with classical motivational theories, corporate HR policies, their necessary adaptation for new generations (Gen Z and Alpha, in comparison to Gen X and Y), and the influence of digitization and AI in education and training.

2. EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF EMPLOYEES

We live in an informational society where information, knowledge, and science equate to professional advantage and power. As Napoleon Hill once said, *Specialized knowledge paves the way to wealth* (Simion, 2022). Therefore, whether as an employee or entrepreneur, one must be well-prepared, continually improving, and among the best in their professional field.

To reach such a level of excellence and performance, continuous specialization, learning, and self-instruction are essential - not just for young people but for everyone. One must be dedicated to lifelong learning.

Digitization has taken over many fields, including education. Professional training and domain-specific knowledge are abundantly available and can often be acquired quickly and inexpensively. In addition to formal education in schools and universities, educational resources include: printed books at accessible prices, e-books, scholarly articles and papers from international databases, university or college courses, correspondence courses, and training from specialized online companies.

However, today's knowledge and skills become outdated faster than ever before. Thus, ongoing study in one's field is necessary to stay updated and competitive. Those who wish to keep up with developments in their area - and especially those striving to reach and maintain a position among top professionals - must be efficient and effective in acquiring new knowledge.

3. HUMAN RESOURCES MOTIVATION POLICIES

3.1 Motivation and Motivational Theories

Human resource management regards motivation as a major component, which is why managers at all hierarchical levels must understand this concept. Their task is to coordinate and align organizational goals with each employee's skills, abilities, and capacities.

Nowadays, tailoring individual motivational and incentive policies has become a necessity in HR management. This ensures the retention of top employees and supports their personal and professional growth.

Creating an attractive and favourable motivational environment forms the foundation for achieving the best performance from employees - including highly educated young professionals with distinct values and motivations, especially regarding self-affirmation and career development.

Motivational theories suggest that employee motivation is closely linked to work results, loyalty, and job stability.

Motivation is defined as "*the set of dynamic factors that determine an individual's behaviour. Motivation is the first chronological element of behaviour; it activates the organism.*" (Hodor, 2004, p.73).

Work motivation, according to the Romanian dictionary (DEX), is "*an individual's willingness to make intense and sustained efforts to achieve organizational goals, with the hope that such efforts will also lead to the achievement of personal goals driven by their needs.*" (Cornescu, et al., 2003).

"Motivation is a psychological and physiological change that occurs in a human being whenever a need arises. To satisfy that need, the individual adopts behavior aimed at restoring psychological and physiological balance" (Asociația Getica, 2022).

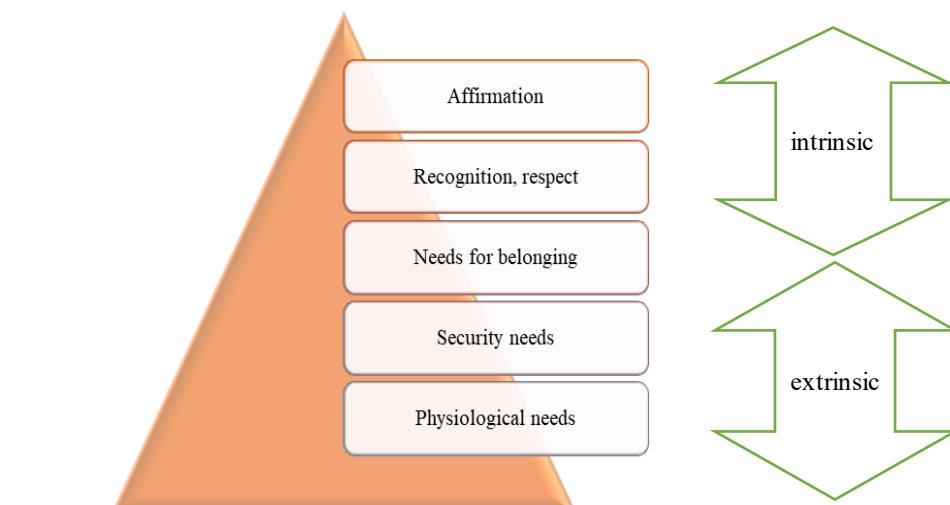
To better stimulate motivation among young and talented employees, companies can apply various motivational methods - methods which are also the basis of motivational theories. These include:

Table 1. Forms and Motivational Theories

Forms of Motivation	
Intrinsic motivation results from a person's engagement and interest in enriching their knowledge. Extrinsic motivation stems from external stimuli, especially of a material nature.	Positive Motivation (Motivational Theory Y) – suggests that people respond better to rewards, praise, recognition, encouragement, autonomy, and involvement. Negative Motivation (Motivational Theory X) – suggests that people react primarily to control, supervision, sanctions, and punishments.
Need Theories (Maslow, Alderfer)	Herzberg Theory, Two-Factor Theory

Motivational theories also explore the needs and stimuli to which individuals respond, based on the same components: intrinsic and extrinsic stimuli, as well as positive and negative stimuli. The most well-known motivational theories are classified into: need-based theories, which are the most numerous and are often adaptations of Maslow's work (e.g., Maslow, Alderfer, Herzberg), expectancy theories, and equity (Fairness) theories. Abraham Maslow identified a hierarchy of human needs that includes five levels, which must be satisfied in the following order (Csiminga, 2010, Muscalu, 2016):

- Physiological needs – related to basic necessities such as food, water, and shelter;
- Safety needs – focused on security, protection, and stability in daily life;
- Social needs – involving belonging, communication, and love;
- Esteem needs – involving self-respect, achievement, recognition, and respect from others;
- Self-actualization needs – related to personal growth, development, and self-fulfillment.



Source: <https://www.stelianmuscalu.ro/>

Figure 1. Maslow's theory of needs

In his studies, Maslow developed two fundamental ideas regarding human needs:

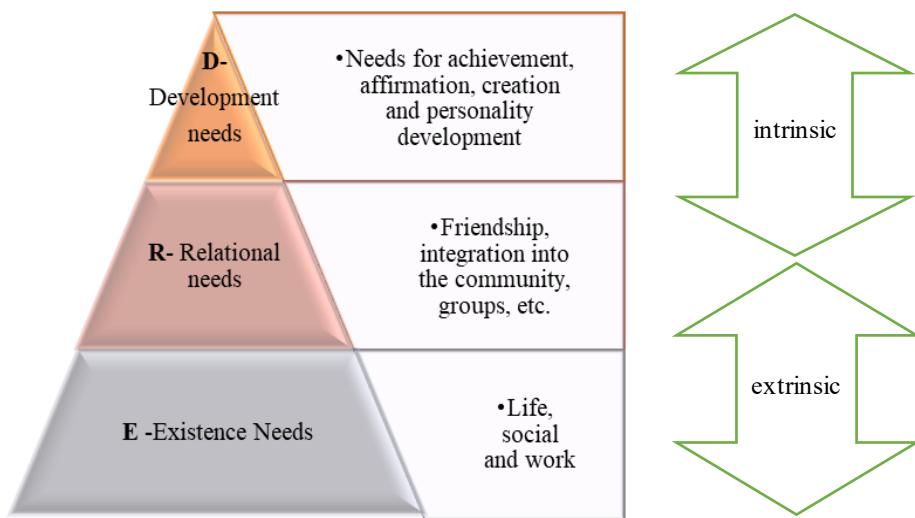
- Human needs can be hierarchized into five levels, which can be represented as a pyramid;
- As long as a need is not satisfied, it remains a source of motivation. Once it is satisfied, the next higher-level need becomes a new source of motivation. He suggested that lower-level needs must be fulfilled before an individual can be motivated by higher-level needs.

Clayton Alderfer's model, known as the ERG Theory, builds upon Maslow's model with the following ideas (Csiminga, 2010, p.64):

- An individual may pursue the satisfaction of two or more needs simultaneously;
- An individual may give up on satisfying a higher-order need if lower-order needs are satisfied as compensation.

Alderfer's theory is also a needs-based theory derived from Maslow's concept, but it regroups the needs into three main categories (Hodor, et al., 2004, p.76):

- E – Existence: needs related to survival (basic material and physiological desires);
- R – Relatedness: needs related to interpersonal relationships and social interaction;
- D – Growth: needs related to personal development and self-fulfillment.



Source: adaptation after Hodor, 2004

Figure 2. Alderfer's theory of needs

In the 1960s, Frederick Herzberg expanded on Maslow's theory, starting from the principle that human existence unfolds on two distinct levels: the physical and the psychological. He approached motivational factors from the perspective of both positive and negative influence, and also classified them as intrinsic and extrinsic.

Herzberg concluded that there are specific factors determining satisfaction and dissatisfaction, grouped as follows:

- Intrinsic motivators (related largely to the nature of the work itself, and when present, they motivate and positively satisfy employees), such as:
 - Achievements and professional accomplishments;
 - Recognition and appreciation;
 - Delegation of authority;
 - Responsibility;
 - Involvement in important decisions;
 - Opportunities for development;
 - Hygiene factors, also called extrinsic motivators (related to the environment and conditions in which the work takes place). If inadequate, these can cause

dissatisfaction, but if adequately met, they do not necessarily motivate employees, as they are considered basic expectations (Hodor, et al, 2004, p.79).

3.2. The 70:20:10 Learning and Development Model in the New Context

Managing talented and high-performing employees is an emerging topic of interest in the HR community and is increasingly gaining importance on the agenda of human resources executives.

But what is talent management?

It can be defined as the totality of systems and processes that allow a company to attract, develop, and retain highly skilled employees. However, the meaning of talent management varies from company to company.

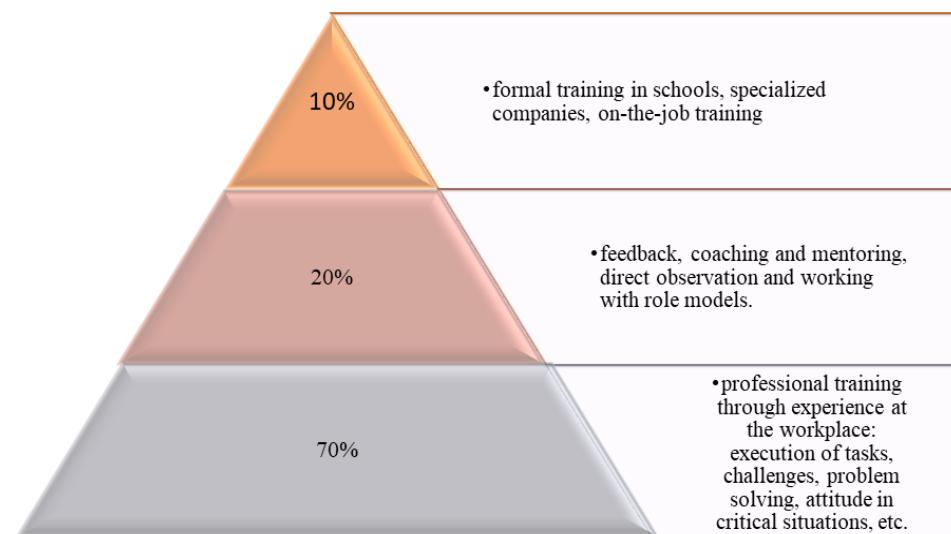
- For some organizations, it refers to managing talent across the entire workforce.
- For others, it focuses specifically on the development of high-potential employees.

Traditionally, human resource development was often considered synonymous with training. Most talent management practices focused on analyzing training needs and delivering training programs, especially for high-potential employees.

In recent years, however, a new talent development philosophy has emerged, known as the 70:20:10 model (<https://www.ucd.ie>).

What is the 70:20:10 Model?

The 70:20:10 model was developed in the 1980s by Morgan McCall, Michael Lombardo, and Robert Eichinger, researchers at the Centre for Creative Leadership (CCL). The model was later elaborated in the book "*The Career Architect Development Planner*" (1996) by Lombardo and Eichinger.



Source: adapted <https://702010institute.com/>

Figure 3. Model 70:20:10

They conducted a study on successful leaders, analysing how they develop their competencies. Their conclusion was that professional learning is primarily based on practical experience (70%), social interactions (20%), and formal training (10%) (Centre for Creative Leadership, 2022):

- 70% of what an individual learns, develops, and acquires professionally is obtained from real-life and concrete experiences at the workplace: completing tasks, solving problems, responding to critical and risky situations, ingenuity in finding new solutions, etc. These elements form the most important and comprehensive component of the learning and development process.
- 20% of what an individual learns comes from coaching and coordination activities at the workplace by direct hierarchical superiors, colleagues, teamwork, feedback, direct observation, and working alongside exemplary individuals – coaching, mentoring.
- 10% of an individual's knowledge and development comes from formal instruction (through courses in schools or within the company).

This model of professional training and development is used in practice by many companies both to increase employee and company performance and to elaborate strategic policies in human resource management (<https://702010institute.com/>). In the book "*70:20:10 Towards 100% Performance*", authors Jos Arets, Charles Jennings & Vivian Heijnen provide a practical guide for how the 70:20:10 model can be used as a best practice in human resource management to boost the performance of employees and managers (Arets, J., et. al, 2016, p.11). It is believed that by applying this model and adapting it to the personal needs of employees, successful leaders can be developed internally within the company.

Most professionals and companies specializing in training claim that the model must be adapted to the new context of self-education, informal learning, digitalization, technological progress, and AI (Training Industry, 2022; Bersin, 2023; Leonari, 2023). According to a research report conducted by Training Industry, regarding how the 70:20:10 model for employee and especially manager development remains relevant, the necessity to adapt training and professional development tools to new information technologies is emphasized. The emergence of the internet and the current proliferation of online learning technologies have changed the training industry's perspective on the 70:20:10 learning model.

The 70:20:10 model must be significantly adapted to the context of digitalization and artificial intelligence (AI), which changes the way people learn and develop professionally. This can be achieved through the presence of digitalization and AI, as follows:

1. 70% – Learning through experience (learning by doing):
 - Simulations and virtual reality (VR) to practice real scenarios;
 - AI platforms that provide personalized learning recommendations based on user behaviour;
 - Automation of repetitive tasks, allowing employees to focus on strategic thinking and solving complex problems.
2. 20% – Learning through social interactions (coaching & networking):

- Virtual mentoring and coaching through AI platforms that match employees with suitable mentors;
- Internal social networks (e.g., Microsoft Viva, Slack, Yammer) that facilitate knowledge sharing;
- AI-powered chatbots that offer instant feedback and virtual coaching.

3. 10% – Formal learning (courses & training):

- Personalized e-learning platforms (Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, Udemy) that adjust content based on user progress;
- AI that creates adaptive learning experiences, adjusting material difficulty in real-time;
- Gamification and microlearning – short, interactive lessons delivered via mobile apps.

Coaching and mentoring are the best methods for enriching organizational culture and properly guiding the potential of staff, with the final goal of increasing organizational performance.

“Coaching and mentoring as methods of staff development are training and evaluation processes offered to employees by the supervisor who is directly above them in the hierarchy.” For effective coaching, there must be an open relationship between the employee and the manager or supervisor (Szekely, 2018).

When a company launches coaching programs for development, coaching involves the development of a working relationship whose ultimate goal is to encourage the employee to set and achieve professional objectives (ultimately a career plan). In practice, through coaching, the manager engages employees in a process of enhancing personal skills or competencies to increase both individual and company performance.

3.3. Employee Motivation Practices

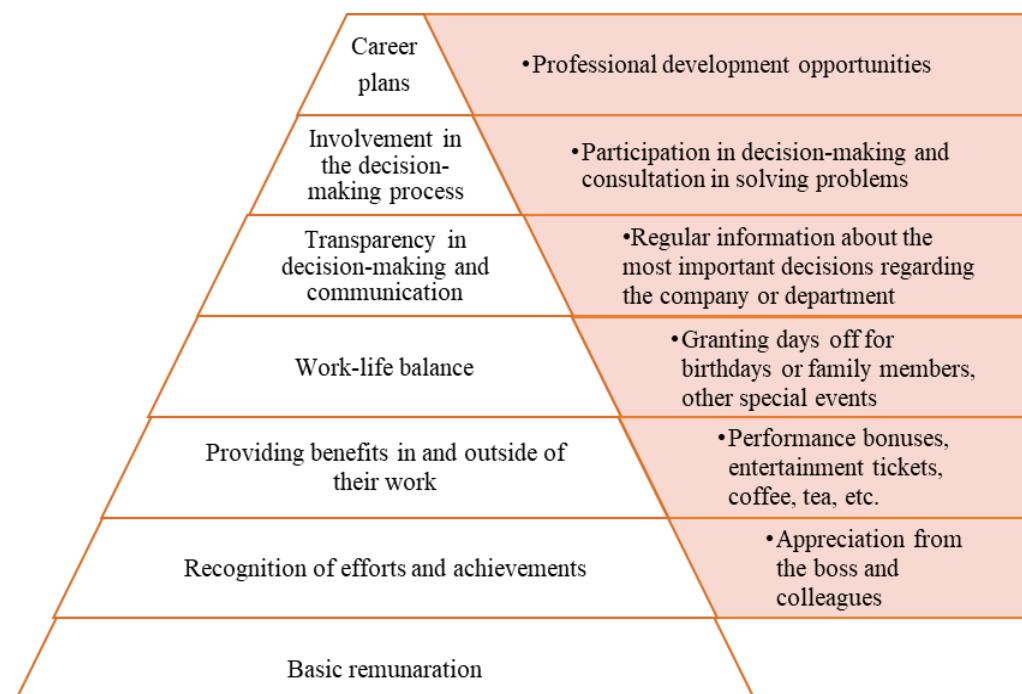
In practice, human resources management considers that a key condition for satisfying a high-performing employee is to contribute financially by offering a higher salary. However, it has been found that this initial condition is not always effective, so several other measures can satisfy employees, often in conjunction with a higher salary.

Essentially, to create a strategic policy for attracting and retaining high-performing employees - especially young ones - companies must have a solid understanding of motivational theories and, additionally, adapt to the needs of current employee generations: Generation Y and Generation Z. Later in this paper, I will return to this point, specifically to the fact that there are major differences in needs and motivating factors between Generations X, Y, and Z, and how human resource management must respond to these needs.

The practices commonly found in most large companies within their human resources management policies - besides basic salary and wage rights - are grounded in motivational theories. These include intrinsic and extrinsic motivation practices, which can be grouped as follows (Forbes, 2024):

- *Recognition of efforts and achievements.*

Not all employees feel motivated solely by salary increases. Most of them will be more engaged in their work if they observe appreciation from colleagues, collaborators, and managers. And this often doesn't require expenses. Public thanks during a meeting, using communication tools, or a weekly email to all employees highlighting efforts and expressing gratitude are ways to encourage them. In addition to praise and gratitude, a symbolic gift can be added (a notebook, pen, folder, etc.), depending on the employee's preferences (Forbes, 2024).



Source, designed after: <https://www.talentneuron.com> & Sayed, 2024

Figure 3 Human resource management policies

- *Providing benefits at and outside the workplace.*

To reward employees, companies can offer gym discounts, vacation packages, theatre or movie tickets, spa or restaurant subscriptions. Additionally, massage sessions available directly at the workplace can significantly improve work quality, considering that physical and mental well-being are enhanced and the body is relaxed through massage. Workplace benefits may also include weekly fresh fruit, or access to coffee machines, tea, water, or soft drinks.

- *Encouraging work-life balance.*

In every company, there are employees who do not disconnect from work during their free time, essentially bringing work home. Often, these individuals are either overwhelmed by their workload and try to catch up at home, or they simply cannot detach and prefer to work in advance - even while at home and outside working hours, including weekends. The manager's task is to explain to employees how

important the balance between personal and professional life is. Thus, by enforcing working hours and fairly distributing tasks among all employees, a favorable work environment is created, where people can complete their projects and fully enjoy their personal time and family (Ghicajanu, 2020, p.87).

- *Maintaining transparency in decisions.*

The manager's decisions, whether positive or negative, must be transparent and free of hidden agendas. This way, the employee enjoys free will, being fully responsible for their behaviour and actions at work once the decision that affects them is communicated. Decision-making transparency maintains harmony and unity among employees, as they can be confident that information is conveyed accurately, clearly, and to everyone.

- *Involving employees in decision-making.*

A motivational technique is to involve employees in the strategic decision-making processes of the company or at the department or unit level, where employees have a voice within the organization, developing a sense of engagement. For example, outstanding employees can form groups that meet to help solve a problem related to product quality. This form of participation has two advantages (Ghicajanu, 2020, p.87)

- It increases employee motivation;
- It helps solve an important organizational issue.

- *Career planning for high-performing employees.*

Career plans should offer opportunities for professional development through personalized career paths that help employees envision their future within the company and understand the necessary steps for advancement. Programs for international transfers can also be developed if the company has branches in other countries. These programs are seen as opportunities to work abroad, which can be extremely attractive for employees looking to gain international experience and advance their careers. Although the belief is that every employee can have a career plan, in practice, most career plans are targeted at top-performing employees, and studies show that in this era of change, only 27% of employees have a career plan (ManPower, 2024).

3.4. Differences Between Generations

Human resource management in today's companies faces major challenges in finding the right systems for motivation, training, and professional development for their employees - mainly because people from different generations often work within the same organization.

These employees may belong to generations X, Y, and Z, and in the future, companies must prepare for generations Alpha and Beta.

Regarding the timeline of generational distinctions, studies classify employees and potential employees based on this criterion. The following table presents a synthesis of the characteristics and differences between generations, in terms of needs and motivational factors, specific to the Romanian population (Table 1).

Beta Generation – children born after 2020 – will grow up in a world where artificial intelligence is omnipresent and accessible to most people. Education, social interactions, and jobs will be strongly influenced by technology, especially AI-based

technology, making their lives easier and opening new opportunities for learning and interaction through virtual reality.

Table 2. Characteristics of Employees by Generation

Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z (iGen)	Generation Alpha
Birth range (1965-1980)	Birth range (1981-1995)	Birth range (1996-2012)	Birth range (after 2013-2015)
Age range (59-44 years)	Age range (43-29 years)	Age range (28- 18 years)	current children
Characteristics (+/-):			
Pragmatic	High flexibility and adaptability	The smartphone generation, immersed in social media, online communication, and long-distance relationships	Because they were born and are growing up in an era of advanced technology and online interaction, these children will be exposed to numerous technological innovations that will influence their behaviour and the way they interact with the world around them.
Hardworking and stable in one workplace	Quickly adapt to new technologies	Involved in social causes and more empathetic	
Well-trained professionally	Freedom of movement	High freedom of movement	
Realistic and loyal	Raised in the era of the Internet, instant messaging, and social media	Socially unadjusted and resistant to organizational rules	
Patient and resilient in crisis and risk situations	Idealistic and critical	Easily influenced by online manipulation	
Largely independent from technology		Impatient and unstable	
Disciplined			
Not driven by overly ambitious goals			
Low degree of adaptability and flexibility			
Main motivational factors:			
Job security	Compensation proportional to the work performed	Acceptable and gradually increasing compensation	It is estimated that they will have very high expectations regarding the personalization of experiences in the workplace.
Compensation proportional to the work performed	Access to technology and additional facilities	Recognition and appreciation	
Good communication and relationships with colleagues	Opportunities for advancement and professional development	Freedom in decision-making	
		Variety and lack of monotony at work	
		Involvement in challenging tasks	
		Flexible schedule	

Source, designed after <https://panorama.ro/>; <https://manpowergroup.com/>;
<https://www.iberdrola.com/>, <http://www.cisco.com>

4. NEW MOTIVATION POLICIES

New strategic policies in employee management must be adapted to the needs and motivational factors of each generation. Several new strategies can be identified and implemented by employers to retain and motivate talented, high-performing employees:

Offering competitive compensation. An attractive salary and additional benefits, such as performance bonuses or extra vacation days, can encourage employees to remain loyal to the company. Competitive salary refers to the pay level being equivalent within the same industry and for the same position under similar working conditions. This principle is also stated by Fayol as one of the main management principles: “fair remuneration in relation to the work performed” (Indeed). Employees who know they are receiving fair compensation and are satisfied will be well-motivated, contribute to achieving both individual and company goals, and exhibit greater stability within the company.

Continuous professional development. Investing in training programs, specialization courses, and participation in conferences helps employees improve their skills and grow their careers within the organization (CoreValues). Such investments ensure that employees stay at the forefront in terms of productivity and performance, are constantly prepared for changes in their field, and feel valued and prioritized by company leadership.

Creating a positive organizational culture. Promoting values such as fairness, collaboration, and respect contributes to a work environment where employees feel valued and engaged. Work engagement is an essential dimension of organizational culture that influences high performance. Managers can significantly impact employee attitudes and behaviour through appropriate use of organizational culture elements, shaping how employees perceive their work experience (Ghicajanu, 2020, p.94–103).

Flexible work schedule. Offering remote work options and flexible hours supports work-life balance, especially appreciated by employees from Generations Y and Z. According to a study by ManPower Group (2023), there are also disadvantages to remote work, such as lower chances of immediate promotion (26%), learning from others (31%), and connecting with senior leaders (37%) (ManPower Group, 2023).

Recognition and reward of performance. Implementing appreciation systems, such as bonuses or promotions based on results, motivates employees to maintain high performance. To develop an effective and objective recognition and reward system, performance must first be measured and evaluated (Ghicajanu, 2020, p.30). Evaluation procedures should be based on clear regulations, held regularly, provide constructive feedback, and ensure opportunities for improvement through resources, information, and training.

Involving employees in decision-making. Giving employees the opportunity to contribute to company decisions enhances their sense of belonging and responsibility, boosts morale, and improves the quality and outcomes of their work. The organization also benefits from their unique ideas and perspectives and reduces the workload of managers. A McKinsey study found that decision-making can take up to 70% of leadership team members' time, and delegating some decisions to subordinates can free managers to focus on more important tasks (McKinsey & Company, 2024). Promoting participative management and leadership frameworks that involve employees in key decisions fosters a performance-oriented environment (Ghicajanu, 2020).

Promoting diversity and inclusion. Adopting policies that support team diversity and ensure a fair and representative work environment for all employees contributes to a positive and innovative atmosphere. Generations Y and Z are more

receptive to including diversity and inclusion policies in HR management. According to a 2024 ManPower Group study on 2025 workforce trends, approximately 61% of respondents believe that DEIB – Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging – should be an important component of a company's HR strategy (ManPower Group, 2023).

Implementing mentoring and coaching programs. Pairing less experienced employees with mentors within the organization facilitates knowledge transfer and supports professional development.

Offering flexible benefits. Providing customizable benefit packages, such as gym memberships or vacation vouchers, shows the employer's concern for employee well-being.

Creating a motivating and stimulating work environment. A workplace that encourages innovation, creativity, and employee involvement contributes to satisfaction and enhances both individual and team performance.

Involvement in additional projects, such as sustainability and social responsibility initiatives: Current generations are increasingly open to volunteering, environmental action, supporting disadvantaged communities, and promoting local sustainability. In the future, these volunteer activities will become central to their professional identity. The same ManPower Group study mentioned earlier indicates that 51% of employee skills will shift toward environmental and ecological domains, and the most in-demand and best-paid jobs will also be in this area.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Employee motivation has become an increasingly serious concern. Employees need to be motivated to work efficiently, be creative, and push beyond their limits. To retain high-performing employees, companies must adopt strategies and actions that provide an attractive and motivating work environment, supporting both professional and personal development.

Employees have different motivations and need that must be met. Being motivated by money is no less honourable than being motivated by the desire to improve professionally; what ultimately matters is how the motivation process contributes to employee performance. To motivate employees, managers must create an action plan to discover what drives them. This plan must take into account - as outlined in this paper - the needs and behaviours of new generations of employees, as well as the influence of new information technologies in education, training, and work performance.

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