



The Driving Forces Behind Employee Motivation

What are the Motivations of Different Generations?

Bachelor's Thesis
International Business
Autumn 2025
Sabina Balintova

DP International Business
Author Sabina Balintova Year 2025
Subject The Driving Forces Behind Employee Motivation: What are the Motivations of Different Generations?
Supervisors Annaleena Kolehmainen

This bachelor's thesis examines employee motivation and how it affects job satisfaction and performance. The following key questions are investigated in this study: What motivates employees the most to perform better at work? What are the different and common factors that influence work motivation across different generations? The thesis aims to identify the main elements that affect the motivation of people from different generations and to determine the variations in how people of different generations view and react to motivational tools.

A variety of motivational models and ideas, including both traditional theories, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, or Adam's Equity Theory, and modern theories like Locke and Latham's Goal Setting Theory, or Self-Determination Theory, are presented in the theoretical section. Additionally, it emphasizes the traits of distinct generations and their values in the workplace. The work's practical component is grounded in qualitative research using focus groups. Thematic analysis was used to examine the collected data, with special focus on comparing responses from Generation Z, Millennials, and Generation X. The findings suggest that preferences, expectations, and views of the workplace vary by generation but also have numerous common features.

The study found that even though generations differ in their view and priorities, they share a similar motivational foundations, such as the importance for regular and constructive feedback, sense of belonging, and good interpersonal relationship in the workplace. Despite the lack of a specific workplace where the study was carried out, suggestions such as increasing the number of respondents, or incorporating mixed research methodologies can be applied to further studies of work motivation.

Keywords Work motivation, Employees, Generational Differences, Job Satisfaction
Pages 36 pages and appendices 3 pages

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Background.....	1
1.2	Research Question	1
1.3	Objectives and Thesis Structure.....	2
2	Theoretical Framework.....	3
2.1	Literature Review	3
2.2	Definition of Motivation.....	3
2.3	Positive and Negative Motivation	4
2.4	Types of Motivation in the Workplace.....	4
2.4.1	Intrinsic Motivation	5
2.4.2	Extrinsic Motivation.....	5
2.4.3	Social Motivation	5
2.4.4	Achievement Motivation.....	5
2.5	Theories of Motivation.....	6
2.6	Content Models.....	6
2.6.1	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	6
2.6.2	Alderfer's ERG Theory of Needs.....	8
2.6.3	McClelland's Theory of Needs	10
2.6.4	Herzberg's Two Factors Theory.....	10
2.7	Process Models	12
2.7.1	Skinner's Reinforcement Theory.....	12
2.7.2	Vroom's Expectancy Theory	13
2.7.3	Adam's Equity Theory.....	14
2.8	Modern Approaches to Motivation.....	15
2.8.1	Locke and Latham's Goal Setting Theory.....	15
2.8.2	Self-Determination Theory.....	16
2.8.3	Job Characteristics Model.....	17
2.9	Generational Identity as a Sociological Construct	19
2.9.1	Generational Differences in Work Motivation	19
3	Research Methodology	20
3.1	Qualitative Research.....	21
3.2	Thematic Analysis.....	22
3.3	Ethical Considerations	22

3.4	Data Collection.....	22
4	Research Findings and Analysis	23
4.1	Focus Group Interviews	23
4.2	Findings Overview	24
4.2.1	General Motivation.....	24
4.2.2	Compensation and Benefits.....	25
4.2.3	Workplace Relationships	26
4.2.4	Management Style.....	27
4.2.5	Personal Development and Satisfaction	27
4.3	Main Findings.....	28
5	Discussion.....	32
5.1	Interpretation of Findings	32
5.2	Recommendations	33
5.3	Research Limitations.....	34
5.4	Future Research	35
6	Conclusion	35
	References	38

Figures

Figure 1.	Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs	8
Figure 2.	Alderfer’s ERG Theory of Needs.....	9
Figure 3.	Direction of Needs	9
Figure 4.	Skinner’s Reinforcement Theory	13
Figure 5.	Job Characteristics Model.....	18

Tables

Table 1.	Focus Groups Overview, own sources	24
Table 2.	Thematic Coding Table	28

Appendices

- Appendix 1. Interview Questions
- Appendix 2. Data Management Plan

1 Introduction

Work motivation is one of the primary elements of job satisfaction which affects other aspects of the work process. Motivation can directly influence productivity, turnover and satisfaction of the employees, which is directly related to the productivity of the organization as well as employee's well-being. (Vo, Tuliao & Chen, 2022) Work motivation is an area that greatly influences the functioning and performance of every organization, it is closely related to satisfaction of the employees. Every company that wants to avoid issues and stay productive and competitive in the market should focus on this area. (Pârjoleanu, 2020)

1.1 Background

Work motivation is one of the most crucial factors in any organization. Unmotivated employees will be more likely to work slower and be less productive than those who are motivated correctly, even when they are skilled enough. (Vo, Tuliao & Chen, 2022) Bradberry (2016), states that the research conducted by the University of California found that motivated employees are 31% more productive and three times more creative than their unmotivated counterparts. Also, according to Corporate Leadership Council (2004), they were 87% less likely to leave their workplace. Harter (2025) conducted research that showed that 29% of workers lack consistent communication with their superiors, 14% lack feedback or recognition, and 32% feel that their workplace is impersonal.

Every generation has a different perspective of life, values, job expectations, and preferences, influenced by the environment they were raised in. These things can be challenging for any manager in an organization with employees from various generations. (PDG, 2024) According to PDG (2024), managers must find out, how to use these generations' advantages to create a productive and performative work environment.

1.2 Research Question

The following key questions are investigated in this study: What motivates employees the most to perform better at work? What are the different and common factors that influence work motivation across different generations?

The following secondary questions were defined in order to answer the main questions in detail: How do employees perceive the work environment and its positive and negative aspects? How important is financial reward to employees compared to non-financial benefits? Which internal and external factors do employees consider the most important for their motivation? Interview questions are listed in the appendix.

By providing answers to these questions, the research will have a firm base for analysis of the factors that motivate employees the most and will help to propose specific measure that can improve the workers' job satisfaction in the organization.

1.3 Objectives and Thesis Structure

This thesis aims to identify and analyse factors, that influence the work motivation of employees within multigenerational work environments and how they differ across different generations working in the organizations.

The two primary sections of the thesis are the theoretical and practical chapters. In the theoretical chapter, positive and negative motivation, main types of motivation, theories focused on this area as well as generational differences in work motivation based on existing literature and studies was introduced.

This leads to the practical part of this thesis, what research method is being used in this study, and the process of the research was introduced. The research was conducted based on the acquired knowledge from the theoretical part. After introducing the research, the collected research data acquired through focus groups were investigated and analysed and the main factors of motivation of the employees as well as their level of motivation were evaluated.

Based on these findings, particular recommendations were made to boost employee satisfaction and motivation across different workplace environments using the knowledge gathered from the theoretical component of the thesis. The knowledge gained from both theoretical and practical part is included in the conclusion of the thesis. This approach enables to propose specific measures for multigenerational working groups and maximize satisfaction and productivity of these teams.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Literature Review

The literature on the subject is further examined in this section using a variety of sources. The definition and meaning of the term motivation, the most well-known theories of motivation, some modern methods of motivation, and the variations in work environments between generations are all covered in this.

Vo et al. (2022) examined how people's motivation at work is influenced by their competence, autonomy, and social relatedness. The moderating factors of those individual-level associations at the national level were also investigated.

Krajac & Samardzija (2024) analyse how different generations vary in their motivation for their jobs from an organizational behaviour standpoint. The authors examine how different generations differ in terms of preferred leadership philosophies, technological adaptation, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

This investigation helps secure the theoretical framework and provides a base for practical part of the thesis and conclusion.

2.2 Definition of Motivation

Motivation studies the reasons behind people's actions and aims to clarify why they act in certain ways (Gorman, 2004, p. 17). The Latin word *motivus*, meaning "a moving cause," is where the word "motivation" originates and can refer to the forces or activating processes that inspire people to take action. It is not possible to measure motivation directly, but it can be measured by monitoring reactions and behaviour to these stimuli. (Cofer & Petri, 2024)

A numerous internal as well as outside factors may be involved in the broad concept of motivation. These include factors such as personal values, job security, expectations, well-being, the economic and cultural environment, and the level of communication between employees and their management. (Sternad, 2013)

2.3 Positive and Negative Motivation

Motivation has many types, but in general, we can say that motivation is either positive or negative. Positive motivation can be used to encourage feelings of happiness. The thought of receiving something beneficial serves as our motivation. (Cardwel, Prelip & Graber-Peters, 2024) According to Cardwel et al. (2024), positive motivation can be external, for instance, a promotion, a bonus, or group inclusion, or internal, such as satisfaction from good work, the sense of achievement, or just a good feeling in general.

Negative motivation relies on worries and penalties. The thought of avoiding or getting rid of a punishment or unpleasant thing motivates our actions. (Cardwel, Prelip & Graber-Peters, 2024) Cardwel et al. (2024) state that as with positive motivation, this kind of motivation also has internal factors, such as feeling inadequate or experiencing regret, and external factors, along the lines of a physical penalty, reduced grade, or group exclusion.

People tend to steer clear of negative emotions that cause anxiety or bad feelings, like fear, pity, and shame, and instead choose positive emotions that cause good feelings, like humour, hope, and warmth. (Cardwel, Prelip & Graber-Peters, 2024)

2.4 Types of Motivation in the Workplace

There are numerous advantages to identifying each employee's motivations: improved performance and productivity, increased morale and engagement among employees, increased rates of retention, improved congruence between company objectives and employee values, ability for managers to provide employees with greater support. (Fitzgerald, 2023)

There are primarily four main categories of motivation. Maximizing employee satisfaction and performance requires evaluating individual motivations and matching responsibilities and rewards to motivators. Each of these elements influences employee motivation to varying degrees, but each person frequently has a primary motivator. Managers who use these psychological insights will help their teams succeed because motivation is a powerful tool. (Fitzgerald, 2023)

2.4.1 Intrinsic Motivation

According to Andreev (2024), the simplest way to characterize intrinsic motivation is as an internal reward system. Andreev (2024) states that this includes any activity that is done for enjoyment or satisfaction without seeking recognition from others. When an employee has high intrinsic motivation, they will find the completing of the task satisfying. To maximize the motivation individuals with intrinsic motivation managers should provide chances for advancement, a range of duties, and decision-making authority and create challenging and meaningful jobs. (Fitzgerald, 2023)

2.4.2 Extrinsic Motivation

Andreev (2024) states that everything that acts as an external drive is referred to as extrinsic motivation, which falls into two categories: rewards and penalties. Salary, bonuses, or a review can be examples of rewards. Fines, criticism, or judgement are examples of penalties. Although this aspect of extrinsic motivation is often viewed as bad, it has a lot of positive aspects. An employee displays extrinsic motivation when they do well at work and are compensated properly. They also arrive at work on time because they are aware, that arriving late may cost them money, or work. Additionally, if they meet the objectives set for them, they will be eligible for a bonus from their supervisor. (Andreev, 2024) According to Fitzgerald (2023), to improve motivation of extrinsic motivated individuals it is important to create equitable pay plans that include bonuses based on performance, express gratitude and acknowledgment, and offer both monetary and non-monetary incentives.

2.4.3 Social Motivation

If an individual's social motivation is high, they want to feel like they belong and they want to be accepted in the work environment. Managers should encourage teamwork and collaboration, offer mentorship programs, and acknowledge team contributions in order to maximize the motivation of a person with high social motivation. (Fitzgerald, 2023)

2.4.4 Achievement Motivation

This type of motivation seeks to accomplish a goal solely for self-improvement. A common example for this type of motivation is certification. An employee wishes to obtain a

certificate to demonstrate their abilities. (Andreev, 2024) A manager should set challenging goals, provide leadership opportunities and challenges, acknowledge accomplishments, and provide training and development in order to maximize the motivation of a person with high achievement motivation. (Fitzgerald, 2023)

2.5 Theories of Motivation

Gorman (2004, p. 17) states that "theories of motivation try to explain our behaviour with reference to instincts and drives, incentives and rewards, and the desire to change one's level of arousal."

Even though there were various theories made on motivational factors, each theory provides a unique perspective on how work motivation influences employee performance.

These theories can be divided into two types: content models such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Alderfer's ERG Theory of Needs, McClelland's Theory of Needs, Herzberg's Two Factors Theory, and process models like Skinner's Reinforcement Theory, Vroom's Expectancy Theory, and Adam's Equity Theory (Carrier, 2019a).

In addition to classical theories, in this chapter will be explained also more modern approaches to motivation, therefore theories such as Locke and Latham's Goal Setting Theory, Self-Determination Theory and Job Characteristics Model will be mentioned (StudySmarter, 2023).

2.6 Content Models

The primary focus of content models of motivation is on the various items that people might assume they require in their lives. These days, management and leadership training heavily utilizes these models. (Carrier, 2019a)

2.6.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

According to Carrier (2019b), this theory was introduced in 1940s but completely expressed in 1954. It was created by Abraham Maslow, and it is among the most recognized and oldest concepts of motivation. According to this theory, which is frequently represented by a triangle or pyramid, everyone has the same kind of needs, and they are

arranged in a hierarchy. On the very bottom part of the hierarchy are the basic things people need for the exact purpose of survival and it goes up through things that can fulfil our potential up to the things that give us a purpose in life. (Carrier, 2019b)

The first category is called Physiological Needs, and it shows the most basic needs for our survival and things we need to satisfy before we can move up on this hierarchy. These needs include food, water, sleep, clothing, etc. If we cannot satisfy these basic needs, we cannot be motivated to fulfil needs higher on this hierarchy. (Carrier, 2019b)

The second level of the hierarchy, called Safety Needs is about security. According to Carrier (2019b), this is mainly about feeling safe and stable, minimalizing any risk in your life. Safety and security include physical and emotional safety and support (Herrity, 2025).

The third category of the hierarchy, named Social Belonging is only about sense of belonging and acceptance which every human need. It is crucial for emotional well-being. Social Belonging includes things such as friendships, community and/or relationships, trust etc.

The fourth level of the hierarchy is about self-esteem. According to Herrity (2025), it is about believing that person's contribution is about higher goal and that they will be valued. Carrier (2019b) states, that it is all about feeding the ego and feeling recognition and respect.

Fifth level of the hierarchy is the last category in this theory, and it is called Self-actualization. McLeod (2025) states that "Self-actualization needs is the pursuit of realizing one's full potential through personal growth, creativity, or achieving meaningful goals. Maslow described it as the desire 'to become everything one is capable of becoming'."

Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



2.6.2 Alderfer's ERG Theory of Needs

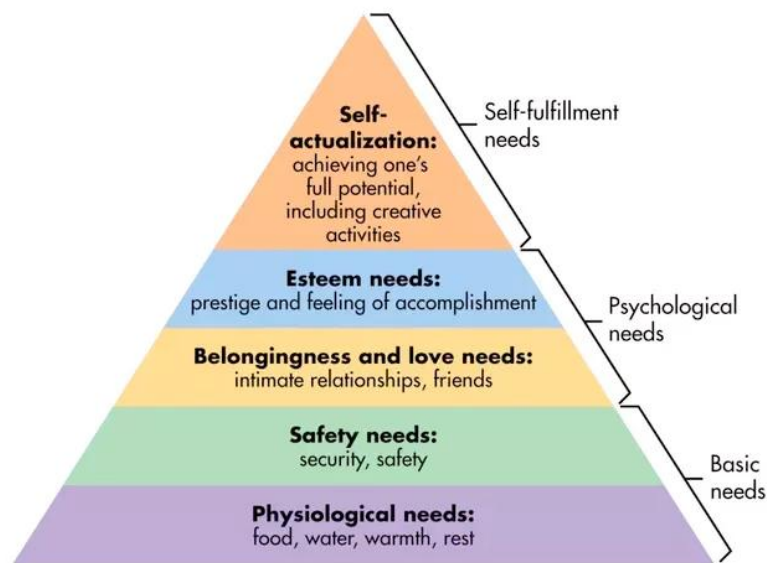
American psychologist Clayton Paul Alderfer developed this theory between the years 1961 to 1978 by using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and expanded it by creating ERG Theory. (Kurt, 2023) According to Juneja (2025a), Alderfer used the Maslow's Hierarchy and divided his five levels into three simpler categories.

Existence Needs is the first category, and it covers first two levels of Maslow's Hierarchy. These include person's basic physical and physiological requirements along the lines of food, water, and safety. (Juneja, 2025a)

The second category is called Relatedness Needs. It is comparable to the external component of self-esteem levels and Maslow's hierarchy of needs for social belonging. It covers social needs like friendships, relationships, recognition, trust etc. (Juneja 2025a; Kurt, 2023)

The third category, called Growth Needs is also the last category of the ERG theory. Maslow's intrinsic part of the Self-esteem level and Self-actualization level fall under this category. This category includes every need for improvement, personal or career growth, or reaching person's full potential. (Juneja, 2025a; Kurt. 2023)

Figure 2. Alderfer's ERG Theory of Needs



According to Carrier (2019c), the main difference between these two theories is, that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states, that person cannot start satisfying their needs on the higher level of the hierarchy before satisfying all the needs in the lower level, meanwhile Alderfer's theory claims, that person can be motivated by more than one level at the same time and this motivation does not have to be in a step-by-step order as with Maslow's Hierarchy but it depends on the person's view of life and their values. Carrier (2019c) gives an example of "the starving actor who's motivated by growth through their art, potentially at the expense of their existence (i.e. they can't pay their rent but are pursuing their passion)."

Stainton (2023) states that when addressing their needs, people also go through three stages: Progression, when an individual shifts from Existence Needs to Growth Needs; Strengthening when an individual alternates between all three needs for motivation; and Regression, when an individual shifts from Growth Needs back to Existence Needs.

Figure 3. Direction of Needs



2.6.3 McClelland's Theory of Needs

American psychologist and Harvard professor David Clarence McClelland devoted thirty years of his life to the study of motivation. His theory, created in 1961 lists three types of basic needs that person is driven by. Those include Power, Affiliation and Achievement. Typically, one of these needs is always more dominant than others. (Kurt, 2022a)

The need for power is specified by the desire to have influence, status, control, and to be able to teach other people (Carrier, 2019d; Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017, p. 169). According to Kurt (2022a), people with high need of power do not take well disagreements, demand mindless devotion and are most appropriate for leadership positions. Kurt (2022a) also states that people with low need of power tend to avoid these opportunities and rather keep socially distant.

The need for Affiliation is explained as a desire to be admired, to have friendly relationships and to be accepted (Carrier, 2019d; Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017, p. 170). Individuals who have a strong need for affiliation desire to spend time in welcoming, friendly and collaborative environment. People with low need for affiliation may function well in a group but have no desire to improve their position. (Kurt, 2022a)

The need for Achievement is described as a desire to progress, to be successful, perform at high level and complete tasks (Carrier, 2019d; Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017, p. 169). An individual with strong drive for achievement wants to complete different ambitious tasks that challenge them and wants to always win. These people also prefer to work alone rather than in a team. People not driven by need for achievement often avoid accountability and are afraid of failure. (Carrier, 2019d; Kurt, 2022a)

According to Osemeke & Adegboyega (2017, p. 169, 171), Sinha (2015) associates McClelland's Theory of Needs with theory of learning since David C. McClelland thought that these desires and needs can be gained and changed by individual's life experiences.

2.6.4 Herzberg's Two Factors Theory

In 1959, American psychologist Frederick Herzberg proposed the Two Factors Theory, also known as the Motivation-Hygiene Theory. This theory claims, that certain aspects of the job

lead to job satisfaction, while other aspects of the job keep people from being unsatisfied. (Juneja, 2025b)

The first type of things used in this theory are called "motivating factors" and they are used to describe everything that is possible to make workers satisfied. The second type is called "hygiene factors" and this phrase is used for everything that can make workers unsatisfied when absent. (Carrier, 2019e) According to Kurt (2022b) motivational factors include things such as accomplishment, acknowledgment, meaningful and challenging work, elevated responsibility, or growth opportunities. If these factors are absent in the work environment, it does not always result in dissatisfaction, but it can cause a lack of satisfaction, however if these factors are present, workers feel motivation and satisfaction in their workplace (Nickerson, 2025).

Wages, company administration and policies, satisfactory and safe working conditions, good connections with coworkers and superiors, job security, and status within the organization are all included in the hygiene factors and when these factors are absent or insufficient, it leads to employee dissatisfaction. If these factors are present, or improved, although it may lead to a reduction in dissatisfaction, it does not necessarily lead to satisfaction. (Nickerson, 2025)

When using this theory, it can lead to four outcomes. If the job has weak hygiene factors, but strong motivating factors it can be considered challenging but purposeful work. If both hygiene and motivating factors are weak, the job is considered miserable. If hygiene factors are strong but motivating factors are weak, the job can be considered comfortable but unsatisfying, therefore workers are neutrally productive. If both these factors are strong, the job is considered enjoyable and stimulating and workers can be productive and work at high-level. (Carrier, 2019e; Nickerson, 2025)

Juneja (2025b) claims that this theory may have some limitations. For instance, Juneja (2025b) states that situational factors are not taken into account by the two-factor theory, Herzberg's research ignored productivity even though he believed that productivity and satisfaction were correlated, or that this theory fails to consider blue-collar workers.

2.7 Process Models

Process models of motivation concentrate on the steps people take rather than what they assume they might need. These processes help to understand the behaviours, interactions, and situations that influence people's choices. (Carrier, 2019a)

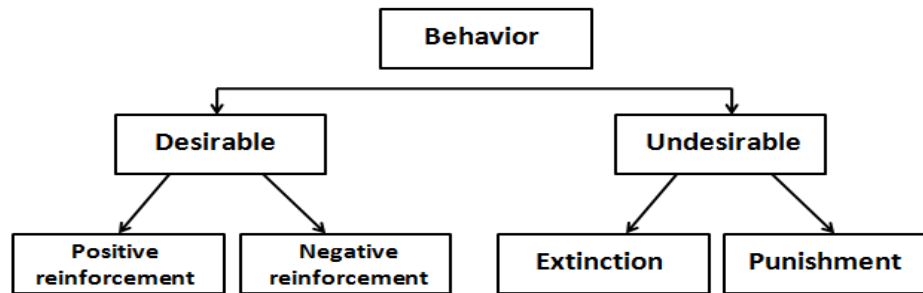
2.7.1 Skinner's Reinforcement Theory

One of the earliest theories of motivation, the Reinforcement Theory, was developed by BF Skinner and his collaborators to explain behaviour and the reasons behind our actions. Various industries can learn more about human behaviour by implementing his ideas on how to modify motivation through different stimuli. (Susanto, Lim, Linda & Wijaya, 2021, p. 4; Juneja, 2025c)

According to Carrier (2019f), this theory shows that our future behaviour is influenced by the results of our past actions and behaviours. We take more action when it leads to positive results, also called 'reinforcements'. When they have negative effects, called 'punishments', we tend to do fewer of them. It means that we can manipulate someone's behaviour by either adding or removing a positive or negative effect. Carrier (2019f) also claims that this theory has many similarities with feedback that people use all the time without even realizing it.

There are four types of this methods, where a person can control the behaviour of another person. Positive Reinforcement is favourable reaction, when person shows positive and sufficient behaviour, for example, a verbal appreciation for arriving to work early. Negative Reinforcement rewarding a worker by eliminating negative outcomes. Punishment is eliminating positive outcomes to lessens the possibility that unwanted behaviour will recur. Extinction is the process of eliminating rewards for unwanted behaviour to reduce the likelihood of that behaviour. (Juneja, 2025c)

Figure 4. Skinner's Reinforcement Theory



2.7.2 Vroom's Expectancy Theory

One of the core process theories and one of the primary theories used by organizations is expectation theory, which was created by Victor Vroom in 1964. This theory claims that if people receive rewards that are valuable for them, they will put in more effort to do well at work. (Mills A., Mills J., Forshaw & Bratton, 2006, p. 223)

According to Mills et al. (2006, p. 223), the main factor of this theory is, that every individual sees each reward differently valuable, as one person can find money as the most valuable reward, another person can find more value in an option of more free time. Mills et al. (2006, p.223) also stated that this theory shows that these personal values and preferences can not only differ from one person to another, but it can also change over time.

Even though this theory is used widely among organizations, Mills et al. (2006, pp. 223, 224) claim that it has some issues regardless of the support in empirical research. First issue is that this theory believes that people will always act and think in a logical manner; for this reason, Mills et al. (2006, p.224) find this theory invalid for some individuals. Second issue is that if an individual think that they are not capable of performing the task at required level, they believe that they are not suitable for the reward, and therefore this theory will not work on them. The last issue stated that this theory is situated on extrinsic motivation only and it may not work in long-term situations, or it may not work at all in some individuals. Considering the third problem, organizations who use this theory as the main motivational tool must always find more valuable rewards for their employees. (Mills A., Mills J., Forshaw & Bratton 2006, p. 224)

2.7.3 Adam's Equity Theory

According to Miner (2005, p. 135), this theory is the most applicable and completely expressed in motivation of employees.

This theory claims that people are motivated when they sense fairness and equality in their workplace connections (Channell, 2023). What a person gives could be considered an input, and these inputs have to be considered actual and compatible by this person but not by the other person. Things that this person gets are considered the outcomes, and they have to be actual and compatible as well as inputs. (Miner, 2005, pp. 135, 136)

Carrier (2019g) states that the relationship between inputs and outcomes has to be considered fair by an individual, which indicates that an individual desires equal reward for the amount of labour they perform. This fair relationship keeps an individual motivated, however if this relationship is not fair, an individual may feel unmotivated.

According to Channell (2023), feelings of unfairness will arise if those inputs and outputs are seen to be out of balance in comparison to others, and equity must be restored in order to inspire the workers. This could occur when an individual believes that they contribute to a job more than their colleagues but receive the same wage. Inequity can also work in a way, where person can be "overrewarded" when they put as much effort into work as their colleagues, but is being paid much more than them. (Miner, 2005, p. 136)

According to Miner (2005, p. 137), inequity can cause negative feelings, either in the form of anger, when the reward is not sufficient, or in the form of guilt, when the reward is larger than it should be. The more inequity there is, the more tension is produced, and it acts as a motivation to minimize the inequity to zero. This reducing of the inequity can be done by multiple methods.

Depending on the kind of inequity, the first approach involves changing the inputs by either raising or lowering them appropriately. When talking about work environment, it can be done for instance by alternating the workload or the quality of work. The second method is attempting to modify the outcomes by increasing or lowering them. (Miner, 2005, pp. 137, 138) According to Channell (2023), numerous strategies can be used to create "an equitable workplace and motivated workforce", including things, such as fair compensation, open performance reviews, equal development opportunities, or healthy work-life balance.

2.8 Modern Approaches to Motivation

Even though, modern approaches to motivation are based on the traditional theories, they have developed to take into account things, such as social context, emotion, and cognition in order to address the complexity of the modern workplace (StudySmarter, 2023).

2.8.1 Locke and Latham's Goal Setting Theory

According to Carrier (2019h), Locke and Latham released a book "A Theory of Goal Setting and Task Performance" in 1990 where they explained this theory and their five goal-setting principles in detail.

The first principle is called Goal Commitment. The relationship towards performance of the goal is strongest when people are devoted to their objectives. Goal commitment is facilitated by two primary categories of factors. The first are factors that affect how important it is to reach a goal, like a person's self-assurance in their own capacity to do so and the importance of the outcomes they expect from working toward that goal. People can be convinced that achieving goals is important in variety of ways. Publicly committing to the objective increases commitment, likely because in individual's and other people's eyes it turns the individual's deeds into an issue of integrity. (Locke & Latham, 2002, p. 707)

Another principle is called Challenge. When objectives are challenging, commitment is crucial. The particular reason for this circumstance is that challenging goals demand more work and have a lower chance of success than simple ones. However, if the goals are too much of a challenge, people will not be motivated, and they will tend to give up or not even start the achieving of the goal. (Locke & Latham, 2002, p.707; see also Carrier, 2019h)

According to Carrier (2019h), there is a principle called Clarity. Tasks must be clear in order to be motivating. Tasks are more difficult for people to comprehend when they are not specified and that makes these goals less motivating.

The fourth principle is called Feedback. People require concise feedback that shows progress toward their goals in order for them to be effective. It will be difficult or impossible for them to modify their performance strategies or the amount or direction of their effort to meet the goals if they are unaware of how they are doing. (Locke & Latham, 2002, p. 708) Carrier (2019h) states that this feedback can come in a variety of ways, such as data,

metric, or other people's opinions. The kind of goal being pursued will determine what kind of feedback is appropriate. To sum up, feedback of some kind is always helpful.

The last principle is called Task Complexity. A factor that influences it is establishing objectives at the appropriate degree of difficulty. (Carrier, 2019h) Locke & Latham (2002, p. 709) claim that another influencing factor is setting short-term goals. According to Locke & Latham (2002, p. 709), a business game used by Latham and Seijts (1999) found, that if an individual had "do-your-best" goals set, it was more motivating than long-term goals, however when short-term goals were set alongside long-term goals, it was more effective than setting just one type of goals.

2.8.2 Self-Determination Theory

Deci & Ryan (2017) state that Self-Determination Theory is a theory of human motivation at a macro level that broadened to encompass studies of work organizations and other spheres of life after developing from research on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

According to the Self-Determination Theory, an employee's motivation for work activities influences both their performance and psychological well-being. Self-determination theory clarifies the relationship between self-determination and motivation, arguing that people are more inclined to take action when they believe their deeds will affect the outcome. As a result, this theory distinguishes between various motivational styles and upholds that they all have distinct outcomes. (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan, 2017; see also Cherry, 2024)

According to CSDT (n.d.) each of the six mini theories that make up this theory focuses on a distinct facet of personality functioning or motivation. Cognitive Evaluation Theory is the first theory that discusses intrinsic motivation, or motivation that comes from enjoying an activity "for its own sake." Cognitive Evaluation Theory is concerned with the ways in which ego-involvements, benefits, and controls at interpersonal level affect intrinsic motivation and interest in relation to social contexts. Cognitive Evaluation Theory emphasizes how important competence and independence are in promoting intrinsic motivation, which is important in a variety of fields. (CSDT, n.d.)

Organismic Integration Theory is the name of the second mini theory. This theory discusses extrinsic motivation in all its ways and the effects they have. It is believed that these forms of extrinsic motivation fall on an internalization continuum. The more an

individual accepts the extrinsic motivation, the more independent they will be in implementing the behaviours. (CSDT, n.d.)

CSDT (n.d.) state that the third mini theory, Causality Orientations Theory, demonstrates individual variations in the ability of individuals to regulate their actions and orient themselves toward their environment. According to CSDT (n.d.) this theory outlines and evaluates three different kinds of causality orientations: the autonomy orientation, in which individuals participate in actions because they are interested in and appreciate what is taking place; the orientation of control, which highlights benefits, gains, and acceptance; and the unmotivated or passive orientation characterized by anxiety about competence.

The term Basic Psychological Needs refers to the fourth mini theory. Theories that are founded on "autonomy, competence, and relatedness" explain the connection between mental health and well-being as well as the concept of evolved psychological requirements. The theory states that each of these needs must be satisfied, and that failing to do so will negatively impact psychological development. (CSDT, n.d.)

The distinctions between intrinsic and extrinsic goals and their influences on motivation and well-being create the fifth mini theory, Goal Contents Theory. These goals are viewed as dissimilarly related to well-being due to the fact that they provide different ways of meeting basic requirements. (CSDT, n.d.)

The sixth mini theory, Relationship Motivation Theory is interested in relationships and claims that, because they satisfy the need for relatedness, some degree of these interactions is not only desirable for the majority of individuals but also necessary for their adaptation and general well-being. (CSDT, n.d.)

According to Cherry (2024), when person is highly self-determined, they would have the ability to admit if they made a mistake, they would believe that they can correct the mistake, and take steps to fix it, however if an individual is poorly self-determined, they tend to make excuses and find the blame elsewhere.

2.8.3 Job Characteristics Model

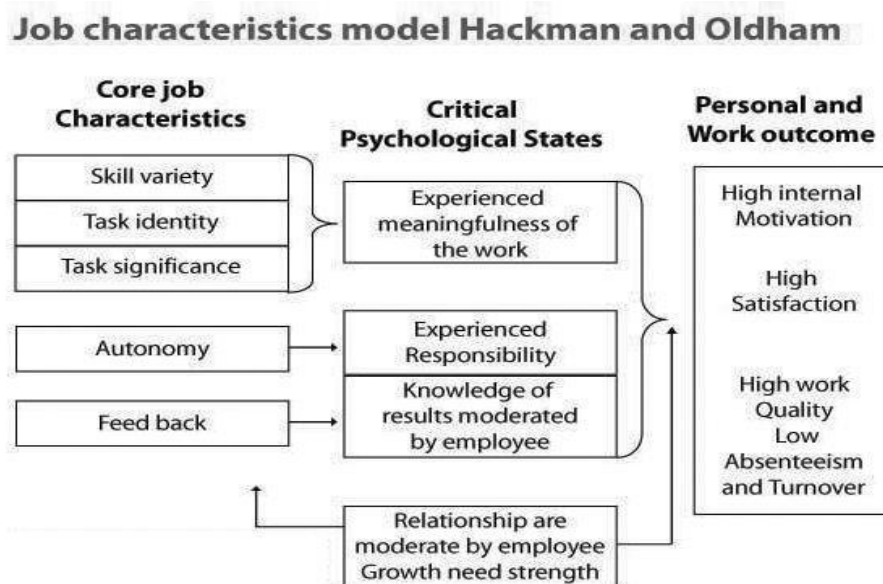
The Job Characteristics Model is among the most well-known theories that have been applied to comprehend the philosophy behind job designs. This theory states that that three psychological states that are crucial to both individual and professional outcomes are

defined by five aspects of jobs: skill variety, task significance, task identity, autonomy, and feedback. (Siruri & Cheche, 2021, p.163)

The initial aspect, skill variety, describes the extent to which a job demands the performance of various tasks in order to be completed, tasks that are expected to require for the use of several or specific skills. The second aspect, called task significance is used to describe the extent to which the work affects other individuals, both inside and outside the organization. Task identity as the third aspect relates to the extent to which work requires finishing an entire task from start to finish with observable results. The fourth aspect, autonomy, corresponds to the degree to which a worker has the liberty to perform his duties, including choosing the methods by which they should be performed. The last aspect, feedback, involves to the possibility of job duties to give the individual direct, understandable performance feedback. (Siruri & Cheche, 2021, p.163)

The five aspects of jobs that have been mentioned above are essential for identifying three psychological states. The first state, experienced responsibility for work outcomes, indicates that a person feels like they are accountable for the labour they do. The second state, experienced meaningfulness of work, refers to a person's perception that the labour they have done is worthwhile. The last state, knowledge of the results of work involves the employee having sufficient knowledge of how they are carrying out their duties in a competent way. To achieve the desired results of enriched jobs, all three of these psychological states must exist. (Siruri & Cheche, 2021, p.163)

Figure 5. Job Characteristics Model



2.9 Generational Identity as a Sociological Construct

According to PDG (2024), the generational diversity of today's workforce is greater than it has ever been. Krajac & Samardzija (2024) claim that Mahmoud et al. (2020) divided generations into: Generation X, as people born between 1965 and 1981; Generation Y, as people born between 1982 and 1999; and Generation Z, as people born between 2000 and 2012.

According to Krajac & Samardzija (2024), in addition to birth years, formative experiences and fundamental traits that influence their behaviour at work are frequently used to differentiate different generational cohorts.

Early technological advancements and revolutionary sociopolitical change defined the era in which Generation X grew up (Lee, 2022). According to Balon (2024), individualism and scepticism of authorities became acceptable by Generation X. Autonomy, independence, and self-direction appear to be valued by this generation (Krajac & Samardzija, 2024).

Millennials represent a significant portion of today's workforce (Lee, 2022). Millennials, or Generation Y, grew up in an era of globalization and swift technological advancement. As a result, the generations are highly flexible, socially conscious, and passionate about their rights. (Krajac & Samardzija, 2024)

Being the most recent generation to start working, Generation Z has also been influenced by political unrest, social media's explosive growth, and a variety of economic uncertainties. In addition, because they grew up using technology so quickly, they lack in-person interactions and frequently exhibit symptoms of anxiety, mental health problems, and heightened sensitivity. Some, however, continue to be outspoken and display resilience and individualism. (Krajac & Samardzija, 2024)

2.9.1 Generational Differences in Work Motivation

According to Heyns & Kerr (2018 p. 4), every research done in this area had different results about the degree to which different generations have different ideas about what constitutes a significant motivator. Heyns & Kerr (2018, p. 4) stated that research done by Kooij, De Lange, Jansen, Kanfer and Dikkers (2011) and De Lange, Bal, Van der Heiden, De Jong and Schaufeli (2011) have offered data in favour of the theory that intrinsic work motivation rises with age, while extrinsic work motivation falls. Heyns & Kerr (2018, p.4)

also found that Giancola (2006) offered a counterargument, claiming that the perceived differences between the generations were not supported by empirical data and that the cohorts' motivational drivers were surprisingly quite comparable. According to Heyns & Kerr (2018, p. 4), this point of view was supported by Wong et al. (2008) by conducting extensive study, that found that these differences were more adequately accounted for by age differences as opposed to generational ones.

Krajac & Samardzija (2024) state that Generation X is the most motivated group when it comes to work attitudes because they see social extrinsic rules as a source of employee motivation. They also have total trust in the organization's goals and objectives, without questioning its ethical considerations, and they trust their managers and supervisors.

Generation Y and Generation X are both driven by extrinsic work values and share similar work attitudes. Opportunities for teamwork and work-life balance are very important to them in both their personal and professional lives. If their managers are open, welcoming, and encouraging and share their values at work, Generation Y can be inspired. (Krajac & Samardzija, 2024)

According to Krajac & Samardzija (2024), when it comes to Generation Z in workplace, although they are aware that financial security can be achieved, they will always put their own welfare ahead of an organization's quantifiable success. Truth, curiosity, and identity are the core values of Generation Z. They have no trouble leaving an organization that does not align with their values. Furthermore, Generation Z prioritizes values of the workplace over competitive compensation, making them the generation with the least care for compensation. These standards include things like inclusive workplace culture, focus on mental health, transparency, autonomy, and flexibility. (Lee, 2022)

3 Research Methodology

It was essential to link the literature review and the theoretical section, which served as the paper's main framework, in order to successfully address the research questions presented in this thesis and accomplish the objectives set forth. This chapter describes what methods were used in the research process, some ethical considerations, what were the primary goals of the research, what methods were used in data collection, and some research limitations endured during its process.

3.1 Qualitative Research

To understand people's attitudes, behaviours, interactions, experiences, and beliefs, the qualitative research method is used. It generates non-numerical data unlike quantitative research method where the data is based solely on numbers which can give have more reliable approach. Once believed to be philosophically inconsistent with experimental research, qualitative research is now recognized for its ability to give interventional research a new perspective that is not achievable with only variable measurement. Qualitative research increases everyone's participation regarding the research. Furthermore, compared to quantitative research, the researcher-participant relationship is frequently less formal when using qualitative methods. (Pathak, Jena & Kalra, 2013, p. 192)

According to Gibbs (1997, p.2), Morgan and Kreuger (1993) state that focus groups are primarily used to gather information about respondents' attitudes, feelings, experiences, and reactions in a manner that is not conceivable with other techniques, such as questionnaire surveys, individual in-depth interviews, or observation. Though they may be somewhat independent of a group or its social context, these attitudes, sentiments, and beliefs are more likely to come to light through the social interaction that focus groups entail. Individual interviews seek to ascertain a person's attitudes, beliefs, and feelings; in contrast, focus groups collect a variety of opinions and emotional processes in a group setting. Focus groups give the researcher the opportunity to collect more data in less time than observation does. Focus groups are especially helpful when one wants to investigate the level of agreement on a particular subject, the culture of specific groups is of interest.

The goal of this qualitative research is to find similarities and distinctions in work motivation among generations. The research aims to create customized motivational techniques based on these insights, taking into account the values and expectations that each generation has for their jobs. The study will be conducted on different employees from different generations. To provide a meaningful comparison of generational attitudes toward motivation, participants were carefully chosen to ensure a diverse representation of roles and experiences. Employees from few different generations will be interviewed to make sure the study is significant and provides insightful information. This method facilitates the development of strategies suited to the expectations of different generations and makes it possible to compare motivational patterns in a clear and understandable manner.

3.2 Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis was used to explore the findings of the focus groups. The thematic analysis is known as process of methodically locating, classifying, and providing insight into meaningful patterns (themes) within a dataset. The researcher can see and understand common or communal meanings and experiences by utilizing thematic analysis, which focuses on meaning across a dataset. The goal of thematic analysis is not to find distinctive and peculiar interpretations and experiences that are only present in one data item. Another feature of thematic analysis is its adaptability, which allows it to be used in a variety of research projects. (Braun & Clarke, 2012)

This thesis's use of thematic analysis enables the author to pinpoint characteristics of motivation that are shared between generations, which may be used as a foundation for developing universal motivating programs that appeal to a larger spectrum of workers.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

To maintain the integrity, legitimacy, and dependability of this qualitative study, ethical issues must be addressed. Because the study entails direct interaction with participants, extra caution must be taken to protect their rights.

Each participant received clear information about their rights, the purpose of their participation, and the goals of the study. All personal information will be anonymized and safely stored to guarantee privacy and confidentiality. Transcripts and recordings of interviews will only be utilized for academic purposes; they will not be distributed outside of the research setting. The interviews will be handled with consideration for the comfort and boundaries of the participants, in a respectful and non-intrusive manner.

3.4 Data Collection

Early in the research process, the theoretical framework and findings from the literature review were developed. The author developed the questions using the information gathered from the theoretical framework. The interviews were conducted in a systematic way to provide methodological and reliable data gathering.

The data were collected primarily in the form of notes taken during the interviews. The interview questions focused on the aspects of work motivation and their importance to respondents. Focus group interviews were used as a primary method of data collection, conducted with multiple participants of different generations, professional roles, and lengths of work experience. Slovak was used during the conversations, which were then transcribed for analysis.

4 Research Findings and Analysis

The following chapter will concentrate on analysing the basic information about the respondents in addition to answers to the questions used in the research.

4.1 Focus Group Interviews

The aim of the research was to compare perceptions of motivation of employees of different generations and identify the factors that most motivate them to perform well at work. Respondents were selected on the basis of voluntary interest. The data was obtained through smaller focus groups with 2-3 participants in each group. The aim was not to achieve statistical representativeness, but to gain an in-depth insight into the differences in work motivation between generations. Smaller number of respondents enabled a more detailed analysis of the individual attitudes and experiences of respondents. Respondents were divided into generations according to age: Generation Z (up to 25 years old), Millennials (26–43 years old), Generation X (44–60 years old). This classification allowed for the identification of generational disparities in job satisfaction, motivation, and benefit perception. A more comprehensive understanding of motivational elements across generations was made possible by the respondents' diverse age ranges, professional roles, and lengths of work experience. The questions were created by the author based on the knowledge gained in the theoretical part of the thesis. Respondents were not given questions in advance to ensure the authenticity and spontaneity of their responses. The data analysis was carried out based on focus groups with questions categorized into five thematic areas: General Motivation, Compensation and Benefits, Workplace Relationships, Management Style, Personal Development, and Satisfaction. Focus groups lasted roughly 30 to 45 minutes and were held both in-person and virtually through video conversations. Slovak was used during the conversations, which were then transcribed for analysis.

Table 1. Focus Groups Overview, own sources

Focus Group Date	Generation	Number of participants	Focus Group Length	Location
24.10.2025	Generation Z	3	30 minutes	In-person Meeting
29.10.2025	Generation Y (Millennials)	2	45 minutes	Video call
8.11.2025	Generation X	2	45 minutes	Video call

4.2 Findings Overview

The primary results from the focus groups are presented in this subchapter, which is organized thematically according to the format of the questions given. Key elements of job satisfaction, motivation, and interpersonal interactions are reflected in every focus area. In order to better understand the differences in attitudes and preferences between Generation Z, Millennials, and Generation X, the replies of respondents from various generational groups are compared within each topic.

4.2.1 General Motivation

Fair treatment, a manageable workload, and a nice work environment are all factors that Generation Z respondents believe contribute to job motivation. They stressed the importance of enough breaks, and a work-life balance in addition to monetary compensation. Respondents stated that "it is important that the work is divided fairly and that no one has an unnecessary amount of work". One important element was found to be the company's atmosphere. The working mood is diminished in a bad atmosphere.

Millennials believe that a great work atmosphere, financial compensation, and recognition all contribute to motivation. For them, praise and acknowledgment for a job well done are

crucial, and money rewards for working overtime serve as a powerful external motivator. Respondents stated that "they know that they will be paid the same amount of money even if they do better work, but sometimes they just want to help their coworkers". This generation places a high importance on social elements of work, as evidenced by their enjoyment of team building, workplace events, and teamwork. On the other hand, employees view things such as a lack of vacation time and personnel shortages as highly demotivating. They are greatly impacted by the culture of the organization. The mood of the entire team might be impacted by a single anxious coworker. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the capacity to "make a nice day for yourself under any circumstances" demonstrates inner resilience and self-control.

Respondents from Generation X stated, that they are most motivated when they do work that they like and enjoy. At the same time, they stressed the necessity of having sufficient assets and conditions to perform their tasks, and that their satisfaction decreases in the absence of them. They believe that a bad work environment has a big impact on their motivation to work, even though they see it as something they contribute to.

4.2.2 Compensation and Benefits

Generation Z values financial compensation, however, not always in the form of large salary. Instead, they call for equality in terms of position and work content. Respondents stated that they "will not do extra work for free". They especially value non-monetary incentives that foster a sense of community, like team-building exercises, and events. People value feedback, especially when it is delivered sensitively. It might be discouraging to receive negative feedback. Constructive criticism boosts one's sense of competence.

The most significant motivating factor for Millennials is financial compensation. To boost their income, they frequently take up additional work. Among non-monetary benefits, they especially value dining possibilities in the workplace, company events, and group activities, as they enhance their general happiness. For them, feedback is crucial. They are motivated by positive feedback, but as respondents said, "the negative feedback can help to learn how to get better" which indicates, that millennials use feedback as a tool for personal development.

Financial compensation was marked as the most important motivating factor for Generation X. They believe that compensation must be appropriate with the level of difficulty of the work. They view money as proof of the value of their work. Respondents stated that they

also value non-monetary benefits like company events, team-building exercises, gift cards, and more time off. They would appreciate more frequent company events. Respondents stated that "it would be better if those events and team-buildings were more frequent and not just once in a few months". Feedback is very important for Generation X, as they said that "positive feedback is heartwarming, it gives you strength, motivates you, and makes you happier at work." Respondents stated that negative feedback is not pleasant, however it drives them to do better.

4.2.3 Workplace Relationships

Respondents from Generation Z have mixed feelings about cooperation within the company. They prefer to work independently, but at the same time they recognize the importance of positive interpersonal relationships. Respondents stated that "it is important to remember that colleagues are not friends, they are colleagues, but it is still important to have a positive relationship with them because nobody wants to work with people that hate each other". Bad relationships affect mood and motivation negatively and carry over into personal life. Additionally, it should be noted that while teamwork is not favoured, psychological safety and respect are important for Generation Z.

Millennials are more productive when working in a group than when working alone. Since positive relationships with coworkers have a direct impact on their well-being at work, they place a high value on a sense of belonging. Additionally, it should be mentioned that millennials respondents stated that "if you have a good relationship with your colleagues, they can help you with work but also you can talk to them about anything, which makes your time at work more pleasant" which indicates that millennials view their coworkers as both an emotional support system and a tool for work.

Teamwork is considered natural and pleasant for Generation X. They like it, when colleagues help each other. Respondents stated that "when you spend most of your days with someone, you want to have something to talk about during the day. It makes the work time more pleasant, and the time goes faster". Sense of belonging is essential to them. One of the respondents stated that they "remember the times when there were bad relationships within a team and it was awful".

4.2.4 Management Style

Generation Z prefers a management style that combines initial training with subsequent autonomy. Respondents said that it is important to learn basics, but being able to have a free hand afterwards to apply their creativity and make the work more enjoyable. The ability to influence working hours is seen as a tool for increasing performance. Flexibility allows for better adaptation to individual needs.

Millennials would rather be given more freedom to do their tasks. In order to make it both efficient and pleasurable, they want to adjust it. They value the freedom to control their working hours mostly for practical reasons. Respondents said that "anything can happen in life, so it is good to be able to agree with a colleague to swap shifts" that show that it is important to them more because of "unexpected events", not because of the performance. This implies that for them, flexibility is more about lifestyle than productivity at work.

Generation X appreciate it when experienced colleagues give tips and insights that improve the efficiency of the work. They interpret this as a show of collaboration and support. They feel more confident and are better able to handle unfamiliar circumstances. They prefer having consistent working hours. It provides them with a sense of stability and helps them better arrange their personal lives. They don't believe that a set schedule has a negative impact on their productivity or satisfaction.

4.2.5 Personal Development and Satisfaction

Self-development and learning new things are essential for Generation Z. Stagnation leads to stereotyping and loss of interest in work. Respondents said they "want to develop not only for career advancement but also for personal growth". Work is meaningful to them when it helps people or makes life easier; they perceive it as beneficial if it has a real impact. Praise and feedback are perceived as confirmation of the value of the work performed. As a bonus, Generation Z has a strong internal compass and is motivated by the feeling that their work has value outside the work environment.

Millennials primarily grow in their field of work. They do not actively seek out new knowledge, especially when they have been working in the field for a long time, but they do accept it when it is provided. They find purpose in their work if it affects other people, and as respondents stated, "it is important for every person to find a job that makes sense to them". They typically have a sense of fulfilment at the end of the workday when they are

able to focus on their personal life and, as respondents stated, they "know they have done their jobs honestly".

Especially in their field, Generation X enjoys learning new things. If educational opportunities make sense, they are open to them. When they find enjoyment, fulfilment, and concrete results in their work, it becomes significant to them. They are inspired to work hard and "from the heart" because they believe their efforts have a genuine impact. Respondents stated that "if they didn't find personal fulfilment in their work, they wouldn't stay there very long".

4.3 Main Findings

The main conclusions drawn from the information gathered through interviews are covered in this section. Workplace relationships, feedback, fairness and equity, autonomy, and personal fulfilment are the five main themes that surfaced during the data collection process. The results of this study will provide direction for future studies and may also benefit businesses that collaborate with multigenerational teams.

Table 2. Thematic Coding Table

First-Order codes (Quotes / Direct ideas)	Second-Order codes (Interpretive categories)	Aggregated themes
<p>"Work should be divided fairly so no one has an unnecessary amount of work"</p> <p>"I will not do extra work for free"</p>	<p>Fair distribution of workload; Resistance to unpaid extra work</p>	<p>Fairness</p>
<p>"I know I will not be paid more, but I just want to help"</p>	<p>Voluntary extra effort motivated by colleague support</p>	<p>Workplace relationships</p>

<p>"We know how to make a nice day under any circumstances"</p> <p>"The atmosphere at work is what we make it"</p>	<p>Positive work atmosphere, Collective responsibility for mood</p>	<p>Workplace relationships</p>
<p>"The negative feedback is not pleasant, but it helps me to learn how to get better next time"</p> <p>"Positive feedback is heartwarming "</p> <p>"Negative feedback is okay, but it should be delivered constructively"</p>	<p>Feedback as a learning and motivational tool</p>	<p>Feedback</p>
<p>"It would be better if we had these events and teambuilding more often"</p>	<p>Desire for teambuilding and social events</p>	<p>Workplace relationships</p>
<p>"Colleagues are colleagues, not friends, but still, you should have a good relationship with them because then you take the negative feelings into your personal life"</p> <p>"Good relationship with colleagues is nice, they can help you and you can talk about anything"</p> <p>"When you spend most of your days with someone, you want to have something to talk about"</p>	<p>Importance of positive interpersonal relationships at work</p>	<p>Workplace relationships</p>

"When there were bad relationships at work it was awful"		
"I want to develop not just for work, but also for personal life, the more skills, the better"	Desire for learning	Personal development
"It is important to find a job that makes sense to you" "I would not want to work somewhere, where I don't feel fulfilment"	Desire for meaningful work	Job meaningfulness and personal fulfilment
"I want to find my own way of working so it is easier and more enjoyable"	Need for independence	Autonomy
"It is not about a lot of money, but it has to be fair to the amount of work you do" "Financial compensation is 90% of the motivation, but I feel like lot of positions are not paid fairly"	Emphasis on fair compensation	Fairness

This table shows how the data from the interviews were methodically examined and categorized using a thematic analysis approach into more general concepts. Finding first-order codes, which are direct statements or particular concepts from participants, was the first step in the process. These codes were then translated into second-order codes, emphasizing more general trends. In order to properly address the research question,

these categories were then merged into aggregated themes. This methodical technique guarantees that the results offer a clear link between the data and the study's themes.

1. Feedback

Every generation consider praise and recognition to be a strong motivating factor. Positive feedback increases the feeling of work satisfaction and makes them feel competent. However, when using negative feedback, it should be delivered sensitively and constructively to make sure that workers will try to be better next time and not be demotivated. In both cases, feedback is considered a valuable tool for increasing motivation and self-reflection.

2. Fairness

All generations' responses indicated that one of the most important motivating factors was financial reward. They see money as both a practical tool that helps them perform better in their personal life and as proof that their work is valuable. However, fairness is crucial; compensation should be paid fairly and should match the difficulty and amount of the work.

3. Workplace Relationships

For all generations, relationships at work are crucial. Even while Generation Z prefers to work alone, they understand that bad connections with coworkers can have an impact on motivation, mood, and even personal life. In contrast, Generation Y and Generation X value teamwork and views the team as a source of efficiency and job pleasure. Recreational activities, team-building exercises, and corporate events are seen positively since they promote relationship building and a break from the pressures of the workplace. Every group is sensitive to the workplace environment, and a negative environment may make them less inclined to work. Therefore, positive interactions and a nice atmosphere are regarded as necessary prerequisites for motivation.

4. Autonomy

Employees like having sense of independence and trust from management in the workplace. They feel responsible and respected as professionals when they are able to choose how they organize their workday, how to approach tasks, or what pace to set. Additionally, autonomy encourages their creativity and capacity to adjust to their own

demands, which increases their efficiency and sense of satisfaction. Another common characteristic is that employees are better motivated when they are free to work autonomously within well-defined objectives rather than feeling constantly watched over.

5. Job Meaningfulness and Personal Fulfilment

One of the key elements that greatly affects motivation is the significance of the work. According to the respondents, they find fulfilment in their work when it has a specific impact, whether it is beneficial to others, helps the business run smoothly, or has greater social significance. It is crucial that they understand the purpose of the work and be able to relate to it. Even in challenging situations they are able to keep their interest, dedication, and motivation to perform because they feel that their work is valuable. Therefore, the meaning of work is an internal source of motivation that repeatedly appeared in all generations' responses.

6. Personal Development

Every generation stated that they find educational opportunities useful not just in their professional lives but also in their personal life. Although some of them may not actively seek for these opportunities, they are happy to accept them when they are offered. Therefore, offering regular training and other educational opportunities may increase their satisfaction and motivation.

5 Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate how different generations' motivational elements differ or coincide, as well as to identify and analyse factors that affect their motivation at work the most. Focus groups were used in the research, and thematic analysis that followed identified a number of themes that were shared by all generations.

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The focus group results showed that while there are some distinctions across Generations X, Y, and Z in terms of how much emphasis is placed on individual factors, the basic requirements related to motivation are still similar.

Financial compensation was viewed by all generations as a source of stability as well as a sign of respect and equity, which is consistent with Adam's Equity Theory (Carrier, 2019g). The younger Generation Z, however, placed greater emphasis on equality and fair working conditions than on actual compensation, indicating a shift in values toward an ethical and inclusive workplace.

There was also a significant focus on the necessity for positive work environment and high-quality interpersonal interactions. This feature gives support to Herzberg's two-factor theory, which holds that connections are one of the factors affecting satisfaction and that their absence may decrease motivation (Nickerson, 2025). Despite its inclination toward independence, Generation Z still views communication and the workplace as essential components of psychological well-being.

Another common theme across generations is the need for trust and autonomy on the part of management. For Generation Z, the ability to decide how to work and develop their skills is important, which confirms Self-Determination Theory (CSDT, n.d.). Generations X and Y, on the other hand, value clear goals and recognition of achievements, which is in line with Locke & Latham's Goal Setting Theory (Carrier, 2019h).

Feedback has been shown to be an effective motivator across all generations. In line with Herzberg's theory of motivators, self-development is made possible and intrinsic motivation is strengthened when constructive criticism and acknowledgment are combined (Kurt, 2022b, Nickerson, 2025).

In general, it can be said that the distinctions between generations are less about the nature of motivation itself and more about how motivating needs are prioritized. Younger generations prioritize equality, adaptability, and personal development while older generations seek stability and recognition. Nonetheless, the need for fulfilling employment, equitable treatment, and healthy working relationships unites all three generations.

5.2 Recommendations

The study's findings allow for the development of several recommendations for businesses that employ workers from multiple generations. These suggestions may help in developing successful motivational strategies and improving work environments.

1. Promoting good relationships in the workplace

Good interpersonal relationships have a direct impact on motivation and satisfaction of the employees. Organizations should promote team spirit through joint activities, open communication, and fair conflict resolution.

2. Emphasis on fairness and transparency

All generations are sensitive to inequity in workload or compensation. Therefore, it is advisable to implement the equality principle and to make rules, expectations, and evaluation criteria clear.

3. Ensuring development and education

Opportunities for career advancement boost intrinsic motivation, especially among younger employees. To encourage long-term employee satisfaction, companies should offer training, mentoring, and chances for personal growth.

4. Focus on meaningful work

Employees should find their work meaningful and valuable. Employees are more engaged and motivated when they understand the organization's objectives and find value in their work.

5.3 Research Limitations

Despite efforts to guarantee the quality of the study, it is important to consider various limitations that could influence how the findings are interpreted. The initial limitation is the focus group technique itself, which may be impacted by group dynamics even while it permits the recording of a range of participant interactions and viewpoints. The sincerity of some respondents' statements may have been impacted by their lack of activity or by being influenced by the perspectives of others. Focus groups typically have larger number of participants, however the conclusions of the research were confirmed by the theories used in the theoretical part of the thesis, therefore can be seen as relevant.

The respondents' selection is an additional disadvantage. The study's focus on general work experience rather than a particular company allowed for a wider perspective, but it also limited the conclusions' applicability to a particular organizational setting. In the same manner, the quantity of focus groups and the age distribution of members might not

accurately reflect the whole workforce.

When putting the ideas into practice and organizing future research, these limitations must be considered.

5.4 Future Research

The findings of this study serve as a foundation for further research into the problem of work motivation among generations. Given the size of the study sample and the qualitative character of the methodology, several areas, that need additional research can be highlighted.

More respondents from various industries, roles, and organizational structures should be included in future studies. Expanding the sample would enable verification of the trends found and improve the general validity of the findings, given that this study was carried out on a smaller scale through focus groups.

Using a mixed research methods approach, which combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, should be considered. A more thorough understanding of the problem would be possible with this method, which would also enable the discovery of significant connections between elements in addition to subjective attitudes.

International comparisons, such as those between Central European countries, where generational differences may have different dynamics because of cultural values, historical changes, and work norms, may be an interesting area for future research. Understanding whether the discovered factors are culturally specific or universal might be achievable with this kind of method.

A more thorough investigation of the connection between company culture, leadership style, and generational motivating factors is another potential approach. This would make it possible to develop more detailed suggestions for managerial practice and better modify managerial strategies for multigenerational teams.

6 Conclusion

There were two main key questions of this research: What motivates employees the most to perform better at work? What are the different and common factors that influence work

motivation across different generations? The goal of the thesis was to identify and analyse factors, that influence work motivation of multiple generations, and compare their features. The research was conducted through focus groups, with each group containing different generation, and subsequently analysed using thematic analysis, which made it possible to capture deep and specific attitudes of employees in different generations.

The results showed that different elements of work motivation are prioritized by different generations. Fair labour distribution, meaningful jobs, and a balance between work and personal life are all preferred by Generation Z. They also value the chance for self-fulfilment, open communication, and good working connections. In addition to appreciating chances for both professional and personal growth as well as flexibility in the workplace, Generation Y is highly motivated by praise and acknowledgment. For Generation X, respect for experience and the capacity to work well in a team are important, and stability, security, and predictability in the workplace are crucial.

It has been shown that there are common motivational factors among all generations. Employee engagement and happiness are greatly increased by a number of factors, including meaningful work, autonomy, clear rules and transparency, fair compensation, and positive interpersonal interactions. The results demonstrate that motivation is strengthened not only by monetary rewards but also by acknowledgment, encouragement for personal development, and the chance to have an impact on one's own work.

The thesis includes practical guidelines for HR departments and managers of multigenerational teams. Regular and thoughtful feedback, promoting collaboration and trust among coworkers, and encouraging learning, growth, and independence are some of the main suggestions. This strategy can increase employee loyalty and general satisfaction in addition to motivation and performance.

There were limits to the research as well. There weren't many participants, and concentrating solely on the qualitative approach might have an impact on how broadly applicable the results are. Therefore, future research might look at cross-cultural variations, increase the sample size, and incorporate qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

All things considered, this research improves the understanding of work motivation across generations. It demonstrates that motivation is not constant but rather dynamic and influenced by factors such as age, priorities in life, and the workplace. The results give businesses useful information for developing more productive and pleasant work

environments that promote long-term satisfaction, productivity, and employee engagement. The findings of this study can therefore be useful for management practice as well as for upcoming academic studies in the areas of human resources and motivation.

References

- Andreev, I. (2024). *9 types of motivation for the workplace with examples*.
Valamis. <https://www.valamis.com/hub/types-of-motivation>
- Balon, R. An Explanation of Generations and Generational Changes. *Acad Psychiatry* **48**, 280–282 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40596-023-01921-3>
- Bradberry, T. (2016). *70% of Employees Say They Are Disengaged at Work. Here's How to Motivate Them*. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2016/11/70-of-employees-say-they-are-disengaged-at-work-heres-how-to-motivate-them/>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher, *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 57-71). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004>
- Channell, M. (2023). *How Can Adams' Equity Theory Boost Your Team's Motivation?* TSW Training. <https://www.tsw.co.uk/blog/leadership-and-management/adams-equity-theory/>
- Cardwel, P., Prelip, A., & Graber-Peters, J. (2024). *Positive and Negative Motivation*. Social Sci LibreTexts. <https://shorturl.at/v5Q3t>
- Carrier, J. (2019a). *Motivation Theories: Content and Process*. PeopleShift. <https://people-shift.com/articles/motivation-theories-context-and-process/>
- Carrier, J. (2019b). *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: A Simple Summary*. PeopleShift. <https://people-shift.com/articles/maslows-hierarchy-of-needs/>
- Carrier, J. (2019c). *Alderfer's ERG Theory of Motivation: A Simple Summary*. PeopleShift. <https://people-shift.com/articles/alderfers-erg-theory-of-motivation/>
- Carrier, J. (2019d). *McClelland's Acquired Needs Motivation Theory*. PeopleShift. <https://people-shift.com/articles/mcclellands-motivation-theory/>
- Carrier, J. (2019e). *Herzberg's Two Factor Theory of Motivation: A Simple Summary*. PeopleShift. <https://people-shift.com/articles/herzbergs-two-factor-theory-of-motivation/>

- Carrier, J. (2019f). *Reinforcement Theory In The World Of Work*. PeopleShift. <https://people-shift.com/articles/reinforcement-theory/>
- Carrier, J. (2019g). *Adams' Equity Theory of Motivation: A Simple Summary*. PeopleShift. <https://people-shift.com/articles/adams-equity-theory-of-motivation/>
- Carrier, J. (2019h). *Locke and Latham's Goal Setting Theory: Set Better Goals*. PeopleShift. <https://people-shift.com/articles/locke-lathams-goal-setting-theory/>
- Cherry, K. (2024). *Self-determination theory and motivation*. Verywell Mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-self-determination-theory-2795387>
- Cofer, C. N., & Petri, H. L. (2018). Motivation | behaviour. In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/motivation>
- Corporate Leadership Council. (2004). *Driving performance and retention through employee engagement: A quantitative analysis of effective engagement strategies*. Corporate Leadership Council; Corporate Executive Board. https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/33187063/Employee_engagement-libre.pdf
- CSDT. (n.d.). *Self-Determination Theory*. Selfdeterminationtheory.org; Center for Self-Determination Theory. <https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/theory/>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-Determination theory in work organizations: The state of a science. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113108>
- Fitzgerald, C. (2023). *4 Employee Motivation Types: Understanding The Key Factors – Oak Innovation*. Oakinnovation.com. <https://www.oakinnovation.com/blog/free-leadership-advice/4-employee-motivation-types>
- Gibbs, A. (1997). *Focus Groups*. Social Research Update, Issue 19. Department of Sociology, University of Surrey. Retrieved from https://openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/her-macdonaldsbs2000fall2015b/files/2011/06/Focus-Groups_Anita-Gibbs.pdf
- Gorman, P. (2004). *Motivation and emotion* (p. 17). Routledge.

- Harter, J. (2025). *Anemic Employee Engagement Points to Leadership Challenges*. Gallup.com; Gallup.
<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/692954/anemic-employee-engagement-points-leadership-challenges.aspx>
- Herrity, J. (2025). *Applying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in the Workplace*. Indeed.com; Indeed.
<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/maslows-hierarchy-of-needs>
- Heyns, M. M., & Kerr, M. D. (2018). Generational differences in workplace motivation. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16(0), 4. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v16i0.967>
- Juneja, H. (2025a). *ERG Theory of Motivation*. Managementstudyguide.com.
<https://www.managementstudyguide.com/erg-theory-motivation.htm>
- Juneja, H. (2025b). *Herzbergs Two-Factor Theory of Motivation*. Management Study Guide.
<https://www.managementstudyguide.com/herzbergs-theory-motivation.htm>
- Juneja, H. (2025c). *Reinforcement Theory of Motivation*. Management Study Guide.
<https://www.managementstudyguide.com/reinforcement-theory-motivation.htm>
- Krajac, L., & Samardzija, J. (2024). *Creating a unified foundation for Sustainable Development: Interdisciplinarity in Research and Education*.
<https://www.rit.edu/croatia/sites/rit.edu.croatia/files/docs/Workplace%20motivation%20across%200X%2C%20Y%2C%20and%20Z%20generations%20-%20An%20organizational%20behavior%20perspective%2C%20Krajac%20%26%20Samardzija%2C%202024.pdf>
- Kurt, S. (2022a). *McClelland's Three Needs Theory: Power, Achievement, and Affiliation*. Education Library. <https://educationlibrary.org/mcclellands-three-needs-theory-power-achievement-and-affiliation/>
- Kurt, S. (2022b). *Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory: Two-Factor*. Education Library.
<https://educationlibrary.org/herzbergs-motivation-hygiene-theory-two-factor/>
- Kurt, S. (2023). *Alderfer's ERG Theory*. Education Library. <https://educationlibrary.org/alderfers-erg-theory/>
- Lee, H. (2022). *The Changing Generational Values*. John Hopkins University. <https://imagine.jhu.edu/blog/2022/11/17/the-changing-generational-values/>

- Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2002). Building a Practically Useful Theory of Goal Setting and Task Motivation: a 35-year Odyssey. *American Psychologist*, 57(9), 707–709.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.57.9.705>
- Mcleod, S. (2025). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. *Simply Psychology*, 1(1-18).
https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html?ez_vid=2cae626a2fe896279da43d587baa3eb663083817
- Mills, A., Mills, J., Forshaw, C., & Bratton, J. (2006). *Organizational Behaviour in a Global Context* (pp. 223–224).
https://www.google.cz/books/edition/Organizational_Behaviour_in_a_Global_Con/eTpoNm5U_JwC?hl=sk&gbpv=1
- Miner, J. (2005). *Organizational Behavior 1: Essential Theories of Motivation and Leadership* (pp. 135–138). <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.hamk.fi/lib/hamk-ebooks/reader.action?docID=302474&c=UERG&ppg=152>
- Nickerson, C. (2025). *Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation-hygiene*. Simply Psychology.
<https://www.simplypsychology.org/herzbergs-two-factor-theory.html>
- Osemeke, M., & Adegboyega, S. (2017). Critical Review and Comparism between Maslow, Herzberg and McClelland's Theory of Needs. *Funai Journal of Accounting*, 1(1), 169–171.
<https://fujabf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Critical-Review-and-Comparism-between-Maslow-Herzberg-and-McClellands-Theory-of-Needs.pdf>
- Pârjoleanu, R. (2020). Work Motivation Efficiency in the Workplace. *Postmodern Openings*, 11(4), 293–309. <https://doi.org/10.18662/po/11.4/236>
- Pathak, V., Kalra, S., & Jena, B. (2013). Qualitative Research. *Perspectives in Clinical Research*, 4(3), 192. <https://doi.org/10.4103/2229-3485.115389>
- PDG. (2024). *Unlocking Potential: Managing and Motivating Across Generations*. Performance Development Group. <https://www.performdev.com/blog/unlocking-potential-managing-and-motivating-across-generations/>
- Siruri, M. M., & Cheche, S. (2021). Revisiting the Hackman and Oldham Job Characteristics Model and Herzberg's Two Factor Theory: Propositions on How to Make Job Enrichment Effective in

Today's Organizations. *European Journal of Business and Management Research*, 6(2), 163.

<https://doi.org/10.24018/ejbmr.2021.6.2.767>

Sternad, D. (2013). Towards an eclectic framework of external factors influencing work motivation. *SBS*

Journal of Applied Business Research, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.70301/ee0e9q27>

StudySmarter. (2023). *Modern Motivational Theory: Components & Effects*. StudySmarter UK.

<https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/business-studies/organizational-behavior/modern-motivational-theory>

Susanto, S., Lim, B., Linda, T., Tarigan, S. A., & Wijaya, E. (2021). ANTECEDENTS EMPLOYEE

PERFORMANCE: A PERSPECTIVE REINFORCEMENT THEORY. *Journal of Industrial*

Engineering & Management Research, 2(4), 4. <https://doi.org/10.7777/ijemar.v2i4.156>

Vo, T. T. D., Tuliao, K. V., & Chen, C.-W. (2022). Work Motivation: the Roles of Individual Needs and

Social Conditions. *Behavioral Sciences*, 12(2), 49. ncbi. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12020049>

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

Questions about General Motivation

- What motivates you most to perform better at work?
- Which aspects of the work environment suit you best, and which ones bother you?
- How does the company atmosphere affect your satisfaction?

Questions about Compensation and Benefits

- To what extent does financial compensation motivate you?
- Which non-monetary benefits are most important and motivating to you?
- Do you receive feedback on how you are doing?
- How do you perceive negative feedback?
- How important is feedback to you?

Questions about Workplace Relationships

- Do you prefer to work independently or as a part of a team? Why?
- How do relationships with your colleagues affect your desire to work?
- How important it is for you to feel as a part of a team?

Questions about Management Style

- Which management style suits you better? Someone who guides you step by step, or someone who give you freedom to decide how to do your work?
- Do you have the opportunity to influence your working hours? How important is this to you?

Questions about Personal Development and Satisfaction

- Do you feel that you are learning something new and developing at work? If so, in what areas?
- Is learning new things important to you?
- What does meaningful work mean to you, personally?
- Do you feel that your work has a real impact on something?
- When do you feel satisfied with your work? What most often brings you that feeling?

Appendix 2. Data Management Plan

1. Description of thesis research data

The research data for this thesis were collected through focus group interviews, which is a qualitative data collection that allows the author to gain in-depth insights of participants' attitudes and experiences. This method was used to gain more detailed insight as it helps the respondents to better express their thoughts through social interaction that this method entails.

Focus group interviews were used as a primary method of data collection, conducted with multiple participants of different generations, professional roles, and lengths of work experience. Slovak was used during the conversations, which were then transcribed for analysis.

The data were collected primarily in the form of notes taken during the interviews. One interview was conducted as an In-person Meeting and that interview was also recorded in the form of audio file. The interview questions focused on the aspects of work motivation and their importance to respondents.

The participants were selected based on voluntary interest and categorized solely according to their generational group. No sensitive or identifying personal information such as names were included in the thesis. Respondents' exact age was not collected, as the only thing considered was their birth year range for classification purposes. All data were anonymized to protect the privacy of the participants.

The textual data was coded and interpreted using thematic analysis, which revealed themes and patterns pertinent to the study's goals.

2. Management and storage of research data

The research data, which includes audio recording and notes taken during the interviews, will be kept on the thesis author's personal password-protected computer. Backups will be stored in an encrypted folder apart from the current files being examined to guarantee data security.

The information gathered will only be accessible to the thesis author, while the thesis supervisor may access it if necessary for evaluation or academic advice. Cloud services won't receive or store any data.

3. Processing of personal data and sensitive data

This thesis includes limited personal data, specifically previous work experiences, which is necessary to provide context and reliability of the participants statements. No personal information, including contact details, is gathered or distributed.

The gathered personal information is primarily utilized for academic research and is not distributed in any way that could identify the participants. During the transcription process, interview recordings are anonymised, and all identifiable information is eliminated.

This study does not collect any sensitive personal data.

4. Ownership of research data

The research data collected for the study, consisting of audio recording and textual notes, are owned only by the author of the thesis. The author independently gathered the data, which is mostly used for completing this thesis. Each participant gave their approval after being made aware of how the data will be used.

The data is not a part of any research, development, or research project at HAMK, nor does it contain any copyrighted content from other parties. As a result, no additional contract pertaining to the transfer of rights was necessary.

The author of the thesis owns the research's results and conclusions. The author must grant authorization for other third parties to utilize any portion of the thesis or its conclusions in a public or commercial capacity.

5. Further use of research data after completion of the thesis

After the thesis is finished, the research data gathered for it will not be used again. For a year following the date of final thesis approval, the data will be safely stored by the thesis author to enable any necessary verification of the findings. All data, including audio recordings, will be safely and permanently erased after this year.

