WHAT (DE)MOTIVATES GEN Z WOMEN AND GEN Z MEN AT WORK? COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE YOUNG GENERATION'S MOTIVATION

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Abstract. This study responds to the call for a more nuanced understanding of intragenerational variations and provides a detailed insight into how men and women in Generation Z perceive work motivation. Unlike most prior studies with a similar focus, this study is qualitative, employing a specific method of empathy-based stories (MEBS) to capture the (de)motivators in Gen Z directly through their native point of view. On a sample of 437 business students, the vast majority of whom reported having work experience, results reveal that Gen Z women pay significantly more attention to social aspects of interpersonal relationships at the workplace, intrinsic factors of having a dream job, low levels of routine, experiencing job success, and an extrinsic need to receive recognition for the work done, while Gen Z men are more attentive to the altruistic factor of making a meaningful difference at work, extrinsic factor of benefits, and leisure-related aspects of happy personal life and no stress at work. Findings inform evidence-based motivation policies, which may help target more precisely recruitment and motivation programs in companies.

Keywords: generation Z, gen Z, gender, women, men, motivation, demotivation, work values, MEBS.

JEL Classification: M12, M54

Introduction

This study focuses on gender differences in workplace motivation of Generation Z (hereafter "Gen Z"), which is currently entering the labor market. As Lyons et al. (2005a) point out, the connection and interaction between variables of gender and generation is crucial. They state that value priorities are linked to both gender and generation and therefore suggest that when studying people's preferences and value orientations, researchers should take into account both gender differences and generational cohorts, which should not be considered in isolation from each other. Besides, a recent study by Ng et al. (2022) also raises attention to heterogeneity within individual generations leading to within-generational units with dif-

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fering work values and expectations. While research on various work-related preferences of Gen Z, in general, has been well established over the last decade, considerably less attention is paid to differences *within* Gen Z. There is only a handful of studies investigating gender differences in Gen Z's motivational preferences (e.g., Arora et al., 2020; Egerová et al., 2021). Thus, more research is needed to examine and understand potential differences in Gen Z men's and Gen Z women's workplace motivation.

In addition to the gap in current research, there are several broader reasons why this study focuses on gender differences in Gen Z and applies the gender lens to investigate factors of (de)motivation at work. The significance of studying gender differences was highlighted in the work of Risman (2004), who claims that gender needs to be conceptualized as a distinct social structure so that research and theory could both transform and inform our communities (i.e., societies, organizations). The theory of gendered organization looks at gender inequalities as deeply embedded in the organization. According to the seminal work of Acker (1990), organizational structure and related managerial approaches are not gender neutral; quite the contrary, the dominant masculinity is reproduced in all organizational processes and work relations. This leaves little space for tailored mechanisms supporting equity, for instance, in human resource management practices that substantially shape the career and life of both men and women in an organization. Following Acker's theory and examining organization of the 21st century, Williams et al. (2012) came to the conclusion that gender inequalities tend to reproduce themselves under the "new economy" and continue to create a kind of breeding ground for gender biases in the workplace. In line with this, our study aims at providing insights into motivational factors and potential differences between men and women in this respect, which could help companies that employ the youngest generation in the job market to understand better and promote programs respecting gender diversity in motivational preferences.

The context in which this research was conducted is relatively underrepresented and, as such, could enrich the existing scholarly discourse. The research involved young people from Slovakia, a former communist, now post-transition country in the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region. Interestingly, Gen Z is the first generational cohort born and raised in a free-market economy established after the communist regime collapse, as well as the first generation born into an independent sovereign state of Slovakia (after the peaceful separation of former Czechoslovakia in 1992). The turbulent path of transition from central planning to a free-market economy and the related drastic economic slump and profound changes in the social and institutional fabric of society imposed a challenge for the previous generations. However, Slovak Gen Z did not experience these in adulthood and takes the formerly absent freedom of speech, democracy, unrestricted travel, and access to foreign higher education for granted. In addition, older generations lived in a society with strictly defined male and female roles and insufficient opportunities for women to make full-fledged professional and high-social-status careers (Ferenčíková, 2023). From this perspective, Gen Z members experience a totally different world with access to international education, a global job market, and boundaryless careers. Connected with that, one of the most pressing issues Slovakia faces today is the brain drain of the young generation. It is estimated that 3% of the population leaves the country each year, half of whom are people below thirty (Chrancokova et al.,

2020). Causes are manifold, for instance, Vanhuysse (2023) notes that the "young exit" and outmigration from the CEE countries are connected with low government quality, corruption, weak rule of law, and regulatory ineffectiveness. Other reasons may include a mostly negative image of homeland higher education frequently accentuated by local mass media, ineffective measures in this area taken by the state, negligible investments in universities and research at large, and higher salaries that graduates can earn abroad compared to the domestic labor market. The results of this study can help navigate otherwise complex matters of workplace motivation in domestic and foreign companies employing Slovak Gen Z members. Many large firms, including prominent multinational corporations from the West, operate in the Slovak business space, and many of them currently employ young people in entry-level positions. A deeper look at how to motivate and retain young Slovak talents could be an asset for these businesses. This study offers such insights in a detailed breakdown by the two gender groups, which may help target motivation programs in companies more precisely.

Since Gen Z represents a new employee cohort in the workplace, research on their workplace preferences is on the rise. Still, as noted above, there is only a handful of studies examining the differences between young women and men on this issue. In addition, these few studies elaborating on the gender aspect in motivation are based on quantitative, standardized questionnaires (e.g., Egerová et al., 2021; Lalić et al., 2019). Although this approach may be useful, it may also lead to a reduction in themes and understanding of the research subjects' unique perceptions and world of meanings attributed to workplace motivation.

With respect to this, our study offers a more fine-grained understanding of the subject matter, which stems from the qualitative research design based on a specific research method of MEBS (Method of Empathy-Based Stories, see the Research methodology section). This is in line with Van Rossem (2021), who noted in a recent study that not the values assigned to various motivators but actually the way how different generations perceive the motivators explains why the same motivators have different influences on various generations. Based on MEBS, this study conveys a view of (de)motivation through the "eye of the beholder" and provides a native, emic view of the sources of workplace satisfaction and frustration produced directly by Gen Z members. In other words, results presented in this study convey insiders' own perspectives on what can be (de)motivating at work. Thus, both the identified factors (qualitative lens), as well as the prevalence of individual factors in respondents' stories (quantitative lens), considered here as a proxy for their relative importance, come directly from the subjects of this study.

This comparative study seeks to contribute to the currently emerging interest of scholars in intragenerational variations in Gen Z. Its main aim is to identify differences between Gen Z men and Gen Z women regarding their perception of motivating and demotivating factors in the workplace. This aim translates into several research questions:

- *RQ1*: What is the extent of differences in perceptions of (de)motivation in Gen Z men and Gen Z women?
- *RQ2*: What is the composition of the most salient top ten (de)motivating factors in both genders?
- *RQ3*: From a qualitative point of view, are there any unique (de)motivating factors specific only to Gen Z men and Gen Z women?

  – *RQ4*: From a quantitative point of view, are there any statistically significant differences between Gen Z men's and Gen Z women's volume of attention paid to the identified (de)motivating factors?

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. First, a brief overview of prior research results to the topic is presented. The next chapter outlines the methodological approach utilized in this research, including a description of the MEBS method, its application in this study, sampling and sample characteristics, and data analysis methods. Afterwards, results are presented, both from a qualitative and quantitative point of view. Next, the paper provides an extensive discussion of the research findings sectioned by the highlighted main outcomes. Finally, the concluding section provides a succinct summary of findings related to research questions posed in the Introduction and outlines the limitations and future research avenues connected with this study.

1. Theoretical background to the study

Generation Z (also known as Zoomers, post-millennials, iGen, or digital natives) is the youngest generation entering today's workplace. According to the World Economic Forum (2021), by 2025 they will make up 27% of the workforce. Labor shortages and attracting employees have become challenging, especially in certain industries (Causa et al., 2022). Therefore, employers are interested in finding ways to attract the newest generation, most notably because traditional recruitment tools are failing with the new generation (Jenkins, 2019). On the other hand, after recruitment, there is another issue that poses a challenge, which is retention. According to Deloitte's 2022 report (Deloitte, 2022), which takes into account responses from Gen Z respondents from 46 countries around the world, four out of 10 Gen Z members would like to change jobs within the next two years. The top reasons are pay, mental health issues at work and burnout. A low level of commitment to a company was also found in the study by Ngoc et al. (2022). When choosing their next job, the most important factors were work-life balance and opportunities for learning and development (Deloitte, 2022).

In their study on the reactions of the Polish labor market to the entry of the new generation, Bieleń and Kubiczek (2020) list the following requirements that make the workplace more attractive to Gen Z: friendly atmosphere in the workplace, availability of the latest technologies in the company, ambassador programs, internships for students, benefits packages, support from the supervisor in the first days of work, and involvement of employees in CSR activities. Gen Z members are more aware of social and environmental issues than previous generations (e.g., Grow & Yang, 2018; Ngoc et al., 2020; Seemiller & Grace, 2019; Jenkins, 2019). Generation Z also expects fairness and respect from their manager and is more interested in personal fulfillment than monetary evaluation (Grow & Yang, 2018). Work environment and workplace atmosphere are also high on the list of important workplace expectations (Ngoc et al., 2022; Ozkan & Olmaz, 2015). The traditional way of working, 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, seems to be unattractive for Gen Z. The autonomy to decide for themselves when and from where to work is highly valued, so a better work-life balance is sought (Ngoc et al., 2022; Chillakuri, 2020; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2019). Some research

studies, as well as the experiences of HR managers, point to unrealistic expectations of to-day's young generation regarding appreciation as an important asset (Ngoc et al., 2022) and the level of wages (Kupczyk et al., 2021). On the other hand, the research findings of some other authors suggest that salary is valued less by Gen Z than by other generations (Ngoc et al., 2022).

As for the gender differences in motivation within Gen Z, the research evidence is quite scarce, especially compared to the volume of findings on the preceding generational cohort of Gen Y. For instance, prior research on Gen Y showed that job security was more important to Gen Y males, while college major-job match was more important to females (Samutachak et al., 2021). De Cooman and Dries (2012) found that gender was a significant predictor of values connected with status in men, while values linked with content, meaningful work, collegiality, and freedom were higher in women. Regarding entrepreneurial intentions in Gen Y males and females, research showed that self-direction values enhanced entrepreneurial intention for women, and social affiliation values improved entrepreneurial intention for men (Ettis, 2022). A study by Ng et al. (2010) pointed out that Gen Ys' expectations and values varied by gender, but this demographic variable explained only a small proportion of variance. More specifically, women were more likely than men to accept a job that was not perceived as ideal and had lower salary expectations than Gen Y men (Ng et al., 2010).

In terms of gender differences specifically in Gen Z, both genders were found to expect a fun work environment, a positive team atmosphere and supportive relationships with both colleagues and superiors (Lassleben & Hofmann, 2023). A study by Graczyk-Kucharska and Erickson (2020) provided evidence that a good atmosphere at work is preferred, and this is especially true for Gen Z women. The same trend was also observed by Egerová et al. (2021), who found that the Gen Z women in their sample placed more value on the social atmosphere at the workplace than the men. This finding also has support from past research on systematic differences in how people of both genders perceive and participate in social relationships, with feminine personalities valuing emotional support and masculine persons seeking tangible support (e.g., Reevy & Maslach, 2001). Furthermore, Graczyk-Kucharska and Erickson (2020) noted that men had a greater preference for remote work than women, and they also felt that a high salary and task-based work schedules were important. Similarly, a study by Silva and Carvalho (2021) showed that Gen Z women had lower entry salary expectations and expressed higher work values in terms of social, intrinsic, and extrinsic aspects of work motivation.

2. Research methodology

Unlike other studies on gender differences in Gen Z, this research is exploratory and quali-tative in nature. It utilizes a specific method of MEBS (Method of Empathy-Based Stories), which is an actor-centered and passive role-playing method rooted in narrative research tradition (Lehtomäki et al., 2014).

Respondents are asked to take on the role of the main character in the presented in-troductory script (passive roleplay) and express through writing a short story or reflection (narrative), what they would do in the given situation if they were in the protagonist's shoes,

or, alternatively, what the main protagonist, i.e., is feeling, thinking, is likely to do, what led to that situation, or what will the consequences of that situation be (e.g., Mesiäislehto et al., 2021; Wallin et al., 2020). Usually, two stories are offered where only one aspect is altered, which enables researchers to track in a systematic manner how the altered element affected the responses.

We decided to use MEBS due to several advantages compared to more conventional quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g., surveys, interviews). First, the introductory scripts in MEBS solicit a creative, playful approach and spark respondents' imagination. This may motivate them to think about the scenarios in divergent ways. As we dealt with young people in this research, we assumed the playful factor would ignite their attention and be an asset to the research.

Second, proponents of MEBS (e.g., Lehtomäki et al., 2014; Wallin et al., 2019) point out that this method is particularly suitable for mapping out or extending research areas because respondents' stories can produce new, unexpected insights. Compared to quantitative surveys with pre-defined content/items, MEBS facilitates access to tacit, personal views on the subject matter in question. Thus, MEBS allowed us to capture the sources of the workplace (de)motivation produced directly by the respondents. Our aim was to understand the meaning of (de)motivation through respondents' eyes.

Third, compared to more traditional qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups), MEBS provides the participants with a greater degree of freedom and lower stress levels as it lacks face-to-face interaction and thus induces less external pressure from, for instance, the interviewer. MEBS allows respondents to express themselves openly (Uusiautti et al., 2014). In other words, being put in "someone else's shoes" via the script (a role) supports respondents' ability to do that without fear of rejection, social pressure, or an urge to please the interviewer. Thus, this method limits the social desirability bias of respondents as it enables them to express their thoughts freely via empathizing with the main character depicted in the provided story they should reflect upon (Wallin et al., 2019).

The research approach utilized in this study took inspiration from Kultalahti and Viitala (2014, 2015), who used MEBS methodology in their study of workplace motivation in Gen Y, motivational differences in working and non-working Millennials (Kultalahti, 2017), and motivation in Gen Z carried out by Kirchmayer and Fratričová (Fratričová & Kirchmayer, 2018; Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2017), who kindly shared their introductory script to utilize it in our study. An online form was disseminated in December 2021, containing a positive and a negative introductory script. Participants were instructed to write a short story on why they think the main character in the stories is feeling (de)motivated.

(1) Positive script:

Imagine Samuel going home from work. He is excited, full of energy and really feels motivated. He is already looking forward to the next working day. Why do you think Samuel feels so motivated and full of enthusiasm?

(2) Negative script:

Imagine Samuel going home from work. He is tired, frustrated and lacks enthusiasm for his work. He doesn't want to go there at all tomorrow and can't wait for the weekend, because at least he doesn't have to work then. Why do you think Samuel has such a negative attitude towards his job, is not motivated to work and lacks enthusiasm?

Convenience-based sampling was used to gather responses from n = 437 Slovak business students from two universities in Bratislava (the capital) and one located in the western part of the country. The given sampling technique was considered eligible within our exploratory research design. The number of stories generated by respondents and of the derived codes supported the assumption about saturation of research questions. In addition, the size of our sample was significantly larger compared to most previous studies based on the MEBS methodology (e.g., Hyrkäs et al., 2005; Kultalahti & Viitala, 2015; Särkelä & Suoranta, 2020). Based on the population size of a total of 11677 business students (incl. 60.5% of women; acc. to CVTI, 2021), 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, a minimum sample size of 372 participants was determined. Our sample with 437 participants (incl. 67.5% of female students) exceeded the minimum requirement regarding the number of respondents, and the women-to-men ratio was also relatively close to the proportion of both genders in the baseline population. Regarding the inclusion of participants from different Slovak regions, due to the traditionally high concentration of students from different regions in the capital city, the majority of participants (78%) came from other regions of the country. The vast majority of all participants reported having work experience (94.1%). All were born between 1996 and 2004. As for their work aspirations, being an entrepreneur and having own business (33%), working in event management (13%), marketing (11%), finance/accounting (7%), human resource management (5%), and project management (5%) were amongst the most represented categories.

The average time spent by completion was 8:25 minutes (18 minutes with outliers included). Respondents provided 874 stories, and this material was analyzed in Maxqda software for qualitative data analysis. Data were analyzed by the method of conventional qualitative content analysis. The initial coding structure was established after coding the first 50 positive and negative stories by two researchers independently. The two structures were compared, yielding 87% intercoder agreement. The differences in coding were resolved in subsequent series of discussions among the team members, and a final coding tree was established.

The coded material contained 2276 coded segments in total (1599 in women's and 677 in men's stories). The coding tree involved 78 codes (42 motivating factors and 36 demotivating factors), which were grouped under 14 clusters and 15 categories according to common denominators in codes' meaning (some clusters contained only individual factors, whereas some involved a more fine-grained structure of categories under which the factors were grouped, see Annex). The female subsample produced 38 motivators and 31 demotivators, while the male subsample generated 32 motivators and 27 demotivators. On average, female respondents described 2.7 motivating factors and, equally, 2.7 demotivating factors, and male respondents described 2.3 motivating factors and 2.5 demotivating factors.

As for the quantitative analysis of the obtained data, the factors of (de)motivation identified from respondents' stories and gender were analyzed using frequency tables. To test whether there is an association between each individual *factor* and *gender*, Pearson's chi-squared test of association with a significance level of 0.05 was applied when conditions were met. In the case of factors that were very infrequent and more than 20% of expected values were under 5, Fisher's exact test was applied. Statistical analysis was carried out in the SAS Enterprise Guide software.
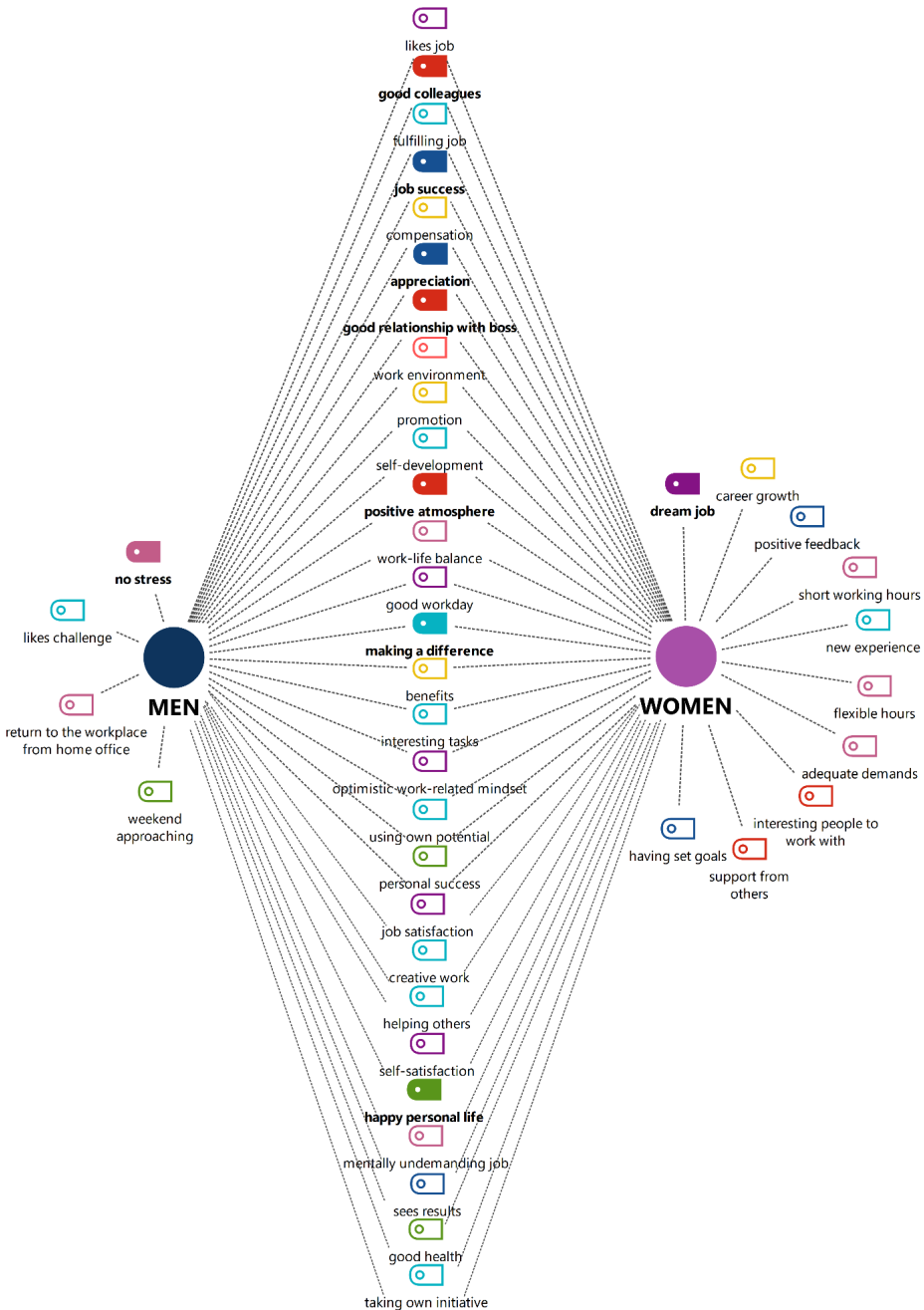
Note: **Factors common** for both men and women are displayed in the center. Unique factors specific for men only and women only are shown on the very left and right. **Factors in bold** are those that were identified by men and women with significantly different frequencies. **Factors with the icons of the same color** belong to the same cluster – a complete overview of factors can be found in Table A1 in Appendix.

Figure 1. Factors of motivation as expressed by male and female respondents

3. Research results

Based on the data analysis in Maxqda, Figure 1 shows the **factors of motivation** that appeared in both the men's and the women's stories (in the middle), as well as factors that were specific to men only or women only (on very left and right sides). An overview of all factors and their grouping into categories and clusters with frequencies and p-values can be found in Appendix, Table A1.

Good colleagues and *good relationship with boss* accounted for the most prevalent factors. In case of both of these factors, they appeared in the women's stories more frequently than in the men's stories – *good colleagues* is a factor perceived as motivating by 50.2% of women as opposed to 37.3% of men. *Good relationship with boss* was mentioned by 12.9% of women and only 5.6% by men. Another factor within this cluster was the positive atmosphere that was stated by 5.1% of women and by 0.7% of men (only one respondent). Another area of strong motivators seems to be Success and recognition. Within this cluster, both factors also appeared more frequently in women's stories – 27.1% of women were motivated by *job success*, compared to 17.6% of men, and 14.6% of women mentioned *appreciation* as a motivating factor, compared to only 7% of men.

Table 1 shows motivational factors that appeared in men's and women's stories with significantly different frequencies.

Table 1. Statistically significant differences in the occurrence of the motivating factors as expressed by male and female respondents

Factor	Gender		Tests and measures of association			
	Men	Women	p (asym. 2-tailed)	Phi Coeff.	Cont. Coeff. C	Cramer's V
good colleagues	37.3%	50.2%	0.01	0.12	0.12	0.12
good relationship with boss	5.6%	12.9%	0.02	0.11	0.11	0.11
positive atmosphere	0.7%	5.1%	0.02	0.11	0.11	0.11
job success	17.6%	27.1%	0.03	0.10	0.10	0.10
appreciation	7.0%	14.6%	0.02	0.11	0.11	0.11
dream job	0%	3.4%	*0.03	–	–	–
no stress	2.1%	0%	*0.03	–	–	–
making a difference	4.9%	1.4%	*0.04	–	–	–
happy personal life	2.8%	0.3%	*0.04	–	–	–

Note: Pearson's chi-squared test of association was used except for p-values with * which were calculated using Fisher's exact test.

Table 2 shows the top ten factors of motivation according to men and women.

The first three places are the same regardless the gender – *likes job, good colleagues* and *fulfilling job*. *Compensation* is on the 4th place according to men, but 5th according to women. Instead, women mention *job success* more frequently (similarly as fulfilling job) and men place this factor on the 5th place. *Work environment* was the 6th most frequent factor in the men's stories, but 9th in the women's stories. The no. 6 according to women is *appreciation*,

Table 2. Top ten factors of motivation according to male and female respondents

#	MEN		WOMEN	
	Factor	Frequency	Factor	Frequency
1	likes job	61.3%	likes job	54.9%
2	good colleagues	37.3%	good colleagues	50.2%
3	fulfilling job	25.4%	fulfilling job	27.1%
4	compensation	21.1%	job success	27.1%
5	job success	17.6%	compensation	19.3%
6	work environment	8.5%	appreciation	14.6%
7	appreciation	7.0%	good relationship with boss	12.9%
8	good relationship with boss	5.6%	promotion	8.5%
9	promotion	5.6%	work environment	7.8%
10	making a difference	4.9%	self-development	6.8%

while position of this factor in the men's ranking is the 7th place. Similarly, *good relationship with boss* and *promotion* are the no. 7 and no. 8 most mentioned factors by women, but they are both one place lower in the case of men. The last ones of the top 10 factors are unique – *making a difference* in the case of men and *self-development* for women.

The following part presents the results for the demotivators. All the **factors of demotivation** are displayed in Figure 2 (see Table A2 in Appendix for a complete overview of demotivators, their grouping into categories and clusters, and frequencies).
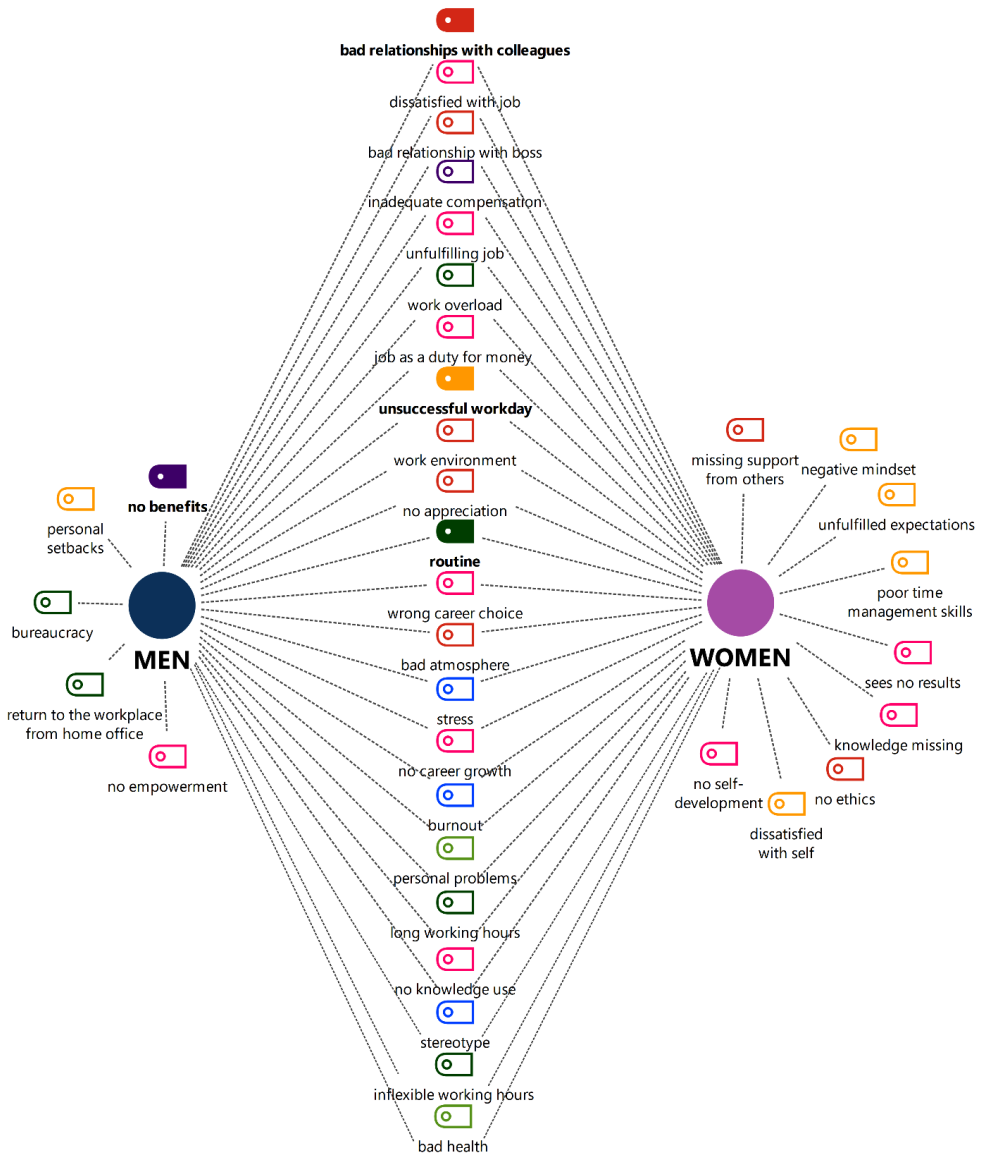
As in the case of motivators, women perceived *bad relationships with colleagues* as a reason of demotivation in 58.6% of cases, while this factor was a problem according to only 43.7% of men. However, *bad relationship with boss* was considered a problem similarly among men and women, although this factor appeared as a motivator more often in women's stories. Women also considered *routine* (7.8%) and *unsuccessful workday* (11.5%) as a demotivator more often than men (1.4% and 4.9% respectively).

Table 3 shows the p-values for significant differences identified in the four factors.

Table 3. Statistically significant differences in occurrence of the demotivating factors as expressed by male and female respondents

Factor	Gender		Tests and measures of association			
	Men	Women	p (asym. 2-tailed)	Phi Coeff.	Cont. Coeff. C	Cramer's V
bad relationships with colleagues	43.7%	58.6%	0.00	0.14	0.14	0.14
routine	1.4%	7.8%	0.01	0.13	0.13	0.13
unsuccessful workday	4.9%	11.5%	0.03	0.11	0.11	0.11
no benefits	2.1%	0%	*0.03	–	–	–

Note: Pearson's chi-squared test of association was used except for p-values with * which were calculated using Fisher's exact test.

bad relationships with colleagues

dissatisfied with job

bad relationship with boss

inadequate compensation

unfulfilling job

work overload

job as a duty for money

unsuccessful workday

work environment

no appreciation

routine

wrong career choice

bad atmosphere

stress

no career growth

burnout

personal problems

long working hours

no knowledge use

stereotype

inflexible working hours

bad health

no benefits

personal setbacks

bureaucracy

return to the workplace from home office

no empowerment

MEN

WOMEN

missing support from others

negative mindset

unfulfilled expectations

poor time management skills

sees no results

knowledge missing

no ethics

no self-development

dissatisfied with self

Note: **Factors common** for both men and women are displayed in the center. **Unique factors** specific for men only and women only are shown on the very left and very right. **Factors in bold** are those that were identified by men and women with significantly different frequencies. **Factors with the icons of the same color** belong to the same cluster – a complete overview of the factors can be found in Table A2 in Appendix.

Figure 2. Factors of demotivation as expressed by male and female respondents

Finally, Table 4 shows the top ten factors of demotivation according to men and women.

Table 4. Top ten factors of demotivation according to male and female respondents

#	MEN		WOMEN	
	Factor	Frequency	Factor	Frequency
1	dissatisfied with job	46.5%	bad relationships with colleagues	58.6%
2	bad relationships with colleagues	43.7%	dissatisfied with job	47.8%
3	bad relationship with boss	27.5%	bad relationship with boss	26.4%
4	inadequate compensation	25.4%	unfulfilling job	20.7%
5	unfulfilling job	20.4%	inadequate compensation	19.7%
6	job as a duty for money	14.8%	work overload	13.6%
7	work overload	12.7%	unsuccessful workday	11.5%
8	work environment	11.3%	no appreciation	10.5%
9	no appreciation	6.3%	job as a duty for money	10.5%
10	wrong career choice	6.3%	work environment	8.1%

The top five factors are the same but ranked differently. Although the factor *dissatisfied with job* appeared with very similar frequencies, it is no. 1 factor for men, but no. 2 for women. Women placed more emphasis on *bad relationships with colleagues*, which is no. 1 according to them. *Bad relationship with boss* is no. 3 in both rankings. Whereas *inadequate compensation* and *unfulfilling job* are on the fourth and fifth place, respectively, in men's ranking, the order is swapped in women's ranking. The remaining factors' ranking for men and women was as follows: *job as a duty for money* – 6th vs 9th place, *work overload* – 7th vs 6th position, *work environment* – 8th vs 10th place, and *no appreciation* – 9th vs 8th position in the top ten ranking. Unique factors in the top ten lists were *wrong career choice* (no. 10 for men) and *unsuccessful workday* (no. 7 for women).

4. Discussion to research results

This section takes a more profound look at the composition of the (de)motivating factors in each of the two genders and highlights several important findings.

Extent of differences between the Gen Z genders. Past research studying gender differences in motivation shows inconsistent results. Some studies indicated no substantial differences between males and females in this respect (e.g., Cheung & Scherling, 1999; Gilbert et al., 2010; Rani & Samuel, 2018). On the other hand, some studies found gender variations in work values and preferences (e.g., Janíčko & Šimová, 2021; Štefko et al., 2017). In this context, our results point to the existence of certain systematic differences between Gen Z men and Gen Z women in the composition of (de)motivating factors. However, these distinctions are relatively modest since significant differences were found in only 13 factors out of a total of 78 identified factors (in 9 out of 42 motivators and 4 out of 36 demotivators), and in addition,

the composition of the top ten (de)motivating factors also showed only minor differences. In general, women tended to have a slightly wider outlook on (de)motivation, mentioning six more motivating factors and four more demotivating factors than men.

Attention to social relationships in Gen Z women. Our results indicate that Gen Z women tend to perceive the category of good relationships at the workplace more broadly than Gen Z men, mentioning, unlike Gen Z men, two unique aspects of social relationships (meeting interesting people and support from others) in their responses. Although men considered social relationships in the top ten (de)motivators similarly to women, the analysis of statistically significant differences revealed that compared to their male counterparts, Gen Z women attribute substantially more attention to interpersonal relationships at the workplace. This manifested through a more frequent occurrence of the demotivator "bad relationship with colleagues" and of the motivators such as "good colleagues", "good relationship with boss", and "positive atmosphere" in the workplace. Thus, young women in our sample might have a somewhat more layered understanding of the social relationships sphere at work, which, according to Lyons et al. (2005b), derives from the need for belonging and building connections through social interaction with others. This outcome is in line, for instance, with the findings of Arora et al. (2020) on an Indian Gen Z sample, showing that compared to males, female students regarded social relationships and interactions more highly. Another study on Czech and Slovak Gen Z by Egerová et al. (2021) also supports the idea that women tend to attribute greater importance to the social atmosphere at the workplace than men. The greater importance of social interactions in Gen Z women compared to men was also present in a Portuguese Gen Z sample, where women rated good relationships with colleagues and a sense of belonging with others higher than Gen Z men (Silva & Carvalho, 2021).

Sensitivity of Gen Z women to subjective personal setbacks. Both genders addressed the category of subjectively felt personal setbacks, yet women were able to express these in greater diversity. They mentioned having a negative mindset, disappointment due to unfulfilled expectations, poor time management skills, and dissatisfaction with self, whilst none of these factors appeared in the men's responses. These results indicate that Gen Z women are able to perceive various facets of the obstacles connected with personal problems that can negatively affect an individual's work motivation. Besides, the sharpened sensitivity to various personal setbacks might stem from a higher propensity of women in general to self-reflection, which is connected with their emotional processing and understanding (Bohanek & Fivush, 2010) and self-focused attention (Csank & Conway, 2004).

Salience of intrinsic motivators. Our results can also be viewed through the lens of intrinsic and extrinsic theory of motivation. Looking at the top ten (de)motivating factors, clearly the intrinsic motivation, such as having interesting and varied work, gaining new skills, and seeing results of one's work, prevail in both genders. This is not surprising, as prior literature pinpoints the importance of intrinsic motivation in Gen Z and young people in general (e.g., Arora et al., 2020; Silva & Carvalho, 2021; Lechner et al., 2017; Song et al., 2020). Interestingly, a special emphasis on the intrinsic motivators in our study was evident in Gen Z women, who, unlike their male counterparts, associate motivation with the possibility of having a dream job, which indicates that a need for equilibrium between personal inclinations and the content of work is essential for women. Likewise, women, again unlike

men in the sample, accentuate the possibility of gaining new experiences through the job. Furthermore, with respect to the category of no growth through work, while men distinctively mention only zero empowerment, women refer to the lack of knowledge important for the work to be done, the inability to see the results of one's work and zero self-development on the job. Interestingly, Gen Z women in our sample pay considerably more attention than Gen Z men to the demotivating effect of routine in performing the job, which also belongs to the intrinsic aspects of work. Our findings are in accordance with other studies highlighting the particular gender difference in women's inclination to intrinsic vs men's prioritization of extrinsic motivation (e.g., Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Johnson, 2001; Sortheix et al., 2013; Vallerand & Blssonnette, 1992). Our results give support to what seems to be a distinctive feature of female motivation, suggesting that, compared to men, women are more attentive to the intrinsic aspects of work and somewhat less to the extrinsic tangible rewards such as pay or benefits. In this context, it is worth mentioning that getting no benefits as a demotivating factor was mentioned only by the men in our sample. Our results also partially support the idea outlined by Brinck et al. (2020) about a gradual decrease in the importance of extrinsic work values over the last few decades.

Need for praise in Gen Z women. On the other hand, findings show yet another distinctive sign of young women's motivation, namely the extrinsic need to receive recognition and praise for the work they have done. Although located in the top ten motivating factors in both subsamples, young men paid significantly less attention to this factor. Past research on the importance of appreciation for achievements at work, status, and career showed that these were dominantly male values (Neil & Snizek, 1987); however, in career-oriented women with high achievement orientation, the importance of status was proved relatively salient (Jenkins, 1987). Nevertheless, a study by Tien (2011) showed that women were more achievement-oriented than men, despite the traditional division of gender roles in the Taiwanese culture. In a Slovak sample of employees, Štefko et al. (2017) also found that women regarded recognition from a superior with significantly higher importance than men. Interestingly, prior research specifically in the Gen Z by Arora et al. (2020) did not show any significant differences in the need for recognition between men and women. Still, our results suggest that getting recognition from others is an important motivating force at work that seems to have a special value to Gen Z women. This might be driven by continuing gender discrimination, stereotyping, and weaker social status of women in the workplace (e.g., Trentham & Larwood, 1998; Verniers & Vala, 2018). Special attention of young females in our sample to the need for recognition and appraisal could then be their reaction to issues connected with lingering gender inequality in the workplace.

Relaxed pace of work. Gen Z men in our sample tended to mention factors belonging to this category (interestingly, also including the work-life balance) more frequently than women, although the occurrences differed significantly only with respect to having no stress at work in men. Furthermore, while both Gen Z subsamples are attentive to a comfortable pace of work, they recognize some different facets in it. For instance, unlike men, women mentioned adequate demands on the work to be done and having short and flexible working hours. Typically, flexible work arrangements are seen as a benefit with added value to women who, in many societies, are stereotyped as the primary caregiving persons within families.

The importance of having convenient hours especially for women was proved, for example, in Sharabi (2014). Similarly, Kim and Gong (2017) provided evidence that particularly female managers demand flexible arrangement to alleviate work-family conflict. Another study by Wayne and Casper (2016) showed employer attractiveness was rated higher if family-supportive culture and work flexibility were provided, and that this effect was stronger for women students in their sample. Nevertheless, prior research by Halpern (2005) showed that the advantages connected with flexible work arrangements apply equally for men and women employees. Importantly, research by Arora et al. (2020) on Gen Z showed that it is actually the Gen Z men who attribute significantly greater importance to working hours and work-life balance. These outcomes, in connection with the results of our qualitative investigation, could indicate a gradual change in the young generation's mindset, where the need for a better work-life balance is no longer women's domain but also applies to the male part of the young population.

Altruistic motives in Gen Z men. Our results indicate that Gen Z men are more attentive to this kind of motives than Gen Z women. Two factors related to altruism were identified in our research, namely helping others that occurred in men more often (though insignificantly) and having meaningful work that was significantly more frequently mentioned by men than by women. This is surprising since numerous studies indicate that women in general have a higher affinity to altruistic work orientation i.e., stewardship, helping others, others' wellbeing, or having a job meaningful to community (e.g., Brinck et al., 2020; Konrad et al., 2000; Weisgram et al., 2011). Considering specifically the altruistic gender differences in Gen Z, studies are almost non-existent; yet, one study by Arora et al. (2020) showed insignificant differences between men and women. In addition, they found a somewhat lower importance ascribed to the altruistic motives in Gen Z in general (Arora et al., 2020). Our results show the same tendency since the two altruistic factors are among the less frequently expressed aspects of work motivation. A similar level of importance of altruistic values in Gen Z was noted for instance by Maloni et al. (2019) where these values ranked somewhere in the middle compared to other work values.

Absence of the job security factor. Job security is an instrumental, extrinsic type of work motivator, which refers to a person's relative certainty about not losing a job, predictability for the future and stable employment. This factor (or a set of items relating to job stability and fear of job loss) is often part of standardized quantitative surveys examining employee motivation. Results are, though, mixed. For instance, some studies show that women attribute similar importance to job security as men do (Sharabi & Harpaz, 2013), while others note the salience of fear from job loss especially in women (Štefko et al., 2017), whilst some studies indicate that compared to men, women are less likely to value job security (Tolbert & Moen, 1998). In any case, our qualitative research did not show that job security/job loss would play a significant role in the thinking of Gen Z males and females, as none of the respondents mentioned this issue in any way in the stories they produced. This implies that the factor of job stability is not an innate, essential part of Gen Z's mental construction of work (de)motivation, at least in our sample. There are probably several possible causes, for instance, a hypothesized shift from traditional, extrinsic work values, including, among others, job stability and economic security, towards intrinsic and

autonomy-related values, emphasizing self-development, growth, authenticity, and congruence of personal inclinations and talents with the content of one's work. Another reason may be the youth of respondents and a certain fearlessness in relation to the future as well as personal freedom resulting from the absence of responsibilities associated with care for one's own family. More research is needed to ascertain the meaning of job security in Gen Z and how this may change with age.

5. Practical implications

The findings presented in this study bear several implications for organizational practice. Companies try to beware of the negative impact of high turnover, which might be even higher among the younger generation, as they are more likely to change jobs when dissatisfied (e.g., Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Zahari & Puteh, 2023). Generally, it is advisable to avoid unfounded stereotypical conclusions when dealing with female and male employees. Our research shows rather modest differences and the majority of the (de)motivators are perceived similarly.

Nevertheless, our findings also indicate some distinctions that practitioners should consider. For instance, a somewhat greater focus on workplace relationships and social interactions among Gen Z women needs to be considered, as this is supported by our findings as well as previous studies. Remote work mode might also enhance the risk of social isolation or misunderstandings, so monitoring the quality of relationships is recommended. Preparing managers to interact with young Gen Z employees and understanding their expectations of the job is crucial, as poor relationships with managers can be a major cause of dissatisfaction for both men and women.

The fact that pay or rewards are generally similarly important for men and women implies that transparent pay policies should be implemented, and analyses of the gender pay gap (such as the same-job-level type of analysis) are highly advisable to avoid inequality or injustice.

Although extrinsic rewards can work as useful tools when managing young employees, companies should not focus exclusively on them, as motivation through work itself gains importance, especially among young Gen Z people. Interesting work and gaining new experiences as opposed to routine jobs can still be achieved through traditional approaches such as job rotation or various forms of job enlargement or enrichment, but there is also an untapped potential in the increasingly popular job crafting, which enables employees to make small changes to their jobs according to their preferences.

Upskilling, one of the challenges in today's workplace, is crucial not only to prepare employees for the ever-changing work demands brought about by new technologies, for example, but self-development and gaining new skills also prove to be motivating for young people irrespective of gender. Leaders should not underestimate the need for recognition among women since it might be even more important for them than for men.

Conclusions

The answers to the research questions (RQs) posed in the Introduction section can briefly be summarized as follows:

– In general, there were more similarities than differences between Gen Z men's and Gen Z women's views of (de)motivating factors. Gen Z women tended to perceive the areas of both motivation and demotivation somewhat more broadly, being attentive to more factors than Gen Z men (*RQ1*).

– Composition of the top ten of the most salient factors of (de)motivation differed only to a minor extent between Gen Z men and Gen Z women. Regarding the motivators, the distinction lies in the opportunity to make a meaningful difference at work that ranked in the top ten for men and the possibility for self-development in women. Concerning the composition of demotivators in the top ten, the only difference regarded wrong choice of career specific for the men's top ten and having an unsuccessful workday as a subjectively felt momentary setback in the top ten in the women's subsample (*RQ2*).

– Motivators expressed exclusively by Gen Z women included meeting interesting people, receiving support from others, having a dream job (in the meaning of aligning personal preferences with the job content), an opportunity for career growth, receiving positive feedback for the work performed, adequate demands on the work to be done, the possibility of having short and flexible working hours, and gaining new experience through the job. Demotivators expressed only by Gen Z women involved the lack of support from others at the workplace, a work climate where ethics has no place, having a negative mindset (as a person), disappointment due to unfulfilled prior expectations, poor time management skills, dissatisfaction with oneself, lack of knowledge important for the work to be done, inability to see results of one's work and zero self-development on the job. Motivators specific only for Gen Z men concerned a stress-free work environment and the presence of challenging work. Demotivators unique for Gen Z men regarded getting no benefits, high levels of bureaucracy at work, and getting zero empowerment (*RQ3*).

– The statistically significant differences between the genders point to a higher attentiveness of Gen Z women to good interpersonal relationships at workplace (colleagues, boss, atmosphere), harmony between personal inclination and job content (dream job), having work that is not drowned in stereotype (aversion to routine), and receiving recognition (appreciation) for the outstanding work done, while Gen Z men pay significantly more attention to the opportunity to make a meaningful difference within their work, benefits provided by the organization, having a happy personal life, and no stress at work (*RQ4*).

The research has several limitations. The results of a qualitative research approach have limited generalizability in the traditional positivistic sense of this term in social sciences. Besides, non-probability convenience-based sampling was used, and thus, the results are prone to bias, although the proportion of men and women largely copies the ratio in the overall business student population in the country. Nevertheless, this study was conceived as a quali-

tative exploratory investigation, and the number of respondents and produced stories provide support for the saturation of the research questions. We tried to balance the limitations resulting from the given qualitative method by involving an additional quantitative statistical analysis of the occurrence of investigated factors. Other limitations primarily concern the nature of the sample. This research involved young people from one post-transformation country in Central Europe. Since there is a reasonable assumption that culture influences people's motivation and work values, the results of this study can be perceived as culturally specific. On the other hand, considering the idea of gradual convergence of values in the young generation across different cultures as a result of globalization and cultural exchange, the outcomes presented could bear at least some informative value beyond the culture which our young sample comes from. Furthermore, the sample included only business students, and this could have influenced our results to some extent as well. Still, most of the respondents have had work experience by the time of the research in diverse industries, which could somewhat mitigate the bias in results. Lastly, since the multiplication of demographic variables was beyond the scope of this study, the absence of a more layered analysis including, for instance, socioeconomic status within Gen Z women and Gen Z men subsamples, could also be considered a limitation. Further research could ascertain whether and to what extent the results hold for males and females with various background characteristics in the Gen Z cohort.

In addition to this possibility of expanding the scope of the extant research, our study also opens up other future research avenues. For instance, thanks to a large variety of the identified factors, this study may represent a solid basis for constructing a new quantitative measurement tool for mapping the level of motivation specifically in Gen Z employees, thereby improving a non-discriminatory and holistic approach to studying motivation across different generations. Furthermore, the original classification of (de)motivating factors, which derived directly from the respondents' stories obtained through MEBS, might inform a future theory of motivation that would take into account the current societal changes and connected shifts in the employer-employee relationship. Additionally, cross-cultural comparative research using the MEBS method to investigate potential differences in the motivation of Gen Z genders in various cultures may shed new light onto the potential impact of the cultural background on motivation specifically in young people from different socio-cultural environments.

Acknowledgements

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APPENDIX

Table A1. Factors of motivation – frequencies by gender (test of association, α = 0.05)

	Men	Women	p-value	Total %
Good relationships and workplace				
good colleagues	37.32%	50.17%	0.0116	46.00%
good relationship with boss	5.63%	12.88%	0.0208	10.53%
work environment	8.45%	7.80%	0.8135	8.01%
positive atmosphere	0.70%	5.08%	0.0224	3.66%
interesting people to work with	0.00%	0.34%	*1.0000	0.23%
support from others	0.00%	0.34%	*1.0000	0.23%
Positive approach to work and satisfaction				
likes job	61.27%	54.92%	0.2091	56.98%
good workday	1.41%	3.39%	*0.3521	2.75%
dream job	0.00%	3.39%	*0.0346	2.29%
optimistic work-related mindset	4.23%	1.02%	*0.0639	2.06%
job satisfaction	0.70%	1.36%	*1.0000	1.14%
self-satisfaction	0.70%	1.36%	*1.0000	1.14%
Energizing and stimulating work				
Challenging job content				
fulfilling job	25.35%	27.12%	0.6953	26.54%
interesting tasks	1.41%	2.71%	0.5104	2.29%
creative work	0.70%	1.36%	*1.0000	1.14%
new experience	0.00%	0.68%	*1.0000	0.46%
likes challenge	0.70%	0.00%	*0.3249	0.23%
Utilizing own talents				
self-development	3.52%	6.78%	0.1695	5.72%
using own potential	1.41%	1.69%	*1.0000	1.60%
taking own initiative	0.70%	0.34%	0.5448	0.46%

End of Table A1

	Men	Women	p-value	Total %
Meaningful work				
making a difference	4.93%	1.36%	*0.0443	2.52%
helping others	1.41%	1.02%	*0.6617	1.14%
Success and recognition				
Goals attainment				
job success	17.61%	27.12%	0.0293	24.03%
sees results	1.41%	0.34%	*0.2476	0.69%
having set goals	0.00%	0.34%	*1.0000	0.23%
Praise				
appreciation	7.04%	14.58%	0.0239	12.13%
positive feedback	0.00%	1.36%	*0.3091	0.92%
Formal acknowledgment of performance and results				
Adequate remuneration				
compensation	21.13%	19.32%	0.6581	19.91%
benefits	2.11%	2.37%	*1.0000	2.29%
Professional development				
promotion	5.63%	8.47%	0.2925	7.55%
career growth	0.00%	1.36%	*0.3091	0.92%
Relaxed pace at work				
Personal wellbeing				
work-life balance	4.34%	2.71%	*0.3974	3.20%
no stress	2.11%	0.00%	*0.0338	0.69%
return to the workplace from home office	0.70%	0.00%	*0.3249	0.23%
Comfortable hours				
short working hours	0.00%	1.02%	*0.5542	0.69%
flexible hours	0.00%	0.68%	*1.0000	0.46%
Feeling at ease at work				
mentally undemanding job	1.41%	0.34%	*0.2476	0.69%
adequate demands	0.00%	0.68%	*1.0000	0.46%
Unrelated to work				
personal success	2.82%	0.68%	*0.0906	1.37%
happy personal life	2.82%	0.34%	*0.0404	1.14%
good health	0.70%	0.34%	*0.5448	0.46%
weekend approaching	0.70%	0.00%	*0.3249	0.23%

Note: * Fisher's exact test was used.

Table A2. Factors of demotivation – frequencies by gender (test of association, α = 0.05)

	Men	Women	p-value	Total %
Dissatisfying relationships and workplace				
Personal relationships				
bad relationships with colleagues	43.66%	58.64%	0.0033	53.78%
bad relationship with boss	27.46%	26.44%	0.8209	26.77%
no appreciation	6.34%	10.51%	0.1568	9.15%
missing support from others	0.00%	1.36%	*0.3091	0.92%
General work climate				–
work environment	11.27%	8.14%	0.2876	9.15%
bad atmosphere	2.82%	5.42%	0.2220	4.58%
no ethics	0.00%	0.34%	*1.0000	0.23%
Weak professional and personal development				
Job content-related problems				
dissatisfied with job	46.48%	47.80%	0.7961	47.37%
unfulfilling job	20.42%	20.68%	0.9507	20.59%
job as a duty for money	14.79%	10.51%	0.1956	11.90%
Career problems				
wrong career choice	6.34%	5.42%	0.6999	5.72%
no career growth	1.41%	3.73%	*0.2378	2.97%
No growth through work				
no knowledge use	2.11%	1.36%	*0.6869	1.60%
sees no results	0.00%	1.02%	*0.5542	0.69%
knowledge missing	0.00%	0.68%	*1.0000	0.46%
no self-development	0.00%	0.34%	*1.0000	0.23%
no empowerment	0.70%	0.00%	*0.3249	0.23%
Inadequate remuneration				
inadequate compensation	25.35%	19.66%	0.1751	21.51%
no benefits	2.11%	0.00%	*0.0338	0.69%
Bad job design				
work overload	12.68%	13.56%	0.7988	13.27%
routine	1.41%	7.80%	0.0071	5.72%
long working hours	1.41%	2.03%	*1.0000	1.83%
inflexible working hours	0.70%	0.68%	*1.0000	0.69%
return to the workplace from home office	0.70%	0.00%	*0.3249	0.23%
bureaucracy	0.70%	0.00%	*0.3249	0.23%
Subjectively felt setbacks				
unsuccessful workday	4.93%	11.53%	0.0268	9.38%

End of Table A2

	Men	Women	p-value	Total %
unfulfilled expectations	0.00%	1.36%	*0.3091	0.92%
negative mindset	0.00%	1.36%	*0.3091	0.92%
poor time management skills	0.00%	1.36%	*0.3091	0.92%
personal setbacks	0.70%	0.00%	0.3249	0.23%
dissatisfied with self	0.00%	0.34%	*1.0000	0.23%
Psychological distress				
stress	3.52%	4.75%	0.5566	4.35%
burnout	3.52%	2.37%	*0.5372	2.75%
stereotype	1.41%	1.36%	*1.0000	1.37%
Problems unrelated to work				
personal problems	2.11%	3.05%	*0.7586	2.75%
bad health	0.70%	1.36%	*1.0000	1.14%

Note: * Fisher's exact test was used.