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## Article

# Work motivation of social workers in the context of management innovations

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## WORK MOTIVATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE CONTEXT OF MANAGEMENT INNOVATIONS

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**Abstract:** *In the current turbulent and constantly changing conditions, there is a growing tendency to develop human resource activities through implementing managerial innovations. The present paper addresses social workers' work motivation. The paper's main goal is to determine the impact of work motivation on social service employees, representatives of generation X and generation Y. The present paper analyses generation X's and generation Y's work preferences accounting for the distinctiveness of social service work performance. An original questionnaire was distributed to the social workers. For the selection of respondents in social services facilities, the method of a random selection of respondents was used. In this method, each respondent has the same probability of being chosen. The research sample consisted of 201 employees of social services. The questionnaire tackled two areas: demographics (gender, age, and educational background) and work motivation (work environment, working atmosphere, career opportunities, upskilling, income, and demotivating agents at the workplace). The obtained data were statistically processed and evaluated. The data were analysed regarding correlations, differences, and similarities in the social workers' perception of work motivation. The research shows no statistically significant relationship between generation X and generation Y regarding the main motivational stimulus in social workers. Both generations perceive motivation in the same way. Another outcome of the research is that Generation X respondents consider «financial remuneration» and «upskilling» more important than Generation Y respondents. Generation Y respondents consider «career growth», «work being interesting», «friendly work environment», «feedback», and «work-life balance» more important than Generation X respondents. Research respondents appreciate the scope for internal reflection and strengthening of internal motivation. External and internal motivational stimuli, as well as other motivational benefits, support improving the quality of social services and overall improving the quality of life of social services employees. The presented research brings findings applicable to the social service sector in the framework of managerial innovation and the scope of employees' work motivation.*

**Keywords:** human resources management, social services, work motivation, generation X, generation Y.

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**Introduction.** The beginning of the present century brought widespread doubts in science in response to the turbulent conditions in the world. A turbulent and constantly changing environment characterizes the present age. Workers must have proper social relations and personal attitudes to the environment (Glova et al., 2020; Dancakova et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2023). The present research aims to provide social service employers with social workers' perceptions of motivation.

Work motivation is an essential component of any company or institution, and the right motivation of its employees representing different generations plays a vital role in shaping the working environment. Modern times bring innovations and the ability to adapt to new forms of competition. A motivated employee is an important factor in maintaining competitive advantages. Competition in the working environment affects social services institutions seeking qualified professionals equipped with social skills. They bring their expertise in the form of skills and competencies, and the institution management should be able to appreciate and motivate such employees properly (Bila et al., 2015; Rony, 2019; Massingham & Chandrakumara, 2019; Safrankova et al., 2020; Sarisska & Balogova, 2021; Friberg, 2022; Chen et al., 2023). Nowadays, there are enough Generation Y employees in the labor market who differ from older, more established, and often more experienced Generation X employees in many features. The young generation has different work values, principles, beliefs, and priorities. Thus, it is assumed that their work motivation differs from generation X's. Generation Y engages in critical reflection and anti-oppressive social work that came to the forefront in the 1990s as a response to the oppression in labor relations and involved less qualified employees, refugees, and other disadvantaged groups in the labor market. Recognizing these factors may increase the overall efficiency of social service institutions and thus provide their clients with the appropriate services they naturally expect (Cox et al., 2019; Jirasevijinda, 2019; Weeks and Schaffert, 2019; Baum, 2020).

The research respondents were social workers. They were selected using probability theory, which allows finding some random events related to other random events according to probability. Probability theory allows us to generalize the results to the selected sample. The method of random selection was used to select respondents. There is the same probability for each worker to be selected. Random selection was defined so that each worker had an equal chance of being included in the selected sample. The choice of workers for social facilities took place based on extracting the number of social service providers from the publicly accessible section of the social services information system.

The present paper is divided into the following chapters: the first part provides the theoretical underpinnings of the investigated issues of work motivation in the social services system. The second part describes the research methods, sample, and tools – the questionnaire. The third part presents the outcomes of the present research, i.e., the validated hypotheses. The last part presents the discussion, which juxtaposes the previous research on the issue in question and the results of the present research taking into account the specifics of work motivation in social workers on anti-oppressive social work and appropriate critical reflection.

**Literature Review.** The labor market's economic and social conditions are challenging, reflected in the workers' mental and physical well-being. Their level of motivation conditions the employee's performance and personal traits, but also it depends on the external conditions (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2015; Szostek, 2021).

For many years, work motivation has been an almost unknown concept. Motivation is employees' response to permanently attractive incentives resulting in a good performance. Investing in people means realizing that they are the most important factor in any business activity as they bring talent and add value to all management levels, from operational to senior executives. Currently, different perspectives are adopted in discussions across workplaces or in research. The concept of motivation emerged from social changes that interlink one's personal and public life. No valid mutual relationship is observed between motivation concepts and work performance, as high motivation does not guarantee high performance (Durocher et al., 2016; Eriksson et al., 2017; Brink & Zondag, 2021).

Motivation is fundamental in shaping human life. Every worker needs to engage in activities that would stimulate them, help them fulfill career goals, and enable them to perform exceptionally well. Work motivation stands for a person's relationship to their work. Work motivation could be approached from two perspectives. On one side, there is an interest in what motivates a person at work, their needs, relationships, and external factors that influence performance. On the other side, the interest is in the mere nature of motivation – positive signs of motivation are enthusiasm, a positive approach to work, and work commitment or the energy an individual devotes to work. Four different motivators could come into play. Economic motivation is the primary motivator as a financial reward determines one's approach to work and affects one's performance. A salary is often an important motive for choosing a particular career. Where there is money, there is power, and

there is no money, there is neither power nor work (Kuvaas et al., 2017; Erro-Garcés et al., 2019; Rani & Samuel, 2019; Borgkvist et al., 2021; Unguren & Kacmaz, 2022).

Social motivation derives from interpersonal relationships at the workplace and one's satisfaction. A good team pursues a well-done job; a bad team generates worse results. Personal motivation means a person's need for recognition and self-realization. The feeling of satisfaction with work is person-specific. It depends on the volume of demand projected on the employee and its perception by an employee. Job satisfaction is also reflected in the employee's private life. Unfortunately, many companies tend to treat their employees as a labor force performing tasks and fulfilling goals. The widespread term «human resources» has too impersonal a connotation and sees an employee as a figure. However, a person - an employee - should not be degraded to a source of performance. A common mistake is motivating employees only through wages, bonuses, or benefits (Kinnunen et al., 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2018; Spagnoli et al., 2020).

Financial motivation is important for recruiting new employees. It is also an important factor in the performance motivation of present employees, yet not the only one. Financial motivation may not work as a decisive factor for all people. For some people, salary is not a priority. They may value other things more, e.g. a good team, a pleasant working environment, and various non-financial benefits. Long-term satisfaction of employees and their loyalty to a company also includes non-financial forms of motivation (Kaiser & Menkhoff, 2017; Cai & Szeidl, 2018).

The basis for the present research and for stating hypotheses was studied into work motivation of particular generations in social services. They include a study by Mahmoud et al. (2021), who mainly focused on internal factors of motivation and personality development as a factor of social service workers' work motivation. The study by Heyns and Kerr (2018) triggered our interest in that it reports generational differences in internal and external motivational factors. Severo et al. (2021) studied remuneration and independence as essential factors of work motivation in generations X and Y.

The main factors of social workers' motivation have not been defined yet. The study considers this a knowledge gap to fill it. Further, another factor, namely work-life balance, and assessing its importance in both studied generations were added. The research brings results applicable to social service facilities in innovating the scope of employees' work motivation.

The present paper interprets the research results on work motivation in the social services sector.

**Methodology and research methods.** The present paper examines generation X's and generation Y's work motivation and analyses the two generations' assessment of the importance of work in the social service sector. The questionnaire was chosen as the main research tool since it is considered the most appropriate way of finding out attitudes and answers in research of this type. The use of the questionnaire method was determined based on already conducted research by other authors (Heyns & Kerr, 2018; Baum, 2020; Mahmoud et al., 2021; Brink & Zondag, 2021; Severo et al., 2021).

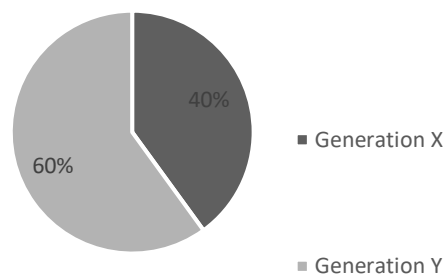
The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of demographic questions, focusing on the respondent's sex, education, age, and years spent in the institution. The second part of the questionnaire was intended for collecting research data. It focused on how Generation X and Generation Y in social services perceive work motivation. The questionnaire consisted of questions with a predetermined choice, open questions, and Likert-scale-based questions. The Likert scale contained a five-point scale of options ranging from "strongly agree", through "I cannot answer", to "completely disagree". The research was carried out online using the Google platform. The selection of respondents used the method of a random selection of respondents, in which each respondent has the same probability of being selected. The research was carried out in social service facilities. A total of 201 responses were received. The research focusing on work motivation in the social service sector was carried out to prove or disprove the following hypotheses:

**H1:** There is a statistically significant relationship between generation X and Y regarding the greatest motivational stimulus from the point of view of an employee in social services.

**H2:** There is a statistically significant difference between Generation X's and Generation Y's perception of the importance of work motivation in social services.

The mathematical-statistical methods were used to process the questionnaire-obtained data, which enabled us to interpret the research results accurately. For statistical analysis (concerning the stated research hypotheses and the nature of the data), the study used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality, the Wilcoxon paired test, the Cramer V test, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U-test, and the Spearman correlation test. For quick analysis and a clear display of data, the so-called contingency tables were used. They summarize the relationship between the two statistical features. The statistical evaluation used Statistica software version 12.

**Results.** The present research focused on exploring work motivation in social service facilities. The work motivation was explored in terms of generation X and generation Y perception. The authors define the age structure of generations X and Y with small deviations. The present research worked with the age structure of generations as follows. The age structure of Generation X includes the years of birth ranging from 1965 to 1980, which means it is represented by the subjects who are in their forties and fifties. In Generation Y, the range from 1981 to 1995 was defined, which means subjects in their twenties and thirties represent it. Based on such categorization, we assigned respondents to the appropriate generation. Figure 1 shows the distribution of research respondents.



**Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by generations**

Sources: developed by the authors.

The analysis of the identification questions shows that 80 respondents from Generation X (i.e., 40% of respondents) and 121 respondents from Generation Y (i.e., 60% of respondents) participated in the research.

After examining the identification question, the hypotheses were also verified by statistical methods. The first hypothesis was based on the assumption that there is a statistically significant relationship between Generation X and Generation Y and the greatest motivational incentive from the point of view of social services workers. Table 1 displays the variables that represent motivational incentives in the present research. For each motivational incentive, the number of responses is given.

**Table 1. Social services workers' motivational incentives**

	Social services workers' motivational incentives					Total
	Success	Recognition	Responsibility	Upskilling	Financial remuneration	
X Generation	8	19	6	11	36	80
Y Generation	23	29	5	17	47	121
Total	31	48	11	28	83	201

Sources: developed by the authors.

Hypothesis 2 assumed that there was a statistically significant relationship between age and the greatest motivator from the social services worker's point of view. After considering the nature of the variables, a nonparametric Cramer's V test was used. The result is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Cramer's V (nominal vs. nominal) correlation test**

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Cramer's V	0.141	0.409
N of Valid Cases	201	

Sources: developed by the authors.

The interpretation of Cramer's V correlation test derives from the assumption of the relationship (correlation) strength in the value on a scale from 0 to 1. The closer the calculation to 1, the stronger the relationship. The closer it is to 0, the weaker the relationship, or there is almost no relationship. The correlation value is 0.141, which indicates a weak or almost no relationship. The Approx. Sig. (p-value) the column shows a value of 0.409, which is bigger than 0.05. The above states that there is no statistically significant relationship



between Generations X and Y regarding the major motivational incentive from a social services employee's perspective.

The second hypothesis was based on the assumption that there is a statistically significant difference in the perception of the importance of work motivation between Generation X and Generation Y employees in social services. Particular aspects as perceived by Generation X and Generation Y are displayed in tables 3 and 4.

**Table 3. The importance of the aspect for Generation X**

	N	Average	Median	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Range	Min	Max
Financial remuneration	80	1.86	1.00	1.166	1.256	0.344	4	1	5
Employee benefits	80	2.46	2.00	1.113	0.464	-1.066	4	1	5
Career growth	80	2.99	3.00	1.085	-0.402	-1.393	3	1	4
Educational process	80	2.20	2.00	1.095	0.657	-0.861	3	1	4
Freedom and flexibility	80	2.10	2.00	1.249	0.686	-1.211	3	1	4
Working conditions	80	3.31	4.00	1.143	-0.541	-0.944	4	1	5
Training courses	80	3.26	4.00	1.145	-0.432	-1.030	4	1	5
Friendly working environment	80	3.01	3.00	1.153	-0.279	-1.273	4	1	5
Feedback	80	3.20	4.00	1.184	-0.540	-1.044	4	1	5
Upskilling	80	1.68	1.00	0.991	1.500	1.163	3	1	4
Work-Life Balance	80	2.73	2.00	1.302	0.001	-1.545	4	1	5
Job security	80	2.21	2.00	1.064	0.596	-0.838	3	1	4

Sources: developed by the authors.

**Table 4. Illustrates the importance of the aspect for Generation Y**

	N	Average	Median	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Range	Min	Max
Financial remuneration	121	2.19	2.00	1.192	0.644	-1.032	4	1	5
Employee benefits	121	2.52	2.00	1.266	0.241	-1.440	4	1	5
Career growth	121	2.03	2.00	1.183	0.857	-0.602	4	1	5
Educational process	121	1.82	1.00	1.072	1.237	0.377	4	1	5
Freedom and flexibility	121	2.27	2.00	1.265	0.701	-0.804	4	1	5
Working conditions	121	3.29	4.00	1.241	-0.542	-0.895	4	1	5
Training courses	121	3.11	4.00	1.315	-0.380	-1.184	4	1	5
Friendly working environment	121	1.91	2.00	1.049	1.242	0.717	4	1	5
Feedback	121	2.64	2.00	1.366	0.127	-1.518	4	1	5
Upskilling	121	2.45	2.00	1.252	0.351	-1.253	4	1	5
Work-Life Balance	121	2.21	2.00	1.297	0.935	-0.351	4	1	5
Job security	121	2.46	2.00	1.169	0.361	-1.205	4	1	5

Sources: developed by the authors.

A nonparametric Mann-Whitney U-test for 2 independent selections was used to verify the stated hypothesis after considering the distribution normality tests and the nature of the variables. The results are displayed in Table 5.

**Table 5. Illustrates the importance of the aspect for Generation Y**

	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Financial remuneration	3987.500	7227.500	-2.254	0.024
Employee benefits	4827.500	8067.500	-0.033	0.974
Career growth	2676.000	10057.000	-5.602	0.000
Educational process	3739.500	11120.500	-2.924	0.003
Freedom and flexibility	4368.000	7608.000	-1.234	0.217

**Continued Table 5**

	<b>Mann-Whitney U</b>	<b>Wilcoxon W</b>	<b>Z</b>	<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</b>
Working conditions	4821.500	12202.500	-0.049	0.961
Training courses	4554.500	11935.500	-0.747	0.455
Friendly working environment	2404.000	9785.000	-6.353	0.000
Feedback	3704.000	11085.000	-2.964	0.003
Upskilling	3071.000	6311.000	-4.629	0.000
Work-Life Balance	3785.500	11166.500	-2.730	0.006
Job security	4295.000	7535.000	-1.426	0.154

Note: Z – Z-statistical test, Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) – the two-tailed significance evaluating.

Sources: developed by the authors.

Verifying the hypothesis with the use of statistical tests allows stating that Generation X respondents consider the aspects of «financial remuneration» and «upskilling» to be more important aspects at work compared to Generation Y. Conversely, Generation Y respondents consider «career growth», «job being interesting», «friendly working environment», «feedback» and «work-life balance» to be more important aspects at work compared to generation X. In other aspects, no statistically significant difference was found between Generation X and Generation Y.

The present research examines hypotheses on work motivation in the social services sector. After verifying the hypotheses, it was concluded that the statistically significant relationship between the age (Generations X and Y) and the greatest motivator from the social services worker's perspective was not confirmed. Work motivation in Generation X and Generation Y is also addressed by Mahmoud et al. (2021), who argue that internal motivation comes to the forefront of interest, i.e., self-realization and personality development, which increasingly contributes to the overall work motivation of Generation X and Generation Y of social services workers. Similarly to the present research, the above-given authors used a questionnaire as a research method. They worked with a probability error of  $p = 0.05$  in the statistical evaluation of the data. As in the above hypothesis, Heyns and Kerr (2018), examining work motivation in the social services sector, argue against the popular notion that generational groups differ significantly from each other in terms of different internal and external motivational preferences potentially affecting their work behavior. No significant differences were found regarding the degree of basic psychological needs satisfaction leading to autonomous and internally motivated behavior. As the authors mentioned above, the quantitative research used the Anova test as a statistical method. The present research also examined the hypothesis stating there is a statistically significant difference in the perception of the importance of particular aspects at work between Generation X and Generation Y. Generation Y respondents consider «career growth», «job being interesting», «friendly working environment», «feedback» and «work-life balance» to be more important aspects of work compared to Generation X. Severo et al. (2021) found that Generation X was more willing to work if motivated and supported by management. Generation Y responses correspond with Generation X regarding remuneration, motivation, time availability, and autonomy at work, which are important factors in work motivation. In the study, the authors used a questionnaire method in which the obtained data were processed through factor analysis and linear regression.

**Conclusions.** Work motivation is a factor worthy of continuous exploration. The strong motivation of social services workers will bring the expected benefits not only for the facility's management but also for other employees and all stakeholders. The present study focused on work motivation in social services. The research findings show that the differences between Generation X and Generation Y concerning work motivators are insignificant, and both groups have similar motivators enhancing their work performance. Differences in work aspects between Generation X and Generation Y include mainly career growth, a friendly working environment, and work-life balance. Generation Y considers these factors to be more important than Generation X. These findings, seen through the lens of anti-oppressive social work from the perspective of critical reflection, encourage the management of social services facilities to create favorable conditions for their employees' external work motivation. Likewise, the respondents, as employees, are given space for internal reflection and enhancing their internal motivation. Concerning social services clients, these external and internal motivational stimuli multiply the benefits of increasing the quality of social services, leading to improved quality of life.

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P. G.; writing-original draft preparation, B. B.; writing-review and editing, P. G.; visualization, B. M.; supervision, P. G.; project administration, B. B.; funding acquisition, B. B.

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#### **Мотивація праці соціальних працівників в контексті управлінських інновацій**

У сучасних турбулентних умовах, що постійно змінюються, зростає тенденція до розвитку кадрової діяльності через впровадження управлінських інновацій. Дана стаття присвячена дослідженню мотивації праці соціальних працівників. Головною метою дослідження є визначення впливу мотивації праці на працівників соціальних служб покоління X та покоління Y. У статті проаналізовано переваги покоління X та покоління Y, що зумовлюють особливості виконання ними роботи в соціальних службах. Підґрунтям дослідження стали результати анкетування соціальних працівників. Для відбору респондентів застосовано метод випадкової вибірки з однаковою ймовірністю включення у вибірку для всіх респондентів. Вибірка дослідження складалася з 201 працівника соціальних служб. Анкета опитування складалася з двох частин та включає данні: демографічні (стать, вік, рівень освіти); про мотивацію праці (робоче середовище, робоча атмосфера, можливості кар'єрного росту, підвищення кваліфікації, дохід, демотиватори на робочому місці). Методичним інструментарієм проведеного дослідження визначення відмінностей та подібностей у сприйнятті мотивації праці соціальними працівниками стали: тест Кормоголова-Смірнова, параметричний тест Вілкоксона, тест Крамера V, непараметричний тест Манна-Уїтні та кореляція Спірмена. Дослідження не виявило статистично значущого зв'язку між поколінням X та поколінням Y щодо основного мотиваційного стимулу серед соціальних працівників. Обидва покоління сприймають мотивацію однаково. Встановлено, що порівняно із поколінням Y,

респонденти покоління Х вважають «фінансову винагороду» та «підвищення кваліфікації» більш суттєвими факторами мотивації. Своєю чергою, важливе значення для респондентів покоління Y мають «кар'єрне зростання», «цікава робота», «дружнє робоче середовище», «зворотний зв'язок», а також «баланс між роботою та особистим життям». Учасники дослідження цінують можливості для внутрішньої рефлексії та посилення внутрішньої мотивації. Зовнішні та внутрішні мотиваційні стимули, а також інші мотиваційні переваги сприяють підвищенню якості надання соціальних послуг та загальному покращенню якості життя працівників соціальних служб. Представлене дослідження містить висновки, які можуть бути застосовані в секторі соціальних послуг в рамках управлінських інновацій та мотивації працівників.

**Ключові слова:** управління персоналом, соціальні послуги, мотивація праці, покоління X, покоління Y.