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DOI: 10.38173/RST.2024.27.1.6:71-80

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Section: Social Sciences

Issue: 1(27)/2024

Received: 7 January 2024	Revised: 17 February 2024
Accepted: 2 March 2024	Available Online: 15 March 2024

Paper available online [HERE](#)

WORKPLACE REPORTING: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' OPINIONS EMPLOYED IN A MULTINATIONAL COMPANY

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ABSTRACT:

THE DECLINING POPULATION TREND AND EVOLVING EXPECTATIONS OF "GENERATION Z" IN ROMANIA'S LABOR MARKET POSE CHALLENGES, NECESSITATING A NUANCED APPROACH TO INTEGRATE STUDENTS INTO WORKPLACES WHILE ADDRESSING THE IMPACTS OF GLOBAL TRENDS. THIS STUDY PRESENTS A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE OPINIONS OF STUDENTS EMPLOYED (WORKING STUDENTS) AT A MULTINATIONAL COMPANY IN ALBA COUNTY WITH OVER 2500 EMPLOYEES. THE ANALYSIS INDICATES A STRONG INCLINATION AMONG STUDENTS (67.1%) TO CONTINUE WORKING WITH THEIR CURRENT COMPANY AFTER GRADUATION, WITH SALARY EXPECTATIONS PLAYING A CRUCIAL ROLE, WHILE A SMALL PERCENTAGE (5.5%) PLANS NOT TO JOIN THEIR CURRENT EMPLOYER POST-GRADUATION, AND 27.4% REMAIN UNDECIDED, EMPHASIZING THE NUANCED DYNAMICS OF STUDENTS' CAREER DECISIONS. RESPONDENTS PRIORITIZE FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING, SIGNALING A SHIFT IN CONTEMPORARY WORKERS' PREFERENCES FOR EFFICIENT TIME MANAGEMENT AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE. MEDICAL SERVICES AND MEAL VOUCHERS ARE ALSO CRUCIAL, HIGHLIGHTING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN PERCEIVED BENEFITS.

KEY WORDS: WORKING STUDENTS, MULTINATIONAL COMPANY, WORK, EMPLOYEES

INTRODUCTION AND STUDY CONTEXT

The downward trend in Romania's population [1] over the last three decades and the projected developments for the next 40 years contribute to a pronounced medium and long-term decline in the replacement rate of exits from the working-age population through entries [2]. One of the main causes of population decline is emigration, with a high probability of the decision to emigrate temporarily transforming into a permanent one, especially among young individuals with higher education, considered a vulnerable category [3]. There are notable differences in the common expectations of "Generation Z" across different cultural areas regarding leadership, mostly attributed to the economic and cultural conditions of the

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societies they belong to [4]. The importance of case studies is increasingly emphasized to enhance strategies for the inclusion of young graduates in the labor market. The rise in inflation and, consequently, prices, in line with the energy crisis on the continent due to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, are just the latest pressures exerted on an already troubled sector in Romania, namely the labor market. This topic, as explained by Doinița Zafiu and Narcisa Liliana Leiciu [5], is always in the public eye because the labor market is where the demand for labor from companies meets the labor supply from the population within an economic space. This involves the process of buying and selling labor force and all associated relationships. The labor market establishes the conditions for hiring employees, negotiates and sets salaries based on workers' performance, and facilitates salary and workforce mobility between different jobs, firms, or geographical areas.

This article presents the workplace reporting of students employed in a multinational company in Romania's Alba county, that operates in the automotive industry and has over 2500 employees. According to a press release from 2022 on its website, the multinational is a global leader in providing technologies and services, actively involved in educational projects, and supporting the careers of young talents. The company establishes long-term partnerships with several universities in the country, offering students the opportunity to specialize in various professional fields and contributing to the creation of inspirational spaces within university premises. In the Alba county establishment there are over 110 students employed, that are benefiting from mentorship for their bachelor's or master's theses, with approximately 60% of them securing full-time employment after completing their studies. From this last statement we determined the hypothesis that if a high percentage of students manifest the intention to remain in the company, they have career growth and personal development expectations.

-The main objective of the study was to determine the students' opinions related to their workplace condition inside the multinational company. To determine the primary objective, secondary objectives that are related to some key indicators were set in order to establish the overall satisfaction of the students.

The secondary objective were:

- Measure the intention of the students to remain inside the company
- Determine the non salary-related expectations of the students at the workplace before they joined the company
- Determine the most appreciated student benefits offered by the company

LITERATURE BACKGROUND

As in any other sociology related study, according to Septimiu Chelcea [6], the researchers aim to obtain the transition from common knowledge or the appropriation by the individual, based on his own experiences, of a sum of knowledge about "people's living together" to scientific knowledge that is achieved on the basis of rigorous research methods and techniques for an objective description of social a phenomenon. Every research in the social sciences, continues Chelcea, runs into some challenges regarding the correct measurement of the social factors analyzed. We are therefore looking for a transition from a thorough description of the analyzed phenomena but also of the social units to a separation of some constants that manifest themselves similarly in similar socio-temporal contexts.

Important theories related to workplace engagement come from analyzing the work related motivation. According to Michael Armstrong [7], " Motivation theory is concerned with what 'moves' people to do something (...). It explains the factors that affect the effort that they put into their work, their levels of engagement and contribution and their

discretionary behaviour". Armstrong, after taking into considerations the Herzberg's [8] motivation-hygiene theory and Maslow's [9] need theory, concludes that motivation by pay or other means (material needs) are not sufficient and personnel development strategies must take into consideration other factors related to the individual such as significance of needs, the expectations and the personal goals in order to obtain the best performance.

The reporting of students to the workplace is a particularly important issue for human resources departments because this generation of employees comes with high expectations and finds it challenging to develop attachment to the workplace. This lack of loyalty to their current employer and rapidly changing priorities necessitate constant adaptation to their needs and values, continuous active communication, quick response to change, and ongoing innovation in companies. Individuals from the generation Z possess entrepreneurial qualities, grow up with computers and mobile phones at hand, have easy access to the internet, are multitasking, get bored quickly; in short, they are digital, social, global, mobile, flexible, independent, and visual [10]. The dynamic nature of opportunities in the labor market has sparked many discussions about the fairest and most efficient approach when it comes to their integration and motivation into the field of activity. In any organizational strategy, consideration of future staffing requirements is critical to aligning with performance goals and overseeing the achievement of these benchmarks. The selection of methodologies and protocols requires careful deliberation to ensure that they facilitate the achievement of the desired quality and competitiveness envisaged by the entity [11].

Perceived success and satisfaction associated with internship programs may stem from certain factors during the internship period. Studies indicate that student satisfaction is influenced by opportunities to develop relevant skills, engage in meaningful tasks, and build professional networks [12]. Several occupations in Romania have been identified as priorities for addressing discrepancies, facing either a shortage or surplus. However, official data on the incidence of surpluses are not available in Romania [13].

Global labor unions have concluded that precarious work has reached a global dimension, including through zero-hour contracts, unpaid internships, and short-term contract employment, all becoming commonplace in the labor sphere [14]. This trend is closely linked to the decline of the traditional employment contract concept and the significant rise in precarious work. In the context of students entering the labor market, it is important to observe how these changes also affect the employment conditions of young individuals, increasing their insecurity, instability, and vulnerability to risks.

The study provides an the analysis of some indicators reflecting the workplace reporting of the students, offering insights to improve recruitment strategies, internal development programs, and workplace conditions. This adaptive approach is part of the concept of ergonomics, characterized and defined by Americans as "engineering psychology." Ergonomics research has evolved significantly, focusing primarily on organizing the workspace according to the capacities, characteristics, and aspirations of the individuals using that space [15]. The efficiency of organizational management is closely linked to organizational climate, essentially representing the atmosphere and culture characterizing an organization [16]. When the organizational climate becomes more stimulating, encouraging creativity, collaboration, and commitment, management becomes more effective [17].

METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

In this research context, a quantitative approach is employed for the case study, with the results presented in a descriptive manner. The instrument utilized for this sociological

inquiry is a self-administered questionnaire. The chosen sample for the survey is exhaustive, representing an intentional sample characteristic of case studies; more specifically the aim was to survey all employees with working student contracts in the targeted company. For example there are people employed within the company who are students but not employed on a working student position. The present research only targets employees in active working student positions. The survey took place between May 25 and June 1, 2023.

In total, the questionnaire was distributed to 120 students (the entire target group), from which 74 completed and validated questionnaires were collected. It is noteworthy that during that period (exam sessions in universities), 20 individuals were on leave and unable to participate in the study. Additionally, 26 individuals declined to participate in the research. The questionnaire was individually transmitted in electronic format through company-generated email addresses for each student for professional purposes.

The study location was chosen based on the researcher's ability to administer the questionnaire and the availability of students to respond. It should be emphasized that respondents participated voluntarily, willingly completing the questionnaire under the protection of anonymity, in compliance with current legislation regarding the handling of personal data and with the consent of the company where the study took place.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The age range of employees with working student contracts within the company at the time of the study was between 19 and 28 years old, with only 5.4% of the surveyed students being over 30 years old. The modal value is 22 years (21.6%). Regarding the residence of the respondents, 43.2% live in rural areas, while 56.8% have their residence in urban areas. A relevant aspect in this context is not necessarily the respondents' residential environment but the distance in kilometers traveled to the workplace. To highlight this aspect, the following graph depicts the proportions associated with the distance traveled to work by the employed students.

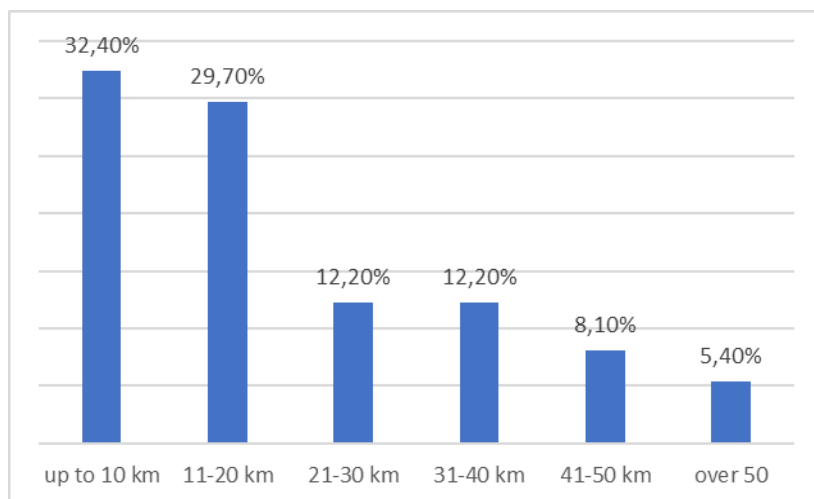


Figure 1. Commuting distance to work

We would like to mention that the study was conducted within the multinational company that is located in a city which is not a university center but is in close proximity to several university cities such as Cluj Napoca, Alba Iulia, or Târgu Mureş. Therefore, the institutional affiliation of the respondents is diverse. The majority of respondents, 43.2%, are

students at the Technical University of Cluj Napoca, followed by 32.4% who study at the "1 Decembrie 1918" University in Alba Iulia, and 10.8% enrolled at "Lucian Blaga" University in Sibiu. Percentages below 10% are specific to working students enrolled in other universities. Respondents were not queried about the distance they need to travel from home to the university³. However, the connection between the factory and the academic environment goes beyond students employed by the company. The economic agent has established partnerships with the academic environment from which the majority of the employed students originate. This aspect is acknowledged by 49.3% of respondents who recognized that in their university, the company invested funds for the material endowment of the institution. Additionally, 8.2% of students stated that no such investments were made, while 42.5% of them are unaware of whether the company they work for has made investments in their university or not.

Another important socio-demographic aspect is related to the tenure of students as employees in this company. Thus, most of them, 39.2%, have been employees of the multinational for a period ranging from one to two years, followed by 31.1% who have been working in this company for six to twelve months. At the same time, 14.9% of respondents have been working for this multinational for no more than three months, a percentage followed by 6.8% of individuals working between three and six months. In a proportion of 8.1%, there are individuals who have been employed for over two years.

Regarding the professional experience of the respondents, 43.2% of them declared that they had other jobs before joining the company, while 32.4% had not worked previously. A relatively low percentage, 8.1% of employed students, stated that although they had not worked before, they had volunteer experience, while 16.2% declared that before joining the multinational, they had both volunteered and gained professional experience.

The categorization of students within the company was done in two domains: the technical domain, with 48.6% of respondents employed in this field, and the commercial or administrative domain, with 51.4% working in this sector. Regarding the work schedule, the majority of employed students at the company (56.8%) work 6 hours per day or 30 hours per week, followed by 41.9% who work full time, i.e., 8 hours per day or 40 hours per week. In a very small proportion, 1.4% of students work 4 hours per day or 20 hours per week.

Regarding the educational level of students employed within the multinational corporation, 70.3% are pursuing undergraduate studies, with the majority being in their third year of studies (38.5%), followed by second-year students (34.6%) and fourth-year students (21.2%). The lowest proportion of employees enrolled in undergraduate programs pertains to first-year students (5.8%). It is worth noting that in the Romanian higher education system, the undergraduate cycle is typically three years, with exceptions in some specializations, for which the duration of master's studies may be only one year.

Concerning the second cycle of university education, 29.7% of employed students are enrolled in a master's program. The majority of master's students employed are in their first year of studies (72.7%), while the proportion of second-year master's students is significantly lower (27.3%). A possible explanation for these significant percentage differences could be the existence of one-year master's programs.

The most of respondents, 91.9%, attend full-time education, whether at the undergraduate or master's level, while 8.1% are enrolled in part-time studies. Regarding this

³ 4.1% corresponds to Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. A similar percentage is applicable to the University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Sciences, and Technology "George Emil Palade" in Târgu Mureş, while the combined percentage is 5.4% for other university institutions.

aspect, we do not have informations regarding the extent to which students attending full-time education effectively manage to attend classes, seminars, or laboratories, especially considering that some of them are full-time employees within the company. An important factor that enables students to be employed while attending university courses is the flexible working time offered within the company and the additional free paid hours that come as a benefit for working student contracts. To highlight this aspect, we will present an association between the number of working hours according to the employment contract and the form of education to which the respondent students are enrolled, with total frequencies calculated per line in the following table.

		Type of education	
		Full-time learning	Distance learning
Work schedule/ Work hours	4 hours/day 20 hours/week	100%	0%
	6 hours/day 30 hours/week	92.9%	7.1%
	8 hours/day 40 hours/week	90.3%	9.7%

Table 1. Association between the number of working hours and the type of education

One final aspect presented in this section of the study is related to the language proficiency of employed students. The majority of respondents speak only one foreign language, followed by 25.7% who speak two foreign languages. At the opposite end, 4.1% declared that they do not speak any foreign language, and 2.7% stated that they speak more than two foreign languages. The primary foreign language spoken within the company is English, but there are situations where employed students are conversant, at least at a basic level, in Spanish, French, Italian, German, Russian, or other languages. The very high percentage of employees who speak at least one foreign language, especially English, is not coincidental; it should be noted that we are dealing with a multinational company. Therefore, English is undoubtedly one of the primary languages used within the company and may be more frequently utilized than Romanian, especially in interactions with top management or foreign collaborators.

NON-SALARY EXPECTATIONS BEFORE EMPLOYMENT

Without generalizing, it can be stated that the current expectations of the younger generation, overall, differ from the expectations of past generations, particularly concerning specific aspects of work. Thus, working students were asked about their non-salary expectations before employment, specifically from the company they currently work for. This open-ended questionnaire allowed respondents to express themselves freely. Upon analyzing the responses, an unexpected situation regarding the non-salary expectations of the respondents before receiving the job offer emerged. We encountered a significant percentage of non-responses (46%), which may indicate a possible lack of interest or crystallization of expectations. Alternatively, it may reflect the uncertainty and indecision of students regarding non-salary expectations. However, the valid responses were diverse and categorized as follows:

- personal and professional development/growth opportunities: 25%
- flexible schedule/remote work possibilities: 25%
- job quality/working conditions: 10%

- team support: 7.5%
- adherence to the employment with permanent contract: 7.5%
- non-salary benefits: 7.5%.

Moreover, a percentage of 7.2% of students stated that they had no specific expectations before getting employed. This perspective may represent a realistic outlook from a segment of respondents with not overly high expectations. Companies offering internship programs and working student opportunities might consider adjusting their recruitment strategies to enhance the level of interest among young individuals. The remaining 10% provided frivolous responses that did not align with non-salary expectations.

The significant percentage within the category of personal and professional development may indicate the strong interest of students in their evolution as future permanent employees, aiming for growth opportunities within the company. A flexible schedule and the option to work remotely are also among the most prevalent non-salary expectations of students, reflecting the need for flexibility and the absence of constraints for the new generation of employees. This could be largely attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic, with respondent students participating in online university courses during that period. Therefore, adapting to a hybrid work system has become a habit sooner than expected, often representing a crucial criterion for young individuals in choosing employment. International companies are already offering flexible work programs and telecommuting options to attract talented youth.

Job quality can influence overall employee satisfaction and is an important aspect for students (10%). This is underlining that is still important for companies to pay attention to working conditions and try to improve the work environment to meet student expectations. The 7.5% of respondents expecting team support indicate that workplace people connection and support from colleagues are crucial for these students. Fostering a team culture could contribute to their satisfaction within the organization. Adherence to the employment contract (7.5%) underscores the importance of honoring commitments and maintaining a fair working environment. Companies should ensure that the employer-employee relationship is transparent and equitable. An equal percentage relates to expectations regarding benefits, which could encompass aspects such as health insurance, paid vacations, gifts for specific events or holidays, and other perks.

STUDENT EMPLOYEES' INTENTION TO REMAIN IN THE COMPANY

The students' interest in continuing their employment within the same company where they are currently engaged is an indicator of their work commitment, reflecting their satisfaction with both the work they perform and the company they are associated with. According to the survey findings, 67.1% of employed students express the opinion that they intend to continue working within the same company after graduation. In contrast, 5.5% of respondents indicate that they do not plan to join the company where they are currently employed. Additionally, 27.4% of participants are uncertain about whether they will continue working for the multinational corporation after completing their university studies or if they will opt for a different employer.

On the other hand, to underscore respondents' intention to remain with the company, they were queried about the likelihood of seeking alternative employment during the year 2023, the period covered by the study. The responses provided by research participants reinforce the previously presented data. Accordingly, 78.1% of participants express that it is unlikely or very unlikely that they will seek employment outside the company. Conversely,

the search for alternative employment is deemed very likely by 6.8%, and likely by 15.1% of employed students within the multinational corporation.

Simultaneously, students' intent to continue working in the multinational, according to the survey, may be influenced by certain objective criteria, such as commuting distance to the workplace, or by subjective factors such as workplace relations, leadership style within the company, the relation with the immediate supervisor, salary expectations, advancement opportunities, or other specific considerations.

An important aspect for the labor market in Romania is the level of salaries. In this regard, students were inquired about their net salary expectations from the company where they are currently employed, post-graduation, in order to continue remaining with the company. The reference range spans from 2500 to 7000 RON. The majority of respondents, at 22.7%, selected a salary of 4000 RON, with a similar percentage for students desiring a net salary of 5000 RON. Simultaneously, 15.2% opt for the middle option (4500 RON). When aggregating the recorded percentages, it is evident that 22.7% of respondents are content with a net salary below 4000 RON. Conversely, 10.6% of respondents aspire to a higher salary of over 5000 RON per month. The remaining percentage of responses had also opted for amounts in the range of 4000-5000 RON. Therefore, we can emphasize that the salary expectations of the majority of respondents are between 4000 ron and 5000 RON

From respondents' answers to the question "What are, in your opinion, the most important benefits from the contractual package?" It can be summarized the categories of benefits as follows: most frequently encountered, flexible schedule (45%), with the same percentage of 12.2% for students` free paid hours and transportation bonus, medical services (5.4%), meal vouchers and remote working (4.1%), while at the bottom of the ranking are personal laptop, free courses, holiday bonus, gym, leave, all with the same percentage of 1.4%.

We observe that "flexible schedule" is mentioned most often and is perceived as the most important benefit. This aspect may indicate a shift in the priorities of contemporary workers, who value the opportunity to manage their time more efficiently and achieve a balance between professional and personal life.

Additionally, medical services and meal vouchers are mentioned by a significant number of respondents. This indicates the importance of health and well-being-related aspects within benefits perceived as essential. Even though health insurance or the meal vouchers are considered norms, basic benefits in the contractual package for many large companies, they remain appreciated by employees.

Although benefits such as a personal laptop, various company-provided courses, holiday bonus, the opportunity to exercise in a dedicated gym for free, and leave appear with lower frequency, they remain important for certain categories of employees, and companies should continue offering them.

THE LIMITS OF THE RESEARCH

Despite the efforts to obtain the most relevant results, this case study presents certain limitations that must be considered. The first limitation is the small size of the responders` group. The maximum number of respondents was 120 students that were active employees at the time of the research. To obtain more robust conclusions, the use of a larger number of employed students from multiple companies is recommended. Somewhat related to the first, the second limitation is that there was no control of the researchers regarding the filling of the questionnaire. The survey was individually transmitted in electronic format through company-generated email addresses for each student. Certain aspects, such as the degree of

satisfaction and the perception of work relations could have been influenced if the survey was filled in the presence of a colleague.

Therefore, the use of additional methods, such as applied interviews in the department or direct observations, could contribute to obtaining more detailed information about the subject. Another limit is the limited duration of the case study. Additional empirical data can be extracted if the same study is applied multiple times during a longer period in order to extract only the recurring information. Another limitation of the study is given by the lack of a global approach of the specialized literature, at the same time is the lack of a specific sociological theory for the current study. The application and construction of the questionnaire is not based on a concrete sociological theory but rather on the knowledge of a situation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a careful analysis of the non-monetary expectations of students employed at the targeted automotive company reveals a complex landscape of preferences and priorities within the workplace for this younger generation. Although a significant percentage of respondents did not provide responses regarding non-salary expectations before employment, a detailed analysis of valid responses unveils significant trends.

Personal and professional development, alongside growth opportunities within the company, emerge as essential elements, reflecting a deep interest in the individual and professional evolution of the students which also confirms our hypothesis. The desire for increased flexibility in working hours and the option to work from home has become a common expectation, possibly influenced by the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic and the transition to online university courses.

Simultaneously, the quality of work and working conditions have also been significant aspects, emphasizing the importance of a pleasant and stimulating and inspiring working environment. The wish to receive support from the team and the strict adherence to the permanent employment contract underscore the aspiration for healthy interpersonal relationships and transparent, fair commitment from the employer. It is important to note that a small number of respondents stated they had no expectations or provided trivial responses, signaling a possible lack of clarity or interest in defining their expectations.

Without extracting them from an explicit outcome of the questionnaire, we could analyze in the future some external factors that influence the choice of students to work in the company after graduation. Factors like political insecurity, company latest changes, economy inflation and all other aspects that can contribute to the psychological state of the responders.

The descriptive analysis reveals a strong inclination among students to continue working with their current company after graduation, with 67.1% expressing this intention. A small percentage (5.5%) plans not to join their current employer post-graduation, while 27.4% remain undecided. The study emphasizes students' reluctance to seek alternative employment in the coming year, with 78.1% considering it unlikely. Salary expectations emerge as a crucial factor influencing their decisions, with diverse preferences among respondents. The findings highlight the intricate nature of students' career choices and underscore the need for companies to address concerns and provide incentives for retaining their talented workforce.

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