“Employee Engagement at Work: Hire for Talent, Train for Knowledge”

Katušić, Niko

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“Employee Engagement at Work: Hire for Talent, Train for Knowledge”

Student:
Niko Katušić

Mentor:
Milena Kužnin

RIT Croatia
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ABSTRACT

This research paper studied different approaches towards employee motivation, willingness to exceed expectations and enthusiasm based on geographic location, culture and age components. With a purpose of finding the gap between newly educated workforce and industry professionals. Questionnaire was distributed to 60 students half from Zagreb and half from Dubrovnik area, and among 6 industry professionals operating on both locations. Groups considered relationships among colleagues and way of communication as the most important factors for employee motivation. Because of the need to create desirable working environment from which both employer and employee will benefit and mutually rise towards success.

Key Words: Employee Engagement, Healthy Communication, Working Environment, Enthusiasm, Employee Relationships

INTRODUCTION

In today's working environment which is constantly changing we have more and more issues and challenges with disengaged workforce. Employee engagement is a positive force which is motivating and connecting employees with their organization through emotions, cognitive sense, and or physical appearance (Kahn,1990; Wellins and Concelman,2005).

Managers should be more aware of the importance of workforce engagement because it may improve employee daily performance, increase job satisfaction and at the end it may lead the organization towards achieving its shared goals. Over the years, researchers found out that enthusiastic and engaged workers are a productive and valuable asset to the company. A such, they need to be utilized in a proper way with a certain level of employee relationships (Kompaso and Sridevi,2010).

The general characteristic of organization can be seen through specific requirements and expectations which employees have through their working experience. If organization is changing working environment, employees are changing their expectations as well (Glass 2007). Today individual workers seek more meaning in day to day work assignments then they do in their personal free time (Mishra et al,2014; Ugwu et al, 2014). We can also argue that employees often have small impact over their level of job satisfaction, because big companies have different range of factors which are influencing employees. For example, organizational ground rules that require each and every employee to follow them. By following those rules, we are losing an aspect of motivation that could lead towards innovation.

Entrepreneurial companies have bigger percentage of enthusiasm and motivation compared to an academic community where workforce is chained with hierarchy and rules to follow (Macey and Schneider, 2008). Different views towards employee motivation and engagement can be seen as "involving feeling positive about your job as well as being

prepared to go the extra mile to make sure you do your job to the best of your ability", Christensen-Huges and Rog (2008). By identifying the key factors or motivational drivers of employee engagement combined with level of trust or relationship between company and employees we are creating an environment in which standard hierarchy is removed and new free environment is build.

Healthy communication is one of the strongest approaches towards employee motivation and enthusiasm. The standard pyramid of hierarchy is disappearing but in some companies it is still crucial for staying alive. Empowering communication from the top downwards and from the bottom upwards, including each and every department into communication pool from which we are creating equality among the employee workforce. Building sense of trust and credibility, companies are not hiding things from their employees rather being open and ready to communicate Kristof (1996), May et al. (2004).

After having sense of friendly atmosphere the healthy company's next step is satisfaction of their workforce. By building close links between co-workers and providing them with needed resources required for them to undertake job duties, company is not just utilizing employee engagement but also maximizing employee potentials and leading them towards their peak performance. Next approach which is used in business environment is connected to problem-solving and connecting it with creativity Kim et al. (2009) and Karatepe and Olugbade (2009).

The purpose of implementing healthy working environment into companies' culture is about "emotional share of wallet" (Journal of Business Strategy, 2013). It drives the organization into meaningful, long term relationship between employers and employees. Second aspect towards employee motivation is the sweet spot which is the crossroads between employees' skill set, aspirations towards work and given value which is sourced from organization culture.

In order to drive employees into the sweet spot the employer should answer three key questions: what is the motivation of an employee to remain loyal and engaged in every day working environment. After finding the key element which keeps employees inside one organization for a longer period company is attacking second problem which is related to time of engagement. Organization needs to find a way to keep their employees happy and motivated from day to day tasks. Workforce needs a reason for coming back into organization and push themselves to go extra mile with each interaction (Smith, 2008; Gibbons, 2006).

The key problem to solve is how to train workforce in the field in which they are performing the best of their abilities. In other words, what is defining company itself in order to build a healthy working environment to their workers? In this way an organization can place each and every employee into his or her sweet spot and they can maximize their "emotional wallet shares", (Journal of Business Strategy, 2013).

Measuring employee engagement is hard and related to research done (Conway and Monks, 2008; Demerouti et al., 2001; Kim et al., 2009; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003) three main concerns were raised. First obstacle which was encountered was connected with a mission of connecting employees with their purpose or job. After finding purpose for each employee, the company is required to redefine and adjust working tasks towards employees and their preferences in order to nurture their engagement. Second challenge was related to the workplace and its relationship. Are employees well connected and working as a unit or do they avoid each other, which is again creating certain problems and keeping workforce away from performing in a right way. Last encounter was questioning how the organization provides the resources that employees need for efficient performance. What are the main resources needed in order to keep working tasks going smoothly and without problems?

Number one factor for achieving employee engagement after answering previously mentioned sets of questions relates to recruitment process. Is it true what Herb Kelleher says

that today companies should hire for attitude and train their employees for knowledge? Second factor towards employee motivation is creation of authentic relationships. Employees can feel which kind of environment is set in the organization. Unauthentic atmosphere and relationships do not contribute to the health of an organization and they can be detected almost immediately. Third component is personal attributes of a specific employee. Namely, what are they brining into the company, which set of skills and attributes, etc. And finally, it is all about communication, which combined with engagement, equals enthusiasm (Amabile and Kramer, 2011). This brings us to the importance of having enthusiastic employees in our organizations. This paper will address the issues of location, age and sub-culture influence on the level of engagement.

The location component in this paper is related to geographical working environment. The paper will test two different working environments in Croatia: Zagreb and Dubrovnik. The choice of the city of Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, presents itself as being an urban city. Moreover, the city of Zagreb is the business oriented town with a sub-culture of everyday business; it is more exposed (and closer) to the EU standards of living and doing business than the coastal cities. The city of Dubrovnik, which is a hospitality business-oriented city, one of the well-known tourist destinations in Croatia and across the world, has been chosen due to its geographical distance from the city of Zagreb and its confined geo-position.

The age component is related towards seniority level in companies. After conducting focus groups with middle management, senior management, academic faculty and staff the author of this paper will compare their views of employee engagement with entry level workforce. Questioning what they expect from their future employers for enhancing their motivation, engagement and enthusiasm regarding the job which they will obtain (Kropivšek et al. 2011).

In the secondary literature research, the author focused on the topics such as studying different approaches towards employee motivation, willingness to exceed expectations and enthusiasm based on geographic location, culture and age components. In order to close the gap between employers' and employees' understanding of engagement at work, this paper suggests the following:

Hypothesis 0 – There is no difference in employee engagement based on the age, location and different sub-culture belonging.

Hypothesis 1 – There is a significant difference in the level of engagement between different age groups (seniority level).

Hypothesis 2 – There is a positive impact on employee engagement based on geographical location of the organization.

Hypothesis 3 – There is no impact on employee engagement based on sub-culture in which organization is doing business.

Because of the need to create desirable working environment from which both employer and employee will benefit and mutually rise towards success. In the next section, the author will try to gather primary research data to validate the hypothesis and try to answer the above mentioned research questions.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Procedures

After examination of 20 different motivational factors, used from the previous research that was done (Conway and Monks, 2008; Demerouti et al., 2001; Kim et al., 2009; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003) the researcher decided to track top 5 and bottom 5 motivational

factors for both groups, students from Zagreb and students from Dubrovnik in order to find in which measure these motivational factors will overlap and in which two different groups will disagree. Also the same approach was done for industry people by trying to match top 5 and bottom 5 motivational drivers among two groups of professionals operating among two different locations and subcultures.

The primary objective of this study was to close the gap between employers and employees based on twenty different motivational factors used for enhancing employee motivation and progress towards better working environment. Motivational factors combined physical factors with emotional atmosphere. To meet the study objectives, questionnaire with 5 point Likert scale was selected as the most appropriate method, enabling the researcher to reach bigger population. Data for this research paper were collected from 60 senior students at RIT Croatia college, divided among two campuses; one from Zagreb and second one from Dubrovnik. Senior students are very crucial sample for this project because they are newly educated workforce which is entering into the world of business with fresh understanding of what they will seek for during their work time.

With the assistance of the RIT Croatia faculty in the first wave 60 students were randomly selected and were asked to participate in the study. They were informed that the questionnaire sought to the better understanding of employee engagement factors and that all data provided were confidential and anonymous. Questionnaires were distributed to 60 students along with a brief cover letter explaining the survey procedures, participation guidelines and study purpose with a response rate of 100%. Students were chosen on a principle of covering all study programs so groups included were students from: IT, IHSM and IB programs.

Second wave of questioning, constructed with the same motivational drivers was distributed to the industry professionals with a purpose of seeing how industry people will

rank these 20 different motivational drivers and which ones do they consider important for employee engagement. The focus of this research paper was on head office employees, rather than frontline staff. This research is concerned with the experience of individual employees with keeping employees engaged and involving their employees through organizational tasks which contributes to understanding of true engaged workplace.

For this research paper 6 industry professionals participated in the survey including three different industries, hotels, restaurants and academia. Businesses were chosen on a principle of the same concept that were implemented in Dubrovnik and Zagreb. The purpose of testing culture and location components and their impact on working environment.

After matching industry professionals' responses with those from students, the final sample included 66 valid questionnaires. Of the 66 participants including Zagreb and Dubrovnik, 63% were female and 37% male. In addition, non-response bias was examined to enhance validity of the responds. The results indicated that there was no significant difference across received questionnaires based on age, culture and location factors.

Measures

In this survey all motivational factors were measured with 5 Likert scale model written in English. One standing for not important at all and five being essential. Since majority of the participants were Croatian, appropriate translation was done and participants were able to choose between taking survey in English or Croatian. Furthermore, for the research to be successful, consultations with mentor and experts from the academia were done prior to distribution of the questionnaire.

Control Variables

Additionally, questionnaire distributed among students had four variables measuring geographic location, gender, program of studying and year level. For industry people

variables were set based on location, gender and industry. The purpose of eliminating invalid questionnaires and keeping the relevant data in cycle of research.

RESULTS

The following section gives examples, as drawn from the survey data collected. As identified, the aim of this research paper is to explore different approaches towards employee engagement with 20 different motivational drivers. Key factors to engagement and disengagement are identified, specifically discrepancies among different employees, cultures and working environments. In doing so, this research paper presents an increasingly fine-grained understanding of employees as stakeholders inside the organization.

Top 5 motivational factors for Zagreb students (Table 1, Appendix)

After asking students to rank 20 different motivational factors which are combined from tangible and intangible factors 30 students out of 30 ranked workloads as number one most important motivational driver.

The second motivational driver which they found out crucial for motivation is Professional development which 29 students out of 30 ranked with a high score. Possibility for promotion was placed onto third place which 29 out of 30 students also ranked with a high score.

Effective Communication is followed next with 28 students agreeing with its importance, and at the end job security followed with 27 out of 30 student votes. From these results students in Zagreb are more interested into intangible factors such as atmosphere rather than being attracted with more tangible factors.

Bottom motivational drivers for Zagreb students (Table 2, Appendix)

When students were asked what is the least important motivational driver, 28 out of 30 students immediately ranked fixed salary as the first one which is killing motivation among

workers. Second one is recognition inside the company with 27 out of 30 student votes, with a meaning that they are less willing to decide for themselves they are willing to let this job to other employees.

Mentorship program was placed into third place by 16 out of 30 student votes. Ability to travel is the next motivational driver which Zagreb students consider unimportant in a process of employee engagement by 15 votes out of 30.

Top 5 motivational drivers for Dubrovnik students (Table 1, Appendix)

Dubrovnik students were asked the same questions as Zagreb students and their number one motivational factor is Effective Communication among employees with 28 out of 30 votes. Which is followed by workload on the second place with 27 students agreeing out of 30 participants. Dubrovnik students showed different approach by choosing third motivational driver which is job security and stability by 25 out of 30 students.

These students are seeking for more secure jobs and they are not willing to rapidly move from one job to another. Fourth motivational driver is professional development and possibility for promotion with the same amount of students agreeing 24 out of 30.

Bottom motivational drivers for Dubrovnik students (Table 2, Appendix)

Dubrovnik students consider Ability to travel as the least motivational driver with 29 out of 30 votes; which students don't see as potential for workers to bond and make connections. Mentorship program was followed with 28 out of 30 student votes as motivational driver which they don't see important. Third place was saved for recognition inside the company with 17 out of 30 student votes. The last motivational driver voted with 15 out of 30 students is fixed salary.

Zagreb and Dubrovnik students agreed

When students were asked to fill in the questionnaire they were separated and there is no possibility that data could be matched. Interesting data which the researcher found out that

students agreed upon 5 motivational drivers. Two motivational drivers are considered crucial for motivation at work and three were explained as not important or these groups don't see them important for their motivation.

Both Dubrovnik and Zagreb students are seeking for relations with their colleagues, they both expect effective communication among co-workers. Which is sign of intangible atmosphere being crucial in employee satisfaction and performance. Ability to travel, fixed salary and performance reviews both sides ranked as not important and they don't see them as motivation which can bring them satisfaction.

Top 3 motivational drivers for Zagreb industry professionals (Table 3, Appendix)

Industry professionals were given the same time and questions to fill in and based on 20 motivational factors they ranked them in the following order. On the first place relations with colleagues then workload among colleagues. Third place was reserved for professional development. All 3 industry professionals from Zagreb agreed upon these motivational drivers.

Bottom 3 motivational drivers for Zagreb industry professionals (Table 4, Appendix)

Recognition inside the company was ranked as number one unimportant motivational driver by 2 out of 3 industry professionals, followed by ability to travel again with agreeing 2 out of 3 professionals. Fixed Salary was also considered as not important in motivation process among 2 out of 3 industry professionals.

Top 3 motivational drivers for Dubrovnik industry professionals (Table 3, Appendix)

Industry people from Dubrovnik ranked workload and type of work as the biggest motivation for workers by all agreeing 3 out of 3 participants. Workload was also put as one of the good motivational drivers and professional development with the same agreeing rate.

Bottom 3 motivational drivers for Dubrovnik industry professionals (Table 4, Appendix)

Industry people from Dubrovnik ranked recognition inside the company as the least motivation for workers by 2 out of 3 agreeing, fixed salary was second with the same agreeing rate. The last one ranked was ability to travel.

Zagreb and Dubrovnik Industry professionals agreed

Professional from both cities agreed that effective communication and co-relations with colleagues are very important and engaging among employees. Recognition inside the company, ability to travel and fixed salary are not important and employees are not engaged based on these factors.

Students VS Industry Professionals

Students and industry professionals are both agreeing that intangible factors are the most important for employee engagement. Where emotional atmosphere, relations with colleagues and effective communication are factors which are crucial for one working environment to succeed and be engaged. After detail examination of received data researcher can see how students and industry professionals are sharing the same opinions and concerns about employee engagement.

Hypothesis Testing

At the beginning of this research paper four different hypothesis were made in order to try to close the gap between employers and employees based on three different factors; age, location and sub-culture.

Hypothesis 0 – There is no difference in employee engagement based on the age, location and different sub-culture belonging. The hypothesis was partially confirmed.

Hypothesis 1 – There is a significant difference in the level of engagement between different age groups (seniority level). The hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis 2 – There is a positive impact on employee engagement based on geographical location of the organization. The hypothesis confirmed.

Hypothesis 3 – There is no impact on employee engagement based on sub-culture in which organization is doing business. The Hypothesis was partially confirmed.

After questionnaire was carefully distributed and all data were collected from two different groups which are operating on two locations, Zagreb and Dubrovnik. The closes hypothesis was hypothesis number 2 “There is a positive impact on employee engagement based on geographical location of the organization”. Both groups were agreeing with factors of employee relationships which are showed as crucial for motivation and further development. Zagreb students and professionals are more flexible and ready to change the jobs in shorter term. Where students and industry professionals from Dubrovnik seek for more stability and security in their careers.

Zagreb students and professionals seek for factors of possibilities to upscale and get more feedback from their co-workers. Dubrovnik people are more secure in a way that they seek for distance and creativity towards decision making. They are more willing to stand alone instead of listening and waiting for rules to be made. Both groups agreed that workload and ability to travel are not important in motivation process and those two factors were the most surprising because of millennials are constantly traveling and more willing to accept jobs which are offering mobility and an opportunity to gain more international experience, which this group denied.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to gain insights into the employee motivation through different motivational drivers in order to find and close the gap between employers and employees with a purpose of creating more engaged and successful working environment.

Accordingly, the findings of this study shed further light on how motivational drivers can be used as a tool to enhance employee engagement, employee retention and work performance as suggested by Aguinis and Glavas (2012).

Furthermore, a secondary aim of this study was to incorporate the findings into a framework that could be used for future research. Thus, top 5 or bottom 5 motivational drivers could be used in research to close the gap between employers and employees' perception of positive motivation. This is the first time that research was done on Croatian market of workers combining the students' experiences through co-ops with industry professionals and their experiences.

In brief student and industry professionals' responses appear to indicate that employee engagement is based on relationships which should be developed among employees. It is more about having an open communication and trust among colleagues then being offered with more physical compensations. If colleagues have mutual interests and trust among themselves, positive environment is being created and workplace environment is being improved through work performance.

Furthermore, the findings also suggest that motivational drivers can be designed to meet the needs of the organization generally and, more specifically, the needs of workers. This means that managers or business owners can leverage employee motivation to mutual benefits for organization and employees as well.

Theoretical implications

In summary, five mutual motivational drivers were discovered related to employer-employee motivation process: Emotional Atmosphere, Effective Communication, Co-relations, Workload and the Feedback. More importantly these five motivational factors can be represented in terms of essentials for success. These five motivational drivers were categorized into positive emotions, social capital and task related skills.

Positive emotions are related to the first two drivers. Having positive attitude and motivation towards job which one person is obtaining is the representation of the highest engagement which one company can get from their workers. Social capital is related to co-relations and finding a purpose inside the organization and feeling of belonging. Third aspect related workload and feedback from other colleagues and supervisors. When workers are task oriented they have a clear path which they need to follow and it usually takes them towards success. When workers have appropriate feedback in a terms of improvement employee engagement and satisfaction goes up and health environment is being created.

Practical implications

In this study, the dynamics involving 20 different employee motivational drivers have been uncovered. Emotional atmosphere combined with effective communication can assist in better understanding of employer versus employee mind-set related to engagement. The evidence that future workforce is being more attracted by healthy environment filled with trust and mutual respect shows the direction in which HR managers should shift their recruiting skills and motivational programs in order to keep their employees happy and engaged. However, with this information being shared, the question to be raised is why employers are still striving away from successful employee motivation if the both sides are sharing the same opinion towards effective engagement.

While these findings have indirect implications with companies which are not taking actions to prevent employee dissatisfaction in order to strive for better working conditions, employees are sharing the valet of motivation. Every single candidate showed the will towards motivation by being attracted with intangible side of environment which is hard to fake and control at the same time. It appears that benefits to the employer-employee relationship are more recognized by being involved and having the sense of belonging then being compensated with material drivers such as bonuses, trips or money rewards.

Limitations and future research

There are several limitations to this study. First one is related to motivational drivers, author picked twenty out of fifty different motivational drivers. In order to continue with this research paper other 30 motivational drivers should be included in the study as well.

Second limitation is lack of time, originally, the author planned to conduct focus groups with industry professionals in order to better understand what industry people consider as crucial to motivate their employees. How working environment is being created from their perspective and in which measure they are willing to negotiate the terms of engagement with their workforce. By moderating focus groups author could get more information than from questionnaire which didn't had an option of open discussion.

Further research could consider investigating employee perception of benefits accruing from engaged working environment. Furthermore, a comparison between employer-employee satisfaction could be observed within the same motivational drivers. In addition, a bigger scope of benefits could be considered with including the cost-benefit analysis. The next step for this research paper could be implication of given results in one working environment and use method of observation to test results and to see if working environment is changing when employer and employee are both included and willing to engaged in development of successful working environment. This method will provide further opportunities for research.

CONCLUSION

This research focuses on two different groups who are at the moment less connected but very soon becoming essential for doing business and keeping an organization engaged and productive. An examination of the subsequent differences within these two groups, while for a broader understanding of this paper, presents valuable area for further research and actual examination of the motivational factors on real organization.

Engagement is often discussed without defining difference between various employees, assuming that employee sight of an organization is the same as their opinions. However, with employee engagement existing across a spectrum, the traditional one size fits all approach to managing employees must be customizing to a level of personalized approaches.

As the author of this paper mentioned previously engaging employees is an ongoing process and sometimes very sensitive. We have different groups of employees which have different wants and needs in order to satisfy them we need to create detailed employee selection. Given the power of employee motivation and engagement on workplace behaviours, engaged workforce plays a significant role in organizational survival and success.

The author concluded that empowering colleague relationships and communication positively influence work engagement, which in favour decreases the frequency of underperformance. he actual need of having satisfied workforce should be desirable to move towards the next step. And that step is having fair, positive and equal working environment with open sense of communication. The author hopes that his findings will stimulate future research and advance understanding of the role of empowering engaged workforce and its importance in everyday business.

Appendix

Table 1 (Top 5 Motivational Factors for Dubrovnik and Zagreb Students)

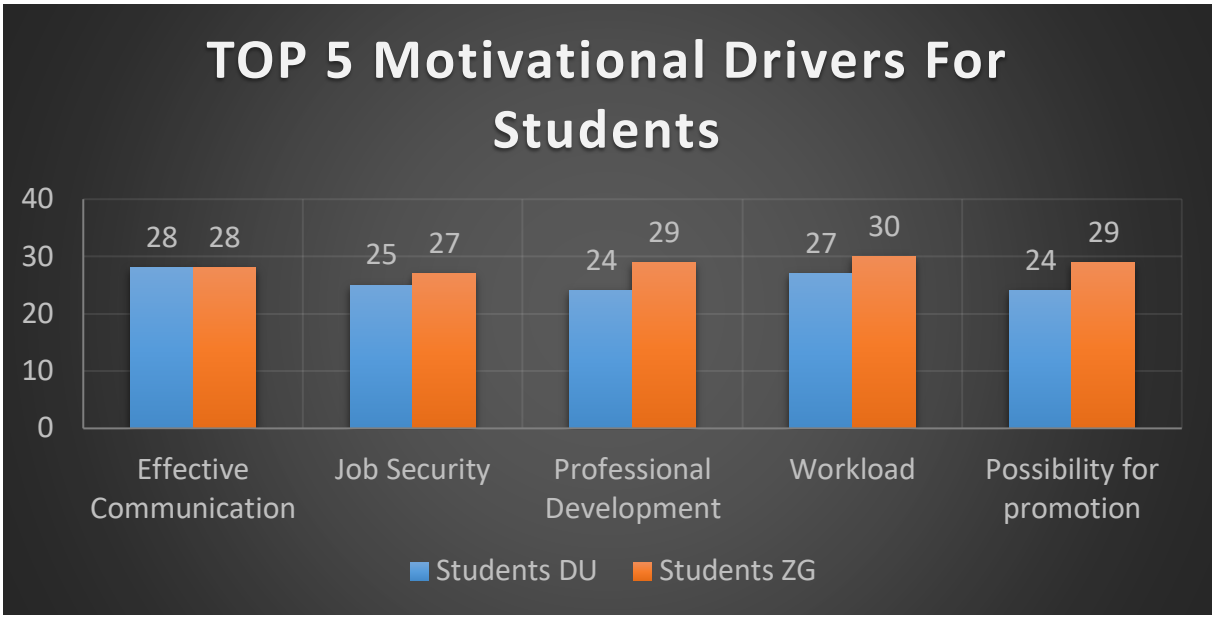


Table 2 (Bottom Motivational Drivers for Dubrovnik and Zagreb Students)

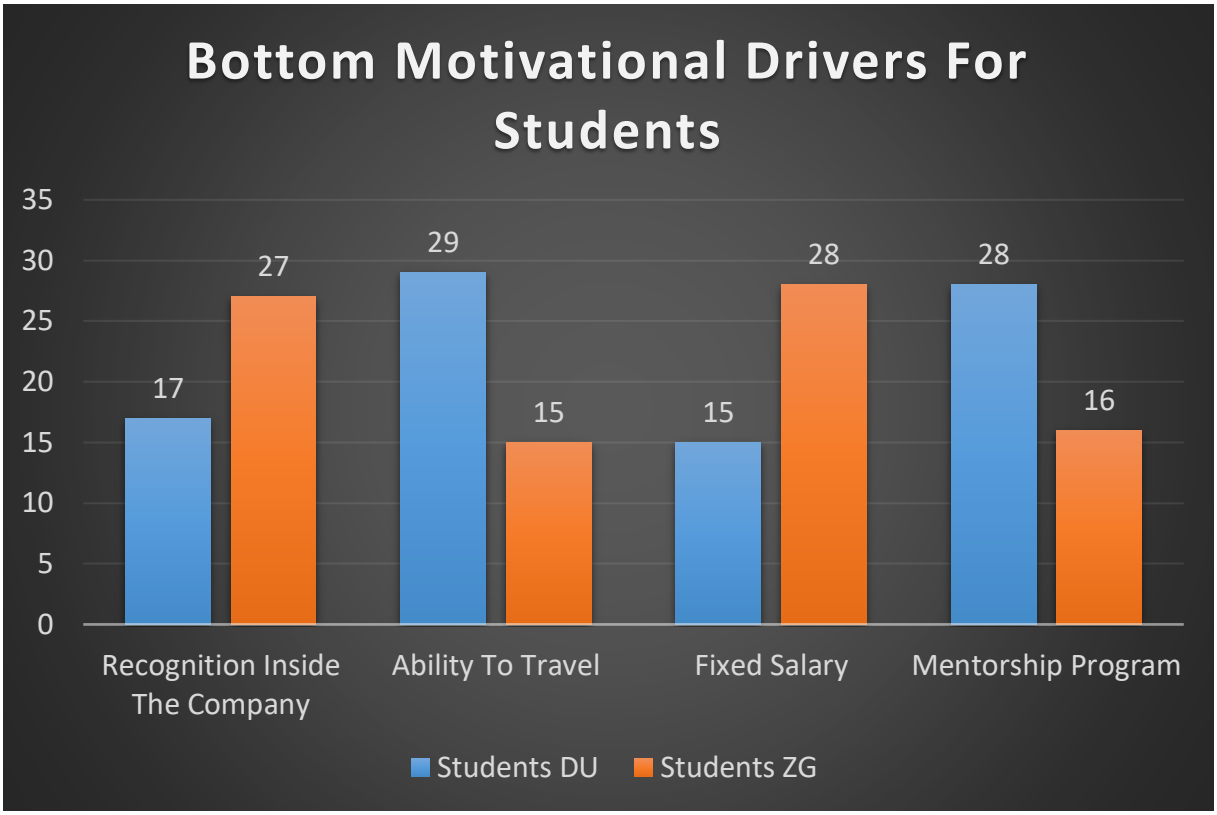


Table 3 (Top 3 Motivational Drivers for Industry Processionals)

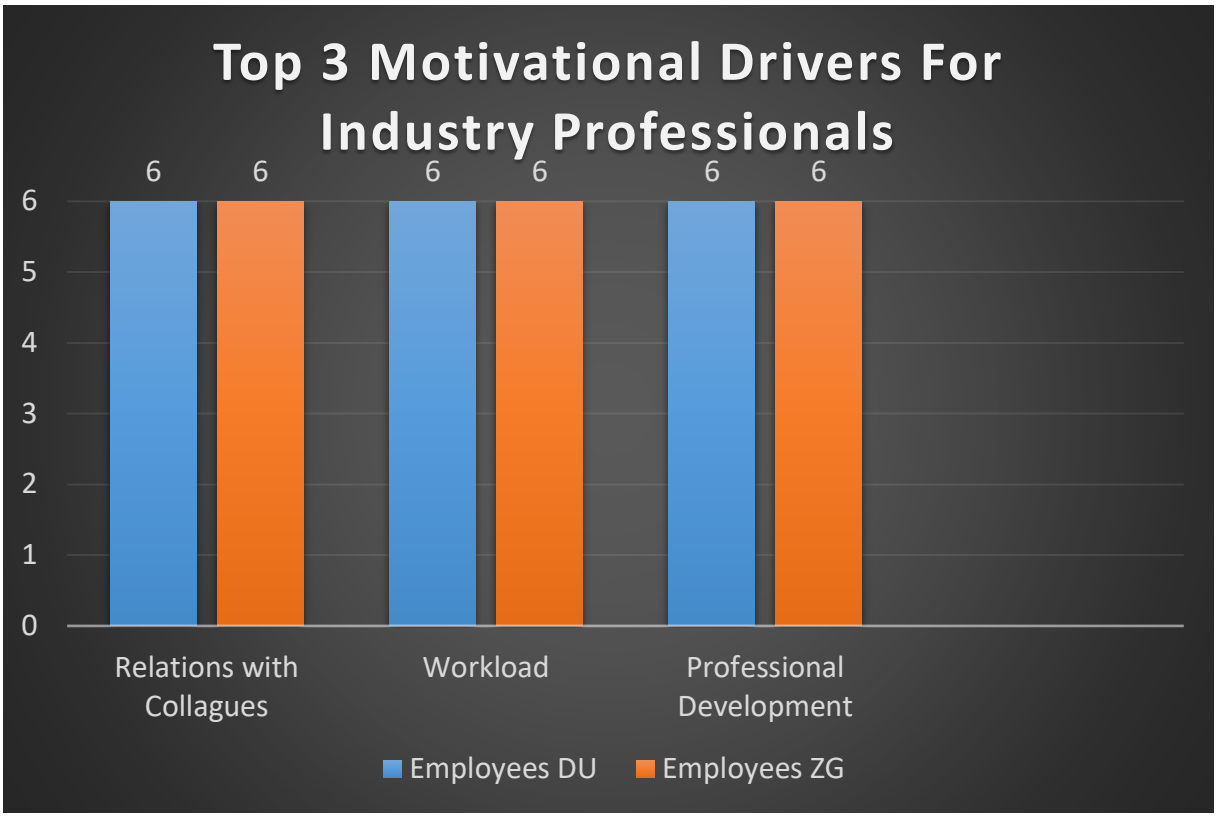


Table 4 (Bottom 3 Motivational Drivers for Industry Professionals)

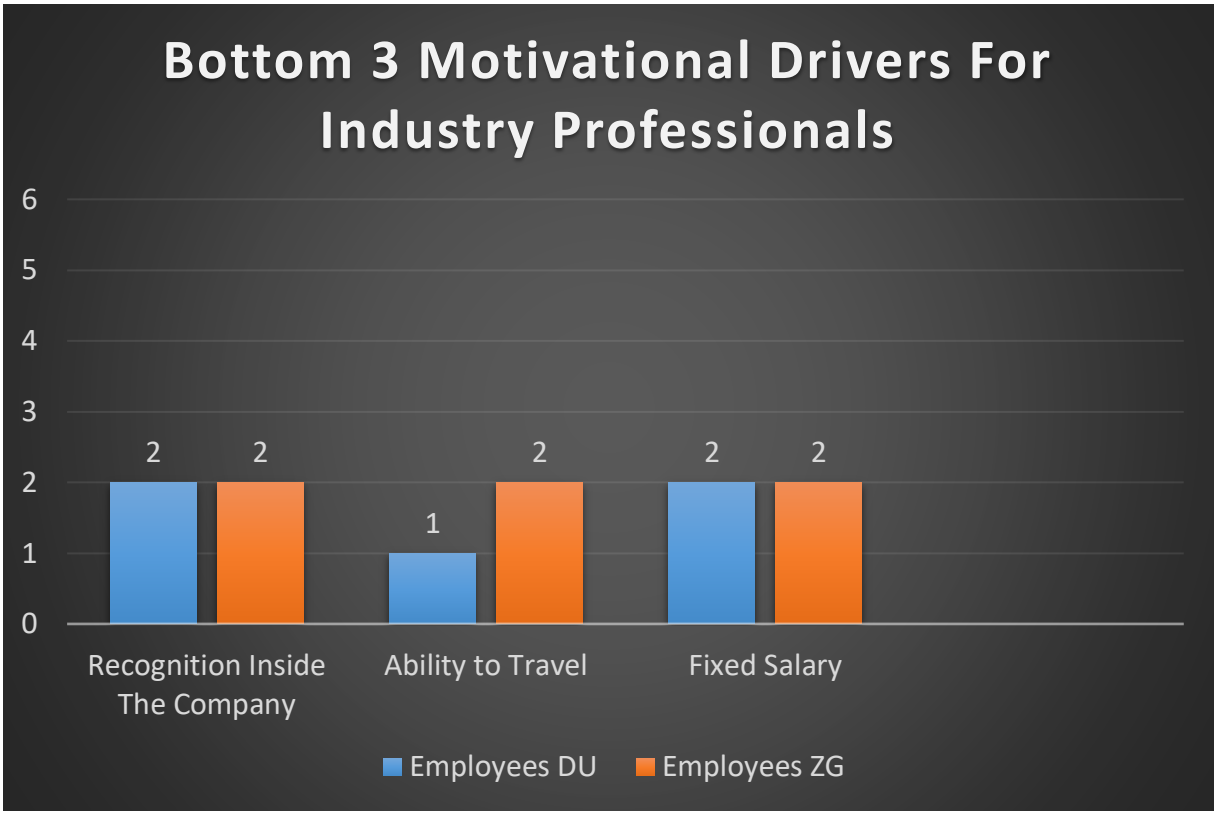


Table 4 (Student Questionnaire Sample)

What's important to you at work?

Campus Dubrovnik Zagreb

Gender Male Female

Program IT IB HTM

Year level 1 2 3 4

When you think about your future job, how important to you are each of the following aspects? One stands for not important at all and five stands for essential.

		Not Important at all	Somewhat Important	Neutral	Very Important	Essential
	Question	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1	Emotional atmosphere in the workplace					
2	Relations with colleagues					
3	Opportunity for extra financial compensation					
4	Job security and stability					
5	Effective communication among colleagues					
6	Workload and type of work					
7	Feedback from my supervisor					
8	Working hours					
9	Possibility for promotion					
10	Recognition inside the company					
11	Creativity towards decision making					
12	Social benefits (Health insurance)					
13	Level of stress in the workplace					
14	Corporate culture (Mission, Vision, Beliefs)					
15	Opportunities for professional development					
16	Ability to travel (Business trips)					
17	Vacation time					
18	Mentorship program					
19	Fixed salary					
20	Performance reviews					

Thank you for your input. Niko Katušić, 4th year student, RIT Croatia Dubrovnik

Table 5 (Industry Professional Questionnaire Sample)

How to effectively engage your employees at work?

Location	Dubrovnik	Zagreb	
Gender	Male	Female	
Industry	Hotels	Restaurants	Academia

What do you think which factors are the most crucial for employee engagement at work? One stands for not important at all and five stands for essential.

		Not Important at all	**Somewhat Important**	**Neutral**	**Very Important**	**Essential**
	Question	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1	Emotional atmosphere in the workplace					
2	Relations with colleagues					
3	Opportunity for extra financial compensation					
4	Job security and stability					
5	Effective communication among colleagues					
6	Workload and type of work					
7	Feedback from my supervisor					
8	Working hours					
9	Possibility for promotion					
10	Recognition inside the company					
11	Creativity towards decision making					
12	Social benefits (Health insurance)					
13	Level of stress in the workplace					
14	Corporate culture (Mission, Vision, Beliefs)					
15	Opportunities for professional development					
16	Ability to travel (Business trips)					
17	Vacation time					
18	Mentorship program					
19	Fixed salary					
20	Performance reviews					

Thank you for your input. Niko Katušić, 4th year student, RIT Croatia Dubrovnik

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