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## **The self-esteem and work motivation of Romanian employees in the Covid-19**

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**Abstract.** The paper entitled **The self-esteem and work motivation of romanian employees in the Covid-19 pandemic** started from the interest in the field of work psychology and human resources management, seeking to find out the correlational aspects between work motivation and self-esteem amongst public and private employees in Romania. The purpose of the paper was to establish a diagnosis and suggest strategies to improve the existing situation by implementing programs dedicated to motivational stimulation and assessing their impact in other addressed fields.

**Keywords.** Covid-19 pandemic, work motivation, employee self-esteem

### **1. The influence of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the economic and social activity in Romania**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the COVID19 infection a pandemic, classifying it as an international public health emergency. This is a crisis in the health and socio-economic system, which has required action in all sectors of our society.

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact suffered by a sudden and almost general deterioration of the macroeconomic context and business environment, severely affected the extremely fragile balance of the Romanian labor market, under the action of divergent influences, at the confluence of determinants of labor demand and supply.

If the economic aspects of the crisis, generated by COVID-19, are unprecedented and the psychological and social effects of this pandemic will last, they will require a very different set of responses from those used to counter previous crises. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic will have a negative impact on the economy given that the economic activity has been reduced by direct government action and decisions to suspend business activity to limit the spread of the virus among many states, including our country. Both in the case of suspended employment contracts and in the case of those terminated as a result of the COVID pandemic19, the effects are extremely complex. A particular Eurofound study specifies that those who have become

unemployed as a result of the COVID-19 crisis suffer not only from financial insecurity but also from an increased level of emotional vulnerability and a state of social anxiety.

The above mentioned information highlight the need for psychological intervention and social protection of employees in the context of physical distancing, declining incomes, reduced social contacts and social and economic insecurity.

## **2. Self-esteem and work motivation: conceptual dimensions**

### **2.1. Self-esteem**

According to Rosenberg's well-established opinion, self-esteem refers to „the general self-assessment of skills of the individual, constituting that type of descriptive self-assessment and conceptualization that individuals obtain and maintain about themselves.” (Rosenberg, 1965).

From this perspective, self-esteem is a personal assessment, a form of reflection regarding what individuals think about themselves.

To humanistic psychologists, the self is even more important, for one of their primary concerns is with subjective experience- with what the individual thinks and feels right here and now. According to Carl Rogers (1902-1987) a major figure in the humanistic movement, a crucial fact of this subjective experience is the self or self-concept.

According to Korman's conception, self-esteem is a reflection of the degree to which the individual perceives himself/herself as a "competent individual who meets the needs" (Korman, 1970, p. 32), a situation in which individuals endowed with high self-esteem experience a sense of personal adequacy accompanied by "a sense of satisfaction about the past." (Korman, 1966, p. 479)

More than a reflection of a knowledge of the self, the authors Pelham and Swann noticed the fact that „self-esteem also consists of an affective component, a feeling of pleasure or displeasure, translated in terms of the fact that people with high self-esteem appreciate who and what they are.” (Pelham and Swann, 1989).

In other words, people with a global self-esteem agree, according to Rosenberg, with statements such as "I am a valuable person, on an equal footing with others" or "I am satisfied with myself" (Rosenberg, 1965, widely used tool for self-esteem measurement).

According to Pierce and Gardner, "the construction of self-esteem is usually conceptualized as a hierarchical phenomenon" (Pierce, J. L., & Gardner, D. G. 2004). As such, we find it on different levels of specificity, usually seen, as Simpson and Boyle argued, in terms of global self-esteem and specific self-esteem according to the task or situation (Simpson & Boyle, 1975).

As a multi-faceted conceptualization of the self, researchers generally agree with the idea that self-esteem „can develop around other dimensions, such as the social self, the physical self, the academic self and moral one” (Korman, 1970; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976).

Most of the existing opinions on self-esteem, in general, and on self-esteem in the context of work and organization, „come from research focused on global self-esteem” (Brockner, 1988). „It was only in the past eighteen to twenty years that research has focused on the organizational conceptualization of the self” (Pierce, J. L., & Gardner, D. G. 2004).

Regarding the content of self-esteem, there are theories that support a one-dimensional interpretation and other theories that support a multidimensional approach. Taking into account the complexity of the studied concept, we bring into discussion the perspective that targets all its aspects.

Therefore, self-esteem is built from the evaluation made on each of the following dimensions:

- a. „The emotional self - identified as a representation of the individual regarding the degree of control s/he has over his/her own emotions and impulsivity and his/her degree of self-control which is transposed into the ability to organize activities.
- b. The social self – the component that focusses on the representation of the interaction with others and the feeling of social belonging.
- c. The professional self - refers to representations, behaviors and performance at work. The perception of one's own competencies is incorporated in the image that the person builds about his/her own persona.
- d. The physical self - includes body image, perception of the opinions of others about physical appearance and physical and athletic skills.
- e. The anticipatory self - the way in which a person looks to the future and the attitude towards what awaits him/her there.” (Macarie et al., 2007).
- f.

## **2.2. Work Motivation**

Regarding the work motivation, Mafini, C. & Nobukhosi D. (2014) observed „statistically significant relationships between job satisfaction and four factors of extrinsic motivation: payment, quality of work, supervision and teamwork. The relationship with the promotion proved, according to the study of the cited authors, to be insignificant, but the study found the establishment of a statistically significant relationship with life satisfaction”.

Human resource managers most often meet their organizational objectives through the work of employees. Therefore, managers must have highly efficient and productive staff members. Although many factors contribute to productivity, workplace performance is considered to be the most influential. „Performance itself is a function of four variables: ability, task understanding, environment, and motivation.” (Mumin O., 2017). Human resources and their management staff are the source of competitive advantage for the business, rather than access to capital or the use of technology. Therefore, it is logical to suggest that attention should be paid to the nature of human resources and how the entire management ensures staff performance through motivation schemes, as motivation affects the behavior and performance of human resources and, consequently, the performance of the organization. „While many organizations are clearly aware of the need to improve employee performance, there are many who have not yet motivated their employees to achieve such a goal. However, a number of companies gain a competitive advantage by establishing effective motivational practices for overall business performance.” (Sakovska, 2012).

In most organizations, „current leaders are aware that much needs to be done to ensure that they have a concentrated and highly competitive workforce” (Pratheepkanth, 2011).

„Encouraging employees to achieve high performance requires considerable effort and concentration of the top management to a large extent in motivating employees to give their best.” (Mumin, O., 2017)

Employee motivation is the best tool in the company's efforts to gain competitive advantage and remain competitive. In this context, Torrington, et al. (2009) „warns that there is no reward system, intrinsic and extrinsic, that can achieve all the characteristics mentioned above, so that all employees perform well in an organization at the same time, because the human being does not perceive things in a uniform manner”.

The above mentioned is the reason why the authors recommend to managers to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each reward system and decide where to focus on employee performance. Therefore, for organizations that face many fluctuations and pressures to achieve their goals, it is necessary „to address the motivation and performance of employees

in their development processes with the understanding of effective changes that will give them the desired performance to achieve the organization's goals.” (Khan, Farooq and Ullah, 2010)

Numerous studies have suggested that „a person's self-esteem, crystallized around professional and organizational experiences, plays a significant role in determining employee motivation, attitudes, and work-related behaviors” (Pierce, J. L., & Gardner, D. G. 2004).

Self-esteem clearly influences the behavior of individuals and their performance both at work and in life in general. Researchers have shown that self-esteem is an important concept that can be used in an organizational context in order to measure the impact of the organization on employee behavior and performance.” (Sumanasiri E.G.T., Yajid M.S.A., Khatibi A., 2016).

„Motivation plays a key role in employee performance in any organization” (Calder, 2006). Employee motivation has been a long-debated concept in human resource management and has attracted the attention of many researchers and practitioners as research topics (Calder, 2006). As a result, a lot of theories and approaches have been developed to explain the motivational nature of private and public sector employees.

The role of motivation on employee work performance in the public organization „was developed worldwide during human resource management as a tool, proposing to promote the efficiency and performance of the organization.” (Mumin O., 2017)

However, most studies on the role of employee motivation in workplace performance have few practical applications or offer such applications only to the private sector.

The identified problem is that, as a result of the effects of the latest financial crisis and sometimes mismanagement in the public sector, governments today, more than ever, need practical ways to motivate public sector employees to be productive. It is obtained “more with less” (Robbins et al., 2007).

When a family is under chronic stress and it goes untreated, the family becomes dysfunctional. A family can become dysfunctional for several reasons, including abuse, divorce, death of a family member, illness, money problems and alcoholism.

Many women who have been passive all their lives find difficulties in acting assertively on the job. They may feel they will be considered less feminine if they act assertively. Some men have difficulty in dealing with an assertive woman but this is more of the male's problem. Again, it is usually related to the man feeling threatened. Women can be both assertive and feminine without becoming aggressive, and in doing so will reduce their own stress.

### **3. Research methodology**

#### **3.1. Objectives and hypotheses**

**The objective** of this paper was to conduct a correlation study between self-esteem and work motivation of employees in public and private organizations in Romania, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The formulated hypotheses are:

H<sub>1</sub>. It is assumed that there are statistically significant differences in the self-esteem of public and private sector employees in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

H<sub>2</sub>. It is assumed that there are statistically significant differences in the coordinates of the motivation of public and private sector employees in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### **3.2. Sample presentation**

The sample on which the instruments were applied was one of convenience and included 79 participants, public and private sector employees, with the following characteristics:

-18.99% of the respondents were male and the difference was 81.01% female;

- 67.09% of the respondents are domiciled in urban areas, and 32.91% in rural areas;
- 64.56% of respondents are between 26 and 45 years old, while 31.65% are over 45 years old and only 3.1% between 18 and 25 years old;
- 72.2% of the persons included in the sample are married, 15.5% unmarried and 3.8% divorced;
- 74.268% of the participants in the study have at least one child and only 25.32% have not yet become parents;
- 59.49% have university studies, 29.911% postgraduate; only 7.259% graduated as a last form of high school and 3.8% postgraduate;
- 46,584% are employed in a public institution and 53,16% in a private institution, the distribution of the sample being approximately balanced;
- 75.95% work in the services sector, while in the mixed regime there are 13.92% of respondents, in trade 6.33%, and in production only 3.8%;
- 70.89% of the participants hold an executive position, while 29.11% hold a management position.

### 3.3. Presentation of the engaged instruments

The instruments on which this study was conducted are the Self-Esteem Questionnaire and the Motivational Dominance Questionnaire.

#### (a) 3.3.1. Self-Esteem Inventory

The first instrument that was applied to the analyzed sample aimed at quantifying self-esteem. A "Self-Esteem Inventory" was applied, this being a variant of the Toulouse Inventory, focused on 4 of the five dimensions, namely: the physical self, the emotional self, the social self and the professional self.

#### (b) 3.3.2. Motivational Dominance

For the evaluation of the motivational dominance we used the questionnaire "Motivational dominants" (Ticu C., 2004).

Open-ended question for the focus group: "What are the challenges of your profession that will cause you the greatest dissatisfaction or the greatest demotivation?". The open-ended question was asked in order to identify the factors that influence people in the public and private environment.

### 3.3. Research results

**H1. It is assumed that there are statistically significant differences in the self-esteem of public and private sector employees in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.**

In demonstrating this first hypothesis, we started from the presentation of descriptive statistics of the two subsamples in terms of self-esteem, continuing with the verification of the normal distribution of the variable "self-esteem" depending on the respondents to public or private.

Self-esteem score		Institution type: public / private	Statistics
Public	Mean		27.76
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	25.59
		Upper Bound	29.92
	5% Trimmed Mean		28.04
	Median		28.00
	Variance		42.189
	Std. Deviation		6.495

	Minimum		12
	Maximum		37
	Range		25
	Interquartile Range		10
	Skewness		-.562
	Kurtosis		-.293
Private	Mean		29.24
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	27.58
		Upper Bound	30.89
	5% Trimmed Mean		29.59
	Median		29.50
	Variance		28.235
	Std. Deviation		5.314
	Minimum		9
	Maximum		38
	Range		29
	Interquartile Range		7
	Skewness		-1.352
	Kurtosis		3.901

*Table no. 1. Descriptive self-esteem statistics by type of institution in which respondents are employed*

Following the generation of the starting indicators regarding the distribution of self-esteem scores, we concluded that at the level of the subsample of persons employed in the public environment, the average self-esteem score is 27.76 in the context of a standard deviation of 6,495, with a minimum score value. at self-esteem equal to 12 and maximum of 37, the value of the median being 28.

On the subsample of persons employed in the private sector, the average score obtained in the self-esteem assessment is equal to 29.24 in the context of a standard deviation of 5.314, with a minimum value of the self-esteem scores equal to 9 and a maximum of 38, the median value being of 29.50. It seems that there are a number of differences between the two subsamples, both in terms of the value of the average and the deviation, respectively the minimum and maximum values, but also the median of the scores obtained in the evaluation of self-esteem. In order to identify whether the existing differences are also significant, which we want to prove by hypothesis no. 1, we tested, for the beginning, the normality of the distribution (table 2).

		Tests of Normality					
		Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
Institution type		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Self-esteem score	Public	.110	37	.200*	.955	37	.145
	Private	.146	42	.024	.907	42	.002

\*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

*Table no. 2. Normality test of the self-esteem score for employees in public versus private institutions*

Following the application of the Kolmogorov-Smirnova normality test, there is a normal distribution for self-esteem of persons employed in the public environment and a non-normal distribution for persons employed in the private environment, context in which to test the first hypothesis of the study we will apply a nonparametric test, more precisely U Mann-Whitney (table 3).

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	Scor stima de sine
Mann-Whitney U	688.500
Wilcoxon W	1391.500
Z	-.872
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.383
a. Grouping Variable: Institution public-private	

*Table 3. Statistical testing of the hypothesis 1*

Analyzing the value of Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) equal to 0.383, higher than 0.05, it results that there is no statistically significant difference between the self-esteem of the two samples comprising persons employed in public and persons employed in private.

It was thus found that at the level of both groups investigated, self-esteem underwent changes and restructuring due to social and economic insecurity during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

On the other hand, it has been suggested on numerous occasions that a person's self-esteem, formed around professional and organizational experiences, plays a significant role in determining employees' motivation, attitudes and work-related behaviors.

A study conducted by Pierce, J. L. and Gardner, D. G. (2004) conducts a review of a decade of research in the field, „making a conceptualization of self-esteem, based on the organization of which the employee is part. The study shows that the sources of the organization's structure, the signals about value from the organization, as well as the conditions that have the role of consolidating success are predictors of self-esteem depending on the field of work - private and public”.

In addition, self-esteem based on organization is related to job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, motivation, citizen behavior, performance in the role assumed and intentions to change career direction, as well as other important attitudes and behaviors related to the organization. „The mentioned study identified a correlation between the self-esteem of the employees and the work environment in which they work.” (Pierce, JL, & Gardner, DG, 2004), without substantiating the existence of a statistically significant difference between the self-esteem of the employees. two samples - persons employed in the public sector and persons employed in the private sector.

**H<sub>2</sub>. It is assumed that there are statistically significant differences in the coordinates of the motivation of public and private sector employees in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.**

Because work motivation is quantified in the present study by the four factors: leadership, expertise, relationship and subsistence, we will test the four dimensions, through the perspective of the public and private environment (table 4).

Institution type	Leadership DM				Expertise DM				Relationship DM				Subsistence DM						
	N	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Deviation	
Public	37	5.222	5.625	1.000	7.000	1.601	37	5.814	6.375	1.000	7.000	1.646	37	5.766	6.500	1.000	7.000	1.656	
	37	5.378	5.875	1.000	7.000	1.604	42	5.440	6.438	2.250	7.000	1.347	42	5.476	5.750	2.125	7.000	1.362	
	42	5.476	5.750	2.125	7.000	1.362													
	42	5.476	5.750	2.125	7.000	1.362													
	42	5.476	5.750	2.125	7.000	1.362													
	42	5.476	5.750	2.125	7.000	1.362													

Table no. 4. Comparative presentation of the starting indices for the four factors of motivational dominance at work

The normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnova normality test shows a non-normal distribution for the scores related to the four motivational factors at work given by the value of Sig. below the 0.05 threshold.

	Institution type public-private	Tests of Normality					
		Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Leadership DM	Public	.186	37	.002	.862	37	.000
	Private	.218	42	.000	.833	42	.000
Expertize DM	Public	.302	37	.000	.700	37	.000
	Private	.236	42	.000	.729	42	.000
Relationship DM	Public	.290	37	.000	.711	37	.000
	Private	.180	42	.001	.828	42	.000
Subsistence DM	Public	.237	37	.000	.812	37	.000
	Private	.174	42	.003	.863	42	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table no. 5. The normality test of the four motivating factors for employees in public versus private institutions

It therefore follows that for the testing of Hypothesis 2 it is necessary to use a non-parametric test for independent samples, namely Kruskal-Wallis H.

The non-parametric testing of the four data sets (using the Kruskal-Wallis H test) shows that there are no significant differences between the results obtained by public and private

employees in terms of Leadership, Expertise, Subsistence and Relationship, in the context in which the Asymp values. Sig. are all greater than 0.05 (Table no. 6).

Test Statistics <sup>a,b</sup>				
	Leadership DM	Expertise DM	Relationship DM	Subsistence DM
Kruskal-Wallis H	.552	.014	.990	.000
df	1	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	.458	.905	.320	1.000
a. Kruskal Wallis Test				
b. Grouping Variable: Insitution type public-privat				

*Table no. 6. Application of the Kruskal-Wallis H. test at the level of the four motivating factors for employees in public versus private institutions*

One of the most controversial issues in public management is the motivation of civil servants. Often, civil servants express dissatisfaction with the lack of interest of the representatives of the Romanian administrative system regarding the issue of motivation. Besides the fact that it does not offer financial satisfaction, another problem of the public system is the fact that it does not offer professional satisfaction. None of the participants mentioned any experience related to promotion, recognition of merits, or appreciation from bosses or colleagues.” (Stănescu DF, Mateiana R. 2012)

#### **4. Conclusions and limitations of the research**

In Romania, changes related to the state of emergency and the state of alert during the Covid-19 Pandemic have tipped the balance of employment preferences to positions in the state apparatus. One of the main arguments during this period in Romania was job security. In the public sector, employees were not laid off because, as is well-known, the criteria are different, while private companies were more affected by the pandemic context - employees being sent into technical unemployment, non-essential positions being abolished and some of the private companies, especially the small ones and without financial power, soon becoming bankrupt.

As the results of the various job-related problems, working women often come down with psychological disturbances. Job related psychological stressors for the working woman are: fear of disapproval, either by men or other women, feeling of dependency on male coworkers or supervisors, need to submerge her own desires, fear of being aggressive or self-assertive and hence, being labeled unfeminine, fear of failure and fear of success.

We consider that the element of novelty, compared to other studies, in addition to the combination of the studied factors was the addition of the open question "*What are the challenges of your profession that will cause the greatest dissatisfaction or the greatest demotivation?*". The question was meant to identify the factors that influence people in the public and private environment in the direction of diminishing motivation in their workplace and thus to identify the sensitive points on which any improvement action can be directed.

Some of the answers received were as surprising to the research team as the respondents were surprised to receiving such a direct and specific question.

Among the identified reasons for dissatisfaction were: lack of professionalism, professional incompetence, incorrectness, discrepancy between workload and benefits, frequent legislative changes, capping, economic instability and legislative vacuum, wrong changes in the system, stress, limitation, lack of preparation and verticality, lack of principles and lies, fruitless work,

team, lack of respect between participants in the activity, very short, urgent deadlines, many legislative changes in the economic and financial field, stopping or blocking projects started by the previous government, contradictory fiscal measures, the mentality of the people they interact with, online work, excessive workload and additional tasks, not directly related to professional activity, interaction with very selfish people, incomprehensible, arrogant, lack of seriousness and partial involvement, the lack of discipline and of appreciation from the other members, the bureaucracy, the lack of sets of rules / working procedures valid for everyone in the same field as well as the lack of involvement from the local community.

In this context, we consider that it becomes necessary to periodically assess the expectations and perception of employees at work by members of the human resources department of the public or private institution in which they are employed to identify elements of discomfort and demotivation, influencing organizational performance.

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