

Study: “Why Do We Work?”
(2024)
FSPAC
CSLDI

Introduction

The study “Why Do We Work?” investigates the perspectives of students (future employees) and employees in the Cluj-Napoca labor market (individuals employed by corporations in fields such as ICT, finance & banking, services, and industrial manufacturing) in an effort to understand the factors that influence the employee’s relationship with the organization, their professional identity, satisfaction, and commitment to their job.

The study employs a mixed-methods approach—quantitative research (student opinion survey, N=1,200; employee opinion survey, N=800) and qualitative research—student focus group (1), employee focus group (1), and CEO interviews (12). The study was conducted between June 2023 and April 2024.

Using the collected data, the research identifies the factors that influence job choice, the elements of a “healthy” organizational environment, the relationship with the leader and expectations regarding the leadership style practiced, their expectations regarding professional and personal development opportunities, as well as their concerns regarding job security and work-life balance.

The study’s findings highlight the complexity of the employee-organization relationship, a dynamic view of professional identity, the essential role that leaders play in the architecture of modern organizations, and the importance of an employee-centered organizational environment, flexibility, and a positive social structure in attracting and retaining employees, underscoring the need for companies to adapt and respond to employees’ demands and aspirations in order to maintain their competitiveness in the labor market.

Analysis of Employee Expectations

Methodology¹

Mixed methodology—quantitative (survey) + qualitative (focus group)

Quantitative

Study conducted on a sample of employees at private companies in Cluj-Napoca;

Study population: N=800

Data collection period: November–December 2023

Organization type: Corporation/Multinational (96%), of which 40% in the banking and finance sector, 36% in IT, 8% in engineering, and 5% in human resources

Demographic data:

Age

Age (years)	Percentage of total	Notes
18–24	7.97%	81.75% of respondents are between the ages of 25 and 45
25–30	22.75%	
31–35	22.37%	
36–40	18.77%	
41–45	17.87%	
46–50	6.56%	
51–55	1.80%	
Over 55 years old	1.54%	

Years of service (years)	Percentage of total	Remarks
0–2 years	6.17%	45% of respondents have up to 10 years of experience, 38% have between 11 and 20 years of experience, and nearly 16% <i>have over 20 years of experience—respondents have extensive experience in the labor market</i>
2–5 years	14.40%	
6–10 years	24.16%	
11–15 years	20.82%	
16–20 years	17.99%	
In 20 years	15.94%	

Education

42% - bachelor's degree

53% - master's degree

4% - high school

Purpose

This analysis aims to identify and understand the perceptions and expectations of private-sector employees (in the city of Cluj-Napoca) regarding their organization (employer) across the following dimensions

¹ The data was collected with the direct support of the student organizations OSUBB, STUDPAC, and CSUBB.

- factors influencing job choice
- organizational culture (values)
- organizational environment
- leadership style
- labor market mobility
- Motivation and satisfaction

The purpose of the study is to provide an overview of how employees perceive the quality of their workplace, their own career path, and their relationship with their employer.

Education and Personal Development

The first dimension focuses on respondents' perceptions of their level of knowledge and transferable skills across several relevant areas, regardless of their position within the organization or the sector in which they work: foreign languages, financial knowledge and skills, and transferable skills and competencies (critical thinking, analytical and synthesis skills, digital competencies)

Self-assessment of knowledge and skills²

- In terms of knowledge and skills, we were interested in students' perceptions regarding several areas of general relevance and applicability that are attractive regardless of the field

	Employees	Students	
Knowledge & Skills	Average value/extreme scores (scale 1–10)		Comments
Ability to analyze and synthesize	Average score: 8.71 87% consider themselves to have a high/very high level of preparation 0.39% consider themselves to have a low/very low level of preparation	Score: 8.25 72.5% consider themselves to have a high/very high level of preparation 0% consider themselves to have a low/very low level of preparation	<i>Highest score</i> Nearly 9 out of 10 employees believe they have very well-developed analytical and synthesis skills (7 out of 10 among students—a difference of approximately 15% in favor of employees)
Critical thinking	Average score: 8.48 81.75% believe they have a high/very high level of proficiency 0.77% believe they have a low/very low level of training	Average score: 7.97 66% consider themselves to have a high/very high level of preparation 2.5% consider themselves to have a low/very low level of preparation	<i>High average score</i> 4 out of 5 employees believe they can think critically; the number of students who believe the same is nearly 20% lower (2 out of 3 students)

² Q2: How would you rate your current level of knowledge and skills? (1—very low, 10—very high). The score represents the average of all responses; the percentages indicate the proportion of respondents who gave a score between 7 and 10—that is, high or very high—regarding the assessed knowledge, skills, and competencies; 1–3 = low to very low

Digital skills	Average score: 8.25 80% consider themselves to have a high/very high level of proficiency 0.39% believe they have a low/very low level of proficiency	Score: 7.66 60% consider themselves to have a high/very high level of proficiency 3.2% consider themselves to have a low/very low level of proficiency	<i>Respondents consider themselves to have a high level of proficiency in using digital tools</i> 4 out of 5 employees believe they possess digital skills (at a high level)—only 3 out of 5 students rate themselves similarly
Foreign Languages	Average score: 8.1 72.5% consider themselves to have a high/very high level of proficiency 1.93% believe they have a low/very low level of proficiency	Score: 7.40 51% consider themselves to have a high/very high level of proficiency 5.7% consider themselves to have a low/very low level of preparation	Employees (self-assessment) have a better command of a foreign language, both in terms of average score and level of proficiency—3 out of 4 employees consider themselves to have a good or very good command of a foreign language, compared to 2 out of 4 students
Financial literacy	Average score: 7.30 67% consider themselves to have a high/very high level of financial literacy 2.83% consider their level of financial literacy to be low or very low	Average score: 6.10 25% consider themselves to have a high/very high level of financial literacy 12.5% consider themselves to have a low/very low level of financial literacy	2 out of 3 employees believe they have adequate financial knowledge vs. 1 out of 4 students Overall, the lowest percentage among the assessed dimensions is recorded here (financial education)
Knowledge and Skills (Overall Average)	Overall average: 8.17	Overall average: 7.48	Across all dimensions analyzed, employees rate themselves higher than students The closest values—critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis The largest differences—foreign languages

- Respondents' (employees') perception of their own knowledge and skills is positive.
- The analysis across the five dimensions, as well as the distinction between cross-cutting and specialized knowledge and skills, provides an interesting picture:
 - o Nearly 9 out of 10 respondents believe they have a high capacity for analysis and synthesis, and 8.5 out of 10 believe they can think critically to a large or very large extent. These scores are offset by the very small percentage of those who believe their level of development or mastery of these two categories of skills is below 1%. The same perception observed among students regarding these two categories of skills persists, but the scores are even higher among employees. The high scores among employees indirectly confirm students' perception of the importance of these skills in the workplace

- One pattern that stands out is the intensity or degree of confidence in self-assessment—across all dimensions analyzed, employees rated their own knowledge and skills at a higher level compared to students' self-assessments
- Also noteworthy is the consistent ranking between the two categories of respondents—transversal competencies received the highest scores (analytical and synthesis skills, critical thinking) while technical or specialized skills and knowledge—such as foreign language proficiency and financial literacy—have the lowest proportion of respondents reporting a high level of proficiency
- Another pattern observed between the two categories of respondents is that the gap between employees and students widens as the proportion of those with a high level of proficiency decreases—more specifically, while the differences for the first two categories of skills (analysis and synthesis, critical thinking) are 15%, as we move down the hierarchy, these gaps widen: 20% for digital skills, 22% for foreign languages, and 42% for financial literacy. We do not have empirical data that directly explains this increase in the gaps, beyond the characteristics of the respondents—a potential explanation could be the accumulation of experience upon entering the labor market—on-the-job learning (if this hypothesis is correct, it offers insight into the gaps between formal education in institutions and the accumulation of knowledge, skills, and competencies in the workplace—this hypothesis is also supported by the qualitative data obtained in the study of students, which indicates that students place a high value on extracurricular activities—essentially the same type of knowledge acquisition: *learning by doing*).
- Regarding “technical” knowledge and skills, respondents consider themselves best prepared in the area of digital competencies—8 out of 10 respondents believe they have a high level of proficiency, and 7 out of 10 also believe they are proficient in a foreign language, while 7 out of 10 believe they have financial literacy. The same pattern is observed in the perceptions of employees and students—employees rate themselves as better prepared (which is understandable given their accumulated experience); the order of the scores also remains the same, with financial literacy receiving the lowest score among employees as well
- When comparing the scores for each dimension to the average score, the only category scoring below average (8.17) is the level of financial literacy (7.30)—among students, two categories fall below the overall average: financial literacy (6.10) and knowledge of a foreign language (7.40)

Current Job – Selection Criteria

The second section of the study focused on identifying the factors that respondents—in this case, employees—consider important, value, and use as criteria when looking for a job. The responses provide insight into both employees' expectations and the way they choose a particular type of job. It should be noted that these factors are dynamic and influenced by the respondents' accumulated experience; over 80% of them have more than ten years of experience in the labor market.

One final point of interest is the relationship between expectations/projections and reality—Phase 1 of the study, in which the respondents were students, offers a perspective on expectations, while the employees' responses reveal the current reality.

Type of Organization and Industry

- The vast majority of employees work for multinational organizations/corporations (96%), distributed across two sectors—banking & finance (40%) and IT (36%)—with the remainder in engineering (8%) and human resources (5%)
- Among student respondents, nearly one-third (28.3%) wanted to work for a corporation, compared to 20% who wanted to start their own business and 20% who wanted a job in the public sector (local or central government).
- 60% of respondents state that they work in the same field in which they completed their specialized studies

Demographics

- Respondents are relatively young—81.75% are between the ages of 25 and 45—and have extensive experience - 45% of them have up to 10 years of experience, 38% have between 11 and 20 years of experience, and nearly 16% have over 20 years of professional experience
- The level of education is high—more than half hold a master's degree (53%), and 95% have completed a college degree

Factors in selecting their current job (preferences)

- In compiling the ranking, we used two criteria—the first was the absolute average score, which indicates the average of all responses on a scale of 1 to 10; the second criterion was intensity (the percentage of respondents who selected the criterion as very important)

Rank	Employees	Students
1	<u>Job security</u> Average score: 9 87% consider it an important/very important criterion	<u>Work-life balance</u> Average score: 9.28 89% consider it an important/very important criterion
2	<u>Type of work performed</u> Average score: 8.81	<u>Opportunities for career development/advancement</u>

	85% consider it an important/very important criterion	Average score: 9.24 90% consider this an important/very important criterion
3	<u>Opportunities for career development/advancement</u> Average score: 8.56 79.5% consider this an important/very important criterion	<u>Type of work performed</u> Average score: 9.1 90% consider this an important/very important criterion
4	<u>Work-life balance</u> Average score: 8.58 78.6% consider it an important/very important criterion	<u>Job security</u> Average score: 9.08 86% consider it an important/very important criterion
5	<u>Salary</u> Average score: 8.44 76.5% consider it an important/very important criterion	<u>Salary</u> Average score: 8.64 83% consider it an important/very important criterion
6	<u>Benefits in addition to salary (health insurance, meal vouchers, access to a company car, etc.)</u> Average score: 7.93 66.8% consider this an important/very important criterion	<u>Benefits in addition to salary (health insurance, meal vouchers, access to a company car, etc.)</u> Average score: 8.33 76% consider this an important/very important criterion
7	<u>Work from home/work remotely</u> Average score: 7.82 67% consider it an important/very important criterion	<u>Organizational values</u> Average score: 8.27 72.5% consider this an important/very important criterion
8	<u>Organizational values</u> Average score: 7.74 66.5% consider it an important/very important criterion	<u>Work from home/work remotely</u> Average score: 7.59 62% consider this an important/very important criterion
9	<u>Working with cutting-edge technology</u> Average score: 6.94 49% consider this an important/very important criterion	<u>Working with cutting-edge technology</u> Average score: 7.37 59% consider this an important/very important criterion

- The four most important factors in choosing a job are the same for both employees and students, namely: job security, work-life balance, the type of work performed, and opportunities for career development and advancement
- There is a reversal in the most important criterion between the two categories of respondents: for employees, job security ranks first in importance, while for students, a work-life balance is essential.

- the type of work performed and opportunities for professional development and career advancement; the only differences lie in their order of importance—employees value job security most highly, followed by the type of work performed and the availability of career development opportunities, with work-life balance ranking fourth. For students, job security and work-life balance are reversed: students value work-life balance the most, followed by development opportunities and the type of work performed, with job security ranking fourth. This transition from expectations/projections (in the case of students) to reality (employees)—for students, the balance between the two dimensions of life—professional and personal—takes precedence over potential risks; in contrast, current employees (who likely have a busier schedule and broader life responsibilities) prioritize job security
- In both categories of respondents, salary—though important—ranks in the middle of the list (5th place)—this ranking of financial factors remains consistent—salary and benefits hold the same positions (5th and 6th) in the hierarchy for both current employees and those about to enter the job market
- There is also agreement regarding the least important factors—these are the organization’s values, the ability to work remotely/from home, and the use of cutting-edge technologies, which is the least important factor for both categories of respondents
- Less important criteria are: the ability to work remotely or from home, the organization’s values, and the use of cutting-edge technologies. This ranking holds true for both categories of respondents

Open-ended responses

Respondents had the opportunity to mention other important criteria for choosing a job beyond the predefined ones. We received 113 open-ended responses; analyzing them provides a range of relevant information for understanding how employees evaluate the attractiveness of a job.

Summary – Criteria for Choosing the Current Job (113 open-ended responses)

- 1. Pleasant work environment/relationship with coworkers/relationship with the manager (38/33%)**
 - The most important factor is the work environment in the broadest sense—a positive relationship with the manager and teammates, an environment that values people, and a pleasant (non-toxic) atmosphere
- 2. Company prestige/brand (12/10%) + positive word of mouth (3/2.5%) – 13%**
 - A stable company, a strong market player, and the prestige and appeal of the brand (a proxy for security and/or status—“I work for Google”)
- 3. Learning opportunities/Career development/Projects (12/10%)**
 - Opportunity for professional growth, participation in training in your field, the feeling that you’re always learning something new
- 4. Accessibility—location, easy and quick access (12/10%)**
 - In the local context (the companies that participated in the study are based in Cluj), location is an important factor—understood as accessibility, commute time, and easy and quick access (a proxy for the city’s traffic problem)
- 5. The need to have a job (a proxy for income security) (6/5%)**

- Respondents who primarily want a stable income—either after a long period without a job (6–12 months) or because they are changing jobs due to salary or a toxic work environment
- 6. A positive interview experience (5/4%)**
- The person conducting the interviews—particularly the manager with whom the employee will be working—and the interview experience (the interpersonal rapport that inspires trust, the questions asked, and how the interview is conducted—alignment between expectations and reality)
- 7. Others:** flexible schedule/work from home, type of work performed/position, leadership style, and the fact that it's in Cluj.

JOB EXPERIENCE – organizational culture, leadership

The final section of the study assesses how employees perceive “life at work.” We are interested in finding out what type of organizational environment they prefer, what expectations they have regarding their relationship with their supervisor, whether they have preferences regarding leadership style, and which organizational values they identify with. This information helps us understand how employees view their relationship with the organization—an important element in the equation of organizational performance—since, to the extent that these expectations are met, they generate a high degree of satisfaction and serve as a good predictor of productive behaviors, organizational commitment, and high performance.

Organizational Environment & Leadership

<i>When you think about your current job, how important is it to you....</i>		
Organizational Environment		
Descriptors	Employees	Students
The organization should prioritize employee well-being and mental health	Average score 9.25 89.7% consider this criterion important or very important	Average score 9.27 90% consider this criterion important or very important
The organization should emphasize continuous learning and professional development	Average score 9.18 91% consider this criterion important or very important	Average score 9.16 90% consider this criterion important or very important
The organization should emphasize sustainability and minimal environmental impact	Average score 7.78 64.6% consider this criterion important or very important	Average score 7.67 63% consider this criterion important or very important
The work environment should be diverse, including gender-neutral	Average score: 6.77 55.78% of respondents consider this criterion important or very important (<i>17% not at all</i>)	Average score: 7.92 68% of respondents consider this criterion important or very important

	<i>important/slightly important)</i>	<i>(11.6% consider this criterion not at all or not very important)</i>
Leadership		
Descriptors	Employees	Students
The team leader supports you and is approachable when you face challenges (people-oriented leadership)	Average score 9.28 92.8% consider this criterion important or very important	Average Score: 9.36 95% consider this criterion important or very important
The team leader fosters a collaborative and inclusive work environment (participatory leadership)	Average score: 9.18 89.7% consider this criterion important or very important	Score: 9.23 93% consider this criterion important or very important
The team leader delegates tasks and empowers team members to make decisions (delegative leadership/autonomy)	Average score 9.18 87.6% consider this criterion important or very important	Score 8.95 88% consider this criterion important or very important
The team leader makes decisions and provides clear direction and guidance regarding tasks and objectives (goal-oriented leadership)	Average score 8.67 82% consider this criterion important or very important	Score 9.20 90% consider this criterion important or very important

- From the perspective of organizational culture and the work environment, respondents prefer an organization that prioritizes employee needs, where they feel included and valued, have a pleasant work environment based on strong, positive interpersonal relationships with their manager and other colleagues, where they can build a long-term career, and where there are opportunities for professional development (learning)
- From a leadership perspective, as expected, a culture such as the one described above requires a leadership style that is primarily people-oriented—leaders who support employees, are empathetic, offer employees opportunities for involvement and participation, consistently communicate their expectations as well as the technical details of task completion, instill trust, and maintain a high degree of transparency in everything they do.
- Employees strongly prefer collaboration over competition and expect to be clearly told what they need to do and to have sufficient autonomy to decide how to carry out their tasks.

Open-ended responses³

³ Q: Are there any other factors that are important to you regarding your current job (and are not included in the list above)?

Respondents had the opportunity to mention other aspects they consider important regarding the work environment, leadership practices, and their personal experience within the organization. We received 46 open-ended responses to this question. Analyzing them allows us to gain a deeper understanding of employees' expectations regarding "life in the organization"—these responses are important because they paint an ideal picture and help us understand the elements that employees value but that may be unknown to the organization:

Summary – Employee Expectations Regarding the Work Environment⁴

1. **Pleasant work environment (14/30%)**—a pleasant work environment, a relaxed atmosphere, good relationships with colleagues and the direct manager, a non-toxic and non-violent environment, and low stress levels
2. **Supervisor-Subordinate Relationship – Management's Treatment of Employees (4/12%)** – employees want to be treated humanely and fairly, with their rights respected; they want the organization and their supervisors to treat them "as people" rather than just as resources, and they want to feel valued
3. **Communication & transparency (7/14%)**– Employees want clear, two-way communication (top-down/bottom-up) regarding tasks and responsibilities; they want a high degree of transparency regarding the activities of those in leadership positions; they want their opinions to be valued, and they want opportunities to provide feedback and input (personal contribution to the organization's work)
4. **Organizational values (organizational culture) (7/14%)** – employees prefer a merit-based system that values competence (performance evaluations, promotions, and results-based reward and disciplinary systems), rewarding performance, professionalism, fairness (objective and impactful evaluations), honoring commitments, honesty, integrity, sustainability—the organization should express these values through its actions, including the recruitment, selection, and promotion of employees who embody these values through their own behavior
5. **Career development/advancement opportunities, continuous learning (7/14%)** – employees prefer a workplace where they can grow; the organization values its people and invests in learning/development programs; they have the opportunity to plan their careers in the medium and long term
6. **Others:** location—distance from home, time spent commuting to and from work, job security, flexible schedule/remote work

Summary of Leader Profile (open-ended responses)

1. **Employee-oriented leader**—takes employees' needs into account, treats them as equals, puts in the same level of effort as they do, creates a pleasant, collaborative work environment that values employees, demonstrates empathy, and provides a career path—41%

⁴ The first number in parentheses represents the number of responses, and the percentage represents the proportion of the total number of respondents who answered the open-ended question

2. **Communication, transparency, a trust-based environment, sincerity** – 23% – a leader who trusts employees, communicates effectively and, above all, transparently, and is sincere in their communication with employees.
3. **Participatory leadership**—gives employees autonomy in carrying out their tasks, seeks and provides feedback, is interested in employee input, recognizes employees' merits, and rewards outstanding results—19%
4. **Fair treatment**, impartiality in employee evaluations, and an emphasis on work-life balance – 9%

Mobility, satisfaction, compensation

We have grouped separately several elements of interest regarding the employee experience at work, which, although they do not directly fall under the previous dimensions, are connected to them and complete the picture of “organizational life.”

These are:

- mobility—willingness to change jobs, willingness to change location/residence
- satisfaction
- salary level

Mobility – willingness to relocate (to another city) if the job required it

Employees	Students
Average score 4.4 30% would be willing to relocate if the job required it (47% would not be willing to do so)	Average score 6.3 52% would be willing to relocate if getting the job required it (20% would not be willing to do so)
Voluntary relocation—changing current job (employees only)⁵	
Only 20% (one in five employees) of respondents are seriously considering changing their current job	
67% of employees say they <i>do not consider this option at all</i> (correlation with satisfaction levels)	

- Relocation is not a popular option among either group of respondents—with greater resistance to the idea among those who are already employed
- Beyond natural resistance (relocation involves personal costs—interpersonal relationships, changing one's place of residence, adjusting to a new urban environment, etc.), we can also observe an increased appeal of the current location (the city of Cluj-Napoca), which emerges as a criterion in the open-ended responses (among both categories of respondents)

Job Satisfaction⁶

⁵ Q: To what extent are you considering changing your current job in the next 12 months?

⁶ Q: How satisfied are you with your current job?

Average score: 7.78

- **66.5%** of employees report having a high/very high level of satisfaction
- **Only 1.93%** of employees are deeply dissatisfied
- Based on this indicator, we can conclude that regardless of what an employee's "organizational life" looks like, 2 out of 3 employees have a high degree of satisfaction with their workplace experience (debunking the myth of the "corporate slave")

Salary

Salary is a powerful motivator from several perspectives—an adequate salary allows employees to channel their energy toward intrinsic motivations such as continuous development, learning, and personal contributions to the organization's overarching goals, etc.

Among the employees surveyed:

- **40%** of them earn a net monthly income of **over 7,000 RON** (more than 1.5 times the national average salary)
- **73%** of respondents earn a monthly income of at least 4,500 RON (approximately the national average salary)
- **Only 3.5%** of respondents report having a monthly income between 2,500 and 3,500 RON

Comparison of Students' Salary Expectations

- **84% of student respondents** have salary expectations equal to or below the national average wage
- **27% have salary expectations between 2,500 and 3,000 RON, 30% expect to earn a salary between 3,001 and 3,500 RON**, and 26% expect a salary between 3,501 and 4,000 RON
- Only 2.5% of respondents have salary expectations above the average salary

Salary conclusion: students' salary expectations are realistic, slightly below what employees report earning as monthly income—2.5% of students expect to earn over 5,000 RON upon starting a job, compared to 40% of employees (study participants who report earning this amount) – it should be noted that respondents have significant work experience – 55% have between 10 and 20 years of experience, while only 6% of respondents have between 0 and 2 years of experience.

Conclusions (Employee Opinion Survey)

This study reveals an interesting picture of employees' perceptions and expectations regarding several important topics in "organizational life." Here are the major patterns observed following the data analysis:

Self-assessment of knowledge and skills

In terms of knowledge, skills, and competencies, we observe several major patterns: (1) their order does not differ between students and employees—the ability to analyze and synthesize information and critical thinking are, in the respondents' opinion, the two categories of (transferable) competencies they master best, while foreign language proficiency and financial literacy are the two areas where respondents feel they are least prepared. In addition, employees' scores are, on average, approximately 0.75 points higher (on a scale of 1–10), while the percentage difference increases as we move down the hierarchy—a 42% difference in financial literacy.

A potential explanation for this difference between employed respondents and students could be the experience gained in the labor market—learning by doing—an (indirect) indicator of the existing difference in various areas—transferable skills vs. specific skills—between formal education and skills acquired through experience (learning by doing)

Current Job—Selection Criteria

- The most important criteria used by respondents (employees) when choosing a job are (in order of importance): (1) job security, (2) the type of work performed, (3) opportunities for professional development and career advancement, and (4) work-life balance — thus, a job that is attractive to employees is, first and foremost, one that offers job security, involves engaging work, provides opportunities for medium- and long-term career development (indirectly confirmed by the fact that more than half of the respondents (55%) have been with their current employer for over 10 years), and allows for a healthy balance between professional and personal life. Compared to student respondents, the criteria remain the same for them as well, but work-life balance ranks first in importance, while job security drops to fourth place (students have a higher level of dynamism due to their current stage in life—they are at the beginning of their professional careers or entering the labor market).
- Financial benefits—salary and additional perks—are of moderate importance when employees are looking for a job, while the organization's values and the opportunity to work with cutting-edge technologies are the least influential factors in choosing a job. This order holds true (with minimal differences) for students as well—we observe that, in terms of criteria, there is minimal variation between the social status of a student (with no experience) and that of an employee with at least 2 years of experience (over 80% of respondents)—the only notable change being the reversal of "work-life balance" as the top criterion (for students) with "job security" for employees
- For employed respondents, we also provided the option to indicate other criteria considered important beyond those mentioned in the list—the responses round out the picture of what an attractive workplace looks like—employees value a pleasant work environment, having good relationships with their manager and team, being part

of a well-known company with a strong brand, and (surprisingly) having a commute that's manageable (time spent traveling)

Job Experience – Organizational Culture and Leadership

- There is a clear alignment between the ideal leader profile and the work environment—the ideal leader is people-oriented, collaborative, communicative, and open with employees, who creates an environment where values such as transparency, equality (lack of hierarchy), and fairness are dominant, who understands the importance of balancing professional responsibilities with personal life, and who provides employees with opportunities to continuously learn and grow

Mobility, Income, Satisfaction

- Willingness to change jobs is low; only one-third of respondents would be willing to do so if the job required it (50% among students) —a factor that can be explained both from the perspective of job satisfaction at their current workplace—two out of three employees state that they are satisfied or very satisfied with their current job—and from the perspective of their desire not to leave and, by extension, not to change their urban lifestyle in Cluj-Napoca. When considered alongside the respondents' demographic characteristics (relatively high tenure, young adult population), one assumption is that the respondents represent a middle class that earns enough (over 40% of them earn more than 1.5% of the average gross monthly salary) and appreciate the lifestyle (vibrant, dynamic, with services above the national average) specific to a city like Cluj—thus dispelling the myth of the “corporate slave” employee.

Qualitative study. Employee focus group

Methodology

Duration: 2:30h

23 participants/12 companies (ITC, finance)

Average experience: 6–8 years, min. 2, max. 20

Purpose:

To validate the results of the quantitative study.

In-depth analysis of the significance of the results. Understanding the significance of the results

Skills/Abilities/Knowledge

The first part of the discussions focused on self-assessment of knowledge, skills, and competencies. We assessed the extent to which the focus group participants' perceptions align with those of the respondents in the quantitative study regarding the results (competencies, skills) and the intensity of those results. We sought to gather additional information on the influence of experience and the relevance of other skills or competencies, as compared to those tested.

- Regarding the two most important skills—*critical thinking and the ability to analyze and synthesize*—focus group participants confirmed their importance to the company; there is an influencing factor related to job position—generally, a higher-level position (in management) increases the importance of these two skills, but respondents emphasized companies' expectations of employees regarding systemic thinking—the ability to see the big picture when faced with a problem—and noted that critical thinking enables one to develop such a perspective.

- "I value both skills; they're important regardless of position."
- "At the management and leadership levels, their importance within the company is emphasized."
- "As an employee, I try to develop this area—I know I've invested a lot in it, so I'd rate myself positively."
- "It depends on what we're comparing ourselves to, what the benchmark is—generally, I compare myself to my colleagues and tend to think I'm doing better."
- "It's a 'fake it till you make it' process, and you compare yourself to those around you when you answer."
- "I thought I had critical thinking skills, but after an MBA, I realized I was lacking them."
- "These skills are relevant pretty much everywhere."
- "I've never worked at a company where it wasn't necessary to have employees who possess both of these."
- "When it comes to financial literacy, I think the scores are too high—we're the least prepared."

The participants' responses reveal a number of significant details regarding the collective perception of these skills:

- Respondents acknowledge, directly or indirectly, the importance of these traits for companies—which is why there is a tendency toward positive bias or overestimation of them (the “trait” being evaluated is considered positive in the given social context). A point of reference emerges—those around them—against whom the evaluation is made.
- Advancement in the hierarchy increases the importance of these skills (as expected)
- Work experience contributes positively to their development—there is a phenomenon of progressive awareness of the importance of these two traits, which is reflected in their impact on work and an organic accumulation of experience in this area
- For managerial positions, participants mention that there are specific evaluation criteria, which confirms employees' perception of the importance of these two traits as well as the importance companies place on them as desirable qualities.

Job Selection Criteria

The next set of questions aimed to assess the criteria by which an employee evaluates a future job. The quantitative study revealed a convergence of criteria (their hierarchical ranking) for both categories of respondents—both students and employees have a similar hierarchy of criteria by which they choose a job. We sought to test the focus group participants' perceptions regarding these criteria (especially their order of importance) and to identify potential explanations for this order.

- “The timing matters a lot—if this question had been asked two years ago, job security wouldn't have been at the top of the list.”
- “Horror stories about layoffs—of course that affects us.”
- “We've been living in a bubble; around the middle of last year, we started asking ourselves about job security.”
- “Employees have bills to pay, too.”

- Participants confirm the importance of job security (ranked first in the quantitative research) and point to the global economic context (negative), especially in the ICT sector, as a key factor in valuing job security—participants are attuned to the “information” circulating in the ICT environment, and the collective view is that the market is in decline, making it harder to find a job compared to the pre-pandemic period.
- Regarding work-life balance, its importance in employees' perception of a desirable job is confirmed; it complements the job security component. Participants believe that work experience is a factor that allows one to better manage the relationship between professional and personal life, but they also note (and thus confirm) the increased importance that the “younger” generation places on this aspect.

- “Work-life balance also means an employee’s ability to say no; it’s up to you to disconnect
- “I left during the pandemic because I didn’t have work-life balance—you can leave a job if you know how to learn and are willing to”
- “Social media plays a big role—you’re told to find a job you love, and everyone thinks it’s easy and that it can be done”
- “Security also comes from the responsibilities you have—loans, family—it’s important that I don’t have to give my apartment back to the bank
- “We’re already able to handle the work-life balance aspect
- “We’ve also noticed that young employees aren’t available after hours and lack patience.”

- Regarding salary and benefits, one factor explaining their ranking in the middle of the hierarchy (6th–7th place) is the participants’ above-average income level, combined with their seniority (above-average pay) — this was observed in both the quantitative study and the focus group, which included individuals with relatively high levels of experience. Furthermore, the majority’s perception is that salary and benefits are hygiene factors—they are a problem if they are not met, but once met, they are weak motivators.

- “All companies are generally at the same level—this variable—salary and benefits—cancels itself out.”
- “Salaries are within the same range; we don’t complain about them because we know we’re not doing badly.”
- “Above a certain salary threshold (once your basic needs are met), something else motivates the employee—not money.”
- “Right now, I’m making X. If I go somewhere else and get 20% more, I ask myself—do I want to relearn X things? Do I want to change my schedule? The opportunity cost is a factor.”

- With regard to the type of work, the (post-pandemic) transition toward hybrid work instead of (fully) working from home is confirmed, as is the variability in the importance of this factor depending on two factors—the respondent’s demographic characteristics—particularly those with children, who prefer this type of work, or those with multiple jobs—and age (these two factors are correlated, indicating a certain social status in which the availability of hybrid work offers advantages—greater autonomy in managing the work-life balance). The direction companies are taking is toward in-person work whenever possible.

- “During the pandemic (respondent with 15 years of experience), I needed to work from home and achieve a work-life balance—after a year, I returned; I felt I needed to work, but differently—in person and with new technologies.”

- “It seems to me that the importance of remote work varies depending on what you do—the nature of the work can influence how well remote work works for you or not.”
- “We’re starting a project where we have to be in the office 3 out of 5 days, and the people there agreed to come to the office for the pay.”

Organizational Environment & Leadership

The final dimension explored in the focus group was related to the organizational environment, leadership characteristics, and the type of leadership practiced. We sought to understand what explains the emphasis on focusing on employee needs and the quality of organizational life—an environment characterized by positive social relationships, support for employees from leaders, and the concept of mental health. We also examined the role that leaders/managers play in relation to the organizational environment, as well as their specific roles and contributions.

The responses provided by participants complement the results of the quantitative research:

- Employees value an open, informal organizational environment (especially regarding social interactions), where employees can express themselves freely, are understood and treated as individuals (with specific needs), have flexibility and autonomy in performing their work, and are led by a people-oriented leader who offers support and is participatory/delegative in assigning tasks
- What emerges beyond the variation in responses regarding the characteristics of the organizational environment and the preferred leadership style (people-oriented, participatory) is, in fact, the importance of direct leaders/managers (with whom employees interact most frequently) in creating a healthy organizational environment and maintaining engagement and performance. There are direct implications for turnover rates, employee satisfaction levels, and organizational commitment. From the companies’ perspective, the management/leadership team plays a fundamental role in the organization’s performance

- “I prefer a (leadership) style where I’m allowed to do my job, once I know what’s expected of me.”
- “People leave managers, not jobs.”
- “At the company where I worked, good people were leaving precisely because of those two factors—a toxic work environment and a weak leader.”
- “When we talk about the work environment, people refer to their immediate circle” (the importance of the work team in shaping perception)
- “Projects are carried out by people—a strong relationship between the leader and the team is needed, a combination of leadership and a high-performing environment.”
- “Leaders who don’t delegate show a lack of trust in the team and a need for control.”
- “If you’re on a team with a good leader, the rest falls into place on its own”
- “A leader must adapt to the situation.”

- The responses paint a picture of a leader who is constantly connected with the team, offers support, adopts a participatory approach to decision-making, and is able to accurately read the context and adapt. The components of emotional intelligence and interpersonal relationships with employees are emphasized
- Participants confirm a high level of satisfaction, resulting from a combination of the work itself (which is satisfying—that is, sufficiently challenging and not monotonous)—job security, and an above-average salary.

Conclusions. Employee focus group.

Competencies and Skills

Critical thinking and the ability to analyze and synthesize information were identified as two essential skills in a professional context. Participants confirmed their importance, with particular emphasis placed on them by senior management. The need for a systemic perspective and the ability to understand the broader context of issues—which are indicative of the development of critical thinking—was also emphasized. Furthermore, work experience was associated with a greater awareness and appreciation of these skills, suggesting a progressive increase in their importance over the course of one's professional career.

Participants' responses also reflected a tendency to overestimate their own competencies, particularly when these are perceived as being valued in the professional environment. Additionally, frequent comparisons with colleagues were observed, serving as a benchmark for evaluating one's own performance.

Regarding financial literacy, a discrepancy was noted between participants' perceptions and practical reality, suggesting a possible overestimation of their level of preparation in this area. Digital skills and knowledge of a foreign language are "default" requirements from the companies' perspective (the expectation is that employees possess them).

Selection Criteria – Job

Job security and work-life balance were identified as priorities in the job selection process. The global economic context, along with the participants' personal experiences, influenced their perception of these criteria. These two are followed by the type of work performed and opportunities for growth and learning—both in terms of developing technical skills and in terms of the complexity and challenge of the job (a positive motivational factor—in contrast to a routine job)—these four factors indicate a preference for challenging, secure (at large companies), well-paid jobs with a high degree of flexibility.

Furthermore, salary and benefits were considered important, but primarily as "hygiene" factors, as they are less motivational once they are met.

Organizational Environment and Leadership

Participants emphasized the importance of an open and flexible organizational environment, where employees are treated as individuals and have the opportunity to freely express their ideas. They also valued participatory and supportive leadership that fosters positive

relationships among team members. Leaders were seen as essential to creating and maintaining a healthy and motivating work environment, with a direct impact on employee satisfaction and performance.

Phase 3. Qualitative Study: 12 Interviews with Top Managers/CEOs

The final part of the study aimed to explore the perspectives of the leaders of the companies that participated in the quantitative research and focus groups. The goal was to test employees' perceptions and identify the perspectives of company leaders on how employees relate to the company and their jobs. This final phase provides a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study.

The interviews were conducted between February and March 2024

12 interviews with top managers or company leaders in Cluj-Napoca.

Company profile: corporation/multinational in the knowledge economy sector (ITC, industrial manufacturing, finance)

Interview Analysis

Employee training. The profile of the ideal employee

The first aspect we explored with the interviewees was that of knowledge, skills, and competencies. We were interested in obtaining top leaders' perspectives on the respondents' self-assessments regarding a range of skills and competencies. We also sought to determine what constitutes an "ideal employee" from the perspective of those who lead large companies—this profile allows us to identify what employers are currently looking for and to what extent this perception aligns with that of prospective employees.

Regarding the study's results (on the skills component), the following stand out:

- Although overestimated by respondents (employees and students), their perception of the importance of critical thinking and analytical and synthesis skills is accurate—both, especially critical thinking, play a fundamental role, and the position held influences their impact.
- The higher the position (decision-making/managerial/leadership), the more relevant these two skills—especially critical thinking—become.
- These characteristics take various forms in managers' expectations and are reflected in the employee's ability to understand a situation beyond the limits defined by the job description, the product they work with, the client's needs, etc.
- Those interviewed believe that this ability to view things systemically is increasingly important and link it to an openness to learning and a proactive attitude.

- "It's important to know where to start with a completely new task for which you have no prior experience or reference points"..." "We try to select people who are proactive, want to solve problems on their own, and aren't intimidated by new situations—we try to reduce the number of people who just wait to be told what to do and discourage that kind of behavior."
- "In the management team—but not only there—I like people who challenge me—who ask, 'Why is it this way?' Who have a desire to learn and understand, who have a say and are motivated—I don't want 'yes people' or people who say, 'I wasn't told' (which is specific to a mindset of avoiding responsibility)"

- “We don’t want people who say, ‘I know this, I’ll just do what’s in my job description,’ or ‘Everything has to be in the job description.’”

- The existence of digital skills and knowledge of a foreign language is also confirmed—English is considered “mandatory” or is no longer an advantage—and it is assumed that the employee has at least an intermediate level of proficiency. Depending on the clients they work with, other languages become a competitive advantage in hiring (German, Spanish).
- The relatively low level of financial literacy is confirmed by the interviewees. The financial aspect is viewed subjectively and personally, with a focus on immediate, individual impact—employees evaluate this element almost exclusively in terms of salary, leading to paradoxical situations where employees do not fully understand the additional benefits or the implications of certain benefit packages from which they must choose.
- Those interviewed acknowledge that employees’ understanding—both of financial benefits and of the broader context—namely, financial resource management—is limited. An interesting point is that several companies offer counseling services or specific events designed to address this situation, yet interest and participation remain low; a catalyst for increased interest has been the recent tax changes (2023) and their direct impact on income.

- “We constantly explain to them what the total compensation package (salary + benefits) entails and encourage them to take a holistic view—they tend to focus on the marginal difference—‘there, they get an extra 200 lei.’”
- “We offer a range of support services—legal and psychological support, including financial assistance. I don’t have the exact figures, but aside from therapy sessions, there’s limited interest in the financial component.”
- “Financial education is a gap—we see a difference between experienced employees who understand the implications of a legal change and juniors/interns who don’t understand this.”
- “Another example is the packages we offer: they tend to be interested only in the specific issues they encounter—if they go on vacation, can they reimburse the expense, and will it affect their salary?”
- “I don’t think they have financial and entrepreneurial literacy—meaning they aren’t able to manage their own budget effectively. I appreciate the companies that work with us and that pay their employees their gross salary—precisely to help them see the full picture, including their contribution to the common good (the state).”
- “Yes, that’s true (regarding financial education)—they spend all the money they earn—they always spend it all; they aren’t familiar with financial tools, nor do they feel they need to know about them. We’ve tried to organize educational events (on this topic), but interest is low.”

- Soft skills: communication is essential—they must be able to communicate effectively in different contexts—depending on their role (manager, sales representative, customer service representative, leader-employee)—and clearly convey what they want or what their needs are

- The technical skills and competencies specific to the position they're applying for can be considered "eligibility" criteria; generally, applicants possess these, and companies have specific screening processes in place for this during the recruitment and selection process
- **Profile of the ideal employee**—a mix of
 - (1) continuous learning/curiosity/openness to new ideas
 - (2) a proactive attitude, autonomy, and problem-solving ability
 - (3) alignment with the organization's values
- The idea of continuous learning comes up most often—regardless of the nature of the company, respondents indicate this characteristic as fundamental, especially for the future, due to increased dynamics and the impossibility of accurately predicting how things will evolve

- "Be curious and have a desire to learn continuously"
- "I like employees who challenge me, who have a desire to learn and have a say"
- "To tackle a complicated situation and figure it out on their own; autonomy and self-directed learning"
- "Flexibility is important—being open to working on a variety of projects"
- "The willingness to challenge oneself, to remain curious, to learn—this willingness to think differently is inversely proportional to **age**."
- "Openness to learning, which is linked to the need for adaptability and a willingness to learn constantly"

- Alignment with the organization's values and culture are elements that create a bond between the individual and the company; a shared understanding of what we want to achieve together, which gives managers the opportunity to "build"; there is a foundation of values that enables employee development on the one hand, while the company enjoys a high level of engagement, and thus the employee's added value goes beyond "statistical performance"—the employee is a long-term resource.

- "Their mindset and alignment with the company's values—attitude, level of involvement, and a set of values that are as compatible as possible—are the foundation upon which we can build."
- "The employee's desire to join our company (beyond the minimum technical requirements)—we realized this by hiring people who later said they'd wanted to join us for a long time—their subsequent attitude was better than that of the rest—if you have good ideas, even if you just joined yesterday, you can express them and contribute."

Company Evaluation Criteria

With regard to the organizational environment, respondents confirm the importance of workplace safety.

- Workplace safety is generally an important factor, but in this context it takes on greater significance (ranked as the most important criterion from the employees' perspective in the qualitative study) due to economic developments over the past 18 months.

- "You'll get different results depending on when you conduct the research—if you had done the study in 2019, the results would likely have been different."
- "Internal surveys show us that an important factor is the company's brand and size as an indirect indicator of job security—yes, job security is important."
- "We have many employees who leave and then return: most come back because of the organizational culture; they prefer working here. But there are some who say it's safer here, and that's why they come."
- "Workplace safety—yes, it's important, but it's a new entry on this list; two or three years ago, this concern didn't exist—and this is also reflected in the turnover rate: two or three years ago, it was 10–15%; now it's at 4%, a significant portion of which is due to maternity leave."
- "Job security is clearly an important factor; when you have a family and a mortgage, a strong focus on this naturally emerges, and a sense of responsibility sets in."

- Another element examined was the concept of "work-life balance"—an important indicator especially for students but also for employed respondents (ranked 4th in the hierarchy). The concept is difficult to assess, mainly due to its ambiguity—its practical meaning varies depending on the respondent. There is a common element that describes the concept of work-life balance, as confirmed by the respondents: drawing as clear a line as possible between professional and personal life. This element grows in importance, especially among younger employees.

- "For me, this concept is more about flexibility—going to the gym or on vacation whenever you want—not necessarily working less. For those in IT, there's the phenomenon of burnout. This means they have multiple jobs they're working on at the same time. It's not clear which employer pays for the burnout."
- "You can take care of both your personal life (family) and your work—that's what I understand. It's important for people to have their own time—for example, in the services sector, when we're talking about long-term projects, it's important to maintain a balance so they don't burn out."
- "I don't encourage them to work more than 8 hours. If I have employees who respond outside of working hours and overdo it, I tell them to plan their work in a healthy way. Its importance varies from person to person."
- "I agree on the importance of work-life balance; the difference between generations is very clear—among the younger generations, there's pushback and

resistance from employees when you try to ask them to do something. Even if they're paid, they might do the task sometimes, but not very often. Their personal life is separate from their professional life; once they've finished the task or their shift, that's it—they just want to get away."

- "I don't feel it (work-life balance—it's obvious). Ten years ago, at 5:30 p.m., half the people were still at the office; now, only two are left at 5:30 p.m. when the official workday ends. People's mindset has changed—that's what they want: work time is work time, and free time is free time. Overtime leads to demotivation and an even greater drop in productivity."
- "Work-life balance—it depends on seniority and income—the most important factor is salary—if the income component is met, then work-life balance is important—in conjunction with position (junior vs. senior, expectations differ)" (Siemens)
- "Work-life balance is the new hot topic; although it means something different to everyone, there is no universal understanding—we've had employees who turned down benefits packages because they felt they'd have to work on weekends or at night—the idea of extra work isn't appealing." "It's important for employees to know when their workday starts and ends—they want to set clear boundaries that won't be crossed—one theory is that if you're available, time becomes more important."
- "There's a popular ideology of 'well-being' right now that has caught on with employees—it's expressed in the separation of professional and personal life—I personally don't believe in it, but it's popular."

- Work-life balance, mental health, and employee well-being are factors highly valued by employees and are growing in importance. The pandemic has amplified the need for a "healthy" organizational environment that does not place "psychological" pressure on employees. The pandemic's impact has multiple ramifications, both in terms of the collective psyche (as reflected in mental health and a non-toxic environment) and in the organization-employee relationship—the option for hybrid or remote work is present in all companies in one form or another, although the trend is to bring employees back to the office at least three days a week. Companies' strategies for adapting to the challenges of the pandemic have largely remained in place, with the most common being support services or benefits designed to meet employees' needs through psychological counseling, workshops, or events featuring guest experts in the field—all of which have proven popular among employees. Flexibility regarding work arrangements (hybrid) is also a feature that has been maintained.

- "Every company needs to prioritize this, especially given the reduction in social connections during and after the pandemic. They have a sort of psychological safety net they can turn to."
- "The pandemic has amplified feelings of fear—we have employees returning from occupational health with a 'conditionally fit' status—so we've implemented a hybrid schedule of three days in the office and two days working from home. Regarding mental health, we have a comprehensive program that offers employees five sessions with a psychologist paid for by the company; the number of people using these services is steadily increasing."

- “Companies have realized that human resources are important—there’s greater care for employees, and the pandemic has significantly changed this relationship—we have a support platform at (as a benefit) for employees—where they receive psychological counseling—starting with the pandemic.”
- “(Mental health) is more important now; it has become a greater priority since the pandemic—we have many people who spend a lot of time alone and need support.”
- “The company offers a range of support services for employees, including psychological therapy sessions—these are the most widely used, and the impact has been positive.”

- Two other important criteria for both employees and students when choosing a job are professional development opportunities and the type of work performed. Both are also confirmed as priorities from the perspective of company leaders. There is an interesting nuance regarding career development and advancement—several respondents noted that some employees prefer to remain in a senior technical position rather than advance into management, a behavior attributed to a low appetite for risk and a reluctance to take on increased responsibility.

- “We have a significant number of experienced technical staff who do not want to transition into management; we are forced to use all kinds of strategies and incentives to promote from within.”
- “We try to offer a long-term career path combined with professional development—meaning you can acquire new skills that open the door to more diverse and important roles. We have great jobs and interesting positions, yet eligible employees within the company don’t apply—this frustrates me greatly. The reasons have to do with complacency—an unwillingness to adapt to something new.”

- In general, career development opportunities combined with the type of work performed (which should be attractive and non-routine from the employee’s perspective) are elements to which companies pay close attention, and they are important criteria in recruitment and selection

- “By ‘type of work,’ I mean *meaningful work*—yes, I’ve noticed that it has an impact, and conversely, when they don’t see meaning in what they’re doing, they disengage.”
- “The project you’re working on is critical—it has implications for motivation and attrition rates.”
- “The type of work performed is an important factor for motivation—it mattered how their work was perceived by those around them; the employee would say, ‘I work for Samsung’ or another major brand, even though Samsung was just a client—they were actually working for us.”
- “The type of work is an important criterion. It’s part of human nature.”

- Regarding professional development opportunities, companies support their employees and have a wide range of tools at their disposal—training sessions, workshops with experts, and guest speakers with a reputation or expertise in a specific field. From the respondents' perspective, the existence of these opportunities isn't matched by an equal level of participation—rather, these opportunities fall under the category of hygiene factors—they have negative effects if they're absent. There's a growing appetite for events with a "psychological" theme.

- "Unless forced by circumstances to learn something new, (the employee) won't do it—we had huge budgets for training and cut them because people weren't showing up."
- "Proactive people are automatically interested in this, especially those in IT—we have policies designed to help them grow professionally—the most important factor is the manager; if we have a good manager, they will bring benefits to the team."
- "I agree (on the importance of professional development opportunities); we actually used this as an HR policy—we showed them these prospects for advancement and development right at the time of hire."
- "A theme that constantly comes up in discussions with employees—or even right at the time of hiring—is that I think they want to know this possibility exists, but their proactive engagement toward it is lower."

- Salary, benefits, and the use of cutting-edge technology have a lower impact; the explanation lies in the context—on the one hand, the companies included in the study operate in the knowledge economy, and the salaries offered are higher compared to other economic sectors (manufacturing, consumer goods, retail). From the employees' perspective, quantitative research indicates a high level of overall job satisfaction and an income level of 1.5 times the average salary (approx. 1,500 euros)—we are in a situation where salary is no longer an issue, so employees' focus shifts to other criteria. However, it does become an important factor for those leaving the company—it is the most frequently cited reason for leaving. As for benefits, the most valued are: health insurance and any kind of psychological support or therapy services

- "The main reason cited by those who leave, when we conduct exit interviews, is salary—other companies offer me a better salary."
- "It's probably something specific to large cities like Cluj, where this issue (of salary) has been resolved."
- "(Regarding salary and other benefits) they're not that important anymore—in the Cluj market, having a low salary isn't an issue; the base salary is high regardless of the company—it's when you add to or subtract from the salary that it becomes a problem. Very few people come asking for more on their own."
- "We always explain to them what the total compensation package—salary and benefits—means and encourage them to take a broader view—they tend to focus on the marginal difference—like, 'there they get an extra 200 lei.'"
- "Many people reach the average salary relatively quickly and aren't interested in an extra 200–300 euros in pay; they're interested in doing interesting things. For

talented people, it's more important to have a good team and to create something they can be proud of. Salary is important symbolically—when two people are chatting over a beer, that's when you realize what really matters, and that's when they compare salaries, not benefits."

Organizational Environment and Leadership

Quantitative research indicates (1) employee well-being and mental health as the most important descriptor of the organizational environment, followed by (2) opportunities for advancement and professional development, (3) an emphasis on sustainability, and (4) an inclusive, diverse, and gender-neutral organizational environment.

Interviews with leaders confirm these findings and provide a detailed picture of how these elements are interrelated

- Employee well-being, support, and a healthy organizational environment are correlated with how employees define their "job" or "professional identity"—the work environment must be a space where employees feel treated fairly, receive support when needed, and where they feel valued – there is a repositioning of the employee's relationship with the organization – yes, they are there to contribute to the organization's goals, but this "transactional" relationship is no longer defined solely by salary; elements of the organizational environment are part of this puzzle – employees must feel comfortable at work and feel that they are appreciated. This is reflected in the efforts companies make to create such an environment.

- "Employees want companies to prioritize their mental well-being; we move employees away from difficult customers—those who get upset if things don't go their way—precisely to avoid problematic situations. People are also interested in companies that invest in their employees. From the company's perspective, there's a risk that you'll invest in them, and they'll leave anyway. On the other hand, you try to create an environment that encourages them to stay for the long term, during which time they can contribute positively, and then the company recoups its investment—for example, we've paid for MBA programs for employees."
- " (referring to a healthy organizational environment) The time spent within the organization and how the employee feels are becoming increasingly important. We have an entire department dedicated to overseeing the full range of employee programs—'*well-being on the go*' sessions—programs that have nothing to do with work—gardening, cooking, flying a plane, etc."
- "We have a range of support services exclusively for employees—psychological counseling (a certain number of free sessions), financial and legal support, plus all kinds of events featuring various speakers through which we try to meet their needs."
- "It's more important now, but it's increased since the pandemic—we have many people who spend a lot of time alone and need support" (Siemens)
- "I don't feel it; it's obvious—if 10 years ago at 5:30 p.m. we had half the people in the office, now I only have two at 5:30 p.m. when the official workday ends—

people's mindset has changed; that's what they want—work time is work time, and free time is free time."

- "With the younger generations, you see resistance when you try to ask them to do something; even if you pay them, they might come sometimes but not very often—their personal life is separate from their professional life; once I've finished the task or the workday, that's it."
- "We had a benefits package that included support for counseling, yoga, etc.—only 10% took advantage of it, but if you didn't have it, it was a problem."
- "I sense this element—the employees' desire to feel comfortable in the organization—and sometimes I think it's slightly exaggerated; no matter how much we offer, it never seems to be enough. I don't sense an age difference in relation to these needs—but there are few left who can work under any conditions, no matter what, and who have a strong inner drive to perform."

- These responses correlate with the concept of work-life balance—the emerging picture of a healthy organizational environment looks like this: from the employee's perspective, the organizational environment must be comfortable, provide support both in terms of tasks/work and individual needs, and professional life must be clearly separated from personal life. From the companies' perspective, we observe a recognition of these needs—the benefits packages that supplement compensation, along with the constant efforts they make to best address these diverse needs, convey the underlying message that the employee holds a privileged position in this relationship—*they deserve it; it is their due*. Beyond corporate philosophy and organizational values (which do indeed emphasize the importance of human resources), competition is a source of pressure—we are witnessing an "arms race" in which companies cannot afford to fall behind the market in this area.
- When it comes to sustainability, the picture is clearer—there is a growing general interest in this topic (climate change, environmental impact, green energy, carbon-neutral processes and initiatives, etc.), with a stronger emphasis among young people; expectations are primarily at the company level—what the company is doing in this regard to be sustainable—rather than what I can do individually. This area is usually accompanied by other activities or initiatives with a positive social impact (CSR), for which there is also growing interest among employees. From the companies' perspective, this component is inevitable, as the pressure comes not only from collective or social values but also from regulatory requirements. All companies represented in the study have clear regulations and actions/measures in this area.

- "The environmental aspect is prioritized especially by younger employees who are now joining the organization.
- "Sustainability also represents a significant business opportunity for certain companies. When it comes to sustainability reporting—specifically ESG (environment, social, and governance)—there are consulting firms involved in measuring and reporting on sustainability that are acquired by corporations or contracted to handle this aspect exclusively."

- “For the past 18 months, we’ve installed solar panels, we recycle, and we operate in an eco-friendly manner—all of which are highly appreciated by our employees; I’ve noticed that.”
- “We’ve invested heavily in this area, and we’ve seen that people turn out in droves for these kinds of campaigns. There’s an element of interpretation that’s important to the company’s image—people assign a certain meaning to these activities, a personal meaning.”
- “(With regard to CSR and sustainability) young people are asking us more and more often what we’re doing in this area, or they tell us, ‘We saw on social media that you’re doing this, and it’s really cool’—fortunately, we have major projects in this area, our own initiatives, as well as the ability to financially support CSR projects proposed by employees—the positive impact is significant.”
- “They’re becoming more aware of this issue; it’s clear that the younger generation is much more concerned about the future and climate issues—they’re picking up on the signs and are sensitive to news of this kind.”
- “It will become increasingly important, especially since those around us (the competition) are moving strongly in this direction. Employees are concerned about what the company is doing in this regard.”
- “I agree; there’s growing interest in this topic (sustainability), but fewer people understand why, and it’s not even that important whether the company takes action in this area.”
- “It’s similar to the organization’s values—if it’s something concrete and committed to, then it has a (positive) impact; otherwise, actions taken solely for marketing purposes have little impact.”

- Another important factor for the organizational environment is work arrangements—the extent to which employees can work from home, either partially or fully. All participating companies offer this option to some extent, a clear effect of the pandemic—a necessary adaptation for survival during the pandemic that has remained in place even after the “crisis” has passed and that has fundamentally changed the organization-employee relationship. One negative impact is the distance that develops between the employee and the organization, reflected in weaker alignment with the organization’s values, which can have major long-term consequences. On the other hand, companies have “sensed” this risk, and the trend is toward reducing this type of arrangement (working from home) and reintroducing the requirement for traditional “in-office” work—at least partially, or even fully for new hires—precisely to establish a foundation for organizational commitment.

- “At the joint venture, we asked them to come to the office at least three days a week, and it turns out it’s possible, even though employees appreciate working from home or hybrid work.”
- “I think there are two categories—experienced employees do need this, but for new hires, it’s important for them to physically come to work; you can’t integrate them if they don’t come to the office at the beginning.”
- “It’s very interesting and appealing to the middle-aged group (30–45)—it’s not appealing to young people or older employees—this group (30–45) are the ones

who take advantage of it, and for them, it's useful to have this option to work from home or remotely."

- "It's a given; many expect to have this option even if they aren't directly interested."
- "Employees take this option for granted; it's not even a question of whether it's possible—our colleagues (the company) in Dublin asked employees to come in at least three days a week—the initial reaction was, 'It's a tragedy!'—but so far, I haven't seen any negative effects. We have 800 offices and 1,700 people; we'll grow to 2,000—there's no way I can bring everyone into the office, but we bring them in for the moments that matter (we have specific situations like this—induction or meetings at the start of a project, etc.); otherwise, we let them organize themselves. We make sure there's time for face-to-face interaction, which is important—at least once a month."
- "Yes, (working from home) remains an important factor—'if you call us back to the office starting in 2022, I'll quit'—that was the stance 18 months ago. Things have changed since then—interns and new hires must come to the office five days a week—it's important for team cohesion and a sense of belonging. "The positive aspect of working from home is that people have flexibility and stay with the organization; the negative aspect is that there's no longer any on-the-job training because they're on their own—they can't learn how things are done from others."

- One element that created polarization in the quantitative research was the descriptor related to inclusion, diversity, and gender neutrality. Interviewees say they haven't observed any problems or tensions in this regard; they also highlight the ambiguity and ever-expanding boundaries of these concepts—whether we're talking about diversity or inclusion. Companies are placing increased emphasis on these two areas. Gender neutrality is not perceived by the interviewees as a taboo or sensitive subject (at least for now)—a confirmation of its relatively low importance compared to other elements of the organizational environment—we may be witnessing a "silent majority, vocal minority" phenomenon (most people are indifferent or take a neutral stance on these issues, while at the extremes there are much more active, vocal minorities who express themselves more frequently). Companies place particular emphasis on gender diversity—especially the representation of women at all hierarchical levels and equal pay—as well as initiatives that support the inclusion of as many groups of people as possible.

- "Speaking of gender neutrality—we offer specific training on unconscious bias, cultural diversity, and support for people with disabilities or illnesses—what it means to live with certain conditions (lupus, cancer)—we've introduced specific practices through a 'diversability playbook'—we've been pioneers in this area."
- "Gender diversity—we have 42% women in the company, which puts us well ahead of the industry average; it's a major focus for us. We address gender, accessibility (people with disabilities), and LGBTQ+ issues—people feel better when they don't have to voice their opinions on these matters."
- "Opinions are mixed—many have an intolerant attitude toward tolerance. It stems from a misunderstanding of the phenomenon—it's something new, and that's always the case with new things."

- “There’s frustration at the management level because all of this is being pushed by the EU—we’re doing well in terms of women’s representation, and we’re doing very well on the pay gap—there shouldn’t be a trade-off between meritocracy and representation. I haven’t noticed anything in the area of gender.”
- “I think it’s a trend in this area; we haven’t had any incidents like that, but I’ve heard of such situations in Germany. We have initiatives in this area, particularly regarding equal pay for similar work—I haven’t seen any issues regarding women versus men; it wasn’t a taboo subject. In Romania, I think the biggest risk is for pregnant women—although the law offers them protection, there’s a higher chance that companies won’t fully comply because it involves costs.”

Leadership

The final dimension explored was leadership. Beyond the results of the quantitative study, which indicate a mix between a people-oriented leader (who builds positive social relationships, offers support to employees, treats them as individuals—individual consideration—and shows empathy) and a participatory leader (who involves employees in decision-making processes, offers autonomy, and delegates), the interviewees’ responses point to two important ideas:

1. Directive or authoritarian leadership is no longer an effective option regardless of the situation, largely due to employees’ (and even more so students’) rejection of formal hierarchies and an organizational context characterized by a significant distance from power —this redefinition of the leader’s role in team functioning and the exercise of authority can be expressed as follows: the leader’s authority is accepted to the extent that the person in that position treats employees/individuals fairly from a position of equality (the concept of “equal among equals”)
2. The role of the leader or direct manager is fundamental to the functioning of the organization in general, but especially to maintaining a high level of engagement, motivation, and, implicitly, human resource performance. A key element is the leader’s ability to connect with employees, offer them support, and understand them on a personal level—without this component, in today’s organizational context (complex problems, a high degree of uncertainty, and the redefinition of the personal-professional relationship), employee performance drops significantly, and in the long term, the team cannot function.
3. The direct manager (leader), regardless of their position in the organizational hierarchy, plays a wide-ranging role—they serve as a role model for the organization’s values as well as for the team’s specific values (the inner circle); they act as a coach and a good motivator; they are a “friend” who demonstrates empathy; they represent the team in dealings with “higher authorities”; is a “problem solver” and, at the same time, provides employees with the autonomy and flexibility they need to express themselves through their work and feel they are contributing to the “final product” —

companies should not underestimate the importance of this professional group for maintaining performance

- “People-centered leadership is appreciated by everyone; it resonates with the heightened sensitivity we’re observing—yes, I feel that this is becoming increasingly important. The need for attention is important to employees; a leader must pay specific attention to employees.”
- For senior employees, a leader who delegates or takes a participatory approach is clearly more important, while for junior employees, a more directive style is preferred. It’s very important to always consult with employees on everything—for example, we modified the benefits package regarding health insurance; we offered a more comprehensive package but didn’t consult the employees—we automatically faced a backlash even though, objectively speaking, they received a much better package, but we didn’t ask them.”
- “The most important quality of any leader or manager is knowing how to listen and offer support to those they work with, to understand them. There’s a lot of pressure in this regard. You can’t function in the long run without it.”
- “(referring to the people-oriented leader) Yes, it aligns with how they relate to the company—I ask myself why they’re leaving the company—, people leave companies because of their bosses and because of how the leader behaves. Basically, it’s an expression of people’s preferences regarding the type of leaders they prefer. The collaborative approach seems to be on the rise, while directive/authoritarian leadership is becoming increasingly niche—it only works in a few areas anymore.”
- “People-centered leadership: absolutely—our greatest efforts are focused on the leadership team and the extended leadership team—we invest in them because they’re extremely important and also very good at what they do. Also, a collaborative work environment is important; over 95% of returning employees say they come for the culture and environment. Participative leadership gives employees the opportunity to express themselves through their work—another important factor for them.”
- “There is no such thing as a universally successful leader—during a recession, you may need to be more authoritative or decisive; during a period of growth, you’re more flexible and approachable—it’s important for a leader to understand the context and make the right decisions for the group, even if that involves sacrifices.”
- “For a leader to treat employees as individuals, to understand and support them—I believe that’s a must; there’s no other way. If an employee feels valued, they perform well—it’s essential to be close to people; otherwise, you can’t keep them engaged.
- Starting at a certain level, we apply the concept of servant leadership—whereas for junior employees in their first one or two years, we apply directive leadership.”
- “A leader must be open and willing to help when asked. Those in entry-level positions need to learn to ask for help; they don’t really know how to do it. But the leader must also cultivate this relationship. Empowerment is also important—the leader becomes a coach, mentor, and role model for employees.”

Interview Findings

Knowledge, Skills, Competencies: The Profile of the Ideal Employee.

- Company leaders confirm the importance of critical thinking and the ability to analyze and synthesize information in today's workplace. Even though these skills are often overrated by respondents, top leaders recognize the fundamental role these competencies play, especially in decision-making and leadership positions. The ability to understand complex contexts and think systemically is considered increasingly important, as it is associated with a proactive attitude and openness to learning—a trait that companies are increasingly seeking in their employees.
- Second, digital skills and knowledge of a foreign language—particularly English—have become industry standards. On the other hand, the relatively low level of financial literacy remains a persistent concern. Employers observe a gap in employees' understanding of financial benefits and the management of financial resources, which can lead to the underutilization or underestimation of these benefits and, ultimately, to poor decision-making. There is also a narrow focus on immediate effects or elements (increases in take-home pay, marginal financial differences)—a broader, long-term perspective on financial management is lacking.
- People and soft skills—particularly communication skills and the ability to solve problems independently—are considered essential in the profile of the ideal employee. Employers seek a combination of continuous learning and a proactive attitude, along with alignment with the organization's values and culture. These elements create an environment conducive to employee development, ensure greater commitment to and loyalty toward the company, and reduce the risk of turnover—all three of which translate into improved performance.

Company Evaluation Criteria

- A significant factor is job security, which is considered crucial, especially in the context of recent economic changes. This is an essential criterion for employees, ranking among their top preferences, and certain companies promote it through their brand and scale. Furthermore, a significant number of employees return to their former jobs because of the security they offer or because of the “healthy” work environment.
- Another important aspect is the balance between professional and personal life, known as “work-life balance.” This is difficult to assess due to its ambiguity, but it appears that employees place particular emphasis on a clear distinction between the two spheres of their lives—professional and personal. Setting clear boundaries and ensuring the organization does not violate them has become the norm in modern companies. Employees expect to have as much autonomy as possible in creating a “healthy balance” between the two.

- Employee mental health and well-being have become top priorities, especially in the wake of the pandemic. Companies have had to adapt their organizational environments to meet these needs, offering psychological counseling services and other benefits to support employees' mental health. All participants indicated an openness to psychological support and a growing demand not only for support services but also for events of this nature.
- Opportunities for professional development and the type of work performed are also aspects valued by employees. However, some leaders note that certain employees prefer to remain in senior technical roles, avoiding promotion to management positions due to the increased risk and responsibility—a leadership position entails greater psychological pressure and a higher risk of conflict (with coworkers)—which not everyone desires, despite the benefits associated with such a position.
- Salary and benefits remain important factors, but, in general, employee satisfaction with their income is high, and salary is a common reason cited by those who leave the company—a hygiene factor
- Employees seek a balance between job security, opportunities for professional development, mental well-being, and financial satisfaction in an organizational environment that offers them an adequate “work-life balance” and allows them to feel valued and motivated within the company.

Organizational Environment

- First and foremost, employee well-being and mental health are considered priorities in the organizational environment, while opportunities for career advancement and professional development, as well as the promotion of an inclusive and diverse environment, are also key elements. Employees want to feel valued and supported, and companies are making considerable efforts to create a conducive work environment and meet employees' needs.
- When it comes to sustainability, there is growing interest—particularly among young people—and increasing pressure on companies to adopt socially and environmentally responsible practices. This aspect is also becoming increasingly relevant to companies' public image, driven by CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) initiatives and legislative regulations.
- Work arrangements have undergone significant changes in the context of the pandemic, with an emphasis on working from home and flexible work schedules. However, there are concerns regarding the distance between employees and the organization and their alignment with company values. Hybrid work is prevalent across all companies, but the trend is toward increasing employees' physical presence at work and combating disengagement and disaffiliation.

- Regarding inclusion, diversity, and gender neutrality, companies are paying increasing attention to these issues, particularly the representation of women at all hierarchical levels and the elimination of the gender pay gap. However, there are differences in perception and the degree of acceptance of these initiatives among employees. The results of the quantitative analysis are confirmed by the qualitative study: the DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) component is not considered a priority relative to other elements, and companies have multiple initiatives and are making considerable efforts to address this aspect

General Conclusions of the “Why Do We Work?” Study

Through this research, we sought to identify the perceptions of key stakeholders in the labor market —students (as future employees), employees, and company leaders/top managers— regarding the criteria used to choose a job, what a good job looks like (in employees’ minds) and what they value, what the profile of the ideal employee looks like (from the employer’s perspective), and where the three categories converge.

To build as detailed a picture as possible, we used a mixed-methods approach:

- Quantitative research to identify the expectations of two categories of respondents— students (future projections) and employees (current expectations)
- Qualitative research—focus groups—we conducted two focus groups with the two categories of respondents to validate the results of the quantitative study and examine the respondents’ perceptions in depth
- Qualitative research – interviews with company leaders/CEOs – the third component examined the employer’s/company’s perspective and expectations of employees

Each of the three stages of the research identified a number of major patterns related to the study’s topic, which we summarize below:

Employee Training—Skills, Competencies, and Attitudes. Profile of the Ideal Employee

1. Critical thinking, the ability to analyze and synthesize information, and soft skills (communication, social skills) are what make an employee attractive. Knowledge of a foreign language, digital skills, and technical competencies are considered “mandatory” for hiring (exclusion criteria). Financial literacy is lacking but necessary.

- There is a strong convergence among all three categories of participants — students, employees, and leaders — regarding what is important (even if justified differently) for an employee’s attractiveness: critical thinking, the ability to analyze and synthesize, as well as technical skills are perceived as “mandatory” regardless of position, with the first two becoming increasingly important for managerial/leadership roles.
- Both employees and students confirm the importance of this set of skills, believe they possess these skills (a confirmed subjective bias), and consider them to be skills to which workplace experience contributes positively
- Leaders/managers emphasize the importance of “an employee capable of thinking independently” through their expectations: they want employees who are willing to learn constantly, to make an effort to develop themselves (especially in terms of thinking patterns and flexibility), to have a proactive attitude, and to demonstrate a high degree of autonomy – It is difficult to say whether these two factors give rise to such behaviors, or whether proactive behavior and a certain curiosity or openness to development generate the skills; most likely, the two categories form a self-reinforcing virtuous circle that underlies the ideal employee (in the professional field under study).

2. The profile of the ideal employee is a combination of (1) continuous learning/curiosity/openness to new ideas + (2) a proactive attitude/autonomy and problem-solving ability + (3) alignment with the organization’s values.

- The idea of continuous learning comes up most frequently—regardless of the nature of the company, respondents indicate this characteristic as fundamental; due to the fast-paced dynamics of the market, a high-performing (and desirable) employee is one capable of constantly reshaping their thought patterns and behavior.
 - Employers expect future employees to be proficient in at least one foreign language (English is considered a given), to possess digital skills relevant to the position they are applying for, and to have technical knowledge specific to the role—generally, these are the criteria used to screen job applicants.
- 3. Choosing a company or a job—**job security, the type of job (challenging with opportunities for growth and advancement), and work-life balance—are the main factors by which employees evaluate a job’s attractiveness. Salary and benefits are hygiene factors—they grow in importance as they are perceived to be insufficient or uncompetitive compared to a benchmark (generally “industry peers”). Hybrid or remote work is an expectation as an option, but the trend is toward a return to “office work.”
- 4. A new professional identity.** There are four fundamental elements that paint the picture of perceptions regarding the criteria by which an employee chooses a job.
- The first elements relate to the content of the “job” and the concept of job identity, as perceived by the employee—currently, the “image of the ideal job” looks like this: a job at a major company (which offers security and contributes to one’s portfolio in case of career mobility), work that is interesting and offers opportunities for growth and development (career + professional development), and the ability to establish a healthy balance between professional responsibilities and personal life (work-life balance). Added to these are a satisfactory salary and benefits package (hygiene factors) and the possibility of hybrid work.
 - For those earning above the average salary (as is the case with the respondents), these aspects of the job fit into (and should contribute positively to) a broader view of life—ideally, the job offers satisfaction but, above all, allows the individual to lead a fulfilling life beyond working hours and serves as a source of high and secure income. We may be witnessing a redefinition of professional identity in which it becomes less important and must be properly integrated into the broader umbrella of personal identity—the emphasis on drawing clear boundaries between the two spheres, resistance to the use of formal instruments and sources of authority (hierarchical position, internal regulations, professional obligation), and the need for greater convergence between personal values and those specific to the organization—are, at the very least, indicators of such a transformation.
 - This transformation is ambiguously characterized by the phrase “work-life balance” and the concept of “well-being,” which are considered important (or the most important) by all categories of respondents - The pandemic has multiple ramifications, both in terms of the collective mindset (as reflected in mental health and a non-toxic environment) and in the organization-employee relationship—the option for hybrid or remote work is present in all companies in one form or another, although the trend is to bring employees back to the office at least three days a week.

5. The organizational environment—the ideal workplace—is one tailored to the (psychological) needs of employees.

- Employee well-being, support, and a healthy organizational environment are linked to how employees define their “job” or “professional identity”—the work environment must be a space where employees feel treated fairly, receive support when they need it, and feel valued —there is a repositioning of the employee in relation to the organization—yes, they are there to contribute to the organization’s goals, but this “transactional” relationship is no longer defined solely by salary; elements of the organizational environment are part of this puzzle—the employee must feel comfortable at work and feel appreciated. They want to see how their work contributes to “something bigger” and to have opportunities for development and learning.
- Companies are making greater efforts to ensure these elements—particularly the job, career, and learning opportunities—but the picture is complex; these factors have a more pronounced negative effect when the employee perceives them as lacking—in other words, the need for these elements included in “job identity” is strong, but it does not necessarily translate into their actual realization or utilization (as confirmed by interviews)
- The efforts companies make to create such an environment are substantial and confirm the importance they place on “employee well-being.” The “working from home” or “hybrid work” component should also be included here—companies are reversing the trend that emerged during the pandemic, but they have realized that completely eliminating this option can lead to strong resistance and a negative reaction.

6. Leadership is becoming an even more complex puzzle. The people who lead—a key element in the performance equation. The leader is the glue that binds the new professional identity and a healthy organizational environment.

- The direct leader becomes the organization’s primary interface with employees, and employees’ expectations of this interface are enormous. The leader is the “make-or-break” factor in the team’s functioning—companies should value this resource as highly as possible.
- On the one hand, there are fairly clear expectations regarding behavior and interactions with employees—the ideal manager/leader builds positive social relationships, offers support to employees, treats them as individuals—individual consideration—and shows empathy.
- A key element is the leader’s ability to connect with employees, offer them support, and understand them on a personal level—without this component, in today’s organizational context (complex problems, high levels of uncertainty, and the redefinition of the personal-professional relationship), employee performance drops significantly, and in the long term, the team cannot function effectively.
- From the perspective of the formal and technical elements associated with the job, participatory leadership involves engaging employees in decision-making processes, offering autonomy, delegating tasks, and providing guidance when necessary (for inexperienced employees). There has been a significant decrease (even disappearance) in situations where “authoritarian” leadership is tolerated—this type of leadership is no longer an effective option regardless of the situation, largely due to

employees' rejection (and even more so among younger employees) of formal hierarchies and an organizational context characterized by a great deal of distance from power (which is integrated into the employee's new professional identity)—this redefinition of the role played by the leader in team functioning and the exercise of authority can be expressed as follows - The leader's authority is accepted to the extent that the person in that position treats employees/individuals fairly as an equal (the concept of "equal among equals").

- Last but not least, both employees and CEOs expect leaders to take on the role of mentor or coach—the leader is a role model for the organization's values as well as for the team's specific values (the inner circle), is a coach and a good motivator, acts as a "friend" and shows empathy, represents the team in dealings with "higher authorities," is a "problem solver," and at the same time provides employees with the autonomy and flexibility they need to express themselves through their work and feel they are contributing to the "final product."
- Companies should not underestimate the importance of this professional group for maintaining performance and should invest in developing these types of individuals and then retaining them (their value to the organization is the same regardless of the field).
- The organizational leadership component is becoming increasingly important but also more complex—fulfilling the role of a leader is growing more difficult but remains essential.