

DIFFERENCES IN EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION IN WOOD- PROCESSING ENTERPRISES IN SELECTED COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

The human factor is still an irreplaceable element bearing a competitive advantage in the changed conditions of the wood-processing industry created by Industrial Revolution 4.0. Their sophisticated use and motivation result in the company's higher performance potential, and satisfaction is reflected in higher employee loyalty. The study aims to evaluate the level of motivation of employees working in the wood-processing industry in selected Central European countries (Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine) from the point of view of groups of motivation factors and then to compare them between countries in terms of gender and age. Differences in the mean values of the compared groups were tested, taking into account the confidence interval. The research was conducted at the beginning of 2021 when Ukraine has not been in a military conflict yet. The result of our findings is the knowledge that the most important motivation factors for Slovak employees in the wood-processing industry are those related to finance and employer-employee relationships. Czech employees also prefer the same motivation factors but place less emphasis on them. Employees of the wood-processing industry in Ukraine prefer motivation factors related to finance and career aspiration. From the point of view of motivation, the input qualitative parameters of raw-wood material and its assessment in forest stands are also important. In globalization, the findings of our study can serve as insights for managers within the wood-processing industry. These insights can be particularly beneficial in enhancing the quality of human resource management, with a particular emphasis on bolstering employee motivation.

Keywords: motivation factors; differences in employee motivation; salary; career aspiration; work conditions; workplace well-being factors; social needs; wood-processing industry; Slovak Republic; Czech Republic; Ukraine.

INTRODUCTION

Any organization's success, performance, and competitiveness mainly depend on the content and quality of human resource management (Gottwald *et al.*, 2017). With the rapid development of the economy, the performance appraisal of human resource management in all types of enterprises has gained more attention (Zhang 2023). It is immediately known that the competitive advantage of companies lies precisely in their human capital and employees (Vrabcová and Urbancová 2022). They constitute the most essential aspect of any company, represent the most valuable asset, and play a vital role in its performance and

achieving its goals (Bogdanovic *et al.*, 2016). Most employees must be recognized and motivated in the workplace (Baksa and Branyiczki 2023; Oladimeji *et al.*, 2023). It positively affects their job satisfaction and optimal performance (Mendoza-Ocasal *et al.*, 2022; Azmy and Wiadi 2023). Human resource management represents one of the most critical functions of the enterprise, which is responsible for the development of not only the enterprise but also the workforce (Smerek and Vetráková 2020; Alsafadi and Altahtat 2021). However, human resource management must follow the company's internal principles, personnel strategy, and policy (Nguyen *et al.*, 2020).

Many enterprises currently invest large amounts of funds in human capital (Kohnová *et al.*, 2023; Stacho *et al.*, 2017). These investments will ultimately prove to increase the performance of businesses (Graa and Abdelhak 2016; Lazarevic *et al.*, 2020; Jaros, Melichar and Svadlenka, 2014). However, to improve and maintain employees' productivity, it is necessary to ensure their education, training, motivation, and further development at the right time and in the right way (Vetráková and Smerek 2019; Dibiku 2023). The company's performance depends on the employees' efficiency (Jankelová *et al.*, 2020). Benefits and improved performance are primarily due to the development of employees, individuals, and work groups (FitriMansor *et al.*, 2014). One possibility is the implementation of motivational programs because it improves individual and organizational performance (Jankelová *et al.*, 2021).

The quality of human potential is a crucial factor influencing the operation of the enterprise and its prosperity (Szierbowski-Seibel, 2018). Human capital is unique in terms of potential for growth and development (Balková *et al.*, 2022; Hyrslova *et al.*, 2017). It has the potential to create material and spiritual assets capable of meeting ever-new requirements (Erazo-Muñoz *et al.*, 2022; Froněk *et al.*, 2021).

Employee motivation represents an incentive to make certain decisions, engage in specific performance and effort, or persist in a particular course (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2021). Employee motivation has always been and always will be a central issue managers and executives address (Ganta, 2014). Unmotivated or improperly motivated workers are highly likely not to perform as well as motivated workers (Maj, 2023; Riyanto *et al.*, 2021; Skýpalová *et al.*, 2022). In the current turbulent economic environment, the basics of what motivates employees are gaining more and more importance (Tokarcikova *et al.*, 2020)

Concerning the Central European region and cooperation, the country selection is focused on countries where the wood-processing industry forms an essential part of the GDP. Since the analyzed countries have comparable structures of the wood-processing industry, this enables their relevant comparison. The study aims to evaluate the level of motivation of employees working in the wood-processing industry in selected Central European countries (Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine) from the point of view of groups of motivation factors (related to relationship, finance, social needs, work conditions, and career aspiration). Subsequently, the groups of motivation factors between countries regarding gender and age were compared. The research was carried out at the beginning of 2021 when Ukraine was not yet in a military conflict, which can fundamentally affect the results. In the time of globalization, the results of our research can be used in the future by wood-processing industry enterprises to improve the quality of human resource management, especially in employee motivation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The wood-processing industry is a branch of the manufacturing industry dealing with processing wood and wood materials. Its industries are primarily wood processing, furniture, pulp, and paper (Sario, 2022). The total production of wood-processing enterprises in Slovakia represents an average turnover of €640 million (Statistical Office of the SR, 2019).

The wood-processing industry in the Czech Republic is focused primarily on exclusively domestic raw wood and, therefore, mainly on the processing of coniferous tree species. The structure of the industries is very similar to that of the Slovak Republic (Czech Statistics Office, 2019).

The wood-processing industry in Ukraine is one of the prosperous and well-secured sectors of the country, and last but not least, the woodworking industry of Ukraine is one of the major sources of wood in Europe. The structure of the industries is also very similar to that of the Slovak Republic (The State Committee of Statistics of Ukraine, 2019).

The object of the investigation was employees working in enterprises of the forest-based sector in the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine. The data collection took place at the end of 2021. The sample consisted of respondents from the entire territory of the monitored countries to achieve the representativeness of the sample set. The respondents were of different genders, ages, education, and job categories. The sample set was determined by quota selection according to the control characteristics of gender, age, and occupational classification.

The questionnaire was used to gain the data. It consisted of two parts (Hitka *et al.*, 2009). The first part identified the respondents' socio-demographic profile related to age, gender, number of years of service in the company, completed education, and job position. The second part of the questionnaire included thirty closed questions addressing employee motivation preferences. Motivation factors were categorized into five main aspects: the total financial compensation for work (including basic salary, fringe benefits, and a fair appraisal system), satisfying career aspiration (encompassing skill utilization, job performance, competence, prestige, independent decision-making, self-actualization, recognition, education, and personal growth), perception of work conditions (comprising elements such as physical effort, job security, workload, type of work, performance information, working hours, work environment, work processes, mental effort, and stress), meeting social needs (including social benefits, company vision, organization name, regional development, and environmental commitment), and assessment of relationships at the place of employment (involving workplace atmosphere, teamwork, supervisor's approach, and workplace communication).

To ensure objectivity, the motivation factors were presented to respondents in alphabetical order, thereby minimizing potential response bias. Respondents evaluated the importance of individual motivation factors with values. Rating 1 expressed the unimportance of the motivation factor for the respondent; on the other hand, value 5 said the most significant importance of the motivation factor.

The internal reliability of all measured by questionnaire-based motivational factors was evaluated. This assessment involved Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which ranges from 0 to 1 and quantifies the extent to which items in a questionnaire are interrelated or measure the same underlying construct. In other words, it helps determine if the items in a survey or test consistently measure the same concept (Mareš *et al.*, 2015). The calculated coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha is $\alpha = 0.929$, similar to McDonald's Omega coefficient which is $\omega = 0.933$ in the case of wood-processing enterprises (Silva *et al.*, 2003) indicating excellent

reliability. The power of the test for group F tests (Anova) is 0.999, with the set parameters effect size $f = 0.4$, $\alpha = 0.01$.

The next step was to compare the analysed countries using an analysis of variance in the five areas of motivation tested. The following part used the variance analysis to compare the required employee motivation between countries based on gender and age using Statistica 14 software (TIBCO Software Inc.: Palo Alto, CA, USA). We aimed to point out statistically significant differences or similarities between the requirements within gender and age between the three countries under study. Based on the analysis of findings from the theoretical part, the following research hypotheses (RH):

RH1 – it is assumed that there are differences in groups of motivation factors between individual countries.

RH2 – it is assumed that there are differences in terms of age and gender between individual countries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As part of the questionnaire, the socio-demographic profile of the respondent was investigated. 4,120 respondents working in wood-processing enterprises in the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine participated in the survey. Detailed information on respondents by gender, age, completed education, and job category for each country is shown in Table 1.

Tab. 1 Structure of sampling unit.

		SK	CZ	UA
		1654	1068	1398
Gender	man	1130	434	397
	woman	524	634	1001
Age group	Up to 30	339	489	794
	31-40	510	257	452
	41-50	505	233	106
	51 plus	300	89	46
Education completed	primary	54	21	23
	lower secondary	376	138	21
	upper secondary	910	623	305
	higher	314	386	1048
Job position	manager	219	198	287
	blue collar worker	1018	455	730
	white collar worker	417	415	380

Source: own survey

The position of five groups of motivation factors (motivation factors relating to mutual relationship, career aspiration, finance, work condition, and social needs) depending on the importance of individual groups in terms of affiliation to the country was determined. The motivation factors were grouped into five fields based on an expert assessment. The results are shown in Figure 1.

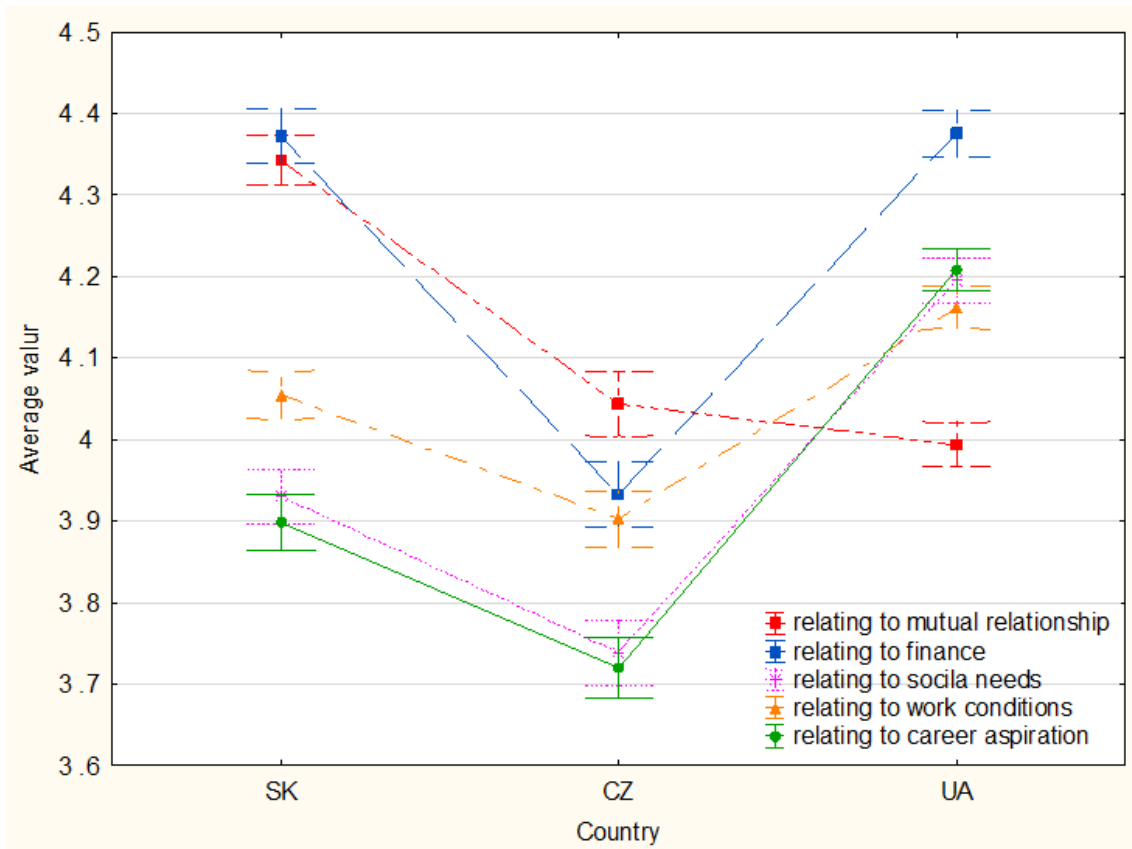


Fig. 1 Box and whisker plot: 95% confidence intervals for the mean values of the importance of individual groups of motivation factors in terms of affiliation to the country.

For employees in the Slovak Republic, the most essential motivation factors are those relating to finance and employer-employee mutual relationships. Czech employees also prefer motivation factors relating to relationships and finance, but they put less emphasis on them than employees from other countries. Employees of the wood-processing industry in Ukraine consider finance and career aspirations the most essential factors.

Similarities in the motivational needs of individual countries can be seen in the fields of finance (the Slovak Republic and Ukraine) and relationships (the Czech Republic and Ukraine). In other fields, the countries show significant differences. Following the findings, it can be concluded that the motivational needs of the monitored countries are different.

In the next part, differences in terms of age and gender for different groups of motivation factors were examined.

From the point of view of motivation factors relating to finance (basic salary, fringe benefits, fair appraisal system), it is possible to evaluate a significant difference between the monitored countries in terms of gender (Figure 2). In the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic, an insignificant gender difference was observed. In Ukraine, the requirements between the genders are significantly different. In terms of age, the differences within countries are similar. There is a significant difference in age between countries.

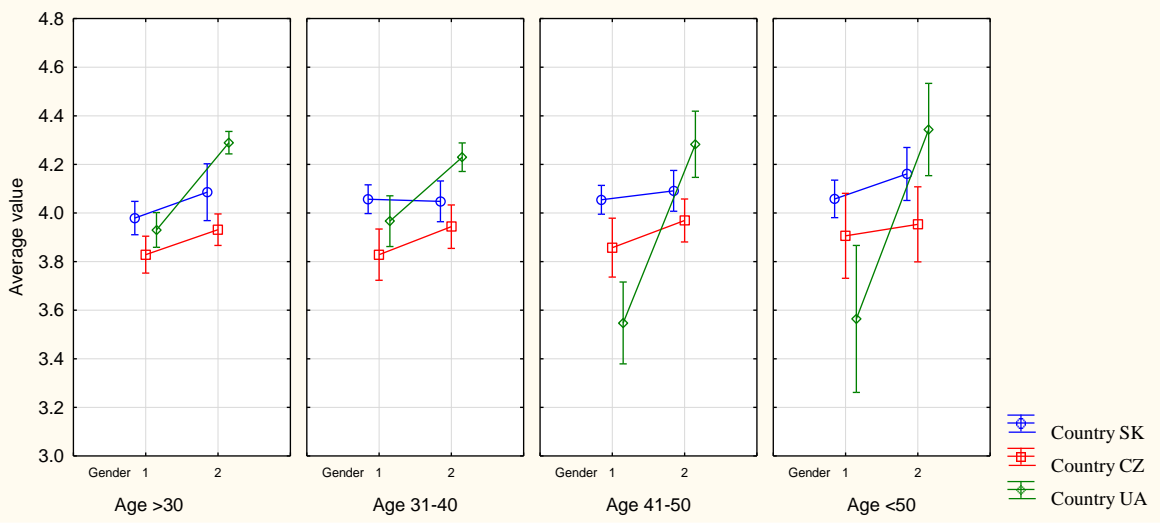


Fig. 2 Motivation factors related to finance.

In the field of motivation factors related to employer-employee relationships (atmosphere in the workplace, good work team, supervisor's approach, communication in the workplace), it can be stated that there is a similarity in the perception of the need for motivation between the Czech Republic and Ukraine. The Slovak Republic is significantly different (Figure 3). The differences between the genders were not observed. In terms of age, there is no significant difference between the countries.

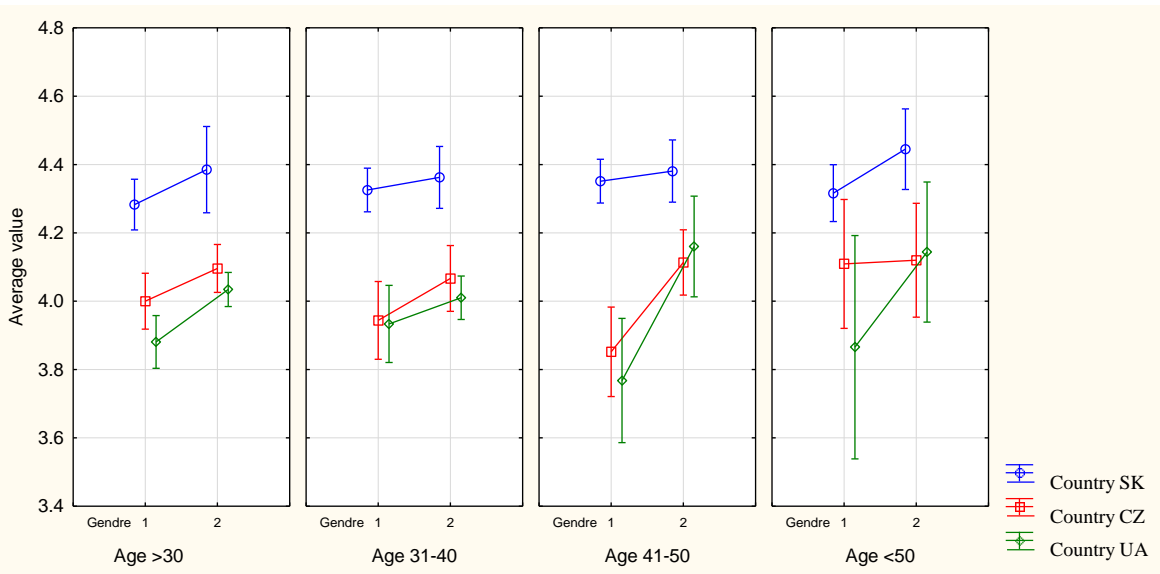


Fig. 3 Motivation factors related to relationship.

From the point of view of motivation factors related to work conditions (Workplace Wellbeing Factors such as physical effort at work, job security, workload and type of work performed, information about performance results, working hours, work environment, work processes, mental effort, and stress), it is possible to see a significant difference between the observed countries in terms of gender (Figure 4), especially in Ukraine. Slovakia and the Czech Republic have similar perceptions of motivational needs within genders. There is a high similarity in this field even within age.

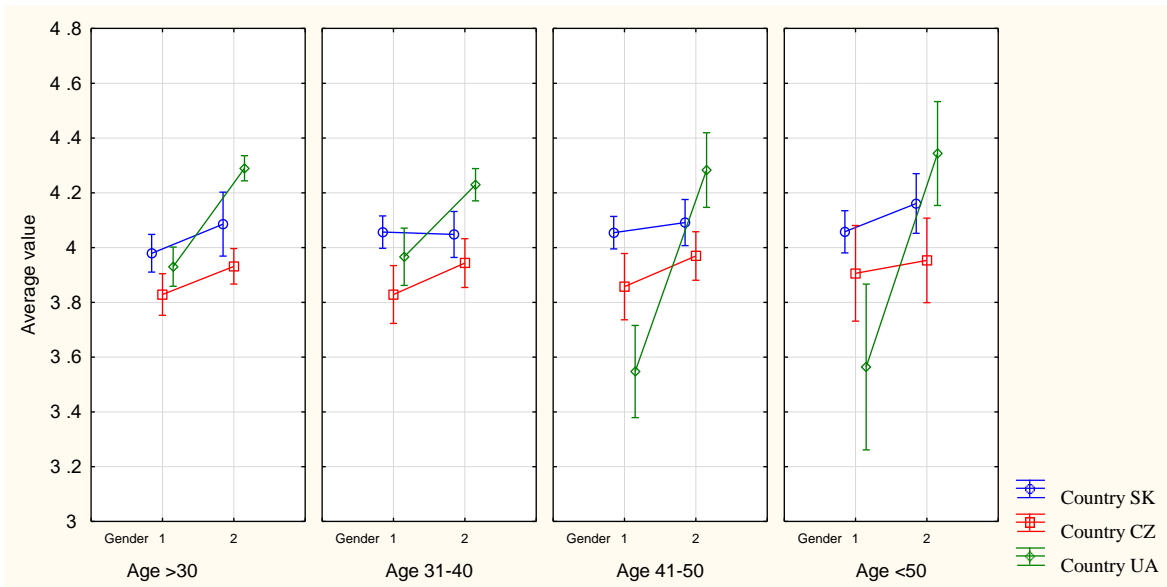


Fig. 4 Motivation factors related to work conditions.

In the group of motivation factors related to social needs (social benefits, company vision, name of the organization, development of the region, relation of the organization to the environment, free time), there is no difference between the monitored countries in terms of gender (Figure 5). All three countries have similar perceptions of motivational needs within gender. There is a high similarity in this field even within age.

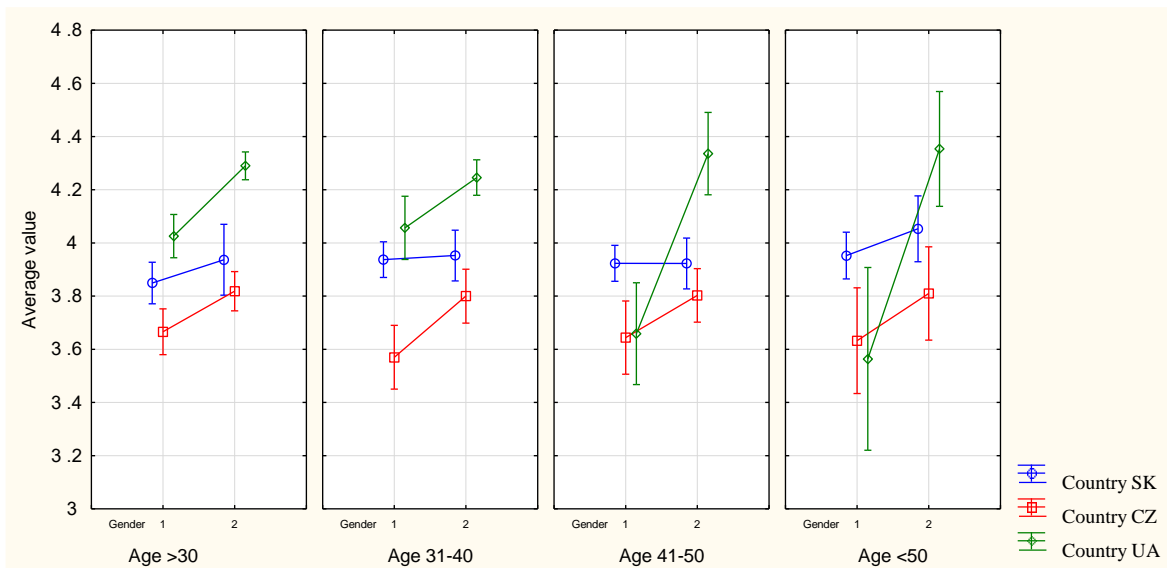


Fig. 5 Motivation factors related to social needs.

In the group of motivation factors related to career aspiration (possibility of applying one's own skills, job performance, competence, prestige, independent decision-making, self-actualization, recognition, education, and personal growth), there is a significant difference between the monitored countries in terms of gender (Figure 6) between Ukraine and the other two countries. Within age, there is a high similarity in this field.

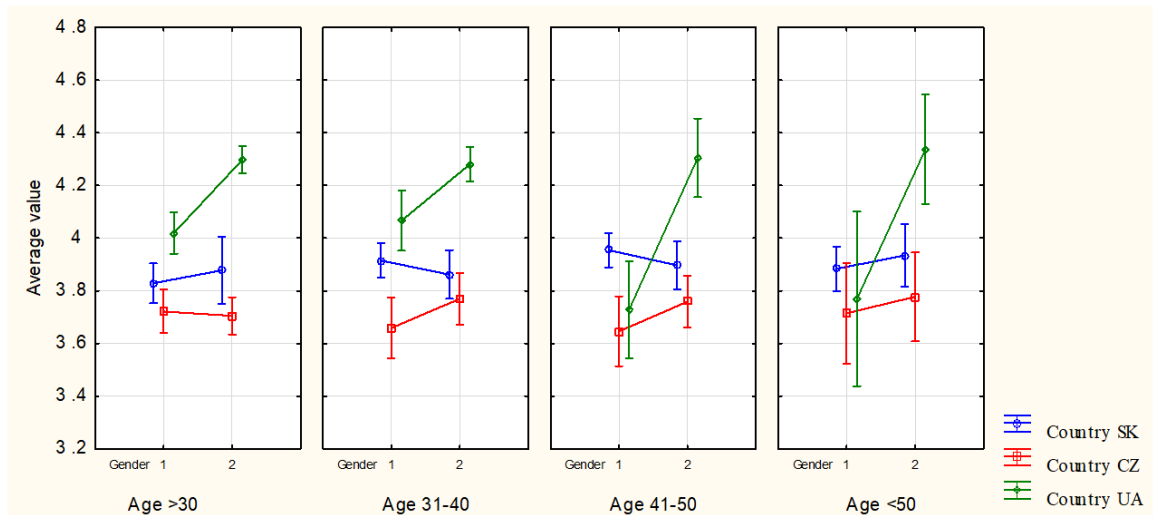


Fig. 6 Motivation factors related to career aspiration.

In our paper, the motivation factors divided into groups were investigated. The result of our findings is the knowledge that the most important motivation factors for Slovak employees in the wood-processing industry are those related to finance and relationships. Czech employees also prefer the mentioned factors but place less emphasis on them. In the wood-processing industry in Ukraine, employees prefer motivation factors related to finance and career aspiration.

The results confirm previous research (Hitka *et al.*, 2018), which examined the required motivation in Slovak, Czech Republic, and Lithuania. The position of the essential motivation factors in all three countries is mentioned and explained, including factors such as basic salary, the workplace atmosphere (Sommerauerová and Chocholáč 2020), the supervisor's approach, and fringe benefits. Also, the authors Sánchez-Sellero *et al.* (2018) confirmed the need for finance and relationships in Spanish wood-processing enterprises. Another research carried out in the Czech Republic and the Russian Federation in 2018 shows that the most preferred motivation among Czech employees is the supervisor's approach, the atmosphere in the workplace, a good work team, a fair evaluation system, and safety at work. Czech employees highlight the motivation factors related to relationship and finance, which coincides with our research, while Russian employees prefer motivation factors related to work conditions (Ližbetinová *et al.*, 2018). Russian employees prefer the motivation of eliminating stress in the workplace, working hours, working environment, good work team, and workload and type of work performed. Research by the author Igusi (2009) focused on the investigation of employee motivation between the countries of France, Italy, Scotland, the Netherlands, and Nigeria noted similar measured values of preferred motivation among the given European countries and the differences between these countries compared to the preferred motivation in Nigeria. The French, Italians, Scots, and Dutch cited challenging tasks, living in a desired area, self-actualization and independent decision-making, contributing to the organization's success, and good working relations with a supervisor as the most important motivation factors. Nigerian respondents cited contributing to the success of their organization, challenging tasks, job security, the opportunity to work at a higher level, and working with others as the most important motivation. There are no significant differences in the required motivation among respondents from European countries (Igusi, 2009). When investigating the motivation of Swedish and Chinese employees (Flisak and Bjerkhage 2015), the authors concluded that there are differences in the required motivation between them. Chinese employees value motivation factors related

to finance and social needs the most. Swedish employees prefer to be motivated by factors related to work conditions, inspiring work, and recognition at work. The study also points to changes in the motivation of Chinese employees, where the achievements of the whole company are valued more than personal benefits for an individual.

Employees in Bangladesh prefer to have authoritative leaders and decisions to follow without needing further explanations when doing their work. They also like a close relationship with a single manager, collectivism, and risk aversion. Therefore, they prefer motivation factors related to work conditions the most (Islam, 2017). A study by Artina et al. (2020) points to the compelling motivation of Indonesian employees using income, recognition, career growth, and job challenges. They avoid uncertainty, which presupposes a preference for a challenging profession and motivation to achieve a higher career. Their requirements are mainly for motivation factors related to career aspiration and finance. The (Acha-Anyi and Masaraure 2021) study in Grundfos Sub-Saharan Africa points to the fact that only monetary incentives are insufficient to motivate employees. The perception of justice, employee equality, communication, respect among employees, and dignity have gained high importance in compelling motivation. The most increased preferences are for motivation factors related to relationships. The results of the Bao and Nizam (2015) research on Finnish employees also indicate the importance of motivation factors such as working conditions, salary, and interpersonal relationships, which Finnish employees rated as the most important, the underestimation of which can cause high employee dissatisfaction. For the employees of Bosnia and Herzegovina, creating a pleasant working atmosphere, a good work team, and good relations with the supervisor are equally important in terms of motivation (Mustajbašić and Husaković 2016).

Following the research, it can be generally stated that there is a similarity in preferred motivation between European countries.

CONCLUSION

In the paper, the motivational needs of employees in the wood-processing industry in the Czech Republic, Ukraine, and the Slovak Republic were defined. The investigated subjective motivation factors are divided into five groups: evaluation of the total financial compensation for work, satisfying career aspirations, perception of work conditions, meeting social requirements, and assessment of professional relationships in the workplace. The research confirmed significant differences between the Czech Republic and the remaining countries. In terms of gender and age, significant differences between countries were also noted.

Employee motivation also includes the possibility of producing quality products. For the woodworking industry, there are particularly limited possibilities in this area in terms of the quality parameters of the input raw material. The process of qualitative assessment already in the forest stands as the primary task of forestry and should be reflected in the motivational factors for the workers of the forestry-wood processing complex. These facts can subsequently be significantly reflected in the prices of wood and wood products (Suchomel and Gejdoš, 2007).

What effectively motivates employees in one country may motivate employees in another country at a different level. In today's globalization and population migration, enterprises need to employ and retain a workforce to identify the needs of individuals from other countries as well. Subsequently, it is necessary to connect them with implemented motivational programs and implement them to the changing needs of employees. The most

common mistake in motivation is focusing on something other than finance. Although monetary stimulus and its motivation factors are essential in most countries evaluated as essentially required motivation, one should remember to supplement this motivation with other motivation factors from other motivational groups. However, in general, across countries, if attention is paid to improving workplace relations, the overall workplace atmosphere, and building a good team, this effort will translate into an overall improvement in business performance and increase employee motivation and satisfaction.

Our research is part of other research carried out in European countries and the world. The goal was to define the similarity of motivation factors that managers of enterprises in the wood-processing industry can use. Based on our results, it is possible to implement the strategy of creating incentive programs by company managers to increase the quality of human resource management.

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