

# Exploring Employee Experience: Millennial Human Resources Practitioners in the IT Sector

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**Abstract:** The labour market is going through a disruptive phase, characterised by changes in expectations about work. On the one hand, younger generations of employees value aspects such as purpose, personal development, and work-life balance, making these elements crucial to a positive experience at work. On the other hand, organisations recognise that employee satisfaction and well-being influence organisational success. Thus, the main objective of this study is to understand the employee experience of millennial human resources in the information technologies (IT) sector. As specific objectives, we intend to understand which (i) factors they consider influencing their personal and professional experience within organizations; (ii) organizational practices associated with the promotion of positive employee experience; (iii) organizational strategies adopted to promote a positive employee experience and, (iv) challenges linked with positive employee experience management. A qualitative research methodology was used to collect data, using a semi-structured interview with a group of 10 millennial human resources professionals joining the IT sector to answer the research question how is the experience of millennial human resources in the IT sector? The interviews were verbatim transcribed, and data were analysed according to thematic analysis procedures. Our findings show that human resources professionals belonging to the millennial generation express a greater interest in being part of organizations that offer a compensation and benefits system aligned with their performance, in addition to ensuring an effective work-life balance. Furthermore, they emphasize the influence of organizational behaviour on their job satisfaction, indicating that employee experience tends to be positive when the organization promotes a collaborative culture, fostering a work environment conducive to the development of strong interpersonal relationships, the creation of cohesive and dynamic teams, and a clear alignment between individual and organizational goals. Overall, the interviewees demonstrate satisfaction with their current employee experience, acknowledging that it meets their needs and interests comprehensively. Some conclusions for Human Resources Management are provided in the last part of the paper.

**Keywords:** Employee Experience; Millennial Generation; Human Resource Professionals; Organizational Success

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## 1. Introduction

The labour market faces major challenges in attracting and retaining talent (Martins & Cruz, 2019). Companies, for their part, seek to be competitive through the efficiency and effectiveness of their labour activity (Kirpik, 2020), aware of the difficulties in attracting candidates who match their needs and objectives (Zahidi et al., 2020). At the same time, candidates are looking to find meaning in the workplace, while also wanting to feel happy and fulfilled (Wesarat et al., 2014). Wesarat and colleagues (2014) emphasise that there are several factors that enhance positive experiences at work. In line with Wesarat and colleagues (2014), this study aims to explore the employee experience of millennial human resources in the information technology (IT) sector.

As specific objectives, we intend to understand which (i) factors they consider influencing their personal and professional experience within organizations; (ii) organizational practices associated with the promotion of positive employee experience; (iii) organizational strategies adopted to promote a positive employee experience and, (iv) challenges linked with positive employee experience management.

This study contributes to the research in two ways. First, it helps to clarify the concept of employee experience in a specific professional group (human resources professionals) and a sector of activity with many idiosyncrasies in people management (IT). Second, it contributes to enriching the employee experience literature by adding traits, characteristics, and skills associated with the millennial generation as well as organisational factors that influence positive employee experiences.

The following section presents the existing literature on the employee experience concept and organizational factors influencers. Section three outlines the methodological approach, followed by the main study's findings, and the final section addresses the discussion and conclusions.

## **2. Literature Review**

The literature (e.g. Morgan, 2017; Jalaja and Padashetty, 2018) suggests that the employee experience model emerges as a necessary response to improve the employee experience within an organisation. It involves a set of diverse interactions that emerge in everyday work and are influenced by the organisational culture in which the employee is immersed (Jalaja and Padashetty, 2018), enhancing or conditioning their employee experience. Many organisations believe that welcoming newly hired employees makes it possible for them to make a greater connection with the corporate strategy and organisational culture, as well as making it easier to build a network of relationships (Martins and Cruz, 2019).

The literature has been highlighting the growing importance that the employee experience can assume as a factor in attracting and retaining talent in organisations, as well as a success factor and competitive advantage in the labour market (Morgan, 2017; Jalaja and Padashetty, 2018; Martins & Cruz, 2019). On the other hand, defining the employee experience strategy within organisations can also be used as a strategic tool to better select the profile of the desired employees concerning the organisational culture (Morgan, 2017; Zahidi et al., 2020). In addition, Vallina and Alegre (2021) add that the concept of employee experience refers to the ability to encompass employees' feelings in their interactions with the organisation, to obtain better results in both attracting and retaining talent. Organisations are increasingly tending to customise and adapt their people management processes and models in order to ensure greater effectiveness in an increasingly sustainable and competitive labour market in terms of the constant search for new talent (Morgan, 2017; Martins and Cruz, 2019; Zahidi et al., 2020; Hahnsson; 2022). In line with these arguments, Hahnsson (2022) stresses that the employee experience can function as a strategic facilitator, especially valuable for the future design of the work environment, in that it will enable the organisation to design its day-to-day life and set objectives and goals to be achieved in the medium and long term. On the one hand, this argument points to the need to align the employee experience programme with the strategic objectives of the business (Sharma and Bhalkikar, 2022), and on the other hand, it must recognise the needs and meet the expectations of its employees (Hahnsson, 2022).

A variety of literature (e.g. Kirpik, 2020; Mäenpää, 2019; Wesarat et al., 2014; Zahidi et al., 2020) shows that there are a number of factors that tend to influence the employee experience within an organisation, namely: the quality of the relationships established; the objectivity and clarity of the role to be performed by the employee; the value that the employee adds to the company; workplaces that meet the physical and psychological needs of the employee, as well as the development of practices that foster and enhance employee well-being. Companies that value these factors in their employee experience programmes tend to be perceived by their employees as more inspiring, collaborative, authentic and, above all, capable of providing a meaningful experience for all their employees (Hahnsson, 2022; Morgan, 2017; Plaskoff, 2017; Tucker, 2020). One of the factors that most influences employee experience is happiness in the workplace (Kirpik, 2020; Wesarat et al., 2014). This concept is directly related to attitude at work, personal and organisational well-being, social relationships, ethical organisational culture, among others (Kirpik, 2020). Several authors (e.g. Bataineh, 2019; Kirpik, 2020; Mäenpää, 2019; Wagner and Hollenbeck, 2020) add that happy employees are also more involved, capable and responsible employees who perform their job more effectively. Associated with the concept of employee experience is the concept of job satisfaction, which is considered a fundamental factor in the individual's quality of life and well-being (Inuwa, 2016; Robbins and Judge, 2013). Job satisfaction can also be seen as a quantifiable representation of an employee's emotional response, which expresses their position concerning the company or even the role they are performing (Bataineh, 2019; Kapur, 2018). Lack of satisfaction in the workplace can be associated with (1) the stress arising from the tasks inherent in the job, (2) the poor interpersonal relationships established, (3) leadership, among others (Supriyanto et al., 2020). It is therefore necessary to consider these causes when assessing any employee's job satisfaction and not just their level of productivity. This is the only way to understand how job satisfaction influences the employee, either positively or negatively (Robbins and Judge, 2013). Also related to the concept of employee experience is the concept of organisational commitment (Cherif, 2020). According to Bataineh (2019) and Wagner and Hollenbeck (2020), organisational commitment implies that there is a force that binds the employee to the actions they are carrying out, to the extent that they meet the organisational objectives and values, demonstrating readiness, involvement in carrying out the tasks and showing an interest in staying with the company. In other words, organisational commitment is characterised by a set of mental predispositions resulting from the relationship established between employees (Vorina, et al, 2017). The concept of employee experience is intrinsically related to employee performance and responsiveness to the organisation (Alserhan and Shbail, 2020; Bataineh, 2019; Cherif, 2020; Sungu, Weng, Hu, Kitule, and Fang, 2020). In line with this argument, Cherif (2020) states that if

employees do not feel committed to the organisation, they tend to have low levels of performance. The concept of performance, therefore, succinctly translates into what an employee does or doesn't do, which involves a result over an established period.

Also associated with the concept of employee experience is the concept of Work Life Balance (Martins et al., 2018; Bataineh, 2019). These factors affect each other and can be moderated by the concept of happiness at work (Wesarat et al., 2014). Work-life balance is highly valued by employees in organisations (Haar et al., 2014; Martins et al., 2018). In turn, Sánchez-Vidal et al. (2012) suggest that companies that adopt work-life balance practices find it easier to get their employees to give back to the organisation in a positive, beneficial, and enriching way, as well as boost their performance and motivation. Several authors (Bataineh, 2019; Plaskoff, 2017; Haar, et al., 2014) state that the balance point will only be reached when the employee feels satisfied with all the roles they play. On the other hand, when employees are unable to find a balance between their personal and professional lives, they are confronted with levels of dissatisfaction and end up with conflicts in terms of the different roles they fulfill (Rodríguez and Dabos, 2016).

Compensation and benefits systems can also influence the employee experience (Plaskoff, 2017). In this way, if care is taken in planning and defining reward systems, employees will feel more involved and motivated to perform their job and subsequently contribute to achieving organisational goals (Plaskoff, 2017; Tuominen and Härkönen, 2022). Finally, leadership is recognised as another organisational factor that can influence the employee experience (Plaskoff, 2017). For this reason, several authors (e.g. Bhatti et al., 2022; Cao et al., 2020; Corriveau, 2020) suggest that leaders must appeal to and enhance positive leadership styles that meet the needs of everyday work. Specifically, leaders must demonstrate a differentiating vision about the employee experience, focused on promoting positive experiences (Plaskoff, 2017; Martins and Cruz, 2019).

### **3. Method**

This study uses a qualitative exploratory methodology to achieve the main objective of understanding the employee experience of millennial human resources in the IT sector. More specifically, we intend to understand which factors they consider to influence their personal and professional experience within organizations; the organizational practices associated with the promotion of positive employee experience; (iii) organizational strategies adopted to promote a positive employee experience, and the challenges related to positive employee experience management.

It was used a semi-structured interview for data collection. The semi-structured interview had a set of questions for the socio-demographic characterisation of the participants and organisation, and 16 open questions related to their employee experience to achieve the study objectives. It was made questions such as “What factors that you think have an impact on your experience within an organization?”, “what can be offered by the organisations to make their employees more satisfied in the workplace?”, “How do you characterise your experience within the organisation you currently work?”, “How do you consider an asset to the organization?”, or “How does your organisation concern with enhancing a positive experience for all employees?”.

Participated in this study 10 millennial human resources professionals (six female and 4 male) working in the IT sector. Their mean age was 27,2 years old, and all of them were single. All of them had higher education studies, seven had master's courses. Their professional experience varies between seven months and seven years.

For collecting the sample, it was used a snowball technique. All the interviews were made online using Microsoft Teams. They were audiotaped and verbatim transcripts. The interviews lasted, on average, 36 minutes. Data were analysed according to thematic analysis procedures (Braun and Clarke, 2006). All ethical procedures were made.

### **4. Results**

Our results suggest for main themes: Millennial Generation, Leadership, Human Resources Practices, and Organisational Behavior.

The Millennial Generation theme emerges from the main skills and characteristics the participants referred to as specific to this generation. It referred to skills such as communication, learning, adaptation, empathy, active listening, stress management, autonomy, confidence, and flexibility. According to our participants, these skills are crucial to have an efficient performance as we can observe in the words of Participant 7 “Communication is mandatory nowadays, you have to communicate clearly, it is very important in this organisation”. Regarding the

category characteristics, the participants were referring to specific features that allow them to define the dimensions of this generation such as information searching and work-life balance. Participant 6 said, "We learn everything very quickly because we are always searching on the internet how to do this or how to work with that". Additionally, all the participants valued an organisation that permits them to have work-life balance as we can observe in the words of Participant 1 "For me it is very important, that was the reason for changing the organisation, I need to have time for me, and to do other things. It is important to have a company that respects my rest and working hours, that knows that I need them, I am there for them, but if I need them, they have to be there for me. I give it my all, but when I need to rest, they respect that and let me rest."

The Leadership theme emerges from the leader's characteristics that are vital to our millennial participants. According to them, the active listening ability of the leader is a distinctive feature because he can keep an eye on the information and details of his employees so that he can make informed decisions and guide them toward their goals as illustrated by "Knowing how to listen to people, knowing what their needs are, seeing the person as a whole not just through what they can produce in their job, in a more way" (participant 4).

The Human Resources Practices theme emerges from Job description, Recruitment and selection, Training and development, Benefits, and Career management categories. Regarding the Job description, our participants referred that this is a very important practice to collect, analyse, and systematise information related to a specific job, based on a set of necessary skills as can be illustrated by "when you have the description of the function each person who is hired knows their responsibilities and the duties they have to perform, and so there is this self-responsibility for tasks" (participant 7). The recruitment and selection process is considered central to the development of any company since this is the process responsible for attracting and selecting the employees who will become part of organisations. Throughout the interviews, turnover was one of the aspects most highlighted by the interviewees. Turnover refers to the movement of workers in the labor market. Therefore, it is possible to observe that in the IT sector, there is a high turnover rate, "In the area of recruitment in the IT sector, there is a lot of turnover, people come and go, come and go, there are a lot of difficulties in this area, but we try to address these needs through good practices to keep them within the organisation" (participant 3). The training and development category refers to the need of having further training and development opportunities inside the organisation. According to Participant 2, "We are the generation other higher graduation, but we still want to learn more, it is the knowledge generation!". Concerning the benefits category, this should be reflected through a set of material or immaterial offers that employees receive from the organisation to the detriment of the quality of their performance. It is also necessary to show the importance of this tool within any organisation. For our participants the benefits valued are related to salary, health insurance, leisure activities, and extra vacation days as can be illustrated by "I look for a higher salary, but nowadays it is important also to have more benefits such as health insurance and leisure activities" (participant 5). For our participants, Career management is also an important category allowing them to develop a path to achieve higher positions. The words of participant 10 illustrate this importance "I think that career progression is also an aspect that I consider to be important, and I now know that it's possible, and it only depends on me achieve these goals".

The Organisational Behavior theme emerges from the need to understand and characterise the professional experience of human resources professionals in the IT sector, as well as to understand which organisational characteristics that have the most impact and relevance for the millennial generation. Our participants associate their professional experience with market labor with Positive experience, Satisfaction, Motivation, Professional Recognition and Appreciation, Demotivation, Mental Illness Burnout/Mental Health, Interpersonal Relationships, Teamwork, Human Experience, and Organisational Happiness. The Positive experience category was referred by most of the participants and it refers to their positive and challenging experience as illustrated by "My experience at the moment is fantastic. At the moment I consider it to be

one of the most positive experiences I have ever had in terms of work, I can say perhaps the best. I do not see myself leaving here in the next few years, I am very happy, the balance is very positive" (participant 2). Regarding Satisfaction category, this is a variable that the millennial generation seeks and values. Job satisfaction is a variable that is intrinsically related to the productivity of organisations as well as the personal fulfillment of its employees as can be illustrate by "On a personal level, I try to achieve personal satisfaction, you are doing something you believe in. And you believe that you are having an impact, even if that impact is only on a personal level. We need to work with people we identify with, who are based on my goals and values, I think these are factors that are important when looking for a job" (participant 4).

Organisational characteristics result from a set of subcategories that human resources professionals in the IT sector value within their organisations. The characteristics mentioned by the participants include organisational culture; work environment; individual and organizational objectives and work methodology as illustrated by “The culture of the organisation itself, the environment is something that both personally and professionally I think is important. In other words, understand whether the organization's culture is aligned with my values. I have to feel connected to the company's values, and objectives of the company, I have to feel that I am working towards something, that I am adding value and it is not just work and I think that's reflected in the culture of the company itself” (participant 6).

## **5. Discussion and Conclusions**

The participants in this study value various skills, namely communication; learning; adaptability; stress management; autonomy; confidence, and flexibility. These results are in line with previous literature (Martins, et al, 2023) which indicates these competencies as determinants of employee attractiveness and retention, especially among the younger generation of professionals (Martins and Cruz, 2019; Martins et al., 2023).

The results obtained show that human resources professionals value being in organisations that allow them to find a balance between their personal and professional lives (Sánchez-Vidal et al., 2012) when they state that companies that allow this balance between personal and professional life for their professionals are simultaneously making a positive contribution to the organisation, as well as tending to show high levels of performance and motivation, reinforcing the positive feeling of employee experience. Participants in the study also showed great interest in seeking information. This evidence confirms the millennial generation's high ability to use technological platforms (Martins et al., 2023), which gives them more autonomy and self-responsibility while demonstrating the organisation's trust in its employees. Another piece of evidence from this study is the importance of leadership as a factor influencing the participants' employee experience. In addition, results suggest that the millennial generation is looking for organisations where leaders promote the continuous development and growth of their professionals, provide feedback and guarantee constant monitoring (Jalaja and Padashetty, 2018).

Participants emphasise their interest in joining organisations in which there is a clear definition of the roles to be performed, which suggests a desire to perform roles that are meaningful to the organisation, underlining the importance that effective recruitment and selection processes can have in attracting and retaining millennials (Klein and Santiago, 2018). The results suggest that the effectiveness of employee experience programmes can be strengthened when the organisation invests in training and skills development initiatives (Martins et al., 2023), compensation and benefits systems that meet employee expectations (Plaskoff, 2017; Martins and Cruz, 2019) and guarantees internal career development plans. The integrated adoption of these human resource management practices tends to positively reinforce the employee experience, contributing to the creation of more lasting and cohesive bonds between team members (Yaffe et al., 2019).

The testimonies collected also show that the main factors of satisfaction and motivation are associated with the enjoyment of performing the current job, the responsibility that this job entails, the desire to learn and progress in their career, as well as the constant challenges that are offered to them. The presence of these characteristics in the organisations where they work reduces the level of dissatisfaction with the job, mitigating the development of negative employee experiences. When, on the other hand, there are feelings of dissatisfaction and demotivation, millennial professionals tend to leave their companies, without having to consider the consequences of this decision beforehand (Klein and Santiago, 2018) and look for organisations where they feel valued and recognised personally and professionally (Kırpık, 2020). This result makes it possible to understand the importance of organisational happiness as a determining factor in the success of employee experience programs.

The organisational culture; the work environment; the alignment of individual objectives with organisational organisational goals and the adoption of flexible ways of working are identified by the participants as the organisational characteristics that most determine positive employee experiences. The participants in the study aspire to belong to organisational cultures that are aligned with their ideals and goals, which allow them to find a balance between work and personal life, as well as flexible working practices, and positive and enriching work environments (Martins and Cruz, 2019).

This study is not without its limitations. The first relates to the group of participants, limited to one sector of activity and one professional group. It is suggested that future studies diversify the participant profiles in order to identify any idiosyncrasies related to organisational and sectoral cultures and to explore any similarities and

contrasts between professional categories and sectors of activity. Another limitation can be pointed to the recent professional experience of the participants who, because they are part of the younger professional generation, may have high expectations of their current organisation and have not yet had time for organisational disillusionment. Future studies could, therefore, be carried out with participants from other generations and with at least five years' seniority in their current company. We therefore hope that the subject will arouse the interest of other researchers and that the study we are now concluding can be continued.

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