

Research Article

Work Motivation in the Millennial Era: Exploring Internal and External Drivers in a Colombian Sample

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Abstract

This research studies the characteristics of millennials' work motivation and differences in internal and external drivers as a function of sociodemographic variables, such as gender and educational level. A total of 142 employees from Colombian companies, born between 1982 and 1999, completed the Work Motivation Questionnaire. Participants' work motivation characteristics were found to be associated with recognition as the main internal motivator and salary as the main external motivator. Differences were found in the internal motivational conditions (affiliation, self-realisation, and recognition), external factors (work content), and preferred means of obtaining desired rewards at work (acceptance of authority) as a function of the sex of the participants. Differences were found in affiliation, supervision, workgroup, and work content drivers as a function of educational level. It is concluded that millennial employees mainly value recognition and economic retribution for their work and are willing to persuade or directly request desired work, and that variables such as gender and educational level can impact differences in work motivation. The implications of these findings for human talent management processes are discussed.

Keywords: human resource management; work motivation; millennials; gender; educational level.

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Work motivation has long been a mainstay in the field of organizational psychology because it represents a fundamental aspect of workers' lives and has direct implications for their performance, job satisfaction, and retention (Vo et al., 2022). From classical theories of motivation, such as Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's (1966) theory of human motivation, to more contemporary approaches (e.g. Ryan & Deci, 2000), researchers have attempted to unravel what motivates people to perform at work and how these motivators may vary depending on individual characteristics and context (Vo et al., 2022; Yusoff & Kian, 2013).

Work motivation has been defined as a set of dynamic forces that arise both inside and outside an individual, driving the initiation of work behaviours and determining their nature, direction, intensity, and persistence (Pinder, 2014). Basic psychological needs are a crucial explanation for individual differences in the motivation to work. Psychological needs are viewed as natural psychological nourishment and intrinsic resources of humans. They are closely connected to individual behaviour and have a significant explicit meaning in work performance. Different needs play a crucial role in motivating individuals, as they experience satisfaction when these needs are met and addressed (Olafsen et al., 2018).

According to Vo et al. (2022), common individual needs that can impact work motivation include physiology, safety, security, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualisation. These needs are part of Maslow's need-hierarchy theory, which is the primary model of work motivation. Additionally, Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory proposes that work motivation is mainly influenced by the job's intrinsic challenge and the provision of opportunities for recognition and reinforcement. More contemporary models have also emerged, such as the



study by [Nicolescu and Verboncu \(2008\)](#), which categorised the types of motivation into four pairs: positive-negative, intrinsic-extrinsic, cognitive-affective, and economic-moral spiritual.

Alongside individual-level factors, social context has also been recognised as having implications for work motivation. [Pinder \(2014\)](#) emphasised the impact of contextual practices on individual-level variables. Culture has been identified as a significant factor influencing motivation ([Bhagat, 2009](#); [Erez, 1997](#); [Erez, 2008](#)). It has been found that proximal social situations, such as workgroups, and distal social situations, such as cultural values, influence individuals' need for satisfaction and motivation ([Vo et al., 2022](#)).

[Steers and Sánchez-Runde \(2017\)](#) asserted that national culture significantly influences thinking and behaviour. Despite this, numerous studies have overlooked the most basic cross-national distinctions when examining work and organisations. There is a common but incorrect assumption that the relationships observed between variables in one culture will also automatically apply to other cultures. For example, a multi-country study of generational differences in work values found significant differences between participants in the cultural variable ([Cogin, 2012](#)). This study compared participants from five different countries (the United States, Australia, China, Singapore, and Germany) and found that they differed significantly in two cultural dimensions: power distance and individualism. Power distance refers to the acceptance of class differences in a culture, while individualism is the degree to which individuals feel they are "on their own" rather than part of a larger group identity. The United States and Australia were the most individualistic of the five countries studied. Latin American culture has been characterised by collectivist rather than individualistic values ([Halgunseth et al., 2006](#)), so it is necessary to consider these cultural differences. Social exchange and interaction among individuals emphasise the importance of studying work motivation by considering contextual elements.

[Toro and Cabrera \(1992\)](#) proposed an approach that has proven to be particularly useful in the study of work motivation in the Latin American context. These authors developed a theory of work motivation that considers the socioeconomic and cultural reality of the region and identified different internal factors (achievement, power, affiliation, self-fulfilment, and recognition) and external factors (supervision, work groups, work content, salary, and promotion) that contribute to work motivation, and the means that employees prefer to achieve the desired rewards at work. Based on this theory, they developed the Work Motivation Questionnaire (WMC), which has been used in research in Latin America and proven to be a valid and reliable instrument for measuring the factors that motivate workers in this region.

In recent years, the interest in work motivation has increasingly focused on millennials. This group, composed of individuals born between 1982 and 1999, represents approximately 75% of the global workforce by 2025 (Pryor, 2019). Although they are often subject to stereotypes and simplifications, millennials represent a diverse and highly educated workforce, bringing new attitudes and expectations toward working with them (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). This generation exhibits motivational characteristics that are different from those of previous generations (Becton et al., 2014; Cugin, 2012; Kapoor & Solomon, 2011; Macky et al., 2008; Mahmoud et al., 2020a, 2020b). The retention of millennial employees has emerged as a problem, with more than 60% leaving their organisations in less than two years (Gribanova, 2020).

Although the inclusion of millennials in the labour market has been the subject of research in the United States and Europe, there is still much to explore in Latin America. Relatively few empirical studies have documented specific motivators for working in Latin American millennials (Begazo & Fernandez, 2015; Cuesta, 2014; Pincheira & Arenas, 2016; Tagliabue & Cuesta, 2011; Ventura, 2017; Zavala-Villalón & Frías, 2018). Considering these studies and research conducted in Europe and the United States, it is known that millennial employees tend to value work-life balance, learning opportunities, and a sense of purpose at work (Cuesta, 2014; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Pincheira & Arenas, 2016; Tagliabue & Cuesta, 2011). A study conducted in Peru showed that the primary motivator for the millennial generation is good pay and benefits (Begazo & Fernández, 2015).

Additionally, they value nurturing work environments with friendly coworkers, fun environments, and good supervisors (Begazo & Fernández, 2015; Cuesta, 2014; Monteferrante, 2010). They also place greater emphasis on opportunities for advancement, variety of work, and challenging work (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Kapoor & Solomon, 2011; Mahmoud et al., 2020a, 2020b; Ng et al., 2010; Pincheira & Arenas, 2016). This generation requires constant feedback and approval from superiors (Begazo & Fernández, 2015). A study conducted in Chile by Ventura (2017) showed that young Chileans do not completely fit the millennial stereotype defined for U.S. society since they consider stability, projection, and a good boss to learn from desirable attributes as a condition for employment.

According to Parry and Urwin (2011), the national context, gender, and ethnicity can impact differences in work values. Similarly, Ng et al. (2010) stated that there are significant differences in expectations and work priorities among millennials based on traditional demographic groups, such as gender, visible minority status, work experience, and academic achievement. However, the study does not provide specific information on the motivators to



work for different genders, and states that future research is needed to investigate this issue. A study on gender and motivation to lead in millennials found that male millennials were more motivated to take a leadership role within a work organisation than female millennials (Porter et al., 2019); However, women from the millennial generation tended to have more agentic traits than women from older generations (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Another study on work motivators in the IT sector found that millennial females value job security more than males (Soman, 2022).

Recent generations are entering the workforce with an increased demand for higher education and the increasing costs of completing higher education. Given these economic trends, more recent workers may place increased emphasis on work that provides extrinsic rewards (Twenge et al., 2010). Some studies have suggested that millennials with a higher level of education may place more importance on internal motivational factors such as self-actualisation and job content than their peers with a lower level of education (Ng et al., 2010). A study on work motivators in the IT sector found that millennials with higher education levels were more motivated by intrinsic factors such as meaningful work and personal growth, while those with lower education levels were more motivated by extrinsic factors such as salary and job security (Soman, 2022). However, it has also been pointed out that this relationship may be mediated by other variables, such as type of work and work context. Thus, another study on workplace motivating factors found that millennial workers are motivated by basic needs and the desire to belong and seek actualisation through challenging and meaningful work, regardless of their education level (Calk & Patrick, 2017).

Understanding and responding to the work motivations of millennials has become crucial for the development of organisations (Gribanova, 2020; Palomar & Victorio, 2016). Without a clear understanding, there is the risk that wellness plans will not respond to the real needs of this working population, which may generate unnecessary costs for companies (Gribanova, 2020). In addition, identifying how millennials' motivations may vary depending on individual factors such as gender and educational level has become a topic of great importance for both academia and business practice (Gribanova, 2020).

In this context, the objective of this study was to explore the characteristics of the work motivation of millennial employees in the Colombian Caribbean region based on the theoretical proposal of Toro and Cabrera (1992), analysing the results according to sociodemographic variables such as sex and educational level of the participants. The following research questions were developed.

Research Question 1: What are the most important work motivators for a sample of Colombian millennials? What means they prefer to achieve retribution for their work?

Research Question 2: Are there differences in the work motivators of a Colombian sample of millennials as a function of sociodemographic variables, such as gender and educational level?

This study not only contributes to broadening our understanding of millennials' work motivation in the Latin American context, but also offers valuable insights for human talent management professionals who are called upon to develop effective strategies to attract, motivate, and retain this emerging generation in the workforce (Calk & Patrick, 2017; Mahmoud et al. 2020a; Mahmoud et al. 2020b).

Method

Participants

A non-experimental, cross-sectional, correlational, group comparison study was carried out with the participation of 142 employees of Colombian Caribbean companies born between 1982 and 1999: 91 males (M age = 30.1, SD = 5.5) and 51 females (M age = 29.4, SD = 5.1). We worked with the employees of large industrial companies in the private sector. Regarding educational level, 35 were high school graduates, 26 were technicians, 26 were technologists, 33 were undergraduates, and 10 were postgraduates. Twelve participants did not report their educational levels. 34 hold administrative positions and 108 held operational positions. The inclusion criteria included the year of birth of the collaborators and that they had been working in the organisation for at least one year. Participants were selected using non-probabilistic sampling according to their availability.

Instruments

The participants completed the Motivation for Work Questionnaire (MWQ; Toro & Cabrera, 1992). The instrument measures three major motivational factors and 15 subfactors: internal motivational conditions (achievement, power, affiliation, self-fulfilment, and recognition); preferred means of obtaining desired rewards at work (dedication to the task, acceptance of authority, acceptance of norms and values, requisition, and expectation); and external motivational conditions (supervision, work groups, work content, salary, and promotion). The MWQ was applied individually or collectively with a duration of 20–30 min and scored manually through a web application. The instrument was used in the Colombian population with a reliability of $\alpha = .72$.

The MWQ measures the preference component of work motivation and not the persistence or vigour component of motivation. Scores are expressed as T-scores and interpreted as follows: 0-20 indicates exceptionally low interest or valuation; 21-40 indicates relatively low interest or valuation; 40-60 indicates average interest or valuation; 61-80 indicates relatively high interest or valuation; 81-100 indicates exceptionally high interest or valuation.

Procedure

Companies in the Colombian Caribbean region were contacted and invited to participate in the study, and four accepted this invitation. A review of the database of collaborators of these organisations was scheduled to identify potential participants, considering the year of birth (1980-1999) as the inclusion criterion. Once identified, those who agreed to participate signed an informed consent form. The questionnaire was then filled out and a database was created with the scores obtained by each participant in the 15 sub-factors measured by the test.

This study was approved by the Research Committee of the Technological University of Bolívar. All subjects participated voluntarily and signed an informed consent form indicating that they could withdraw their participation at any time. The questionnaires were filled out individually and the data were coded using numbers.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0. Data corresponding to quantitative variables were analysed using measures of central tendency and variability using measures of dispersion. We collected descriptive data on the most important sociodemographic variables of the sample (gender and educational level) and identified whether there were significant differences between them with respect to internal and external motivational conditions and the preferred means of obtaining work-related rewards. Comparisons were made using the nonparametric Mann–Whitney U test and Kruskal–Wallis (K-W) test because the study variables were not normally distributed. Normality contrast was performed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test ($p < .05$).

Results

Work motivation of Millennial employees

Figure 1 summaries the work motivation profiles of millennials in the Colombian Caribbean. Regarding the internal motivational conditions, the most motivating condition was recognition

($M = 65.96$, $SD = 10.9$), followed by power ($M = 55.68$, $SD = 9.2$), affiliation ($M = 55.62$, $SD = 11.4$), achievement ($M = 48.58$, $SD = 11.4$), and the least motivating was self-actualisation ($M = 37.1$, $SD = 12.8$). In general, millennials perceive the need to fulfil tasks to gain acceptance and admiration as the most relevant internal motivational condition, showing an average interest, appreciation, or tendency to react in relation to recognition as a motivating element. Power, affiliation, and achievement are internal motivational conditions in which millennials show an average tendency to react. However, self-actualisation is recognised as a motivational condition with a relatively low valuation.

Regarding external motivational conditions, the subfactor of preference was salary ($M = 64.4$, $SD = 12.4$), followed by the work group ($M = 56.6$, $SD = 10.9$), promotion ($M = 52.1$, $SD = 8.2$), and supervision ($M = 50.2$, $SD = 10.1$). Job content was the least motivating external condition ($M = 38.4$, $SD = 12.1$). Thus, millennials perceive financial retribution as the main external motivator with high interest and probability that, at any given time, they will activate behaviours aimed at carrying out activities in pursuit of this incentive. Intrinsic job conditions (job content), which can provide different degrees of autonomy and variety, would be a motivational condition with a relatively low rating, with little likelihood of activating behaviours for the benefit of work activity motivated by this subfactor.

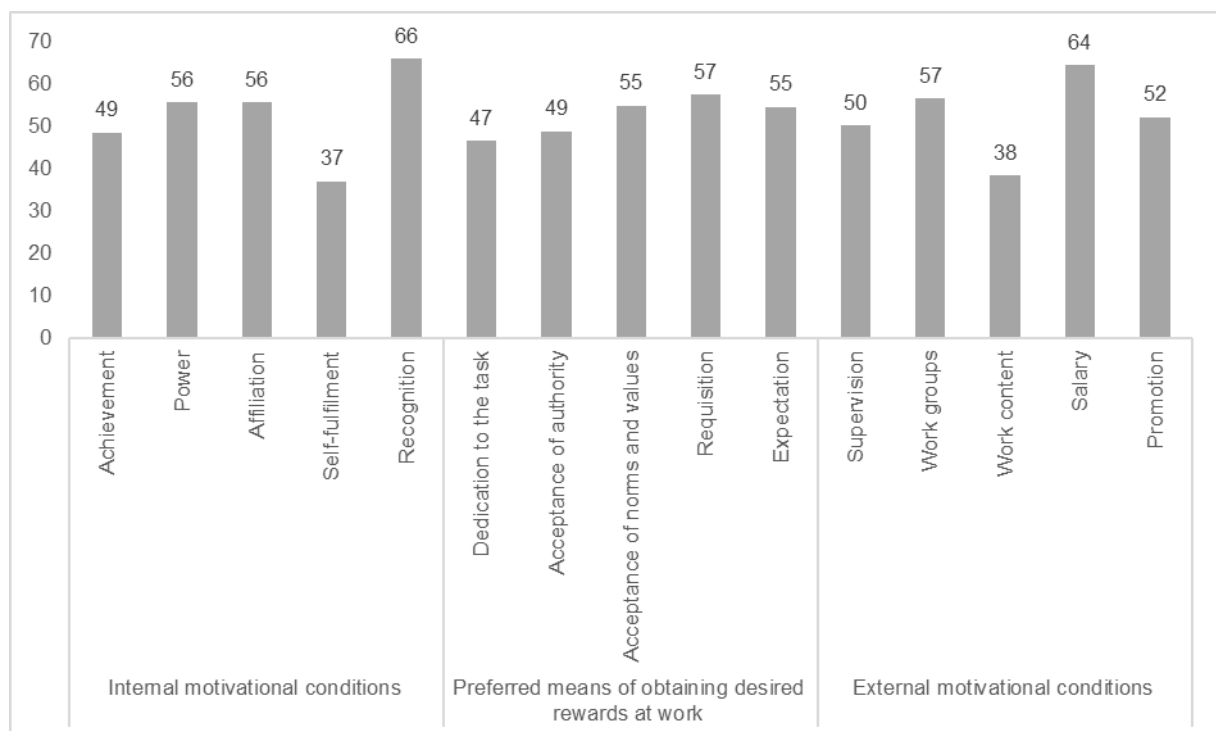


Figure 1. *Work Motivation Profile of Millennial Employees*

Regarding the preferred means of obtaining desired payoffs at work, the most preferred means were requisitioning ($M = 57.5$, $SD = 9.9$), followed by acceptance of norms and values ($M = 54.9$, $SD = 10.0$), expectation ($M = 54.5$, $SD = 11.1$), and acceptance of authority ($M = 48.8$, $SD = 10.1$), and task dedication was the lowest ($M = 46.5$, $SD = 13.0$). Thus, millennials prefer and show an average interest in performing behaviours that seek to obtain the desired rewards by directly influencing whoever can grant them through direct solicitation, persuasion, or confrontation. Dedicating time, effort, and initiative to work for profit would be millennials' least preferred means of obtaining the desired rewards at work, although this subfactor has an average rating.

Work motivation of Millennial employees by gender

For this analysis, the sample was divided into two groups of 51 women and 91 men (Figure 2). When analysing the results according to the gender of the participants, it was found that there were significant differences between males and females in the levels of affiliation ($U = 1766.000$, $p = .018$, $PS_{est} = 0.38$), self-realisation ($U = 1515.000$, $p = .001$, $PS_{est} = 0.33$), recognition ($U = 1710.500$, $p = .009$, $PS_{est} = 0.37$), acceptance of authority ($U = 1858.500$, $p = .048$, $PS_{est} = 0.40$), and work content ($U = 1726.500$, $p = .011$, $PS_{est} = 0.37$). The effect sizes of these differences were moderate.

Thus, regarding internal motivational conditions, males ($M = 57.6$, $SD = 10.7$) showed a greater tendency to establish good friendships with coworkers and maintain satisfactory affective relationships than did females ($M = 52.8$, $SD = 12.0$). The self-realisation subfactor remained the lowest in both men ($M = 34.5$, $SD = 12.6$) and women ($M = 41.6$, $SD = 12.0$); however, women placed greater value on the possibility of using their personal skills and knowledge at work, and knowing that they were acquiring greater skills in their occupation. Males ($M = 67.6$, $SD = 10.8$) attached greater importance to recognition as a motivating element than did females ($M = 62.9$, $SD = 10.7$).

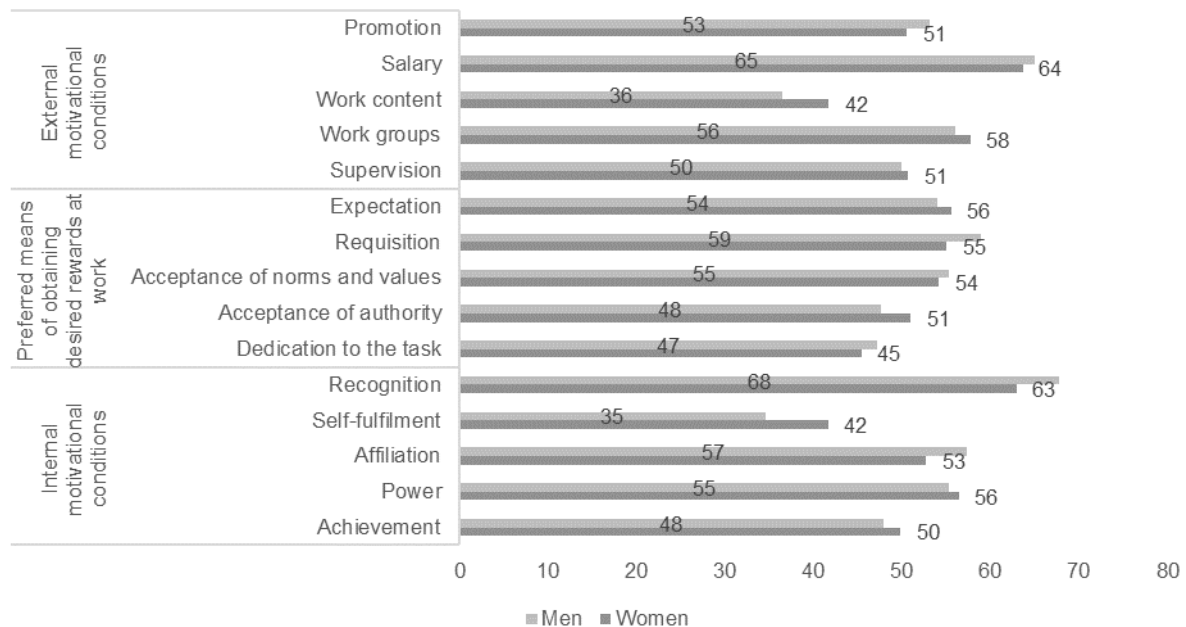


Figure 2. Work Motivation Profiles of Millennial Women and Men

In the case of external motivational conditions, salary was identified as the main external motivator for both females ($M = 63.6$, $SD = 11.5$) and males ($M = 64.91$, $SD = 12.9$). Significant differences were found between males ($M = 36.5$, $SD = 11.5$) and females ($M = 41.7$, $SD = 12.5$) in the work content subfactor. Women place more value on carrying out varied and interesting activities that avoid routine and monotony and have the freedom to decide on the most convenient way to do work.

Finally, gender differences were identified regarding the preferred means of obtaining desired rewards at work. For females, the preferred means were expectations ($M = 55.5$, $SD = 12.1$), whereas for males, the preferred means were requisitioning ($M = 58.9$, $SD = 9.8$). Thus, unlike men, women prefer behaviours that demonstrate expectation, trust, and passivity in the face of the organisation's designs, which is why they may prefer that the desired rewards be given at the boss's initiative rather than by direct and personal request. Similarly, women ($M = 50.9$, $SD = 10.9$) tended to place greater value on the acceptance of authority than men ($M = 47.6$, $SD = 9.5$), abiding by the decisions and orientations of the boss, and accepting with interest changes in job positions or activities when requested by the boss. The least preferred factor for both females ($M = 45.4$, $SD = 12.8$) and males ($M = 47.2$, $SD = 13.0$) was dedication to the task.

Work motivation of Millennial employees according to educational level

Analyzing the results according to the educational level of the participants, it was found that there are significant differences in the subfactors affiliation (K-W $\chi^2(4) = 16, p = .003, \epsilon^2 = 0.11$), expectation (K-W $\chi^2(4) = 11.9, p = .018, \epsilon^2 = 0.08$), supervision (K-W $\chi^2(4) = 13.1, p = .011, \epsilon^2 = 0.09$), work group (K-W $\chi^2(4) = 11.2, p = .025, \epsilon^2 = 0.08$) and work content (K-W $\chi^2(4) = 11.5, p = .022, \epsilon^2 = 0.08$). However, the effect sizes of these differences were small.

Participants with high school degree ($M = 59.9, SD = 12.9$) gave more importance to affiliation as an internal motivational condition compared to participants with technical ($M = 56.2, SD = 9.6$), technologist ($M = 54.6, SD = 10.5$), undergraduate ($M = 52.4, SD = 10.0$), and graduate ($M = 46.4, SD = 11.2$) levels of education. Regarding external motivational conditions, high school degree holders valued supervision more ($M = 54.0, SD = 8.3$) and expected the boss to evaluate their performance in a considerate, understanding, and fair manner while appreciating that the boss recognised their merits. Participants with postgraduate education gave the lowest value to this subfactor ($M = 44.6, SD = 10.6$), although they considered intrinsic job conditions that could provide different levels of autonomy and variety as motivating ($M = 50.9, SD = 10.2$). The group of participants with technical training gave the lowest value to the work-content subfactor ($M = 35.6, SD = 11.3$).

In terms of the preferred means of obtaining desired rewards at work, high school degree holders had higher scores on the expectation subfactor ($M = 59.1, SD = 12.9$), showing a greater willingness to wait for the company to take notice of their knowledge and skills and make suitable cost-of-living increases. Participants with postgraduate training scored lower in this subfactor ($M = 50.4, SD = 10.6$).

Discussion

This study examined the characteristics of millennials' work motivation in the Colombian Caribbean region, considering three aspects: internal motivational conditions, external motivational conditions, and preferred means of obtaining retribution at work (Toro & Cabrera, 1992). We begin with the assumption that a proper understanding of young employees' motivations and expectations can influence their job satisfaction so that they become loyal to their organisation (Gribanova, 2020; Lefton, 2012; Sandhya & Kumar, 2011).

The results of this study show that millennial generation employees in Colombian Caribbean privilege recognition are the most important internal motivational condition. Research conducted in different countries shows that it is very important for employees to receive

recognition for their work as they feel valued and satisfied, and their desire to belong to the organisation increases (Alam et al., 2013; Bakanauskiene et al., 2016; Lefton, 2012).

Additionally, power and affiliation are internal motivational conditions in which preference is found, with an average possibility of developing actions that seek to exert dominance over people or groups, as well as performing behaviours aimed at obtaining or maintaining satisfactory affective relationships with other people. There is a preference to work in a team, and to consider a healthy work climate as a very important element when evaluating a job (Cuesta et al., 2009; Monteferrante, 2010; Yap & Badri, 2020).

It is interesting to note that, in the group studied, self-actualisation was not an important motivator, despite being considered the highest need according to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory. This could be explained by the fact that needs change throughout one's life. It is possible that at the point in life in which the young millennial participants find themselves, they have reached the satisfaction of basic or primary needs, and recognition is a need to occupy them. Once this need is satisfied, they will move on to the satisfaction of other higher needs, such as those related to self-fulfilment. On the other hand, it has been found that young people link personal self-fulfilment with non-compulsory activities, which lack pressure and therefore would not be "work". Thus, personal self-fulfilment is not associated with the work for which remuneration is received but rather with activities that involve tastes and preferences (Marín, 2004).

Salary was the most important external motivational condition for the study group. This finding coincides with those of Monteferrante (2010), Magni and Manzoni (2020), and Mahmoud et al. (2020b), who state that millennials have higher expectations of high remuneration and seek the best money offer. The survey conducted by Deloitte (2018) identified permanent concerns and dissatisfaction with both the general economic situation and the wage gap among young millennials. A study conducted by Calk and Patrick (2017) in the United States highlighted that jobs with fixed salaries and benefits were not the most attractive to millennials. It was also found that employees of this generation may move from one job to another if they are offered a higher salary.

Borra and Gómez (2012) report variability in the importance of wages as an element of well-being; however, conventional microeconomic theory has shown that there is a directly proportional relationship between wages and job satisfaction, that is, the higher the salary obtained, the higher the job satisfaction. Financial compensation is one of the most valued

factors by millennial employees, similar to what has historically been observed in other generations (Magni & Manzoni, 2020).

Another important external motivational condition for millennials in this study is the workgroup; that is, they prefer social conditions at work that provide the person with the possibility of being in contact with others, participating in collective actions, sharing, and learning from others. According to Calk and Patrick (2017), millennial workers are motivated by their desires to belong. Thus, our findings reaffirm the importance of millennials in a pleasant work environment that fosters social relationships (Calk & Patrick, 2017; Dychtwald et al., 2006; Monteferrante, 2010). McClelland's theory of motivational needs proposes that the desire for social connections leads to the development of personal relationships, including those in the workplace (Smith, 2010). However, the importance assigned to the workgroup may vary according to the employee's educational level. This study found that employees with undergraduate and postgraduate training gave less value to this condition than employees with a high school degree.

Regarding the preferred means of obtaining the desired rewards at work, the average of participants opted for requisitioning as the main strategy. This is related to the fact that Millennials value horizontal relationships in the work context, open communication and close and accessible bosses or leaders, these conditions would facilitate personal and direct solicitation to those who can grant some retribution at work (Dychtwald et al., 2006). However, in the analysis of the characteristics of work motivation according to gender, it is interesting to note that women favour expectation as the preferred means of obtaining retribution, whereas for men, the preferred means are requisitioning. Thus, women show a preference for behaviours that demonstrate expectation, trust, and passivity before the organisation's designs, so they may prefer that the desired rewards are given at the initiative of the boss or leader rather than by direct and personal request, unlike men who would actively seek immediate results through persuasion or convincing. This observation suggests a possible sex-based difference.

Understanding the characteristics of the work motivation of young millennials contributes to the development of strategies for employee retention, an increasing need for organisations facing a high turnover of staff of that generation (Mahmoud et al., 2020a; Mahmoud et al., 2020b). The development of retention plans and strategies to recruit a new workforce must consider internal and external motivational conditions and the preferred means of obtaining the desired rewards at work, incorporating these needs into existing plans to increase the effectiveness of the implemented programs.

Palomar and Victorio (2016) asserted that the development of welfare plans does not consider the real needs of the working population, partly because these needs are unknown. The results of this research provide valuable information that could help this situation to begin to change. It is possible to promote the optimal development of welfare plans in organisations with a gender approach, since it was possible to identify the main internal and external motivators and the means preferred by young millennials in the Colombian Caribbean region to obtain rewards derived from their work.

Thus, recognition is one of the conditions that internally motivates millennials and can be taken advantage of by promoting the visibility of merits and attention, acceptance, or formal admiration for what the employee is, does, knows, or can do. Some strategies to achieve this objective may be communication with the organisation, certificates, awards, and incentives associated with the emotional salary that, with budgets that are not necessarily very high, has a positive impact on the area's finances and human capital (Codina et al., 2009; Mahmoud et al., 2020a; Mahmoud et al., 2020b). In addition, young millennials also value financial incentives.

Limitations and further implications of the study

Regarding the limitations of this study, it is considered that the sample size limits the generalisability of the findings, and it is suggested that it be expanded in future research; this would facilitate the study of the motivational characteristics of the "early" and "late" millennial subgroups. Additionally, it is recommended to include a larger number of organisations to study the great variability that exists throughout Colombian territory and replicate this work in other Latin American countries.

Future studies could establish differences in work motivation as a function of variables such as socioeconomic status and the position held in the organisation. Similarly, it would be interesting to study the possible interactions between internal and external motivators, and the mediating variables of work motivation. It is hoped that the data provided by this study will serve as an input for rethinking the design of welfare plans and strategies for the recruitment and retention of new employees in human talent management processes, considering that the millennial generation will be the main workforce in the world in a few years.

Conclusions

This study found that millennials' work motivation characteristics were associated with recognition as the main internal motivator and salary as the main external motivator. It was also found that the preferred means of obtaining desired retribution at work is requisitioning, with a slight difference according to gender, with women tending to favour expectations.

Organisations must provide motivators valued by different generations in the workplace and create a multigenerational and inclusive work environment. To motivate and manage the millennial generation in the workplace, it is important that managers of organisations understand the characteristics of this generation, value, promote their ideas and initiatives, and incorporate this knowledge into the development of programs aimed at reducing absenteeism, attracting, and retaining new talent, and improving the work environment.

Millennials can be motivated by a reward system that considers all employees' equitable contributions. The recognition and appreciation of a collaborator's qualities—who they are, what they know, and what they can do—must be made visible and valued. This should encourage the possibility of establishing relationships with colleagues and working in teams, the possibility of having people in charge, and directing the activities of other people in the organisation. A relevant external motivator is the economic recognition of the work performed and the opportunities for promotion through promotions that allow them to feel that they are progressing and improving in their occupation, which allows them to achieve a job of greater responsibility while simultaneously representing a salary improvement.

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Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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