MANAGING PEOPLE DYNAMICS THROUGH THE LENS OF GENERATION Y

Georgiana CRISTEA[1]
Elena-Mădălina VĂTĂMĂNESCU[2]
Andreea MITAN[3]

ABSTRACT

One of the most critical challenges managers have to face nowadays points to managing people dynamics within organizations, and to the retention of highly-skilled employees. This situation is likely to raise a myriad of issues for managers, as new cohorts of employees – forming Generation Y - will represent 75% of the global workforce by 2025. As genuine seekers of flexibility in terms of both time and space, the members of Generation Y strive for working in digital environments, for collaborating with managers who act as coaches or mentors and encourage communication, teamwork, positive motivation and individual and team performance. Starting from these premises, the current paper aims to analyse managing people dynamics through the lens of Generation Y, in general, and through the lens of undergraduate and graduate students from a Romanian University. The used instrument relies on the profile of the effective manager proposed by the Human Resources Office of the United Nations. Elaborating on the findings of a questionnaire-based survey with 121 students, the investigation supported that all four dimensions of the managerial profile (i.e., Communication, Teamwork, Motivation and Managing Individual Performance) were positively valued by the participants at the study and, further, that there are significant positive influences among them. This fact confirms the intricate dynamics of the managerial function as perceived by Generation Y members.

KEYWORDS: *managerial profile, managing people dynamics, Generation Y, employees, middle management.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *M12, M54*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the workplace has brought forward an unprecedented context where four different generations (i.e., Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y) are expected to collaborate and yield organizational benefits in terms of productivity and efficiency (Kim, Knight & Crutsinger, 2009). Following the retirement of Baby Boomers, Generation Y is the most recent and numerous cohort to enter the workforce and, consequently, "workplaces are being redefined and organizations are being pressed to adapt as this new wave of workers is infused into business environments" (VanMeter, Grisaffe, Chonko & Roberts, 2013, p. 93).

Managers have considerable experience with the demands and motivators in the case of older cohorts/generations, but this is rarely the case with Generation Y employees. Their expectations and values concerning their managers are yet to be investigated by both researchers and managers. In this respect, a point of reference is provided by the advancement of the United Nations Managerial

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[1] SNSPA – National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania

[2] SNSPA – National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania, madalina.vatamanescu@facultateademanagement.ro

[3] SNSPA – National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania, andreea.mitan@facultateademanagement.ro

profile which depicts „effective managerial performance within the United Nations. It assumes that regardless of their level of responsibility within the organization, the defining characteristic of effective managers is that they achieve results, and that they do so with the full engagement of a committed and motivated staff or team of colleagues" (United Nations, 2015, p.2). Within the profile scope, a key dimension refers specifically to the Managing People area of managerial effectiveness.

In order to properly address the perception and attitudes of the Generation Y cohorts towards managers, the current paper focuses on this particular dimension and, implicitly, on its specific abilities. Furthermore, out of the three levels of responsibility included in this category, the emphasis is laid on the middle managers as they are the first ones to interact with Generation Y members when they enter the organization. Four main managerial factors are considered and analyzed, that is Communication, Teamwork, Motivation, and Managing Individual Performance (United Nations, 2015, p. 2).

In this vein, the basic assumption is that there is a growing need for research focusing specifically on Generation Y`s approach on the effective managerial profile, given the embryonic state of knowledge on the topic in the Romanian specialized literature. By exploring this research direction, it is likely that the findings provide actual managers with a pertinent overview of the managerial competencies and abilities valued by generation Y employees, of their understanding regarding an effective managerial process. In a broader sense, it is expected that the results will bring to the fore novel insights for retaining the young generation within the organization.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW. PLACING GENERATION Y IN THE WORKPLACE CONTEXT

There is no general consensus regarding the name of the Generation Y, and the frequently used labels are: "Millennials", "Echo-Boomers", "MySpace Generation" (Rosen, 2007), "Why Generation" (Chester, 2002) and "NetGeners" (Tapscott, 2009). Despite de variety of labels, studying Generation Y becomes a preoccupation for the Human Resources specialists, all the more so as they entered the labor market in 2000 and, by 2025, they will represent 75% of global workforce (Deloitte, 2016). These youngsters come to replace the generation of Baby Boomers who are preparing to retire from the work. According to the literature, the term „Generation Y" applies to young people born between 1977 and 2000, although different studies operate with different dates. For example, consistent with Twenge, Campbell and Lance Hoffman (2010), this generation was born between 1982 and 1999 while for Tapscott (2009), the envisioned period is 1977-1997.

Despite the growing number of studies on Generation Y, the extant literature emphasizes the lack of a common approach and understanding of its values, perceptions and attitudes towards the workplace and managers. Many authors agree that the new generation is different enough from all the ones before them, a fact which makes them an important group to study and understand in more detail (Broadbridge, Maxwell & Ogden, 2009; Pînzaru et al., 2016; VanMeter et al., 2013). Conversely, there is a stream of research which supports the similarity among all the considered generations (Murray, Toulson & Legg, 2011), but this approach is less represented in the existing investigations.

That being the case, there are at least two important reasons for an in-depth study of Generation Y: first, its members will form the most numerous generation in the workplace, and second, they are the generation with the highest employee fluctuation (Cloutier et al., 2015). According to a study made by LinkedIn on 3894 Human Resources and Talent specialists from different countries (Canada, USA, Mexico, Brazil, Great Britain, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, China, India, Australia and New Zeeland), the average time spent in a job by young people from the Generation Y is 4 years (LinkedIn, 2016). So, after the main problem of managing Generation Y, comes the second challenge for managers - retaining them within organizations, as Millennials are emotionally detached from the companies they work for (Rawlins, Indvik & Johnson, 2008). At the same time,

Kaliprasad (2006) pointed out that the ability to retain employees depends significantly upon the ability to manage them. In addition, Human Resources specialists stated that employees are often leaving managers, and not the companies they work for (LinkedIn, 2016).

Taking into consideration the new workplace conditions and the characteristics of these employees, the role of the manager is currently changing. The managerial figure should avail the hypostases of a *coach* and *mentor* for the employees (Miller et al., 2013; Honore & Schofield, 2012). In line with Pew Research Center (2010), Millennials are the most educated generation until now, exhibiting a high growth potential. The employees from this Generation are well informed and if they do not know some piece of information, they are used to search for it in real time, so they are not necessarily looking for a manager with good technical skills, or who has all the answers. They rather look for a manager to trust and to respect, with experience and ability to understand the employee and to treat him as an individual, not as a standard part of a mass.

This could be the result of Millennials being raised by "helicopter parents", always being there to protect and help their kids, always telling them they are the best and they deserve nothing but the best, and teaching them that if they do not feel appreciated or valued, they can quit their jobs (until finding the ideal job and workplace), because "mom and dad will be there for them". The effects of the helicopter parenting may have led them to building high levels of self-trust, but also to be dependent on others (Lythcott-Haims, 2015). As adults, Gen Y'ers are confident in both themselves and their future, motivated, goal-oriented, optimistic, assertive, and they believe they are "right" (VanMeter et al., 2013).

The available research portrays the Generation Y in rather contradictory images: on the one hand, they are described as narcissistic and individualistic and focused too much on their own needs (VanMeter et al., 2013), but, on the other hand, they are presented as activists who are interested in the general good (Greenberg & Weber, 2008). Yet, all the studies from USA, Australia and Europe agree that there is a prominent preoccupation for the work-life balance across the members of this generation (Treuren & Anderson, 2010; Pînzaru et al., 2016). The younger employees have seen what corporations have done for their parents after years of being loyal to the same employer and years of sacrificing the family for a career (e.g., closing pension funds, massive layoffs) (Kennedy & Daim, 2010) and they drew their conclusions and their list of demands. They ask for flexible program, not for a standard one (from 9 to 6), because they need time for their hobbies, for their families, and for volunteering. They are the first generation more interested in making the job matching to their family and personal life (Spiro, 2006).

The accelerated development of technology, the ability to access the information anytime and anywhere (Meier, Austin & Crocker, 2010), the capacity of *multi-tasking* allows this generation the work from anywhere and anytime. Consequently, they do not depend on a desk anymore, their office can be anywhere in the world (Treuren & Anderson, 2010) because they highly value flexibility, both in terms of time and space.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

Stressing on the aforementioned considerations regarding Generation Y and the challenges they avail as current or prospective employees, the present paper aims at exploring their perceptions and attitudes towards a desirable managerial profile. The reference point is settled by the four main managerial dimensions promoted by the United Nations (2015, p.2), namely Communication, Teamwork, Motivation, and Managing Individual Performance. These are considered as pivotal factors when evaluating the effectiveness of management, with subsequent implications of the employees' activity and dynamics within organizations. Based on the research objective, the investigation assumes the following hypotheses:

H1: Generation Y members attach importance to all four managerial dimensions from the managerial profile (i.e., Communication, Teamwork, Motivation, and Managing Individual Performance).

H2: Generation Y members value communication more than the other managerial dimensions.

H3: There are significant positive influences among the perceptions of the four managerial dimensions in the case of Generation Y members:

H3.1: Communication has a positive influence on teamwork in the case of Generation Y members.

H3.2: Communication has a positive influence on managing individual performance in the case of Generation Y members.

H3.3: Teamwork has a positive influence on motivation in the case of Generation Y members.

H3.4: Managing individual performance has a positive influence on motivation in the case of Generation Y members.

H4: There are significant differences between the active employees (with a work experience over 6 months) and the prospective employees of Generation Y in perceiving the influences among the four managerial dimensions.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

4.1. Sample

A total of 121 respondents from a Romanian university, representatives of Generation Y, agreed to complete a self-administered questionnaire regarding their perceptions on a desirable managerial profile. The subjects were enrolled to two different programmes of study, namely management and communication and public relations. In terms of education level, 30% were graduate students while the rest were undergraduates. The option for the two fields of study relied on the goal to investigate the managing people dynamics through the lens of the future experts in management and communication which stand for core dimensions of the managerial profile.

In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were females (79%), the average age being 22.2 years old (M=22.2, SD=3.83). In order to ensure a clearer image on the socio-demographic details of the sample, a distribution of the participants at the survey according to the work experience was detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

Programme of study	
Management (undergraduate)	53%
Communication and Public Relations	17%
Master in Management	16%
Master in Communication and Public Relations	14%
Work experience	
No previous experience	22%
0 - 6 months	18%
6 - 12 months	18%
12 - 24 months	13%
More than 24 months	28%

4.2. Method and procedure

In order to investigate managing people dynamics through the lens of Generation Y members, a questionnaire-based survey was conducted, after unfolding a pre-test with 7 respondents. Based on a convenience sampling technique, more than 350 students were invited via e-mail and student forums to voluntarily fill in a self-administered questionnaire online comprising 24 items, yielding a response rate of almost 50%. The questionnaire was created using the specialized website http://www.isondaje.ro/.

For the purpose of this study, the collected data was processed and analyzed by means of SPSS, version 20 and of a structural equation modeling technique - component-based partial least squares (PLS-SEM), advanced by Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt (2011). At this level, the SmartPLS program was employed (Ringle, Wende & Becker, 2015).

4.3. Measures

The research design integrates the validated profile of an effective manager, defined by the Human Resources Office of the United Nations (2015), which identified for the managing people domain of managerial effectiveness, four managerial dimensions: Communication, Teamwork, Motivation and Managing Individual Performance. The middle managers specifics aspects for each dimension were translated into questionnaire items. Three types of questions were used, as follows:

Q1: Hierarchy question regarding the four managerial dimensions (Communication, Teamwork, Motivation and Managing Individual Performance): "*From your point of view, which is the most important aspect of managing people? Order from 1 = less important to 4 = very important the aspects below*".

Q2 – Q21: Likert-scale items: students were provided with 20 statements, derived from the translation of all factors of the four dimensions of the managerial profile. Using a five-point Likert scale (from 1=totally unimportant to 5=very important), the respondents rated how much importance they attach to each aspect (as presented in Table 2).

Q22 - Q24: Socio-demographic variables: gender, age, year and programme of study, work experience.

Table 2. Likert-scale items depicting the dimensions of the managerial profile

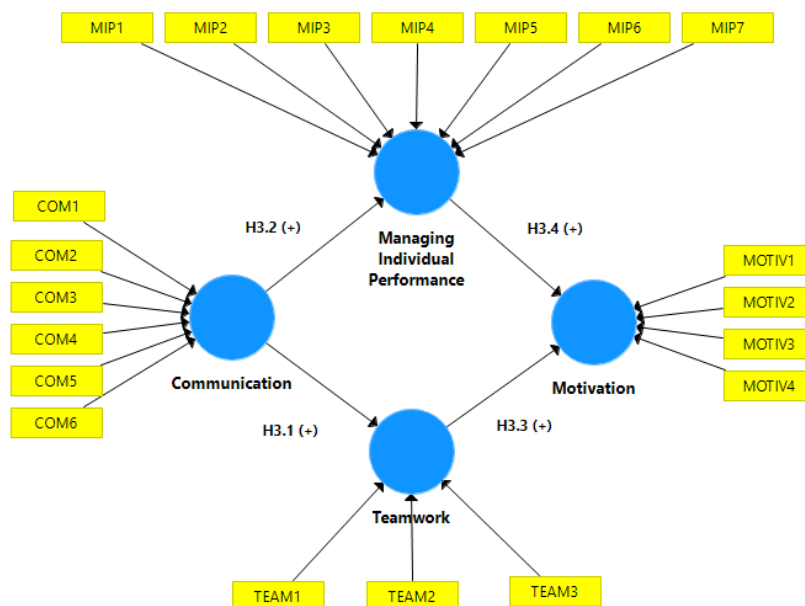|	Dimensions and items
	Communication
Q2	Are accessible to others, easy to approach and to talk to
Q3	Share information with others
Q4	Hold regular, effective staff meetings
Q5	Are able to build rapport, relate well to people
Q6	Foster open communication
Q7	Stay receptive to bad news as well as good
	Teamwork
Q8	Work collaboratively with colleagues to achieve results
Q9	Encourage staff to think and act co-operatively
Q10	Share credit for successes with the team
	Motivation
Q11	Recognize both achievement and effort
Q12	Give staff autonomy in important areas of their work
Q13	Care about the well-being of staff
Q14	Lend their support to work/life policies
	Managing Individual Performance
Q15	Ensure that staff define results to be achieved
Q16	Ensure that roles, responsibilities and reporting lines are clear
Q17	Delegate the appropriate responsibility and decision-making authority
Q18	Review performance and provide ongoing helpful feedback
Q19	Address poor performance promptly
Q20	Appraise performance fairly
Q21	Support the career development of staff

Source: adapted from United Nations, 2015

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

With a view to test the first two hypotheses, the data was processed using the statistical program SPSS, version 20. In this sense, the investigation of the first hypothesis:
H1: Generation Y members attach importance to all four managerial dimensions from the managerial profile (i.e., Communication, Teamwork, Motivation, and Managing Individual Performance) – was performed by computing the average score on each dimension. According to the findings, three out of the four dimensions had a mean score above the threshold of 2, that is Communication (M=2.86, SD=1.11), Motivation (M=2.75, SD=1.00), Teamwork (M=2.41, SD=0.90), whereas Managing Individual Performance scored lower (M=1.98, SD=1.23). As a consequence, the first hypothesis is partially confirmed as, through the lens of the questioned students, only the first three dimensions are perceived positively in term of importance.
The aforementioned scores also supported the validation of the second hypothesis - H2: Generation Y members value communication more than the other managerial dimensions – given the fact that this dimension has reported the highest mean score in the subjects' ratings.
The testing of the third and fourth hypotheses relied was performed using the PLS-SEM technique and the SmartPLS software. Pursuant to the inferred relationships of the third hypothesis, the following conceptual model was advanced (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptual model with hypotheses

As the research instrument is built on a validated managerial profile, the four dimensions were treated as formative constructs whose items possess different weights, as illustrated in table 3. This is indicative of Bollen and Bauldry's (2011, p. 265) guidelines, according to which "Composite (formative) indicators form exact linear combinations of variables (...). Their coefficients are weights rather than structural effects and composites are a matter of convenience."
That being the case, the evaluation of the formative measurement model addressed the assessment of the significance and relevance of indicator weights and of the indicator collinearity (Hair et al., 2014). In order to assess the former, that is evaluating the contribution of a formative indicator, and thus its relevance, emphasis is laid on the outer weight – "we must test if the outer weights in formative measurement models are significantly different from zero by means of the bootstrapping procedure" (Hair et al., 2014, p. 127). At this level, in case the indicator's outer weight is non-significant, but its outer loading is high (above 0.50), the item is suitable to be retained.

The results of the bootstrapping procedure in terms of both outer weights and loadings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Outer weights and loadings of the indicators

	Outer Weights	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	Outer Loadings
COM1 -> Communication	0.121	0.152	0.796	*0.421*
COM2 -> Communication	0.200	0.199	1.001	*0.475*
COM3 -> Communication	0.150	0.183	0.821	*0.396*
COM4 -> Communication	0.531	0.178	2.982	0.787
COM5 -> Communication	-0.084	0.218	0.386	0.558
COM6 -> Communication	0.535	0.229	2.334	0.793
MIP1 -> Managing Individual Performance	0.436	0.139	3.127	0.726
MIP2 -> Managing Individual Performance	0.187	0.128	1.455	0.550
MIP3 -> Managing Individual Performance	-0.066	0.140	0.469	*0.349*
MIP4 -> Managing Individual Performance	0.324	0.142	2.284	0.539
MIP5 -> Managing Individual Performance	0.339	0.158	2.149	0.660
MIP6 -> Managing Individual Performance	0.136	0.139	0.981	0.562
MIP7 -> Managing Individual Performance	0.213	0.161	1.319	0.605
MOTIV1 -> Motivation	0.640	0.151	4.228	0.869
MOTIV2 -> Motivation	0.218	0.149	1.462	0.651
MOTIV3 -> Motivation	0.213	0.148	1.441	0.648
MOTIV4 -> Motivation	0.246	0.115	2.136	0.666
TEAM1 -> Teamwork	0.281	0.155	1.806	0.563
TEAM2 -> Teamwork	0.321	0.170	1.887	0.667
TEAM3 -> Teamwork	0.717	0.149	4.823	0.876

As four indicators (three from the Communication dimension and one from the Managing Individual Performance dimension) did not meet any of the aforementioned criteria – i.e. neither the outer weights are significant, nor the outer loadings are above 0.50 (or close to this threshold), the items were dropped out.

A check of the extent of multicollinearity among constructs was also performed by means of the variance inflation factor (VIF), in line with Diamantopoulos and Siguaw's (2006) recommendations. The results indicated that multicollinearity is not an issue in this case, VIF scores ranging from 1.12 to 1.74 (thus, below the threshold value of 3.3).

After the evaluation of the formative measurement model, the assessment of the structural model was performed, taking into consideration the results of the previous analysis, as illustrated in Figure 2.
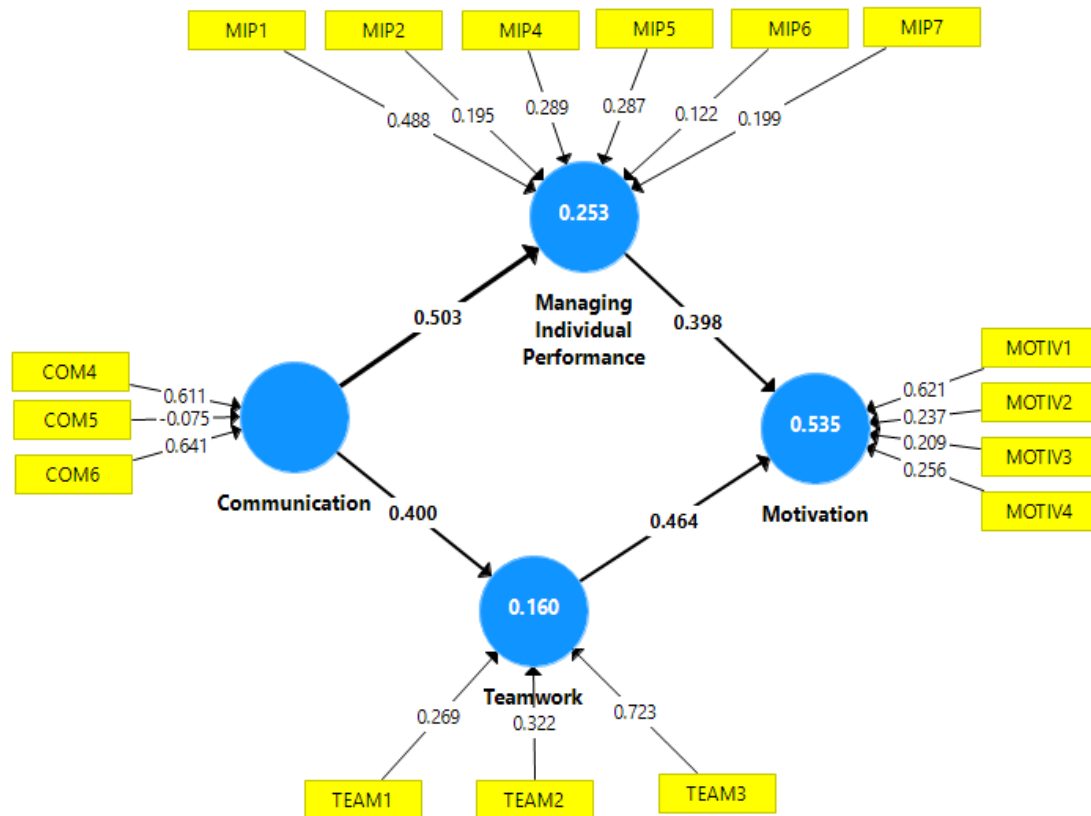
Figure 2. Structural model

The structural model illustrated above is descriptive of the relationships inferred by the third hypothesis - H3: There are significant positive influences among the perceptions of the four managerial dimensions in the case of Generation Y members - and its subsequent components.

In what concerns H3.1: Communication has a positive influence on teamwork in the case of Generation Y members, the results indicated the significant positive relationship between the two managerial dimensions ($\beta = 0.400$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, as the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.16$) showed, communication accounts for 16% of the variance in teamwork. Thus, H3.1 was supported.

Focusing on H3.2: Communication has a positive influence on managing individual performance in the case of Generation Y, the findings highlighted the highest positive influence in the structural model ($\beta = 0.503$, $p < 0.001$). At this level, the variance in the managing individual performance is accounted for by communication to an extent of 25.3%. This is descriptive of the relevance and importance of the managerial communication in supporting the individual performance in the case of Generation Y members; hence, H3.2. was also confirmed.

In its own right, the assessment of the relationship between teamwork and motivation indicated a significant positive influence ($\beta = 0.464$, $p < 0.001$), thus confirming H3.3: Teamwork has a positive influence on motivation in the case of Generation Y. The same situation applied to H3.4: Managing individual performance has a positive influence on motivation in the case of Generation Y, whose testing pointed to a significant positive influence between the two dimensions considered ($\beta = 0.398$, $p < 0.001$). In this framework, the respondents' perceptions on teamwork and managing individual performance explain 53.5% of the variance in their perception on motivation. In other words, through their lens, an effective manager, able to truly motivate the employees, is expected to communicate well and to manage individual performance in an integrative way.

With a view to test the fourth hypothesis – H4: There are significant differences between the active employees (with a work experience over 6 months) and the prospective employees of Generation Y

in perceiving the influences among the four managerial dimensions - a parametric partial least squares multi-group analysis (PLS-MGA) was performed in line with Sarstedt et al. (2011). The multi-group analysis allows to test if pre-defined data groups have significant differences in their group-specific parameter estimates (e.g., outer weights, and path coefficients). In the context of the current research, the procedure ensures the comparison between the two groups of respondents, indicating the significance of the inferred relationships in relation to group specifics. In this respect, the analysis revealed that the differences between the two groups – i.e. active versus prospective employees - are not meaningful (p > 0.05), as depicted in Table 4.

Table 4. PLS-MGA results

Relationships	Path Coefficients diff (| GROUP_EXP(1.0) - GROUP_EXP(2.0) |)	p-Value (GROUP_EXP(1.0) vs GROUP_EXP(2.0))
Communication -> Managing Individual Performance	0.021	0.391
Communication -> Teamwork	0.143	0.738
Managing Individual Performance -> Motivation	0.081	0.347
Teamwork -> Motivation	0.025	0.491

Given the aforementioned findings, the fourth hypothesis was not supported by the empirical evidence, as the differences between the employees versus non-employees within the investigated sample of Generation Y are not statistically significant.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The investigation of the four hypotheses brought to the fore the configuration and influences among the managerial dimensions – i.e., Communication, Teamwork, Motivation and Managing Individual Performance - comprised by the profile of an effective manager, defined by the Human Resources Office of the United Nations. In this front, two hypotheses (H2 and H3) were entirely supported, one hypothesis was partially supported (H1) while the last hypothesis was not confirmed.

From a bird's eye view, the questioned students perceived most of the managerial dimensions as important (apart from managing individual performance), whereas communication was rated first in terms of importance. Further, the application of the PLS-SEM procedure allowed the evaluation of the influences among the constructs, giving credit to their interconnections according to Generation Y.

Through the lens of the participants at the study, the four managerial dimensions display a dynamic nature in that the perception of one factor proved to significantly and positively influence the perception of another, pursuant to the H3 inferred relationships. Moreover, the PLS-MGA procedure underscored that there are no meaningful differences between the groups of employed versus unemployed members of Generation Y.

As any other research, the current one has several limitations which may be addressed in future studies. On the one hand, the convenient sample could be extended as to facilitate inter-group comparisons in relation to the programme of study and education level. On the other hand, further analyses could be translated from middle managers to senior managers and organizational leaders, provided that the sample structure is suitable.

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