

How the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the motivations and attitudes of millennial employees working in the Irish technology Industry towards their employer

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic caused record-breaking levels of attrition globally. Millennials represented the preponderance of this turnover, with the technology industry being one of the worst impacted by it overall. We aim to explore whether a relationship existed between the COVID-19 pandemic and the change in millennial motivations and attitudes toward their employers. Existing literature focuses on the pandemic's impact on employee wellbeing as well as productivity while working remotely, while research on millennial motivation pre-COVID is ample as it is on engagement strategies for the technology industry. A gap in research exists, however, concerning the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase in attrition of millennials in the technology industry, whether it influenced their work motivations or not. We ask the research question *did the Covid-19 pandemic impact the motivations and attitudes of millennial employees working in the Irish technology Industry towards their employer?*

We aim to explore whether the pandemic impacted the work-attitudes of millennials, to develop recommendations and increase retention among millennials post-COVID in the Irish technology industry. The findings of this paper propose that the inflated millennial attrition was an amalgamation of perceived micro-management, reward equity imbalance, a greatly increased workload and burnout all during a very buoyant Irish jobs market. In conclusion it is recommended that organisations prioritise remote management upskilling for people-managers, invest in performance management software as well as increasing recognition and development opportunities. Additional research may be conducted further from the pandemic to assess the long-term nature of the change in millennial employee motivations, also utilising larger participant groups for greater validity of data.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the Research

The Purpose of this research is an exploration of the relationship between the experience of Irish-based millennial employees working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic and their attitudes and motivations toward their employers in the technology industry. Millennials currently account for the largest percentage of non-managerial employees globally and are aged approximately twenty-six to forty-two (Deloitte, 2021). Given that they will soon represent the largest group of working professionals an exploration of their work motivations during and after the pandemic are pertinent as technology companies aim to reduce their turnover costs in a post-COVID-19 world (Beck & Hensher, 2022). Attrition rates have continued to remain at exceedingly high levels in comparison to before COVID-19, illustrating a potential change in the priorities of employees internationally (Akinyooye. & Nezamis, 2021). Millennials are known to value highly collaborative work environments, mutual trust with their manager as well as intellectually stimulating work (Thompson & Gregory, 2012) (Aguenza & Som, 2018). Throughout the pandemic millennials accounted for the bulk of global attrition, many struggling with increased workload, burnout and mental health issues while working remotely (Visier, 2021). Recent turnover surges in the post-COVID-19 era illustrate that previously effective retention strategies will no longer be so, with millennial employees insisting on greater flexibility and work-life balance (Chaudhary, 2022). This prompt shift in millennial attitudes presents many challenges but also opportunities for organisations who pay attention to and facilitate these new requirements. In advance of the development of a retention strategy for this new environment, the circumstance of this change in millennial motivations must be first analysed and understood for it to be effective.

1.2. COVID-19 and Employee Retention

The COVID-19 pandemic has produced historic levels of attrition among millennial employees globally (Akinyooye. & Nezamis, 2021). Deegahawature *et al* (2021) found that demanding work conditions in the technology industry negatively impacted employee health causing widespread burnout. Many organisations have been forced to adapt their policies to allow more flexible working arrangements in an attempt to curb the levels of attrition (Choi, 2020). There has been considerable research produced on the pandemic's impact on gender equality, employee experience along with productivity (Derndorfer, Disslbacher, Lechinger, Mader, & Six, 2021) (Beck & Hensher, 2022) (Farooq & Sultana, 2021). There exists very limited amounts of research focussing on the COVID-19

pandemic's impact on millennial career motivations, even less so concerning the technology industry. It is this gap we aim to address through qualitative research to improve millennial employee experience as well as retention.

1.3. Millennial Retention

Risley (2020) proposed that employee autonomy and frequent, clear communication with their manager had a positive correlation with improved engagement among millennials throughout the pandemic. Millennials are set to represent seventy-five-percent of the global workforces by 2027 (Brinda Devi & Jayakani, 2021). Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic more than fifty-percent of the global workforce left their roles, with millennials accounting for the best part of these changes (Deloitte, 2021). It's for this purpose we believe it is imperative to investigate whether their motivations and attitudes toward their employer were affected by the environment of the pandemic, to develop a framework of millennial retention post-COVID-19. Millennials require more feedback and team participation than previous generations and as such could have been more impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic than their organisations management (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). We believe managers may utilise this research to redesign their millennial engagement strategies for developing and retaining the best talent in a post-pandemic landscape.

1.4. The Irish Technology Industry

The technology is unique to other industries. It grew eleven-percent in size in 2020 and is considered a taxing work environment due to its rapid rate of innovation (Ovide, 2021). It has the highest attrition rates of any business sector at fourteen-percent (Kamalanabhan, Prakash Sai, & Mayuri, 2009). In Ireland specifically, the technology industry employees approximately eighty-thousand high-skilled employees and is set to grow considerably in the next decade (Mac Flynn, 2022). This industry was selected due to millennials accounting for over sixty-percent of total employees in it globally as well as experiencing some of the highest attrition rates of any industry at twenty-three percent annually (Evans, 2020) (Deegahawature & Lakmali, 2021). Existing research relating to the technology industry focuses on innovation within the sector, employee turnover as well as policy (Evans, 2020) (Subha, Madhusudhanan, & Ajai Abraham, 2021). For such a salient research area, very little research exists regarding millennial career motivations in the technology industry throughout the pandemic. Due to the explosion in demand for digital services as well as the industries continuous retention issues this research area was chosen to expand knowledge in this significant area.

1.5. Research Purpose and Methods

Much existing research of the Irish technology industry focuses on its rapid growth and analysis for use by similar economies as well as an exploration of gender inequality within the industry (Trauth & Connolly, 2021) (Heavin & Fitzgerald, 2004). Research on millennial motivation in the workplace is plentiful in addition to millennial employees experience of working through the pandemic, however, the focus has been primarily on their wellbeing and productivity (Brinda Devi & Jayakani, 2021) (Thomas, 2006). Given that millennials will soon represent two-thirds of all employees combined with the continuous expansion of the Irish technology industry there is an inadequate amount of research to understand this significant area (Deloitte, 2021). Studies also exist that are akin to the aims this research, focused on the motivations of millennials as well as strategies for their retention (Thompson & Gregory, 2012) (Aguenza & Som, 2018). However, all were conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings decreed increased compensation as the top motivating factor, as well as reduced workload and work-life balance.

In view of these conclusions we aim to bridge this research gap to explore and analyse if a relationship existed between the COVID-19 pandemic and millennial employees' attitudes toward their employers. Did it contribute to the record levels of millennial attrition in the Irish technology industry during the pandemic?

Qualitative research was employed by the researcher using semi-structured interviews and building upon a foundation of secondary research covering millennials in the workplace, generational and motivational theory as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on millennial employees. The aspiration of this being to answer the research question '*did the Covid-19 pandemic impact the motivations and attitudes of millennial employees working in the Irish technology industry towards their employer?*'. Ten employees that worked in remotely in the Irish technology industry throughout the pandemic were interviewed to examine the impact the pandemic had on their attitude toward their employer and their career motivations. In the following chapter we will review all existing literature in these related research fields to understand the topic further. We will also aim to understand their methodological and theoretical underpinnings to assist in our own selection for this research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Remote working:

With the ascent in levels of attrition globally during the COVID-19 pandemic improving employee retention has become a priority for many organisations around the world. It is for this purpose we aim to explore if the pandemic influenced the increase in attrition amongst millennial employees' working in the Irish technology industry. Upon reviewing contemporary research in this area, four key areas were identified that will build a foundation for this study:

- 1) The Pandemic's Impact on Millennial Employee Wellbeing
- 2) Employee Motivational Theories
- 3) Generational Theory
- 4) Millennials in the Workplace
- 5) The Technology Industry

Studying each of these areas in isolation will inform our study and might uncover gaps in existing research where we will aim to expand on current knowledge.

2.2. The Pandemic's Impact on Millennial Employee Wellbeing

In 2019 just twenty-three-percent of Irish employees worked remotely, however, in March 2020 this rose to eighty-percent as 1.3 million employees were mandated by Government to work fully remotely from their homes (CSO, 2021). Remote working is defined as working outside of a traditional workplace by leveraging technology as well as improving work efficiencies by reducing commute times (O' Hara, 2014). It has been shown to improve employee autonomy as well as satisfaction and productivity (de Klerk, Joubert, & Mosca, 2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the single greatest adjustments in the history of the industrialised world. Almost overnight organisations were faced with an immediate demand for digital resources, employee mental health services and new methods for managing employee performance remotely. Leider *et al* (2016) discovered an association between organisational productivity, employee commitment and job satisfaction with employees having adequate IT equipment to work effectively from home. The positive impact of the pandemic remote-working on employees were more time with family, zero

commute times and increased lifestyle flexibility, while the negatives were burnout, isolation and a self-reported diminishment of mental health (Cook, 2021). In this research, we aim to identify these changes in environment may have influenced a shift in millennial employee attitudes toward their employers.

2.2.1. Negative impact of COVID-19 on Employees

In order to accomplish our research objectives, it's pertinent to set the background of the so called '*great resignation*' (Cook, 2021). In May 2020 the world, from an employment market perspective, espoused a period of inertia that saw job vacancies in many European countries falling fifty-percent from their January levels of the same year, the majority of these reductions impacting employees in the retail and hospitality sector (OECD, 2021). In the initial phases of the pandemic numerous organisations in Ireland leveraged government supports to assist with the payment of employee salaries to reduce levels of redundancies while financial performance was impeded by a reduced demand for services and products across industries (Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, 2020). With so much uncertainty and insecurity in the labour market and the wider world turnover rates were low for the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic (CSO, 2021). However, 2021 the peak of the great resignation was witnessed with forty-two-percent of employees in Ireland declaring they will change roles in the next twelve months from their current role sixteen-percent increase from two-years prior (Workhuman, 2021). The technology industry was the most highly impacted by pandemic resignations with a 4.5% increase in resignations in 2021 compared with the year prior even higher than the healthcare industry with an increase in attrition rates of 3.6% (Cook, 2021). Millennial's include anyone from age twenty-six to forty-two and were the highest group to actively resign from their position within the pandemic, many citing burnout, lucrative alternative opportunities and more hybrid-working as key motivators for changing roles (Cook, 2021).

The reason for this generational group being the highest for attrition is somewhat illuminated by the analysis of Chaudhary *et al* (2022) who revealed disproportionate levels of burnout between young-parents and non-parent employees, mainly due to work-life conflict increasing as the distinction between home and office life continued to dissolve. A regression in gender equality was also found in remote-working couples, where women were often found to take on the dominant amount of unpaid domestic labour during the pandemic (Derndorfer et al., 2021). Qualitative research was produced revealing that millennial-Mothers in Ireland bore a disproportionate amount of childcare burden throughout the pandemic (Trauth & Connolly, 2021). Ireland's workforce is made up of approximately forty-percent by millennials and this is set to grow to sixty-percent in the next four

years (Deloitte, 2021). Working from home for many millennials in Ireland brought paradoxical results such as improved family connection and time with loved ones in the initial stages to considerably longer working hours and higher levels of stress due to workload throughout 2021 (de Klerk, Joubert, & Mosca, 2021). A study of remote working employees in the Guatemalan technology industry found eighty-percent of employees consistently work excessive hours with twenty-seven-percent reporting working four extra hours per day to meet their output requirements as their organisations experienced exponential growth (Arrivillaga, Garcia, & Gramajo, 2022).

2.2.2. Positive impact of COVID-19 on Employees

The story of the pandemic's impact on millennial employees is one of contradictions. The pandemic brought forward numerous positive developments that benefits employees such hybrid working arrangements being commonplace, which show indications of remaining beyond the pandemic (de Klerk, Joubert, & Mosca, 2021). However, in parallel with this practical development we saw the boundaries of home and work life reduce, even disappear in many cases, leading to strained personal relationships, burnout and considerable mental health issues for vast numbers of employees across the world (Arrivillaga, Garcia, & Gramajo, 2022).

Prior to the pandemic the mass of research on remote working focussed on work-life balance and productivity with much research on employee burnout still nascent even today (Farooq & Sultana, 2021). Upon review of current research, the key positive impacts of the pandemic on employees can be broken into two categories:

- Work-Life Balance Improvement
- Increased Job Satisfaction and Creativity

Sanhi (2020) established through qualitative research of remote working employees in India that working from home allowed many to decrease their pace of life and appreciate the circumstance they are in, this appreciation for life increased positivity for most. With the majority of citizens in Ireland living in cities with a fast-paced lifestyle, the removal of a commute combined increased time with loved ones gave many an opportunity to reassess their work-priorities and therefore make decisions based on these new motivations (Mac Flynn, 2022). As the housing market in Ireland has been less than favourable in recent years many millennials took advantage of their remote working benefits

during the pandemic and relocated to rural towns, increasing their quality life by reducing their cost of living (Beck & Hensher, 2022). The benefits of working from home were particularly increased for working parents who cited a reduction in childcare costs as a major benefit of the pandemic's remote working (Farooq & Sultana, 2021).

Nevertheless, in tandem with this benefit of reduced cost of living many millennials reported considerable health difficulties caused by burnout and isolation during the pandemic (Beck & Hensher, 2022). Overall, the impact of remote working on the motivations of millennial employees remained consistently varied as the pandemic progressed. Eckart *et al* (2021) found that at the beginning of global lockdowns employees predominantly cited working from home as the leading factor in their increased happiness, yet, as its presence became sustained remote this became overturned with remote becoming one of the primary sources of employee stress due to the blurred work-life boundaries.

The pandemic changed the lives of millennial employees irrevocably. Even though many faced challenges in coping with their new work from home reality it is surprising that it did not see a reduction in employee productivity but in general saw a considerable increase in it (Beck & Hensher, 2022). O'Hara (2014) found employees who worked from home were found to be thirteen-percent more productive than their office-based colleagues with many citing a reduction in distractions and commute times with their improved output and performance. It's important to note also that as burnout became more prevalent in the latter stages of the pandemic, this increase in productivity became diminished, particularly for technology industry employees as they struggled with increased workloads and high attrition on their teams (Chaudhary, 2022). Jaiswal *et al* (2020) determined a benefit cited by many employees working remotely was an increase in creativity, teamwork and problem-solving due to an increase in focus-time that allowed them to work on long-term projects that are often over-looked due to day to day tasks taking precedence.

The autonomy enjoyed by employees to work in their preferred location, at their own pace saw a widespread boost in job satisfaction (Visier, 2021). Quantitative research by Bulinska-Stangrecka *et al* (2021) highlighted a link between positive employee relations and job satisfaction levels with trust playing a key role in mediating the relationship between the two. Organisations who maintained close, transparent relations with their millennial employees prior to the pandemic witnessed substantial benefits throughout the pandemic as a result (Bulinska-Stangrecka & Bagińska, 2021). Employees who are satisfied in their role contribute to organisational productivity during crisis events, reducing turnover costs and financial losses (Chenyu & Tang, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic brought

innumerable examples of suffering experienced by millennial employees across the world yet it also displayed various advancements in how we work, allowing them to spend more time at home, relocate outside of cities and facilitate greater creativity all of which were unexpected advantages of the pandemic for them.

2.3. Employee Retention & Engagement

A happy employee is an engaged employee and engagement has been found to have a strong correlation with retention (Sandhya & Kumar, Employee retention by motivation., 2011). Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic employee attraction and retention was a consistent top priority for business leaders (Deloitte, 2022). As many businesses experienced a reduction in demand for their products or services during the pandemic, it was critical that costs be closely managed to reduce overall losses. A key area for savings is to retain top performing employees. It estimated that the cost of replacing a high performing employee is anywhere from twenty-five to one-hundred percent of their gross salary, this is without factoring in knowledge loss, morale of remaining colleagues and time for onboarding their replacement (Ramlall, 2004) (Sandhya & Kumar, 2011). Employee retention also plays an important role in the Irish economy as higher employee turnover leads to an increase in unemployment which can cause economic instability and slow growth (Vasquez, 2014). High employee attrition across industries can hinder the economy as it attempts to recover from the aftermath of the pandemic. As the technology industry continues to become more competitive and the war for high calibre talent escalates organisations must place far greater emphasis on the analysis of employee motivations to reduce turnover. An employee is an investment. As with all investments the longer they are retained, the more benefits are accrued and the greater the return an organisation will receive on their investment (Jagannathan , 2014).

2.3.1 Motivational Theories

As we aim to reduce turnover and understand how the pandemic may have impacted the motivations of millennial employees, we must first understand the foundational theories of motivation. Ramlall (2004) believes there is a general dearth of theoretical groundwork in use throughout much of human resources research, however, we will examine employee motivation by way of three psychological theories of motivation, they are:

- 1) Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
- 2) Vroom's Expectancy Theory
- 3) Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

In recent years there has been an abundance of research focussed on the nature of employee motivation and engagement. Ramlall (2004) put forward leading research compiling key theories in the field of employee motivation theory. Recent contemporary research in the field, however, encouraged by the COVID-19 pandemic has presented some findings that are in disparity with leading theories in the area. Kinnear *et al* (2000) discovered through qualitative analysis that employees found extrinsic factors such as salary, interpersonal relationships with their colleagues and manager as key motivators to leave their organisation. These findings are incongruous with Herzberg's two-factor theory that decreed external factors are merely "*hygiene factors*", meaning that their presence does not motivate someone to action, rather that motivation for action can only come from internal factors such as personal growth, recognition and job status (Ramlall, 2004). Al Kurdi *et al* (2020) and Aguenza *et al* (2018) echoed these new findings with their quantitative research, finding that the most impactful means of motivating employees was a strategy focused both on internal and external factors, where both were equally as important to employee motivation.

2.3.2 Engagement and Motivation

Much research around employee engagement and motivation are in agreement that key aspects such as support from their manager, intellectually stimulating and challenging work as well as opportunities for career development are essential for employee engagement (Sandhya & Kumar, 2011) (Al Kurdi, Alshurideh, & Al Afaishat, 2020) (Bulinska-Stangrecka & Bagienska, 2021). Visier (2021) undertook a major quantitative research project throughout the pandemic to assess employee sentiment toward their roles and employers. One of their main findings was the prevalence amongst millennials of the importance of performance equity (Visier, 2021). Performance equity is the equilibrium between the value and effort input by an employee into an organisation and their perceived fair reward for this service (Al Kurdi, Alshurideh, & Al Afaishat, 2020). This can be understood through Vroom's expectancy theory whereby employees are motivated through their belief that diligent performance will be compensated with equitable rewards (Ramlall, 2004). Across numerous employee research during the pandemic employees consistently stated a feeling of a lack of performance equity which lead to a perceived breach of their psychological contract with their employer (Sinclair, Probst, Watson, & Bazzoli, 2021) (Beck & Hensher, 2022). Rousseau (1998) first developed the concept of the psychological contract as "*an exchange agreement between oneself and*

another party” whereby there is an expectation of fair trade for service and reward. Employees who feel this contract has been broken are more likely to engage in reciprocal social behaviour of disloyalty toward their employer (Aguenza & Som, 2018). In this research we will investigate whether a relationship existed between perceived breach of psychological contract and the increase in attrition rates among millennial employees in Ireland’s technology industry during the pandemic. We aim to fill gaps in research around these topics.

Continuing our review of motivational theory, a foundational concept is that of reciprocity. Reciprocity is a social psychology concept where people mutually exchange privileges of perceived equal value (Gouldner, 1960). As illustrated by Visier (2021) employees who felt their psychological contract was broken became disengaged from their work. Throughout millennial turnover research, some themes are found repeatedly, such as an absence of managerial support, a perceived lack of reward equity and a lack of transparent communication between management and employees (Vasquez, 2014) (Sandhya & Kumar, Employee retention by motivation., 2011). Sandhya *et al* (2011) highlighted that millennial employees must feel their voices are heard and valued by their employer in order to be engaged and productive. These findings align with the views of employees in the technology industry who worked remotely during the pandemic. They cited a lack of consideration by management of improving work-life balance as millennials struggled to maintain their wellbeing under the pressure of increased workloads due to the technology industries expansion during the pandemic (Prasad, Vaidya, & Mangipudi, 2020). High employee turnover is a result of poor administration of rewards and recognition (Malvern, Michael, & Crispen, 2010). A common value proposition of technology companies to employees is innovative work and professional development, aligning with Maslow’s need of esteem and self-actualization (Ramlall, 2004). Recent research contradicts this indicating that this value proposition was not effective in the course of the pandemic as the fundamental needs of safety and belonging were not being met for many millennials throughout the pandemic, meaning self-actualization was a less motivating factor (Arrivillaga, Garcia, & Gramajo, 2022) (Ramlall, 2004).

Of those who changed company throughout the pandemic, millennial women were the majority in Ireland and across the world (PWC, 2022) (Workhuman, 2021). The rate of female attrition was higher in the technology industry in than most others (Cook, 2021). Requests for improved work/life balance went widely unacknowledged as well as boundaries between domestic and professional life being blurred, leading to stress and mental health issues (Subha, Madhusudhanan, & Ajai Abraham, 2021). Hancock *et al* (2018) brought forward a view grounded in uncertainty reduction theory that people recovering from PTSD or traumatic events will seek out control to reduce their experience of

duress. Uncertainty reduction theory suggests when in a state of uncertainty, humans will take actions to regain a sense of control over their environment (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) With so much beyond the control of numerous millennials some may have sought to achieve control by deciding to leave their current role and organisation. Job satisfaction, positive co-worker relations, work autonomy and challenging work are key to a highly engaged millennial workforce (Jagannathan , 2014) (Aguenza & Som, 2018). For millennials to be retained, they must feel purposefully connected to their work (Malvern, Michael, & Crispen, 2010). By assessing employee motivation through the lens of motivational theories we uncovered the factors that impact employee engagement. There exists very little research in how these factors combined with the circumstance of the pandemic could have impacted millennial employee retention in Irelands technology industry. We aim to build on previous studies combined with our own qualitative research t fill these gaps in research.

2.5. Millennials in the Workplace

Millennials are the second largest generation in the workforce, after Generation X (Brinda Devi & Jayakani, 2021). We aim to examine the differences between the values of Generation X and millennials through the lens of generational theory. Generational theory puts forward the concept that a group of people within a specific age group share a unique set of values, beliefs as behaviours due to the historical period in which they grew up (Wilson & Gerber, 2007). The study of millennial's in the technology industry is paramount as they represent 21.9% annual attrition in this industry (Naim & Lenka, 2020). It is interesting to note that millennial's have been found to have less organisational commitment and prioritise a supportive work environment over higher remuneration (Brinda Devi & Jayakani, 2021). Globally, fifty-one percent of management positions are currently carried out by Generation X employees (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). If they were leading teams of millennials throughout the pandemic the disparity in their values could have escalated resignations. Gülerüz-Türkel and Altınbaşak-Farina (2017) and Brinda Devi and Jayakani (2021) both performed quantitative research based in generational theory to understand the attitudes and values of millennials. Brinda Devi and Jayakani (2021) contrast previous findings, showing that millennials do share the same level of organisational commitment as previous generations, they also highly value a collaborative environment. The top two factors for retention in millennials are work independence and mutual trust, these findings pertinent in exploring the connection between the pandemic and millennial attrition (Gülerüz-Türkel & Altınbaşak-Farina, 2017).

As many managers were ill-prepared for the pandemic remote working many employees may have felt isolated due to lack of contact with their colleagues. Bussin *et al.* (2019) performed mixed method

research grounded in generational theory which presented social support and environment as the most important factors for retaining millennials. These findings shed light that perhaps it was not how the impact of the pandemic changed the values of millennials but how the distance between the management styles of gen x and millennials may have become exacerbated by it. In order to survive the pandemic many organisations had to reduce costs to survive (Akinyooye. & Nezamis, 2021). In the Indian technology industry millennials were found to view organisational learning and personal professional development as the leading factor in their choice to remain with an organisation (Naim & Lenka, 2020). With learning budgets being cut by many organisations while profits were low, this may have been perceived as an act of mistrust by their employers to millennials. We identify gaps in how millennial motivations could have been impacted during the pandemic and seek to develop a framework that organisations may make use to improve millennial retention.

2.4. The Irish Technology Industry

Now that we have reviewed the factors impacting millennial motivation, we must explore the context of the specific time and industry are assessing. The technology industry in Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the beginning of the 1970's the Irish government experienced rewards from their foreign direct investment strategy by attracting multiple technology manufacturing operations to establish themselves in Ireland, attracted by Ireland's EU membership, educated workforce, infrastructure quality as well as financial incentives from Government (Tallon & Kraemer, 1999). From these manufacturing beginnings, Ireland has become of the 3rd highest ranking technology capital in Europe with the European headquarters of Apple, Facebook and Microsoft being based here as well as considerable footprints by Amazon, Salesforce, Dell etc (FDi Intelligence, 2021). The technology industry had a comparatively unique experience throughout the pandemic, as other industries were negatively impacted by a reduction in demand for their services, the technology industry grew exponentially (Ovide, 2021). Amazon, Google, Microsoft and Facebook had a combined revenue of 1.3 trillion US-dollars during 2020, due to increased demand for online shopping, advertising and many organisations rapid transition to cloud services (Ovide, 2021). Microsoft saw an increase of 34% in the shipment of notebooks in 2020, with their CEO stating they experienced "*Two years of digital transformation in two-months*" (Evans, 2020). Amazon (2021) reported an 82% year on year growth from 2019 to 2021, achieving their three-year growth target in fifteen months. This unprecedented growth across the technology industry created enormous value for shareholders and organisations, however, the burden of this growth was bore primarily by employees.

Subha *et al* (2021) uncovered through qualitative interviews of millennial employees in the technology industry that key factors leading to disengagement were workload, domestic life challenges, occupational stress and job insecurity. In Ireland, seventy-six percent of employees had never worked from home prior to the pandemic (McCarthy, O' Connor, Ó Síocháin, & Frost, 2022). Griffeth *et al* (2000) produced seminal research in the field of employee turnover stating that job satisfaction, organisational commitment as well comparison with alternatives are key factors in millennial employees' decision to leave an organisation. These findings are insightful as millennial employees in the Irish technology industry not only experienced burnout throughout the pandemic but also decreasing job satisfaction as identified by McCarthy *et al* (2022). Job postings in the Irish labour market increased 130% from 2019 to 2021, with the roles offering fully remote availability increasing by 610% in the same period (Nitschke, Vankudre, & Taska, 2021).

As the technology industry competed to attract technical staff to match the pace of growth of their industry, employees who were experiencing low organisational commitment due to burnout, had a plethora of lucrative opportunities in comparison to their current position. In the initial six-months of the pandemic in Ireland one out of every four employees were made redundant, these figures may correlate with the surge in resignations in Ireland not taking place until the latter half of 2020 due to unemployment fears (Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, 2020). Millennial employees across industries require a sense of their voice being heard as well as perceived fair equity for their efforts to have a positive attitude toward their employer (Chaudhary, 2022). More was demanded from technology employees with reduced resources as illustrated by reports of working more hours, exhaustion and reduced work-life balance being wide spread in Ireland and globally (McCarthy, O' Connor, Ó Síocháin, & Frost, 2022) (Kiran, Sridevi, & Preetha, 2021). The majority of millennial employees who changed role during the pandemic had four to six years professional experience, accounting for 65.7% of all attrition (Kiran, Sridevi, & Preetha, 2021). The research of Kiran *et al* (2021) concurs with existing research as the key reasons stated by millennials for their decision to leave their employer were workload, pace of work, absence of support from management as well as burnout.

Although the technology industry has considerably higher levels of investment in employee development than other industries, staff were unable to sustain the levels of continuous effort required of them from their employers (Kiran, Sridevi, & Preetha, 2021). Prasad *et al* (2020) found no difference in mental health burdens between gender of employees working during the pandemic, contrasting existing research on the pandemic and gender equality regression. Kiran *et al* (2021) established workplace isolation, lack of communication with management and family disturbance as

the leading motivators for millennial attrition in the technology industry. Women were found to be the majority of employees who quit their role in the IT industry during the pandemic with many stating parenthood as the key factor in their decision to do so (Trauth & Connolly, 2021), contrasting the work of Prasad *et al* (2020) and corroborating the findings of Derndorfer (2021). Twenty-seven percent of all employees working in Ireland changed role between 2020 to 2021, a scale of resignation never witnessed before (McCarthy, O' Connor, Ó Síocháin, & Frost, 2022).

Throughout seismic expansions in the IT industry during the pandemic, existing research above puts forward that as a result of burnout, excessive workload and perceived reward inequity in their organisation many millennial employees in Ireland re-evaluated their career priorities. At this same time, Ireland experienced the highest demand for skilled talent that it has ever seen, creating lucrative and alternative opportunities for many employees in the technology industry (Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, 2020). Research prior to 2020 focussed mainly around a comparison of productivity between remote working and office-based staff. While the majority of research in the area of employee motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic revolves around the impact of remote working on mental health of employees as well as productivity. Existing research on the IT industry in Ireland is primarily concerned with gender inequality and Irelands economic development through foreign direct investment. Through qualitative research we aim to fill this gap in research to discover if the COVID-19 pandemic created the environment which may have altered millennial motivations and attitudes towards their employer in the Irish technology industry.

Chapter 3: Research Aims and Question

3.1. Research Aims

Considering the above review of existing literature. The aim of this research is to explore whether a the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the motivations and attitude of millennial employees in the Irish technology industry toward their employers. Also whether this contribute to the increase in millennial attrition throughout this period. By focussing on the impact of key factors in existing research such as; management style, reward equity and workload on employee wellbeing, we aim to fill these gaps in existing research.

3.2. Research Question

“Did the Covid-19 pandemic impact the motivations and attitudes of millennial employees working in the Irish technology Industry towards their employer?”

3.3. Research Sub-Questions

- 1) What impact did management style have on employee retention during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 2) Did employee priorities for selecting a new role change during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 3) How did perceived performance equity impact employee satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 4) Did workload influence employee decision to consider new opportunities during the pandemic?

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Introduction (Research Aims and Objectives)

We have now reviewed existing literature and developed our primary research question. Prior to engaging in the analysis of our data we must review our methodological approach to this research. Research methodology is a collection of distinct techniques, tools and procedures used to identify, select and analyse an assemblage of data surrounding a selected topic (Agarwal, 2015). It is performed to ensure the scientific validity of the study's overall findings as well as its legitimacy, both gained through its critical evaluation (Mitchell, 2018). In the forthcoming chapter we will present the rationale for our chosen research philosophy, approach, instruments, sample group, analysis and the researchers' ethical considerations. This thorough assessment will support the reasoning for the chosen research question as well as validating its research methods.

4.2. Research Philosophy

A Research Philosophy is "*a belief about the way data related to a topic should be collected, analysed and utilised*" (Holden & Lynch, 2004). It is a foundation of perspectives and assumptions about the world as well as the knowledge within it, which can influence research methods, strategy and analysis decisions. Research philosophies are broken into two prominent categories:

Positivism: An objective, scientific world-view where human behaviour is shaped by society (Turyahikayo, 2021).

Interpretivism: A subjective world-view where humans engage with society through their beliefs, actions and motivations (Turyahikayo, 2021).

Within these two categories, research philosophies are also understood through a lens of ontology meaning our view of existing reality and epistemology; the nature of our relationship with knowledge (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). This research is an exploration of the experiences of Irish-based millennial employees using in-depth, individual interviews. Therefore, an interpretivist view was used due to its focus on narratives, individual experiences and unique perspectives

(Agarwal, 2015). An epistemological approach was employed given that the nature of the interview will be subjective to allow for exploration of the topic.

Other views such as pragmatism, post-modernism and post-positivism were considered, however due to the nature of the personal experiences being explored these philosophies were not relevant (Zukauskas, Vveinhardt, & Andriukaitiene, 2017). This research is similar in theme and aim with other exploratory literature reviewed above and as such follows a similar philosophical view selection (Al Kurdi, Alshurideh, & Al Afaishat, 2020) (Subha, Madhusudhanan, & Ajai Abraham, 2021).

4.3. Research Approach

In pursuit of achieving its aims, there are two different approaches that research can take; an inductive or a deductive approach. As described by Hyde (2000) the deductive approach begins with a hypothesis, an informed assumption, and focusses on establishing whether this hypothesis is true or false in regards to the topic under investigation, the hypothesis is then accepted or rejected, depending on the outcome of the research. In contradiction to this the inductive approach begins by analysing empirical observations from the study group then aims to discover patterns or consistent themes across these observations and develop generalised theories about them, it begins with research objectives and aims to achieve these throughout the analysis process (Mitchell, 2018).

In keeping with similar exploratory research above, we have selected to employ the inductive research approach for the purpose of this study. The rationale being that we seek to assess whether the environment of the pandemic may have impacted the commitment millennial employees felt to their employer. To acquire these findings we must begin with this research aim and discover them as the research process advances, developing theories upon its conclusion.

The inductive approach explores the relationship between various pieces of information to develop a theory (Thomas, 2006). The deductive approach begins with a hypothesis theory and seeks to disprove or confirm it through data analysis (Hyde, 2000). As no data existed prior to our study, no hypothesis could be developed hence the decision against pursuing a deductive approach. We aim to assess the attitude and motivations amongst millennial employees and their experience of remote working in the Irish technology industry throughout the pandemic, giving further relevance to the choice of the inductive approach.

4.4. Research Design

Building upon the research approach an appropriate research design selection is paramount to achieving the aims of this study. There are two distinct methods for data collection in research design, a brief summary of both is below:

Quantitative research is a scientific method of data collection, it is primarily focused on using measurement devices to collect data upon which the data is analysed through statistical and numerical means (Edwards, 2020). Data is reported through the medium of statistical analyses, focussing on broad generalisations across large data pools (Holden & Lynch, 2004). It is for these reasons that quantitative research is frequently utilised in tandem with a positivist research philosophy as well as a deductive research approach, given the highly structured nature of quantitative data collection as well as its aim to prove hypotheses (Edwards, 2020).

Conversely, qualitative research makes use of non-numerical data to explore, analyse and develop theories concerning a given topic, typically through interviews or participant observations (Gupta & Awasthy, 2015). Saunders *et al* (2019) decree that given the exploratory nature of qualitative analysis it is conducive to an interpretivist research philosophy and an inductive approach given its purpose of investigation of human perspective, emotions and engagement with their environment to develop theories based on these findings.

A well-considered strategy for data collection is fundamental to effective research as it dictates the research instruments that will be employed by developing a framework for the study (Agarwal, 2015). As relayed by Holden *et al* (2004) quantitative analysis provides numerous benefits such as substantial, statistically robust findings based on numerical evidence, which can provide an excellent basis for decision making. Whilst in contrast qualitative analysis enables more in-depth investigation around the motives and sentiments of participants related to the topic of the study, providing answers to exploratory questions and deeper insights (Braun & Victoria, 2013).

It is for this reason that there has been a significant increase in the prevalence of a mixed-method approach amongst contemporary researchers, due to its highly valuable combination of “*how*” and “*why*” data as well statistical insights (Parylo, 2012). A mixed-method approach utilises quantitative as well as qualitative analysis to produce robust research, in opposition to a mono-method approach where just one method is used (Gilad, 2021). However, it can be time consuming to conduct.

Upon deciding the most applicable research design a mixed method approach was decided unfeasible given the time and resources restraint in conducting this research. Given the fundamental nature of the study being investigational a quantitative design was deemed not suitable given the aim of the research, as well requiring a large study group and can be time consuming as well (Edwards, 2020).

For this reason, a qualitative research design was selected as it is most conducive to the goal of this research, although it can produce findings of reduced validity and greater ambiguity, yet, given the small group size it aligns with the exploratory research aims and is best suited to be completed within the time frame (Gupta & Awasthy, 2015).

4.5. Research Instruments

If you wish to develop deep insights about an individual's experience and motivations, qualitative research provides numerous tools to achieve this (Agarwal, 2015). It utilises diverse instruments such as focus groups, observation and individual interviews to explore topics (Braun & Victoria, 2013). For this study semi-structured interviews were chosen to explore these phenomena. In a semi-structured interview an interviewer will provide a set of pre-selected questions, however, these questions are open-ended and the style is conversational, allowing for the interviewee to discuss aspects they feel passionately about (Longhurst, 2003). Similar studies assessed during the literature review used semi-structured interviews to produce valuable research outcomes, further encouraging its use (Derndorfer, Disslbacher, Lechinger, Mader, & Six, 2021) (Al Kurdi, Alshurideh, & Al Afaishat, 2020).

The goal of qualitative interviewing is to come across new perspectives through first-hand, honest accounts (Gilad, 2021). When designing the questionnaire for this research, it was broken into four sections:

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Participants experience of COVID-19 pandemic on their wellbeing
- 3) Participants opinion on their employer's management throughout the pandemic
- 4) Participants career motivation before and after the pandemic

In total twelve questions were asked. Open-ended questions allow for greater breadth of opinion to be shared by the respondent, creating more data and more holistic findings (Parylo, 2012). For this purpose, all questions were open ended. When closed questions were asked follow-up questions were then asked to encourage elaboration. Participants were reminded at the beginning of the interview that they could refuse to answer any question they wished, as well as this adequate time was given to respondents to allow them to formulate their responses.

Ten interviews in total took place through Microsoft Teams, a video communication platform, each ranging approximately thirty to sixty minutes in length. Although Quimby *et al* (2012) advocate for face to face interviews, allowing for great spontaneity as well as privacy for sensitive subject matter there are numerous benefits to virtual interviewing. Primarily, reduced time commitment was a benefit by allowing greater access to participants as well as ensuring the research was feasible to complete within this time constraints. Furthermore, all interviews were auto-transcribed with participants giving their consent in advance for this recording. Interviews were reviewed in full to ensure accurate transcription, as well as this, hand-written notes were made by the researcher throughout the interviews on any points of interest.

Thematic analysis was then performed on all interview transcripts after the second review. The second review of transcripts improved confidence in the trustworthiness of the data (Braun & Victoria, 2013). As well as this it reduces the likelihood of the researcher in putting their bias on the data (Agarwal, 2015). Thematic analysis was beneficial as the interviews were exploratory in nature and allowed for key themes to become pronounced within the transcripts.

Thematic Analysis

Key: Positive Neutral Negative

1. How satisfied are you in your current role?

Participant A

I'd say a 6 out of 10 and it has been a difficult few months. In my current place we have a compulsory 2 weeks annual leave. We're a small team with just three people; myself, my manager and one other, so with one person taking two weeks annual leave at a time, which has been happening sporadically over the last couple of weeks it definitely adds a lot of pressure to and everyone else in the team. I definitely was more satisfied earlier, during COVID like at an 8 or 10. But then yeah, I think things have just jumped up a lot like in work-demands and that. And the hardest part is struggling capacity wise, volume wise and things like that.

Figure 1. Example of Thematic Analysis

4.6. Research Sample

Sampling is the selection of a subset group that is part of a total population which can be studied and conclusions drawn from them about the total population (Bhardwaj, 2019). Sampling provides many benefits such as cost-effectiveness, reduced time input requirements as well as fast results, however,

sampling results can at times lack generalisability (Tuckett, 2004). For this research purposive was chosen over convenience sampling, due to the aim of the research being specific, seeking millennial employees, currently based in Ireland and working in the technology industry here, therefore participants were selected for their specific characteristics (Bhardwaj, 2019).

Non-probability sampling was also employed as participants, although selected to represent a gender-balanced panel were not an accurate reflection of the exact population of the Irish technology industries total millennial employee population (Braun & Victoria, 2013). Participants were contacted through the researcher's personal network of colleagues, ex-colleagues and acquaintances who are currently working in the technology industry and have been since before the pandemic. Participants were contacted by email with a synopsis of the research aims as well the requirements of them should they seek to participate.

In all, ten participants agreed to participate. The sample group consisted of millennial employees who were working in the technology industry during the COVID-19 pandemic and who worked remotely throughout it as well. In order to illustrate a broad snapshot of the Irish technology industry participants were selected from eight separate organisations, none were in management positions to ensure consistency of results. A mix of genders was also established; six women and four men. Finally, the participants were a combination of employees who remained with their employer as well as those who changed employer, remaining in the technology industry, during the pandemic. The purpose of this was to assess the motivations of employees in both groups and what may have been the catalyst of their various decisions.

4.7. Data Analysis

Ten interviews were conducted across a two-week period. Participants were all between twenty-five and forty-one years of age and none were in management positions. Participants were from eight different organisations and living in multiple locations across Ireland, all working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Four participants had changed employer during the pandemic and six had remained with their employer, for a diversity of perspective.

Due to sample group variance, thematic analysis was chosen to analyse and interpret the interview data as it is conducive to highlighting themes and enable the development of theories around the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on career motivations amongst the sample group (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

The framework developed by Braun *et al* (2013) was utilised during the thematic analysis of the data, which follows six distinct steps:

- 1) Data familiarisation
- 2) Developing initial codes
- 3) Theme identification
- 4) Reviewing themes
- 5) Theme definition and naming
- 6) Findings analysis

The researcher was cognisant to ensure harmony between theoretical foundations and analysis. As denoted by Vaismoradi *et al* (2013) thematic analysis can be susceptible to bias from the researcher which may hinder the validity of the analysis. Complete findings are abridged in the findings and analysis chapter.

4.8. Ethical Considerations

Research ethics are particularly pertinent in qualitative research due to the sensitive and personal nature of the data collection methods used (Braun & Victoria, 2013). The purpose of research ethics is to ensure the protection of the privacy and wellbeing of the study participants (Gupta & Awasthy, 2015).

Prior to agreeing to participate in the study, all participants were issued with an information sheet relaying the requirements of them, data processing process as well as the nature of the study. Upon consenting to take part in the study all participants were then sent a form detailing their permissions required for data recording. Each participant was obliged to read, sign and return the consent form prior to beginning any interviews. They were also reminded at the beginning of every interview that they could withdraw from the process and refuse to answer and question they did not wish to.

All data was processed in line with current data protection legislation. All interview data was anonymised and stored in a password protected folder on the researcher's laptop for the duration of the research project. As per NCI guidelines all participant related data will be disposed of after the research has concluded.

Whilst conducting the interviews, freedom and support were offered when participants were exploring sensitive topics or information, to ensure their comfort and safety. Once an interview had concluded a follow-up email was sent to the participants reiterating the data processing process as well as sharing the contact information of the researcher for any follow-up queries they may have.

Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will detail the findings from the ten semi-structured interviews conducted for this study. Thematic analysis was performed on all interview transcripts in order to identify pertinent data for achieving the aims of the research. The findings have been organised into five dominant themes for the purpose of answering the research question; “*did the COVID-19 pandemic have an impact on millennial employees working in the Irish technology industry?*”. For the purpose of this research all participants are of the millennial generation, ages ranging from twenty-seven to forty-one, all worked remotely throughout the entire pandemic and were employed in the Irish technology industry throughout this time also.

Participants:	A	B	C	D	E
Gender	F	F	F	M	F
Age	28	32	30	30	28
Role	HR Business Partner	Customer Service Expert	Account Specialist	Training Administrator	Payroll Specialist
Location	Dublin	Carlow	Dublin	Meath	Louth
Participants:	F	G	H	I	J
Gender	F	M	M	F	M
Age	29	27	41	29	29
Role	Product Specialist	Data Engineer	Talent Sourcer	Product Manager	Technical Recruiter
Location	Kildare	Cork	Meath	Cork	Carlow

Figure 2 – Participants’ Information and Background

The five themes highlighted were:

1. Perceived Lack of Management Support
2. Increased Productivity and Burnout
3. Perceived Reward Imbalance
4. Management Communication
5. Reassessment of Career Priorities

5.2. Perceived Lack of Management Support

Exceeding mentions of all other themes, a perceived lack of line manager support was repeatedly referred to by all participants. Whilst conducting the interviews a recurrent allusion to micro-management from line managers was a prominent theme across all of the ten interviews. Participants A, C, D and E reported a sense of needing to be constantly present at their desk to respond to messages immediately. Participant A relayed how their “*manager couldn't see my workload, then you have your own kind of internal voice telling you that if you're not online all the time, people will think you're not working because you're at home*” this quickly led to a perpetual state of anxiety. Participant C communicated a more direct example of micro management, “*I was down making a cup of tea, I hear my teams chat calling, went back up and it was a whole thing of why aren't you at your computer?, from my Manager*”. This perceived lack of support or understanding was widespread throughout participants experiences, with every person mentioning its negative impact on their work attitudes.

Seven of the ten participants worked full-time from their bedroom with descriptions such as “*prison*”, “*felt like four walls were closing in*” and “*always in work mode, because I can see my computers from my bed*” being shared to describe the experience. Participant J was in their bedroom “*in excess of 22 hours a day*”. Remote working's negative impact on their mental health was another key theme which was mentioned by all participants. This experience of mental anguish, lethargy and anxiety due to the fear of the spread of COVID-19 and the wellbeing of their loved ones was exacerbated by their simultaneous increase in work demands. Four of the ten participants relayed that no mental health services were offered at any point during the pandemic. When asked for their advice to management eight of the participants mention a version of increased understanding from management and the necessity to “*have a clear performance management system in place*” as imparted by Participant A to help improve the experience for managers and employees. Participant H declared that management “*can't expect to go back to the way things were*”. A clear sense of frustration, anxiety and guilt was ubiquitous across all ten interviews in relation to working from home in the initial six-months of the pandemic.

Juxtaposing this lack of support by management all participants reported a considerable increase in their output, with participant B stating “*because my manager couldn't see me, I would do more work and work later to prove I was working hard at home*”. Nine of the ten participants reported working longer hours, ranging from an extra five to fifteen hours a week. One participant reported working harder, but not longer hours. Common advice from participants A, G and I was for management to

have more empathy for employees' various circumstances, *"you don't know what circumstance people are in, what they're going through, they could have lost family members"* stated participant G. Due to this increased workload six of the ten participants reported periods of mental health issues, depression as well as conflict between their home and work life. A lack of quality communication with line management was mentioned in five of the ten interviews as the primary reason for considering to leave or leaving their organisation, *"no trust"* and *"the expectation to always be available, always be online"* participant D expressed how this directly led to their decision to change company during the pandemic. In the next topic we will further explore the impact that increased workload had on the participants decisions to remain or leave their companies.

5.3. Increased Productivity and Burnout

Distrust between managers and employees as well as a perceived lack of support is in contrast to the increased productivity reported by all ten participants. Nine of the ten participants reported working longer hours out of fear of being perceived as idle by their manager, *"I was working extra hours, starting earlier, finishing later. Paranoid my boss will think I'm lazy"*. In the initial months, participants stated difficulty in adapting to the new working model with either too many or not enough video calls with their respective teams. Due to these and other factors such as redundancies six participants reported considerable attrition on their teams. Of the six participants, the majority reported a slow backfill of the team members lost, causing further increases in their workloads, with participant A stating *"my workload definitely increased due to redundancies and company growth"* and reporting it felt like they *"Were working two full-time jobs"*. Five of six the participants who reported a loss of members from their teams took leave for mental health concerns ranging from two to five days. Participant C stated *"the work just kept piling up, people left but they weren't being replaced"* leading to *"a lot of low points, just feeling stressed all the time"* for them and their wellbeing. This psychological anguish was made worse due to the absence of a commute or a distinction between work and home life to destress from a difficult day.

The burden of meeting the growth demands of the technology industry was experienced first-hand by all participants, with such terms as *"skyrocketed"* and *"exploded"* used by participants H and I when asked about their workload during the pandemic. Frequent statements of fatigue, exhaustion and relentless job-demands were frequent across all ten interviews. Participant I recalled how they would *"usually take about 20 complex calls a day before COVID, but this went up to about 60 every day during COVID"*. Similar sentiments were shared by participant F how they would usually have one call come in every thirty minutes on their team, but due to the increase in the purchase of their

companies' products it became "*permanently having 100 calls in the que all the time*". Across six of the ten interviews the theme of mental health difficulties was commonplace, with all participants mentioning some link between increased workload and poor overall wellbeing.

An absorbing fact mentioned by four of the ten participants was the impact the connection between the ceasing of their personal development and their engagement in their role. Participant G stated they experienced lethargy due to the repetitive nature of their work as well as their personal growth projects being stopped due to cost-cutting by their organisation. As well as this participant F reported how they would have worked more diligently without any monetary increase, had there been some form of personal development in their role. The mention of personal development was not unexpected, however, the level of importance it played for the four participants and their decision to remain or leave their organisation was. As the workloads of all participants increased, so too did attrition from their teams lead to a negative impact on the participants wellbeing. Their extra working hours heightened the polarity of the participants perception of their reward versus their input. We will explore this further in the next theme.

5.4. Perceived Reward Imbalance

In analysing the interview transcripts to assess the sentiment of the group, three main factors were found to impact their work-motivation the most; a simultaneous pause on employee compensation increases, rising employee productivity together with company profit growth. When asked if they perceived their reward as adequate for their efforts during the pandemic nine of the ten participants responded with a resolute no. As expounded by participant A their company did not pay any salary increases or bonuses throughout 2020 and 2021, which they were understanding of, "*but then you read of your company making more profits than ever during the pandemic, and it wasn't rectified. I'm still a bit salty about that*". Participant A reveals a common consensus across the group of the disparity between their organisations soaring financial growth and their individual compensation stagnating throughout the same period. In the case of Participant F they "*did more calls than anyone in the Dublin office and received a promotion in 2021, but got the tiniest of salary increases*". This action was a turning point for participant F who became removed from their day to day work at this point, no longer doing extra duties or working later, acting in a manner to reciprocate their perceived inequity for their increased efforts.

Five of the nine participants relayed that they were satisfied with their overall reward in the initial months of the pandemic. A reduction in business and compensation growth was happening “*across the board*”, explained participant E, on paying no bonuses in 2020 they continued; “*I believe in any other company it was a similar approach*”. There was a sense of organisations and their employees experiencing shared misfortunes. Across the nine dissatisfied participants their resentments began to emerge only when their organisations began to experience high levels of growth, some of twenty-percent for already large organisations. Participant I explained how their “*rate of pay didn't go up at all. Despite the massive level of extra effort*”, leading to their observation that “*your level of reward went down, with the level of work going up*”. In the case of participant I this experience of mental exhaustion due to workload combined with their organisation’s apparent indifference for the wellbeing of their employees led them to decide to change careers completely, leaving the technology industry.

The factors contributing to this perception of inequity amongst several participants was compounded as attrition began to rise in their organisations and those who remained were made to contribute even more productivity. Participant D explained how they were on a team of six and by February of 2021 three people had left the team. “*People were leaving and not being replaced, we were told again and again we would have to do more with less*”. This further aggravated the sense of unfairness in regards to their reward as they did not receive their bonus for 2020 or 2021 while their company recorded higher than expected profits in both years. Five of the participants mentioned multiple times how they would have been more engaged with their work had they received recognition for the increased efforts they were making. As explained by Participant H “*rewarding employees wherever possible and just making people feel valued and appreciated would have been nice, through those hard times*”. Overall, nine of the ten participants still held considerable animosity toward their employers for the lack of shared reward for their efforts throughout the pandemic. This factor was the second most highly rated in the decision of participants D, I and J to leave their organisation during the pandemic. Their sense of inequality was exacerbated by working in the technology industry as they read reports of their organisations breaking records for profits repeatedly. Continuing from this we will explore the impact that their company’s communication performance had on their level of engagement.

5.5. Company Communication

Eight of the ten participants felt they were satisfied with their organisation’s communications when the pandemic was nascent. Sharing bi-weekly updates in the case of participant A or multiple company chat groups on internal communications platforms for COVID-related news and health

guidelines in the case of participants C and F. Responses to the question of employer's communication performance during the pandemic was a divisive topic, participants had very positive or quite negative experiences overall. They ranged from participant C elucidation of *"they were really good with their communication and any hiring freezes, or opening a new site, we were informed in advance"* to participant E's negative experience *"we were just told we would be going back to the office full-time, but that there would be guidelines and procedures, but when we arrived it was like none of that ever came out. It was like just literally gone back to as if nothing had happened"*.

The experience of distrust in their management's communications in the case of participants E and I, cause considerable damage to their trust and commitment to their employer. Participant I relayed how all communications in their organisation came from the *"rumour mill"* where *"you'd hear from someone high up that something might happen a week before, then they'd deny it vehemently, but a week later of course it happens"*. Four of the participants mentioned a perpetual *"push to get back to the office"* in the words of participant J, from senior management throughout the pandemic. The sentiment from these actions on the participants was that it was disheartening and created considerable anxiety for those who lived with parents, as participant E describes *"I was the only one in my house of four at the time who didn't have COVID in May this year, my Manager said I still had to come to the office if I was testing negative"*. This lack of autonomy from management to employees was frequently referred to by the participants with frustration, they felt their employer's disloyalty was juxtaposed by the employees excessively high work output.

Participants were also asked about whether they felt the voice of employees was sought by their organisations prior to making business changes. Only three of the participants answered yes to this question, many stating that their direct line managers provided them with weekly updates for any specific business changes that may impact them. Yet, the majority of participants reported frequent emails from their business about updates, *"they were very formal, they didn't feel sincere I stopped reading them after a couple of weeks"* participant A shared. At the beginning of the pandemic both the organisations of participant G and E made a lot of redundancies with very little notice, as participant G put it *"people came in to work on Monday to an email saying they were being let go, I remember so many people being upset"*. Both participants shared how this cause anxiety for them, causing them to over work for fear of redundancy, leading to early burn out by the middle of summer 2020.

A theme of hesitance from their employers in providing adequate equipment for working from home was raised by six of the participants as well. Experiences were similar to participant H's *"I remember*

asking for a chair and a monitor and getting just silence, no response, then eventually; 'we don't do that'". This sense of disparity between the considerable increase in effort being made by employees and their perception of reward inequity with their employers went through all ten interviews. We will explore in the final theme how the accumulative impact of all these factors caused many participants to make career reassessments throughout this period.

5.6. Reassessment of Career Priorities

The impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the wellbeing and career aspirations of all participants cannot be understated. Participant E and I shared how they witnessed a side to their organisations that they had not seen before in terms of work demands and little support, as participant I shared *"I had never worked so hard for so long. I was promoted twice in my time there and was planning on rising through the ranks, but COVID thought me that I never want to work in that kind of environment again"*. It was interesting to note how the career priorities of all ten participants had change throughout the experience of the pandemic. 8 participants recalled salary being a top priority in a new role, with company reputation and career development being other key factors little consideration for work/life balance prior to COVID-19. However, after the pandemic all ten participants reported that a hybrid work model is essential and work/life balance was either priority one or two for all ten. As participant A relayed *"I just never see myself going back to five days in an office"*, also participant F shared how they had *"learned from being in an 'always on' culture, that work/life balance is actually one of the most important things to me, having experienced that"*.

There was a consistent theme of participants values changing as they had more time to consider their futures throughout lockdown. Participant J mentioned *"I use to wake up at 6am every day and have a three-hour round trip to the office. Getting out of bed at 7:30am felt incredible"*. Participants E and I returned to education to change careers after six- and seven-year careers in their respective areas, one to retrain as a teacher, something they mentioned they had never considered before the pandemic, the other was staying in the technology industry but retraining in computer science. As participant I noted, *"you want to feel like you get something out of the job you're doing"*.

Eight participants did consider changing company during the pandemic but only six of them did. Of the six, micro-management as well as greatly increased workload were the most prevalent reasons, both being referenced by all six, with no development opportunities being mentioned by four of the

six. An interesting factor as well was the combination of a very buoyant Irish jobs market coinciding as the participants were assessing external job opportunities. “*It was humbling*” as participant H put it, “*I felt like a Rockstar*”, they continued. “*I usually get a message from a Recruiter on LinkedIn every month pre-COVID, but I was getting 2 or 3 messages every week at some points*” relayed participant D. Five of the participants mentioned that the greater compensation and flexibility on offer by other organisations was a major factor in their decision to change roles, it was “*the cherry on top*” in the words of participant H.

5.7 Conclusion

Through the analysis of the interview data the key themes of poor management support, reward equity as well as mixed communication and greatly increased workload were present throughout all ten participants interviews. Participants shared how they struggled considerably at points with their mental health due to the COVID-19 pandemic concerns as well as their increased workload. In summary, candidates felt undervalued by their employers, their request for support largely went unacknowledged. As the demands for productivity increased exponentially in line with the pandemic’s prevalence, employees were unable to cope with the greater than ever work demands and mental health challenges from imposed lockdowns and isolation. Companies who communicated well with their employees, provided them with recognition, monetary rewards and personal development succeeded in retaining some employees.

COVID-19 has changed the professional landscape irrevocably for talent attraction and retention. Going forward, employees will demand more flexibility in their roles, both in terms of remote working and working hours that suit their lifestyle demands. As the technology industry continues to grow at a rapid rate, so too will the competition to attract the best talent. This analysis provides only one half of the complete picture, in the next chapter we will cross-reference existing literature with the findings from the participants. Limitations exist with this research creating opportunities for future research.

Chapter 6: Discussion

In this chapter we will examine the key findings from the research interviews, it will be compared and contrasted with the existing literature in the field with particular focus on generational and motivational theories. Through this we aim to answer the research question; were the career motivations and attitudes of millennial employees working in Irish technology industry impacted the Covid-19 pandemic impact?

6.1. Perceived Lack of Management Support

Sandhya and Kumar (2011) relayed that management support is essential for the motivation and engagement of millennial employees. These findings were corroborated by the participants of this research project who reported a lack of management support as the number one reason, mentioned considerably more times than others, for their decision to leave their organisations or to begin considering external opportunities. Generational theories relating to millennial employees work motivations state that collaboration is one of the key priorities for them to have a positive attitude toward their employer (Sinclair, Probst, Watson, & Bazzoli, 2021). Five of the participants relayed how they requested additional mental health resources for sharing experiences with colleagues, however four of the five reported their appeals being ignored by management. Given that there is a fifty-one percent probability that the management of the participants were Generation X it is possible that the motivations of each group could have been different, leading to this frustration for millennial employees (Brinda Devi & Jayakani, 2021). Malvern *et al* (2010) decreed that attrition is a consequence of poor reward and recognition. There were correlations with these findings in the participants group as three of those who did leave their organisations during the pandemic reported that they would have stayed for longer had they received recognition, even without monetary reward, for their increased efforts. Participants disclosed how feelings of a lack of management support were compounded by “*Micro-management*” from line managers as well as an expectation to be “*always on*”. A large part of the negative experience of the participants related to the insufficient systems for performance management, leading to a considerable limitation of management’s ability to witness the levels of output for each of their team members. Participants reported substantial anxiety as a result of this poor oversight. Due to this, many felt their efforts went unrecognised therefore they began to withdraw from their work as their workload continued to increase.

6.2. Increased Productivity and Burnout

O'Hara (2014) discovered six-years prior to the pandemic that remote workers were thirteen-percent more productive than their office-based colleagues. These findings were vastly contrasted by the reports of the studies participant where five individuals reported working up to fifteen-percent more per work. At some points participant A reported feeling they were "*working two full time jobs*". With the increase in demand for IT-services during the pandemic participants described the increase of their workload with words such as "*skyrocketed*" and "*exploded*". Participant I had their daily call volumes increase three-hundred percent at the end of 2020, causing them to take a week's sick leave from mental fatigue. A study during the pandemic of remote workers found paradoxical experiences where the experience was positive initially with no commute and more time spent with family, yet, as the pandemic persisted it was these same factors that caused anguish for many, as the boundaries between work and domestic life eroded (de Klerk, Joubert, & Mosca, 2021). Eckart *et al* (2021) brought forward similar homogenous findings of employees recounting the benefits of autonomy, yet the suffering of isolation in the later stages of lockdowns.

Burnout was a common theme across all ten interviews also. Participants reported beginning work earlier and finishing later, in part due to lack of manager oversight on their productivity levels, leading to a concern of perceived idleness by them and a defensive over-working to combat this. Sentiments of being "*stressed all the time*" were common amongst the participants. Due to this increase in workload as well as the concerns for their wellbeing during a global pandemic, seven of the participants reported periods of diminished mental health. These findings are in line with Maslow's hierarchy of need theory, due to the security and safety of the participants not being met, their motivation to pursue goals of self-realisation through career performance were ineffective motivators (Ramlall, 2004). AL Kurdi *et al* (2020) identified that professional development is a key motivating factor for Millennials, compared with Generation X. A noteworthy discovery was that this finding was confirmed with the participant group as five of the participants relayed disappointment and a feeling of injustice that their employers had immediately cut all training and development spending and also how high a level of importance continuous professional development held for the participants. Three stated it as a priority higher than salary when considering a new role after the pandemic.

6.3. Perceived Reward Imbalance

Millennial employees seek equitable rewards based on their individual contributions (Beck & Hensher, 2022). Perceived reward imbalance was the one of the key factors across the participant group that impacted their motivation toward their employer. Eight of the participants relayed how the combination of a pause of employee bonuses and salary increases was made worse by their simultaneous increase in output as well as record profits for their organisations concurrently. Sentiments of injustice were common among the group. All participants bar one said they did not feel their reward was adequate for the productivity throughout the pandemic. Visier (2021) produced quantitative research highlighting that reward equity was the highest factor among millennials in the workplace for improved attitude toward their employer during the pandemic. Vroom's expectancy theory relays that an individual will seek an equilibrium between their output and reward and that this equation will dictate their motivation (Ramlall, 2004).

The participant group largely substantiated this theory. Several participants relayed how they began to withdraw from their daily work due to receiving no bonus for two-years, whilst they had been producing considerably higher output throughout this period. Accounts were shared of receiving promotions with minimal compensation increases or none at all and feeling exploited by their employer. This sense of injustice for all eight participants who did consider changing roles throughout the pandemic was the second highest push factor relayed by all, following micro-management by their line managers. Sinclair *et al* (2021) disseminated the importance of the psychological contract between employer and employee, where unspoken agreements of reward and effort equilibrium are a key example. If employees believe this contract to be broken, they will engage in disloyal activities (Aguenza & Som, 2018). These findings are in line with the interview data from the study group. Many expressed how they began to reduce their output after the initial months of the pandemic, once their organisations began to become increasingly profitable yet their individual compensation was frozen. One unique finding of the interviews was the mention by five of the participants, three of whom has changed roles, how they sought recognition and personal development as well, at times, equally as highly as monetary increases. These findings contradict Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, as some participants appeared to retain a desire for self-actualization when their base needs were not being met (Ramlall, 2004).

6.4. Company Communication

Vasquez (2014) articulated that a lack of transparent communication from management is a key factor in causing disloyal actions from millennial employees. These findings were contrasted by the participant groups experience. Six of the participants rated their organisations communications highly at the beginning of the pandemic, however, this was changed to a very low rating after the initial six-months. Yet, while this caused a small deterioration of engagement with communication in the participants none reported it impacting their work motivation. A hesitancy to provide appropriate equipment for remote work was higher on their list of grievances. Research has illustrated millennials place high precedence on trust with management as well as frequent feedback from their manager (Güleryüz-Türkel & Altınbaşak-Farina, 2017). The studies participants vocalized repeatedly a sense of isolation from their colleagues, a “*rumour mill*” where management communications originated and a dearth of contact with their manager as having a negative impact on them, verifying previous findings.

A second area where the participants feedback diverged from existing research was in the for requirement for millennials to have their voices heard and valued by their employer in order to remain engaged (Sandhya & Kumar, 2011). Seven of the participants reported slight agitation by the lack of consultation by their employers of them prior to making changes although none reported it is a high factor. Only one participant corroborated these findings, participant E was told they would be returning fully to the office at the beginning of 2021, this caused great upset for the participant and was a leading factor in their decision to seek alternative opportunities. A lack of transparent communication was mentioned by all participants, yet it was not a major impacting factor in their attitudes toward their employers. Their main grievance was with the lack of understanding from management as their productivity increased, they felt this was contrasted by their managers display of distrust in them.

6.5. Reassessment of Career Priorities

Intriguingly, all ten participants noted that their career priorities had change through the experience of remote working during the pandemic. Whereas it had not been a high priority for half of the group prior to the pandemic, company culture became the second most important for eight of the participants post-covid. This is in line with previous findings illustrating culture as one of the primary concerns for millennials in their attitude toward a future employer (Brinda Devi & Jayakani, 2021). It

is important to note, however, that this was not the case before COVID-19. It was only through its impact that it changed the motivating factors of the group. Prior to the pandemic many had rated compensation as their highest priority, however, this was overtaken by work-life balance and hybrid working. Their experience of perceived disloyalty of their organisations toward them throughout the pandemic, had made several of the group reassess their requirements, placing harmony between their life and work at the top of the list. Sahni (2020) found higher levels of work-satisfaction among employees working remotely in the initial period of the pandemic, due to a decreased pace of life. Equivalent experiences were shared by the group such as greater time with loved ones, no commutes and overall improved work/life balance as a result.

One finding that was unique to this group was the impact of the buoyant Irish jobs market on four of the six that decided to leave their organisations during the pandemic. It was the so called “*cherry on top*” for participant H. For all participants there was not a sole dictating factor that caused their attitude toward their employer to change, but a combination of elements. Many employees took the opportunity of remote working to leave city-life in favour for rural lifestyles (Beck & Hensher, 2022). Two participants reported discontinuing their rental agreements in Dublin in favour of a return to their rural towns they grew up in, stating proximity to family as well as reduced living costs as the primary motivators. Whilst many of the group did consider changing roles during the pandemic, six actually did. They stated key factors such as micro-management, reward inequity and perceived breach of psychological contract by their employer as key push-factors. These outcomes confirm existing research around the concept reciprocity and the high value placed on it by millennials (Gouldner, 1960) (Bussin, Mohamed-Padayachee, & Serumaga-Zake, 2019). The group interview data demonstrated that the experience of working through the pandemic had directly impact their career motivations.

6.2 Limitations and Future Research

Given its exploratory nature there are innate limitations to the validity of qualitative research (Agarwal, 2015). Comparatively, quantitative research provides greater statistical representations of sample groups, also larger sample groups provide higher levels of confidence in the data produced (Bhardwaj, 2019). Due to the personal nature of semi-structured interviews, the data collected can be prone to bias, at times lacking subjectivity (Braun & Victoria, 2013). Time constraints dictated the use of a small sample group as qualitative research is time consuming, in future similar research could be undertaken with a larger sample group where alternative results may be found (Gilad, 2021). As well as these structural limitations the topic of this study is very recent in history, therefore there does not

exist plentiful research in the area. Current research predominantly concentrates on employee experience and wellbeing while working remotely, with little research in the area of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on employee motivations and attitudes toward their employers. For this research project contemporary research around employee experience of the pandemic was combined with research of millennials, generational and motivation theory from prior to the pandemic.

Many organisations are still allowing fully remote working and workloads are still higher than pre-COVID levels for the majority of participants. If this research were to be conducted again in one- or two-years' time circumstances might be different for employees in the Irish technology industry which could lead to variance in their motivations and attitudes. It would also be pertinent to explore whether the new priorities of the participants remained the same in years to come, as we move further from the memory of the pandemic. Finally, if quantitative analysis is used in future it may provide measurable insights from a larger sample group potentially leading to alternative conclusions.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1: Research Question's Findings

The technology industry is one of the largest employers in the world. Millennials will soon comprise the preponderance of this workforce. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, organisations will increasingly need to leverage e-commerce and digital technologies to ensure they are competitive in future marketplaces, creating further competition for the best talent. This research aimed to answer the questions:

- Did the pandemic play a role in the increased millennial attrition witnessed throughout this period?
- If yes, then what impact did it have?
- What action can technology organisations take to reduce millennial attrition post-pandemic?

The literature review highlighted the unique motivations of the millennial generation, the pandemics impact on employees as well as the technology industries exceptional growth during this period. Through detailed review of existing literature as well as exploratory, semi-structured interviews we aimed to bridge the gaps in research and answer these questions. Through the below we will assess whether these goals were achieved or not.

7.1.1. Research Question

“Did the Covid-19 pandemic impact the motivations and attitudes of millennial employees working in the Irish technology Industry towards their employer?”

In short, yes. The COVID-19 pandemic created a unique set of circumstances for millennial employees working remotely in the Irish technology industry. At the beginning, many millennials reported increased job satisfaction due to no commutes, better work-life balance as well as more freedom in fulfilling their work duties. However, as the pandemic became more drawn out in six to twenty-four months of enforced lockdowns, the technology industry experienced the greatest period of growth in its history. More people were shopping online and working online leading to far greater demand for digital services. It is at this point that we begin to uncover the answer to the research

question. Millennial employees had been working remotely at this point for many months in the midst of a deadly airborne virus causing duress for many as well as isolation, poor home working conditions and high numbers mental health difficulties. It is at this point that these employees were required by their employers to work longer and harder than they ever previously had, due to the growth in demand for their organisation's services. This sustained increase in workload over many months eventually led to burnout for many millennials. At this point the pre-pandemic motivations for millennials becomes a pertinent factor. Research shows that millennial motivating factors are frequent and transparent communication with their manager, continuous professional learning, flexibility as well as a highly collaborative workplace. All ten participants in this research reported micromanagement from their line manager as well a very high increase in workload. Four reported cuts to their development programs, several reported opaque communications with their employer and the vast majority reported poor reward equity for their increased output due to salary and bonus freezes.

Reports of the companies record-breaking profits were in stark contrast with their own reality of exceedingly high job demands and output with all bonuses and salary increases cut. The experience of working through the pandemic also caused an adjustment in the priorities of the participants, almost all reported salary as the primary motivation in changing roles prior to the pandemic, this was replaced with hybrid working and work-life balance. The traumatic experience and perceived poor treatment by their employers caused disloyal activities in millennial employees. Their employer's refusal to increase their compensation, reduce their workload or offer greater flexibility throughout this time stood in polarity with the required factors for millennial motivation. For many, this led them to seek alternative employment elsewhere. The exceedingly buoyant job market in Ireland was the final part of the equation that presented many lucrative alternative opportunities when they did seek to change organisations.

The unprecedented levels of attrition within this group was an amalgamation of factors brought forward by the COVID-19 pandemic. It created the conditions that exacerbated the disparity between the values of millennials and their employers and indirectly impacted the motivations and attitudes of millennial employees working in the Irish technology industry.

- 1) What impact did management style have on employee retention during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Management style was the highest rated factor in the participants group for leaving their roles. Millennials are a highly collaborative, transparent generation who seek frequent feedback and support from their Manager. Many participants reported feeling the need to be “*always on*” during the pandemic as well as micromanagement and a total erosion of trust with their manager. Eight of the group of ten considered alternative career opportunities during the pandemic and all rated micromanagement in the top three factors in pushing them to do so.

- 2) Did millennial employee priorities for selecting a new role change during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes. Within the participant group, many extolled the joyful benefits of remote working. However, as the pandemic persisted far beyond more than most had expected, this caused a major increase in workload for millennials in the technology industry. Due to burnout and poor employer relations all of the participants reported their priorities post-pandemic being different that they were prior to it. The necessity of hybrid working was the biggest change, almost all participants reported never having considered or desired hybrid working prior to COVID, yet now it is an essential feature for any new role they consider. As well as this compensation was replaced in the top priorities by company culture and work-life balance. Several participants relayed witnessing a side to their organisation they did not find pleasant, cutting bonuses while profits were at an all time high and demanding excessive output from employees, many of whom were struggling with difficult environments. This caused the values and priorities of millennial employees in the Irish technology industry to alter during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 3) How did perceived performance equity impact employee satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Perceived performance inequity was the second highest rated factor in the decision to leave their current company by the participant group. Through the concept of reciprocity humans will reciprocate the actions they feel they are receiving e.g. loyalty with loyalty. From existing research on millennial

motivation we know that they place high value on collaborative and transparent work environments. In combining these two factors we can surmise that millennial employees require clear goals as well as fairness in compensation and recognition. As the pandemic progressed their workload increased up to three-hundred percent for some participants, in line with their organisation's profits growth, yet all participants did not receive their bonus or a salary increase in their role (unless due to promotion) for two-years working throughout the pandemic. This led many to "withdraw" from their roles, greatly reducing their job satisfaction and led to actions of disloyalty toward their employer's perceived unfair compensation.

- 4) Did workload influence employee decision to consider new opportunities during the pandemic?

Workload did indirectly influence members of the participant group to consider new opportunities. Increased workload caused burnout for the majority of the participants, as this workload highlighted the inequity between the employee and employer began, their dissatisfaction began intensify. They felt they were working two times harder with no extra reward. Millennials enjoy challenging work as a key priority, however, the reward must be equitable. Workload was the catalyst that, combined with other factors such as perceived reward inequity and attractive alternative opportunities in the Irish jobs market, caused many of the participants to consider new opportunities.

7.2 Recommendation's

Employee attrition is expensive. It costs a company approximately fifty-percent to one-hundred-percent of an employee's salary to replace them (Griffith, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). While organisations navigate through global recessions increasing compensation may not be an option for many, yet this research has uncovered multiple opportunities for organisations to improve millennial employee's motivations and attitude toward their employer that cost very little. Below are the three most prominent recommendations the research would make to the Irish technology industry to boost millennial engagement and retention for the coming years.

7.2.1. Invest in training and resources for remote performance management

- Organisations should invest time and resources in developing the management skills of their management staff. Through training on emotional intelligence, understanding different communication and reward styles as well as how to manage remotely.
- Organisations should invest heavily in adequate digital performance management tools such as online employee relationship management software to track employee productivity and goals. Having the most up to date systems to be prepared for the hybrid-work future.

Implementation:

Beginning with management upskilling. This can be done through virtual events of workshop days in the company offices. The cost of implementing this strategy could be high across the company, if external consultants are utilised for this new era of remote management. An alternative option for larger organisations is to task the learning and development department with building a course for managers to develop their remote management skills. It would require commitment on the behalf of line management, as well as a recognition of current practices being ineffective. Given that most managers are from Gen X and are not digital-natives, time must be allocated for them to nurture these newly acquired skills, with short, medium and long-term goals and key performance indicators to assist with their development.

For performance management software there are now multiple options available to purchase. However, this option can be very costly to the organisation and not feasible. Many organisations have existing customer relationship management software, this could be used as a base for internal IT teams to add alternate or add specific features to assist managers to set goals and track progress for remote employees. For this to be successful, volunteers would be required to become subject matter experts on this new software to train and promote its implementation amongst management in the organisation. Though both options will require financial and time inputs, their potential savings if attrition is reduced are considerable.

7.2.2. Increase recognition and development opportunities

- Create internal social platforms to share news and gratitude acknowledgement between employees as an addition to an existing company platform or a new service.
- Consult millennial employees on their career aspirations and develop a program for them to acquire new skills and development, with a focus on options that have the best cost-optimisation.

Implementation:

Many organisations have a central portal for finding company policies, company information and training resources. If compensation increases are not feasible, public recognition is a valuable asset in employee motivation and retention. An organisation can utilise new social media platforms to create a custom internal social media site, this can be expensive for smaller organisations, however, alternatives such as a dedicated “*praise*” group on company messaging applications could be an alternative. The aim is to have a central location for sharing positive actions and outcomes that are in line with the company’s core values. Managers specifically will be encouraged to ritually post celebrations of their team efforts weekly or monthly, as well as promoting individual efforts on team calls and one to ones. It must be habitual and frequent to ensure it has the greatest impact across teams.

If learning and development budgets are frozen due to slow business growth there are multiple alternatives. Employees can have unexpected career goals that are varied and unique. Not all will require expensive further education or external training workshops on skills development. Their line management must first consult with the staff member on their specific career goals and desired upskilling. Upon acquiring this information Managers must identify through internal networking opportunities to develop their teams’ skills e.g. a HR Business Partner wishes to work in Sales. They could do one day a week for six weeks on the sales team, shadowing the actions of a leading team member, this will require time resources on the part of the sales team member, but if they are going for promotion this added people management/development skills could be go toward their request. As well as this peer to peer training for mutual benefit such as internal project managers upskilling teams of Software Engineers in return for automation of aspects of their reporting, would be an example. Millennials highly value continuous learning, whilst companies cannot pay for new training, employees may be able to trade knowledge and resources to promote development at cost, and improve internal communications between staff.

7.2.3. If company profits are high pay partial bonuses as a minimum

- If a company has achieved or exceeded profit goals for the year, partial or full bonuses must be paid if salaries are not being increased.

Employee salaries are the highest cost of most businesses. While not paying partial bonuses during times of recession may be understood by staff, once an organisation achieves their profit targets it will no longer be. Management must equate the cost of paying partial bonuses versus that of reduced employee productivity or at worse their replacement.

- An employee earns €40,000 per year, with a ten percent bonus of €4,000 annually
- Leaves an organisation after being refused a salary increase to €45,000 whilst the company has achieved their target profits
- This costs the organisation €20,000 to replace, before equating for lost knowledge, team morale etc.
- If the organisation pre-emptively paid this candidate fifty percent of their bonus in advance of salary discussions this would cost the organisation €2,000, slightly less than half of what the employee sought in their salary increase.
- If this strategy was effective in retaining staff in 10% of staff or more, this would be a profitable success for the organisation.

Combined with the above Management support as well as development opportunities, these retention strategies, ground in existing theory and empirical research could improve retention of millennial staff in the Irish technology industry as well as retain essential knowledge and experience within the organisation for sustained competitive advantage.

7.3 Statement of Personal Development

The choice to undertake the Masters in Human Resources Management was taken prior to the existence of the COVID-19 pandemic. I had studied while working previously, but this challenge was made considerably more difficult due to the pandemic's circumstance, my increased workload, isolation from loved ones and burnout I experienced personally. The topic for this research came about as I am a millennial working in the Irish technology sector and witnessed first-hand the extremely difficult circumstances employees faced in coping with workload as the industry grew exponentially. Almost poetically, I was impacted by the very circumstance I was researching, whilst I was researching them.

This entire process has been a great privilege and a joy in many parts. Firstly, I have been afforded the opportunity to greatly improve my abilities in research, project and time management. The latter mainly due to the sometimes-difficult nature of work-life balance as well as studying. I feel much more capable than I was when I began this journey and that is down to the guidance and support from my lecturers, classmates and supervisor. Throughout this research exploring the motivations and attitudes of millennials to their employers I discovered the incredibly varied nature of motivations. How factors such as age, generation, life circumstances such as having dependants or caring for family members, personal illnesses, personal ambitions, personality, social network amongst others all impact an individual's motivations and needs greatly. My own personal perspective and attitudes have changed greatly, mostly in regards to total open understanding for the plethora of challenging an individual may be dealing with that are imperceptible to me. I have become more empathic through this process. It has further developed my belief in the value of supporting all employees not just for the sake of profits or savings but primarily to improve the wellbeing of others. To foster authentic, trusting teams to get the very best performance out of people who are motivated and proud because they are supported and connected to their teams. Culture comes from the Latin word *cultura*, meaning soil. Beautiful will not grow in barren land. I have learnt that culture comes from the top down and organisations must have buy-in from the very highest levels for any improvements to be lasting.

If I was to do this research again, I would conduct quantitative analysis, for the purposes of having a larger participant group and therefore dataset to acquire more quantifiable insights. Overall, the burden of this undertaking has been its blessing. Through moments of doubt, exhaustion and challenge I have developed skills of resilience, positivity as well as broadening my world view and research abilities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Participant Information:

1. Participant:
2. Gender:
3. Age:
4. Role:
5. Location:

Introduction:

1. What are your current role duties?
2. How satisfied are you in your current role?
 - How has this been affected by COVID-19 pandemic remote working?
3. What was your experience of working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - Were there any challenges between domestic/work life during this time?

Employer's performance during COVID-19 pandemic:

4. Were additional resources were offered to you by your employer to support your physical health while working from home?
 - In your opinion, were these resources adequate?
5. Did your workload increase or decrease during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - Did this impact your wellbeing?
6. How would you rate your employer's consultation of employees prior to making business changes during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - What do you think of your employer's communication during the COVID-19 pandemic overall?
7. Do you feel your reward was adequate for your effort during the COVID-19 pandemic and why?

Motivations for Career:

8. What are your top priorities when considering a new role?
 - Did these priorities change during/after the COVID-19 pandemic?
9. Did you consider leaving your organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - What made you remain/leave?

10. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic had you been considering changing jobs?
 - What brought about this search for change?
11. How did you find the jobs market in Ireland during the pandemic?
 - What influence did this have on your decision to remain or stay?
12. In hindsight, what learnings could management in the Irish technology industry have done differently to improve retention during the COVID-19 pandemic