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**THE IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES ON HUMAN RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT**

SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

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Introduction

The thesis examines how demographic changes are reshaping human resources management. Notably, the aging population and increased mobility are transforming recruitment, retention, and workforce management. The past two to three years, marked by the pandemic, have intensified these changes, forcing workplaces to adapt to remote work while continuing to navigate demographic shifts. These changes impact how employers recruit, where they recruit from, and the emergence of skills gaps or worker shortages.

The thesis posits that understanding demographic changes helps companies determine staffing needs, qualifications, and timing, enabling them to set up effective retention, recruitment, and talent management strategies. It highlights the interdependent relationship between demographics and HR, emphasizing how shifts in workforce composition, labor market trends, and talent management strategies influence HR practices.

The research focuses on the impact of demographic changes on HR management, particularly in Europe, where a shortage of high-skilled workers is anticipated due to low fertility and low mortality rates. This situation necessitates new approaches in personnel development and HR policies. The study aims to provide HR professionals with insights into the strategic implications of demographic changes, helping them adapt to global trends and economic and technological evolutions.

The thesis includes a detailed analysis of demographic trends and challenges in Europe and Romania, using statistical data and in-depth interviews to explore these shifts. It offers practical insights for HR practitioners on workforce planning, employer branding, recruitment, retention, talent management, onboarding, and skill development programs.

Theoretical background and literature review

The literature review of this thesis defines key demographic concepts and examines their relevance to HR management. It covers the second demographic transition, demographic trends, child-bearing intentions, fertility, and migration, with a focus on Romania. Key topics include the aging workforce, multi-generational workplaces, remote and flexible work, and skill shortages. As people live longer and healthier lives, organizations face a workforce spanning multiple generations, from Baby Boomers to Generation Z, each bringing unique skills and values. This shift requires HR professionals to tailor their strategies to diverse needs. The rise of digital nomads, who work remotely while traveling, highlights the increasing flexibility and mobility in modern work, significantly impacting HR processes.

In his 2006 article, "Romania and the Second Demographic Transition: The Traditional Value System and Low Fertility Rates," Traian Rotariu explores the "second demographic transition" theory in relation to Romania's demographic changes over the past fifty years. This theory posits that beyond economic factors, social and cultural changes, particularly in value systems, also influence people's distancing from marriage and childbearing in post-industrial society. By the mid-1960s, the baby boom in most Western countries ended, leading to a rapid fertility decline that resulted in fertility rates staying below replacement levels despite fluctuations. Rotariu asserts that this shift marks the beginning of the second demographic transition, driven by changes in Western society's value systems, leading to a decrease in birthrates and an increased demographic balance due to migration. In Romania, although women maintain traditional family values, they exhibit very low fertility rates, suggesting no direct synchronicity between values, beliefs, attitudes, and demographic behavior.

Melegh and Óri (1997) outline the three main stages of demographic transition: the pre-transition stage with high mortality and fertility, the transition stage, and the post-transition period with low mortality and fertility levels ensuring population replacement at a new equilibrium. The transition period itself includes phases where mortality declines first, followed by a decline in fertility, and finally reaching a low-level equilibrium state. Dirk J. van de Kaa (2004) discusses how Western European countries became immigration nations in the mid-1960s due to labor market rigidities, with unexpected declines in mortality and fertility influencing demographic trends.

Studies on fertility intentions reveal the influence of social and attitudinal factors on decisions to have children. Recent years have seen varied fertility rate trends across Europe, with cohort analyses showing a decline in fertility among those born after 1975. Country-specific conditions and group factors significantly influence the realization of childbearing intentions. Notably, a non-linear relationship exists between socio-economic development and fertility, with higher development levels correlating with increased fertility intentions. In Romania, education level inversely affects second and third birth rates, contrasting with trends in Western countries.

Migration, both internal and international, significantly impacts population dynamics and socio-demographic composition. The "New Economics of Migration" model emphasizes the role of families and households in migration decisions, influenced by factors beyond wage differentials. Romania's post-1989 shift in political regime, market transition, EU incorporation, and economic stabilization have marked its internal migration patterns. High external migration rates have not reduced internal migration, with regional economic disparities and demographic decline influencing internal mobility.

Aging in demographic terms refers to the increasing proportion of older individuals due to declining fertility, decreased mortality, and increased life expectancy. Romania's birth rates are at historic lows, with population aging affecting mortality and life expectancy trends. Projections indicate decreasing mortality rates and increasing life expectancy, with cautious assumptions about fertility and migration. Since 1990, life expectancy in Romania has improved modestly but lags behind Western and Central European countries. Significant gender differences in life expectancy remain, with Romanian women living longer than men.

Recent research on demographic changes and human resource management (HRM) highlights the impact of aging populations, workforce diversity, and evolving generational expectations. Studies suggest that demographic shifts necessitate new HR strategies focusing on recruitment, training, retention, and flexible work policies. Organizations need to adapt to maintain motivation, performance, and health across employees' working lives. Strategic HRM must address the challenges of a shrinking labor supply and an aging workforce, leveraging the potential of older employees and mitigating negative impacts on productivity.

The rapid pace of technological advancement, migration, and globalization is transforming the future of work. Human Resource Management (HRM) involves strategic approaches to managing people effectively to gain a competitive advantage. External factors influencing HRM include labor market conditions, demographic changes, technological advancements, and economic conditions, while internal factors encompass organizational culture, workforce capabilities, and management practices.

The analysis of demographic shifts reveals significant changes in the workforce composition, necessitating adaptive strategies from HR professionals. These shifts, driven by factors like ageing populations, declining birth rates, and increasing life expectancy, impact companies in various ways. In Romania, for instance, despite economic growth, only half of the population was active after 2011, with rural areas facing even lower rates (Veres, 2015). Addressing youth unemployment has seen some progress, yet innovative solutions remain crucial (Rimbu et al., 2016).

On a broader European scale, demographic changes are reshaping employment opportunities, posing challenges for younger generations entering a competitive job market (Cseh-Papp et al., 2017). Globalisation exacerbates these shifts, fostering rural-to-urban migration as individuals seek better job prospects, education, and healthcare (The Impact of Economic Globalization on Human Demography, n.d.). Moreover, the concept of a "workless capitalism" emerges, challenging traditional employment paradigms (Beck, 2008).

The ageing workforce presents another critical dimension. With populations across the EU-27 ageing, the proportion of older workers continues to rise, impacting pension systems and labour market dynamics (Eurostat, 2023b). This demographic shift towards an older workforce necessitates tailored HR strategies that accommodate diverse needs and preferences across generations (PWC, 2021b).

Managing a multi-generational workforce becomes imperative as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z coexist in workplaces, each bringing unique skills and perspectives (Lamb, 2019). Companies are increasingly recognising the value of age diversity, moving away from exclusive focus on young talent to fostering inclusive environments that benefit from a blend of experience and innovation (PWC, 2022).

The rise of remote and flexible work arrangements further intersects with demographic trends. As demographic factors influence work preferences and lifestyle choices, organisations are adapting by offering flexible work options to attract and retain talent (Eurostat, 2023c). This evolution is driven by shifting commuting patterns, caregiving responsibilities, and the desire for better work-life balance across different age groups (PWC, 2021a).

Skill shortages emerge as a critical concern, particularly in sectors like healthcare and technology, necessitating investments in upskilling and reskilling programs (Brdulak, 2014). These efforts are crucial in adapting to technological advancements and bridging skill gaps in a fast-paced economy (Kaikhosroshvili, 2020). Upskilling and reskilling initiatives not only enhance workforce capabilities but also contribute to organisational resilience and competitiveness (PWC, 2021a).

In conclusion, demographic shifts profoundly influence HR management practices, requiring organisations to adopt flexible, inclusive, and innovative strategies to navigate evolving workforce dynamics and ensure sustainable growth in a globalised economy.

Although in international context the effect of demographic changes in HR is already started, the different countries, considering different demographic perspectives, the HR management's adaptation to those may differ considerably when handling challenges. In case of Romania few researches were performed in the topic, also, some demographic changes are quite recent, such, the present research first of all is a descriptive type one. Serving this scope, the selected macro demographic and qualitative analysis considered to be proper. During the empirical research, the following research questions were analysed. In relations with those, I also formulated some working hypotheses and assumptions, even if in this kind of empirical research not necessary is needed to test hypothesises. The formulated research question are:

- How do companies in Romania perceive demographic changes in HR management?
- To what extent do HR professionals consider demographic changes in the workforce as a direct challenge?
- What are the demographic changes for which HR has already tried to find solutions?
- How satisfactory and thorough are the responses of HR professionals in Romania to demographic changes. What differing patterns can be identified in their responses?
- Starting with the research questions, I've formulated some assumptions which are connected to demographic changes and HR management, described in chapter II. and IV

Methodology

In the empirical part of the research, relied on two methods: one being the statistical analysis of macro data, through which I examined demographic and labor market trends in Romania. Second, the qualitative interviews, based on which I investigated the HR sector's relationship with demographic phenomena and its awareness and handling of related issues. The macro data were extracted and interpreted using data of National Institute of Statistics of Romania, TEMPO-Online, and data and reports provided by the online site of the National Institute of Statistics of Romania. The third main source of data was Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. In the demographic analysis, I grouped the topics under the evolution of Romania and of the region in the last 25-30 years, after communism, starting with the demographic overview of Romania, in a regional positioning. The target population for interviews consisted of HR employees working at private companies in Romania, specifically those located in cities of Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca. Technically, only medium and large enterprises were considered, as they have actual HR departments where activities extend beyond payroll processing. State-owned companies were not included in the sample because their HR policies often depend on state regulations, which prevent them from considering the phenomena examined (with impact in headcount, budget, etc.). The research targeted respondents from various fields, focusing on human resource departments, even company owners, if they have HR responsibilities. Once the questions were polished, the process of contacting potential respondents began. The criteria to choose respondents were to interview companies with own HR departments, being in Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca. Being given that it is qualitative research, it was not the case to address all Romanian companies, as this would create practical obstacles in achieving the data gathering, so the focus was kept on two areas on the country that from economical point of view are relevantly high, concentrating the most important companies. As concerning the sampling, the main pool of respondents was HR Hub, the largest cluster gathering HR experts in Romania. Respondents originated from companies with medium and large size (with employees between 100-200, or above 200), having own functional HR departments. After, generally more than one contacting, via phone, LinkedIn, e-mail or in person, 34 face to face interviews were held with the respondents.

The demographic analysis

In demographic analysis, it is presented the evolution of the Romanian population in the last 25 years, focusing on Romania's population trends and compares them regionally, the reasons for Romania's low birth and fertility rates, changes in mortality rates and life expectancy in Romania, also on how migration has impacted Romania's population decline. A chapter examines future projections of population ageing in Romania, and an another one, provides statistical analysis of different age groups in Romania. A separate chapter analyzed the impact of demographic changes on Romania's labor market.

Qualitative empirical analysis: results

The demographic changes in Romania, characterized by an aging population, emigration of young workers, multi-generational workforce, remote work trends, skills mismatch, and workforce internationalization, present both challenges and opportunities. The overall opinion expressed by respondents was that addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts from policymakers, educational institutions, and employers to implement proactive strategies that foster an inclusive, skilled, and resilient workforce capable of sustaining Romania's economic growth and stability. The findings from the respondents highlight key demographic and socio-economic trends that are shaping the workforce landscape in Romania. These insights can be grouped into four main pillars, each reflecting the complex interplay of factors influencing the country's labor market. The respondents focus mainly of workforce related challenges due to demographic and socio-economic trends observing that ageing factor in Romania, and that the country is facing a significant challenge with an aging population, leading to a shortage of skilled workers. They considered, that this necessitates increased efforts in recruiting and retaining talent. They also observed the phenomena of emigration of young workers especially of the skilled workers that are seeking better opportunities abroad exacerbates the workforce shortage, causing a brain drain that hinders workforce replacement and the attraction of younger generations. The majority of the answers are observing that the demographic transition in Romania is marked by an aging population and declining birth rates, similar to trends observed in other European countries. Related to a potential

impact, most of the respondents highlighted the economic impact, where the brain drain caused by the emigration of young workers not only reduces the available workforce but also impacts economic growth and innovation. Strategies to counter this trend include enhancing job opportunities, improving living standards, and fostering a conducive environment for young professionals. Related to aging, migration and fertility, the respondents were not as elaborated as assumed. It was mentioned though that aging is a critical demographic challenge, impacting labor markets in Romania and Eastern Europe. The majority of the respondents noted older employees feeling overwhelmed by the high mobility and short job tenure of younger generations. In Hungary, government incentives facilitate employment of the 55-plus age group. Hiring trends have shifted towards more senior candidates, seen as more reliable, but integrating multi-generational policies remains challenging due to differing values of younger generations. Migration has shaped workforce dynamics, particularly in Cluj, a prominent city in Romania. Despite migration trends, Cluj remains attractive, with younger generations returning from Western countries for familial reasons. Historical migrations after the 1989 revolution left some regions depleted of workforce, while recent external migration to Romania presents integration challenges like cultural and linguistic differences. Fertility trends in Europe indicate smaller family sizes with one or two children per family. Migration from other regions, even due to conflict, contributes to maintaining workforce levels in Western countries were also mentioned by the majority of the respondents. This structured order organizes the topics logically based on the interconnected themes of demographic changes impacting the workforce in Romania and Eastern Europe. The main problem the respondents express was around generational differences and remote work, highlighting aspect related to the multi-generational workforce. The coexistence of four to five generations within the workplace introduces differences in communication, relationships, and values and these generational gaps create challenges in knowledge transfer and employee motivation. The respondents also brought into discussion the impact of COVID-19, as the considered that the pandemic has accelerated remote work, prompting many employees to relocate from crowded cities to smaller towns or rural areas. This shift, facilitated by flexible work policies, has impacted housing costs and workforce distribution. The presence of multiple

generations in the workforce necessitates management practices that bridge communication and value differences. Effective knowledge transfer programs and motivational strategies are crucial. The observations also conclude that the shift to remote work has redefined the geographical distribution of the workforce, leading to a redistribution of housing demand and changes in local economies. Employers must adapt to these changes by developing flexible work policies and supporting remote employees. The third main observation covers the skills mismatch and education gap, where the majority of the respondents observed a significant gap between the skills required for contemporary jobs and those possessed by both younger and older generations. This highlights the need for updated university curricula and training strategies. Respondents from various industries, including Horeca, construction, and manufacturing, are affected by these demographic changes, especially with the integration of a workforce from Asia. The respondents considered that the skills mismatch underscores the need for educational reforms that align university curricula with market demands, and that vocational training and lifelong learning programs can help bridge this gap. The fourth big category of responses refers to internationalization and recruitment challenges, considering that the internationalization of Romania's workforce, with professionals from diverse nationalities, often leads to cultural friction within workplaces. Employers face heightened challenges in recruiting and retaining talent, especially in specialist positions, due to the combined pressures of an aging population and emigration trends. Respondents formulated that the recruitment and retention of talent, particularly for specialist roles, are critical for sustaining economic growth. This involves creating attractive job packages, ensuring career development opportunities, and maintaining a supportive work culture.

Conclusions

The general conclusion was that addressing multigenerational workforce challenges requires proactive HR strategies that promote inclusivity, continuous learning, and cultural adaptation. Companies in Romania recognize the diverse needs and expectations of different generations and are adapting their HR practices accordingly. Effective management of demographic changes fosters a resilient, engaged, and innovative workforce, driving sustainable growth in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

The insights obtained about managing a multigenerational workforce, demographic changes, and their impacts on workforce dynamics in Romania were intricately linked. Over the past 25-30 years, Romania's demographic landscape has undergone significant shifts, marked by population decline, aging, and urbanization trends. These changes have profound implications for HR practices and organizational strategies across various sectors.

Aligning HR strategies with Romania's demographic realities is crucial for organizations aiming to thrive amidst these changes. Tailored approaches to managing multigenerational teams, addressing skill gaps through continuous learning, and adapting to an aging population are essential for fostering resilient and innovative workplaces in Romania's evolving socio-economic landscape. These efforts not only enhance organizational agility but also position companies to effectively harness the strengths of diverse generations for sustainable growth and success.

Romania has experienced notable demographic changes, including population decline, aging, and the shrinkage of the employment population. The population has decreased from around 23 million in the early 1990s to approximately 19 million recently, influenced by low birth rates and high emigration. These shifts have led to an older population structure, with implications for workforce sustainability and organizational culture. As hiring practices increasingly favor experienced workers, companies must adapt management strategies to integrate older employees effectively. This adaptation requires nuanced HR approaches that value experience while fostering collaboration across generations.

The interview analysis, combined with topics related to the multigenerational workforce, skills gap, learning and development, aging, migration, fertility, and pandemic impacts, led to several conclusions. Managing a multigenerational workforce necessitates tailored strategies due to the diverse needs, motivations, and work styles across different age groups. Younger employees often prioritize perks and development opportunities, while older employees may place a higher value on stability and traditional work practices. To address these varying needs, effective HR strategies include implementing flexible work arrangements, fostering inclusive cultures, and developing personalized development programs. These initiatives not only enhance engagement but also promote a cohesive organizational culture. Bridging generational gaps requires an inclusive approach that encourages communication and mutual understanding. Customized solutions in training and internal communication are essential to meet the diverse learning needs of each generation, ensuring a harmonious and productive workplace.

Demographic changes significantly impact HR processes such as hiring and training, contributing to skill shortages within the workforce. Upskilling and reskilling initiatives are crucial responses to these gaps, yet they are acknowledged as part of the solution rather than comprehensive remedies. Continuous learning opportunities play a pivotal role in addressing skill gaps and promoting innovation across all age groups. Strategic investments in learning and development, complemented by flexible workplace policies, are essential for effectively navigating demographic shifts and ensuring sustained organizational growth.

The impact of an aging population extends beyond demographic shifts, influencing both workforce sustainability and organizational culture. As hiring practices increasingly favor experienced workers, companies must navigate changes in dynamics and adapt management strategies accordingly. Integrating older employees, who often bring distinct values and work styles, demands nuanced HR approaches that emphasize experience while promoting collaboration with younger generations. This cultural adaptation is crucial for fostering a cohesive and productive workplace environment amidst evolving workforce demographics.

The dynamics of migration significantly influence labor markets, particularly in Eastern European countries like Romania, where emigration of younger, educated workers to Western Europe contributes to workforce shortages. This trend underscores the need for strategic workforce planning and policies to mitigate skills gaps and sustain economic growth. Conversely, some regions experience partial return migration of younger generations, influenced by familial and lifestyle considerations. This return migration can positively impact local workforce dynamics by replenishing skilled labor and fostering community development. Understanding and responding to these migration patterns are crucial for maintaining workforce stability and fostering sustainable economic development in affected regions.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the demand for digital skills and remote work capabilities, fundamentally reshaping workforce expectations and employer practices. This acceleration highlighted the critical need for adaptive HR strategies that embrace technological advancements and support remote work environments. Additionally, pandemic-induced changes spurred increased workforce globalization and mobility, with remote work emerging as a preferred option among many employees, particularly younger generations. Understanding these shifts is essential for organizations seeking to cultivate resilience and flexibility in their workforce strategies moving forward.

As companies navigate future challenges, adapting HR strategies to accommodate diverse demographic shifts and technological advancements is paramount. This involves leveraging data analytics for strategic workforce planning and implementing inclusive practices that span from recruitment to retirement. Emphasizing individual development through tailored training and development programs can significantly enhance employee motivation and retention across all generations. This approach not only supports organizational agility but also fosters a culture of continuous growth and innovation.

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