

## Motivation, Satisfaction, and Engagement of Older Employees During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract:

**Research Question (RQ):** Are there statistically significant differences in work motivation, satisfaction, and engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Purpose:** The aim of the paper is to examine if there are statistically significant differences in work motivation, satisfaction, and engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of the paper is also to identify which factors contribute to increasing work motivation, satisfaction, and engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Method:** The differences in work motivation, satisfaction, and engagement among older employees before and during the COVID-19 pandemic were tested with the non-parametric test for two related samples. To analyze the differences between individual statements, we used the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

**Results:** The results show statistically significant differences in work motivation, satisfaction, and engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Organisation:** The results significantly impact a more detailed review of the creation of new working conditions for employees during the COVID-19 pandemic and especially in the period after the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Society:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, companies and society can focus on how to constructively manage the new challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brings to companies and what they can learn from it. For companies and leaders or human resource managers, in particular, the pandemic can be used as a starting point for positive and future-oriented developments.

**Originality:** With our findings, we contribute to the discussion on a constructive and future-oriented approach to the COVID-19 pandemic, both for practices around the management of

employees as well as for future research. Also, our research highlights which factors increase work motivation, work satisfaction and work engagement during COVID-19 and how to create appropriate working conditions during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to keep employees motivated, satisfied, and engaged.

**Limitations/further research:** Our sample was limited to Slovenian companies and older employees. Also, in our research we limited ourselves on work motivation, work satisfaction and work engagement. Therefore, for further research we propose examining differences in other constructs relating to employees before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenian companies, as well as the differences in constructs between Slovenia and other countries.

**Keywords:** work motivation, work satisfaction, work engagement, older employees, COVID-19.

## 1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is also unleashing a new era of change for businesses. Companies globally are experiencing unprecedented workforce disruption. Businesses must navigate coronavirus's financial and operational challenges while rapidly addressing the needs of their people, customers and suppliers (Yawson, 2020, p. 1). Caused by the Sars-Cov-2 virus, known as coronavirus, COVID-19 has become a pandemic spread throughout the world. This led to the isolation of many regions and drastically impacted the economy (Bayuni, 2020, 2-3). This makes people work more online to keep themselves productive and maintain their performance amid the outbreak (Fachriansyah, 2020, p. 3). The coronavirus outbreak has forced companies to reevaluate how contact centers are leveraged, how employees deliver relevant customer experiences, where they work, and how digital channels can support business continuity through the crisis and beyond (Agrawal et al., 2020; Stergioua and Farmaki, 2021). Consumer demand patterns are shifting, global supply chains are disrupted and remain under pressure, and different regions, markets, and governments are responding uniquely to the COVID-19 crisis (Agrawal et al., 2020, p. 15). Companies must continuously adapt to new and uncertain market conditions. The global COVID-19 pandemic has forever changed our experiences as customers, employees, citizens, humans and our attitudes and behaviors are changing as a result. The crisis is fundamentally changing how consumers buy and accelerating structural changes in the consumer goods industry (Tovmasyan & Minasyan, 2020). Once the immediate threat of the virus has passed, companies will need to consider the impact of these changes on the way we design, communicate, build and run the experiences that people need and want. Even before COVID-19, many companies faced considerable IT challenges (D'Auria & De Smet, 2020). Now, COVID-19 is pushing companies to operate in new ways rapidly and IT is being tested as never before. Working as usual may be difficult for employers and employees due to the impacts of COVID-19 (Brassey & Kruyt, 2020, p. 5-6). One of the proposed measures for allowing employees to safely return to the workplace is to introduce staggered shifts or hours. This would reduce the likelihood of large numbers of people travelling at peak times and hopefully reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection. During the COVID-19, companies use flexible forms of employee work (Yawson, 2020) (e.g., working from home, part-time hours, job sharing) (Chua et al., 2022, p. 3). Flexible work arrangement refers to a work environment and schedule that is not restricted by traditional work practices (Chua et al., 2022). A flexible work arrangement offers time and location

flexibility for employees to engage in work-related tasks (Adekoya et al., 2022, p. 8). Flexible work arrangement includes flexi-time, contractual working, work shifts (Siddiqui, 2020, p. 14), job sharing, telecommuting or remote working and a compressed workweek, while the most common one is work from home, where employees work full-time from their home (Adekoya et al., 2022; Chua et al., 2022). All changes during the COVID-19 are also reflected in employees' motivation, satisfaction and work engagement. The coronavirus pandemic has led to a significant amount of the workforce working from home. Many employees have also found themselves working more flexibly in terms of the hours or days they work, often due to balancing work and other responsibilities such as home schooling or childcare (Wiradendi Wolor et al., 2020). Before the pandemic, flexible working uptake was slow, and it is generally considered that the overall demand for flexible working outstripped supply in the pre-COVID-19 world. However, there are now early indications that many employees will wish to continue to undertake some degree of homeworking (or flexible working in general) after the current restrictions have passed (Spurka & Straub, 2020). Flexible working describes a type of working arrangement that gives a degree of flexibility on how long, where, when, and at what times employees work (Sulaymonov, 2020). According to Sulaymonov (2020) and Yawson (2020), there are many forms of flexible working, including home working, part-time or reduced hours, job shares, flexi-time, compressed or annualized hours, career breaks, staggered start and finish times or self-rostering (Sulaymonov, 2020; Yawson, 2020). It has already been shown (see e.g., Spurka & Straub, 2020; Tovmasyan & Minasyan, 2020; Yawson, 2020) that flexible working conditions lead to better motivation, satisfaction and also, engagement of employees. Employees' work motivation, satisfaction and engagement affect their work efficiency and productivity and play an essential role in the organization's success. This is also important during the COVID-19. COVID-19 has forced us to think about how we work and what is the most valuable factor in the workplace. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to examine if there are statistically significant differences in work motivation, satisfaction and engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of the paper is also to identify which factors contribute to increasing work motivation, satisfaction, and engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **2 Literature review**

### **2.1 Work motivation**

Motivation is a process that drives a person to achieve organizational goals with maximum work results. Motivation factors have a direct relationship with performance, and employees who have high motivation can also deliver high performance (Pancasila et al., 2020, p. 1-3). According to employees, the organization's motivation policy affects their work efficiency and plays an essential role in the organization's success. The motivation policy is essential in organizations. If employees are satisfied and feel that the organization values their contribution, they will work better (Ferfoggia & Markič, 2020; Spurka and Straub, 2020; Tovmasyan & Minasyan, 2020). If employees feel that the organization does not evaluate

their efforts and they do not feel appreciated, the efficiency of their work performance will decrease. One of the most important lessons learned is that companies and workers desire flexibility (Agility PR Solutions, 2020; Adekoya et al., 2022; Jeske, 2022; Pwc, 2020; Tavares et al., 2021). PwC's Remote Work Survey asked US financial services (FS) companies about flexibility. The survey was made on 50 executives and 144 employees at US FS firms during the period from June 1 to June 12, 2020. It found that 69 % expect almost two-thirds of their workforce to be working from home once a week in the future (Pwc, 2020). Also, nearly half (48 %) of the US employees surveyed by communications consultancy of the Grossman Group (Agility PR Solutions, 2020) said they wanted to continue working from home after the pandemic and that the shift to remote work had positively impacted their view of the company. According to Tovmasyan and Minasyan research (2020), 90 employees from Armenia participated in the survey, studying what motivates employees during COVID-19. Most of them said that the organization's motivation policy affects their work efficiency, and they have an essential role in the organization's success. They mentioned their organization's material and nonmaterial incentives: salary, reward, flexible work schedule, independence, and freedom to make decisions. The main reasons employees leave the job may be the low salary, conflicts in the team, and the impossibility of career advancement. The analysis shows that the organization's motivation policy is an essential tool for affecting the effectiveness of employees' work. The statistical testing also shows the significant relationship between the influence of the motivation policy used by the organization on work motivation and having an essential role in the organization's success (Tovmasyan & Minasyan, 2020). There are also some advantages for working at home. There is no need for a dress code, there are no expenses spent on transportation, companies do not spend a lot of money on office space rent, utility bills and other costs. This pandemic changes the way of businesses, there is no need to keep one at the workplace till the end of the workday and waste their time, employer can motivate employees to do the same work in less amount of time and more productively, so they will work not for time, but a result. It means that the COVID-19 pandemic changed attitudes of work and motivation, revealing the advantages and disadvantages of working in offices and remotely (Spurka and Straub, 2020; Sulaymonov, 2020; Tovmasyan and Minasyan, 2020). So, during the pandemic, many companies made the work mode more flexible to motivate people in the best way (Sulaymonov, 2020; Tovmasyan and Minasyan, 2020;). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1): There are statistically significant differences in work motivation among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

## **2.2 Work satisfaction**

Work satisfaction is an important dimension of employee well-being in its own right but is also a desired indicator of organizational success (Culbertson, 2009, p. 12). Work satisfaction is one of the most used and indicative indices of well-being experienced in work contexts, and it reflects the extent to which employees find their expectations fulfilled by their work experience (Rafferty & Griffin, 2009). According to Menezes (2012), there is a positive

association between the level of work satisfaction in a workplace and the level of employee engagement in a workplace and also, there is a positive association between the level of work satisfaction in a workplace and its productivity. Wiradendi Wolor et al. (2020) made research on 200 employees from Indonesia. The results of this study show that e-training, e-leadership, and work-life balance during COVID-19 have positive effect on work satisfaction and also on work motivation. In contrast, the authors Toscano and Zappalà (2020) emphasize that in remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, social isolation is negatively related to remote work satisfaction. On the other hand, Bellmann and Hübler (2020) in their research, compare employees working from home with those who want to work at home, and they found out that the former are happier and more satisfied. Under flexible work arrangements, employees are given greater scheduling freedom in fulfilling their job responsibilities and may therefore meet personal or family needs and achieve better work-life balance. Therefore, this leads to higher work satisfaction. In addition, Nagel (2020, p. 16) found that people working exclusively from home during the COVID-19 pandemic have greater work satisfaction. Festing and Kraus (2020) examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global employees (in January 2020, n = 524, they surveyed the same sample again in April 2020, n = 344), and they compared the results of job and career satisfaction from prior to and after the outbreak of the pandemic. Interestingly, for the overall sample, both job satisfaction and career satisfaction increased after the outbreak of COVID-19. Therefore, it seems that despite the important implications of the crisis, most of the investigated global employees still see positive effects on a personal level. In addition, Nagel (2020) explains that the increase in technology use in everyday work and changes in working hours implies that employees could be working in new ways, using technology to a greater extent, and taking on more autonomy. Moreover, people working from home have a lower risk of being infected with COVID-19, leading to greater work satisfaction. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 2 (H2): There are statistically significant differences in work satisfaction among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

### **2.3 Work engagement**

In the present business situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, employee engagement has become one of the utmost prominent primacies for human resource managers and practitioners in organizations due to lockdown (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020, p. 4-6). Today, the business setup is changing concerning the global pandemic of COVID-19 (Nagel, 2020, p. 1). Human resource managers persistently evolve innovative, creative, and effective ways to engage employees healthier during this difficult time (Harter, 2020; Kozole & Gračner, 2020). Employee engagement is a workplace attitude that allows all adherents of an organization to give their excellence every day, committed to their organization's goals and values. In addition, employees who are well engaged in a company will lead to productivity in the place of work, and this generates higher customer satisfaction and, absolutely, developments in sales and profit in the company (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020). Schaufeli et al. (2002) explained work engagement as a positive and work-related state of mind, which is

considered by strength, dedication, and absorption. According to May et al. (2004), engagement is closest to job involvement, well-being, and emotions (May et al., 2004). Gallup's survey (Gallup, 2021) across 112.312 business units shows that in early March 2020, as work and life were first disrupted due to COVID-19, the overall well-being of Americans declined sharply. Engaged employees are at risk if their well-being is low. Engaged employees who are struggling or suffering in their overall lives have a 61 % higher rate of burnout often or always. In 2020, 47 % of employees strongly agreed that their organization cares about their overall well-being. Approximately half of the employees participating in this survey strongly agreed their organization did a good job of communicating a plan of action in response to COVID-19 (47 %), that they felt well-prepared to do their jobs (51 %), and that their supervisor kept them informed (47 %) (Gallup, 2021). Engaged employees always care about their effort, work, and performance, and employees want to feel that their work, efforts, and performance could make a difference. Employee engagement is usually understood as an inner state of mind, that is, physically, emotionally, and mentally, that binds together the commitment, satisfaction, and work effort in an employee (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020, p. 18). Engaged employees lead to productivity in the workplace, generating higher customer satisfaction and positive increases in sales and profit in organizations. Confidence and communication among both employees and organizations are also essential. This unification between the enterprise and the employee is a necessity as both are able to best in performance (Sarangi & Nayak, 2016, p. 21). Due to lockdown, most of companies provide the facility to their employees to work from home. But work from home is difficult for employees as they do not feel the organizational climate at home, as lack of concentration due to frequent invasion of family members, work-life conflicts arise. They do not have proper equipment and tools (computer, mouse, printers, scanners, headphones, webcam, internet connection, and dedicated workspace, a quiet place to work). Most employees feel stressed due to rising cases of COVID-19 in the world. They are not sure about their job security and also their salary. Due to these problems, employees cannot concentrate or focus on their work, so there is a need for employee engagement (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020). On the other hand, the flexible working environment during the COVID-19 leads to higher work engagement (Nagel, 2020, pp. 7). In 2020, Gallup tracked 190 organizational employee engagement surveys from April through July 2020 across more than 300,000 employees in 18 industries. Each organization's survey results in 2020 were compared with similar organizations' employee engagement as measured before the pandemic in 2019. Gallup found the median survey response rate during COVID-19 was 86 %, as compared to a median response rate of 85 % pre-COVID-19. Overall levels of engagement and average growth in engagement were not compromised for organizations implementing employee engagement measures and interventions during COVID-19 (Harter, 2020). Also, Chanana and Sangeeta (2020) emphasize that company support and digital tools keep employee engagement high and working from home during COVID-19 efficient and productive. Research from Towers Watson (2020) found that 90 % of companies surveyed believe their culture improved during COVID-19, while 83 % believe their employee experience is better. Human resources (HR) is

not far behind, with 63 % of HR professionals surveyed believing their organizational culture has improved. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 3 (H3): There are statistically significant differences in work engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

### **3 Method**

#### **3.1 Participants**

Our empirical research includes two paired samples of older employees for two periods: before the COVID-19 pandemic (1086 older employees) and during the COVID-19 pandemic (328 older employees). The first data collection before the COVID-19 pandemic was part of a broader research, in which, among other things, we also studied work motivation, work satisfaction and work engagement. Regarding these multidimensional variables, we used the same measuring instrument during the COVID-19 pandemic and the same database of companies. The empirical research before the COVID-19 pandemic was conducted from November 2017 to January 2018. The empirical research during the COVID-19 pandemic was conducted from March 2021 to May 2021. We obtained information about the companies from the Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services. We included 1.000 companies in the final sample based on a random selection. We used random sampling, which is characterized by the fact that each unit in the population has an equal and independent chance of being selected into the sample (Kumar, 2005, 169). We asked the owner to distribute questionnaires among older employees in each company. In the survey during the COVID-19 pandemic were involved 47.9 % employees aged from 50 to 55 years, 41.1 % of employees aged from 56 to 61 years, and 11.0 % employees aged over 62 years. The companies in which employees are employed were manufacturing (18.9 %); trade, maintenance and repair of motor vehicles (16.5 %); financial and insurance activities (15.3 %); professional, scientific, and technical activities (14.6 %); information and communication activities (11.9 %); other diversified business activities (5.5 %); real estate business (6.7 %); health and social care (5.2 %); catering (2.7 %); transport and storage (1.5 %); other activities (1.2 %). The survey before the COVID-19 pandemic involved 41.8 % of employees aged from 56 to 61 years, 38.4% of employees aged from 50 to 55 years, and 19.3 % of employees aged from 62 to 67 years. The lowest percentage is presented by employees aged over 68 (0.6 %) years. The companies in which employees are employed were from manufacturing (30.3 %); trade, maintenance, and repair of motor vehicles (16.4 %); financial and insurance activities (11.0 %); professional, scientific, and technical activities (10.9 %); information and communication activities (7.6 %); construction (4.4 %); other diversified business activities (3.4 %); real estate business (3.4 %); catering (2.8 %); health and social care (2.4 %); supply of electricity, gas, and steam (2.2 %); transport and storage (1.8 %); agriculture and hunting, forestry, fishing (1.2 %); water supply, sewage and waste management, environmental rehabilitation (1.0 %); other activities (0.7 %) and mining (0.4 %).

### 3.2 Research instrument

For research instrument, we used a questionnaire (closed type). Items for work motivation were adopted from Islam and Ismail (2008) and Bhatti et al. (2016). Items for the work satisfaction were adopted from Hayday (2003). Items for the work engagement were adopted from Robinson et al. (2004) and Gallup (2006). The respondents indicated their agreement to the listed statements, at a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1– completely disagree to 5– completely agree. The reliability of measurement scales was assessed within the scope of internal consistency with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient (Chronbach, 1951, p. 24). Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the construct work motivation is 0.893, for the construct work satisfaction is 0.917, and for the construct work engagement it is 0.934. Thus, all measurement scales proved high reliability (all values of Cronbach’s alpha > 0.80).

### 3.3 Statistical analysis

Arithmetic means and medians were calculated for answers considering the work motivation, work satisfaction, and work engagement among employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were used to verify the normality of the data distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013, p. 34). We found that the data for work motivation, work satisfaction, and work engagement are not normally distributed ( $p < 0.001$ ), therefore, we have tested the hypotheses relating to the differences among employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the non-parametric test for two related samples. To analyze the differences between rankings of individual statements, we used the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

Figure 1 shows the research model.

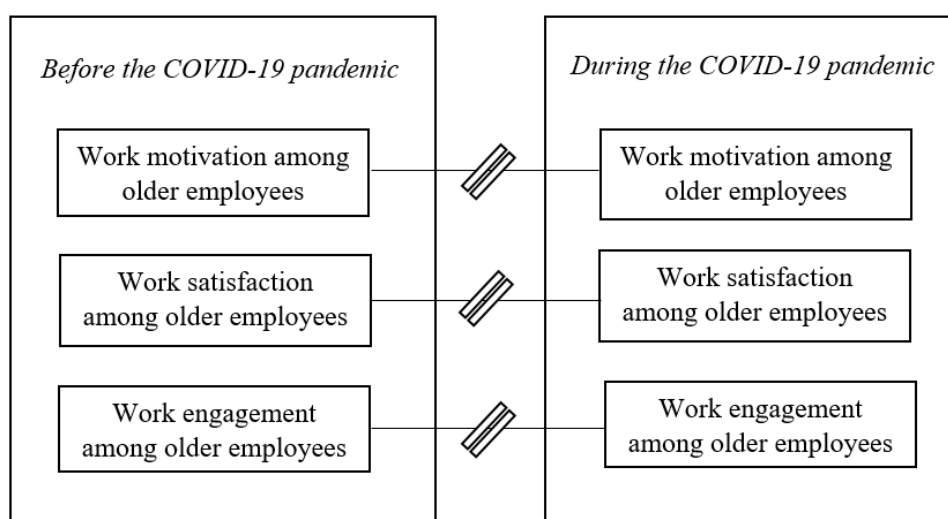


Figure 1. Research model



## 4 Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for work motivation among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for work motivation among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic

Work motivation	Before the COVID-19 pandemic			During the COVID-19 pandemic		
	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
The employer gives us compliments for the well-done work.	3.22	3.00	1.266	3.57	4.00	0.961
The employer gives me the possibility of flexibility in the workplace.	3.46	4.00	0.971	3.62	4.00	1.019
The employer gives me the possibility of autonomy at work.	3.58	4.00	0.766	3.78	4.00	1.154
The employer gives me the opportunity to provide diverse tasks.	3.90	4.00	0.899	3.30	3.00	1.220
The employer allows me to do my work at my own pace.	3.46	4.00	1.018	3.72	4.00	1.037
The company gives me the opportunity to do work from home.	2.68	2.00	1.140	3.81	4.00	1.331
The employer gives me the possibility of advancement.	3.23	3.00	1.079	3.03	3.00	1.100
The employer gives me the possibility for training and education.	3.57	4.00	1.026	3.41	4.00	1.073
In the company prevails the possibility of equal treatment of employees by age.	3.84	4.00	1.102	3.93	4.00	0.971
In the company prevails the possibility of cooperation with other employees and the allocation of work.	3.70	4.00	0.915	3.36	3.00	1.065
In the company prevail respect among employees.	4.13	4.00	0.811	4.16	4.00	0.768
In the company prevail good relationships in the workplace.	3.94	4.00	0.904	3.96	4.00	0.850
In the company is established intergenerational cooperation, thereby reducing the burden on the workplace.	3.67	4.00	0.947	3.59	4.00	0.976

The results in Table 1 show that the means for answers about the work motivation of older employees during the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that, on average, older employees had the highest agreement with the statements describing respect among employees, good relationships in the workplace, possibility of equal treatment of employees by age and opportunity to do work from home. Also, results show that the means for answers about the work motivation of older employees during the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that, on average, older employees had the lowest agreement with the statement regarding the possibility of advancement. Also, results show that the means for answers about the work

motivation of older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that, on average, older employees had the highest agreement with the statements regarding respect among employees, good relationships in the workplace and the opportunity to provide diverse tasks. The means for answers about the work motivation of older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that, on average, older employees had the lowest agreement with the statements describing the opportunity to do work from home, compliments for the well-done work and the possibility of advancement. Also, the median for answers about the work motivation of older employees during the COVID-19 pandemic is higher than before the COVID-19 in the statements describing compliments for the well-done work and the opportunity to do work from home. Table 2 shows the results of statistically significant differences in work motivation among employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 with a non-parametric test – Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

Table 2. Statistically significant differences in work motivation among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic

Work motivation		Older employees		
		Mean rank	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
The employer gives us compliments for the well-done work.	Negative ranks	111.74		
	Positive ranks	122.90	-3.472	0.001
The employer gives me the possibility of flexibility in the workplace.	Negative ranks	91.09		
	Positive ranks	114.33	-2.853	0.004
The employer gives me the possibility of autonomy at work.	Negative ranks	107.93		
	Positive ranks	109.06	-5.890	0.000
The employer gives me the opportunity to provide diverse tasks.	Negative ranks	121.54		
	Positive ranks	100.90	-4.399	0.000
The employer allows me to do my work at my own pace.	Negative ranks	109.56		
	Positive ranks	122.04	-2.247	0.025
The company gives me the opportunity to do work from home.	Negative ranks	97.29		
	Positive ranks	129.39	-7.919	0.000
The employer gives me the possibility of advancement.	Negative ranks	116.40		
	Positive ranks	110.39	-0.825	0.409
The employer gives me the possibility for training and education.	Negative ranks	115.01		
	Positive ranks	108.49	-2.203	0.001
In the company prevails the possibility of equal treatment of employees by age.	Negative ranks	103.06		
	Positive ranks	126.86	-4.214	0.000
In the company prevails the possibility of cooperation with other employees and the allocation of work.	Negative ranks	104.78		
	Positive ranks	110.92	-3.263	0.001
In the company prevail respect among employees.	Negative ranks	94.35		
	Positive ranks	113.55	-1.281	0.200
In the company prevail good relationships in the workplace.	Negative ranks	96.23		
	Positive ranks	118.28	-1.046	0.269
In the company is established intergenerational cooperation, thereby reducing the burden on the workplace.	Negative ranks	96.89		
	Positive ranks	114.36	-0.142	0.887

Table 2 shows that mean ranks of work motivation among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the Covid-19 pandemic statistically significantly differ in most (i.e., 69.2 %) statements. There are statistically significant differences in nine statements, but there are no statistically significant differences in the four statements relating

to the possibility of advancement, respect among employees, good relationships in the workplace and established intergenerational cooperation, thereby reducing the burden on the workplace. Based on the results of the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test ( $p < 0.05$ ), we confirmed hypothesis 1: There are statistically significant differences in work motivation among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 3 shows the results of descriptive statistics for work satisfaction among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for work satisfaction among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic

Work satisfaction	Before the COVID-19 pandemic			During the COVID-19 pandemic		
	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
At my workplace, I am satisfied with the working hours and distribution of work obligations.	3.40	3.00	1.037	3.56	3.00	1.204
In the company, I am satisfied with the organization of work tasks tailored to the elderly.	3.08	3.00	1.156	3.51	3.00	1.051
In the company, I am satisfied with enabling the flexible workspace (for example, working from home).	3.37	3.00	0.992	3.60	4.00	0.988
In this company, I am satisfied with the balance between my work and private life.	3.36	4.00	1.016	3.78	4.00	1.289
I am satisfied with the level of self-regulation of work speed that is enabled.	3.43	3.00	0.997	3.62	4.00	0.990
In the company, I am satisfied with the number of programs in the context of active aging and a healthy lifestyle.	3.19	3.00	1.250	3.60	4.00	1.288
I am satisfied with the intergenerational cooperation and, thus, the distribution of work in the company.	3.55	4.00	0.989	3.52	4.00	0.956
At my workplace I am satisfied with flexible working hours.	3.06	3.00	1.167	3.67	4.00	1.299
I am satisfied with the provision of job-sharing, which reduces the burden on the workplace.	3.52	4.00	1.000	3.53	4.00	0.946
I am satisfied with the interpersonal relationships in the company.	4.04	4.00	0.891	4.06	4.00	0.806
I am satisfied with the leadership in the company.	3.71	4.00	1.175	3.73	4.00	1.076

The results in Table 3 show that the means for answers about the work satisfaction among older employees during the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that, on average, older employees had the highest agreement with the statements related to the satisfaction with the interpersonal relationships in the company, with the balance between their work and private life, with the leadership in the company, with flexible working hours, with the level of self-regulation of work speed that is enabled, with enabling the flexible workspace (for example, working from home), and with the number of programs in the context of active aging and a healthy

lifestyle. Also, results show that the means for answers about the work satisfaction of older employees during the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that older employees are low satisfied with the intergenerational cooperation and, thus, the distribution of work in the company. In addition, the means for answers about the work satisfaction among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that, on average, older employees had the highest agreement with satisfaction with the interpersonal relationships in the company and satisfaction with the leadership in the company. Also, the means for answers about the work satisfaction among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that, on average older employees are low satisfied with the flexible working hours and with the organization of work tasks tailored to the elderly. Also, the median for answers about the work motivation of older employees during the COVID-19 pandemic are higher as compared with time before the COVID-19 in the satisfaction with enabling the flexible workspace (for example, working from home), satisfaction with the level of self-regulation of work speed that is enabled, satisfaction with the number of programs in the context of active aging and a healthy lifestyle, and satisfaction with flexible working hours. Table 4 shows the results of statistically significant differences in work satisfaction among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19.

Table 4. Statistically significant differences in work satisfaction among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic

Work satisfaction		Older employees		
		Mean rank	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
At my workplace, I am satisfied with the working hours and distribution of work obligations.	Negative ranks	104.62		
	Positive ranks	119.35	-2.678	0.007
In the company, I am satisfied with the organization of work tasks tailored to the elderly.	Negative ranks	109.03		
	Positive ranks	128.13	-5.871	0.000
In the company, I am satisfied with enabling the flexible workspace (for example, working from home).	Negative ranks	112.64		
	Positive ranks	121.21	-3.903	0.000
In this company, I am satisfied with the balance between my work and private life.	Negative ranks	117.16		
	Positive ranks	116.08	-2.987	0.003
I am satisfied with the level of self-regulation of work speed that is enabled.	Negative ranks	104.37		
	Positive ranks	120.15	-2.173	0.030
In the company, I am satisfied with the number of programs in the context of active aging and a healthy lifestyle.	Negative ranks	119.22		
	Positive ranks	123.88	-2.904	0.004
I am satisfied with the intergenerational cooperation and, thus, the distribution of work in the company.	Negative ranks	108.58		
	Positive ranks	112.90	-2.045	0.046
At my workplace I am satisfied with flexible working hours.	Negative ranks	111.12		
	Positive ranks	130.27	-5.026	0.000
I am satisfied with the provision of job-sharing, which reduces the burden on the workplace.	Negative ranks	109.62		
	Positive ranks	117.11	-0.925	0.355
I am satisfied with the interpersonal relationships in the company.	Negative ranks	89.95		
	Positive ranks	107.96	-1.215	0.224
I am satisfied with the leadership in the company.	Negative ranks	105.61		
	Positive ranks	117.08	-1.036	0.300

The results in Table 4 show that mean ranks of work satisfaction among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic statistically significantly differ in most (72.7 %) statements. There are statistically significant differences in eight statements, but there are no statistically significant differences in the three statements relating to satisfaction with the provision of job-sharing, which reduces the burden on the workplace, the interpersonal relationships in the company and with the leadership in the company. Based on the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test ( $p < 0.05$ ), we confirmed hypothesis 2: There are statistically significant differences in work satisfaction among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 5 shows the results of descriptive statistics for work engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for work engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic

Work engagement	Before the COVID-19 pandemic			During the COVID-19 pandemic		
	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
I do my work with passion.	3.60	4.00	1.020	4.19	4.00	0.967
I am engaged to the quality of my work.	4.16	4.00	0.804	4.28	4.00	0.986
I am engaged to achieve successful business results.	4.07	4.00	0.901	4.13	4.00	0.851
I feel connection with the company in which I worked.	3.63	4.00	1.124	3.72	4.00	1.006
I am aware of the importance of innovation for our company, and I am helping to develop the company	3.92	4.00	0.973	4.01	4.00	0.918
I trust in my colleagues and the manager	4.04	4.00	0.879	4.12	4.00	0.903
I feel that my work and job are important.	3.69	4.00	1.127	3.94	4.00	1.039
I am proud to be employed in this company.	3.79	4.00	1.043	3.83	4.00	0.964
I believe in the successful development and operation of our company.	4.00	4.00	0.900	4.15	4.00	1.029
I feel very good at my workplace.	3.41	4.00	1.270	3.55	4.00	1.206

The results in Table 5 show that the means for answers about the work engagement among older employees during the COVID-19 epidemic indicate that, on average, older employees had the highest agreement with the statements describing engagement to the quality of work, doing work with passion, believing in the successful development and operation of company and engagement to achieve successful business. In addition, the means for answers about the work engagement of older employees before and during the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that older employees had the lowest average agreement with the statement: »I feel very good at my workplace. The means for answers about the work engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic indicate that, on average, older employees had the highest agreement with the statements describing engagement in the quality of their work, engagement to achieve successful business results and trust in colleagues and the manager.

Table 6 shows the results of statistically significant differences in work engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19.

Table 6. Statistically significant differences in work engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic

Work engagement		Older employees		
		Mean rank	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
I do my work with passion.	Negative ranks	137.02		
	Positive ranks	118.95	-6.077	0.000
I am engaged to the quality of my work.	Negative ranks	99.87		
	Positive ranks	100.99	-2.137	0.042
I am engaged to achieve successful business results.	Negative ranks	96.01		
	Positive ranks	103.21	-0.074	0.941
I feel connection with the company in which I worked.	Negative ranks	102.13		
	Positive ranks	119.32	-2.201	0.028
I am aware of the importance of innovation for our company, and I am helping to develop the company	Negative ranks	103.46		
	Positive ranks	113.54	-0.612	0.541
I trust in my colleagues and the manager.	Negative ranks	95.35		
	Positive ranks	109.23	-2.171	0.030
I feel that my work and job are important.	Negative ranks	111.00		
	Positive ranks	112.62	-3.207	0.001
I am proud to be employed in this company.	Negative ranks	108.96		
	Positive ranks	118.04	-0.536	0.592
I believe in the successful development and operation of our company.	Negative ranks	109.42		
	Positive ranks	101.17	-1.983	0.046
I feel very good at my workplace.	Negative ranks	119.54		
	Positive ranks	126.60	-2.076	0.038

Table 6 shows that mean ranks of work engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic differ. There are statistically significant differences in seven statements, but there are no statistically significant differences in the three statements relating to engagement to achieve successful business results, being aware of the importance of innovation for company and helping to develop the company and being proud to be employed in company. Based on the results of the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test ( $p < 0.05$ ), we confirmed hypothesis 3: There are statistically significant differences in work engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 5 Discussion

The non-parametric – Wilcoxon signed-rank test results showed statistically significant differences in most statements describing work motivation, satisfaction, and engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results are in line with Tovmasyan and Minasyan's research (2020) in which employees during COVID-19 mentioned that the motivation incentives used in their company

are salary, reward, flexible work schedule, independence, and freedom to make decisions. In our research, we found out that older employees during the COVID-19 face higher work motivation than before COVID-19 in Slovenian companies. This was confirmed by the possibility of equal treatment of employees by age, the opportunity to do work from home, doing work at their own pace, the possibility of autonomy at work, the possibility of flexibility in the workplace, and compliments for the well-done work. Also, we found out that older employees during COVID-19 are less motivated regarding the opportunity to provide diverse tasks, the possibility for training and education, the possibility of cooperation with other employees, and the allocation of work as before COVID-19 in Slovenian companies. Our findings are also in line with the research of Nagel (2020), Wiradendi Wolor et al. (2020), and Bellmann and Hübler (2020) in which authors found that flexible work, better work-life balance, e-training, e-leadership during COVID-19 have a positive effect on work satisfaction. In our research, we found out that older employees during the COVID-19 pandemic face higher work satisfaction than before COVID-19 in Slovenian companies. They are more satisfied with the balance between work and private life, with flexible working hours, with the level of self-regulation of work speed that is enabled, with enabling the flexible workspace (for example, working from home), with the number of programs in the context of active aging and a healthy lifestyle, with the working hours and distribution of work obligations, and with the organization of work tasks tailored to the elderly. Also, we found out that older employees during the COVID-19 pandemic are less satisfied with the intergenerational cooperation and, thus, the distribution of work in the company as before COVID-19. Additionally, our findings are in line with the research of Harter (2020) and Towers Watson (2020), in which authors found out that employees can be engaged not only before the COVID-19 but also during COVID-19 if employers consider the proper management of employees during the COVID pandemic. Based on our research we also found that older employees are engaged during the COVID-19 and they are engaged to the quality of their work, they do their work with passion, they believe in the successful development and operation of the company, they are engaged to achieve successful business results, they trust in colleagues and the manager, they are aware of the importance of innovation for the company, and they are helping to develop the company, they feel that their work and job are important, they are proud to be employed in their company, they feel a connection with their company, and they feel very good at the workplace. Figure 2 presents the research model, completed with the results of the hypotheses' verification based on the conducted research on Slovenian companies.

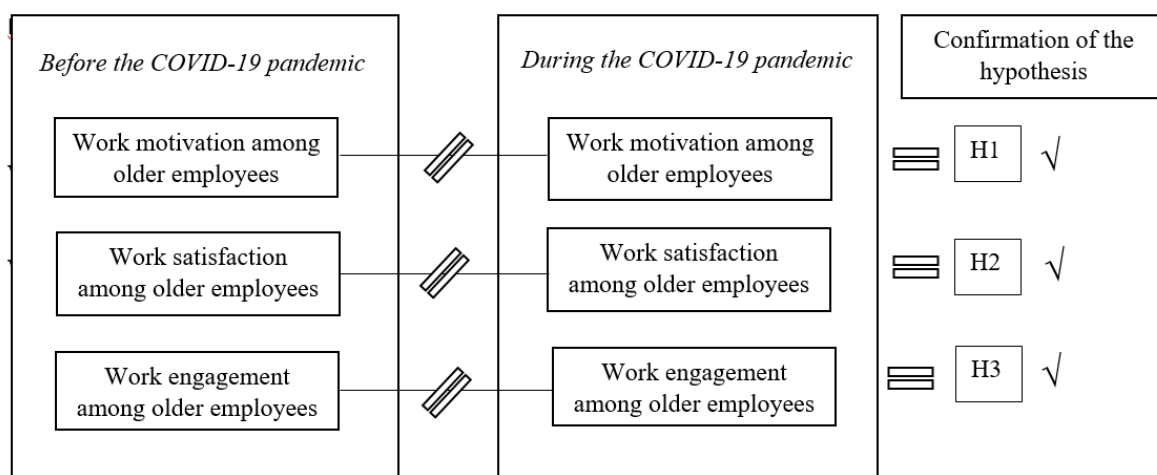


Figure 2. Results of the verification of hypotheses

Based on the results, we recommend that not only during the COVID-19 pandemic but also after the COVID-19 pandemic, companies should make the workplace more flexible. Popular alternative arrangements, including compressed workweeks, flexible work schedules, part-time work, job sharing, and telecommuting, are used to enhance work motivation, satisfaction, and engagement. Also, during the COVID-19 and after the COVID-19 pandemic, employers should ask employees about personal motivations and improve the work environment with a positive organizational climate. Also, attention needs to be paid to training and education opportunities for older employees, increased opportunities for advancement, opportunities to provide diverse tasks, and intergenerational cooperation. Employers should start a mentorship program in their companies. Employees that receive training and skill development feel more valued by their company and will be more engaged. Encouraging upskilling and cross-training will benefit both the company and the employees greatly. In addition, employees will be motivated to work and perform well in the company where they work if the company thinks of their safety. Companies that dare to make policies and decisions to provide security for older employees are very important to keep growing positive motivation from their employees, especially amid the pandemic COVID-19 virus. Therefore, the company becomes a central role in increasing employees' motivation, satisfaction, and engagement in completing their work and a sense of security for employees. We also suggest that employers ensure effective communication with their employees. Employers should provide employees with an internal communication channel to report what they see and feel within the company. So, how employers behave during critical moments leaves a lasting mark on their companies and people. Therefore, consistent and effective communication and interaction with employees can strengthen the company and enhance its culture. Misinformation in the media has created particular challenges for organizations responding to virus outbreak. Employers should become the source of accurate, timely, and appropriate information for their employees. Employers should consider creating their own news channels in the workplace based on credible sources of information. Employers should be very cautious about making harsh, unpopular decisions about personnel reduction. The crisis will pass, but inappropriate decisions or behavior of company leaders in a time of crisis



will have a lasting negative impact on business. During COVID-19 and after COVID-19 pandemic, fair workload distribution and regular reviews of workload and objectives are important. After the COVID-19 pandemic, we suggest that companies organize regular team meetings and social spaces to maintain connections and build relationships. Short-term flexible working may also support the return to the normal workplace. There may be limitations to public transport (and employees with concerns about using it), and to maintain social distancing, there will need to be limitations on the number of people who may be able to work in any single office building. The following forms of flexible working can support social distancing and help maintain hygiene, therefore supporting a safe return to the workplace:

- Homeworking: Where they can do so effectively, organizations should allow employees to continue to work from home.
- Staggered hours: A staggered hours system may allow workers some discretion, within prescribed limits, in fixing the time when they start and finish work. For example, some employees may work 7am-3pm with others working 10am-6pm. Staggered shifts or hours can help avoiding large groups of people arriving and leaving offices at the end of the day.
- Compressed hours: Compressed hours allow employees to work their normal contracted hours over a reduced number of days. A typical pattern would involve working four longer days and not working on the fifth day. This pattern could reduce the number of employees in the office on some days.
- Adjusted shift rotations: Where employees work in shifts, for example, a rotating shift pattern where one group of employees takes over from another on rotation, processes can be introduced to reduce contact between different shifts and their employees. Handovers should be undertaken by the same individuals while observing social distancing. The same teams should rotate in order so that they always follow the same individuals. Groups starting and leaving work should do so on a phased basis to reduce interaction or crowds forming in certain locations.

According to Chanana and Sangeeta (2020), Farrell et al. (2020), Matli (2020), Spurka and Straub (2020), and Tovmasyan and Minasyan (2020), companies can learn from situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, higher work motivation, satisfaction, or engagement could in part be due to the implications for employees of using digital means instead of traveling and working from the office. It creates more flexibility to combine work and private life and opens the opportunity to stay longer in one place. Using the digital infrastructure and new work routines that are currently being built to meet the challenges of COVID-19 could enable companies to create more flexible workplaces. Farrell et al. (2020) emphasize that technological innovation in the workplace has led to many examples of changes in how work is organized and how employees perform their duties (Farrell et al., 2020). The homeworking arrangement offers both employers and employees various benefits, such as no necessity to commute to and from workstations and work and-life balance advantages (Nagel, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, employees had to trust leaders to

take the right direction and to make tough decisions for the future. A key part of trust in leadership is transparency, where employees have visibility into what is happening within their company. This is particularly important during a work-from-home scenario, where employees are reliant on leaders to make crucial decisions for the future of their jobs and the company. A key part of this has been communication between management and employees on how the company is tackling COVID-19. By way of examples, in some companies, discussions have centered on the effects to the company, strategic plans for acquiring clients, and re-shuffling of roles, etc. (Chanana and Sangeeta, 2020; Wiradendi Wolor et al., 2002).

## 6 Conclusion

Our findings highlight the need for companies to be aware of the extent and factors associated with work motivation, work satisfaction, and work engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our research shows that there are statistically significant differences in most variables describing work motivation, satisfaction, and engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, our research highlights which factors increase work motivation, work satisfaction and work engagement during COVID-19 and how to take care of these constructs during the COVID-19 and after the COVID-19 pandemic to keep employees motivated, satisfied, and engaged. We also presented the measures with which companies can increase work motivation, satisfaction, and engagement among employees during the COVID-19 pandemic and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The contribution to science refers to the use of a measuring instrument that we implemented at Slovenian companies and thus we came to new insights about the motivation, satisfaction, and commitment of older employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. The above contributed to new views on creating appropriate working conditions after the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for older employees.

Our research suggests that management researchers and practitioners need to pay careful attention to creating suitable work conditions for older employees after the COVID-19 pandemic to increase work motivation, satisfaction, and engagement. Thus, our research shows statistically significant differences in work motivation, work satisfaction and work engagement among older employees before the COVID-19 and during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, companies can focus on how to constructively manage the new challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brings to companies and what they can learn from it. For companies and leaders or HRM in particular, the pandemic can be a starting point for positive and future-oriented developments.

Our sample was limited to Slovenian companies and older employees. Also, in our research we limited ourselves on work motivation, work satisfaction and work engagement. Therefore, for further research, we propose the examination of differences in other constructs relating to employees (for example, leadership, work commitment, employee relations, the well-being of employees) before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenian companies, and also the

examination of differences in constructs between Slovenia and other countries. Also, for further research, we propose the examination of differences in other constructs during the COVID-19 pandemic and after the COVID-19 pandemic. With our findings, we contribute to the discussion on a constructive and future-oriented approach to the COVID-19 pandemic, both for practices around the management of global employees as well as for future research.

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## **Povzetek:** **Motivacija, zadovoljstvo in zavzetost starejših zaposlenih v času COVID-19 pandemije**

**Raziskovalno vprašanje (RV):** Ali obstajajo statistično značilne razlike v delovni motivaciji, zadovoljstvu in zavzetosti med starejšimi zaposlenimi pred COVID-19 pandemijo in med COVID-19 pandemijo?

**Namen:** Namen prispevka je preveriti, ali obstajajo statistično značilne razlike v delovni motivaciji, zadovoljstvu in zavzetosti med starejšimi zaposlenimi pred COVID-19 pandemijo in med COVID-19 pandemijo. Cilj prispevka je tudi ugotoviti, kateri dejavniki prispevajo k povečanju delovne motivacije, zadovoljstva in zavzetosti v času pandemije COVID-19.

**Metoda:** Razlike v delovni motivaciji, zadovoljstvu in zavzetosti med starejšimi zaposlenimi pred COVID-19 pandemijo in med COVID-19 pandemijo smo testirali z neparametričnim testom za dva odvisna vzorca. Za analizo razlik med posameznimi trditvami smo uporabili neparametrični Wilcoxonov signed-rank test.

**Rezultati:** Rezultati kažejo, da obstajajo statistično značilne razlike v delovni motivaciji, zadovoljstvu in zavzetosti med starejšimi zaposlenimi pred COVID-19 pandemijo v primerjavi s časom med COVID-19 pandemijo.

**Organizacija:** Rezultati pomembno vplivajo na podrobnejši pregled ustvarjanja novih delovnih pogojev za zaposlene v času pandemije COVID-19 in še posebej v obdobju po pandemiji COVID-19.

**Družba:** Med COVID-19 se lahko podjetja in družba osredotočijo na to, kako konstruktivno obvladati nove izzive, ki jih podjetjem prinaša COVID-19 pandemija. Za podjetja in vodje oziroma zlasti za managerje se lahko pandemija uporabi kot izhodišče za pozitiven in v prihodnost usmerjen razvoj.

**Originalnost:** Z našimi ugotovitvami prispevamo k razpravi o konstruktivnem in v prihodnost usmerjenem pristopu k pandemiji COVID-19, tako za prakse v zvezi z upravljanjem zaposlenih kot tudi za prihodnje raziskave. Naša raziskava prav tako poudarja, kateri dejavniki povečujejo delovno motivacijo, zadovoljstvo pri delu in delovno zavzetost med COVID-19 in kako ustvariti ustrezne delovne pogoje med COVID-19 in po pandemiji COVID-19, da ostanejo zaposleni motivirani, zadovoljni in zavzeti.

**Omejitve/nadaljnje raziskovanje:** Omejili smo se na slovenska podjetja in starejše zaposlene. Prav tako smo se v naši raziskavi omejili na delovno motivacijo, zadovoljstvo in zavzetost. Zato za nadaljnje raziskave predlagamo preučitev razlik v drugih konstruktih pred pandemijo COVID-19 in zaposlenih v času pandemije COVID-19 v slovenskih podjetjih oz. tudi preučitev razlik v konstruktih med Slovenijo in drugimi državami.

**Ključne besede:** delovna motivacija, zadovoljstvo, zavzetost, starejši zaposleni, COVID-19.

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