

## Understanding Undergraduates' Work Values as a Tool to Reduce Organizational Turnover

---

### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this research paper is to provide with a strategic approach to reduce organizational turnover by identifying undergraduates' work values. In order to do so, the research undertook two different studies. The first one focused on identifying undergraduates' work values, while the second one explored the alignment between undergraduates' work values and current human resources retention strategies.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The research paper follows a mix method approach combining the Work Values Scale (EVAT) applied to 293 hospitality undergraduates of the bachelor's degree in Tourism and Hospitality Management and 30 semi-structured interviews along with 32 semi-structured interviews carried out to human resources professionals. Data was analysed using the EVAT methodology that classifies work values in (openness to change, conservation, self-enhancement, and self-transcendence). Relationships between the four dimensions were tested using Pearson correlations and the student profile was analysed comparing the impact of the professional experience and gender in the dimensions.

**Findings** - The results conclude that undergraduates' work values placed themselves under the categories of self-transcendence and openness to change. There is a significance level in the correlation between self-transcendence and openness to change and work values are influenced by previous professional experience and gender. Human resources professionals tend to overlook work values focusing their retention strategies in providing with training, feedback and promotions but not including practices to promote work-life balance and flexibility.

**Practical Implications** - Practical recommendations are provided for educators with examples of initiatives developed that can be applied in any educational institution.

**Originality:** The research highlights the importance of work motivation based on values as a tool to generate retention strategies.

**Keywords:** undergraduates' work values, EVAT, retention strategies, hospitality industry, higher education, employability.

## Introduction

The low retention rate of the Millennial workforce has become one of the major concerns at the human resources (HR) departments in the hospitality industry, and has raised the need to redefine retention strategies by properly considering and including their work motivations (Latham and Pinder, 2005). Although some of the main work motivations for Millennials include feeling empowered, trust, pay and flexibility, unfortunately the hospitality industry is commonly known for offering low salaries, long work hours, and poor work-life balance, among others, which prompt employee dissonance and ultimately a high turnover ratio (Karatepe *et al.*, 2014). Having in mind that the Millennial generation will represent an estimated 74 percent of the world's working population by 2025, it will be wise for organizations to take into account what motivates this generation to increase their retention due to the high costs associated with recruiting a new employee (Afsar *et al.*, 2018). This problem has been approached by different scholars and practitioners within the hospitality industry mainly from a generational global perspective (Kong *et al.*, 2016), but less emphasis has been given to work motivation based on values as a key element to generate organizational strategies (Green *et al.*, 2017). Relevant studies highlight the importance of considering values as a key element to retain employees within the hospitality industry, for example, by analysing the impact when comparing work motivation based on values among different generations in order to foster motivation and leadership (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008), or focusing on how motivation based on values influences employee attitudes towards brand perception (King *et al.*, 2017).

Organizations have to understand that employees from different generations have different work preferences and work values to reduce their turnover (Dokadia *et al.*, 2015). Taking this statement as a premise, the objective of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of undergraduates' work motivation based on values and their alignment with the HR retention strategies using the Work Values Scale EVAT (*Escala de valores hacia el trabajo* in Spanish) as a tool for setting a common landscape in the hospitality industry. EVAT is one of the most widely used work values scale in the field of social psychology to study individual values as a theoretical framework of reference to analyse and measure values towards work (Arciniega and González, 2000). This study was developed in three stages and was possible thanks to the participation of 293 Spanish undergraduates and 32 international companies within the hospitality sector.

## Literature Review

### *An incredible sector that moves the world and its employees*

The tourism sector is one of the major employers in the world and, regarding the European Union, over 80% of the entire workforce belong to this sector (Bangwal and Tiwari, 2019). Although it is a complex industry consisting of thousands of public and private organizations, where jobs are heterogeneous depending on the type of business and seasonality, the majority of jobs directly focus on customer satisfaction, and depend on the ability of employees to create successful service interactions (Lee-Ross and Pryce 2012). This industry is commonly known by having a high turnover rate, in fact, in 2019 there was a 78.5% of turnover in the hotel industry (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), when the healthy turnover rate, stated by human resources experts, should be 10-15% (Wells, 2018). This situation is mainly related to the fact that there are no clear patterns between job titles and their expected skills and, at the same time, salaries and working conditions are characterized by low wages, long work hours and not having the opportunity to socialize (Bloom *et al.*, 2009). In 2019 the world faced an unprecedented health emergency, the pandemic of COVID-19 and unfortunately the hospitality industry was one of the most affected industries producing a massive loss of jobs and auguring a global recession (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2020). All these stressful working conditions affected employees' motivation and pushed them to look for other industries with better working conditions and stability (Karatepe *et al.*, 2014).

### *Identification of work motivation based on values*

Research on career development highlights that work values play a key motivational role in job selection and career development (Sortheix *et al.*, 2015). Thus, understanding the link between motivation, needs and values can help companies to reshape their current strategies to retain employees (Winter and Jackson, 2015).

Individual work values have been classified using a large variety of taxonomies and from different perspectives, however, there is one approach that offers a dynamic vision between the value dimensions and this is the one developed by Schwartz (Ramirez *et al.*, 2019). Schwartz's theory of value content and structure offers a theoretical framework of reference to analyse and measure values towards work (Schwartz, 1992). The model classifies values depending on the motivational goal that they express, as portrayed in a circular structure with the relations of conflict and harmony among values. In this case, the author creates a dynamic structure of 10 values clustered in four higher-order values: self-enhancement, self-transcendence, openness to change, and conservation. Self-enhancement and self-transcendence relate to opposite or bipolar dimensions. The first one seeks to increase personal interest even at the expense of others (achievement, power) and the second one seeks to promote the welfare of others and is altruistic (universalism, benevolence). The other two bipolar dimensions refer to openness to change and conservation. The motivational goal in openness to change gives importance to independence of thought, actions or readiness to change (self-direction, stimulation); in contrast, conservation cares for preserving the past and shows resistance to change (conformity, tradition, security). These 10 motivational types of values are recognized by members of most societies (Ralston *et al.*, 2011) and help us to understand the relation between the individual's values and their choices and behaviours (Monteiro *et al.*, 2016).

The EVAT scale is an instrument linked to Schwartz's theoretical framework and has been widely used in the field of social psychology to analyse and measure work values (Arciniega and González,

2000). This scale offers a dynamic vision of the four value dimensions, classifying individuals in four easily differentiated work values categories. It uses short verbal portraits that describe the goals of employees focusing on their work values in sixteen questions and respondents are asked to rate themselves in terms of each of the sixteen portraits, using a 7-point scale where (1 is totally different from me, 7 is identical to me) to score their comparisons.

## Research methods

### *Study one: Identification of undergraduates' work values*

The study follows a mixed method research design by combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in two steps. In both cases, participants were undergraduate students, born between 1993 and 1998, currently studying a bachelor's degree in Tourism and Hospitality Management at our faculty. First, a quantitative approach was performed by applying the EVAT scale to 293 students from all the different academic years, with 80% being from Spain and 20% being international students. The aim was to identify relationships between the four higher-order values of Schwartz's theory and the student profile. The four dimensions are measured by 16 items that outline how an individual behaves at work. Regarding student profile, gender and previous professional experience were also collected. Previous professional experience is a key element for segmenting students but is not necessarily aligned with the academic year because students can do optional internships in holiday periods and other students come from other studies.

Second, a qualitative approach was followed via face-to-face semi-structured interviews with a representative sample of 10% of the participants, considering gender, academic year and previous professional experience. As in the previous step, the aim of the interview questions was to classify respondents' answers into one of the four dimensions. The procedure to design the questionnaire was as follows: (1) A content analysis of the EVAT scale, as well as Schwartz's work values theory, was undertaken; (2) Each individual value dimension was enriched by a cluster of specific adjectives; (3) Table 1 was built as a result of the previous steps and was validated by a group of psychologists specialised in organizational psychology to ensure that the categories were consistent and clear; (4) Interview questions were defined (see Table 2). Interview questions were intended to classify respondents' answers in one of the opposite dimensions: openness to change versus conservation, and self-transcendence versus self-enhancement.

Dimension	Description	Main adjectives
<b>Openness to change</b>	Self-direction, stimulation, hedonism	Creative, open-minded, explorer, novelty, energetic, active, lively, improvement, updating, efficiency, self-challenging, daring, proactive.
<b>Conservation</b>	Conformity, tradition, security	Stability, restraint to change, obedient, follower, retroactive, conventional, methodical, habit, routine, disciplined, diligent, preservative.
<b>Self-Enhancement</b>	Achievement, power, hedonism	Gratified, personal success, competent, dominant, ambitious, leader, controller, goal-focused, convincing, decisive, influencing, bossy, superiority, prestige.
<b>Self-Transcendence</b>	Universalism, benevolence	Caring, fair, tolerant, empathetic, understanding, appreciative, protective, teamwork, loyal, honest, person you can trust, grateful.

Table 1. Content analysis of the EVAT scale according to Schwartz's theory adapted by Arciniega (Arciniega Ruiz de Esparza and González, 2000). For each description, a list of possible adjectives is generated.

Interview Questions	Values
1. How would you describe yourself as an employee?	All
2. If you feel comfortable in your workplace and your employer mentions that they are planning to have a small change in the daily procedures, do you feel open to the new situation or prefer to continue as before?	Openness to change / Conservation
3. How do you like decisions to be made when you are working within a team?	Self-Transcendence / Self-Enhancement
4. Where do you feel more comfortable: Performing a job where you have similar daily tasks or a job that often involves doing new tasks?	Openness to change / Conservation
5. Do you consider it is important to understand your team's needs in order to have a good work environment, even though this means that it takes longer to achieve goals?	Self-Transcendence / Self-Enhancement
6. You realize that in your company there is a systematic unfair treatment towards other employees: How would you endure this situation?	Self-Transcendence / Self-Enhancement
7. In your opinion, what do you think is the maximum time to be in the same company? And in the same position?	Openness to change / Conservation
8. Is it important for you that your company has recognition activities and programmes for employees? You as a leader, how would you recognize or congratulate your employees?	Self-Transcendence / Self-Enhancement

Table 2. Hospitality undergraduates' work values interviews associated with each value dimension.

## *Study two: HR professionals' retention strategies*

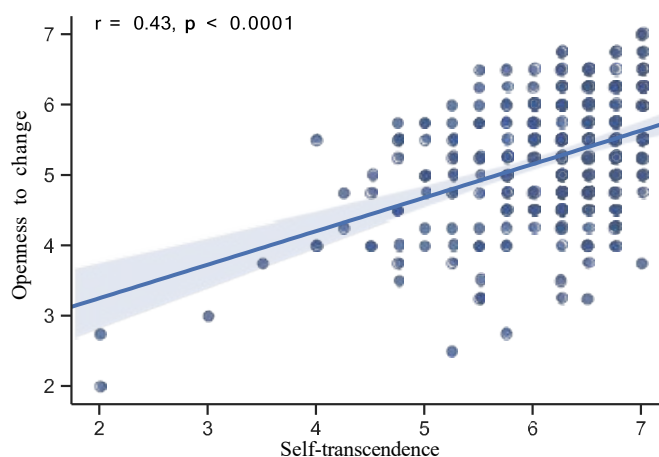
The second study focused on identifying current awareness of HR professionals in regard to what motivates undergraduates. In this stage, 32 HR professionals from 4- to 5-star international hotel chains were interviewed by means of a semi-structured face to face interview. Questions focused on establishing relationships between, company size and percentage of Millennial workforce; what values they are looking for in the recruitment process; what are the main challenges to retain Millennials from their perspective; what are the main actions to deal with those challenges; and what are their future plans -if any- to retain them. Finally, interviews ended with questions about their perception of Millennials' turnover in comparison with other generations and what they would do if they had unlimited resources to retain Millennials.

## **Results and discussion**

### *Study one: Identification of undergraduates' work values*

The aim of the first study was to identify relationships between the four higher-order values of Schwartz's theory and the student profile in terms of gender and previous professional experience.

First of all, the individual relationship between the dimensions using all 293 participants was tested using the Pearson correlation. The only pair that passed the significance level is the correlation between self-transcendence and openness to change ( $r = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ), as the scatter plot in Figure 1 shows. The main values inside these dimensions include universalism and benevolence for self-transcendence and self-direction, stimulation and hedonism for openness to change. This is in line with previous literature reviews that state that Millennials value transparency and fair treatment, promotion opportunities, having meaningful jobs, work-life balance, and tasks that allow them to avoid routine. They build their fidelity based on respect towards the company and honesty.



*Figure 1. Scatter plot with regression line between self-transcendence and openness to change. The straight line represents the regression estimate and translucent bands the confidence bands of the regression estimate. The Pearson value with its corresponding significance is  $r=0.43$  and  $p<0.0001$ .*

Table 3 shows the percentile table of the four dimensions organized by gender and also includes the mean and standard deviation. In general, the percentile distribution evolves in a similar way in both genders, with the exception of slightly higher scores for Openness to change and Self- enhancement

dimensions in male students. The previous professional experience is another element collected in the EVAT process and the organization of the sample based on this is described in Table 4. As previously described, professional experience is not directly related to academic year because students can optionally do internships along the different years and, at the same time, some students come from advanced professional training courses related to tourism and hospitality.

	Openness to change		Conservation		Self-enhancement		Self-transcendence	
N	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Mean</b>	5.4	5.1	4.2	4.3	4.2	3.7	6.1	6.1
<b>SD</b>	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0	0.8	0.8
<b>10</b>	4.3	4.0	3.3	3.0	3.0	2.5	4.8	5.0
<b>20</b>	4.6	4.5	3.5	3.5	3.3	3.0	5.5	5.5
<b>30</b>	5.0	4.8	3.8	3.8	3.5	3.3	5.8	5.8
<b>40</b>	5.3	5.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.3	6.2	6.0
<b>50</b>	5.5	5.3	4.0	4.1	4.3	3.6	6.3	6.3
<b>60</b>	5.5	5.3	4.3	4.5	4.5	4.0	6.5	6.3
<b>70</b>	5.8	5.5	4.5	4.8	4.8	4.3	6.5	6.5
<b>80</b>	6.3	6.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.5	6.8	6.8
<b>90</b>	6.5	6.3	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.0	6.8	7.0

Table 3. Percentile table of the four higher-order dimensions organized by gender.

Gender	Academic year	Previous professional experience				Total
		None	0-3 months	3-9 months	>9 months	
Female	1	40	13	4		<b>57</b>
	2	18	27	8	4	<b>57</b>
	3	10	12	25	6	<b>53</b>
	4			8	35	<b>43</b>
<b>Female Total</b>		<b>68</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>210</b>
Male	1	11	5		4	<b>20</b>
	2	5	14	3	1	<b>23</b>
	3	4	2	10	6	<b>22</b>
	4			3	15	<b>18</b>
<b>Male Total</b>		<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Students' Total</b>		<b>88</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>293</b>

Table 4. Number of students organized by gender, previous professional experience and academic year.

The relationship between the four dimensions and student profile is analysed by comparing the impact of their professional experience and gender. Figure 2 illustrates the four higher-order values of Schwartz's theory and their evolution depending on the professional experience organized by gender. In general, self-transcendence (6.1/7) and openness to change (5.2/7) are the highest scores while conservation (4.3/7) and self-enhancement (3.8/7) are the dimensions with the lowest scores. At first sight, it seems that greater previous professional experience influences the increase in openness to change and self-enhancement while it decreases in conservation. On the other hand, self-transcendence remains stable. These behaviours are similar if gender is considered, with the

exception of self-enhancement, slightly higher in males, and in self-transcendence where the value is lower in males with 3-9 months of previous professional experience.

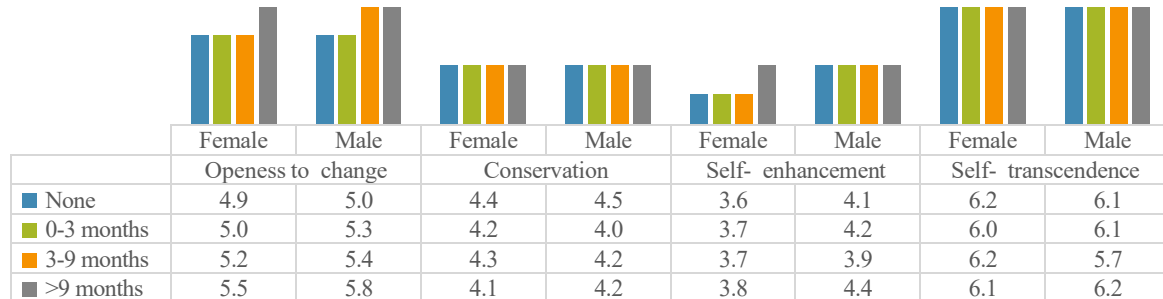


Figure 2. Means for values dimensions according to the student's previous professional experience and gender.

Next, the relation between the four EVAT dimensions and student profile variables was analysed by means of a Pearson correlation coefficient and portrayed as a scatter plot in Figure 3. The left side of the plot shows these relations divided by experience and coded by colour: Green for no experience, red for 0-3 months, blue for 3-9 months, and orange for more than 9 months. On the right side, the same plot is shown, but samples are organized by gender (blue for female, and orange for male). All student profile variables were tested with regards to the four EVAT dimensions by using an unpaired two-tailed t-test to find out whether they influence the value dimensions. For all tests, significance is considered only for p values smaller than 0.05. As portrayed in Figure 4, experience appeared to have a significant difference in openness to change (tval,  $p < 0.0001$ ) between experience values of no experience and 9+ months. Experience does not appear to significantly affect any other variables. However, by dividing the sample by gender, self-enhancement shows a significant difference (tval,  $p < 0.0001$ ).

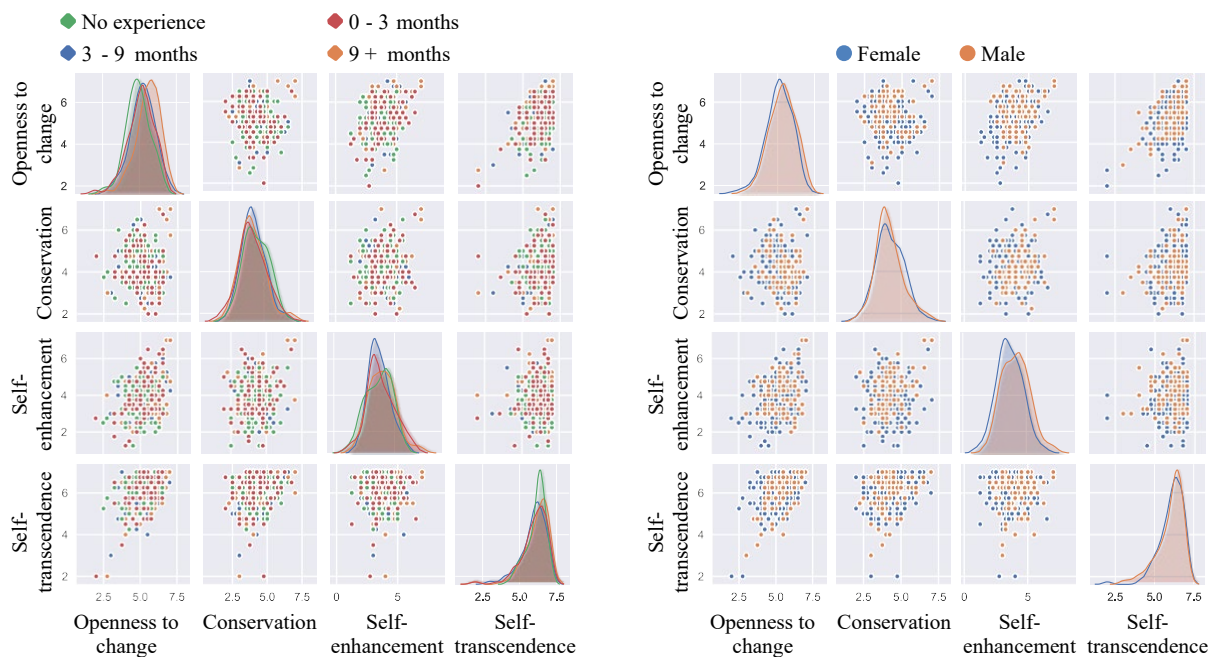


Figure 3. Scatter plots and probability distributions for each of the four EVAT variables (openness to change, conservation, self-enhancement, and self-transcendence) regarding student profile in terms of professional experience and gender.

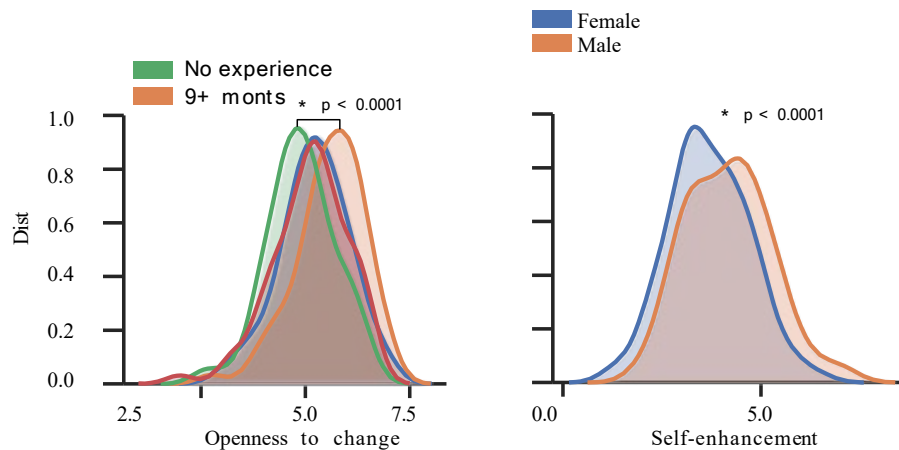


Figure 4. Probability distribution of variables showing significant differences. Left plot shows the distribution of Openness to change divided by experience. Significant differences are shown between no experience (green) and 9+ months (orange). Right plot shows the distribution of self-enhancement divided by gender (blue for females and orange for males)

Regarding the second part of the study, different interviews were conducted to gain insight about how students describe themselves as employees, and their responses were classified according to the different value dimensions depicted in Table 2. The predominant value categories included openness to change with adjectives such as: ambitious, proactive, competent, adaptable, open-minded, creative, active, flexible, self-challenging, and in the self-transcendence category where undergraduates described themselves as team players, loyal, trustful, helpful and empathetic employees. Undergraduate students were also asked about recognition; an aspect that allowed us to gather information concerning retention practices by HR professionals. The question in particular was: “As a leader, how would you recognize or congratulate employees?” Their answers were clearly divided into 2 value categories, with openness to change including initiatives such as small details, sharing positive feedback, training, recognition emails, verbal recognition, recognition events, and self-transcendence including initiatives such as outings and meals together, free time, free meals, extra vacation, work-life balance, massage, night free in the hotel. Therefore, HR practices that meet employees’ needs will result in a higher motivational workforce (Green *et al.*, 2017).

### *Study two: HR professionals’ retention strategies*

The aim of the second study was to identify current awareness of HR professionals regarding the Millennial workforce motivation and what strategies they are following to retain them according to their needs.

Figure 5 describes the profile of the 32 international hotel companies in terms of percentage of Millennials employed and their turnover percentage. These results are in line with the literature which states that the Millennial generation has become an important part of the workforce and, at the same time, their turnover is higher than in other sectors so keeping them motivated and engaged is still a challenge. Regarding questions, Table 4 summarizes the most common answers of HR professionals. Questions mainly focused on the most demanded attributes, their main retention strategies, most valued initiatives by Millennials, current actions and new initiatives to deal with turnover, and what initiatives they would do if they had unlimited resources.

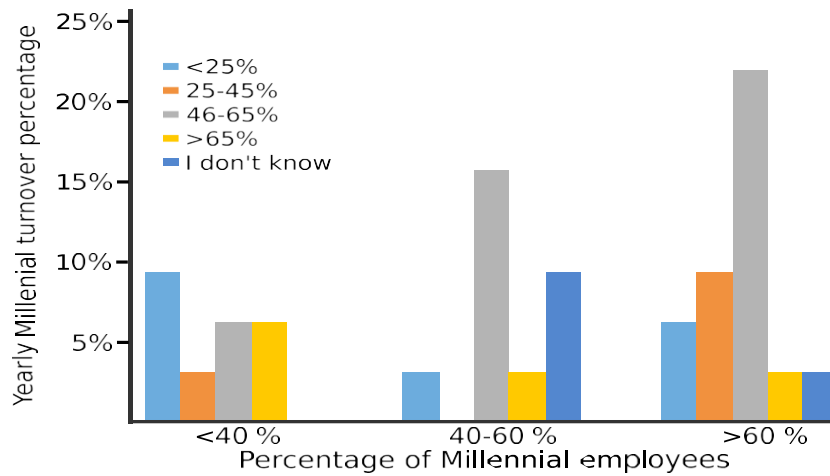


Figure 5. Description of the yearly percentage of Millennial employees and their turnover percentage. The average company size is 500 full-time employees.

Variables	Answers of HR professionals
<b>Most demanded attributes</b>	Achievement, active, ambitious, appreciative, benevolence, bossy, caring, competent, conformity, controller, conventional, convincing, creative, daring, decisive, diligent, disciplined, dominant, efficient, empathetic, energetic, explorer, fair, follower, goal-focused, grateful, gratified, habit, hedonist, honest, improvement, influencer, leader, lively, loyal, methodical, novelty, obedient, open-minded, personal success, powerful, preservative, prestige, proactive, protective, restraint to change, retroactive, routine, security, self-challenging, self-directed, stability, stimulation, superiority, teamwork, tolerant, traditional, trustful, understanding, universalism, updating.
<b>Main retention challenges</b>	Constant feedback, do not understand the nature of the hospitality industry, get bored easily, lack of flexibility, need to progress quickly and have promotions, not loyal, not proactive.
<b>Current actions to deal with turnover</b>	Career development plans, explain the nature of the hospitality industry, mentoring programs, more flexibility, nothing, promotions, provide feedback, recognition programs, social events, training.
<b>Most valued initiatives by Millennials</b>	Feedback, promotions, social events, they value nothing, training.
<b>New initiatives to deal with turnover</b>	Development programs, flexibility, Millennial focus groups, nothing, social events, technological development.
<b>Initiatives to deal with turnover with unlimited resources</b>	Creation of strong brand to attract and retain Millennials, more development opportunities, more employee benefits, nothing, open-minded executive team, technology, training according to their needs, work-life balance.

Table 5. Different keywords in alphabetical order, as mentioned during HR professionals' interviews. For the question concerning the most demanded attributes, attributes offered to respondents corresponded to the ones described in Table 2,

Findings were constructed using the yearly Millennial turnover ratio as the main variable, as shown in Table 6. In order to establish whether Millennials' work values are in line with the key attributes that companies are looking for in their potential employees nowadays, HR professionals were asked to highlight the 3 most demanded attributes that a successful candidate to their companies should have. It is interesting to observe that teamwork, honesty, proactivity and empathy are the most repeated attributes from the long list of adjectives listed before and that teamwork and proactivity are always in the top 3 regardless of the Millennial turnover ratio. This agrees with previous research developed by Baird and Parayitam (2019) who identified interpersonal skills and working

well with others as key demanded attributes for employers. HR professionals look for attributes that fall under the categories of openness to

change and self-transcendence; those attributes clearly match the needs of the industry: the hospitality industry is an industry made of people for people where success depends on the ability of employees to create successful service interactions (Lee-Ross and Pryce, 2012).

Variables		<25%	25%- 45%	46%-65%	>65%	I don't know
<b>Top attributes</b>	Teamwork	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
	Honesty	2 <sup>nd</sup>				2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Proactivity	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>
	Empathy		3 <sup>rd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	
<b>Main retention challenges</b>	Progress quickly	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>
	Constant feedback	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>		2 <sup>nd</sup>	
	Lack of flexibility	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Not loyal			2 <sup>nd</sup>		3 <sup>rd</sup>
<b>Current actions to deal with turnover</b>	Explain industry nature		•			
	Promotions		•	•		•
	Provide feedback	•			•	
	Recognition programmes	•			•	•
	Training	•	•	•	•	
<b>The most valued initiatives by Millennials</b>	Feedback				•	
	Promotions					•
	Training	•	•	•		
<b>New initiatives to deal with turnover</b>	Development programmes	•				
	Social events	•				
<b>Initiatives to deal with turnover with unlimited resources</b>	More development opportunities	•		•		•
	More employee benefits	•		•	•	•
	Open-minded executive team	•				
	Training according to their needs		•	•	•	•

Table 6. HR professionals' interview answers using the yearly Millennial turnover ratio as the main variable. Interviewees were asked to highlight 3 main attributes when looking for a potential employee for their companies and to highlight the 3 main retention challenges that they are facing nowadays. With regards to the other questions, no limit of answer was established. Results depicted above show their answers ordered per frequency number, with the first one being the most mentioned.

Agreement was also reached when HR professionals were asked about the main challenges to retain this workforce. They highlighted that the need of this generation to progress very quickly, their demands for constant feedback, the lack of flexibility and the fact that they are not loyal are the common problems that affect them regardless of their turnover ratio.

The relationship between Millennial turnover and actions that companies are developing to cope with their turnover ratio was then examined to see if implemented practices tackle the aforementioned problems directly. Companies with less than 25% of yearly turnover ratio focus on providing regular feedback, explaining the nature of the industry, recognition programmes and

training, whereas companies with a turnover ratio between 46-65% or more implement practices such as training, internal promotions or career development plans. Within this range, some respondents alluded that it is up to Millennials to be responsible for their careers and to be loyal, so they develop no specific action to deal with it. Interviewed companies are giving less importance to examining flexibility. However, all of them are aware that this is one of the main reasons for Millennial turnover. Literature reinforces this importance of revising flexibility policies, stating that Millennials value promotion opportunities and pay raises (Milman and Dickson, 2014) (Lyons *et al.*, 2015), flexibility in their schedules (Broadbridge *et al.*, 2007) (Brown *et al.*, 2015) (Richardson *et al.*, 2012) (Waljee *et al.*, 2018), freedom to coordinate their amount of work to do during work hours (Ukleja *et al.*, 2010). In fact, graduates in the hospitality industry, tourism and leisure sectors may find it difficult to develop “positive psychological contracts in that many are likely to work for organizations which require employees to work relatively long hours which make it difficult to find a good balance between

Training, feedback and promotions appear to be the most valued initiatives by Millennial employees, falling into the value categories of openness to change and self-transcendence. This is in line with findings obtained from the semi-structured interviews with undergraduates that mentioned values within those categories including other aspects such as sharing positive feedback, recognition emails, verbal recognition, recognition events, free time, free meals, extra vacation, work-life balance. From this question, it can be seen that work-life balance appears, together with extra vacation, as a key aspect to retain and recognize this generation. This finding highlights the importance of identifying Millennial values in order to create either short- or long-term strategies to improve employee welfare and reduce turnover (Ertas, 2015). When HR professionals were asked if they were planning on new initiatives for the upcoming year to retain Millennials, companies with a turnover ratio of <25% mentioned focusing on development programmes and creating more social events. However, those with a turnover ratio over 25% or the one unaware of their turnover ratio had no initiatives in the pipeline.

Finally, HR professionals were asked what they would do if they had unlimited resources to retain Millennials. No significant differences were found in relation to their turnover ratio. Common ideas pointed at creating more development opportunities, having more employee benefits or providing tailor-made training according to their needs. These initiatives could very well tackle the issue of the need that the Millennial generation faces with regards to their career advancement; nevertheless, the aspect of work-life balance needs to be reinforced. A paradox raises from the results regarding the fact that they are not planning new actions even though they are aware of this need and one can argue that this might be due to the lack of flexibility and the hierarchical structure characteristic of this industry.

## **Higher Education Applicability**

The EVAT scale together with the face-to-face semi-structured interviews allowed us to improve the employability of our students by helping to match student's profile with organizational needs while improving the psychological contract. Moreover, the results of this research were shared with the career service department to increase the pool of companies that we collaborate with in terms of internships or jobs depending on what our students' value.

The methodology followed helped us to see if the values of our students were aligned with the ones that our industry requires. Moreover, the EVAT scale was implemented in our mentoring programs

promoting individual and group actions. Group actions included tutorial sessions to work on the work values that a particular group needed to improve, while individual actions included mentoring sessions structured using the EVAT scale as a as a previous step to create a personal development plan with our students. This methodology helped us to differentiate ourselves from competitors by offering a scientific approach to improve the employability of our students.

## Conclusions

The high turnover rate in the hospitality sector has always been a concern due to its direct and indirect impact from the HR and financial perspective. Moreover, this situation has been aggravated in the case of the Millennial generation with new graduates entering the workforce. Although this problem has been addressed mostly from a generational global perspective, less emphasis has been put on work motivation based on values. New studies highlight the importance of considering work motivation based on values as an organizational strategy to reduce turnover and increase employee welfare. The research of this work focused on exploring the alignment between undergraduates' work values and HR retention strategies through two different perspectives, with the aim of gaining insight about the results of current practices and what actions and initiatives may contribute to reduce the Millennials' turnover.

From the undergraduates' perspective, a mixed approach using the EVAT tool with 293 students and 30 semi-structured interviews was used to identify relationships between the four higher-order values of Schwartz's theory (openness to change, conservation, self-enhancement, and self-transcendence) and the student profile in terms of gender and previous professional experience. The results conclude that undergraduates' work values place themselves under the categories of self-transcendence and openness to change; particularly, undergraduates define themselves as being self-directed, creative, open-minded, energetic, active, caring, fair, tolerant, understanding, loyal, individuals who love to work in teams, trustful, grateful and empathetic. This classification highlights the importance for organizations to avoid any traditional approaches as a strategy to retain this generation. In fact, the nature of the hospitality industry itself, with its long work hours, lack of flexibility, hierarchical and traditional structure, can be a restraint for this generation, who describe themselves as employees that embrace diversity, teamwork, able to greatly communicate and with an advanced knowledge of technologies (Gorman *et al.*, 2004).

From the HR perspective, 32 HR professionals from 4- to 5-star international hotel chains were interviewed with semi-structured interviews to explore their awareness about the Millennial workforce motivational values and what strategies they are following to reduce their turnover. Participants highlighted their concerns regarding their current situation as the Millennial turnover ratio is still very high in comparison with other industries. From the sample, 43.75% of respondents had a yearly Millennial turnover ratio between 46-65% and there were 12.50% of companies with a turnover ratio greater than 65%. This can be due to the fact that, even though companies are aware of what pushes their Millennial workforce to leave (urge to progress very quickly, need of constant feedback, flexibility), the industry itself is not allowing to include practices that promote work-life balance and flexibility. Unfortunately, only by providing with training, feedback or promotions, it seems not to be enough for this generation, who are happy to move to another company that offers them the full package, even though this might occur in another industry. This is aligned with other works where research with a group of students undertaking a hospitality management degree course concluded that at least one third of students were not interested in having a career in the tourism industry after having had a professional experience in the sector (Richardson *et al.*, 2012).

Finally, from the interviews, the mind-set of HR professionals seems to accept this situation, as those with a turnover ratio of 25% or higher have no plans to do anything to deal with the turnover challenge during the upcoming year. It is interesting to observe that companies that take care of their turnover are the ones with a turnover ratio of <25%. Only by understanding what is important for employees, can companies reshape their current strategies and prioritize their rewards criteria contributing to shape employee performance (Winter and Jackson, 2015).

The findings highlight the importance of focusing on values when creating retention strategies, as Millennials' values influence their needs and expectations at the work place. They feature that the problem of the hospitality industry in relation to the high turnover ratio of Millennial employees still needs to be addressed. From this study, and having in consideration previous research, it will be advisable to continue the investment in Millennials' professional development and to focus more on providing strategies that include work-life balance, flexibility and freedom in schedules.

## **Limitations and further research**

Although the findings are aligned with results and trends of other works, there are two main facts that limit the results. First, 80% of undergraduate students were from Spain. Second, HR managers were from 4- to 5-star hotels. Further work could extend this study to other student and company profiles in order to reinforce the findings.

Within the fast-changing pace of organizations, it would be interesting to investigate if culture is a variable that influences the work values of the Millennial generation. Moreover, it would be advisable to explore more in depth HR practices that companies with a lower turnover ratio in the hospitality industry are undertaking and see if those practices are aligned with the work values of flexibility and work-life balance. This article proposes a process with two clearly differentiated stages within the hospitality industry; nevertheless, it can be applied to other disciplines with the objective of identifying and investigating the alignment of their employees' work values and HR retention strategies. In fact, it would be very enriching to observe what other industries are doing to deal with unhealthy turnover ratios.

## **Acknowledgements**

This research was partially supported by a grant from Obra Social la Caixa and Ramon Llull University (URL/R21/2019).

## **References**

- Afsar, B., Shahjehan, A., Shah, S.I. (2018), Frontline employees' high-performance work practices, trust in supervisor, job-embeddedness and turnover intentions in hospitality industry, *International Journal of Contemporary Management*, Vol. 30, No. 3, pp.1436- 1452.
- Arciniega, L. and González, L. (2000), Desarrollo y validación de la escala de valores hacia el trabajo EVAT 30, *Revista de Psicología Social*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 281-296.
- Baird, A.M. and Parayitam, S. (2019), "Employers' ratings of importance of skills and competencies college graduates need to get hired: Evidence from the New England region of USA", Vol. 61 No. 5, pp. 622-634.

- Bangwal, D. and Tiwari, P. (2019), Workplace environment, employee satisfaction and intent to stay, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 12, No. 31, pp.268-284.
- Baum, T., 2008. Implications of hospitality and tourism labour markets for talent management strategies. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 20, No. 7, pp.
- Bloom, Nicholas, Sadun, Raffaella and van Reenen, John. (2009), *The Organization of Firms Across Countries*, CEP Discussion Papers, Centre for Economic Performance, LSE.
- Broadbridge, A.M., Maxwell, G.A., Ogden, S.M. (2007), Experiences, perceptions and expectations of retail employment for Generation Y, *Career Development International*, Vol, 12,pp. 523–544.
- Brown, E.A., Arendt, S.W., Bosselman, R.H. (2014), Hospitality management graduates' perceptions of career factor importance and career factor experience, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 37, pp. 58–67.
- Brown, E.A., Thomas, N.J., Bosselman, R.H. (2015), Are they leaving or staying: A qualitative analysis of turnover issues for Generation Y hospitality employees with a hospitality education, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 45, pp. 130-137.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020), *Job Openings and Labour Turnover*.
- Chen, T.L. and Shen, C.C. (2012), Today's intern, tomorrow's practitioner? - The influence of internship programmes on students' career development in the Hospitality Industry, *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 29-40.
- Chi, C.G., Maier, T.A., Gursoy, D. (2013), Employees' perceptions of younger and older managers by generation and job category, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 34, No. 42–50.
- De Hauw, S., and de Vos, A. (2010). Millennials' career perspective and psychological contract expectations: Does the recession lead to lowered expectations? *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 25, pp.293–302.
- Dokadia, A., Rai, S., Chawla, D. (2015), Multigenerational Differences in Work Attributes & Motivation: An Empirical Study, *Indian Journal of Industry Relations*, Vol. 51, pp. 81-97.
- Ertas, N. (2015), Turnover intentions and work motivations of millennial employees in federal service. *Public Personnel Management*.Vol. 44, pp. 401–423.
- Green, P.I., Finkel, E.J., Fitzsimons, G.M., Gino, F. (2017), The energizing nature of work engagement: Toward a new need-based theory of work motivation. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol.37, pp. 1-18.
- Gursoy, D., Maier, T.A., Chi, C.G. (2008), Generational differences: An examination of work values and generational gaps in the hospitality workforce, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 27,pp. 448–458.

Hershatter, A., Epstein, M. (2010). Millennials and the world of work: An organization and management perspective, *Journal of Business Psychology*, Vol. 25, pp. 211–223.

Hom, P.W., Lee, T.W., Shaw, J.D., Hausknecht, J.P. (2017), One hundred years of employee turnover theory and research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 102, pp.530-545.

Karatepe, O.M., Beirami, E., Bouzari, M., Safavi, H.P. (2014), Does work engagement mediate the effects of challenge stressors on job outcomes? Evidence from the hotel industry, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 36, pp. 14–22.

King, C., Murillo, E., Lee, H. (2017), The effects of generational work values on employee brand attitude and behavior: A multi-group analysis, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 66, pp. 92–105.

Kong, H., Sun, N., Yan, Q. (2016), New generation, psychological empowerment, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 28, pp. 2553–2569.

Latham, G.P., Pinder, C.C. (2005), Work motivation theory and research at the dawn of the twenty-first century, *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 56, pp. 485–516.

Lee-Ross, D. and Pryce, J. (2012). Human resources and tourism: Skills, culture and industry.

Book Reviews, in: *Human Resources and Tourism: Skills, Culture and Industry*.

Lyons, S., Schweitzer, L., Ng, E. (2015), How have careers changed? An investigation of changing career patterns across four generations. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol.30, pp. 8–21.

Maxwell, G.A., Ogden, S.M., Broadbridge, A. (2010), Generation Y's career expectations and aspirations: Engagement in the hospitality industry, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, Vol.17, No.1, pp..53-61.

Milman, A., Dickson, D. (2014), Employment characteristics and retention predictors among hourly employees in large US theme parks and attractions, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 26, pp. 447–469.

Monteiro, M., Castro, M., Teixeira, N., Aparecida, C., Da Silva, J. (2016), Article information: Values, motivation, commitment, performance and rewards: Analysis Model. *Business Process Management Journal*. Vol.22, No.6, pp.1139-1169.

Ramirez, I., Del Cerro, S., Fornell, A. (2019), The role of work motivation based on values in employee's retention in the 21st century. *Management Studies*. 7, 149–156.

Schwartz, S.H. (1992), Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 25, pp. 1–65.

Shapoval, V.( 2019), Organizational injustice and emotional labor of hotel front-line employees, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 78 ,pp. 112–121.

Sortheix, F.M., Chow, A., Salmela-Aro, K. (2015), Work values and the transition to work life: A longitudinal study, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 89, pp..162–171.

Ukleja, M., Espinoza, C., & Rusch, C. (2010). *Managing the Millennials: Discover the Core Competencies for Managing Today's Workforce*.

United Nations World Tourism Organization. (2020), *Impact assessment of the COVID-19 outbreak on international tourism*, United Nations World Tourism Organization.

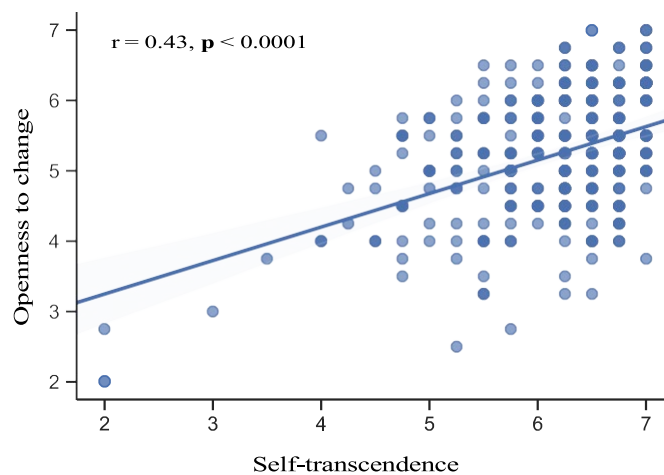
Waljee, J.F., Chopra, V., Saint, S. (2018), Mentoring millennials. *JAMA - Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 319. No. 15, pp. 1547-1548.

Wells, M. (2018, November 13). Turnover and retention rates for hotels and the hospitality industry. <https://business.dailypay.com/blog/staff-turnover-rates-hotel-motel-hospitality-industry>

Winter, R.P. and Jackson, B.A. (2015), Work values preferences of Generation Y: Performance relationship insights in the Australian Public Service, *International Journal of Human Resources Management*.

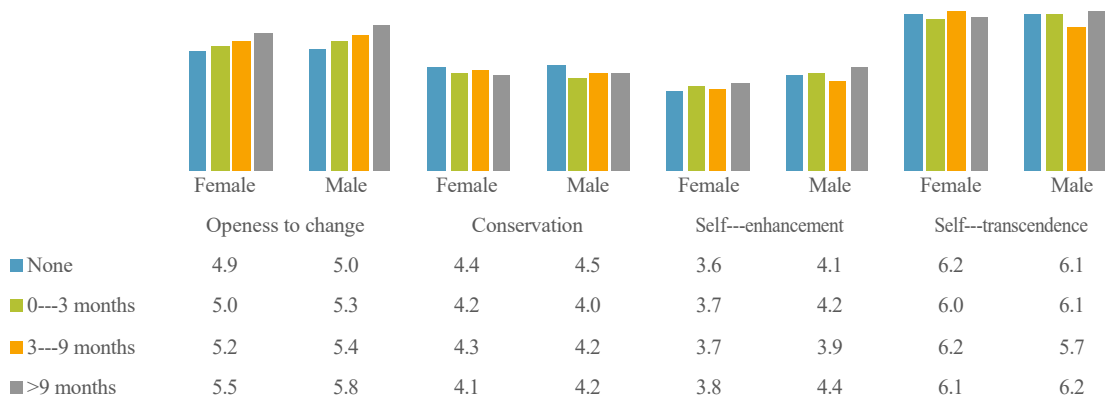
Dimension	Description	Main adjectives
<b>Openness to change</b>	Self-direction, stimulation, hedonism	Creative, open-minded, explorer, novelty, energetic, active, lively, improvement, updating, efficiency, self- challenging, daring, proactive.
<b>Conservation</b>	Conformity, tradition, security	Stability, restraint to change, obedient, follower, retroactive, conventional, methodical, habit, routine, disciplined, diligent, preservative.
<b>Self-Enhancement</b>	Achievement, power, hedonism	Gratified, personal success, competent, dominant, ambitious, leader, controller, goal-focused, convincing, decisive, influencing, bossy, superiority, prestige.
<b>Self-Transcendence</b>	Universalism, benevolence	Caring, fair, tolerant, empathetic, understanding, appreciative, protective, teamwork, loyal, honest, person you can trust, grateful.

Interview Questions	Values
1. How would you describe yourself as an employee?	All
2. If you feel comfortable in your workplace and your employer mentions that they are planning to have a small change in the daily procedures, do you feel open to the new situation or prefer to continue as before?	Openness to change / Conservation
3. How do you like decisions to be made when you are working within a team?	Self-Transcendence /Self-Enhancement
4. Where do you feel more comfortable: Performing a job where you have similar daily tasks or a job that often involves doing new tasks?	Openness to change / Conservation
5. Do you consider it is important to understand your team's needs in order to have a good work environment, even though this means that it takes longer to achieve goals?	Self-Transcendence / Self-Enhancement
6. You realize that in your company there is a systematic unfair treatment towards other employees: How would you endure this situation?	Self-Transcendence / Self-Enhancement
7. In your opinion, what do you think is the maximum time to be in the same company? And in the same position?	Openness to change / Conservation
8. Is it important for you that your company has recognition activities and programmes for employees? You as a leader, how would you recognize or congratulate your employees?	Self-Transcendence / Self-Enhancement

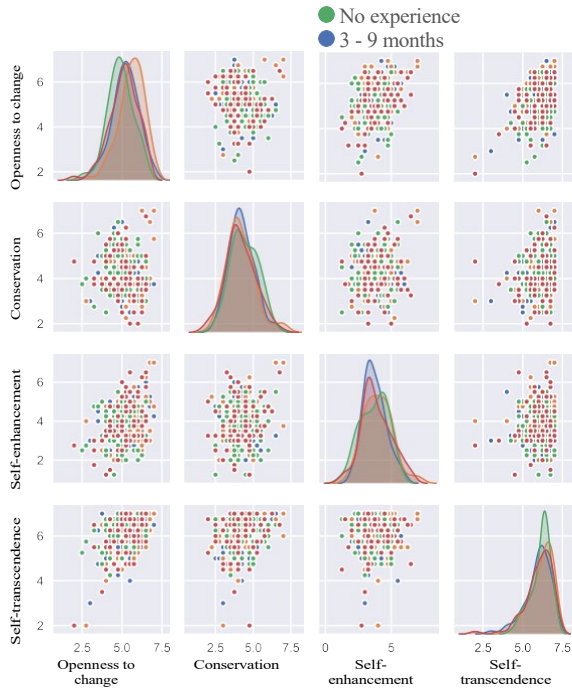


N	Openness to change		Conservation		Self-enhancement		Self-transcendence	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Mean</b>	5.4	5.1	4.2	4.3	4.2	3.7	6.1	6.1
<b>SD</b>	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0	0.8	0.8
<b>10</b>	4.3	4.0	3.3	3.0	3.0	2.5	4.8	5.0
<b>20</b>	4.6	4.5	3.5	3.5	3.3	3.0	5.5	5.5
<b>30</b>	5.0	4.8	3.8	3.8	3.5	3.3	5.8	5.8
<b>40</b>	5.3	5.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.3	6.2	6.0
<b>50</b>	5.5	5.3	4.0	4.1	4.3	3.6	6.3	6.3
<b>60</b>	5.5	5.3	4.3	4.5	4.5	4.0	6.5	6.3
<b>70</b>	5.8	5.5	4.5	4.8	4.8	4.3	6.5	6.5
<b>80</b>	6.3	6.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.5	6.8	6.8
<b>90</b>	6.5	6.3	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.0	6.8	7.0

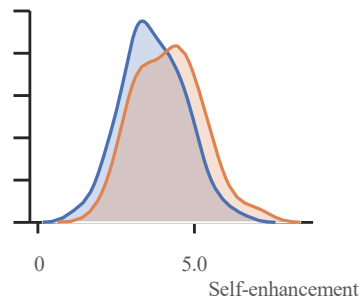
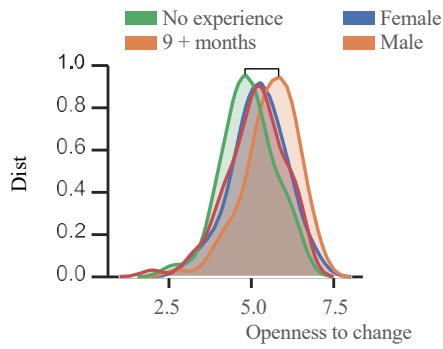
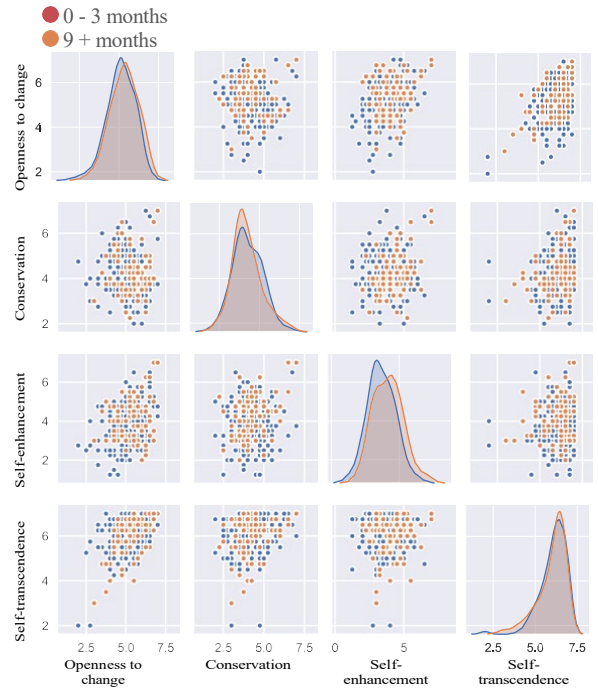
		Previous professional experience				
Gender	Academic year	None	0-3 months	3-9 months	>9 months	Total
Female	1	40	13	4		57
	2	18	27	8	4	57
	3	10	12	25	6	53
	4			8	35	43
<b>Female Total</b>		<b>68</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>210</b>
Male	1	11	5		4	20
	2	5	14	3	1	23
	3	4	2	10	6	22
	4			3	15	18
<b>Male Total</b>		<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Students' Total</b>		<b>88</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>293</b>

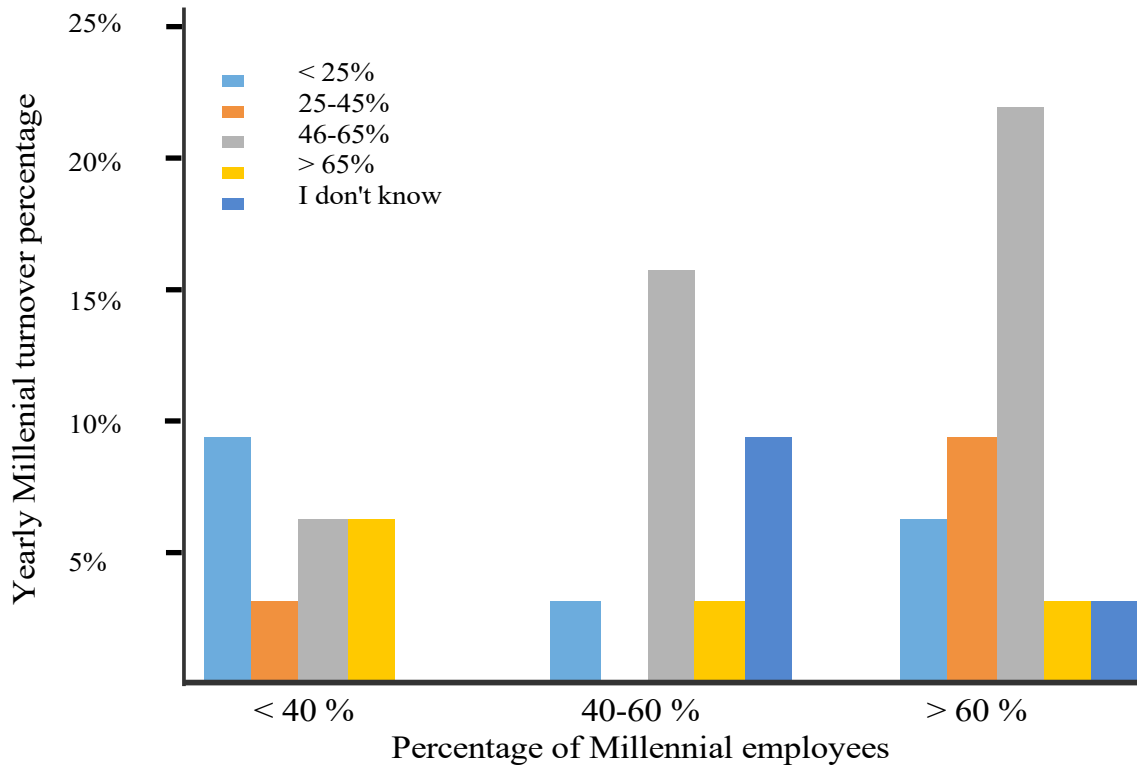


**Experience**



**Gender**





Variables	Answers of HR professionals
<b>Most demanded attributes</b>	Achievement, active, ambitious, appreciative, benevolence, bossy, caring, competent, conformity, controller, conventional, convincing, creative, daring, decisive, diligent, disciplined, dominant, efficient, empathetic, energetic, explorer, fair, follower, goal-focused, grateful, gratified, habit, hedonist, honest, improvement, influencer, leader, lively, loyal, methodical, novelty, obedient, open-minded, personal success, powerful, preservative, prestige, proactive, protective, restraint to change, retroactive, routine, security, self-challenging, self-directed, stability, stimulation, superiority, teamwork, tolerant, traditional, trustful, understanding, universalism, updating.
<b>Main retention challenges</b>	Constant feedback, do not understand the nature of the hospitality industry, get bored easily, lack of flexibility, need to progress quickly and have promotions, not loyal, not proactive.
<b>Current actions to deal with turnover</b>	Career development plans, explain the nature of the hospitality industry, mentoring programs, more flexibility, nothing, promotions, provide feedback, recognition programs, social events, training.
<b>Most valued initiatives by Millennials</b>	Feedback, promotions, social events, they value nothing, training.
<b>New initiatives to deal with turnover</b>	Development programs, flexibility, Millennial focus groups, nothing, social events, technological development.
<b>Initiatives to deal with turnover with unlimited resources</b>	Creation of strong brand to attract and retain Millennials, more development opportunities, more employee benefits, nothing, open-minded executive team, technology, training according to their needs, work-life balance.

Variables		<25%	25%- 45%	46%-65%	>65%	I don't know
<b>Top attributes</b>	Teamwork	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
	Honesty	2 <sup>nd</sup>				2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Proactivity	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>
	Empathy		3 <sup>rd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	
<b>Main retention challenges</b>	Progress quickly	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>
	Constant feedback	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>		2 <sup>nd</sup>	
	Lack of flexibility	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Not loyal			2 <sup>nd</sup>		3 <sup>rd</sup>
<b>Current actions to deal with turnover</b>	Explain industry nature		•			
	Promotions		•	•		•
	Provide feedback	•			•	
	Recognition programmes	•			•	•
	Training	•	•	•	•	
<b>The most valued initiatives by Millennials</b>	Feedback				•	
	Promotions					•
	Training	•	•	•		
<b>New initiatives to deal with turnover</b>	Development programmes	•				
	Social events	•				
<b>Initiatives to deal with turnover with unlimited resources</b>	More development opportunities	•		•		•
	More employee benefits	•		•	•	•
	Open-minded executive team	•				
	Training according to their needs		•	•	•	•