

SPECIALISTS OF FUTURE: POST-PANDEMIC PROFILE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF PSYCHOLINGUISTICS

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The paper addresses the possibility of mindset transformation of the specialists of future within the framework of COVID-19 pandemic. The psycholinguistic research conducted among university students, allows to see the post-pandemic labor market and employment expectations through the eyes of Generation Z. The obtained information is used to create a comprehensive representation of new human resources and check their readiness for revealing professional potential in the challenging digital environment. The specialists of future reveal their attitude towards the trend of telecommuting and speculate on the personality and the value system changes that employees can endure due to the relocation online.

Keywords: *psycholinguistics, mental representation, employment, specialists of future, digitalization of workplace, telecommuting, post-pandemic, Generation Z.*

1. Introduction

As mankind knows, disasters and crises have a huge impact on all the aspects of human life and professional activity, which cannot but affect the mindset: from thinking patterns to behavior, from individual settings to cultural processes taking place in the society. Currently, the society is experiencing a pandemic, the consequences and impact of which are to the same extent dramatic, still not identical for different groups of the population. Exposure is found in the environment as well as in the cognitive processes of perception, representation, memory, imagination, and thought structuring. The same framework allows variation on the individual level but also generates tendencies in life spheres on the group level.

The recent outbreak of COVID-19 has posed an unprecedented challenge to society as a whole, and to various organizations in particular, forcing them to reconsider the approach to management, all the working processes and routines in order to balance the interests of all the parties and not to go bankrupt. Such a state of affairs is certainly a great test, forcing unprecedented inevitable

transformations of socio-psychological, physical, procedural, technical and legal character. The basic obvious concepts have become blurred. The pandemic has erased the boundaries between home and workplace. Within the context many working people have irrevocably changed their views, understanding and nature of working practices. The employers and employees have faced the necessity of digitalization and telecommuting. Individuals have got some time for introspection, a chance to consider the advantages and disadvantages of this alternative format and an opportunity to make the final choice.

The working part of population has to deal with the circumstances and either to adjust to the changing character of labor market or to remain in a vulnerable position of anticipation. What excites a real interest is the situation with the younger generation, the future of the labor market. It was decided to find out the traits of post-pandemic mindset of the specialists of future. The aim of the study was to capture the possible changes in professional aspirations and preferences of the target group by accessing their mental lexicon using the methods of psycholinguistics.

Nowadays only joint efforts and interdisciplinary research allow to tackle problems effectively, especially the ones that emerge across countries, cultures and realities (real and digital) where unpredictable events enforce inevitable changes and erase the boundaries between the conventionally separate life spheres. In this case psycholinguistics can aid the field of human resources providing verified data that can be used as a foundation of the evolving labor market.

2. Methodology

Science is always sensitive to any changes in the society, especially global ones. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented phenomenon which has affected all the life spheres of all the nations globally. Even before the pandemic the sphere of employment was anticipating meaningful transformations. During COVID-19 period and in the post-pandemic time far more issues emerged and occupied the minds of those responsible for the area. The tendencies and prospects of labor market, standing at the edge, aspired and still aspire the interest of scientists [Ice et al. 2021; Karácsony et al. 2020; Suvalova et al. 2021]. The impact of digitalization on all the levels of labor relations, both from the sides of employer and employees has been considered as well. Scientists highlight the need and suggest some ways to adjust, augment, modify the working environment, the management system and the company structure, to develop quick adaptability to market changes, to work out effective ways of dealing with digital natives entering the labor market, to create a suitable media for coexistence of different generations on the labor market, to maintain and improve overall workers' well-being [Bucoveţchi et al. 2019; Hodder 2020; Ice et al. 2021; Karácsony et al. 2020; Nieuwenhuis, Yerkes

2021; Ruzsa 2018; Snieska et al. 2020; Suvalova et al. 2021; Vilaplana, Stein 2020; Vladimirov et al. 2021].

This research precisely focuses on the target group of Generation Z and addresses the issue of COVID-19 influence on the minds and habits of these individuals which has immediate manifestation in their views, expectations and preferences referring the upcoming employment. The paper considers the issue from a psycholinguistic perspective [Lebedeva et al. 2021].

Generation Z, individuals of up to 24 [Dimock [http](#)], is next in line to take work places and fill the labor market. The specialists of future are different and are likely not just to fill in the gaps left by the predecessors but to become a reflection of the modern era processes as they grow and develop in this environment. The human resources of Generation Z can safely enter the labor market and moreover even shape it.

To gain access to the post-pandemic mindset patterns of Generation Z it was decided to conduct a research among university students. The procedure comprised a directed associative experiment and a questionnaire that were combined to provoke the targeted mental representations. The participants of the study, 98 males and females of different majors, represent two different Moscow universities – the State University of Management and the Russian State Social University. The age of all the involved students is within the limits that is proved by the questionnaire. To obtain reliable data it was checked that all the recipients had witnessed the COVID-19 pandemic and had had the experience of online education.

The associative experiment encouraged the participants to characterize the specialist of future using all the verbal means available. The obtained associations were to create a rough description. The initial profile was to be specified and completed by means of the questionnaire data.

The survey was carried out on the platform FreeOnlineSurveys [FreeOnlineSurveys [http](#)]. The questionnaire included 15 questions, some of which were accompanied by multiple choice answers. Except the age and gender details, the survey collected the following information:

- *The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced my understanding of the future profession: (yes, I have changed my views during/after/because of the pandemic; no)*
- *Your ideas about your future career/professional activity: (multiple choice)*
- *How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced your understanding of the future profession: (optional question)*
- *You feel successful in your job/profession/career when/if: (multiple choice)*
- *Your ideal working conditions: (multiple choice)*
- *Your ideal boss/employer: (multiple choice)*
- *Digital technologies in professional activities: (multiple choice)*
- *Is communication important for your future professional activities? (yes; no)*

- *Do you enjoy team work? (yes; no)*
- *Is online communication the same effective as live communication for professional purposes? (yes; no)*
- *What are the advantages of remote work or telecommuting? (personal response)*
- *What new professional habits have you developed due to the pandemic? (personal response)*
- *Can remote work or telecommuting influence the personality and the value system of employees? How? (personal response)*

3. Results and Discussion

The pandemic has not passed yet but has already left an imprint on the lives and in the minds of many. The carried out associative experiment and survey have given some insight into the profession-related post-pandemic mindset of specialists of future. The results of the associative experiment and the survey are consistent. Therefore, the emphasis will be placed on the questionnaire providing a more profound knowledge.

According to the responses, just 28% of the participants note some change of views during/after/because of the pandemic, while 72% see no difference. The supporting data can be observed in Table 1. The majority of the respondents still have the same understanding of the future profession. They still want to work in their speciality. However, the future job should, first of all, bring pleasure.

It should be noted that Generation Z does not mind to work online, they see the advantages of telecommuting. Many participants have a reasonable approach and feel the need to become flexible specialists who will always be in demand. Some respondents plan/want to work in the currently trendy spheres – SMM and blogging.

Table 1. Responses to the question “Your ideas about your future career/professional activity”

59%	The most important thing – is to like and enjoy the job.
41%	I’ll work in my speciality.
35%	I want to work remotely/online (any type of telecommuting) as it’s comfortable.
28%	I will not concentrate on just one profession. It is important for the modern labor market to be flexible. Continuous professional development and self-development are the main competitive advantages.
15%	I’ll not work in my speciality, as there are easier but more profitable ways of earning money which don’t require any degree.
13%	The type of work doesn’t matter. High salary is important.
11%	I want to work in SMM (Social Media Marketing).
9%	I want to become a blogger or an influencer. It’s modern, cool, profitable, prospective in the long run.
4%	I’ll not work in my speciality, as it’s not that much in demand nowadays. I just need some degree.
4%	I haven’t thought about it yet.

The students who do identify some impact of the pandemic realize the current trends as well as all the upcoming challenges and prospects. These young people are ready to accept the rapidly changing reality and become its part.

They provided the following responses: *My profession is changing fast; My profession has become even more popular; Now specialist of my field mostly work remotely and I consider my job in future will be always online; It should be easy to go online; Future professions must be adaptive and flexible to keep strengths of a company and me as a worker; It's important to be a specialist in different areas; I started to learn more about remote work; I understood there will be more variations of working at home; It has shown me that I can work from home; I've realized that I need more knowledge; I should world as a self-employed person; The pandemic has shown many ways to optimize the work to have it done quicker; Internet is our future; I understood the value of having computer skills like capability to work in excel and etc. And I think that the future belongs to computers; Specialists should have good time management skills; etc.*

The ideal working conditions for the majority – remote work from home or telecommuting (Table 2). Just 26% still prefer face-to-face interaction over digital one. Nevertheless, 67% enjoy teamwork, 33% – do not. 93% highlight the importance of communication for their future professional activities. They are still for interpersonal interaction but now prefer a digital format which has become quite usual and lets individuals remain within one's comfort zone. Even though 57% emphasize that live communication is more effective for professional purposes.

Having tried and enjoyed the remote format with all its perks, the majority of the participants of the survey are no longer willing to endure any hardships in future. The set of personal and professional values is changing. Live communication is not a very big sacrifice in favor of multidimensional comfort. The feeling of freedom is also appealing. One can stay at home if the conditions allow or find another cozy suitable location. On the one hand the employees are at work place, on the other hand – out of reach.

Table 2. Responses to the question “Your ideal working conditions”

50%	remote work or telecommuting, probably from home (solves a number of problems especially in a big city)
26%	remote work from home is perfect if the living conditions allow
26%	remote work but not from home (it's psychologically difficult to locate all the life spheres in one place)
26%	office work among people, team work, the opportunity of face-to-face interaction you're your colleagues and the boss

The desire of freedom and independence is proved by the following data (Table 3). 52% of respondents want to be self-employed and some of them are not afraid to take responsibility. The majority of those who admit a possibility of having a boss prefer the format of subordination to be democratic which means less pressure and stress. 13% also admit another advantage of remote work – no need of constant face-to-face interaction with the boss.

Overall attitude to digital technologies in professional activities is positive. 83% of the respondents cannot imagine their work without digital technologies as they are really useful and helpful. 15% have got really tired of them due to the pandemic experience, they are still associated with discomfort. 11% don't like digital technologies, try to avoid them, prefer to work with people and enjoy live face-to-face communication.

Table 3. Responses to the question “Your ideal boss/employer”

52%	I want to be self-employed (freedom of action and decision-making rights)
46%	democratic management style (...)
15%	liberal management style (...)
13%	authoritarian management style (...)
13%	the boss who I don't contact in person as you work remotely (the control is not very strict, less psychological pressure)

The feeling of professional success can be achieved by the representatives of Generation Z in the following ways (Table 4). 67% of the respondents are self-centered. Self-satisfaction is the essential component. For 54% the rewarding work is the one, the results of which may be useful or applicable. It implies that the specialists of future may tend not just to earn money fulfilling duties, but are likely to aim at creating something worth. Constant professional development is essential and it should be rewarded by the employer. Popularity and public recognition also take place (20%). It can be especially vital for those who choose the dream jobs of bloggers and digital influencers whose persuasive content is mostly targeted and useful.

Table 4. Responses to the question “You feel successful in your job/profession/career when/if”

67%	you are satisfied with your results
54%	the results of your work may be useful or applicable
50%	you develop professionally and get a deserved promotion
28%	your boss recognizes and appreciates your results, you get some benefits for good performance
20%	you are popular and you feel public recognition
15%	you have authority to act and decision-making rights
9%	you have no responsibility and decision-making duties
4%	people envy your results/success

Can remote work or telecommuting influence the personality and the value system of employees? Some participants are sure of that, others –

disagree.

Some think that it all depends on people. Those who do see the difference in the formats suggest the following changes (they've mixed the considered issue and the description of pros/cons of telecommuting, still the results are comprehensible and add to the subsequent question):

- positive changes: *increased productivity; adaptability to new conditions and changes; employers start to value employees more; gives an opportunity to prove oneself as a reliable employee and improve the relationship with the boss; remote work will allow people to cope with both work and personal issues faster; work from home can help to achieve enhanced efficiency and high speed of performance; more psychological freedom and privacy for employees; remote work is more convenient for introverts; flexible schedule; staying at home with fixed work hours and no need to spend many hours commuting to work is way more appealing; working processes become simpler; the value system can even become stronger as many people are having the same experiences;*
- negative changes: *people will cease to be in the system, discipline will be violated; a lot of people will want to have lack of discipline and exactingness, and freedom of action and decision-making rights; people can get lazy or less motivated; remote work is harder to control and concentrate on; the decrease in the value of live communication; people can become more nervous because of the frequent usage of PCs and phones;*
- controversial: *remote work can change the priorities in employees' lives, rearrange their daily routine.*

Some participants of the survey think that *"We just need to get rid of the quarantine because IT influences our personalities"*, *"It's not worth to work online constantly because employees should be capable of communicating with clients face-to-face, or employees will be at a loss when such a situation takes place"*, *"Employees working face-to-face still have more values"*.

The list of advantages of remote work or telecommuting may argue in its favor: *comfort; less stress; less commuter stress, money savings; more free time; flexible schedule; more time for self-development and for the second job; you are self-dependent and can work from all over the world in a comfortable environment; gives more freedom of different kind; the opportunity to feel free and work more efficiently; no distractions, less people; no need to interact with people face-to-face (especially in the pandemic circumstances); remote work minimizes interaction with the authorities and allows to do household chores; all the communication and paperwork is sped up.*

Only one respondent provided the answer *"Not too many advantages"*.

It was also interesting to learn, what new professional habits the respondents have developed due to the pandemic. It turns out that the pandemic has had some positive effects and has forced the Generation Z to develop the skills which can be useful in personal as well as in the future professional life. This is the list: *I developed useful skills of time-management and read more than*

5 books on psychology and became closer to myself; Proper daily routine and good time management; Excellent time management; Discipline; Task calendar; Patience, flexibility; I can work without breaks more than 5 hours; Take breaks between work steps; Do the work in your own time, work hard to achieve the goal; Now I have become faster to work at the computer. I can handle several tasks; Using computer; Work online; Distribution of responsibilities; To wake up and start my to-do list right away; Fast typing speed, new skills in using some apps; Bring my notebook everywhere; Finding all the needed information a lot faster. Also, better understanding the undertones of someone's voice; I've started checking my phone more frequently; I tried myself in the photo and video making; Watch movies without subtitles; I've improved my make-up skills; I can eat while I work; I still develop it, etc.

The findings appear to be relevant since the issue under consideration is of great interest and importance and it has not been properly addressed within the framework of psycholinguistics as well as from the interdisciplinary perspective. The obtained information is to complement the multiple studies in the field of human resources.

4. Conclusion

The study of the transformation of thinking in the context of social upheavals and disasters is important in itself, since it allows to build a cognitive map of a person's social and personal consciousness, determine the hierarchy of values that have the greatest significance for people, and identify the level of cognitive complexity of their ideas. Such studies are important today in the context of the practical search for values and meanings as the basis for the formation of a national state identity of a person. In such turbulent times it is urgent to analyze the current state of affairs to draw some conclusions and to take a look into future to consider the possible prospects.

The research findings allow us to create a composite image of specialists of future who are to dominate the labor market within a short while. Investigating the mindset of Generation Z through their mental representations, we have figured out and made sure that these young people are ready to face the challenges of the new era. The obtained statistics shows that they are not going to confront the modern trends and changes. The specialists of future will naturally and harmoniously coexist with the innovations of the digital times as they were born and brought up in this environment. They are on friendly terms with digital technologies and consider these technological advances to be an essential part and a necessary aid in professional practices.

The COVID-19 pandemic has collided two realities: the real and the digital one. The former due to objective reasons has given way to the latter one. It was a tough rehearsal which revealed the areas of concern and showed the world an alternative way which is about to substitute the routines we are accustomed to. The pandemic has influenced the professional aspirations of

Generation Z but only of those representatives who were still in confusion. The rest, the majority, have become assured of their views. These human resources will focus on professional flexibility and the development of soft skills that will allow them to have a constant competitive advantage and choose the desirable job. They will first of all rely on introspection, the professional success for many of them equals personal satisfaction with the results which they wish to make useful and applicable. Such tendencies encourage hope in the upcoming generation of human resources.

The number of advantages mentioned in the section Results and Discussion shows the origins of motivation for remote work. The specialists of future understand that digital technologies together with telecommuting represent our future and they are willing to make use of it. Moreover, work from home has started gaining popularity. This tendency has a potential to grow. Generation Z does not underestimate the importance of life communication and its efficiency in work practices, still digitalization allows to do the same but in a distant more comfortable format. Some young people even enjoy online teamwork.

The specialists of future prefer to be independent, sometimes – self-employed. Those who do not mind some kind of management expect it to be democratic. They do not want to work under pressure and live in stress.

The pandemic has had a positive impact as well. Attention should be paid to the skills and habits developed under the influence of lockdowns which resulted in digitalization of the environment and basic routines, the newly-emerged digitally-conditioned freedoms and responsibilities. The correct mindset together with profound knowledge and useful skills can allow the specialists of future to achieve success and not to get lost in the upcoming versatile reality.

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