

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Master's degree in
Management from the Nova School of Business and Economics.

Elevating the Employer Brand: A Quantitative Investigation into the Impact of Cultural
Intelligence on Employer Attractiveness

Measuring the Impact of Sociodemographic Factors on Employer Attributes

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Abstract

Considering today's increasingly globalized and culturally diverse job market, this thesis investigates the role of cultural intelligence (CQ) in shaping employer attractiveness. Addressing the unexplored linkage between CQ and employer appeal, the study initially establishes a foundation linking CQ and employer attractiveness. Employing a quantitative survey, it examines the influence of sociodemographic factors on CQ levels, preferences for employer attributes, and their interrelation. The findings provide crucial insights for companies aiming to enhance employer branding, revealing the significant impact of CQ on attracting and retaining a culturally adept workforce.

Key Words

Cultural Intelligence, Intercultural Competence, Employer Branding, Employer

Attractiveness, Employer Attributes, Generation Z, Human Resource Management

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List of Abbreviations

AV	Application Value
CLT	Central Limit Theorem
CQ	Cultural Intelligence
DV	Development Value
EQ	Emotional Intelligence
EV	Economic Value
EB	Employer Brand(ing)
EmpAt	Employer Attractiveness
EVP	Employer Value Proposition
Gen	Generation
IE	International Experience
IV	Interest Value
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SLT	Social Learning Theory
SV	Social Value
WE	Work Experience
WLB	Work-life balance
WLBV	Work-life balance Value

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1. Introduction

The labor market is undergoing a transformative shift characterized by increasing labour shortages across various sectors and skill levels, a trend that is expected to increase in the following years (Veettil 2016). As the global talent shortage reaches record heights, with 77% of companies worldwide struggling to fill positions in 2023 – a sharp increase from 35% in 2013 – the challenge of attracting and retaining talent intensifies (ManpowerGroup 2023).

Several factors are driving this shortage, including generational shifts. As Baby Boomers approach retirement, Generation Z begins their professional journey and is expected to represent 30% of the workforce by 2030 (Kumar 2023). With this shift come new expectations towards employers as each generation, from Baby Boomers to Generation Z, holds unique values and perspectives (Leslie et al. 2021). These expectations highlight the importance of developing a successful employer brand as it is essential for achieving competitive advantages and retaining top talent, in navigating the “war for talent”.

Simultaneously, the business landscape is being reshaped by globalization, which has led to internationally growing companies where cultural diversity and intercultural exchange are increasingly important. This diversity fosters creative outputs but also poses the risk of cultural conflicts. Companies and their workforce face difficulties managing a foreign environment of cultures, customs, and economic systems (Adamczyk, 2017). Cultural intelligence (CQ) has been identified as a critical skill enabling individuals to thrive in culturally diverse contexts. Studies by Ang et al. (2007) and Ang and Van Dyne (2008) have established CQ as a predictor of adaptive outcomes in multicultural environments.

The present thesis aims to analyze these developments by examining the influence of CQ on employer attractiveness and identifying the attributes that potential employees prioritize. By investigating the previously unexplored relationship between CQ and employer choice, this

research provides valuable insights for organizations striving to secure a workforce capable of navigating an international, culturally diverse workplace – an increasingly crucial skill for future success.

Thus, this work aims to answer the research question: “How does the level of cultural intelligence (CQ) impact the importance ranking of employer attributes?” To address the research question, the following research objectives are considered:

- How are sociodemographic elements related to the level of CQ?
- How are sociodemographic elements related to employer attractiveness?
- How are the CQ dimensions related to the importance ascribed to certain employer attributes?

The present work is divided into three parts; initially, a foundation is established with a literature review, followed by the methodological section of the work, where the results of the three research objectives are evaluated and analyzed separately. Figure 1 illustrates the research design.

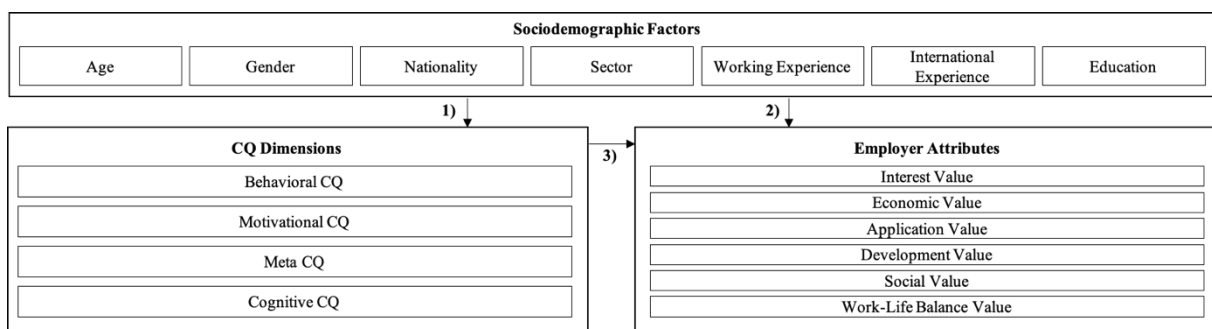


Figure 1: Research Design (Own Illustration)

Based on the novel insights of the previous steps, implications for research and practice are discussed. Furthermore, limitations are pointed out, and finally, a short outlook on prospects for future research is drawn up.

2. Literature Review

Given that our research question touches upon cultural intelligence, employer branding, and employer attractiveness, this chapter is organized as follows. First, we review the literature on cultural intelligence, including previous empirical findings. Second, we introduce key employer branding concepts and present previous empirical studies. Drawing on existing literature, we formulate hypotheses to be tested.

2.1 Cultural Intelligence Literature

Differences in people's behaviors and ways of thinking are commonly influenced by socially acquired norms, values, and attitudes. These attitudes and ways of thinking can cause confusion, astonishment, or even incomprehension to someone unfamiliar with them (Doser 2012), leading to conflict and interpersonal misunderstandings (Early and Ang 2003). In today's globalized world, where connections are no longer limited by geographical boundaries, interactions with people from diverse cultures have become an inevitable part of professional life. Organizations that are expanding their operations across borders need to navigate a challenging environment of foreign cultures, economic practices, and social systems. Additionally, their management faces the complexities of interdisciplinary tasks, job transitions, and remote work (Earley and Mosakowski 2004). Having a broad knowledge of cultural facets is, therefore, crucial to thrive in a global environment (Doser 2012).

2.1.1 The Concept of Cultural Intelligence

About Culture. Culture is a commonly used concept in society as well as social sciences. As frequently as it is utilized, as many different areas of application it has. In a broader, more general sense, culture can be described as the entirety of preconditions for social action, created by people themselves and acquired through socialization, such as ways of living, standardization of thought and action, or set of values and norms. (Nünning 2009)

Scholars have identified that this general definition ignores the connection between the cultural environment and behavior and, therefore, lacks applicability in the context of cultural interactions. Cognitive theory overcomes this shortcoming of relying solely on cultural dimensions to explain variations in behavior. It proposes that variances in cognitive structures are the primary drivers of culturally diverse behavior. This conceptual shift has fostered the idea that, beyond cultural knowledge, there may be a more extensive development of cognitive structures, which in turn influences cultural competencies (Thomas et al. 2015). According to Early and Ang (2004), the conceptualization of cultural intelligence best captures this idea.

About Intelligence. For many decades, research on intelligence solely concentrated on an individual's cognitive abilities (the ability to learn) measured by abstract academic tasks (Gardner 2008). Since then, it has been suggested that intelligence comprehends more than simply cognition but also mental functioning. (Early and Ang 2003). Sternberg (2019) describes being intelligent as the ability to adjust to, and shape an environment, also explained as a system of interacting skills. Subsequently, a multitude of intelligences have been explored and conceptualized based on this idea, for example, social intelligence, emotional intelligence, physical intelligence, personal intelligence, and so forth (Sternberg 2019).

Social and emotional intelligence (EQ) have been discussed the most in trying to understand differences in people's adaptability to new cultures. Socially intelligent people can navigate social situations effectively by understanding others' behavior and adapting to it through empathy, interpersonal communication, and the recognition of social cues (Kihlstrom and Cantor 2000; Thorndike and Stein 1937). EQ is someone's ability to recognize and comprehend the emotional well-being of others, while understanding and regulating their own emotions. It comprises self-awareness, empathy, as well as being able to grasp and communicate emotions (Mayer and Salovey 1997).

Despite an increasing interest in intelligence research, social and emotional intelligence still overlook cultural context by focusing solely on the general ability to identify and regulate emotions (Ang and Van Dyne 2008). According to Early and Ang (2003), society's environment and cultural values define what is considered intelligent behavior, showing that different cultures have different definitions of intelligence. Therefore, emotional, and social intelligence are culture-bound, and being emotionally (socially) intelligent in one culture does not ensure the same level of intelligence in a different cultural context.

Thus, an individual who thrives for effective cross-cultural interactions needs to re-interpret confrontations and its dynamics and thoroughly adjust behavior and responses for each culturally new encounter (Ang and Van Dyne 2008). This need has brought about the conceptualization of cultural intelligence, established by Early and Ang (2003).

About Cultural Intelligence. In their work, Early & Ang (2003) touch upon the topic of the function of cultural intelligence to answer the question of why people differ significantly in their ability to adapt to new cultural environments. The main argument is that an individual's ability to perceive, analyze, and react to different cues allows them to operate efficiently in different cultural settings. These capabilities fall under a separate category of social intelligence. Thus, CQ has its origin in social intelligence and emotional intelligence. However, it goes a step further by providing individuals with the ability to identify culturally distinctive behaviors and differentiate them from those unique to individuals and those familiar to all humans (Early and Ang 2003).

Cultural intelligence is defined as a reflection of someone's capacity to familiarize themselves with unfamiliar cultural environments by effectively interacting with people from different backgrounds (Early and Ang 2003). Thomas et al. (2008) describe cultural intelligence as someone's capacity to adjust to, choose from, and influence the cultural facets of their

surroundings. They portray this concept as a blend of knowledge and skills supported by cultural metacognition.

As this research paper makes use of the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS), which is based on the framework of Early and Ang (2003), we will confine our discussions to the model and the definition of cultural intelligence established by Early and Ang (2003).

2.1.2 CQ Framework

Derived from their definition, Early and Ang (2003) developed a conceptual framework based on Sternberg's and Detterman's (1986) framework theory of multi-loci of intelligence that helps assess and apply CQ to intercultural interactions. The framework examines four complementary yet qualitatively different dimensions of a person's cultural intelligence: motivational, cognition, metacognition, and behavior (Figure 2). The four dimensions are represented by four skills, which, according to Van Dyne, Ang, and Livermore (2010), should all be present for effective leadership and maximization of cultural intelligence: CQ Drive, CQ Knowledge, CQ Strategy, and CQ Action.

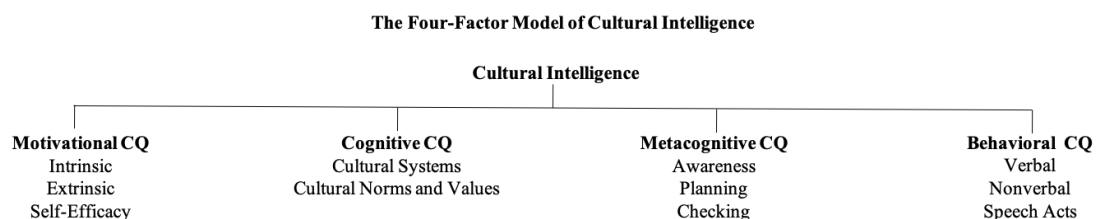


Figure 2: The Four Factor Model (Van Dyne, Ang, and Livermore 2010, p. 134)

Motivation is someone's drive, effort, and desire to learn about cultural settings, engage others in those settings, and adapt to unfamiliar environments. The more confident one is about their capability to adjust appropriately to unfamiliar multicultural settings, the stronger the adaptation efforts.

Cognition is the knowledge dimension of CQ. It involves an individual's skill in understanding cultural dimensions, grasping the impact of cross-cultural interactions, and applying these

insights to shape their thoughts and actions. A crucial part is comprehending cultural systems and different societies' associated cultural norms and values.

Metacognition refers to people's strategy and processes to gather knowledge, modify it and revise that knowledge to function effectively in culturally complex contexts. This includes being aware of one's surroundings, planning for intercultural interactions, and monitoring one's expectations during the experience, bridging the gap between understanding and navigating cultural differences effectively.

Behavior describes someone's aptitude to respond appropriately and efficiently in cross-cultural interactions, both verbal and nonverbal. A person with a high CQ action understands when and how to modify behaviors for effective cross-cultural interactions (Van Dyne, Soen, and Livermore 2010).

Ang and Van Dyne (2008) suggest thinking about the dimensions as a four-step model, with motivational CQ being the first step and behavioral CQ being the last step.

A high level of CQ relates to several benefits. People with a high cultural intelligence often find themselves better equipped to thrive in multicultural settings, showing an enhanced resilience and ability to handle uncertain and complex demands in multicultural settings. A high level of CQ can create trust, which facilitates creative teamwork, information and idea sharing, and boosts overall performance (Azevedo 2018).

From an organizational perspective, having employees with a high CQ has various advantages. For instance, enhanced team collaboration, innovative problem-solving, and increased negotiation efficiency. These components drive profitability and smoother expansion into international markets. Furthermore, organizations can adjust their services more effectively to the specific needs of diverse customer groups (Azevedo 2018).

2.1.3 Empirical Studies on the Relationship between Sociodemographic Factors and CQ

Factors like personal interest or international experience can influence the growth of cultural intelligence and its *dimensions* (Best and Williams 2019). Thus, it is difficult to determine which dimension is generally the most developed. However, based on the nature of each dimension, we can hypothesize on some general trends. Motivational CQ “only” involves drive and general curiosity in engaging with different cultures, which requires less specialized knowledge and education, as is needed for cognitive CQ. The latter includes knowledge about the history, values and norms of a culture (Van Dyne, Soon and Livermore 2010). Therefore, motivational CQ might be more commonly developed than cognitive CQ. Behavioral and metacognitive CQ go a step further as they comprise skills that are likely to develop with exposure to and experience in multicultural environments (Pogosyan 2022). Based on this theorization and Ang and Van Dyne’s (2008) suggestion to think about the four dimensions as a four-step model, we expect to find:

H1: Motivational CQ is more strongly developed than the remaining CQ dimensions.

Research on the interconnection between *gender* and CQ is ambiguous. While some studies present males with higher means in cultural intelligence (Sousa et al. 2019; Brancu, Munteanu, and Goleț 2016), most studies do not find statistically significant gender differences (Engle and Nehrt 2012; Mahasneh, Gazo, and Al-Adamat 2019; Ward et al. 2008).

Moving into general intelligence, scholars find differences in specific cognitive abilities, with some favoring males and some favoring females. However, no significant overall differences in terms of general intelligence are found (Ng, Bharti, and Faust 2020). Furthermore, cultural intelligence is a multifaceted concept that includes a range of abilities that are influenced by, e.g. personal experiences, educational level, and experience with different cultures - all of which are not gender bound. This indicates that cultural intelligence is an acquired skill and knowledge rather than an innate ability (Best and Williams 2019).

Thus, we expect to find that:

H2: There are no gender differences in the level of cultural intelligence.

Only a few studies have investigated the connection between cultural intelligence and age or generation. To get a glimpse into possible generational differences regarding levels of cultural intelligence, it might be helpful to look at the characteristics of the generations.

A study conducted with students from Germany, Romania, and Ukraine shows that Gen Z finds cross-cultural communication skills to be essential in both private and professional environments (Lifintsev, Fleşeriu, and Wellbrock 2019). They are willing to work in multicultural environments, acknowledging the significance of effective intercultural interactions in the present global and digital landscape (Lifintsev, Fleşeriu, and Wellbrock 2019). As younger generations (i.e., Generation Z), grew up with an implicitness of colliding cultures and frequent cross-cultural interactions, they might be equipped with more effective adaptation skills. Thus, it is expected that:

H3a: The younger the respondent, the higher the cultural intelligence level.

H3b: Younger generations have a higher cultural intelligence than older generations.

Additionally, *international exposure* and *intercultural contact* have been pointed out in several studies to have a positive impact on CQ (Engle and Crowne 2014; Gelfand, Imai, and Fehr 2008; Presbitero and Attar 2018). Regular social interaction across cultures appears to be an indicator of cultural intelligence (Lee et al. 2018). People who spend considerable time living and interacting with those from different cultures tend to develop higher levels of CQ (Kurpis and Hunter 2016).

Especially non-work experiences seem to be an indicator of high levels of cultural intelligence. McKay et al. (2022) assessed the cultural intelligence development of students from Australia and France during their semester-long exchange program. The results showed that exchange

enhanced all dimensions of cultural intelligence and that increases were seen throughout the duration of the exchange semester.

According to Tarique and Takeuchi (2008), the time (length) and number of trips positively affect the level of cultural intelligence. They argue that someone who has been exposed to various cultures has a broader range of exposure and can therefore grip cultural variations more effectively than someone who has only been exposed to the culture of a single country. Sternberg and Grigorenko (2006) have explored the development of tacit knowledge through experience. They conclude that tacit knowledge about cultural norms increases with the number of different experiences in other cultures. Therefore, we theorize that individuals with a greater breadth of experiences (meaning different kinds of international experiences) are culturally more experienced, leading to a higher CQ.

Thus, it is expected that:

H4a: Individuals who have been previously exposed to international experiences have higher levels of cultural intelligence.

H4b: International non-work experiences lead to a higher cultural intelligence than international work experiences.

H4c: For individuals with previous international experiences, greater scope and length of experience leads to higher levels of cultural intelligence.

2.2 Employer Branding and Employer Attractiveness Literature

Ambler and Barrow (1996, p. 187) introduced the concept of the employment brand as “the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company”. Similarly, the Conference Board (2001, p.13) suggests that the employer brand shapes the corporate identity and “(...) encompasses the firm’s value system, policies, and behaviors toward the objectives of attracting, motivating, and

retaining the firm's current and potential employees". These definitions imply that employer branding (EB) entails advocating a distinct and attractive perception of a company as an employer, both within the company and externally. This is further supported by Lievens and Slaughter (2016), who differentiate between external and internal employer brands and propose that the former align with the company's employer image, while the latter match the company's identity.

2.2.1 The Concept of Employer Branding

Employer Branding. As per Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), EB involves differentiating a company's characteristics as an employer from those of the competition and refers to the efforts taken to attract and retain the finest talents in the job market. It draws from the principles of human resources and brand marketing, sharing similarities with corporate culture, identity, internal marketing, and corporate reputation (Ambler and Barrow 1996).

Employer Branding Framework. To facilitate the understanding of the concept of employer branding, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) established a framework that illustrates how EB creates two values: employer brand associations and brand loyalty.

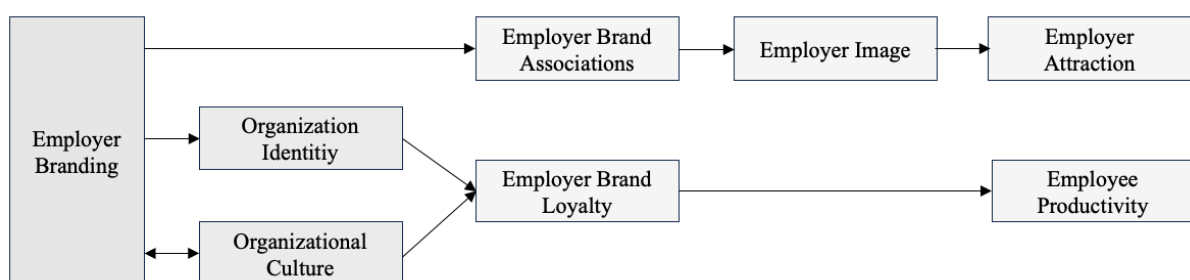


Figure 3: Employer Branding Framework (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, p. 505)

External employer brand associations shape the employer image and thus influence the organization's desirability to potential employees. The connection between the employer image and employer attraction can be explained by person-organization fit (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Studies in this field show that prospective applicants assess how well the employer's brand image corresponds to their needs, personality, and values. If the values of the organization

and those of the individual are strongly aligned, the perception of a company's attractiveness is likely to increase (Schneider 1987; Judge and Cable 1997).

Internally, EB influences an organization's identity and culture, with the latter, in turn, having a reciprocal effect on the employer brand. Employer brand loyalty corresponds to organizational commitment, reflecting the employee's sense of connection towards the organization as represented in its employer brand (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). According to Crewson (1997), organizational commitment increases the growth of identification with the organization. EB aims to exploit the connection between loyalty to the employer brand and employee productivity.

Employer Value Proposition. Lastly, one must distinguish between EB and employer value proposition (EVP). Graeme and Sinclair (2021) suggest that EVP summarizes the distinct array of valued benefits a company offers in exchange for the knowledge, skills, experience, and personal attitudes an individual contributes to a company. According to Evans, Pucik and Börkmann (2011), unlike the employer brand, which should be consistent, the EVP should vary by employee target group and geographic market, as attempting to attract everyone with a single value proposition is not feasible. An increasing number of companies are differentiating their EVPs based on the diverse needs of different generations (Bussin 2018). While there may be different EVPs, they should complement each other and communicate a consistent message, following joint values that are identifiable to the company (Näppä, Farshid and Foster 2014).

2.2.2 The Concept of Employer Attractiveness

A closely linked concept to employer branding is employer attractiveness. Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005, p. 151) describe employer attractiveness as “the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization”. Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005) propose that the construct can be seen as a predecessor to the broader concept of employer brand equity.

The greater the attractiveness of an employer to prospective hires, the higher the value of the company's employer brand. In EB, brand equity refers to how brand knowledge impacts potential and existing staff. It's the sought-after result of EB efforts.

In their study, Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005) identified that employer attractiveness is composed of five distinct values:

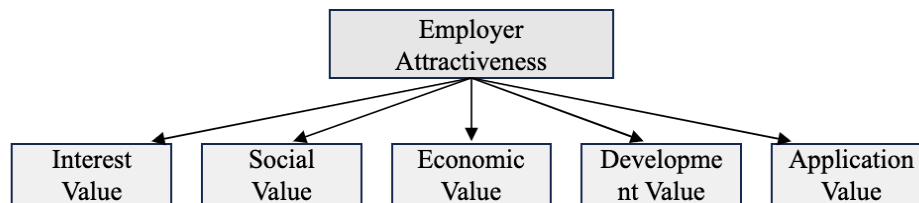


Figure 4: Employer Attractiveness Factor Model (Own Illustration)

The *interest value* relates to how the working environment is perceived as an exciting place to work, where employee creativity is used to create innovative and high-quality outcomes. The *social value* reflects the degree to which a person is drawn to a working environment that is fun, offers good relationships with team colleagues and supervisors as well as a good atmosphere within the team. The *economic value* captures the extent to which a candidate is captivated by an above-average salary, the compensation package, job security, and career opportunities. The *development value* investigates a person's attraction to an employer, providing recognition, self-esteem, confidence, and career-enhancing experience as well as a springboard to future employment. Finally, the factor *application value* refers to the attraction someone assigns to an institution that enables learning to be actively applied and taught to others while being a customer-oriented environment that takes ecological and social goals into account. Together, they form the base frame for the employer attractiveness (EmpAt) scale, which will be implemented in this work project's questionnaire design.

2.2.3 Empirical Studies on the Relationship between Sociodemographic Factors and Employer Attributes

Similar to our research objective, scholars have developed a large body of literature analyzing the relationship between certain sociodemographic factors and preferred employer attributes.

Gender is one of the most researched factors in this sphere. In their study, Samoliuk et al. (2022) discovered that irrespective of gender, the most crucial factors for the majority of respondents are salary size as well as opportunities for training and personal development. In contrast, a vast gender gap was identified for the criteria for flexible employment conditions, which prove to be much more important to women than to men (Samoliuk et al. 2022). Regardless, the three most crucial employer attributes to female participants seem to be career opportunities (1), salary size (2), and safe workplace (2), and for male participants, the company's reputation as an employer (1), salary size (1) and career opportunities (1). Thiranagama and Dileesha (2020) found that men are most drawn to the economic value (EV) of an employer, while women find social value (SV) more appealing and rate the development value (DV) as less crucial.

Baum and Kabst (2013) revealed that the primary factors influencing employer attractiveness include career and development opportunities, along with the working atmosphere. This is in line with Eger et al. (2019), who revealed that overall, the research participants placed the highest importance on social value (SV), followed by economic-development values. Further, women seem to value lower workloads and collegial working environments more highly, whereas men put a greater emphasis on career prospects and salary (Jost and Möser 2023). Despite the majority of research indicating significant gender differences, Bellou et al. (2015) found that both men and women ranked the same features as the highest priorities in an employer of choice. Based on the existing literature, we can assume that:

H5: Overall, SV, DV and EV are recognized as the most important employer attributes.

H6a: Preferences in employer attributes vary among genders.

H6b: Women rate WLBV significantly more important than men.

The influence of *age*, especially in terms of generational differences, is another widely analyzed relationship in the EB literature. In the vast majority of cases, scholars differentiate between Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964; Generation X, born during the period from 1965 and 1980; Generation Y, also known as Millennials, born between 1981 and 1995; and Generation Z, encompassing those born between 1996 and 2010 (Schnitzer, 2023). Every generation possesses unique overarching values, abilities, and personalities that shape their perspectives on the work environment. While Gen Y is the most investigated generation, literature on Gen Z is relatively scarce, a gap we intend to fill with this research.

Economic values, such as an above-average salary, compensation package, security, and promotion opportunities, are regarded as more important in the context of employer attractiveness with each successive generation (Reis and Lacombe, 2016). It appears that as age increases, individuals are more inclined to value the work itself, while assigning less importance to extrinsic rewards. This is supported by Thiranagama and Dileesha (2020) according to which young and middle-aged participants are more drawn to the economic value. Thus, it can be expected that:

H7a: An increase in age leads to a decrease in the importance assigned to several employer attributes.

Looking at each *generation* more closely, research shows several differences in their preferences. Baby Boomers prioritize interest value, meaning they look for demanding and inspiring jobs with innovative work methods (Reis and Lacombe 2016). Gen X favors the development and economic value the most (Stiglbauer, Penz, and Batinic, 2022). Generation Y seeks economic value the most and interest and application value the least (Reis and Lacombe 2016; Stiglbauer, Penz, and Batinic 2022). These findings are corroborated by other studies

indicating that Gen Y favors extrinsic rewards and development opportunities (Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons 2010; Twenge 2010; Bakanauskiene, Kyguoliene and Siumete 2020).

As stated, research on Gen Z is somewhat limited. However, De Boer et al. (2021) found that the top three values for this generation were learning, promotion, and visible results. According to their research, Gen Z business students attach great importance to continuous learning and growth and the need for career advancement. These findings are corroborated by Deloitte's Millennial Survey (2018). Bakanauskiene, Kyguoliene, and Siumete (2020) propose that Gen Z's most valued employer attribute is meaningful work, followed by development opportunities and a good rapport with the direct manager and team. Therefore, we can anticipate that:

H7b: The importance allocated to the employer attributes differs significantly across generations.

H7c: Gen Y places the highest value on EV, while Gen Z values the DV factor the most.

Lastly, we discuss the impact of *work experience*. Samoliuk et al. (2022) revealed differences between respondents with and without work experience. Salary size appeared to be a primary consideration in job selection for respondents with work experience, whereas it holds less importance for those without work experience. This is in accordance with the work of Thiranagama and Dileesha (2020), who found that experienced workers exhibit a greater preference for EV and demonstrate the least interest in AV. On the contrary, they found inexperienced workers to be highly attracted to SV. Additionally, reputation in the labor market proved decisive for individuals without work experience when choosing an employer. Kismono and Rahayu (2021) add that experienced employees seek a greater work-life balance in contrast to those with limited work experience.

H8a: The higher the work experience, the more important becomes EV.

H8b: For participants with low work experience, the SV factor of an employer is most vital.

This literature review, presenting research findings from around the world, indicates that employer attribute preferences vary from country to country. This is in accordance with the work of De Boer et al. (2021), which confirms differences in work value preferences across Chinese -, Thai -, Dutch, and German participants. Therefore, it can be assumed that:

H9: Preferences in employer attributes are significantly different across nationalities.

2.3 The Relationship between CQ and Employer Attributes

Scholars have not yet investigated the relationship between CQ and employer attributes. Therefore, we developed the following hypotheses primarily based on deductive reasoning as well as the CQ and employer branding literature.

First, we hypothesize that individuals with a high level of CQ are more demanding when it comes to the attributes an employer should offer. High CQ is proven to be associated with increased job performance (Doğru 2019). These individuals are aware of their market value as an employee resulting in ascribing more importance to various employer attributes. Thus, it can be expected that:

H10: People with a higher CQ have higher overall expectations towards their employer.

Secondly, we expect high CQ levels to correlate with prioritizing WLBV. Flexible working conditions, one of the WLBV attributes, refer to arrangements that allow employees to have more control over when, where, and how they work. These can include flex time, remote work and telecommuting, flexible scheduling, and flexible location policy. Therefore, flexible working conditions are likely to be valued by individuals who travel frequently and enjoy a variety of cultural experiences. A large body of literature shows that travel and international exposure is positively related to high levels of cultural intelligence (Crowne 2008; Gelfand, Imai, and Fehr 2008; Mukherji, Jain, and Sharma 2016; Presbitero and Attar 2018; Sousa et al. 2019). Therefore, a high CQ is acquired through international exposure, indicating that high

CQ individuals have a desire to experience different cultures and travel. Hence, they prefer an employer that accommodates these preferences through flexible work conditions and a healthy work-life balance.

H11: Higher CQ relates to ascribing more importance to WLBV. This positive effect is the strongest compared to the other employer attribute factors.

Lastly, we hypothesize that high CQ is positively related to prioritizing SV in an employer. Research suggests that social - and cultural intelligence are interconnected (Sterelny 2023). Social intelligence is seen as a component of cultural intelligence, as it entails comprehending and effectively interacting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Hence, it is logical to assume that people with a high CQ and, therefore, most likely high social intelligence prioritize SV, which comprises attributes such as having a good relationship with your superiors and colleagues and a fun and happy working environment.

H12: The higher the overall CQ, the higher the importance ascribed to SV. This effect is the second strongest compared to the other employer factors.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

Data was collected with a quantitative approach to collect countable and measurable insights through a questionnaire conducted between the 9th and 22nd of October 2023 using the Google Docs platform. Initially, a pilot study was carried out. Within a test phase of two days, the original questionnaire was sent to ten candidates to test the questionnaire for comprehensibility and simplicity. In the descriptive part, weaknesses were revealed in the wording of the questions relating to work and international experience, which were adjusted through reasonable feedback. In addition, the structure of the Employer Attractiveness Scale was changed to a more user-friendly design, which made the questionnaire appear shorter and more straightforward. Due to the extensive scope of 63 questions, this was a necessary measure, as long questionnaires deter participants and thus jeopardize the success of a survey (Bryman and Bell 2022).

The revised questionnaire was first sent out to friends and acquaintances via direct messages and subsequently published repeatedly via the social channels Instagram and Facebook as well as the professional network LinkedIn. This ultimately led to a total of 295 participants, which constitutes a representative sample size (Hair et al. 2013).

3.2 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire contains 53 items grouped into three main blocks addressing 1) sociodemographic variables, 2) cultural intelligence, and 3) employer attractiveness (view Appendix 1). In the survey, mainly close-ended questions were chosen to ensure comparability, supplemented by a few open-ended questions in the sociodemographic block to allow for specifications where needed.

3.2.1 The Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS)

For this study, we chose to work with the self-assessment CQS (Ang et al. 2007) due to its widespread use in research and its demonstrated reliability and validity in a significant number of studies across multinational samples (Ward et al. 2008; Takeuchi and Tarique 2008) and multiple countries (Jyoti and Kour 2015; Şahin and Gürbüz 2014; Al-Dossary 2016). Ang, Van Dyne, and Koh (2006) initially developed 53 items. Testing the scale with business school undergraduates from Singapore (n = 576) showed that 33 items could be discarded due to high residuals, low factor loadings, minor standard deviations or extreme means, and low item-to-total correlations.

The final CQS is a four-dimensional 20-item scale that was developed, validated, and cross-validated by Ang et al. (2007) and Van Dyne, Ang, and Koh (2006) and is based on the multidimensional construct CQ. The 7-point Likert-type items are divided into four dimensions: metacognitive CQ (4 items), cognitive CQ (6 items), motivational CQ (5 items), and behavioral CQ (5 items), as seen in Figure 5.

Metacognitive CQ	Cognitive CQ
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds. 2. I adjust my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from a culture that is unfamiliar to me. 3. I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I apply to cross-cultural interactions. 4. I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I know the legal and economic systems of other cultures. 2. I know the rules (e.g. vocabulary, grammar) of other languages. 3. I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures. 4. I know the marriage systems of other cultures. 5. I know the arts and crafts of other cultures. 6. I know the rules for expressing nonverbal behaviors in other cultures.
Behavioral CQ	Motivational CQ
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I change my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it. 2. I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations. 3. I vary the rate of my speaking when a cross-cultural situation requires it. 4. I change my nonverbal behavior when a cross-cultural situation requires it. 5. I alter my facial expressions when a cross-cultural interaction requires it. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures. 2. I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me. 3. I am sure I can deal with the stress of adjusting to a culture that is new to me. 4. I enjoy living in cultures that are unfamiliar to me. 5. I am confident that I can get accustomed to the shopping conditions in a different culture.

Figure 5: Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) (Own Illustration)

3.2.2 Employer Attractiveness Scale

Within their research, Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005) developed a scale for measuring employer attractiveness by identifying and operationalizing the components of employer attractiveness from the perspective of potential employees. Researchers (Roy 2008; Tuzuner and Yuksel 2009; Arachchige and Robertson 2012; Alniaçık and Alniaçık 2012) favored the

adoption of Berthon, Ewing, and Hah’s (2005) scale due to its solid theoretical and methodological underpinnings. However, a drawback of this scale is its reliance on the perspectives of potential employees, predominantly students who may have limited actual work experience (Nanjundeswaraswamy, Bharath, and Nagesh 2022). In 2022, Nanjundeswaraswamy, Bharath, and Nagesh (2022) published a more recent research instrument to measure the various factors of employer attractiveness from the perspective of existing employees, specifically designed for the IT sector.

For this work project, which is centered around young work professionals – who we do not expect to be tied to a specific sector yet - the scale developed by Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005) was chosen, and supplemented by two items from Nanjundeswaraswamy, Bharath, and Nagesh (2022), that capture the area of work-life balance (WLB). Besides Nanjundeswaraswamy, Bharath, and Nagesh (2022), several recent studies, such as De Stobbeleir et al. (2016), Dabirian, Kietzmann, and Diba (2017) and Bussin and Mouton (2019) include the WLB factor within their employer branding scale, underlining its necessity.

The 7-point Likert-type scale is divided into five factors, developed by Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005) containing 25 items and supplemented with two of Nanjundeswaraswamy, Bharath, and Nagesh’s (2022) items to compose the work-life balance value, as can be observed in figure 6.

<p>Factor 1 – Interest Value</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Working in an exciting environment 11. Innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking 12. The organisation both values and makes use of your creativity 13. The organisation produces high-quality products and services 14. The organisation produces innovative products and services 	<p>Factor 2 – Social Value</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2. A fun working environment 7. Having a good relationship with your superiors 8. Having a good relationship with your colleagues 9. Supportive and encouraging colleagues 23. Happy work environment 	<p>Factor 3 – Economic Value</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Good promotion opportunities within the organization 21. Job security within the organisation 22. Hands-on inter-departmental experience 24. An above average basic salary 25. An attractive overall compensation package
<p>Factor 4 – Development Value</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognition/appreciation from management 3. A springboard for future employment 4. Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation 5. Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation 6. Gaining career-enhancing experience 	<p>Factor 5 – Application Value</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Humanitarian organisation – gives back to society 17. Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution 18. Opportunity to teach others what you have learned 19. Acceptance and belonging 20. The organisation is customer-orientated 	<p>Factor 6 – Work Life Balance Value</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 26. Opportunity for work-life balance 27. Flexible working conditions

Figure 6: Employer Attribute Values (Own Illustration)

3.3 Reliability and Validity

Reliability describes the degree to which measurement yields consistent results over multiple repetitions or under different conditions, assuming the underlying variable remains stable (Hair et al. 2013). The individual scales underlying this questionnaire were extensively tested and confirmed for reliability. However, we decided to test the reliability of the EmpAt Scale, including the added WLBV factor, the CQS, and the respective dimensions using the internal consistency method by calculating Cronbach's alpha values (view table 1).

For an instrument to be considered reliable, Cronbach's alpha value should exceed .70 (Lunneborg 1979; Harrison et al. 2019). The Cronbach's alpha value for this scale lies at .95, indicating high reliability. For the collected data, the reliability of the individual components, such as the CQ dimensions and the employer attribute values Cronbach's alpha, ranges from .80 to .96.

Dimension	N	Cronbach's α	Dimension	N	Cronbach's α
EmpAtS	27	.96	CQS	20	.93
IV	5	.83	Meta CQ	4	.86
SV	5	.90	Cognitive CQ	6	.84
EV	5	.89	Motivational CQ	5	.88
DV	5	.83	Behavioral CQ	5	.88
AV	5	.83			
WLBV	2	.80			

Table 1: Scale Reliability Test

Validity refers to the extent to which a measure accurately represents what it is intended to assess (Hair et al. 2013). Validity has been thoroughly tested and confirmed for the scales by the scholars that this scale is based on. The CQS four-factor structure was validated by CFA findings in several samples, time frames, and cross-country contexts (Ang, Ng and Rockstuhl 2020). Berthon, Ewing and Hah's (2005) five-factor structure of the EmpAt scale was confirmed by structural equation modelling (SEM) with all 25 items loading ranging from .73 to .86. Further, several validity aspects such as criterion -, nomological -, convergent -, discriminant -, and content validity, were considered. Also, within the supplemented factor WLBV by

Nanjundeswaraswamy, Bharath, and Nagesh's (2022), both item loadings exceeded the .50 hurdle (Stewart, 1981) with values of .88 and .86.

3.4 Statistical Tests and Assumptions

For the first two sub-questions, the overall scores were examined and tested for significant differences using a paired sample *t*-test. This test assesses whether there is a significant difference between the means of two related groups. The various sociodemographic factors were then analyzed regarding their impact on the level of cultural intelligence (CQ) and prioritized employer attractiveness attributes. Here, Pearson correlation analysis was initially applied to scan for significant correlations. Subsequently, a simple linear regression for metric variables and a one-way ANOVA for categorical variables were conducted to investigate for significant relationships. Within the ANOVAS (if feasible), Games-Howell post hoc tests were performed to identify the differences between the individual groups. Similar to the first two sub-questions, a correlation matrix, as well as a simple regression analysis, was performed for the third sub-question. Additionally, multiple regression models were constructed, and lastly, a cluster analysis was performed. Ideally, structural equation modelling would have been performed. However, due to the scope of the paper as well as SPSS's inability to perform this test, this method could not be applied.

Prior to performing the analyses, we tested the collected data for the required assumptions. First, normality was tested. According to the CLT, the sample distribution tends to be normally distributed regardless of the population distribution for large enough samples ($N > 30$) for *t*-tests. Further, we conducted the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality. These showed significant findings for most of our variables, indicating non-normality. However, according to Field (2009), these tests are susceptible, especially in larger samples ($N > 200$). Therefore, we followed Field's recommendation to test the normality assumption

through several other indicators. First, we checked the skewness and kurtosis values for all variables and found that they lie within the parameters of normality. Furthermore, we used histograms, P-P Plots, and box plots to visualize the distribution and spot outliers. We found strong outliers in age and work experiences, which skewed our sample. Therefore, we decided to eliminate two cases. Furthermore, we had to eliminate a third case due to dubious data entries. The test of normality revealed that years of international experience are not normally distributed, and therefore, non-parametric tests are performed. The test for homogeneity of variances was performed during the data analysis. The following results section will highlight individual cases where this assumption is unmet.

Regression analysis entails several assumptions. First, all predictor variables were quantitative or dummy variables, and non-zero variance was given. We checked the correlation matrix for values above .80 between input variables to ensure no perfect multicollinearity. Even though we found strong correlations between predictor variables, these values are below the appropriate level identified by Field (2009). To test the assumption of homoscedasticity, we plotted the predicted z score against the residual z scores. Even though we see some deviation from the line, the assumption still holds. Additionally, we checked for the independence of errors with the Durbin-Watson tests. SPSS showed values close to 2, confirming the assumption is met. Lastly, independence is ensured.

3.5 Descriptive Analysis

The following table summarizes the descriptive data of the 292 survey participants:

Variables	N	Percent	Min	Max	Mean
Gender					
Female	169	57.9%			
Male	122	41.8%			
Prefer not to say	1	0.3%			
Age			18	64	31.65
Baby Boomer	19	6.5%			
Gen X	40	13.7%			
Gen Y	50	17.1%			
Gen Z	183	62.7%			
Nationalities	29				
North Europeans	16	5.5%			
East Europeans	6	2.1%			
Central Europeans	209	71.6%			
Germany	194	66.4%			
West Europeans	26	8.9%			
South Europeans	16	5.5%			
Non Europeans	19	6.5%			
Education					
High School Diploma	47	16.1%			
Apprenticeship	17	5.8%			
Bachelor's Degree	120	41.1%			
Master's Degree	91	31.2%			
Other	17	5.8%			
Working Experience			0	44	8.8
No experience	22	7.5%			
Low experience	108	37.0%			
Medium experience	67	22.9%			
Advanced experience	13	4.5%			
High experience	82	28.1%			
International Experience			0	35	2.8
Yes	245	83.9%			
Study Abroad	185	63.4%			
Internship Abroad	75	25.7%			
Work Placement / Voluntary Work abroad	95	32.5%			
Longterm travel	122	41.8%			
Permanent relocation	5	1.7%			
Exchange year	10	3.4%			
Business Travel	7	2.4%			
No	47	16.1%			

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis Overview

4 Data Analysis and Discussion

This section forms the fundamental part of this work project. It presents and discusses the main findings of the three sub-questions and answers the tested hypotheses.

4.1 Measuring the Impact of Sociodemographic Factors on Employer Attributes

4.1.1 Analysis

This section aims to answer the second research objective: “How are sociodemographic elements related to Employer Attractiveness?” For this purpose, the previously established hypotheses (H5-H9) are tested and presented consecutively, supplemented by additional insights.

First, to get a holistic overview and to address **H5** (*Overall, SV, DV and EV are recognized as the most important employer attributes*), the overall importance of the employer attributes resulting from the responses of the 292 participants was tested. For this purpose, a mean comparison was conducted as a first step:

EBA Factors	Importance of Employer Attributes	
	M	SD
IV	5.06	1.26
SV	5.41	1.18
EV	5.15	1.08
DV	5.38	1.08
AV	4.79	1.15
WLBV	5.33	1.39

Table 3: Mean Comparison - Employer Attributes

Following, a paired samples *t*-test was carried out to test whether the ranks and, thus, the level of importance between the employer attributes differ significantly:

		Paired Differences					
		Mean	SD	SE	<i>t</i>	df	p
Pair 1	SV – DV	.03	.78	.05	.63	291	.53
Pair 2	DV – WLBV	.05	1.10	.06	.76	291	.45
Pair 3	WLBV – EV	.18	1.06	.06	2.97	291	.003
Pair 4	EV – IV	.09	1.00	.06	1.52	291	.13
Pair 5	IV – AV	.27	.99	.06	4.72	291	<.001

Table 4: Paired Samples *t*-Test - Employer Attributes

The test results reveal that there is a statistically significant difference between ranks 3 and 4 ($t_{(291)} = 2.97, p = .003$), indicating that WLBV is perceived as significantly more important than

EV. While SV and DV appear within the top three most valued employer branding attributes, EV is recognized as significantly less crucial than SV, DV, and WLBV. Therefore, **H5** must be rejected.

Another significant difference was found between ranks 5 and 6, indicating that IV is perceived as considerably more critical than AV ($t_{(291)} = 4.72, p < .001$).

This first glance at the overall importance distribution is also largely reflected across the individual sociodemographic dimensions, albeit with some deviations.

Within the sociodemographic factors, the relationship between *gender* and employer attractiveness was first examined. To investigate **H6a** (*Preferences in Employer attributes vary among genders*), a comparison was made between the mean scores of the two genders:

Employer Attributes	Importance of Employer Attributes			
	Female (n = 169)		Male (n = 122)	
	M	SD	M	SD
IV	5.11	1.33	4.98	1.17
SV	5.51	1.29	5.27	1.01
EV	5.17	1.20	5.11	0.91
DV	5.45	1.15	5.28	0.97
AV	4.87	1.22	4.67	1.03
WLBV	5.52	1.42	5.05	1.29

Table 5: Mean Comparison - Gender

Rank	Female	Male
1	WLBV	DV
2	SV	SV
3	DV	EV
4	EV	WLBV
5	IV	IV
6	AV	AV

Table 6: Employer Attribute Ranking - Gender

As seen in tables 17 and 18, female participants value WLBV most, closely followed by SV and DV, marking their third priority. For male participants, DV is the most important factor in an employer, followed by SV and EV in third position. For both genders, factor IV is ranked fifth, and AV is rated least important.

When breaking down the top three employer attributes by gender into their sub-items, the picture becomes even clearer: Within SV, “having a good relationship with your manager/colleagues” is rated most important by both genders. The key aspect for male participants within DV is “gaining career enhancing experience,” followed by “recognition/appreciation from management.” For women, on the other hand, “feeling good about yourself as a result of working for an employer” appears to be the most important trait, with “gaining career-enhancing experience” in second place. Taking a closer look at WLBV

shows that women prioritize “flexible working conditions” while men favor “an opportunity for work-life balance”. Lastly, for women, “an attractive overall package” is the most essential item within EV when considering an employer, followed by “job security.” For men, “good promotion opportunities” is the most crucial item within EV, followed by “an above-average salary.” (For statistical analysis results view Appendix 2)

The employer attribute mean comparison, extended by the breakdown into the sub-items, indicates several variations in employer attribute prioritizations between female and male participants. Thus **H6a** (*Preferences in employer attributes vary among genders*) can be confirmed.

It should be noted that female participants assigned higher overall average scores across all six employer attributes. This indicates that females might have overall higher expectations for their employer than men and raises the question of whether these differences are only minor or significant. Therefore, we tested the mean difference between genders for all employer attributes. We were particularly interested in the WLBV factor (*Women rate WLBV significantly more important than men*). To test **H6b**, a *t*-test was performed. The test statistic indicates that the attributed importance to WLBV yields a significant difference ($t_{(289)} = 2.89, p = .004$) between genders. Therefore, our findings confirm **H6b**. WLBV is significantly more important to female participants. However, no significant differences ($p > .005$) were found between the genders for the remaining employer attributes.

Next, the relationship between *age* and employer attractiveness was investigated by testing **H7a** (*An increase in age leads to a decrease in importance assigned to several employer attributes*).

Regression analyses were conducted to evaluate the extent to which age could predict the level of importance ascribed to the different employer attributes:

Independent Variable: Age				
	B	SE	β	R ²
Model IV (Constant)	5.42	.20		.01
Age	-.01	.006	-.12*	
Model SV (Constant)	5.71	.18		.02
Age	-.01	.005	-.13*	
Model EV (Constant)	5.54	.20		.02
Age	-.01	.005	-.15*	
Model DV (Constant)	5.96	.20		.05
Age	-.02	.005	-.22**	
Model WLBV (Constant)	5.83	.21		.02
Age	-.02	.006	-.15*	

Note. *p<.05 **p<.001

Table 7: Simple Regression Analyses - Age

As presented in table 19, a significant regression was found for age and several employer attributes. It emerges that age has the highest predictive power for DV ($F_{(1,290)} = 14,83, p < .001$) with a r^2 of .05, indicating that age explains 5 % of the variance in the average DV score. The equation $DV = 5.96 + -.02$ expresses that the predicted DV level decreases roughly by .02 score points for each one-year increase in age. Age is a smaller predictor for the variances in EV (2%), WLB (2 %) and SV (2%) as well as in IV (1%). Thus, Hypothesis **H7a** can be affirmed as a significantly negative relationship was found between age and all employer attributes but AV.

Having established a significant statistical relationship between age and the prioritization of employer attributes, we proceeded to examine generational differences. Therefore, **H7b** (*The importance allocated to the employer attributes differs significantly across generations*) was tested conducting ANOVA analyses:

Employer Attributes	Baby Boomer n = 19		Gen X n = 40		Gen Y n = 50		Gen Z n = 183		ANOVA F(3,288)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
IV	4.84	1.26	4.92	1.31	4.53	1.06	5.26	1.26	4.97*
SV	5.09	1.22	5.26	1.09	4.90	0.93	5.61	1.21	5.85**
EV	4.76	1.07	4.93	1.13	4.93	0.86	5.30	1.10	3.34*
DV	4.67	1.02	5.21	1.08	4.92	0.95	5.62	1.05	9.90**
AV	4.59	1.10	4.77	1.08	4.48	1.08	4.90	1.17	2.02
WLBV	4.68	1.50	5.29	1.31	4.83	1.22	5.55	1.39	5.24*

*p<.05 **p<.001.

Note. Means in a row sharing subscripts are significantly different. For all measures, higher means indicate higher importance scores.

Table 8: ANOVA Analyses - Generations

Statistical significance was found between the different generations and all employer attributes, but AV. Games-Howell Post Hoc tests demonstrate that the most significant distinction can be

identified between Gen Z and Gen Y. Here, differences were found for IV, SV, DV ($p < .001$), and WLB ($p = .003$) factors. For the DV factor, a significant difference ($p = .005$) was also observed between Gen Z and Baby Boomers, where the mean strongly decreased from Gen Z to Baby Boomers (-.94, 95% - CI {- 1.62 – -.22}).

We can hereby confirm **H7b** (*The importance allocated to the employer attributes differs significantly across generations*) as several employer attributes differ significantly between Gen Z and two other generations.

Subsequently, the focus shifted towards the distribution of importance between the employer attributes by examining **H7c** (*Gen Y places the highest value on EV, while Gen Z values the DV factor the most*). Therefore, a mean comparison was conducted, as shown in table 21.

Employer Attributes	Importance of Employer Attributes							
	Baby Boomer		Gen X		Gen Y		Gen Z	
	N = 19		N = 40		N = 50		N = 183	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
IV	4.84	1.26	4.92	1.31	4.53	1.06	5.26	1.26
SV	5.09	1.22	5.26	1.09	4.90	0.93	5.61	1.21
EV	4.76	1.07	4.93	1.13	4.93	0.86	5.30	1.10
DV	4.67	1.02	5.21	1.08	4.92	0.95	5.62	1.05
AV	4.59	1.10	4.77	1.08	4.48	1.08	4.90	1.17
WLBV	4.68	1.50	5.29	1.31	4.83	1.22	5.55	1.39

Table 9: Mean Comparison - Generations

As highlighted, Gen Z participants allocated the highest importance to DV, while Gen Y seems to prioritize EV in an employer. Thus, **H7c** can be confirmed.

The table reveals further interesting findings. For one, it is evident that Gen Z (the youngest working generation) assigned the highest average importance values for all employer attributes. This further supports H7a as younger people allocate higher importance scores to the employer attributes. Secondly, it is noticeable that the IV factor is more important to Baby Boomers (rank two) than to all other generations (rank five).

The employer characteristics rated highest by Gen Y and Gen Z were then broken down into their sub-dimensions to provide further insights. Within DV, “gaining career enhancing experience” received the highest mean score by Gen Z participants, followed by “feeling good about yourself as a result of working for an employer.” For Gen Y, the three items “good

promotion opportunities”, “job security (...)”, and “an attractive overall package” share first place within EV. (More details are provided in Appendix 3)

Next, the relationship between *work experience* (WE) and the employer attributes was explored to evaluate **H8a** (*The higher the work experience, the more important becomes EV*). A Pearson correlation analysis revealed a negative correlation between WE and EV ($p = .02$). Also, between WE and SV ($p = .02$), DV ($p = .001$), and WLBV ($p = .01$) negative correlations were discovered. Following, to assess how well WE can predict the importance of EV and the other employer attributes, regression analyses were performed:

Independent Variable: Work Experience				
	B	SE	β	R ²
Model SV				.02
(Constant)	5.53	.09		
Work Experience	-.01	.01	-.13*	
Model EV				.02
(Constant)	5.26	0.08		
Work Experience	-.01	.01	-.14*	
Model DV				.03
(Constant)	5.54	.09		
Work Experience	-.02	.01	-.19*	
Model WLBV				.02
(Constant)	5.49	.10		
Work Experience	-.02	.01	-.15*	

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 10: Simple Regression Analyses - Work Experience

The table indicates that a significant regression was found for WE and EV as well as the other three factors. The years of work experience explain approximately 2% of the variance in the EV scores. The respective regression equation $EV = 5.26 - .01$ illustrates that for each one-year increase in WE, the predicted EV importance level decreases by approximately .01. Therefore, **H8a** (*The higher the work experience, the more important becomes EV*) cannot be confirmed, as an increase in age proves to have a negative effect on the importance of EV.

Additionally, the results show that the dependent factor best explained by WE ($r^2 = .03$) is DV. Age is a smaller predictor for WLBV ($r^2 = .02$) and SV ($r^2 = .02$).

In order to check **H8b** (*For participants with low work experience, the SV factor of an employer is most vital*), WE was grouped into five different categories:

No Experience n = 22	Low Experience n = 108	Medium Experience n = 67	Advanced Experience n = 13	High Experience n = 82
0	>0 - 3	>3 - 6	>6 - 9	>9

*Data in years

Table 11: Work Experience Categories

The following findings can be obtained from the mean comparison of the employer attributes:

Employer Attributes	No experience n = 22		Low experience n = 108		Medium experience n = 67		Advanced experience n = 13		High experience n = 82	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
IV	4.96	1.29	5.30	1.28	5.06	1.26	4.63	1.07	4.83	1.22
SV	5.43	1.18	5.62	1.30	5.52	1.11	4.85	0.89	5.14	1.06
EV	5.23	1.05	5.28	1.15	5.23	1.03	4.68	0.74	4.96	1.05
DV	5.43	1.14	5.56	1.10	5.48	1.05	5.28	0.94	5.06	1.02
AV	4.65	1.15	4.82	1.18	5.01	1.17	4.35	0.89	4.68	1.11
WLBV	5.41	1.32	5.61	1.44	5.37	1.28	4.50	1.27	5.05	1.37

Table 12: Mean Comparison - Work Experience

According to the output, participants with little professional experience consider SV most important, which supports **H8b**. WLBV was ranked as the second most valuable employer branding attribute, and DV came in third place.

The picture looks similar for high work experience, except that positions two and three are reversed. Although the same factors represent the most important characteristics for participants with little and much work experience, highly experienced participants exhibited fundamentally lower scores across dimensions. An ANOVA was conducted to test whether those differences are significant:

Employer Attributes	No Experience n = 22		Low Experience n = 108		Medium Experience n = 67		Advanced Experience n = 13		High Experience n = 82		ANOVA
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>F</u> (4,287)
SV	5.43	1.18	5.62	1.30	5.52	1.11	4.85	0.89	5.14	1.06	2.86*
DV	5.43	1.14	5.56	1.10	5.48	1.05	5.28	0.94	5.06	1.02	3.23*
WLB	5.41	1.32	5.61	1.44	5.37	1.28	4.50	1.27	5.05	1.37	2.84*

*p<0.05. **p<0.01.

Note. Means in a row sharing subscripts are significantly different. For all measures, higher means indicate higher importance scores.

Table 13: ANOVA Analyses - Work Experience

The ANOVA tests revealed statistical significance between WE and all three factors. Games-Howell post hoc tests provided more specific information on differences between the arranged categories for SV and DV.

Within SV, a statistical difference was found between *low experience* and *high experience* ($p = .05$) in that participants with low work experience stated to value SV on average more (.47, 95%, CI {.01 – .95}). Participants with little professional experience also attached significantly greater importance to the DV factor than those with more experience.

Thus, although SV, WLBV and DV were among the three most essential employer attributes for participants with both, low - and high work experience, lower experienced workers placed significantly more value on SV and DV.

Lastly, **H9** (*Preferences in employer attributes are significantly different across nationalities*) was assessed. To determine whether *nationality* affects the perceived importance of employer attributes, the nationalities were grouped into regions due to the wide range of the participants' countries of origin (N=29). A distinction was made between *Northern, Eastern, Southern, and Western Europe* as well as *non-Europe*.

For most factors, no significant differences in preferences could be identified between the nationalities by ANOVA analysis ($p > .05$). The exception to this is the DV factor, where a significant difference was found between the regions ($F_{(5,286)} = 2.77, p = .02$). The Games-Howell post hoc test revealed that this refers to the difference between North Europe and non-Europe. Non-Europeans assigned the highest importance to the DV of all regions ($M = 5.72, SE = .16$). North Europeans, on the other hand, assigned the lowest importance to the DV of all regions ($M = 4.83, SE = .22$). Thus, Non-Europeans, perceived the DV factor as more important (.79, 95 % - CI { .09 – 1.48 }), than North Europeans.

Therefore, we can accept hypothesis **H9** (*Preferences in employer attributes are significantly different across nationalities*), albeit solely vaguely.

Only two regions showed a significant difference for one single employer attribute. The density of those two categories (North-/non-Europe) cannot be declared representative ($n = 16$ vs. $n = 19$). Additionally, the non-European category encompasses nationalities from various continents (Africa, North and South America, and Australia), resulting in a broad geographical scope that may reduce the meaningfulness of this finding. Thus, our findings need further confirmation by follow-up research.

4.1.2 Discussion

The preceding analysis revealed valuable insights into the relationship between several sociodemographic factors and employer branding attributes. In this discussion, the main findings are presented and put into context based on the existing literature and theories.

Finding 1: SV, DV and WLBV received overall the highest importance scores.

The research findings suggest that, on average, SV received the highest overall importance among all employer attractiveness factors, followed closely by DV and WLBV. Interestingly, EV only secured the fourth position, while IV and AV were rated as least important.

Drawing a comparison between these findings and previous research reveals certain parallels. For instance, a study conducted by Eger et al. (2019) on business students, also using the scale developed by Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005), similarly identified SV as the most crucial factor. However, with regard to the EV factor, which was perceived as less important, the literature holds mixed perspectives. While our results align with the research conducted by Hiltrop (1999) and Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen (2013), highlighting the reduced importance of monetary considerations in attracting and retaining employees, they diverge from the findings of other authors. According to researchers such as Thiranagama and Dileesha (2020), Eger et al. (2019), and Mostafa (2022), EV is still considered both important and compelling for various target groups.

It should be noted that the present survey was conducted largely among private business students, suggesting that a considerable number of participants come from financially well-off households. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) offers a potential explanation for why EV was perceived as less important in this context. According to Maslow's theory, once lower-level necessities are fulfilled, individuals are driven to pursue higher-level needs (Maslow 1943). For individuals from financially secure backgrounds, economic attributes (addressing basic

psychological and safety needs) might already be satisfied to a sufficient degree, allowing them to focus on other aspects of personal and social development.

The outcome, which identified SV, DV, and WLBV as the three most important factors for employer attractiveness, additionally aligns with the principles of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the concept of intrinsic motivation (Deci and Richard 1985). Self-determination theory proposes that individuals are motivated by three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. According to SDT, when these psychological needs are met, individuals are more prone to encounter high levels of well-being and intrinsic motivation. The identified prioritization of the SV factor aligns with the relatedness aspect of SDT. Social connections and relationships contribute significantly to individuals' well-being and intrinsic motivation. DV corresponds to the need for competence in SDT. Individuals seek opportunities for personal and professional development, which can contribute to their sense of competence and effectiveness. Emphasizing WLB aligns with the autonomy aspect of SDT. A balance between professional and private life gives individuals a feeling of control over their time and activities. It is essential to note that individual preferences can vary, and these theories provide frameworks for understanding general trends in motivation.

Finding 2: Preferences in employer attributes vary among genders.

A mean comparison between genders revealed that female participants value WLBV as the most important employer attribute, with SV in second place and DV in third place. Male participants, on the other side, attach the greatest importance to DV, followed by SV and EV. The findings contradict those of Bellou et al. (2015), who found that both genders ranked the same factors among their top four priorities.

Taking a closer look into the sub-items under the employer attractiveness dimensions, some interesting insights can be gained. Within the DV, the item “gaining career enhancing experience” is of utmost importance for both genders. While for women, “feeling good about

yourself as a result of working for an employer” is a driving dimension, male participants indicated that they primarily seek “recognition/appreciation from management.”

The findings suggest that females seem to be more driven by intrinsic factors, whereas males seem to be fueled by extrinsic affirmation. A study on workplace recognition (IMA 2022) revealed that more men than women would leave an employer where they felt unappreciated. This outcome supports the point that external validation is more important to men than women. What should be highlighted for EV is that both genders strongly value promotional opportunities. While it is even more crucial for women to have an attractive overall compensation package, men declared to prioritize receiving an above-average salary. This opposes the findings of Samoliuk et al. (2022) according to whom the salary size is substantially more important to both genders than the compensation package.

Finding 3: Women rate the WLBV as significantly more important than men.

Female participants rated all factors higher and, therefore, more important than males, which is consistent with the work of Mostafa (2022). Nevertheless, the only employer attribute with a significant difference between genders was found for WLBV. The results are contrary to those of Jost and Möser (2023), who noted that women appreciate the factors DV and SV significantly more than men. Simultaneously, they are consistent with the findings of Samoliuk et al. (2022), who likewise conclude that flexible working conditions are considerably more relevant for women.

Studies show that working mothers continue to be more predominantly inclined to undertake additional household responsibilities than fathers (Kolade 2022). This may explain why women perceive work-life balance as significantly more critical than men, as they try to devote more time to personal and domestic responsibilities that men may feel less responsible for. However, the analysis results show that WLBV was also rated as the most important employer attribute by Gen Z females. This argues against the idea of solely explaining the gender difference with

the traditional distribution of roles within household responsibilities, as Gen Z has most likely not yet entered a life stage where they are in familial relationships. As per Hernandez et al. (2019), newer generations highly prioritize work-life balance (WLB), emphasizing the significance of seamlessly integrating work and personal life while preserving a healthy balance. Pace and Sciottio (2021) uncovered that the connection between work-life balance and the perception of well-being seems more robust among women than men. This observation provides an additional explanation for why female participants might have assigned greater importance to the WLB dimension than their male counterparts.

Finding 4: The importance allocated to the employer attributes differs significantly across generations.

Interestingly, the most significant generational differences were observed between Gen Z and Gen Y. It must be noted that this finding might be influenced by the data set since most participants belong to Gen Z (n = 183) and Gen Y (n = 50). Except for the EV and AV factors, Gen Y participants assigned significantly less importance to all factors compared to Gen Z. This contradicts the idea that Gen Z is often seen as a subset of Gen Y, sharing work values and characteristics (Mostafa 2022).

Considering the different working generations, it is evident that Gen Z attaches the highest relative importance scores to all factors. This suggests that Gen Z is the most demanding generation when it comes to employer expectations, placing great importance on all kinds of employer attributes. A Deloitte study supports this view, stating that Gen Z will be able to demand greater personalization of their career paths (Gomez, Mawhinney and Betts 2022). Deloitte contends that companies that seek to win and retain the best and brightest of this generation will need to change their mindsets (Gomez, Mawhinney and Betts 2022).

Finding 5: Gen Y places the most value on EV, while Gen Z values the DV dimension most in an employer

For Gen Z, the most crucial factor is the development value (which confirms to be significantly more important for Gen Z than for Gen Y and Baby Boomers). Authors such as Stiglbauer, Penz, and Batinic (2022) advocate that instead of explaining generational differences by the commonality of the generation itself, research should rather be evaluated on the basis of the theory of lifecycle. It explains generational differences by common life stages in which people of the same generation find themselves in. This aligns with this research's finding that Gen Z participants, who, compared to the other generations, are at the beginning of their careers, placed the greatest value on development. Within DV, "gaining career-enhancing experience" and "feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organization" are prioritized. The second most important factor for Gen Z turns out to be social value, where the item "working in a happy environment" is perceived as most relevant, followed by work-life balance in third place.

For Gen Y, on the other hand, the economic value takes the top spot, with the items "good promotion opportunities," "job security" and an "attractive overall package" within EV holding equal importance. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Dutta and Mishra (2021), who asserted that monetary incentives are the primary motivator for the millennial generation as well as with the works of Reis and Braga (2016) and Stiglbauer, Penz and Batinic (2022).

Finding 6: Baby boomers consider IV to be remarkably more relevant than the other generations.

IV is perceived as the second least important employer attribute across generations but proves to be the second most relevant one for Baby Boomers. This aligns with the work of Reis and Braga (2016), who found that Baby Boomers prioritize the IV factor by placing particular importance on finding a stimulating job with innovative practices. The Generational Theory

developed by Strauss and Howe (1991) might provide an explanation for these recurring findings. The theory suggests that individuals born and coming of age during the same historical and cultural context share common values, attitudes, and priorities. Baby Boomers came of age in an era characterized by substantial social changes and economic growth. However, it was only after subsequent generations had joined the workforce that significant innovations and technological leaps occurred. Having observed and actively engaged in these transformative experiences, Baby Boomers may value workplaces that welcome innovation and offer engaging challenges. Younger generations, by contrast, having grown up in a much more progressive and innovative environment, may take such aspects for granted and, therefore, consider the IV factor less important (Rozen 2023).

Finding 7: More professional experience does not mean that EV is accorded more importance.

An increase in work experience was found to lead to a significant decrease in importance attributed to several employer attributes such as EV, SV, DV, and WLBV. These findings contradict the work of Kismono and Rahayu (2021) who discovered the opposite for WLBV, namely that experienced workers claim a better work-life balance in comparison to employees who have little professional experience. Thiranagama and Dileesha (2020) found that experienced employees show more attraction to EV and have the least attraction to AV. This survey can confirm these results with regard to AV but not for EV, as the latter doesn't prove to be one of the most important factors in the attractiveness of an employer. One limitation that must be considered is that the classification into little and much work experience is subjective. Therefore, different research results can only be compared to a limited extent.

The negative relationship between WE and employer attractiveness perception aligns with the findings for the relationship between age and the attached importance to employer attributes. To be specific, the analysis revealed that as age increases, the significance attributed to various employer attributes diminishes significantly, especially for DV. This is comprehensible, as

more work experience is usually associated with an advanced age. It is also logical that the DV dimension, in particular, is becoming less important. At a younger age and the beginning of a career, there is still a lot of need for development and room for career leaps. However, with increasing age and professional experience, personal growth is already advanced, thus the need for development might become secondary.

Finding 8: Low-experienced workers most value the SV factor in an employer

While this finding aligns with the research results from Thiranagama and Dileesha (2020), Dabirian, Kietzmann and Diba (2017) found that career development is the main driver of attractiveness for young workers in an employer. This again concurs with this study's findings where participants with low work experience declared on valuing the SV factor most, while the development value was only third important, behind WLBV. The fact that SV, on the other hand, has been assigned the highest importance by Gen Z is plausible. Particularly for career starters, who have a lot to learn from colleagues in the early stages and are in close contact with their superiors, a good collegial relationship is of immense importance - also for professional development.

5. Implications and Conclusion

The analysis of our data allows us to answer this paper's research question. Namely, “*How does the level of cultural intelligence impact the importance people ascribe to certain employer attributes?*”. The results of this study provide information on how employers can attract high CQ individuals.

5.1 Practical Implications

The first research question deals with the relationship between sociodemographic characteristics and the level of CQ. While for gender, age, and international experience, statistically significant relationships are found for the level of CQ, work experience has no significant impact. For nationality and education no meaningful conclusion can be made. The only negative relationship exists between age and CQ.

While most participants have a relatively high motivational and metacognitive CQ, the opposite occurs for cognitive and behavioral CQ. Training interventions should therefore target the specific CQ factors, developing one factor after another. Improving the grasp of interventions that develop certain parts of CQ will increase training effectiveness as well as give a clearer understanding of the CQ development process (Ang, Ng, and Rockstuhl 2020).

Motivational CQ involves setting personal intercultural goals and reflecting on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which can build self-confidence to put oneself in unfamiliar situations (Early 2016). Cognitive CQ can be improved by educating oneself about how cultures vary to better understand the meaning of custom and behaviour (Early 2016). Thomas et al. (2008) have found that mindfulness interventions can be supportive in developing metacognitive CQ. According to Menabney (2023) behavioural CQ is best developed through practice. Failing and succeeding will help to adapt cultural styles.

The second research question addresses the relationship between the various sociodemographic characteristics and their influence on the perceived importance of employer attributes. Overall, the results show that SV, DV, and WLB are perceived as significantly more important than EV. It can be assumed that once financial security is fulfilled, psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness move more into focus. Several sociodemographic dimensions, including gender, age, work experience, educational background, and nationality, were found to be significantly related to the various employer attributes.

The present study highlights which employer attributes are of most importance across different sociodemographics, especially delivering valuable insights on gender and generational differences. According to Moroko and Uncles (2009) designing an appropriate value proposition based on the insights on a population's specific preferences will enhance employer attractiveness by differentiating an organization's employment offers from that of other competitors. The study results suggest that if organizations want to attract Gen Z, they should craft their employer value propositions around career-enhancing opportunities. When specifically targeting female Gen Z, the focus should particularly be set on the feeling resulting from taking on a position (DV). Additionally, organizations should emphasize managerial culture and team atmosphere (SV) and flexible work-life balance conditions. When targeting Gen Y, an EVP should centre around managerial and team culture (SV), next to promotional opportunities (EV). Furthermore, when aiming to attract Female Gen Y, employers should shift the focus towards an attractive overall compensation package.

Finally, the third research question investigates the relationship between cultural intelligence and the importance ranking of employer attributes; hence, delivering the answer for the research question: *"How does the level of cultural intelligence impact the importance people ascribe to certain employer attributes?"*. The analysis shows an exclusively positive, however somewhat weak, relationship between the two variables. These findings suggest that individuals with a

higher CQ have higher expectations towards their employer. We observe the strongest relationships between CQ and DV and WLBV. The weakest association between CQ and employer attribute values is with SV and EV.

Therefore, we suggest that employers who want to attract culturally intelligent employees should focus on promoting development and career enhancing opportunities, next to a healthy work-life balance and flexible working conditions. However, the findings show that high CQ individuals ascribe overall more importance to the employer attributes. Therefore, employers need to be able to offer a well-rounded employer value proposition to attract culturally intelligent talent.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

Firstly, this work project contributes to theory by its results from testing and using the Employer Attractiveness scale (EmpAt) and the Cultural Intelligence scale (CQS) in a new context, hence further testing their applicability.

Secondly, the present research enriches the field of cultural intelligence research by examining the cultural intelligence level of various sociodemographic groups to identify which circumstances are favorable to being culturally intelligent. It further enriches the field of employer branding by identifying attributes of employer attractiveness that potential employees prioritize in their assessment of prospective employers. Our generational insights, in particular, are a valuable addition to the literature, which was previously very limited on Gen Z. This generation's presence in the workforce is going to grow substantially in the coming years, making it arguably the most crucial one for employer branding efforts.

Most importantly, this work examines the previously unexplored relationship between two areas, namely CQ and the importance of employer attributes. Findings from this research propose that a connection does exist between the variables in question. However, more research

is needed to investigate this relationship further, specifically with regard to potential confounder and mediator variables.

5.3 Limitations

While providing valuable insights into employer attractiveness dimensions and cultural intelligence, this research project is subject to several limitations. For one, the selection of participants in this study introduces potential sampling limitations. A significant majority of participants fall within the Gen Z category (63%), possess German nationality (66%), and most likely study predominantly at business schools, indicating a wealthy sociodemographic background. These demographic imbalances highlight the need for caution in generalizing the findings to the broader population.

Furthermore, one must be prudent of possible response bias. For instance, central tendency bias might pose a problem where answers are clustered around the center of a scale. In addition, the use of forced-choice scales in the questionnaire may lead to higher mean scores, as respondents may consider most of the dimensions rated as important.

Finally, and of utmost importance, is the consideration of confounding variables that have not been controlled for in the study. These unaccounted factors may impact the results, offering alternative explanations for the findings. In the analysis of preferences in employer attributes, variables such as financial situation, personal values and traits, and individual work preferences could potentially influence the dependent variable. Similarly, when exploring CQ in relation to sociodemographic factors, variables like family background, interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and the perceived cultural relevance and inclusivity of the living environment may introduce confounding influences.

5.4 Further Research

Given that the survey adopted a cross-sectional approach, it did not explore the dynamics and development of cultural intelligence and employer attractiveness phenomena over time. Prioritization of employer attractiveness attributes and an individual's cultural intelligence level (especially within the different dimensions) are dynamic. Therefore, conducting a longitudinal study would be a beneficial supplement.

Furthermore, due to the uneven distribution of nationalities, this study could not draw significant conclusions between cultural intelligence and origin-based differences in perceptions of employer attractiveness. Therefore, future investigations focusing on identifying cross-border differences in employer preferences would be valuable.

Further investigation regarding potential mediators, moderators, and confounders between CQ and employer attributes is critical to gain an even more nuanced understanding of the true relationship between the variables at hand. We have discussed the potential mediating and confounding effects of personality traits, job performance, and the desire for travel, which we were able to support by literature. However, a quantitative analysis should be conducted to further substantiate the theoretical argument proposed in the discussion.

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