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INVESTIGATING WHAT ROMANIAN IT RECRUITERS AND EMPLOYEES VALUE WHEN THEY NEGOTIATE EMPLOYMENT CONTRACTS

Case
Study

Keywords

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Negotiation,
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Abstract

When negotiating, people have economic as well noneconomic, subjective concerns. This study is an exploratory investigation into the objective and subjective factors influencing employment contract negotiations and the willingness to interact in future business negotiations in the case of Romanian IT employees and recruiters. The study draws on qualitative data collection and analysis methods, i.e. semi-structured interviews with 10 participants, projective techniques and content analysis. At the time, 5 of the participants held recruitment and contracting HR roles, and 5 were working as employees (programmers, business analysts, IT project managers). They all had a recent working contract negotiation experience (less than one year ago) in the IT industry. Using the principles of corpus linguistics and the methods specific to discourse and critical discourse analysis, our study highlights some of the factors taken into account by Romanian IT employees and recruiters in employment contract negotiations.

INTRODUCTION

Negotiation is not only common, but also essential to living an effective, satisfying life and to attaining fulfilment at work. Recent research has included in the study of negotiations the subjective, socio-psychological factors involved in the process. Thus, the negotiation started to be considered more than the rationalist way, which tended to portray as merely an economically or strategically motivated interaction between rational and emotional actors. Subjective outcomes have emerged as an important research topic in negotiation research (Curhan, Elfenbein, & Eisenkraft, 2010; Curhan, Elfenbein, & Xu, 2006). We all need things—resources, information, cooperation, and support from others and negotiation is a process whereby we attempt to influence them to help us satisfy our needs while at the same time taking their needs into account. It is a fundamental skill, not only for successful management but also for successful living (Lewicki et al., 2010). The *how* in negotiations is, in fact, a prerequisite for economic value, but is rarely considered and measured.

At the IT industry level, there is a high demand for employees in Romania, and, as mentioned by two of the interviewees in our study, the IT specialists employee market is made up of picky, fussy people:

HR1: *Ideea e că ei pot lucra cu oricine. Sunt adaptabili. Sunt alintați și mofturoși. Ei știu că sunt căutați pe piața muncii.*

[The thing is that they can work with anyone. They're adaptable. They're spoiled and fussy. They know they are sought after on the labour market]

E1: *Este o piață de mofturoși. Deoarece toată lumea încearcă să te convingă să vii la ei.*

[It's a market of fussy people. Because everyone wants to convince you to come and work for them]

The present research is thus justified because it might contribute to understanding the way employees in the IT industry relate to the employment contract negotiation.

As a result, this study aims to carry out a first-step, exploratory investigation into the objective and subjective factors influencing employment contract negotiations and the willingness to interact in future business negotiation in the case of Romanian IT employees. Identifying, through an exploratory approach, the factors of influence for the business negotiation process specific for the Romanians employees has methodological implications. The main factors are of cultural type (Zait, 2016), as cultural aspects represent an important category of factors. This phenomenon was highlighted by many studies (Ma, Liang, & Chen, 2013; Simintiras & Thomas, 1998; Teegen & Doh, 2002) as well as

many other national or cross cultural studies on negotiation practices. When other factors are identified – as emotions and behavioural tendencies, suggested by Luomala, Kumar, Singh, & Jaakkola (2015– they are also influenced by national cultures (in Zait, 2016).

The negotiator's subjective opinions on the negotiated results have an impact on the level of satisfaction of the negotiator and it influences the willingness to interact in future business negotiations. As it was previously shown, the subjective elements assessed during the negotiation of employment contracts led to an increase in the employees' commitment and their turnover intention and had a higher importance than economic value (Curhan et al., 2010).

SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE VALUES IN NEGOTIATION

Objective value is undoubtedly a concrete indicator of performance in negotiations. It is generally accepted that a favorable economic outcome is a *sine qua non* prerequisite in a successful negotiation. The subjective outcomes of a negotiation are important in several ways. In real-world negotiations, subjective values, such as feelings of satisfaction, good relationships, or pride in the other party, may be as important as the economic outcome to many real-world negotiators (Curhan et al., 2010; White, Tynan, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2004). It is almost impossible for individuals to get complete information about a negotiation situation in the real world, so they tend to depend on their own subjective feelings to judge their performance (Curhan et al., 2006; Thompson & Hastie, 1990).

Thompson (1990) considers that the results of a negotiation may be divided into two broad categories: economic and socio-psychological. Economic outcomes refer to explicit negotiation terms or outcomes. The socio-psychological are grounded in social perceptions and, according to Thompson, consist of three important elements: perceptions of the negotiation situation, perceptions of the other, and perceptions of oneself.

METHODOLOGY

Aiming to shed some light on the interplay of objective and subjective values involved in Romanian IT employment contract negotiations, this study was carried out using qualitative data collection and analysis methods, i.e. semi-structured interviews and content analysis. Ten interviews were conducted with people hired by nine different IT companies based in the city of

Iași. At the time of the interviews, 5 participants were working in recruitment and contracting HR positions (henceforth coded HR1, HR2, etc.) and 5 participants had employee roles (programmers, business analysts, IT project managers), henceforth coded E1, E2, etc. Most of them had previous experience working in other companies, but they all had a recent working contract negotiation experience (less than a year ago) in the IT industry. During the interviews there were used projective techniques such as association, idealization, or expressive techniques. The spontaneous character of these techniques helped to highlight important issues in the employment contract negotiation in the IT industry. Projective techniques have been used in marketing research since 1940 and were borrowed from psychoanalysis (Boddy, 2005). Subjects were free to interpret and respond to ambiguous stimuli from their own perspective. As there were no right or wrong answers, respondents revealed their own experiences upon answering. Through ideological projection they were asked to describe a successful working contract negotiation and an unsuccessful one. The interview was projected in that context so that the interviewees would present their own experiences, beliefs, thoughts, attitudes.

The interviews were recorded and the data thus gathered was subsequently transcribed marking the text portions represented by the interviewer's questions so as to exclude them from the analysis. The texts thus compiled may be edited for accuracy, commented or coded, and analysed using several methods.

RESULTS

Our analysis also drew on the principles of corpus linguistics (McEnery & Hardie, 2012; Sinclair, 2004; Stubbs, 2002) and it used some of the methods specific to discourse and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2009; Widdowson, 2007; Wodak & Meyer, 2002). The transcriptions of the interviews were cleaned of the interviewer's questions and analyzed using a monolingual concordancer (Anthony 2014) and a lemma list for Romanian. In order to capture the overall tone as well as the most important themes of interest mentioned by our 10 interviewees, the texts were treated in bulk as a piece of discourse or an extended text relevant for the topic at hand.

Overall, the corpus thus created counts 1,411 word-types and 11,031 word-tokens (see Table 1). The number of types refers to the number of unique words present in the interviewees' answers, whereas the number of tokens refers to the total number of words in these texts. For instance, in the example below, the type *negociere* is represented by 2 tokens:

HR5: *Dar pot spune că mă raportez la **negocierea** inițială când iau în calcul o următoare **negociere**.*

[But I can say that I relate to the initial negotiation when I take into account the next negotiation].

The type/token ratio measures the lexical diversity of these answers – the higher the percentage, the greater the variety of the vocabulary used in the analyzed texts (Stubbs, 2002; Postolea, 2014). Seeing that the interviews approached a specific topic, i.e. employment contract negotiations, the overall type/token ratio of 12.8% shows that the texts are fairly diverse in their vocabulary, with the recruiters' answers being the most varied.

The most frequent nouns in the two sub-corpora, shown in Table 2 in the Annexes, reveal the overall gist of the interviews as well as some of the most important aspects of negotiations mentioned by the respondents.

Even if some nouns (e.g. *company*, *firm*, *project*, *offer*) are frequent in both sub-corpora, the way in which they are distributed in the employees' and recruiters' answers is different. IT employees tend to focus more on the hiring company and the conditions it provides, since the words *company* and *firm* are twice as frequent in their answers as in the case of recruiters (75 versus 31 mentions):

E1: *În IT nu este așa greu să îți găsești un loc de muncă. De exemplu, dacă sunt mai mulți nemulțumiți poți decide împreună să plecați la altă **companie**.*

[In IT it's not very hard to find a job. For example, if there are several unhappy people you can decide together to leave for another company].

E5: *Un alt factor ar fi faptul că îmi doream foarte mult să lucrez în acea **companie**, nu era ceva ales aleatoriu...*

[Another factor would be the fact that I wanted very much to work in that company, it wasn't something chosen at random...]

In the recruiters' case, the process of negotiation itself seems to be the point of focus, being represented by words such as: *negotiation*, *trust*, *candidate*, *questions*.

HR3: *Eram mulțumită că potențialul coleg a avut posibilitatea să adreseze toate potențialele **întrebări** pe care le-a avut și că a primit răspunsurile de care avea nevoie.*

[I was happy that the prospective colleague had the opportunity to put all the potential questions he had and that he got all the answers he needed.]

On the other hand, the references to the people involved both in the employment contract negotiations and in the subsequent work itself are more frequent in the case of employees (represented by three lemmas - *persoană* [person/people], *om* [man/people], and *angajat*

[employee]), which seems to suggest that the human factor plays an important part in their assessment.

E3: *Depinde de persoanele cu care am interacționat în compania respectivă. Și contează câți prieteni am în compania respectivă.*

[It depends on the people I've interacted with in that company. And it matters how many friends I have in that company.]

Employees also tend to relate to factors involved in the process, but from a more work-oriented perspective: *manager*, *work*, *discussion* and *pay* are mentioned frequently in their answers, whereas they are not among the top factors taken into account by recruiters.

E4: *Procesul să fie transparent și oamenii să știe la ce să se aștepte. Dacă nu se știe exact se creează confuzie. Plus că se creează diferențe între colegii pe tema salariilor. Trebuie să existe un sistem transparent.*

[The process should be transparent and people should know what to expect. If they don't know exactly, there's confusion. And there also appear differences among colleagues on the subject of pay. There should be a transparent system.]

However, the notions of *trust* and *openness* appear quite frequently in the recruiters' answers while being far less mentioned in the employees' case. For instance, the word *încredere* [trust/confidence] has 28 mentions in the recruiters' answers and only 7 occurrences in the employees'.

HR2: *Lucrăm pe pași, de exemplu avem totală încredere în acel candidat, îi dăm suma respectivă pentru 6 luni de zile, iar apoi lucrurile se vor alinia cu ce așteptări avem noi și atunci va fi un alt act adițional cu altă modificare salarială.*

[We work step by step, for instance we have complete trust in that candidate, we give her/him that amount for 6 months and then things will align with our expectations and there'll be an addendum with another pay change.]

This seems to suggest that subjective values such as *trust* play a slightly more important role in the recruiters' views of the negotiation process. Another clue in this respect is that while IT employees are interested in *pay*, recruiters seem to focus more on *benefits*, a word which brings the idea of satisfaction into play. This seems to confirm their tendency to increase the other party's subjective feelings during the negotiation so as to build a positive reputation for prospective future encounters (Goates, Barry, & Friedman, 2003). Another word present in the recruiters' column but absent in the other is *win-win*, which is often used to describe the results of a negotiation process and refers to both objective and subjective factors.

HR2: *Mă gândeam la situație de câștig-câștig. Mă gândeam la obiectiv. Să fac numărul de angajări. Este o bucurie când semnezi cu un candidat contractul de muncă. E important să terminăm procesul cu oferta acceptată.*

[I was thinking of a win-win situation. I was thinking of the goal. To make the number of employments. It's a joy to sign an employment contract with a candidate. It's important to finish the process with an accepted offer.]

A closer look at the left and right *collocates* of some of the most frequent words in the two sub-corpora reveals other dimensions of interest. Collocates are the words which tend to frequently co-occur with a *node* word (Stubbs, 2002; Postolea, 2014). In this analysis collocates are determined on a 6-left : *node* : 6-right span, meaning that these words co-occur within six positions to the left or right of the search term.

Owing to their high frequency in both the recruiters' and the employees' answers and to our topic of interest, for this analysis we focused on three nouns: *companie* [company], *firmă* [firm] and *negociere* [negotiation]. As shown by Table 3 in the Annexes, the collocations they form are similar yet different in the case of employees and recruiters. For instance, employees tend to focus on the objective features of the company they work or will work in, on subjective perceptions about the company as an employer (employer branding), and on the person they negotiate with. Some examples include:

E5: *...și faptul că este o persoană care îmi inspiră încredere și care e foarte deschisă, m-au determinat să rămân în companie și să mai negociez cu el.*

[... and the fact that he's someone who inspires trust and is very open made me stay in the company and further negotiate with him.]

E1: *Este important ca o companie să-și păstreze angajații, deoarece dacă vin alții, ei se adaptează mai greu și aceasta este o pierdere pentru companii.*

[It's important for a company to keep its employees, because if others come, they adapt more difficultly and this is a loss for companies.]

What is more, the collocations formed by the words *company* and *firm* in the employees' answers refer to several dimensions deemed as important in the negotiations:

– company size: *mică/micuță* [small], *mare* [big]

E3: *Eram un pic sceptic legat de firmă, deoarece era o firmă mică, un start-up și nu știam cu ce se ocupă și câtă stabilitate avea.*

[I was a little skeptical about the firm, because it was a small firm, a start-up and I didn't know what it did and how stable it was.]

- company type: *start-up, IT*

E1: *Acești factori sunt foarte importanți într-o companie de IT deoarece nu tot timpul atmosfera dintr-o companie ține de bani.*

[These factors are very important in an IT company because the atmosphere in a company does not always depend on money.]

- general organization and mood: *politica* [policy], *managerul* [manager], *directorul* [CEO], *relaxată* [relaxed], and *oameni* [people]

E5: *...mi-a plăcut directorul companiei prin simplitatea lui, era o persoana naturală, zâmbea, din cate îmi aduc aminte, mi-a spus un banc, era o discuție relaxată.*

[...I liked the company CEO because of his simplicity, he was a straightforward person, he smiled, from what I remember, he told me a joke, it was a relaxed discussion.]

On the other hand, the words associated with *company-firm* in the case of recruiters are more abstract and also slightly more subjective in nature. The presence of mental state verbs (*interesează* [be interested / have an interest in]; *înțelege* / *înțelege* [understand]; *învețe* [learn]) in the vicinity of these words is revealing in this respect, showing a pronounced focus on the negotiation counterpart.

HR5: *...încerc să îi fac să înțeleagă că firma nu a venit să facă outsourcing atâta timp cât Iași-ul este un oraș ieftin pentru outsourcing, ci a venit pentru a rămâne aici mult și bine.*

[...I try to make them understand that the firm did not come here to outsource so long as Iași is a cheap city for outsourcing, but it came here to stay here for long.]

Moreover, HR specialists seem to be more inclined to associate the organization they represent with the idea of confidence: *încredere* [trust] is mentioned both before and after these nouns. Recruiters also mention dimensions that belong to the employer branding scale and its attractiveness, such as the company *vision* (*viziunea*), its *transparency* (*transparența*) and its possibility to *grow* (*crească*).

HR3: *Încrederea și transparența din partea companiei pentru a înțelege cum este climatul, ce îl așteaptă în companie sau cum e cultura organizațională.*

[about the candidate - Trust and transparency from the company's part so that he understands what the climate is, what expects him in the company or what the organization culture is.]

As far as the word *negotiation* itself is concerned, collocate data suggest a focus on the process and on the parts involved in it in both the employees' and the recruiters' case. The process is represented by words such as *procesul* [process], *momentul*

[moment], *contractului* [of the contract], *amendamentele* [amendments] in the employee's case, and by *scopul* [the purpose], *parte* [part/y], *câștigă-câștigă* [win-win], *ofertă* [offer], etc. in the answers of recruiters.

E1: *Dar conform primei negocieri, procesul de negociere a fost OK, numai că nu am ajuns la un acord.*

[But according to the first negotiation, the process of negotiation was OK, but we just didn't reach an agreement.]

HR4: *...eu în aproape 2 ani, nu am avut un candidat care să se întoarcă la o negociere, în general ai făcut oferta nu au acceptat-o pe a ta și au acceptat-o pe a altora...*

[...in almost 2 years I haven't met a candidate who would come back to a negotiation, in general you made an offer, they didn't accept yours and they accepted another's...]

The subjective focus on the other party involved in the process is represented by the word *celălalt* [the other] in the employees' answers and by the noun *parte* [part/y] in the case of recruiters.

E2: *O negociere reușită este când și celălalt ascultă indiferent că este patron, manager general sau reprezentantul managerului general.*

[A successful negotiation happens when the other listens too, no matter if he is the owner, the general manager or the representative of the general manager.]

HR3: *Persoanele care intră în dialog, aici e partea personalizată. E partea de negociere care e diferită de la om la om.*

[The people who have a dialogue, that's the personalized part. It is the part of negotiation that is different from a person to the next.]

Even if both the employees and the recruiters seem to relate to the negotiation process in similar ways, negotiation seems to be understood and viewed in a more dynamic way by the recruiters, who use many verbs (*aud* [I/they hear], *accepte* [to accept], *contează* [matters], *gândesc* [I/they think], *cred* [I/they believe], etc.) and deverbial elements (*înțeles* [understood], *încheiat* [closed], etc.), around the word. By comparison, there are only three forms of verbal and deverbial elements associated with the word *negociere* in the employees' answers: (*ne*)*reușită* [(un)successful], *ascultă* [I/they listen] and *încercăm* [we try].

CONCLUSIONS

In order to develop a medium and long term contractual relationship with the employer, the perception gained when negotiating the individual employment contract is very important. It will accompany the people involved throughout their employment.

The present research confirmed that in real-world negotiations, both objective and subjective factors are important and influence the willingness to interact in future business negotiations.

Thus, the negotiator's subjective opinions on the negotiated results have an impact on the level of satisfaction of the negotiator. The feelings towards the company or its representatives, a good relationship also influence the economic outcome.

Our findings could have important managerial implications for working contract negotiations, through the specific variables identified in our research: company attractiveness (employer branding), the feelings about the self, the process and other person-the counterpart in the negotiation, pay & benefits and the negotiation process.

Positive subjective feelings in the first negotiation influence the willingness to continue with the same counterpart and the company. Subjective factors (perception about the company as an employer, perception about the negotiation process or the persons involved) do influence objective factors such as willingness to future interact in negotiations, employee satisfaction, employees' recommendation of the company as an employer, engagement, loyalty and retention.

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ANNEXE

Table 1
Corpus composition by type of interviewees

	Types	Tokens	Type/Token Ratio
Employees' answers	947	5788	16.3%
Recruiters' answers	945	5243	18%
Overall	1411	11,031	12.8%

Table 2
Most frequent nouns in the two sub-corpora

EMPLOYEES		RECRUITERS	
LEMMA	FREQ./ 100 WORDS	LEMMA	FREQ./ 100 WORDS
<i>companie</i> [company] <i>firmă</i> [firm]	1.295	<i>negociere</i> [negotiation]	0.991
<i>persoană</i> [person/people] <i>om</i> [man/people]	1.053	<i>persoană</i> [person/people]	0.648
<i>negociere</i> [negotiation]	0.708	<i>companie</i> [company] <i>firmă</i> [firm]	0.591
<i>manager</i>	0.380	<i>încredere</i> [trust/confidence]	0.534
<i>muncă</i> [work]	0.362	<i>candidat</i> [candidate]	0.419
<i>proiect</i> [project]	0.328	<i>beneficiu</i> [benefit]	0.400
<i>discuție</i> [discussion]	0.259	<i>ofertă</i> [offer]	0.381
<i>angajat</i> [employee]	0.241	<i>câștig-câștig</i> [win-win]	0.305
<i>ofertă</i> [offer]	0.241	<i>deschidere</i> [openness]	0.228
<i>salariu</i> [pay]	0.224	<i>întrebări</i> [questions]	0.228

Table 3
Most frequent collocates of *company, firm, and negotiation* in the two sub-corpora

EMPLOYEES			RECRUITERS		
<i>prezentat</i> [presented]		<i>mică/micuță</i> [small]	<i>schimbe</i> [to change]		<i>beneficii</i> [benefits]
<i>contează</i> [matters]		<i>angajații</i> [employees]	<i>interesează</i> [interest vb.]		<i>angajat</i> [employee]
<i>politică</i> [policy]		<i>start-up</i> [start-up]	<i>crească</i> [grow]		<i>înțelege</i> [understands]
<i>managerul</i> [manager]	COMPANIE	<i>negociere</i> [negotiation]	<i>înțeală</i> [to understand]	COMPANIE	<i>întrebăm</i> [we ask]
<i>lucrez</i> [I work]	FIRMĂ	<i>mare</i> [big/large]	<i>învețe</i> [to learn]	FIRMĂ	<i>încredere</i> [trust]
<i>directorul</i> [CEO]	COMPANY	<i>merg</i> [I/they go]	<i>încrederea</i> [trust]	COMPANY	<i>încercăm</i> [we try]
<i>rămân</i> [I/they stay]	FIRM	<i>lucrăm</i> [we work]	<i>viziunea</i> [vision]	FIRM	<i>venit</i> [come/came]
<i>renunț</i> [I give up]		<i>IT</i> [IT]	<i>umană</i> [human]		<i>ușor</i> [easy/easily]
<i>relaxată</i> [relaxed]		<i>general</i> [general]	<i>vechea</i> [old]		<i>termen</i> [term]
<i>oamenii</i> [people]		<i>ține</i> [keeps/belongs]	<i>transparență</i> [transparency]		<i>suficient</i> [sufficient/ly]
<i>încredere</i> [trust]		<i>reușită</i> [successful]	<i>scopul</i> [purpose]		<i>câștig-câștig</i> [win-win]
<i>ultima</i> [last]		<i>contractului</i> [contract]	<i>partea</i> [part/y]		<i>contează</i> [matters]
<i>succes</i> [success/ful]		<i>nereușită</i> [unsuccessful]	<i>aud</i> [I/they hear]		<i>succes</i> [success/ful]
<i>România</i> [Romania]		<i>muncă</i> [work]	<i>accepte</i> [to accept]		<i>reușită</i> [successful]
<i>părerea</i> [opinion]	NEGOCIERE	<i>individual</i> [individual]	<i>înțeles</i> [understood]	NEGOCIERE	<i>oferta</i> [offer]
<i>procesul</i> [process]	NEGOTIATION	<i>cineva</i> [someone]	<i>întoarcă</i> [return/overturn]	NEGOTIATION	<i>gândesc</i> [I/they think]
<i>primei</i> [first]		<i>celălalt</i> [the other]	<i>înseamnă</i> [means]		<i>general</i> [general]
<i>momentul</i> [moment]		<i>ascultă</i> [listen]	<i>încântată</i> [happy]		<i>cred</i> [I/they believe]
<i>general</i> [general]		<i>amendamentele</i> [amendments]	<i>încheiat</i> [closed]		<i>crapă-crapă</i> [lose-lose]
<i>împreună</i> [together]		<i>încercăm</i> [we try]	<i>împiedice</i> [hinder]		<i>candidatul</i> [candidate]