Investigating young professionals' psychological contracts
to advance human-centred human resources management strategies:

A multi-method qualitative research

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Declaration

I, Annica Lau, declare that this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Worcester.

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- I declare that I have not been employed by the University of Worcester during the period of registration for my research degree.
- I declare that I have no personal relationship with the examiners. I declare that I have not worked directly with the examiners in any capacity (e.g., line management, team teaching, co-supervision, or administrative role).
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Date: 30/10/2022   Place: Hanover (Germany)

Signed: *Annica Lau*

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Abstract

A shrinking labour market, political and economic uncertainty, technological digitalisation, the recent COVID-19 pandemic and, above all, demographic challenges are changing the future world of work. Notably, the youngest group of employees, referred to as Gen Z (born 1995–2010), bring a fresh set of attitudes, behaviours and values into the organisations. Thus, employers must invest in new avenues to attract, develop and maintain their young professionals and to create sustainable and resilient workplaces for their workforce.

Here, contractual obligations move into the background, and implicit expectations with respect to working relations become more important. In turn, human resources management (HRM) departments have recognised that managing these unwritten reciprocal expectations, which can be studied through the concept of the psychological contract (PC), represents a critical challenge to organisational success. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to provide in-depth insights into the formation of young professionals' PCs as a means to advance human-centred HRM strategies.

Applying a social constructionism research philosophy, the subjective expectations and conversations of the research participants were explored to understand their initial experiences of the employee–employer relationship. A sequential multi-method research strategy was chosen. First, data were collected from 13 participants via video statements – an evolved qualitative video method – to identify guiding themes. Second, five focus groups, featuring 19 participants, provided a variety of different views that emerged during the discussion. Using reflexive thematic analysis, six themes were identified around the formation of the PC.

The thesis shows that young professionals' PCs differ from major types of PCs (relational, transactional and balanced) in terms of time, inclusion and external influence due to the training aspect. Furthermore, social and historical events impact the dynamics of the PC considerably, and general job expectations increase upon entry. To pursue a practical human-centred HRM strategy, this research recommends offering a target-orientated knowledge transfer and creating an appreciative work environment by implementing a human-centred integration process. This new approach entails a holistic and long-term perspective and complements existing preboarding and onboarding HR activities with a career-boarding process for young professionals.

Overall, research on young professionals who are currently entering the labour market is at a nascent stage. This study provides evidence of the shortcomings of previous studies by presenting the contextual environmental influences on the formation of relationships between young professionals and organisations. As such, this contemporary thesis is one of the first studies to help both HR departments and managers understand the PC expectations of today's newcomers. Notwithstanding the theoretical and practical contributions of this work, a new improved video method is introduced.

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Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my daughter Victoria.

I love you like crazy – to the mountains and back!

Dissemination of DBA Work

DBA-related award, papers and presentations in the academic environment

Doctoral Colloquium

Lau (2022). *Introducing video statements*, research poster and presentation at the Online Doctoral Colloquium, University of Gloucestershire and University of Worcester.

Lau (2021). *The emergence of young employees' PC expectations – A multiple case study design among dual students in Germany*, Working paper and presentation at the Online Doctoral Colloquium, University of Gloucestershire and University of Worcester.

Lau (2019). *Talent Management of Generation Z: A conceptual framework of case-based research*, working paper and presentation at the Doctoral Colloquium in Gloucestershire.

British Academy of Management Conferences and Awards

Lau (2022). *Expectations vs. obligations in the PC – Does it make any difference at all to young professionals?* Developmental paper and presentation, SIG: HRM, BAM 2022.

Lau (2022). *Research remotely: Video statements as an evolved qualitative method in organisational studies*, Developmental paper and presentation, SIG: Research Methodology, BAM 2022.

Lau (2022). *Young Professionals' PC Expectations*, Poster and presentation at the Doctoral Symposium, BAM 2022.

Lau (2021). *Understanding Generation Z's PC expectations: How work experience leads to adjusted job expectations*, Developmental paper and presentation, BAM 2021, Developmental Paper Award: Highly Commended.

The papers and posters from the BAM conferences can be found in the Appendix, Chapter 5 – Selection of Papers and Posters.

DBA-related presentations in the professional environment

2022 | Science & Stories GmbH | Berlin, Germany
Science Slam presentation: Young professionals – Married at first sight

2022 | scienceslam | Osnabrück, Germany
Science Slam presentation: Berufseinstieg – Happily ever after?

2022 | Business Trends Academy | Berlin, Germany
Leadership workshop: The psychological contract

2021 | LPKF Laser & Electronics AG | International
Distributor Conference: Life hacks for an international business meeting

2019 | Hytera Mobilfunk GmbH | Bad Münder, Germany
Regional Business Presentation: Introducing Generation Z

Lecturing

Since 2022, Part-time lecturer, postgraduate | Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft | Berlin, Germany: Strategic Human Resources Management

Since 2020, Part-time lecturer and supervisor, undergraduate | IU University of Applied Sciences | Hanover, Germany: (Strategic) Human Resources Management, Business Administration and Research Methodology

2022 | Guest lecturer | VIA-University College | Denmark

2021 and 2022 | Guest lecturer | University of Worcester | UK

2021 | Guest lecturer | North-West University | South Africa

Abbreviations

BA	Business Administration
BAföG	*Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz* (State Education Financing Act)
BAM	British Academy of Management
BPM	Business Process Management
CAQDAS	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
DBA	Doctor of Business Administration
DEI	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
ERG	Employee Resource Group
EU	European Union
FG	Focus Group
FüPoG	*Führungspositionen-Gesetz* (Leadership Positions Act)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HR	Human Resources
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRM	Human Resource Management
IHK	*Industrie- und Handelskammer* (Chamber of Commerce and Industry)
IT	Information Technology
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PC	Psychological Contract
PESTLE	Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental
QDAS	Qualitative Data Analysis Software
QR	Quick Response
SHRM	Strategic Human Resources Management

STEM   Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

TA   Thematic Analysis

TM   Talent Management

UK   United Kingdom

US   United States (of America)

VET   Vocational Education and Training

VS   Video Statements

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and context

In Germany, Generation Z (hereafter referred to as Gen Z), those born between 1995 and 2010, has started to fill open job positions, since 12.9 million of the baby boomer generation (born between 1942 and 1962) will retire within the 15 few years (Destatis, 2022b). However, the birth rate has declined sharply in recent decades. This has prompted intense discussion over a demographically induced shortage of skilled employees in the future, with many vacancies already not being filled due to a lack of applicants (Bauer *et al.*, 2021). Crucially, even if optimistic assumptions are made regarding the labour force participation rates of German women and the integration of foreigners and older people returning to work from retirement, organisations will need this youngest generation if they are to sustain their market competitiveness.

In retrospect, there has been everlasting criticism of the youngest generation, which does not seem to subside. As early as 3000 BC, the Sumerians in Egypt complained about youth when the first schools were established (Keller, 2014). As the popular quote by Socrates in 470 BC states, 'Children; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise'. In today's world, Gen Z is said to be aimless, wasting their time on their smartphones (Destatis, 2022d), or lazy and disinterested (FAZ, 2022). These young professionals are looking for meaning in their jobs, but at the same time, they are no longer willing to sacrifice themselves for their work (Klaffke, 2021a). Altogether, this outlines an ongoing stereotyping of younger generations that feeds overall negative perceptions in society (Parry and Urwin, 2021). None of this stereotyping will contribute to stable and reliant working relationships. Rather, organisations need to understand their potential new employees and offer options with respect to the employee's expectations, thereby becoming attractive employers.

Given the demographic change and declining labour force potential in various occupational fields, organisations are already stepping up their recruitment activities for young professionals, especially Gen Z. Human resources (HR) departments need to maintain the performance of their workforce and secure employee capacity for the future (Scholz and Grotefend, 2019a). In addition, German companies are currently experiencing a change in the world of work called *'Arbeit 4.0'*. Known internationally as

'new work', this concept not only implies high competition in the labour market but also an increase in flexible working models, shorter innovation cycles and the use of digital transformation in organisations (Bosse and Zink, 2019). At the same time, this transformation in the world of work leads to new expectations, perceptions and behaviours among newcomers to the job market. Hence, the shift in generational values predicts an impact on employer–employee relationships.

To establish reliable employment relations, it is essential to understand the implicit expectations, beliefs and ambitions of young professionals (Kirsten, 2019). The psychological contract (PC) is a useful concept that describes the assumptions of employees about their organisations and vice versa. Taking into account the post-COVID-19 challenges in the labour market, an urgent need arises to examine in greater depth the job expectations and formation of the PCs of Gen Z (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel *et al.*, 2019; Scholz, 2019).

1.2   Statement of the research problem

As shown in Figure 1, the current demographic developments in Germany point to a shrinking labour market and an ageing workforce (OECD, 2020).
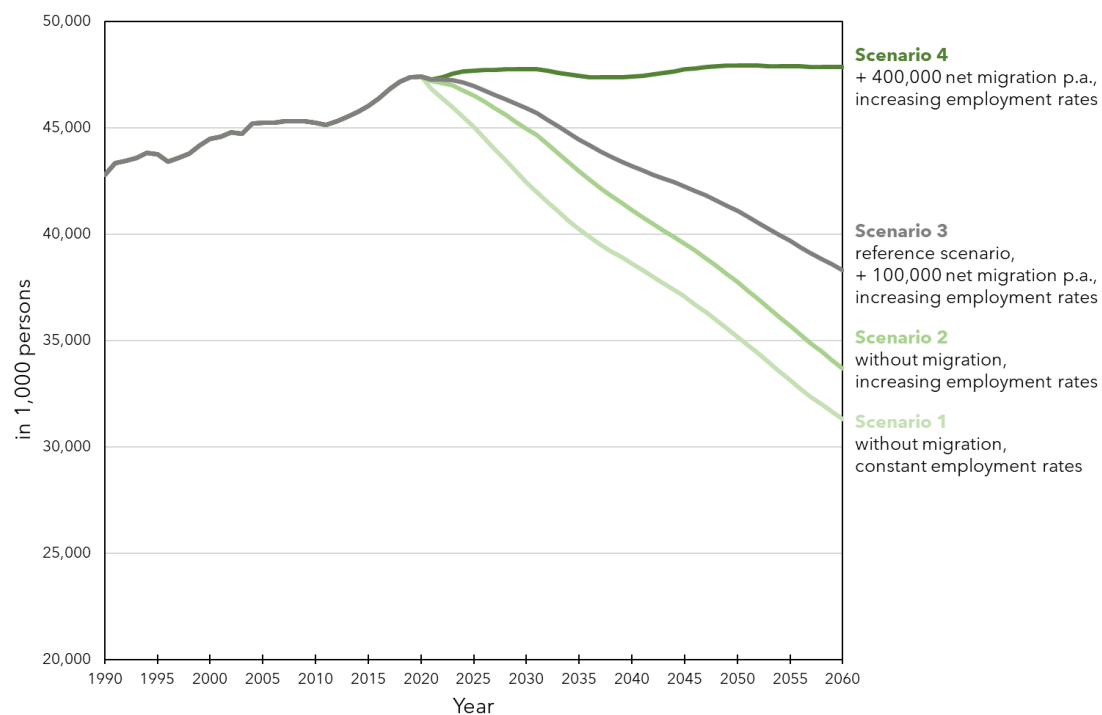
Figure 1: Development of the potential workforce in Germany
Adapted from: Bauer et al. (2021)

Here, the reference scenario illustrates that the labour supply is now starting to decline and will continue to decrease steadily despite immigration and rising employment rates, as presented in the other possible scenarios. To cope with these changes, organisations are required to find ways to attract, motivate and retain their youngest workforce. Accordingly, a growing body of literature demonstrates how organisations can address the challenges associated with demographic change through HR practices geared towards the youngest generation. Therefore, research on strategic human resource management (SHRM) advocates that the efficiency of these practices is significantly affected by their integration into wider HR systems and implementation at the operational level (Poisat, Mey and Sharp, 2018; Roehl, 2019). However, only a few studies have investigated the drivers of and barriers to demographically orientated HRM.

Second, to extend the existing literature in the realm of SHRM, the 'human' side of the employment relationship in general and job expectations in particular need to be explored. Originating from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the PC supports the explanation of how agreement or disagreement in an employment relationship often builds on unwritten or unspoken perceptions, which affect attitudes and behaviours in the workplace (Rousseau, 1995). Above all, the initial socialisation period in an organisation shapes an employee's PC (Thomas and Anderson, 1998; Coyle-Shapiro and Neuman, 2004). Hence, newcomers modify their perceptions of the PC during this stage (Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau, 1994). In recent years, however, the PC has been criticised for its focus on knowledge creation based on quantitative methods solely based on individual perceptions, omitting collective understandings of employees (Korczynski, 2022). Moreover, the dynamic nature of the social exchange relationship is often overlooked. Thus, (Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou (2018) suggest a dynamic phase model of the PC processes, while Baruch and Rousseau (2019) note that multiple stakeholders are increasingly relevant to PCs. In turn, an in-depth qualitative and retrospective research approach is needed to identify the triggers of change during the formation of young professionals' PCs.

Third, an approach is needed to investigate the PCs of young professionals while considering their wider social and historical influences. To understand young professionals' PC expectations in the context of external influences, a generational lens was adopted. This combined approach allows the researcher to identify employees' often unspoken expectations of their working relationships with their organisations in a wider context (Lub, 2016; Kappelides and Jones, 2019). A common attempt in HRM to develop appropriate strategies and policies for specific employee groups is to identify the

differences between generations (Parry and Urwin, 2021). Building on the generational theory of Mannheim (1928), Kupperschmidt (2000) suggests that the shared values of a generational cohort influence an employee's feelings towards the organisation, and this view provides an explanation of what employees desire from their organisations. Nevertheless, limited evidence is available for generational differences in perceived PC expectations and obligations (Lyons *et al.*, 2012).

Fourth, it is unclear whether the characteristics of generational units localised as subgroups within generations differ from the general statements about Gen Z. Thus, a specific generational unit of young professionals is required to investigate the PC expectations of newcomers in depth. As bachelor's and master's degrees become more attractive to students, the offer of a variety of study forms is increasing. One particularly relevant form of study is the internationally unique '*duales Studium*' (dual studies) programme in Germany, which combines academic and in-company training (Nickel *et al.*, 2022). The system started in the mid-1970s, when the lack of practical relevance of a degree course was increasingly criticised, and a need arose to relieve the burden on universities by offering alternative training options for students with university entrance qualifications. While students in regular programmes have lecture-free periods, dual-study students often have this time planned for work placements. Dual-study students also have contractual obligations with their employers. Thus, they gain both an academic degree and practical work experience, which gives them the advantage of earning a double qualification. It is clear from these examples that dual-study students are subject to completely unique social influences and framework conditions. In addition, with an average student share of 4.2% nationwide and a current first-semester share of 4.6%, dual studies in Germany continue to have a marginal existence. Nevertheless, demand has quadrupled from 2004 to 2019 (BIBB, 2020). As this form of study promises a strong developmental dynamic, research in this area is increasingly needed.

Fifth, since the beginning of 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic has continued to cause major disruptions to working life, including the prevalence of remote working (Cooke, Dickmann and Parry, 2022). Massive temporary restrictions on fundamental rights have also been felt in employees' private lives. In turn, this development has affected the education sector, such as the shift from in-person to virtual teaching in universities. Even though this crisis influences all generations, younger age groups are particularly challenged, as they are still in the socialisation phase and must cope with reduced contact and limited freedom (Klaffke, 2021a). In such unprecedented times, the impact and consequences of remote work and study have only just started to gain interest. Since the

collection of the data in this study occurred during this time, such impacts need to be carefully considered.

1.3   Significance of the research

Overall, this thesis aims to contribute to a human-centred HRM approach and to provide an impetus for rethinking in organisations on the value of their success-critical youngest employees. Hence, the research makes several contributions to both theory and practice, as well as related research methodology.

1.3.1   Significance to theoretical knowledge

This research advances the understanding of young professionals' PC expectations from a generational perspective. However, the thesis critiques generational theory in terms of stereotyping and misleading practical recommendations. Although it stems from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the literature on the concept of the PC hardly recognises its social and historical impacts (Korczynski, 2022). Furthermore, generational theory often fails to differentiate between variations in generational units. Hence, a unique target group was chosen to investigate PCs to show that external agents have a significant influence on the formation of PC expectations. Nevertheless, the idiosyncratic nature of the agreement (Rousseau, 2001) underpins the idea that each PC is unique and may include many subjective contract terms (Kotter, 1973); common characteristics can be identified in specific features of young professionals' PCs. Moreover, the call for substantial work relationships (Kraak and Griep, 2022) that focus on establishing PCs that attribute suitable human resource practices can lead to higher quality in the employee–employer relationship. This approach will allow organisations to implement a more holistic HRM strategy in which young professionals feel that they are valued.

1.3.2   Significance in practice

Before 2022, the literature on Gen Z was limited in terms of understanding its attributes, behaviours and demands (Bulinska-Stangrecka and Naim, 2021; Benítez-Márquez *et al.*, 2022). Often, these studies only present what young professionals expect, but not how this can be executed in practice. Therefore, this research adds to the knowledge on how to support young professionals' needs in the early days of their careers. In turn, it contributes to the candidate experience literature by establishing the need for a holistic career plan that consists of preboarding, onboarding and career planning.

1.3.3 Significance to research methodology

The tech-savviness of Gen Z is the most frequently mentioned characteristic in the literature (Dwivedula, Singh and Azaran, 2019; Benítez-Márquez *et al.*, 2022). Because Gen Z is familiar with video content in their everyday lives, a video-based method for collecting insights offers significant opportunities. Additionally, due to the contact restrictions during the data collection period caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, a video method seemed especially promising, so existing methods were adapted to match the challenging situation. Since video methods have gained recognition in organisational research (LeBaron *et al.*, 2018), this research introduces a method of remote data collection: applying a video statement method to complement current methods and to provide richer knowledge for business and management research in a more flexible and convenient way.

1.4 Research aim

To establish the framework for this thesis, to develop carefully stated research questions in order to understand social processes, and to address gaps in the understanding of newcomers' PCs, the overall aim of this research study is to investigate how the PC expectations of young professionals are initially formed due to internal and external influences in order to recommend a holistic SHRM strategy on preboarding, onboarding and career-boarding.

1.5 Research questions

Considering that the investigation of the phenomenon is qualitative, inductive and investigative, it is likely to reveal new and unforeseen avenues of enquiry (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Hence, the objectives of this research are to delve into and be guided by the following research questions:

(1) What PC expectations arise for young professionals as they initially engage with organisations and build relationships during their first work experience?
(2) How are the PC expectations of young professionals influenced in their very first employment?
(3) How can organisations advance their HRM strategies to meet the expectations of young professionals in pursuit of PC fulfilment?

1.6   Research objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- To shed light on young professionals' expectations and how they can be identified
- To investigate the initial formation of PCs
- To describe the type of young professionals' PCs
- To identify internal and external agents that influence the development of young professionals' PCs
- To recommend HRM strategies and organisational practices that support the formation of a successful employer–employee relationship.

1.7   Origin of the research project

For the past 15 years, I have been working in the field of HRM. Over the course of time, I have gained extensive knowledge of HR strategies and practices, including recruitment, talent management, international projects, organisational culture, law and labour relations in general. Even though organisations are constantly reminded of talent shortages and declining labour force potential, I noticed that many organisations only partially adapt their HR processes to the changing world of work. Therefore, it is vitally important for academia and business to engage and collaborate in the success of employee–employer relations, ultimately addressing the needs and expectations of young professionals. Not least through always being a part-time student and through my work as a lecturer, I have repeatedly been made aware of the challenges that young professionals pursuing a dual-study programme face due to the double impact of study and work. In 2018, I started my DBA journey to make a meaningful academic and practical contribution because *'The young professionals of today are shaping our working world of tomorrow!'*

1.8   Definition of key terms

The key terms used in this thesis are briefly explained below.

Psychological contract

The term psychological contract (PC) emerged in the early 1960s and is crucial to understanding the employment relationship. The concept focuses on the implicit expectations between individuals and organisations with respect to performance

(e.g., time, loyalty, work effort) and rewards (e.g., competitive remuneration, career development, working hours) based on subjective interpretations (Rousseau, 1995).

Gen Z

Gen Z is a demographic cohort succeeding Generation Y and preceding Generation Alpha. Most members of Gen Z are children of Generation X. Researchers commonly apply the mid-to-late 1990s as starting birth years and the early 2010s as ending birth years. At the end of 2021 Gen Z comprised of 11.57 million people in Germany.

Young professionals

The term 'young professional' is ambiguous in the literature because it has evolved from its original broad meaning of a young person – aged between 20 and 40 – in a professional setting. In this thesis, the term 'young professionals' refers to young people who recently left school to enter the labour market and hence gain their first work experience in organisations.

Dual-study students

Dual-study students are part of a dual-study programme (German: *'duales Studium'*). This special form of training combines practical work placements with academic education. The model originated in Germany and is internationally unique. This training programme can best be compared to apprenticeships, for example, in the United Kingdom (UK).

1.9 Research design

Based on the preceding outline of the aim, question and objectives of this thesis, research from the perspective of generational theory around the formation of young employees' PCs is a relatively new area of study (Sherman and Morley, 2015; Alcover *et al.*, 2017; van der Schaft *et al.*, 2020). The philosophical stance of social constructionism was chosen for this topic because young professionals constantly engage with internal and external agents in a range of discourses. Thus, this research investigates how newcomers to the workplace construct their reality to form job expectations.

The research was executed in a context-bound environment at a university of applied science in Germany. Here, the researcher adopted the role of a practitioner researcher (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019), which simplified cooperation and access to the

participants. To gain a holistic and in-depth overview, a qualitative investigation was appropriate and beneficial to this avenue of research. Due to the limited available data on Gen Z, a multi-method study was selected (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). First, data were collected via video statements from individuals, and themes were derived via reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022). These predetermined themes were explored further in the second data collection phase using focus groups. This sequential approach allowed the gathering of various views and perspectives of young professionals, which offered new insights into the existing concept of the PC through the lens of generational theory.

1.10 Thesis structure

The thesis is structured in five chapters:

Chapter 1, the introduction, covers the problem under investigation and the research question, the research aim and objectives, the rationale for the research context and a brief overview of the research design.

Chapter 2, the literature review, outlines relevant academic sources on generational theory and the concept of the PC.

Chapter 3, the research methodology, provides an overview of the philosophical spectrum for the research, the applied research strategy and the data collection and analysis. This chapter also includes ethical considerations, the role of the researcher and research quality.

Chapter 4, the findings, first presents the major results of the two qualitative methods separately and then in comparison to each other.

Chapter 5, the discussion and conclusion, reviews and discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4 and links them to the literature outlined in Chapter 2. Furthermore, the research's contributions to theory and practice, as well as its limitations and potential fields for future research, are considered.

2   Literature Review

The previous chapter described the purpose of the research, as well as the objectives and corresponding research questions. Furthermore, the introduction outlined how this research contributes to the current knowledge in the field of young professionals' PC expectations.

Subsequently, this chapter provides an overview of the literature that frames the thesis's area of interest. The first subchapter 2.1 presents a summary of how the relevant themes have been investigated and examined thus far. This is followed in subchapter 2.2 by critical reflections on generational theory (subchapter 2.2.1) and the concept of the PC (subchapter 2.2.2). The perspective of common HRM strategies used to manage young professionals (subchapter 2.2.2.5) is also discussed to provide the basis for the practical contributions of this thesis. In a brief concluding summary (subchapter 2.2.3), a conceptual framework for the formation of young professionals' PC expectations is presented; this forms the basis for the methodological part of this research.

2.1   Literature search strategy

For this thesis, a narrative (also referred to as traditional) literature review was chosen to provide information on seminal current trends and conceptually supportive materials from within and outside the area of research (Rhoades, 2011; Fink, 2014). This thesis follows a thematic structure that shapes the theoretical framework and meets the same criteria as primary research in terms of methodological rigour. The thematic structure (see Figure 2) of the literature review is explained briefly below, followed by a critical assessment of the chosen procedure.

The literature review of generational theory and the concept of PC are assessed in separate subchapters. This contemporary research combines two major themes – (1) introducing a new generation and (2) the formation of PCs – to investigate young professionals' PC expectations. Both subchapters open with an introduction that presents the key literature on definitions and history to ensure transparency and document the evolution of these research areas.

Next, to narrow down the research area, each theme is presented in depth, accompanied by a discussion of current critiques and methodological challenges. Consequently, major arguments in the ongoing debate on generational and PC theory are considered together to provide a roadmap for the research project (Rhoades, 2011). After a discussion of each

theme, limitations and potential future research areas are demonstrated. This approach was purposeful because some of the older concepts were still worthy of analysis and applicable to the present day, while the researcher was able to update the study with new studies published during this research project (Anderson, Fontinha and Robson, 2020).

Finally, the topics were merged under the consideration of strategic HRM to develop a conceptual framework that identifies the research gap in the literature for subsequent investigation in this thesis.

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the key ideas of generational theory and the PC concept

THEME 1: Introducing a new generation

Definitions, history and concepts of how **generational theory** has evolved and has been applied in HRM

Research studies that have illuminated **Gen Z**

Interim conclusion on **Gen Z's preliminary job expectations**

General limitations and implications for research and practice

THEME 2: Formation of PCs

Definitions, history and concepts on how the **concept of the PC** has evolved and been applied in the context of organisations

Research studies that have illuminated the relationships between **generations and PCs**

Research studies that have examined **the formation of PCs**

General limitations and implications for research and practice

BRIEF CONCLUDING SUMMARY
Formation of young professionals' PC expectations
by presenting the
conceptual framework for further research

Figure 2: Thematic structure of the literature review

Adapted from: Anderson, Fontinha and Robson (2020)

After this brief overview of the thematic structure (see Figure 2) of the literature review, a more detailed explanation of how the literature review was approached is given hereafter.

To begin with, scholarly books, academic journals, studies, statistics and other texts that offered relevant insight and background on generational theory and the concept of the PC were identified. The researcher not only used access for literature searches from the university library, but also from the German university library, to which she had access through her teaching activities. Furthermore, literature was acquired and requested directly from researchers to conduct an extensive search using English and German keywords. After obtaining the literature, an in-depth critical analysis and synthesis followed (Fink, 2014). Secondary references were only used to underpin critical interventions, to draw attention to implications for further research or if the original source could not be located. This avoided inaccuracies, misrepresentations and misinterpretations. Furthermore, the reviewed literature is an integral part of this research and allows conclusions to be drawn and decisions to be taken on further research steps. Moreover, the narrative approach helps determine the subsequent research area accurately (Hart, 2018).

However, the challenge in studying an emerging generation is that little basic research is available on the population itself, especially in the context of business research in organisations (Dwivedula, Singh and Azaran, 2019; Barhate and Dirani, 2021). In response, this thesis provides a comprehensive overview of the literature on Gen Z. In addition to the academic literature, current studies, practice-focused journals and industry reports generally recognised in HRM were used to enrich the literature selection. Only when necessary were studies from outside Germany used to highlight generational differences or interesting results. Moreover, to obtain a comprehensive overview of Gen Z, the content of the literature was analysed for keywords and categorised accordingly (see Appendix, Chapter 1 – Literature Review). The literature review was completed during 2021, after which any published literature on Gen Z relevant to this thesis was included in the discussion.

Applying a narrative analysis with categorisation of key themes was a meaningful way to penetrate the barely available literature on Gen Z with a geographical connection to Germany. Although the narrative literature approach does not necessarily adhere to rigorous standards, as with a systematic review, the results of applying a thematic structure and the selection and assessment procedures (Rhoades, 2011) met the criteria

of a broad, qualitative, critically analysed and purposeful evaluation of the selected themes (Jesson, Matheson and Lacey, 2011; Hart, 2018). Moreover, this approach increased the transparency of the review, and its systematic nature provided a sense of rigour to the narrative literature approach (Jesson, Matheson and Lacey, 2011). At the same time, it did not limit the creativity and intuition of the review (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2018).

2.2 Theoretical framework

The following subchapters present a critical review of the literature on generational theory and the concept of the PC. Taken together, these approaches resulted in a combined conceptual framework for further research, which sets the scene for the research methodology.

2.2.1 Generational theory

To cover the background to generational research, this subchapter clarifies the common terms used in generational studies and provides a brief overview of the historical development in this research area. Afterwards, the relevance of generational theory to HRM research and the current critical debate are outlined. In addition, the newest generation entering the job market is examined in more detail. Finally, the implications for this research are discussed.

Definition of terms in generational theory

Generational theory supports the idea that certain generations share similar values, behaviours and characteristics. Based on birth dates, these are grouped by generational terms, such as Gen Z (Eyerman and Turner, 1998). Besides gender, social origin and worldview, age differences form part of this theoretical discussion. The term *generation*, which simply defines population groups that differ in age (Parry, Stavrou and Lazarova, 2013), is generally utilised by both scientists and practitioners. Typically, age ranges are delimited into 15-year intervals and specified by social-historical events (Strauss and Howe, 1991). Since the term *generation* is broadly defined in the literature, a more detailed explanation of the associated terms is essential. Thus far, four general terms have been established in the scientific literature: *generation, cohort, age effects* and *period effects*. They are commonly defined as follows:

The definition of *generation* is summarised as a set of historical or societal events, the impacts of which create a distinct generational group. To identify a generation, a certain social proximity to common historical or critical events or cultural phenomena is required (Matthes, 1985; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Twenge and Campbell, 2008).

Next, a *cohort* is defined as a group of individuals born at the same time who are presumed to be similar because of shared experiences. Only chronological proximity to events and other drivers of differences are assumed to distinguish them from other cohorts (Ryder, 1965; Kruse, 2011; Parry and Urwin, 2011).

Age (or mutation) effects are commonly described as the changing views, attitudes and behaviours of individuals as they mature (Albert, Hurrelmann, Leven *et al.*, 2019). Age is the key variable in age-diversity research and only serves as a proxy for underlying processes that can influence work-related practices and outcomes. In simple terms, biological age is set into relation to physical or mental functioning (Joshi *et al.*, 2010; Parry and Urwin, 2017).

Finally, *period effects* are explained by changes occurring at a specific time and place that will affect peoples' behaviours (Rudolph *et al.*, 2020). This means that individuals' actions are determined not only by the time of their birth, but also by their age (e.g., through changes in the employment market). Period effects are considered when attempting to identify generational, cohort or age-related impacts (Rhodes, 1983; Albert, Hurrelmann, Leven *et al.*, 2019).

The distinction between the terms above is of particular importance, as it helps to better classify and interpret studies in generational research. These distinctions also allow studies to be compared with each other. In addition, the definitions of terms help identify a methodological design that ensures rigour in the research project and its implementation.

Historical development of generational theory

The concept of *generations* originates in biology, where a generation is identified by the average interval of time between the birth-years of parents and those of their offspring (Kruse, 2011). More recently, researchers have discovered that *cohorts* change more quickly in response to societal and historical events, positing that two decades are far too broad a generational span (McCrindle, 2014).

However, the concept of generations must first be distinguished from the genealogical or family-related concept of generations, which refers to the descent in families and the succession of family members (Höpflinger, 1999). Hence, at the beginning of the 20th century, the Austro-Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim (1928, 1952) who later emigrated to Germany, combined the biological definition with past political impacts, economic events and related cultural phenomena. Influenced by German and French social scientists, Mannheim divided generations into ranges from 15 to 30 years. He argued that the first 30 years were the educational years; only after this period would a generation enter public life. At the time, it also seemed that a more concise social change took place every 30 years. Thus, Mannheim stressed the importance of generations as a guide to understanding the structure of social movements, further explaining the notion of a group of people bound together by sharing common historical and social events (Connolly, 2019).

The contemporary literature relating to generational theory refers primarily to the seminal work of Mannheim (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Parry and Urwin, 2011; Klaffke, 2021a), often highlighting Mannheim's (1952, p. 292) definition of a *generational cohort*, which is a:

> *[…] particular kind of identity of location, embracing related age groups embedded in a historical-social process where a generation location is determined by the way in which certain patterns of experience and thought tend to be brought into existence by the natural data of the transition from one generation to another.*

This assumption derives from the central idea of shared experiences. A generation that has gone through the same key historical and societal events shares the same collective memories (Parry and Urwin, 2017; Albert, Hurrelmann, Leven *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, each generational cohort has learned similar responses to environmental stimuli (Smola and Sutton, 2002). Here, Ingelhart's (1997) theory of intergenerational values change supports the seminal work of Mannheim (1928) by assuming that societal events have a role in the development of an individual's identity. Further on, Mannheim (1972) notes that members of a generation are internally stratified by their *social location* and may view different events from different angles. Such a social location is comparable to the class position of an individual in a society whose members do not know each other and not to a particular group that experiences psychological or physical proximity (Zemke, Raines and Filipczak, 1999; Kupperschmidt, 2000). As a result, one or more generational units arise that form a generational consciousness. A supporting example – reflecting groups of like-minded people (i.e., those who think alike and share a similar outlook on life and

values) – is the SINUS youth research project (Calmbach *et al.*, 2020). This study considers that new generations make sense of cultural norms within the unique context of their young people.

By contemplating new ideas with old problems, a young generation is always at the forefront of social change (Lyons and Kuron, 2014). Indeed, research by Twenge *et al.*, (2010) on the values of younger generations confirms that individuals belonging to a generation not only physically exist simultaneously in history but also share and perceive the same experiences. This results in value-sets that are developed in a formative phase early in life and which remain with the people from that generation for the rest of their lives (Ng and Parry, 2016). In addition, Eyerman and Turner (1998) agree that the elaboration of every generational consciousness is a central prerequisite for the analysis of generations. Kupperschmidt (2000) adds that values affect employees' expectations towards the organisation, what they desire from work and how they want to satisfy those needs. Therefore, a social perspective in this research must be considered when investigating young professionals' PC expectations.

Despite the challenge of investigating generations more precisely and in greater depth, the research on different generations generally still takes an isolated view. The main reason for this is that the application of the cohort perspective, which first became popular in the 1960s, especially in Western economies such as Australia, the UK and the US, still dominates the published discourse (Ortiz-Pimentel, Molina and Ronda-Pupo, 2020). In accordance with the above-presented definitions, Strauss and Howe (1991) suggest a categorisation by birth-years and view generations as cyclical. For this, they use the definition of an identifiable group that shares birth-years, age, location and significant life events at a critical developmental stage. These critical developmental stages are divided by five to seven years into the first wave, the core group and the last wave (McCrindle, 2014). Therefore, a generation is represented objectively as an observable group using concrete boundaries that correspond to a set of birth-years. Researchers may use the cohort perspective, for example, to identify the job expectations of members of a sufficiently homogeneous generation who share commonalities that are relatively fixed and measurable (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Howe and Strauss, 2002). In contrast to the social perspective, however, the cohort perspective does not account for marginalised sectors of society, and the role of explaining historical events is limited. Nevertheless, researchers of generational theory, in combination with work-related variables, have almost exclusively adopted the cohort perspective (Lyons and Kuron, 2014).

As shown in Figure 3, the ranges of birth cohorts used by scholars vary and therefore overlap (Parry and Urwin, 2011; Scholz, 2019). Most scholars agree with the argumentation of Pilcher (1994) that precise boundaries are not crucially important, as generational trends should reveal themselves even if the time spans seem to blur together.
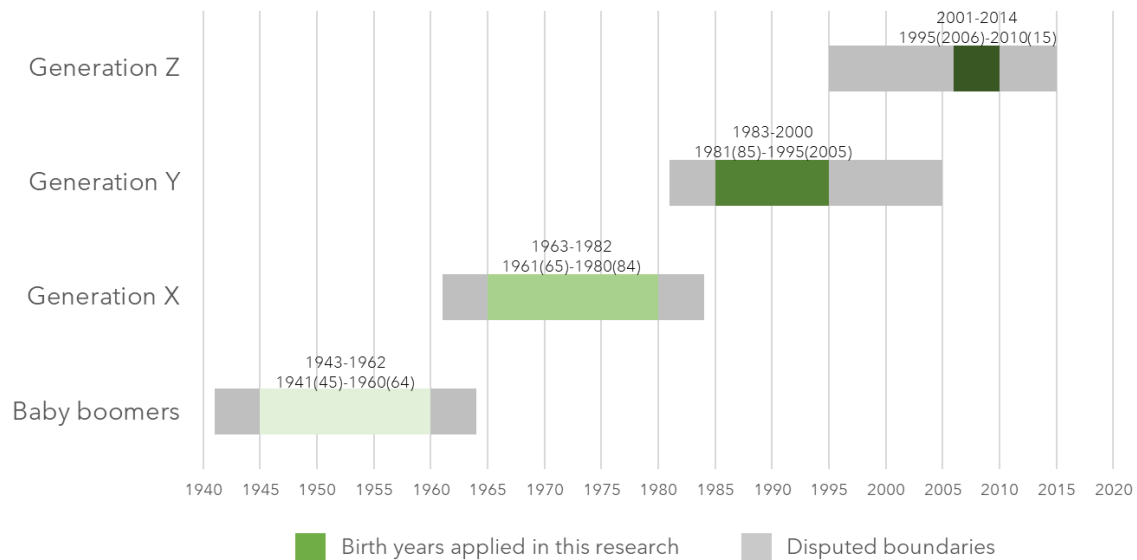
Figure 3: Generations defined by birth-years
Adapted from: Strauss and Howe (1991), McCrindle (2014), Scholz (2014), Klaffke (2021b)

Next, distinguishing between different generations becomes even more difficult when age and period effects are studied as defined earlier in this subchapter. Mostly observed in cross-sectional studies, this approach fails because the true effects of age are ignored (Costanza and Finkelstein, 2015). Accordingly, cross-sectional studies control for period effects but confound age and cohort effects (Twenge *et al.*, 2010; Rudolph *et al.*, 2020). Nonetheless, research that identifies period effects, such as impactful events (e.g., economic crisis) is useful to understand the context of the phenomenon. As this study focuses on the contemporary phenomenon of young professionals, these period effects can be discovered to better understand the expectations of newcomers to their organisations and the associated dynamics.

Not only are there variations in the specific start and end dates used to delineate generations, but the terms used to describe them are also applied differently by academics over time (Smola and Sutton, 2002; Rudolph *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, these definitions often vary across different disciplines (Dencker, Joshi and Martocchio, 2008). A distinction between general, partial and specific generations is often missing, which can lead to confusion over the methodology and outcomes of the studies (Arnett,

Trzesniewski and Donnellan, 2013). Furthermore, scholars have questioned the validity of the premise that people are sociologically and psychologically different according to when they were born (Schröder, 2019; Rudolph and Zacher, 2022). Hence, Mason and Wolfinger (2001) conclude that in most cases, generations can be closely interrelated. This has led to condemnation of the theoretical constructs of generations, which can only be overcome via detailed and in-depth definitions of generational cohorts that factor in social space, geographical location, gender and so on (Parry and Urwin, 2021). If a solely objective attempt is made to define units of enquiry that explain group differences, it is most likely to fail because the research questions do not reach beyond a simplistic view. Instead of relying on determinism, the need arises to harness the subjective, dynamic and actionist aspects of life in society (Rudolph *et al.*, 2020). In the context of understanding young professionals' PC in the formation phase, it is essential for this thesis to include these aspects of society and life in organisations.

In the socialisation hypothesis, an individual's fundamental values largely emerge during the childhood, adolescent and early adult years and reflect the conditions prevailing during the formative phase. Here, too, the location and duration of the formative phase are defined differently in the literature: for example, between the ages of 15 and 20 (Ingelhart, 1997) or between the ages of 16 and 24 (Schuman and Scott, 1989). This age range is particularly interesting to consider because it is during this period that personality development and social integration take place. Above all, this development is characterised by the detachment from the parental home, the acquisition of one's own action-orientated value positioning, the development into a sovereign consumer and the experience of the first acquisition of competence through employment and the financial independence that comes with it. It is also important to note that times of crisis and war can have a particularly formative effect on generations and therefore cannot be disregarded in this type of research.

To briefly sum up, the theory of generations was raised among 20th century sociologists as explanations for social change. Later, psychologists joined the debate on generations, mainly applying birth-cohorts to determine the generations. Today, the general argument for the existence of generations is changing (Rudolph and Zacher, 2022). With every new generation, old patterns of thinking are disrupted and replaced by new ideas.

2.2.1.1 Generational differences at work

Interest in generational research has also been growing in the context of HRM, as practitioners seek to understand workplace attitudes, behaviours, preferences and working values in order to offer recommendations for organisations to attract, develop and retain their workforce (Sparrow and Cooper, 2014; Ng and Parry, 2016). Studies in this area provide evidence for the idea that every generation has a unique set of preferences, both inside and outside the workplace. Furthermore, Lyons and Kuron (2014) have found that several scholars highlight that generational differences in job expectations influence the requirements for all aspects of people management: career development, collaboration, leadership style, recruitment and training. This increasing interest is highly noticeable in German companies, where the phenomenon of a dynamic world of work, often referred to as *'Arbeit 4.0'*, is urging organisations to adapt their strategies and procedures. *'Arbeit 4.0'*, internationally recognised as 'new work', reflects high competition in the labour market, an increase in flexible working models, shorter innovation cycles and the use of digital transformation within organisations (Bosse and Zink, 2019). At the same time, the shift in generational values predicts an impact on employer–employee relationships. Moreover, recent major historical events, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the war in Ukraine, have caused rising prices and disrupted supply chains, accelerating these developments and necessitating a realignment of the workplaces involved.

Referring to generational differences in the context of employment, Dencker, Joshi and Martocchio (2008) suggest that generational identities emerge in the workplace based on shared memories of organisational events that take place within each generation's late formative years. As explained earlier, these scholars also agree that one's generational identity may vary by age, education, gender or social background. Furthermore, individuals are not strictly tied to being part of a birth cohort. Against this backdrop, Dencker, Joshi and Martocchio (2008) assume that shared generational identity leads to common work-related expectations. Thus, mutual obligations between the employee and the organisation are formed – this is also expressed as the PC (Rousseau, 1995), which will be discussed in the next subchapter. Adding a further aspect to this discussion, the inter-generational interaction noted by Joshi, Dencker and Franz (2011) – and regarded as a critical component of Mannheim's (1952) theory – is important in the transmission of resources, skills and values, which can range from resistive to transitive, across generations. This observation means that either knowledge and behaviour are passed on from one generation to the next or the coming generation rejects the behaviour of the

older generation, which can lead to conflicts in the workplace. Rudolph and Zacher (2017, p. 125) propose considering generations from a lifespan developmental perspective, which can help clarify and support future employment *'that seeks reasonable means of conceptualizing and understanding generation-like explanations for individual-level processes and outcomes in the organisational context'.* Although research applying this lifespan perspective has received little attention so far (Lyons and Kuron, 2014), this view suggests that the development of employees occurs in a continuous, multicausal, multidirectional and multidimensional process (Rudolph *et al.*, 2020). Hence, multiple influences affect young professionals' expectations towards their workplaces, and this must be acknowledged in this research.

By carefully analysing the attitudes, behaviours and values of a targeted generation based on the key events and socio-economic trends during their formative years, it may be possible to identify HR strategies and practices that will be favourably recognised by a certain cohort. Accordingly, the generational perspective claims that understanding employees belonging to a specified cohort at work can offer additional benefits compared to merely focusing on differences in education, work experience and personality (Herriot and Pemberton, 1997; Werkmann-Kracher and Rietiker, 2010; Ng and Parry, 2016). Klaffke (2021a) has suggested a generation tableau to comprehend the individual phases of the different generations in the German labour market. Figure 4 outlines the life stages of Gen Z to better understand the classification of their current life situation and development prospects, which will be discussed in detail in subchapter 2.2.1.2.

Generations exist because they are constructs of our society, and this is acknowledged in management practices. In contrast, supporters of the social perspective argue that generationally-based practices are built upon shaky foundations, spreading erroneous ideas based on weak or arguably non-existent evidence (Rudolph *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary not only to understand the external influences, critical events, cultural icons and thus collective memories that affect the creation of a shared value system (Twenge and Campbell, 2008), but also to investigate how generational assumptions are developed in coordination with others. Nevertheless, supporters of the social perspective recognise the socially accepted nature of applying such generational descriptions to people of different ages (Rudolph *et al.*, 2020). However, they stress the ubiquity of generational stereotypes that have been institutionalised in society at large, with some scholars (Arnett, Trzesniewski and Donnellan, 2013; Schröder, 2019; Rudolph *et al.*, 2020; Parry and Urwin, 2021) criticising the ways in which generational terms are applied in an inflammatory and unreflective manner.
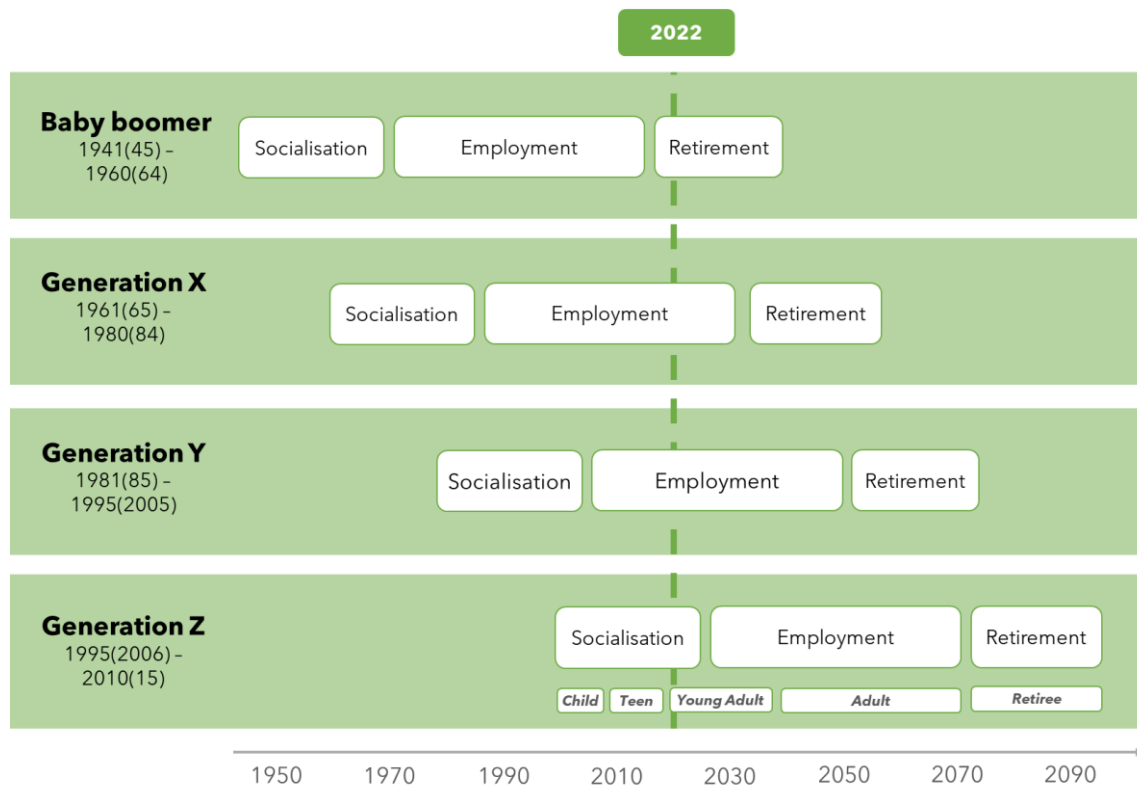
Figure 4: Generations in the workplace in Germany
Adapted from: Klaffke (2021b)

Despite the confusion and limitations caused by dates and terms, generational theory has been expanding in popularity in recent decades, especially in the field of HRM. Advocates of generational theory often acknowledge the multidimensionality and ambiguity of the concept of generations. They claim that the characteristics of a generation evaluated by quantitative research are decisive in determining general assumptions that lead to implications for HR practices in organisations and are therefore of academic interest (Lub *et al.*, 2016; Connolly, 2019; Scholz and Grotefend, 2019a). This thesis follows the scholarly majority that maintains that minor yet meaningful differences across generations may exist, developing through different societal and historical events and shaping attitudes, values and behaviours. However, it is more important for this thesis to argue that generations and generational differences exist in terms of individuals subjective perception and interpretation of generational differences, such as in the workplace. This means that current quantitative research in this area should not be ignored, but that the generational approach needs to be applied with caution and can only serve as an orientation. To ensure a thorough examination, it is therefore inevitable to include generalised data, observations, context and perceptions of generational differences to understand a social complex construct in depth.

To provide foundational knowledge and highlight potential generational differences, the antecedent generational cohorts in the workforce – baby boomers, Generation X and Generation Y – are outlined below. Their general characteristics, work environments and career expectations can be used to cross-reference similarities and differences compared to Gen Z and the subsequent findings of this thesis.

Baby boomers

General Societal Characteristics. The baby boomer generation's birth-years span 1946 through to 1964. Born in the aftermath of World War II, they have a global perspective with a social focus (Zemke, Raines and Filipczak, 1999; Scholz, 2014). They experienced the building of the Berlin Wall in Germany, the Cuban missile crisis and the space race, and they were the first to watch colour television. This generational cohort is characterised as optimistic, loyal and interested in personal growth (Steckl, Simshäuser and Niederberger, 2019). At 23%, the baby boomer generation is the largest cohort of the German workforce (Destatis, 2021), although the older members of this generation have already reached retirement.

Work Environment. The baby boomers have contributed to key changes in organisational studies, including steps towards workplace diversity and capitalist innovation (Zemke, Raines and Filipczak, 1999; Mangelsdorf, 2017). Those baby boomers who are still working require jobs that are less physically demanding. They often struggle with new technological innovations, but they are hard and ethics-driven workers. As a result, conflicts with younger generations often occur when younger employees appear not to be as committed and loyal to their work (Pritchard and Whiting, 2014; Scholz, 2014). This generation appreciates good supervisor relations and positive interactions with co-workers (Karp and Sirias, 2001). This assertion is supported by Twenge *et al.*'s (2010) time-lag study, which evaluated data from 1976, 1991 and 2006 and found a minor decrease in intrinsic values (e.g., meaningful work) and a growing importance of social values (e.g., friendships at work) over time. Williams *et al.* (2010) conclude that baby boomers value work atmosphere more having grown up in a community in the spirit of progress. Furthermore, academics (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002; Eisner, 2005) support the idea that baby boomers value job security and a stable working environment.

Career and Workplace Expectations. For the most part, the male members of this generation have had a management or specialist career. Generally, baby boomers are satisfied with their achieved status. According to Wong *et al.*, (2008), this generation is characterised

as loyal to the organisation, idealistic and ambitious. Collins (1998) suggests that baby boomers' strong focus on hard work and achievement may mean that this group values extrinsic rewards and status symbols in recognition of their loyalty and commitment. At the end of their careers, they still want to be actively included and serve as mentors or coaches for younger employees (Hess and Jepsen, 2009; Oertel, 2021). In response to the shortage of skilled employees, the German government has adapted the country's labour laws to allow employers to retain these often referred to as 'silver workers' in their organisations (Pimpertz and Stettes, 2020).

Generation X

General Societal Characteristics. Members of this generation were born between 1965 and 1979 (Twenge *et al.*, 2010; Mangelsdorf, 2017) and represent nearly 20% of Germany's population (Destatis, 2021). Individuals from this generation experienced ecological and existential crises, such as the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, as well as the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the Cold War. They witnessed the arrival of the first personal computers in 1976 and have a positive attitude towards technological innovations. In addition, they are more locally focused by establishing communities of purpose. Members of this generation are considered to be highly realistic, resourceful and self-interested (Twenge *et al.*, 2010; Mangelsdorf, 2017). According to Smola and Sutton (2002) and Kupperschmidt (2000), members of Generation X are often considered to be cynical and pessimistic.

Work Environment. Growing up in a work environment where their parents had to face job insecurity and layoffs resulted in scepticism among Generation X employees. Moreover, during their formative years, it was difficult for Generation X to find jobs due to economic uncertainty. Hence, this cohort is especially concerned with staying employed and flexible about doing so. Studies have shown that Generation X ranks job security as the most important motivational factor compared to other generations (Applebaum and Payne, 2005; Dries, Pepermans and De Kerpel, 2008). Productivity is a primary focus of Generation X (Kupperschmidt, 2000), and HR policies have mainly been created by this cohort. For instance, their career concepts are well-structured and typically based on competencies (Scholz, 2014).

Career and Workplace Expectations. Members of Generation X value skills development and work-life balance (Sullivan *et al.*, 2009; Oertel, 2021) higher than the baby boomers before them. The latter point can be attributed to Generation X's experiences of high rates of divorce and watching their parents work hard, with less work-life balance as a

result (Lub *et al.*, 2012). This generational cohort places company interests first and focuses on results and outcomes. In contrast, Smola and Sutton (2002) suggest that Generation X is more committed to their own careers than to their employers. Thus, Generation X prefers a self-determined career path where status and tenure are not as important. In turn, they tend to only do what is necessary and expect rewards in return for their efforts. Consequently, members of Generation X are likelier to leave a job in search of a more challenging work environment or higher pay compared to previous generations (Lapoint and Liprie-Spence, 2017). Although they have already achieved a lot, they are still pursuing their career goals in the knowledge that they do not have much time left to achieve them (Twenge *et al.*, 2010; Klaffke, 2021a).

Generation Y

General Societal Characteristics. This generation, also often referred to as *millennials* or the *me generation*, was born between 1980 and 1994 (Twenge *et al.*, 2010). Their population size in Germany is equal to that of Generation X at 20% but with lower unemployment rates (Destatis, 2021). They have been influenced by the rise of the internet followed by global networking, mass shootings in schools, global terrorism (e.g., 9/11), the prominence of business and economic changes (e.g., the introduction of the Euro as a new currency in 2002 or the real estate bubble burst in 2008). Members of this generation are typically referred to as distrustful of and opinionated towards institutions, technologically interested, self-involved and fast learners (Smola and Sutton, 2002; Twenge and Campbell, 2008; Mahmoud *et al.*, 2020).

Work Environment. Generation Y grew up watching their parents affected by the 2000 dot-com bubble and high divorce rates (Linden, 2015). Furthermore, this generation experienced layoffs at a young age during the 2008 financial crisis (Arora and Dhole, 2019). Thus, this cohort has become sceptical of long-term obligations, including to their jobs (Howe and Strauss, 2002; Lapoint and Liprie-Spence, 2017). Having families with dual incomes has made these individuals pursue their financial goals and aim to secure enough money to earn a living and have therefore adopted a work-to-life balance (Lyons and Kuron, 2014). Generation Y is also credited with having a high level of motivation towards success, as well as target- and learning-orientation (Eisner, 2005). These attributes can be explained by Generation Y's socialisation, during which they were told that they could become anything they imagined (Klaffke, 2021b). Thus, they have unified their work and personal lives into a work-life blend (Scholz, 2014).

Career and Workplace Expectations. A constantly changing, globalised world does not offer linear career paths (Lub *et al.*, 2012; Schwieger and Ladwig, 2018). Therefore, Generation Y is seeking meaningful work and more individualised career plans. Furthermore, its members value personal development and enjoy challenging work (Lub, 2013). According to Twenge and Campbell (2008), they are optimistic and even more goal-orientated and demanding of the work environment than Generation X. This is supported by Eisner (2005), who states that Generation Y is known for its demands for challenging and stimulating work. That said, they also give the highest priority to personal well-being and quality of life. In turn, since they are reported to be less committed to their organisations, they are likelier to leave if they feel unfulfilled (Eisner, 2005; Twenge *et al.*, 2010). Although millennials are still a relatively young workforce, they continue to reach higher roles within companies (Mangelsdorf, 2017), with greater interest in careers that are expressive of extroversion and social influence (Lyons and Kuron, 2014; Klaffke, 2021b).

In summary, the above explanations reflect only a straightforward overview of the different generations; they do not allow for any concrete design of generation management policies in the HR sector. For this reason, this thesis rejects such simplification and the unreflective use of generational advice literature as a standard. Nevertheless, the above descriptions point to significant differences that contribute to the broad discussion of expectations and values that emphasises understanding, respect and mutual appreciation between the various generations in the modern-day workplace.

2.2.1.2 Introducing a new generation into the organisational context

While HRM is still addressing the integration of Generation Y, the next generation is already on the way, the first of whom are gaining their initial work experience. The various terms *Generation Z*, *Gen Z*, *Generation Internet*, the *iGeneration* (Twenge, 2017; Barhate and Dirani, 2021) or *Generation Greta* derived from the Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg (Hurrelmann and Albrecht, 2020) are used to describe this youngest generation. As of 2021, this generation represents nearly 14% of Germany's population (Destatis, 2021). The name Gen Z is used worldwide and is therefore the most recognised. Adapting this term, reference is made alphabetically to the previous generations (Generation X, Generation Y) or the distribution of the internet from 1995 onwards as an essential constituent characteristic.

Interest in the Gen Z phenomenon extends to all phases of life: from the parental home through to school, work and family. In the current literature, this new generation additionally spans various roles, from consumer to citizen to employee to media expert. Curiosity about Gen Z research is palpable everywhere across a wide range of disciplines. This can be attributed to the fact that between 2010 and 2020, almost half of the employees in companies in Germany were set to retire due to demographic change (Scholz and Grotefend, 2019). This has already resulted in a personnel bottleneck in various occupational areas and positions, as confirmed by a global study by Deloitte on Generations Z and Y (Deloitte, 2019, 2020b), a trend that has gained political importance in Germany (Deutscher Bundestag, 2017). These new employees have an unwritten set of attitudes, behaviours, expectations (Grow and Yang, 2018), experiences, education (Scholz, 2014), lifestyle, values and ethics (Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019) in relation to the employment relationship, which stands to substantially affect industries and organisations. Recent publications on Gen Z (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel *et al.*, 2019; Scholz and Grotefend, 2019b; Deloitte, 2020b; Ortiz-Pimentel, Molina and Ronda-Pupo, 2020; Pichler, Kohli and Granitz, 2021; Destatis, 2022c) suggest that understanding this new cohort and devising strategies to accommodate young professionals into the workplace are of utmost importance, particularly in the context of HRM.

Gen Z, the age group born from 1996 onwards, currently represents the children and youth generation in Germany (Klaffke, 2021b). Most of their parents belong to Generation X or baby boomers. The beginning of the formative phase of Gen Z, which is important according to the generation hypothesis, can be assumed to be in the late 2000s. Statements about collective events that have shaped its generational personality can, therefore, not yet be made conclusively (Albert, Hurrelmann, Leven *et al.*, 2019; Scholz, 2019). Currently, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine – and their economic and political consequences – can be discussed as the defining events for this generation. Notably, these events have already provoked rapid change in the working world, including working from home and the lockdown of industries such as tourism and gastronomy but also energy and supply-chain disruption. This environmental change will most likely lead to adapted values, attitudes and expectations in working life, not only for Gen Z (Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya and Solnet, 2021).

Since Gen Z is still largely in school, vocational training or university studies, direct reference to work attitudes or job expectations is rare. Nevertheless, their attitudes, behaviours and values are determined by the culture and value systems brought from home (Bencsik, Juhász and Horváth-Csikós, 2016). For example, fundamental

statements on the values and worldviews of Gen Z in Germany can be found in the form of a general overview in the 15th Child and Youth Report of the Federal Government (Deutscher Bundestag, 2017), the 18th Shell Youth Study (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel, *et al.*, 2019) and the empirical survey by McDonald's (Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019). Specific life-world models are qualitatively differentiated in the SINUS youth research project (Calmbach *et al.*, 2020). In addition, the Trendence Student Report (Trendence Institut GmbH, 2019) regularly determines the employer preferences of students at general education schools in grades eight to 13.

Keeping in mind the organisational context, the following subchapters develop a comprehensive overview of Gen Z. First, consideration is given to the societal elements (including *political*, *economic*, *socio-cultural*, *technological*, *legal* and *environmental*) that influence this young generation. Second, an overview is given of the background at the individual level (including values, attitudes and expectations). Third, in the knowledge that different societal and individual elements will create generational differences that result in variant PCs, these elements are brought together in a conclusion on preliminary job and career expectations (see the framework in Figure 5). Overall, knowledge of generational differences is applied to determine the research priorities. To identify the key differences, the antecedent Generation Y is predominantly used for comparison purposes. Since little research is available on Gen Z so far, worldwide findings from studies are additionally presented and, where necessary, cultural differences compared to Germany are specifically highlighted.
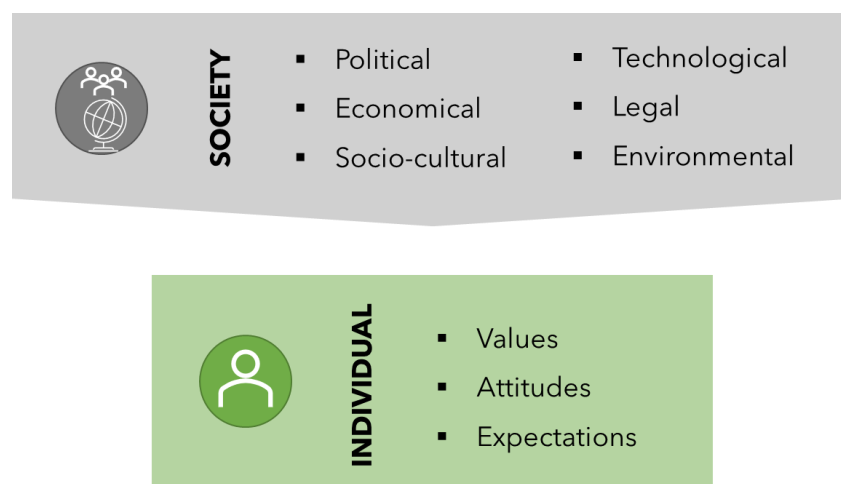
Figure 5: Framework of societal influences on Gen Z
Own illustration

Gen Z is characterised by numerous societal and historical factors that currently and sustainably shape their workplace-related attitudes, behaviours and values. To examine the *societal factors* more closely, PESTLE analysis is applied here as a tried and tested approach to business and strategy development (Aguilar, 1967; Fischer *et al.*, 2018). PESTLE is an acronym for the ***p**olitical*, ***e**conomic*, ***s**ocio-cultural*, ***t**echnological*, ***l**egal* and ***e**nvironmental* factors that influence the target group of companies. A PESTLE analysis seeks to form scenarios based on macroeconomic trends and the internal strategies and plans of the target companies (Aguilar, 1967; Fahey and Narayanan, 1986). Such scenarios make it possible not only to recognise future trends at an early stage, but also to draw useful conclusions for HR strategy, future personnel requirements and the qualitative demands of the workforce (Fischer *et al.*, 2018). Everything external to the unit of analysis is considered, while events that occur in the environment can have significant impacts on the unit of analysis. Therefore, it can be assumed that this tool is especially useful when investigating a new phenomenon or exploring relatively unknown research areas. Dencker, Joshi and Martocchio (2008) support this idea by arguing that generational groups emerge based on collective memory generated in seminal societal and historical events that individuals have experienced during their formative years. Therefore, the adaptation of PESTLE analysis to generational research can help the researcher to identify and extensively describe the elements influencing a particular cohort – in this case, Gen Z. A comprehensive overview can be found in the Appendix 1.2 Overview of PESTLE-Analysis Generation Z.

PESTLE analysis of Gen Z

Political. Clear political positioning can no longer be guaranteed in Germany; the representative democratic system that has been established for decades is teetering. The UK has left the EU, and the previous US President Donald Trump has questioned the values of the traditional democratic system in recent years, which has led to great uncertainty in Germany and worldwide affecting also Gen Z who primarily vote for a minority party, the free democrats (Scholz and Grotefend, 2019b). From a progressive standpoint, younger generations in the US have led the same-sex marriage and Black Lives Matter movements, while policy discussions on religious freedom, immigration and transgender and women's rights have fuelled the fire for many Gen Z students to strive for equal human rights (Deloitte, 2020b). Seemiller and Grace (2018) suggest that these issues are likely to have contributed to Gen Z's 'we'-centred mentality, in which their concerns are placed around the well-being of everyone rather than solely themselves.

The rise in political interest among younger generations in Germany has been confirmed by the Shell Youth Study. Research by IFAC (2018) ranks Gen Z's public policy priorities on an international level: stability of countries' economies, quality of education and availability of jobs. In Germany specifically, even 30 years after the reunification of East and West Germany, the sizeable economic differences, structurally weaker regions in the East, and salary differences between East and West have not gone unnoticed by Gen Z (Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019). More recently, due to the COVID-19 crisis, labour market-related issues have been increasingly brought into focus, including mobile working, work-life balance, short-term work and support for companies in times of crisis to secure jobs. Responding to these issues at the political level can also create expectations for Gen Z as they enter the workplace.

Economic. Germany has the world's fourth highest gross domestic product (GDP) at 3,332.23 billion euros as of 2020 and the lowest unemployment rate within the EU (Statista, 2020). Germany is therefore considered to be a country with high living standards (OECD, 2020). Nevertheless, the OECD (2020) describes the German economy to be in recession, having been hit hard by the crisis in global trade in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The expected increases in unemployment were, to some extent, mitigated by the short-term work scheme provided by the German government (OECD, 2020), according to which no applicant would statistically have to remain unemployed. Moreover, offers of vocational education and training (VET) for young professionals have been increasing since 2005, although the number of applicants is decreasing, since most school students prefer to go to colleges and universities. Hence, dual-study programmes gain more interest.

Education in Germany is free at almost every level, and considerations such as student loans are uncommon. Indeed, the German government provides federal financial aid (*BAföG*) for students (German Bundestag, 2017). As a result, the increase in the number of young university graduates, at about 55.8% in 2021 compared to 33.3% in 2000. (This topic will be further explored in the socio-cultural section below.) Aside from these increases in educational qualifications, employees carry heavy tax and social security burdens. Due to tax exemptions (e.g., inheritance and capital income), wealth inequality has increased significantly – a development already viewed critically by Gen Z (Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019). Compared to previous generations, young people mostly enjoy better living standards, live longer and are wealthier (Scholz and Grotefend, 2019a, 2019b). This is often presented to explain why this young generation is calling for higher payment and financial rewards. However, scholars tend to base

generational expectations, attitudes and behaviours on economic descriptions, leaving industry- and region-related differences out of the equation.

Another important topic that has shaken the German economy is the lack of digital infrastructure. The OECD (2020) highlights that infrastructural investments, which are critical to digital transformation and decarbonisation, have been insufficient thus far in Germany and could be an important part of the country's recovery from COVID-19. More broadly, it must be considered that different current economic and political situations in Europe lead to different ways of addressing these challenges (Scholz and Grotefend, 2019b). Ultimately, the economy can significantly influence the job and career expectations of young employees.

Socio-cultural. Derived from the favourable economic conditions outlined above, health-conscious living has recently drawn greater attention in German society (Albert, Hurrelmann, Leven *et al*., 2019; Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019; Schnetzer and Hurrelmann, 2021). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, this topic was considered important, but it has since taken on a new sense of the immediacy of life and death. In addition, isolation from socialising has increasingly worsened the mental state of this young generation. It is therefore interesting to examine how a pandemic can affect the job and career expectations of Gen Z in the context of health-conscious living.

Apart from the COVID-19 crisis, Gen Z is growing up in a well-organised environment and expects structure in everyday life (Scholz and Grotefend, 2019a), especially in Germany. In particular, this has resulted from changes in the educational sector since 1999, when the Bologna process started to standardise study courses and degrees in the EU. The five-year integrated curriculum at the university level that led to the diploma was replaced by a two-level system: bachelor's and master's (Klaffke, 2014). Concurrently, the school system was reformed in 2001, meaning that the number of years in school until graduation was reduced from 13 to 12. Both of these major changes were intended to enable the younger generation to start their vocational training earlier and to press school leavers into universities and the labour market more quickly (Scholz, 2014). However, such efforts proved unsuccessful because the level of qualifications declined. As a result, the number of years until graduation was reinstated at 13 years in 2014. Currently, more and more students are now opting for a master's degree programme (Klaffke, 2021b). However, the introduction of new educational systems created a huge amount of structure to which Gen Z became accustomed (Scholz and Grotefend, 2019b): whereas almost half of all German pupils in 2002 attended a

Hauptschule or *Realschule*, only a quarter in 2019 do so. On the other hand, the *Gymnasium* (41% in 2002 to 47% in 2019) and the integrated school formats (13% in 2002 to 26% in 2019) have gained in popularity during this period, with no noticeable difference between urban and rural areas (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel *et al.*, 2019).

Due to German immigration policy, Gen Z is growing up with peers from different cultures, thereby building a tolerance for diversity (Eilers, 2019; OECD, 2020). This appears to be a worldwide phenomenon: the notion of inclusion is important to Gen Z, with 91% believing that everyone is born equal (Barnes & Nobel College Insights, 2018) and should be treated that way. In Germany, Gen Z has known a female Chancellor, Angela Merkel, for over 15 years (Kring and Hurrelmann, 2019); Maas (2019) notes that gender-specific differentiation has become less of a topic as a result. Ultimately, issues of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are more prevalent and globally discussed than in any other generation (Berkup, 2014; Lanier, 2017; Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019; Schroth, 2019; Deloitte, 2020b; Klaffke, 2021b). Thus, organisations are tasked with clarifying how these topics affect daily working life and how to further incorporate strategies and policies with respect to a multicultural society.

A good family life plays a central role for this generation of young people. Since 2002, the percentage of young people who have a positive relationship with their parents has been steadily increasing. Four out of 10 young people, mainly from Gen Z, get along very well with their parents, regardless of gender and age (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel *et al.*, 2019). Some experts suggest that this leads to a later weaning from the parental home, which implies a delayed completion of the socialisation phase (Maas, 2019; Scholz and Vyugina, 2019). On the other hand, increasing '*Nesthocker*' behaviour has not been confirmed (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel *et al.*, 2019). In addition, socio-economic situations have an impact on families; for example, a precarious financial situation can increase the potential for conflict. Nonetheless, this trend predicts that parents may have a large say once their children have entered the employment phase. Schroth (2019) notes that Gen Z may enter workplaces with a fixed mindset and be unwilling to take on more challenging work. They may ignore constructive feedback from supervisors and be more likely to seek allies among their parents and friends to complain about their bosses or the company to shore up their self-esteem (Schroth, 2019).

Since reunification, studies have repeatedly found differences between young people in the new federal states and the old West German federal states. A clear contrast is evident in attitudes towards democracy, the compatibility of family and career, and confidence

in one's own future. Although these differences have been decreasing since 2002, they are still most visible with regard to the compatibility of career and family, better earning potential and job offers in Western parts of Germany (Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019).

It is also worth looking into the future, when Gen Z will become parents themselves, and what impact this will have on the workplace. Through '*Elterngeld Plus*', introduced in 2015, families with young children are supported by a German state family allowance if the parents share the responsibility for family and employment as partners. They can take parental leave at the same time or stay at home regardless of gender. This supports men in particular in fulfilling their desire to play an active role as fathers. Surprisingly, 54% of all young people in Germany favour a male provider model (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel *et al.*, 2019). Thus, both sexes have similar traditional ideas about the employment of a father and a mother (Grow and Yang, 2018). Currently, scholars claim that Gen Z would expect a family-friendly policy in organisations. This appears contradictory: with Gen Z demanding equality rights on the one hand but wanting to live in a traditional family model like the baby boomers, where the women stay at home. One explanation for this is the divergent labour force participation of women in West and East Germany (1956–1990), which is perpetuated in the minds of today's young generation, as daughters develop similar attitudes to their mothers when they pass on their own ideals and take up gainful employment, for example. The difference between the former West and East Germany should also be emphasised at this point as far as the assumed role of the mother is concerned: in the East, more men and women would like the mother to work part-time, approx. 50%; than in the West, approx. 25% (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel *et al.*, 2019).

The birth rate in Germany is declining (Eilers, 2019), and the country is faced with an ageing population, leaving a skills gap that cannot be covered by increased educational qualifications and immigration policies (Mangelsdorf, 2017; OECD, 2020). A shortage of skilled employees is therefore expected, and this trend inevitably impacts Gen Z's expectations regarding the employment relationship.

Technological. Gen Z is the first born entirely in the digital age (Scholz and Grotefend, 2019a). Rapid technological advances and being equipped with devices since they were born are the most distinctive traits of this young generation (Berkup, 2014; Klaffke, 2014). Even though the technological infrastructure in Germany, as described in the

'political' section above, still needs to catch up, access to a robust internet connection and smart devices is mostly better than in other EU countries (Scholz, 2019).

According to their own self-assessment, members of Gen Z in Germany spend an average of 3.7 hours on the internet on a typical day, with no differences based on gender, age or social background. They search the internet four to five times a day (preferably via Google) for a spontaneous question or search term. Their key priority is communication or entertainment, such as music or videos. At least 71% of them search at least once a day for information of a general nature for school, education or work. In contrast, only 12% use the internet daily for self-production, publishing their own content (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel *et al.*, 2019). Social media channels such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, WhatsApp and YouTube have become part of their daily lives (Chicca and Shellenbarger, 2018). They can use social media to connect with any person in any location within this techno-global world and share information in seconds (Klaffke, 2014; Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019). Thus, their attention span is short, and they can be interested in more than one subject at the same time (Berkup, 2014; Chicca and Shellenbarger, 2018; Mangelsdorf, 2017; Maas, 2019). Scholars have underlined that Gen Z wants everything to happen quickly and instantaneously because of the impact created by the advancement of technology. Consequently, their intense use of technology can lead to addiction (Schnetzer, 2021), although addictions have been observed in other generations as well. Thus far, however, it has not been investigated whether technology is a new addiction type and causes other addiction types to decrease or if an increase in addictive behaviour is noticeable throughout the entire generation. Nevertheless, the use of smart devices is increasing in the workplace which opens up a whole new world of education and training needs that will also create new jobs and professions in this area (Chillakuri, 2020), driving innovation forward.

Legal. Although many laws in Germany relate to the workplace, the rules and guidelines that influence everyday working life have only been marginally addressed by generational research. When examining how the relationship between a Gen Z employee and the organisation is created, labour law is of particular importance (Scholz and Weth, 2015), as it provides the basis for cooperation. In general, a structural disadvantage is evident for employees vis-à-vis employers. The resulting labour law is divided into two different areas: individual labour law and collective labour law. On the one hand, individual labour law regulates working conditions, such as working hours, part-time employment, the minimum wage and protection against unfair dismissal. On the other

hand, the collective labour law regulates the relationship between employees as a unit and the employer making use of collective agreements.

Concerning representation by works councils in organisations, Scholz (2014) claims that Generation Y sees it as uncomfortable to be seen with employee representation, whereas Gen Z sees contact with these allies as a workplace survival strategy. For Generation Y, it seems inconceivable to go to the works council in the event of a dispute, because if the employer and the employee essentially agree to ignore labour law (in the sense of labour protection rights), the works council, in insisting on compliance with labour law, can only hinder, not protect (Scholz and Weth, 2015). While it may be true that Gen Z welcomes support for personal matters by the works council, it does not influence the current policies and regulations for collective matters. In recent years, however, the proportion of younger people among trade union members has slowly but significantly increased (Scholz, 2014). Against this backdrop, Gen Z appears to be concerned with a clearly defined working space, including working-time regulations and further training opportunities, and with the right to disconnect (e.g. not having to respond to work emails outside working hours).

However, the works council is not the main institution influencing Gen Z in this regard. Referring to the above-mentioned political aspects, equality between men and women, which is governed by the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany), is also being implemented through the '*Führungspositionen-Gesetz - FüPoG I and II*' (Executive Positions Act) from 2015 and 2021. In the future, 30% of the individuals on the supervisory boards of German companies with more than three borad members must be women (Eilers, 2019).

Overall technological advancements have increased employers' expectations regarding private use of technological equipment in the workplace, up to and including the handling of private matters during working hours. Therefore, data protection is another legal concern for Gen Z. Secure IT systems in hybrid work environments that comply with legal requirements can have a negative impact on the freedom to use social media in the workplace. On the other hand, concerns around companies using technology to track and monitor their employees are rising since the introduction of the revised GDPR in 2018.

Environmental. Environmental issues are of existential importance to this young generation (Kring and Hurrelmann, 2019). According to the Shell Youth study, the importance of environmentally conscious behaviour (83%) ranked highest among

Generation X, who participated in the study in the second half of the 1980s. Over time, it can be observed that its importance decreased among Generation Y in 2002 (59%). By 2019, Gen Z ranked protecting the environment (71%) as more important than a high standard of living (63%). This increase in environmental awareness is supported by other small-scale surveys and reports from national and international consultancies (IFAC, 2018; Schnetzer, 2019; Deloitte, 2020a). Although environmental issues have been important considerations for other generations (and cannot therefore be characterised as a generational issue in general), an investigation into how Gen Z approaches these environmental issues is lacking. Referring to Seemiller and Grace's (2017) conclusion about Gen Z's apparent 'we'-centred mentality in relation to political aspects, Hurrelmann and Albrecht (2020) extend this debate by observing that Gen Z is inclined to demand change from everyone rather than just changing their own habits. The role of Gen Z in expecting sustainability and action on climate change from organisations is an interesting view to examine further.

To sum up this subchapter, the PESTLE analysis outlines the societal environment in which and the historical backdrop against which Gen Z is growing up, based on the assumption that generations have been shaped by such varying socialisation influences.

After discussing the societal influences, the following subchapter critically reflects on the results at the *individual level* of Gen Z. In the context of organisations, *work-related values* represent an employee's beliefs. In turn, *attitudes* are the established way of responding based on these values, and both values and attitudes are variables that influence the cognitive process and subsequent behaviours (Wicker, 1969; Črešnar and Nedelko, 2020). On the other hand, *expectations* denote that employees – based on experiences or other influences – are sometimes willing to accept mediocrity, insofar as an alternative is lacking. For example, if an employee's remuneration is crucial to providing for the family, poor working conditions may be accepted, given that no risk-free option is available for the employee to change the situation (Dose, 1997). In short, values, attitudes and expectations predict what employees desire from their occupations or jobs. Unfortunately, these variables are often mixed and interrelated in the literature. Furthermore, research is lacking on these variables for Gen Z in particular and its members' job expectations at the time of this research. Because this key distinction is blurred, this literature review is structured according to Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell's (2019) applied definition of *work values*, specifically including findings and descriptions of values, attitudes and expectations, because they build their research on well-sited and extant literature in the field (e.g. Twenge *et al.*, 2010).

Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell's (2019) approach contains seven elements: *extrinsic*, *intrinsic*, *supervisory*, *social*, *altruistic*, *leisure* and *stability*. The following subchapter provides a brief and critical summary of these seven elements. A structured overview can be found in the Appendix 1.3 Overview of attitudes, expectations and values of Generation Z.

Values, attitudes and expectations of Gen Z

Extrinsic. Most scholars agree that payment and career opportunities, are the most important work values for Gen Z (Bencsik, Juhász and Horváth-Csikós, 2016; Iorgulescu, 2016; Berge and Berge, 2019; Maas, 2019; Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019; Deloitte, 2020b). Thus, the prospect of a higher salary motivates better performance at work (Csiszárik-Kocsír and Garia-Fodor, 2018). Conversely, interest in personal fulfilment has been seen to prevail over interest in money (Grow and Yang, 2018); this can be attributed to existing good living standards and labour market conditions. Indeed, the first practitioners in this field have stressed that Gen Z already takes an appropriate salary and career offers for granted due to the many job opportunities available to them (Barhate and Dirani, 2021). On the flipside, reasons for leaving an organisation include insufficient opportunities for advancement and dissatisfaction with salary (Deloitte, 2019). Such reasons for quitting (Klaffke, 2021b) echoes the debate currently being held over Gen Z's high expectations concerning remuneration and career development. Furthermore, while promotion prospects may be valued by Gen Z, it is questionable how offering such prospects relates to other generations in other life-phases and for whom a steep career progression (e.g., as a baby boomer) is no longer appealing.

In terms of career paths, findings differ from one scholar to another. Lanier (2017) suggests that traditional career opportunities are valued most, whereas Klaffke (2014) and Hesse and Mattmüller (2019) propose that new career paths should be offered. According to Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell (2019), Gen Z employees pursue a non-linear, flexible, job-hopping career in which horizontal and downward moves are acceptable in pursuit of faster advancement and overall career success. Besides traditional management, specialist and project management careers, this could include mosaic careers and horizontal careers with different areas of responsibility. In addition, a Canadian study (Mahmoud *et al.*, 2020) discovered that unlike Generations X and Y, Gen Z employees value external benefits and rewards, as a source of overall work motivation.

Intrinsic. Aside from extrinsic variables, Gen Z employees' most desired value is the ability to see the outcomes of their work, reflecting their interest in meaningful, purposeful work

(Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019). The importance of purposeful tasks to Gen Z is also confirmed in Germany by the Shell Youth study (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel *et al.*, 2019). Jansen, Odoni and Wombacher (2019) add that varied work tasks and freedom in how to complete these tasks are important factors. Thus, Gen Z prefers to work autonomously (Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019; Calmbach *et al.*, 2020). In contrast, this is not considered to be as important by Generation Y, for whom identification with the success of a task is paramount. In comparison to Generation Y, the focus of Gen Z on learning is significantly lower (Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019).

Other intrinsic values of Gen Z, including skill-sets and creativity, are also moderately highly ranked but do not show any significant difference from Generation Y. According to Jansen, Odoni and Wombacher (2019), further training opportunities seem to be more important to Gen Z than to Generation Y; this is justified with Klaffke's (2014) argument that qualification requirements are constantly increasing. Furthermore, Gen Z expects training to include social media platforms (Gupta, 2018) and video instruction (Seemiller and Grace, 2017). They also respond well to collaborative informal learning formats (Klaffke, 2014). Therefore, Mangelsdorf (2017) and Brademann and Piorr (2018) recommend that organisations should offer project-based work along with job rotation, job enrichment and job enlargement.

In a study on employer attractiveness by Steckl, Simshäuser and Niederberger (2019), differences were found in terms of job content. In most German youth studies, work that is fun was rated as particularly important (Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019; Calmbach *et al.*, 2020; Schnetzer and Hurrelmann, 2021), whereas in the study by Steckl, Simshäuser and Niederberger (2019), it was only the seventh most important characteristic. Thus, the authors argue that the members of Gen Z are as traditional as the baby boomers and pay more attention to the formal aspects of work, shifting fun more into private life. This is an example of the outputs of a study from a particular location – in this case, students in Baden-Wuerttemberg– differing from studies conducted nationwide.

Supervisory. While research on how Gen Z behaves as supervisors does not yet exist, studies on its preferred leadership style are on the rise. For example, Grow and Yang (2018) conducted a survey in the US among a small number of students in the advertising industry and identified friendliness, open-mindedness and relatability as appreciated soft skills among supervisors. Lazányi and Bilan (2017) also observe that in-person performance appraisals enhance trust, and Brademann and Piorr (2018) indicate that

trust and esteem seem to be the currency of exchange for affective commitment. Although appreciation and instant feedback (Chicca and Shellenbarger, 2018; Aggarwal *et al.*, 2020; Chillakuri, 2020) are valued by Gen Z, this feedback needs to be positive overall (Scholz, 2014).

A qualitative study by McGaha (2018) confirmed that Gen Z tends to prefer transformational leadership to transactional leadership, as supported and predicted by the literature (McCrindle, 2014; Iorgulescu, 2016; Çora, 2019; Gadomska–Lila, 2020). This contradicts some of the German literature, which posits that a transformational leadership style is valued more by Generation Y, while transactional leadership is better suited to Gen Z (Mangelsdorf, 2017; Scholz and Weth, 2015; Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019; Maas, 2019). Hence, precise instructions and clear structures regarding working time, place and tasks are recommended. Nonetheless, a Hungarian study by Lazanyi and Bilan (2017) concluded that the workplace behaviour of Gen Z employees differed from that of former generations because respect and trust towards superiors had to be gained through professional excellence. That said, whether the behaviour of the supervisor is also a decisive factor in the Gen Z employee's decision to remain loyal to the company has not been investigated in detail in any of the current studies.

Social. In the social sphere, the importance of family and friends is emphasised (Calmbach *et al.*, 2020; Schnetzer, 2021). The Shell Youth study (2019) reports that 97% of students consider it important to have good friends who accept and acknowledge them, followed by having a partner that one can trust (94%) and enjoying a good family life (90%). In turn, Gen Z values a social environment (Ozkan and Solmaz, 2015) that creates a cooperative and supportive working atmosphere (Cho, Bonn and Han, 2018; Jansen, Odoni and Wombacher, 2018; Steckl, Simshäuser and Niederberger, 2019). Indeed, a study by Csiszárik-Kocsír and Garia-Fodor (2018) has found that working in a good team can motivate Gen Z towards better performance. On the contrary, Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell (2019) consider social work values to be relatively less important. However, the authors highlight a shift towards more value in social aspects from Generation Y to Gen Z and the need for clarification over inconsistent findings from the existing literature.

Altruistic. Various recent studies around Gen Z emphasise increasing climate anxiety, a trend towards mutual respect and mindfulness in one's own lifestyle, a strong sense of justice and a greater urge to become actively involved in these issues (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel *et al.*, 2019; Deloitte, 2020a; Schnetzer and Hurrelmann, 2021). In this way, Gen Z's care for universal well-being and protection offsets their concern for

self-achievement and self-security (Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019). Conversely, a German study (Brademann and Piorr, 2018) concludes that the importance of environmentally conscious behaviour among young people ranks behind the importance of diligence and ambition and behind the desire for safety. Alongside these different insights, Aggarwal *et al.* (2020) found that volunteering work positively influences Gen Z. However, in their investigation of the theory of planned behaviour, Cho, Bonn and Han (2018) found that only a small number of future employees intended to contribute via volunteering. Therefore, it appears necessary to ascertain whether *'People, Planet, Profit'-style* sustainability programmes in organisations that encourage Gen Z employees to volunteer are even expected by them at all (McCrindle, 2014).

Leisure. For many young people, enjoying life to the fullest means that they do not want to see either their work or free time restricted (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel *et al.*, 2019). Work-life balance is one of the most mentioned work values for Gen Z all around the world (McCrindle, 2014; Grow and Yang, 2018; Kirchmayer and Fratričová, 2018; Berge and Berge, 2019; Çora, 2019; Calmbach *et al.*, 2020; Chillakuri, 2020). Kirchmayer and Fratričovás' (2017) research on the career preferences of university students in Slovakia revealed that Gen Z expected their jobs to yield inner satisfaction and considered benefits, together with work-life balance, as strong components of both job retention and work satisfaction. Scholz (2014) has even introduced a new term in Germany – *work-life separation* – underlining that Gen Z does not appreciate work life interfering with their free time. Reinforcing this argument, Gen Z employees want the freedom to determine their own working hours and their own scope for flexibility to be better orientated towards family and friends (Scholz and Grotefend, 2019a). In 2019–2020, the working world changed rapidly due to the coronavirus crisis, and employees were mostly forced to work from home. Hence, for a time, job and life happened in the same place for most white-collar workers.

Stability. The emphasis on virtues such as respecting law and order (87%), being hardworking and ambitious (81%) or striving for security (77%) has not changed since 2002 (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel *et al.*, 2019). This new generation strives for security, which is plausible given that its key life goals are geared towards sustainability (Meret *et al.*, 2018). This cohort longs for job security, which results from having grown up in an uncertain political and economical environment (Maas, 2019; Scholz and Grotefend, 2019). Thus, Gen Z prefers to work for state agencies with no-layoff policies in Germany. Research in other countries has rationalised this valuing of job security in terms of the generation's low expectations of finding a suitable job. However, this justification is not

applicable to Germany because of the low youth unemployment rate: 4.5% in 2019, 5.6% in 2020 and 4.9% in 2021 (Destatis, 2022a). Furthermore, the findings of Kirchmayer and Fratričová (2018) in Slovakia show that job security in this context occurs only minimally among their respondents, although the unemployment rate is higher in Slovakia (e.g., 6.54% in 2018) than in Germany.

Besides job security, Gen Z has been found to value financial stability (Seemiller and Grace, 2017), specifically in terms of retention, payment and stock options (Grow and Yang, 2018). Half of Gen Z often worry about their financial situations – slightly more than Generation Y in Germany, but less than the global average. In addition, Germany's Gen Z is less confident than in other countries that its finances will improve over the next 12 months (Deloitte, 2020a). In the German literature, Gen Z is often considered disloyal towards employers (Scholz, 2014; Steckl, Simshäuser and Niederberger, 2019; Deloitte, 2020a). This would be in line with their flexibility in career decision-making, but it also contradicts the statement by Seemiller and Grace (2018) that Gen Z employees tend to be more committed than their Generation Y peers.

Drawing together the major findings of these individual elements underpins the prevailing importance of traditional values, such as sticking to the old ways, being proud of one's country or doing what others do (Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019; Twenge, 2017; Klaffke, 2021b). However, these values may only be relevant to a minority of young people. While signs have been observed of a trend towards an idealistic orientation, this has not yet led to a substantial change in fundamental value patterns and value orientations in Gen Z. Overall, in times of demographic change and the associated shortage of skilled workers available in the German labour market, Gen Z currently has excellent opportunities to find positions in organisations in most regions of Germany. Job security, the expectation of having enough free time outside work and a high income rank most highly in terms of priorities. Since 2002, the Shell Youth survey has examined the extent to which young people are confident that they will be able to fulfil their career aspirations. A comparison over time shows that the values for meeting these career goals reached a low point in 2008 (66%) – at the peak of youth unemployment during the global economic and financial crisis – but have since been rising continuously (now at 84%). As a result, academics conclude that Gen Z's attitude is fundamentally pragmatic (Scholz, 2014), with their immediate life planning kept in the foreground.

The results of the above PESTLE analysis and the review of Gen Z's values, attitudes and expectations offer a holistic contemporary view of this group. Accordingly, organisations

can draw initial conclusions and make assumptions about how they may have to approach this cohort differently from former generations. However, these considerations must be made with caution because false generalisations can lead to a complicated job entry. For example, 61% of participants in a Glassdoor survey indicated that the reality of the workplace differed from the job expectations set during the interview process (Stansell, 2019). Unlike other cohorts, Gen Z would not like to perform a job for which they were not hired in the first place (Chillakuri, 2020). If this occurs, employees tend to leave the organisation within months of joining. In an HR context, organisational socialisation is the process in which young adults with a high degree of commitment express their hopes of being able to commit themselves to the organisation. Because of the potential quitting intentions outlined above, organisations must pay more attention to the issue of organisational bonding (Brademann and Piorr, 2018), as any sense of low belonging or quick discouragement makes it difficult for businesses to retain Gen Z employees within their standard systems (Çora, 2019).

Figure 6 synthesises the PESTLE analysis (societal) and the discussion of the values, attributes and expectations derived from it (individual).

SOCIETY

PESTLE analysis
- Political: Ukraine war, worldwide uncertainty, COVID-19 pandemic, immigration
- Economic: better living standards, low unemployment rate, increasing inflation
- Socio-cultural: DEI, family and friends, ageing population, new education system
- Technological: digital transformation, digital socialisation, new work (Arbeit 4.0)
- Legal: data protection, minimum wage, Working Time Act
- Environmental: climate change, social responsibility, shortage of resources

INDIVIDUAL

Values, attitudes and expectations
- Extrinsic: high salary, career opportunities
- Intrinsic: purposeful job, work autonomously, fun at work, collaboration, media-based training
- Supervisory: instant (positive) feedback and appreciation, clear structures and task assignment
- Social: social support of the team, cooperative working atmosphere
- Altruistic: protect the environment, sustainability within the organisation
- Leisure: work-life balance or separation, flexible and family-orientated working hours
- Stability: job and financial stability

Preliminary job expectations

PRE-EMPLOYMENT

Figure 6: Societal and individual influences on young professionals' expectations
Own illustration

Existing research on Gen Z is mostly conducted before entry into the labour market and makes certain assumptions prior to the employment phase. Hence, little is known about what happens after young professionals enter their organisations – the influence of new agents on socialisation in the workplace and the adaptation of job expectations are questions that remain unanswered. Therefore, it is time to take on a new perspective and add the organisational element to the discussion. To extend the understanding of young professionals in the workplace, the concept of the psychological contract (PC) provides a useful tool for analysing employees' often unspoken expectations of their working relationship with their organisations (Lub *et al.*, 2016; Kappelides and Jones, 2019).

At the present time, Gen Z is experiencing its first major crises in the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The resulting changes in society must be considered as possible influencing factors of the individual elements in this thesis.

2.2.1.3   General limitations and implications for generational research

This subchapter critically reflects on the above literature review on generational theory, along with its limitations and implications.

The increasing popularity of generational theory as a basis for designing HR strategies and policies has been accompanied by a rapid increase in scholarship that aims to examine the differences between generational cohorts (Ortiz-Pimentel, Molina and Ronda-Pupo, 2020). Every generation distinguishes itself from others concerning education, experiences, family, lifestyle, values and work ethics (Grow and Yang, 2018; Klaffke, 2021b), context and behaviour (Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019), significantly affecting the world of work and the organisations within it. Alongside this growing group of supporters of generational theory, more critical voices have also increased in the past ten years.

First, scholars have begun to question the validity of the idea that people are sociologically and psychologically different according to when they were born (Rudolph and Zacher, 2022). From a scientific point of view, the empirical literature, which is mostly sociological in origin, often does not use a consistent definition (Dencker, Joshi and Martocchio, 2008; Schröder, 2018). Therefore, scholars have claimed that exact boundaries demarcating a generational cohort are less important than shared historical events and experiences arising from societal change (Ingelhart, 1997; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002; Twenge and Campbell, 2008; Joshi *et al.*, 2010; Klaffke, 2014; Scholz, 2014; Ng and Parry, 2016; Lyons and Schweitzer, 2017). Moreover, the

three briefly described generations presented in subchapter 2.2.1.1 – baby boomers, Generation X and Generation Y – indicate that different historical and societal events have formed their preferences regarding, for example, work environments, career development and workplace expectations. Although the consideration of shared experiences aligns with Mannheim's (1928) original theory, a distinction between general, partial and specific generation is still often missing in the current studies.

Second, in addition to locating a specific generational cohort, generational research struggles with the methodological challenges of distinguishing between age, period, life phase and cohort effects (Arnett, Trzesniewski and Donnellan, 2013; Lyons and Schweitzer, 2017; Parry and Urwin, 2021). Therefore, it is difficult to prove whether the differences found can be attributed to a generational imprint or to the effects of age or the labour market situation (Costanza *et al.*, 2012; Parry and Urwin, 2017; Schröder, 2019). Moreover, some scholars (Gurtner, Raeder and Kels, 2022) advocate that generational differences need to be identified in an organisational context – preferably through large-scale surveys – to prevent the overestimation of generational effects.

Third, the PESTLE analysis used in this literature review illustrates the current influences on Gen Z in the context of their workplaces. Researchers apply the descriptions of societal elements to justify attributes, values and job expectations. However, a description does not offer a deeper understanding of which elements are important to one young professional at his or her current state of development. For example, the correlation between uncertainty in the world and the work value of job security seems plausible, but other explanations could be equally or more valid, whether it be culture, the influence of parents on children's values, or even the school system. Certainly, generations who are subjected to the same important events during their formative life-stage experience a noticeable impact on their future lives. In the end, it can be assumed that these influences play a different role for every young professional due to divergent backgrounds, education and culture (Arnett, Trzesniewski and Donnellan, 2013; Torsello, 2019).

Fourth, whereas contradictions in the PESTLE analysis are mostly insignificant because they are based on fact, the apparent inconsistencies in work-related values cannot be overlooked. Due to the use of different age cohorts, there cannot be a true definition of one generation that fits all. Furthermore, this confirms the criticism by Ng and Parry (2016) and Rudolph *et al.* (2020) that the social space of Gen Z is not sufficiently taken into account. Therefore, in this research, geographical location, gender and the industrial

sector will be included to provide a richer and more in-depth description of the target group.

Fifth, the literature on work attitudes, behaviours and values does not truly reveal strong differences between the generations. Indeed, the contradictions within the presented findings leave the researcher with only a few agreed-upon statements. Ultimately, in seeking to identify the expectations of young professionals, the existing literature on Gen Z is only partially sufficient to answer what young professionals expect from their organisations.

Sixth, research on the new Gen Z is still in its infancy. Predominantly focused on school students, it remains rather descriptive. The absence of empirical studies examining key characteristics and job expectations adds to the confusion of generational differences (Ortiz-Pimentel, Molina and Ronda-Pupo, 2020). Therefore, this thesis looked beyond the scholarly literature and included wider evidence by using practitioner literature and reports. According to the bibliometric analysis of Benítez-Márquez *et al.* (2022), the most cited papers on Gen Z from 2009 to 2020 included no German references, a point that must be acknowledged in this thesis. In addition, no evidence can be provided at this stage on how organisations influence young professionals from Gen Z. Hence, conducting a study during the emerging phase of a generation's identity (age 17–25) is particularly interesting because the collective memories of the formative events of the generation's early life have yet to emerge (Twenge *et al.*, 2010; Joshi, Dencker and Franz, 2011).

To conclude this subchapter, researchers in the field of generational theory are faced with a confusing disarray of evidence generated in a variety of contexts all around the globe, with different methodological and theoretical justifications for the nature of generations (Lyons and Kuron, 2014). Regardless of the extent to which differences arise between the generations and the exact causes to which these can be attributed, it is of great interest for employers to understand the expectations of their target groups if they are to be able to react accordingly and introduce appropriate measures to engage with their youngest professionals. As a result, both practitioners and scholars (Ng and Parry, 2016; Dwivedula, Singh and Azaran, 2019; Scholz and Vyugina, 2019) are requesting further research on Gen Z in general, highlighting the fact that qualitative studies are currently lacking. Scholz and Weth (2015) and Grow and Yang (2018), for example, recommend investigating understandings of workplace engagement and have called for more in-depth research on the factors that drive job expectations. In this context, the societal

factors that shape one's individual perspective (see Figure 6) can provide key demographic characteristics that can guide an in-depth investigation in this thesis. In doing so, a more nuanced perspective is necessary to understand how young professionals currently entering the labour market are influenced by societal and organisational events.

2.2.2 The concept of the psychological contract

To better understand employment relationships in general and job expectations in particular, the PC is a useful concept that will be discussed in the following subchapters. In this subchapter, the key terms used to describe the PC are explained, and the historical background is presented to provide an overview of the development of this concept over time. The first subchapter covers the contents, dimensions and types of PCs. The second subchapter outlines the consequences of PCs regarding fulfilment, breach and violation. The third subsection discusses PCs through the lens of generational theory, while the fourth reviews how PCs are formed in the workplace. Finally, the limitations and implications for this thesis are discussed.

Definition of terms applied to the concept of the PC

The concept of the PC supports the understanding of how agreements or disagreements in employment relationships – very often built on unwritten or unspoken perceptions – affect attitudes and behaviours in the workplace. As such, it is a cognitive schema (Shore and Tetrick, 1994; Coyle-Shapiro *et al.*, 2019; Hansen, 2019). In the employment relationship, the formal contract is mostly documented and sets out duties and responsibilities in a generalised form, often based on legal provisions (Hansen, 2019). Apart from the written employment contract and its basic terms and conditions, which usually include weekly hours, pay, benefits, holidays and termination conditions, a PC differs in that it focuses exclusively on individually perceived expectations and obligations (see Figure 7). Since the 1990s, the research on the PC has been mainly influenced by Rousseau (1989, p. 123), who first defined the PC as *'an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between the focal person and another party'*. In the context of employment relationships, the PC holds implicit expectations between individuals and organisations regarding performance (e.g., time, loyalty, work effort) and reward (e.g., competitive remuneration, career development, working hours) based on subjectively interpreted promises (Rousseau, 1995).
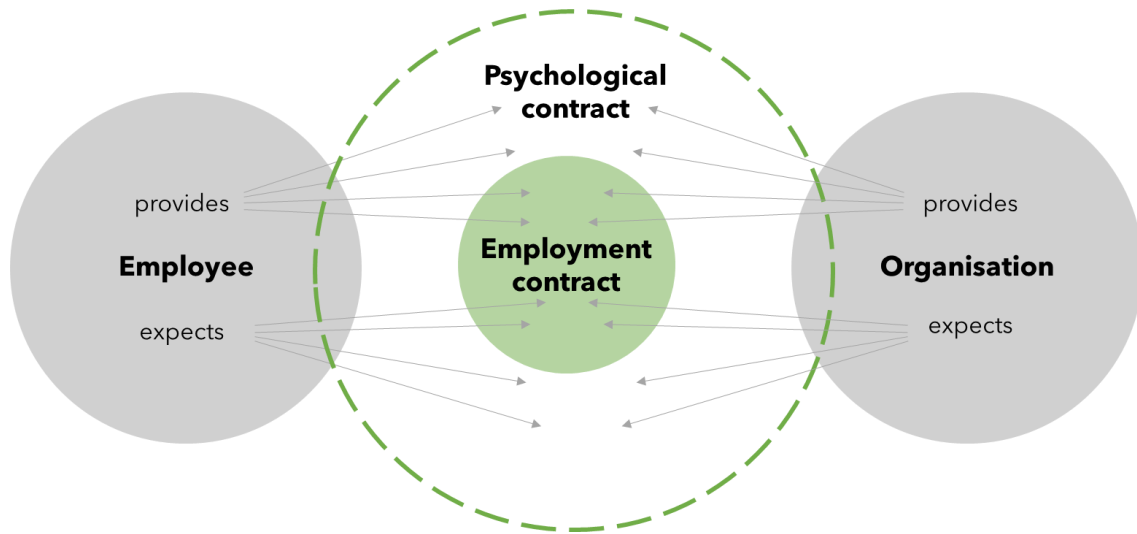
Figure 7: The psychological contract
Own illustration

However, according to Griep, Cooper and Hansen (2019), only a small number of efforts have been made to explicate and re-evaluate the concept of the PC during the pre-Rousseau period. As a result, the PC has been imprecisely operationalised and theorised, making it a point of controversy, even in recent decades. This view has led researchers to offer their own definitions to the point that new researchers are now faced with the dilemma that the terms used to define and describe the PC have become interchangeable and overly simplified (Hansen, 2019). Moreover, this has stoked the debate over how best to distinguish a legal or formal employment contract from a PC (Alcover *et al.*, 2017).

For this reason, it is worth taking a closer look at the 'currency' in which the PC is traded. The terms commonly used are *expectations* (McLean Parks and Kidder, 1994; Sutton and Griffin, 2004), *obligations* (Bal *et al.*, 2010; Coyle-Shapiro and Neuman, 2004; Restubog and Tang, 2017) and *promises* (Montes and Irving, 2008; Woodrow and Guest, 2017). These constructs have been measured separately in the past by adopting divergent operationalisations (Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018), which has led to criticisms of construct validity and coherence (Anderson and Schalk, 1998; Guest, 1998; Hansen, 2019).

Generally, these three terms (see Table 1) appear to be relevant to a PC, although they are often adopted interchangeably and, in some cases, used in conjunction with other terms (Conway and Briner, 2011). These constructs reflect a belief about future outcomes, and each is a potential standard against which future actions can be judged. However, no clear picture of the relationship between them has emerged from the literature thus far.

Terms of the PC	Examples of applications to explain the PC
Expectation	
'[…] a strong belief that something will happen or be the case'; '[…] a belief that someone will or should achieve something' *Oxford English Dictionary (2011)* '[…] expectations that are implicitly or explicitly promised by the employer will […] form part of the psychological contract' *Sutton and Griffin (2004, p. 494)* Met expectations are 'the discrepancy between what a person encounters on the job in the way of positive and negative experiences and what he expected to encounter' *Porter and Steers (1973, p. 152)* 'The mental set of beliefs about the immediate future that predisposes an individual to perceive and conceive in particular ways.' *Cambridge dictionary of psychology (2009, p. 193)*	Expectations arise out of - promises, or - obligations made. Heightened expectations arise out of - needs, - desires, or - because the other party is able to provide a reward.
Promise	
'a declaration or assurance that one will do something or that a particular thing will happen' *Oxford English Dictionary (2011)* '[…] believes that a promise of future returns has been made, a contribution has been given, […]' *Rousseau (1989, p. 123)* 'promise – a commitment to do (or not do) something' *Rousseau and McLean Parks (1993, p. 6)*	Explicit promises arise out of - verbal conversations (team briefing, employee appraisal, etc.), or - written statements (contract, terms and conditions, agreements, regulations, etc.). Implicit promises arise out of - observing behaviour, or - assurances the employer made to the employee based on reward or punishment.
Obligation	
'An act or course of action to which a person is morally or legally bound; a duty or commitment' *Oxford English Dictionary (2011)* '[…] obligations, defined as the duties or responsibilities one feels bound to perform'. *Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou (2018, p. 1081)*	Obligations arise out of - promises made - known or unknown expectations - the receipt of a benefit, or - a sense of cultural or moral duty.

Table 1: Terms of the PC

Adapted from: Conway and Briner (2011)

Whereas Robinson (1996) states that the focus on perceived expectations is distinct from obligations, Guest (1998) draws attention to the fact that the demarcation between these two terms is blurred. This is based on the belief that expectations end and obligations begin in the minds of the employees (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000). Based on the empirical findings of Guzzo, Noonan and Elron (1994) in their study of expatriates as a specific group of employees, Arnold (1996) deduced that PCs can be based on ideas about what one is supposed to get or give. He argues that individuals form expectations based on 'what I deserve', 'what would ideally be the case' and 'what would have been appropriate in retrospect'. Therefore, expectations are highly relevant to PCs, for example, when they relate to issues as central to the individual as professional objectives.

In addition, PC expectations develop through an interactive process that begins with recruitment (Sutton and Griffin, 2004). If promises are made in this context, expectations are raised (Guest, 1998). Thus, expectations become part of PCs as soon as an expectation becomes part of an exchange system in which various contributions and incentives are linked together. However, Robinson (1996) is convinced that the importance of distinguishing between expectations and obligations lies in their consequences. Her empirical study indicated that any violation of obligations produces more intense and organisationally detrimental reactions than unmet expectations (Robinson, 1996). Another interesting aspect to note here is that, in continental Europe, where codified law applies (as opposed to case law in Anglo-American countries), obligations tend to be assigned to the legal contract. Ultimately, the ongoing debate on the terms conceptualizing the PC has often led scholars to not comment precisely on their definition, resulting in a conflation of terms or using one definition and measuring another (Ma, Blenkinsopp and Armstrong, 2020).

In summary, *'whether the employer is expected to deliver a particular resource because it is the norm to do so or because the employer has promised to do so, there is a perceived obligation for the employer to deliver it'* (Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018, p. 1083). A clarification of the roles of expectations, promises and obligations in the employee–employer relationship promotes construct clarity. Based on the literature, this thesis follows the argument that perceived obligations are considered the core beliefs that constitute PCs (Rousseau and McLean Parks, 1993; Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018), and expectations and promises are the key antecedents. Since the focal point of the research lies in the formation of PCs and expectations represent the beginning of the PC, the term *expectation* is focused on in this investigation.

Historical development of the concept of the PC

Over the past 60 years, the PC has been defined by a number of prominent researchers in the fields of HRM, psychology and sociology (Rousseau, 1995; Robinson, 1996; Guest, 1998; Herriot, Manning and Kidd, 1997; Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande, 2003; Conway and Briner, 2011; Hansen, 2019). A clear upward trend has been apparent in the research since the early 1990s, which probably reflects the impact of large cultural, demographic, economic and technological shifts in society and the world of work (Lub *et al.*, 2016; Kraak and Linde, 2019). Thus, organisations are increasingly required to manage a multigenerational workforce with potentially different perspectives on the employment relationship and how employees perceive the PCs that they have with their employers (Lub *et al.*, 2016). In addition, organisations are facing pressure in the labour market, which has caused major challenges in managing the employment relationship (Herriot, Manning and Kidd, 1997). Surprisingly, only a few authors have tried to apply a generational perspective to the PC (Hess and Jepsen, 2009; Bal *et al.*, 2010; Lub, 2016). According to Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000, p. 903), *'the psychological contract presents another opportunity to examine the fundamental aspect of organisational life, the employee-employer relationship'*. In this context, the PC serves as a framework for understanding the changes occurring in the exchange relationship between employees and employers (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000). Decades of empirical research confirm that fulfilment of the PC is associated with positive employee attitudes and behaviours (Zhao *et al.*, 2007; Conway and Briner, 2011; Hansen, 2019). That said, the concept of the PC is mainly represented in English-speaking countries and has only been adopted in German HR textbooks over the last ten years or so (Werkmann-Kracher and Rietiker, 2010; Wittekind, Raeder and Grote, 2010; Raeder, 2018).

Even though the concept of the PC has undergone tremendous advances since empirical studies began, scholars still explain and understand the concept differently. This lack of clarity regarding conceptual definitions and evaluation constructs has led to a fundamental lack of consistency (Hansen, 2019). To gain constructive clarity over the key concepts of the PC literature, the following subchapters focus on understanding the concept's origins and development, with particular emphasis on the extent to which existing conceptual definitions of the formation of PCs from the viewpoint of generational theory have been discussed in the literature.

Historically, research on the tacit and explicit agreements of Cabot (1933), the contributions-inducements model of March and Simon (1958), the equity theory of

Adams (1965) and many other social exchange theories (Blau, 1964) have informed and influenced the concept of the PC. In organisational studies, the idea of the PC was first introduced by Barnard (1938) and continued with the seminal works of Argyris (1960), Levinson *et al.* (1962) and Schein (1965). Initially, these scholars used the term *psychological work contract* to explain an implicit understanding between a group of employees and their foremen. The following definitions outline the historical development of explanations of the PC.

Argyris (1960, p. 96) conducted research in a US factory and characterised the PC as:

> *The expectations of employer and employee which operate over and above the formal contract of employment.*

Levison *et al.* (1962, p. 21) shared Argyris's view and developed the concept further using the following definition:

> *A series of mutual expectations of which the parties to the relationship may not themselves be dimly aware but which nonetheless govern their relationship to each other.*

Based on the work of Argyris (1960) and Levinson *et al.* (1962), Schein (1970, p. 11) focused on the organisational aspect of the PC, arguing that organisational cultures are likely to be promoted depending on the way line managers view their employees. Thus, he explains as follows:

> *The notion of the PC implies that the individual has a variety of expectations of the organization and that the organization has a variety of expectations of him. These expectations not only cover how much work is to be performed for how much pay, but also involve the whole pattern of rights, privileges, and obligations between worker and organization.*

Kotter (1973, p. 92) agreed with Schein (1970) but insisted that it is not organisations that hold perceptions, but rather the individuals within those organisations. However, he still used a broader definition to explain the mutual expectations involved:

> *An implicit contract between an individual and his organisation which specifies what each expects to give and receive from each other in their relationship.*

These early definitions highlight that the concept and terminology of the PC constitute the sum of mutual expectations between the employer and the employee. This initial stage in the discourse is often referred to as the pre-Rousseau period, during which the PC generated little research interest (Conway and Briner, 2011).

In 1989, Rousseau first contributed to the concept of the PC by emphasising the more precise construct of promises as the beliefs at the heart of PCs (Hansen, 2019). Rousseau (1995, p. 9) would later define the PC as:

> *[…] individual beliefs, shaped by the organisations, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization.*

In this way, Rousseau (1989, 1995) referred to beliefs that construct the PC. These beliefs reflect the interpretations that employees made of explicit or implicit promises. Explicit beliefs occur in verbal or written forms, while implicit beliefs are subtle promises based on inferences and observations of past situations. Employees tend to interpret these promises further, which affects their actions and behaviour when aligning their attitude and performance accordingly (Conway and Briner, 2005). Thus, researchers suggest that PCs can be managed better if both parties explicitly articulate their implicit beliefs by verbalizing them or writing them down (Rousseau, 1995; Herriot and Pemberton, 1997). A regular exchange between employer and employee about mutual expectations enhances trust and flexibility, and it can improve understanding to deliver on the promises made. However, the prospect of all-encompassing documentation is impossible, since the PC is dynamic: changing as the organisation and the people within it mature, and relationships change, strengthen or weaken (Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018). Accordingly, researchers have also been interested in distinguishing the outcomes associated with violations of the PC, unmet expectations and inequity (Dabos and Rousseau, 2004). These aspects are discussed briefly in subchapter 2.2.2.2.

Compared to the Rousseau era, the previous period of seminal work on the PC has only attracted a small amount of research and contributions to the subject. Rousseau's (1989) empirical research deviates from the former definitions on two fronts. First, the focus on the employment relationship shifted to the individual level, which is in line with Kotters' (1973) view. This meant that the employee and the organisation no longer had to agree on the PC for it to exist because the PC exists in the eye of the beholder and depends on beliefs based on *promises* made. Second, and later confirmed by Robinson (1996), Rousseau (1995) uses the expression *obligations* instead of *expectations*. Both authors argued that violating an obligation generates a deeper emotional response compared to the expectations associated with motivational theories (Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau, 1994; Pate and Malone, 2000; Chao, Cheung and Wu, 2011). In summary, subsequent studies have generally remained consistent with Rousseau's definition of the PC, and this developmental stage established itself as the post-Rousseau period (Conway and Briner, 2009).

To further develop the concept of the PC, attempts have been made to clarify certain features of the employer–employee relationship in an effort to maintain its distinctiveness from related constructs. This has led to a discussion on the mutuality of the exchange relationship and split the research into two areas, commonly referred to as the broad and narrow concepts (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000).

Broad concept of the PC

Herriot and Pemberton (1997), Guest (1998) and Conway and Briner (2006) suggest that the broad concept is a two-way exchange relation between the employee and the employer that considers the understanding of the responsibilities of both parties. This interpretation emphasises the original meaning of the PC, that is, the reciprocal expectations between two parties: employer and employee (Coyle-Shapiro and Neuman, 2004; Conway and Briner, 2006). Guest (1998) argues that neglecting the organisational perspective may misrepresent the core of the PC. Moreover, employees view actions by agents of the organisation as the organisation itself, such that the employer becomes personified. In turn, employees and employers may hold different views on the content of the PC and the degree to which each party has fulfilled the reciprocal expectations of the exchange (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000). To assess the mutuality between the two parties, scholars following the broad concept insist on including the employer's perspective as well.

Narrow concept of the PC

On the contrary, Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau (1994), Rousseau (1995) and Morrison and Robinson (1997) promote a narrow concept of the PC that focuses on employees' cognition of the responsibilities of both sides. Tomprou, Rousseau and Hansen (2015) argue that organisations only provide the context for the PC and cannot themselves perceive it. Therefore, the PC for employees is a set of beliefs that is influenced by the communications and behaviours of various agents, such as executive directors, managers and supervisors, within the employing organisations. In this view, the PC is a subjective, individual perception of the obligations of the employee towards the organisation and of the obligations of the organisation towards the employee (De Vos and Freese, 2011). Rousseau's argument is supported by Suazo (2009), who states that PCs are subjective in nature and exist in the eye of the job-holder. If the employer is not able or willing to fulfil the employee's expectations and obligations, this may lead to strong emotional reactions by the employee (Freese and Schalk, 2008). Accordingly, employees choose to

enter the relationship and can decide to withdraw or leave if their experiences are not aligned with their exchange expectations (Tomprou and Bankins, 2019).

To sum up, the broad concept of the PC refers to a two-way exchange relationship between the employee and the organisation, whereas the narrow concept focuses on the employee as an initiator and recipient of the contract based on their experiences with the organisation. As the central topic of this thesis is investigating the job expectations of young professionals who have just entered the workplace, the organisations for which they work provide the context for the PC. Moreover, in this research, other external influences on the formation of PCs are of interest. To place young professionals at the centre of this research implies that the narrow concept of the PC should be followed.

2.2.2.1 Content, dimensions and types of the psychological contract

This subchapter reviews and evaluates the main studies on the contents of the PC and includes a discussion of its basic characteristics and dimensions. The introductory overview provides initial insights into possible expectations that may form part of young professionals' PCs. This allows for a better understanding of the complex structure of PCs because the content is not only influenced by individuals and organisations, but also by political, economic and cultural factors. This approach is crucial to elaborating an understanding of how young professionals may view and describe key aspects of the PC.

The content of the PC (see Table 2) can include anything to which the employee promises to contribute and anything promised in return from the organisation (Conway and Briner, 2005). Thus, scholars have restricted their research on PC content to a limited subset of employee-perceived expectations and promises that are assumed to be the most important (Conway and Briner, 2005).

Publication	**Employee** Content	**Organisation** Content
Rousseau (1990)	- Advance notice (termination) - Data protection - Flexibility - Loyalty - Overtime - Refusal to support external competitors - Spending two years in the company - Volunteering to do non-required tasks	- Career development - High reward - Long-term job security - Performance reward - Personnel support - Promotion and training
Guzzo, Noonan and Elron (1994)		- Family-orientated support (e.g., childcare, training, spousal employment) - Financial inducements (e.g., accommodation, mobility, hardship bonus, health) - General support (e.g., emergency, career development)
Herriot, Manning and Kidd (1997)	- Flexibility - Honesty - Hours - Loyalty - Property - Self-presentation - Work	- Benefits - Consult - Discretion - Environment - Fairness - Humanity - Justice - Needs - Pay - Recognition - Security - Training
Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003)	- Flexibility - Loyalty - Open attitude - Personal investment - Respect	- Carefulness regarding arrangements - Equal treatment - Job security - Open attitude - Personal treatment

Table 2: Contents of the PC

Own illustration

Rousseau (1989) first conducted an empirical study on the content of the employee's PC among graduate recruits. She found seven employer obligations and eight employee obligations. Next, Guzzo, Noonan and Elron (1994) surveyed expatriate managers and identified 43 items based on the HR practices of the organisation participating in their research, broadly covering the three areas of family-orientated support, financial inducements and general support (Conway and Briner, 2005). However, as noted by

Arnold (1996), the measurement of said content did not ask employees about the promises made by the organisation, but rather what the organisation should provide, which does not align with the promissory emphasis in most conceptualizations of the PC. Hence, the research by Guzzo, Noonan and Elron (1994) was designed to provide only information from the employee's perspective – an individual or idiosyncratic perspective.

With respect to Conway and Briner (2005), the most thorough study of the content of PCs was probably conducted by Herriot, Manning and Kidd (1997), who emphasised the broad concept of the PC and explored both the employee and organisational perspectives. In their study, they identified twelve categories of organisational obligation and seven of employee obligation. Furthermore, they concluded that employee and organisation views were especially different around the employer's obligations to its employees. Thus, workers emphasise the more fundamental aspects of work, such as pay and remuneration, while organisations emphasise the relational aspects of work, such as compassion and recognition.

As argued by Anderson and Schalk (1998) and Hofmans and Vantilborgh (2019), the content of a PC contains a large number of aspects. Therefore, the development of a single standardised measure that captures this content is challenging, if not impossible. Moreover, the aforementioned studies have considerable methodological limitations, in that their content depends on the methods used and the selected participants. In addition, the number of relevant studies in this research area remain very small (Conway and Briner, 2005). This may be because different measures are designed to tap into different features of the PC and therefore permit various conceptual questions to be answered. Especially for specific target groups in the employment relationship, the examination of the content of the PC remains significant (De Hauw and De Vos, 2010; Freese, Schalk and Croon, 2011; Bordia *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, in this research, the investigation of the expectations of young professionals in Germany can indicate the unique contents of one's PC, thereby helping organisations better manage their employment relationships.

To gain more conceptual clarity in the post-Rousseau period, researchers started to analyse the dimensions of PCs, hoping to gain a general idea of their main components. To achieve a simplified framework, these scholars categorised the contents thematically. The most frequently used content differentiation is based on two dimensions: *relational* and *transactional* PC (MacNeil and Cario, 1995; Rousseau, 1998, 1995). The relational contract, mostly preferred by permanently employed managers or professionals, describes the relationship in which these employees work overtime, often in exchange

for performance awards, high compensation and training offered by the organisation. Moreover, it reflects the willingness of employees to accept long-term work and internal position adjustment in exchange for long-term job security, career development and higher identification with the organisation. Consequently, the relational contract is based on emotional or social exchange. In contrast, the transactional relationship is based on economic exchange. McLean Parks and Kidder (1994) allocate project-related employees – for whom the contract remains unchanged over a fixed term – to transactional contracts. Accordingly, the employment relationship does not extend beyond working hours and clearly defined conditions, meaning that economic content plays a central role rather than personal or professional growth.

Rousseau (1995) further established the distinction between relational and transactional PCs in the form of a typology (see Figure 8). Subsequently, the differentiation of relational and transactional contracts describes very specifically the distinct employment relationships by employment, time, stability, formalisation, focus, inclusion and scope based on a continuum (Raeder and Grote, 2012). Hence, this approach to types of PCs over-simplifies their comparison.
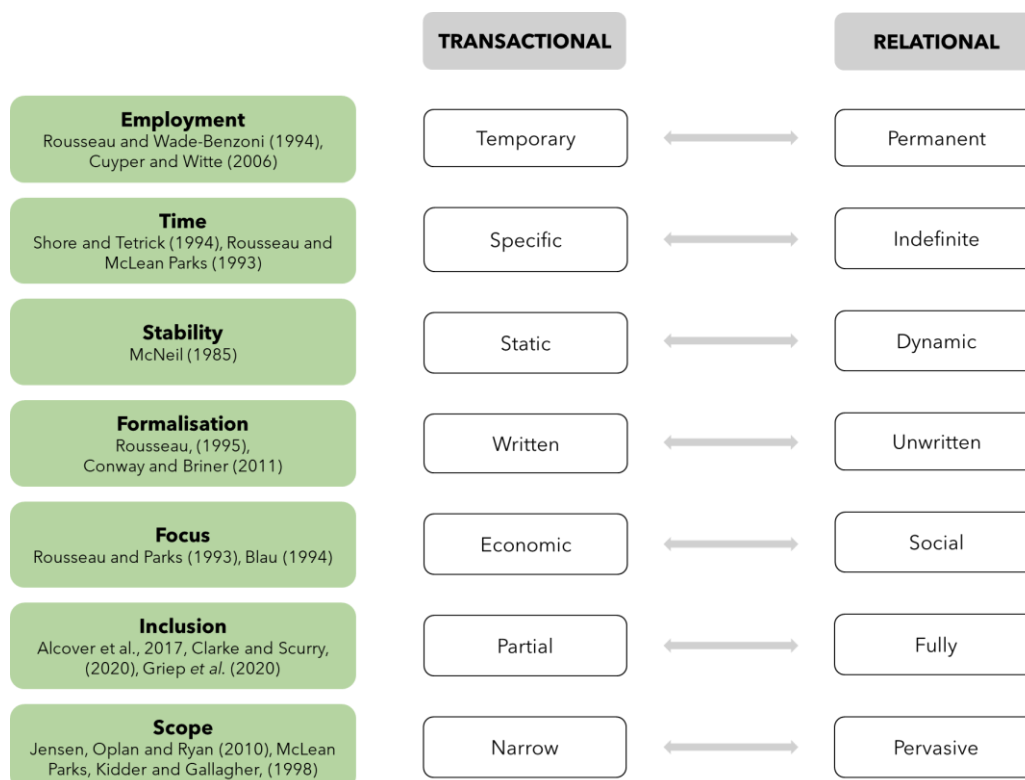
Figure 8: Transactional and relational PCs
Adapted from: Rousseau (1995)

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These two types have been further developed by adding two dimensions: *timeframe* and *performance terms* within the relationship (see Table 3). Here, the timeframe defines whether mutual obligations are fulfilled in the short or long terms, while performance terms refer to the degree to which the standards of high performance are defined by the employer or left to the employee (Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni, 1994). Taken together, these dimensions generate a matrix of four relationship types. As Table 3 shows, in a transactional exchange, the employer offers specific economic conditions as a primary incentive for certain tasks performed by the employee within a certain timeframe. At the other end of this continuum, the relational elements present an open-ended relationship where loyalty, security and trust are central to the exchange (Hess and Jepsen, 2009).

		PERFORMANCE TERMS	
		Specific	**Weak**
TIMEFRAME	**Short-term**	Transactional *(e.g., seasonal workers, temporary staff, project members)* - low ambiguity - easy exit / high turnover - limitations on working time - low commitment/identification - freedom to enter new contracts - less learning - weak integration - substitutability of exchanged resources	Transitional *(e.g., employee experience during organisational retrenchment or following merger or acquisition)* - ambiguity/uncertainty - high turnover/termination - instability
	Long-term	Balanced *(e.g., high-involvement team, permanent employment)* - high commitment/identification - high integration - ongoing development - possible inclusion of private life - mutual support - dynamic - uniqueness of exchanged resources	Relational *(e.g., family business members)* - high (affective) commitment/identification - high integration - stability

Table 3: Dimensions and types of PCs
Adapted from: McLean Parks and Kidder (1994); Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni (1994)

The distinction between relational and transactional contracts has been widely used in the PC quantitative research to measure employment relationships (Hansen, 2019). The main advantage of this typology is its meaningful conceptualisation in terms of common characteristics. However, consensus is still lacking on whether these contrasting

measures of PCs can be placed only at one end of a continuum (one-factor solution) or if an employee's PC can be high or low in both a transactional and a relational dimension (two-factor solution; Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande, 2003; Shore *et al.*, 2006).

Adding to the discussion, Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003) carried out a study based on a large sample of Belgian employees and covering various hierarchical layers and relevant professional categories, with the aim of identifying multiple types of PCs. They suggest that PCs are dynamic, meaning that they change over time during the relationship between employer and employee. However, they also contend that the ambitions of employees may be disconnected from changes in the organisational context that are not reflected in the types of PCs. Thus, six different clusters describing PCs were found: instrumental, investing, loyal, strong, unattached and weak PCs (see Figure 9). All of these clusters have different patterns of mutual expectations. Next, they validated the six-cluster solutions to develop cluster profiles based upon the individual's job, the written contract and organisational characteristics. Moreover, the authors further distinguished between the clusters by examining their outcomes in terms of commitment and employability. In this way, they were able to illustrate the structure of the PC in the context of demographic variables (Raeder and Grote, 2012).
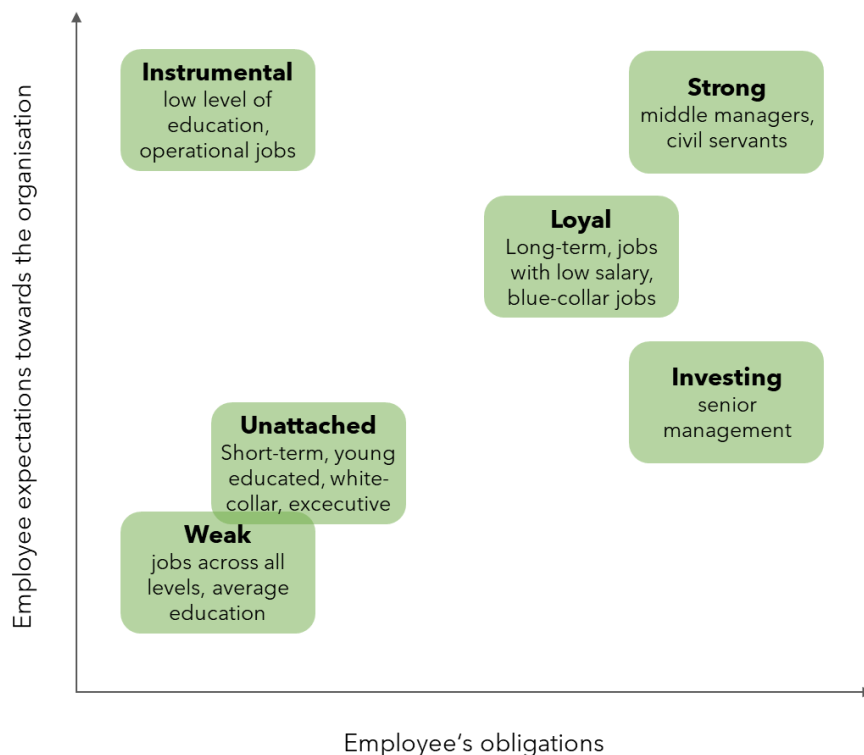

Figure 9: Six types of PCs

Adapted from: Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003), Raeder (2018)

One interpretation of the six clusters is that certain groups of employees have specific expectations and thus specific PCs. This is supported by the idea that older employees have different PCs than younger employees, independent from the organisations or industries in which they work (Anderson and Schalk, 1998). In the context of this thesis, differences in age need to be considered because a small and selective sample of young employees who have just started working within their organisations will be explored. Following Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003), young professionals fit into the cluster of *unattached*. This cluster implies that both employers and employees have low expectations, especially with regard to the long-term nature of the employment relationship. However, returning to the Gen Z studies presented above, young professionals seek job security. This would indicate that the participants in this research may expect alternative offers of work and do not fit into one of the six defined clusters.

2.2.2.2 Consequences of the psychological contract: fulfilment, breach and violation

This subchapter explores the consequences of PCs, beginning with the process of PC fulfilment and moving on to what happens when PC expectations are not met.

Employees who perceive that their expectations in their PC are fulfilled invest more in their job performance, are more engaged and committed to the employing organisation and are less likely to search for a new job (Robinson, 1996; De Hauw and de Vos, 2010; Gurtner, Kels and Scherrer, 2017; Tekleab *et al.*, 2020). Hence, a driving concern behind interest in the PC is the consequences of the employer–employee exchange relationship. Since HR practices relate to the fulfilment of the PC (see Figure 10), this thesis will also briefly review the literature on fulfilment, breach and violation of the PC so that its findings can be considered when recommending advanced SHRM strategies.

The model shown in Figure 10 was developed by Guest (2004) and helps to understand the process of PC within the employment relationship. By the time the framework was presented, its main concern was to create a conceptual model that served as an agenda for future research in employment relations. The starting point of this illustration is the contextual background, including business strategy, HR policies (Guest and Conway, 2002), national culture (Freese and Schalk, 2008) and generational influences (Lub *et al.*, 2012), at both the organisational and the individual levels. Next, HR practices such as resourcing, training, reward and relations form the basis for the employment relationship. The analytical framework includes the employment relationship shaped by

the exchange and responses to it and makes use of the transactional and relational dimensions of the PC. Lastly, the model concerns outcomes that lead to organisational performance, provided that the PC is fulfilled on both sides (Guest, 2004). Ultimately, this framework not only serves as a reference for additional research but also as a signal that PC fulfilment plays a considerable role between employees' expectations and their performance.

Contextual background and factors
- Individual
- Organisation

HR practices
- Resourcing
- Training
- Reward
- Relations

Psychological contract fulfilment

Employer promises fulfilment
- Transactional
- Relational

Employee attitudes
- Satisfaction
- Commitment
- Motivation

Employee promises fulfilment
- Transactional
- Relational

Organisational performance
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
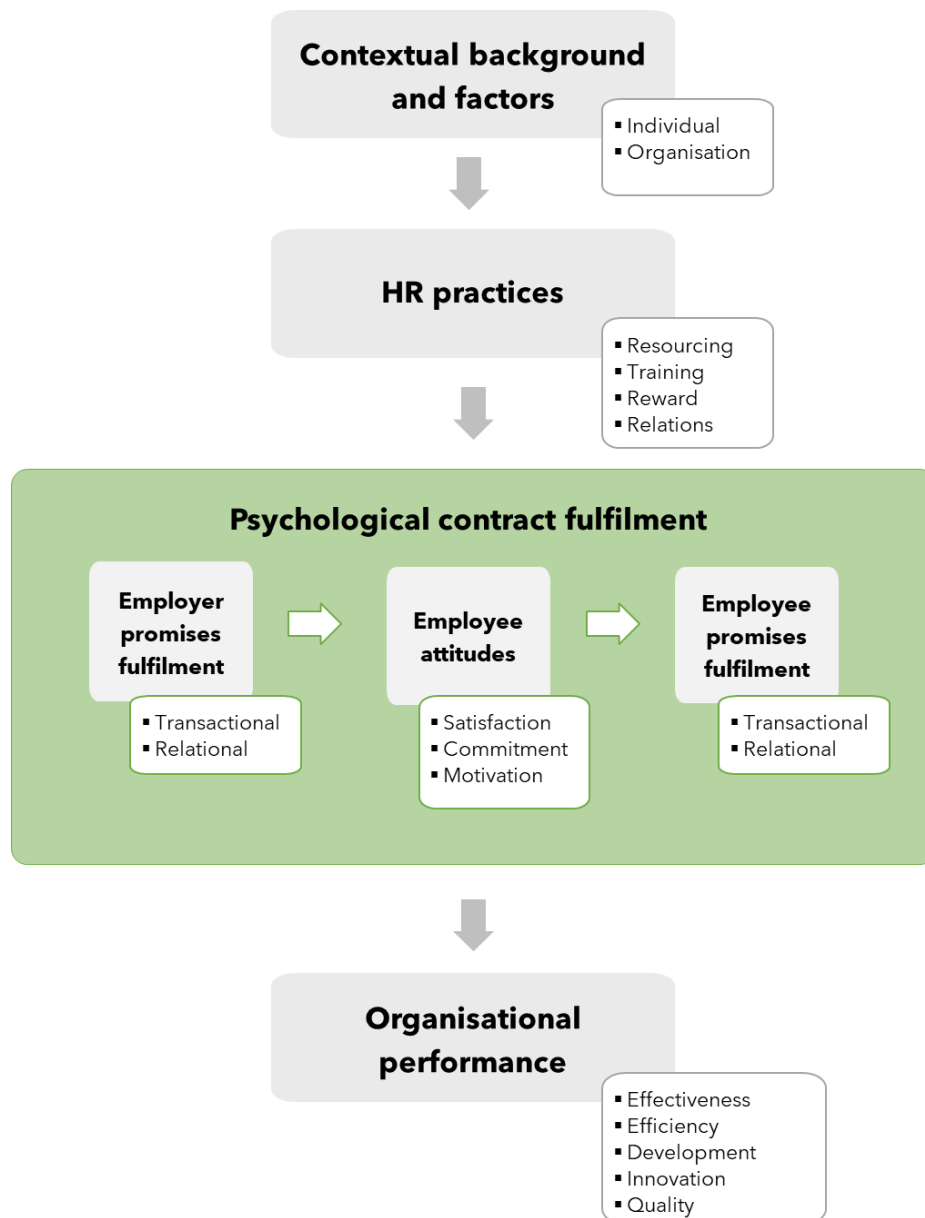- Development
- Innovation
- Quality

Figure 10: PC fulfilment within the employment relationship
Adapted from: Guest (2004)

The overall aim of this research is to investigate how PC fulfilment can be reached during the formation phase of young professionals' PCs. Although breach and violation are not

the focus of this exploration, it is necessary to first understand these consequences, since the participants' reflections may indicate how PCs can be fulfilled.

In their seminal and widely recognised study on the concept of the PC, Turnley and Feldman (1998) examined the consequences of PC violations in restructuring firms. Specifically, a violation of the PC was identified when employees realised that the organisation's commitments to them were not fulfilled or sensed cognitive differences between employer and employees in their perception of the responsibilities undertaken by the employer (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Turnley and Feldman, 1998; Sutton and Griffin, 2004; Tomprou and Bankins, 2019). Other studies have proven that such violations negatively affect employees' behaviours and attitudes and have an adverse impact on employees' perception of organisational obligations (Robinson, 1996). Similarly, Othman *et al.* (2005) note that the violation of a PC leads to a reduction in the employee's citizenship behaviour, as well as doubts over the employment relationship. This is supported by Lee *et al.* (2011), who explain that contract violation causes strong negative emotional reactions and subsequent behaviours. Moreover, Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000) show that employees restore the balance in this relationship by reducing their engagement and willingness to commit whenever they feel that their employer has not fulfilled its part in the exchange process.

Turnley and Feldman's (1999) model contains four employee responses to contract violation: *exit*, *loyalty*, *neglect* and *voice*. These four reactions can be categorised along continuums from passive to active and negative to positive (Sparrow and Cooper, 2003; Dabos and Rousseau, 2004), as shown in Figure 11.
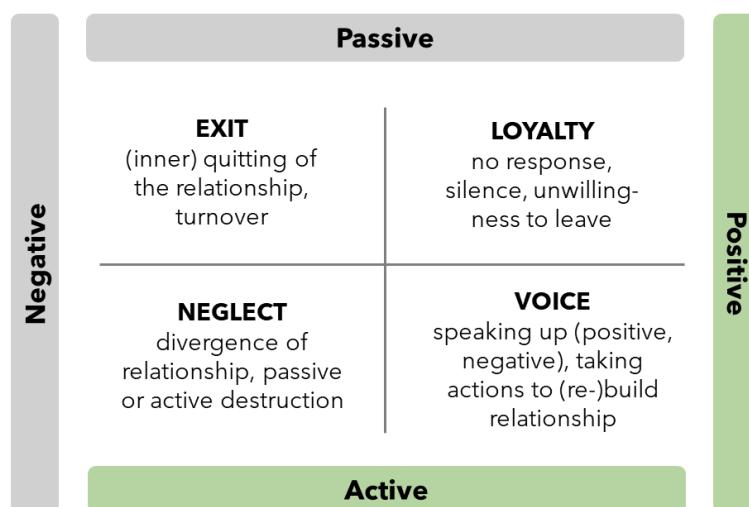
Figure 11: Employee responses to PC violations

Adapted from: Turnley and Feldman (1998, 1999), Sparrow and Cooper (2003)

This quartet of responses shows the importance of corresponding views on the PC on the part of the employee and the employer. From speaking up to the employer, quiet quitting or active or passive destruction to termination of the employment contract, the employee can show a variety of responses depending on the perceived contract violation by the employer (Rigotti and Jong, 2019).

Overall, higher degrees of mutuality and reciprocity in PCs result in greater performance and career advancement (Dabos and Rousseau, 2004; Lub *et al.*, 2016; Solomon and Van Coller-Peter, 2019). Nevertheless, research attention on PCs has been focused on examining the consequences rather than the influencing factors that affect the formation or development of a PC (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000; Guest, 2004; Alcover *et al.*, 2017). With respect to this thesis, the focus here lies on the formation and influence of the fulfilment of the PCs of young employees. However, it is likelier that the participants will report PC breaches or violations that can be evaluated using the presented framework (Turnley and Feldman, 1998, 1999).

As a brief summary, Figure 12 presents a framework for investigating the PC of young professionals during employment.
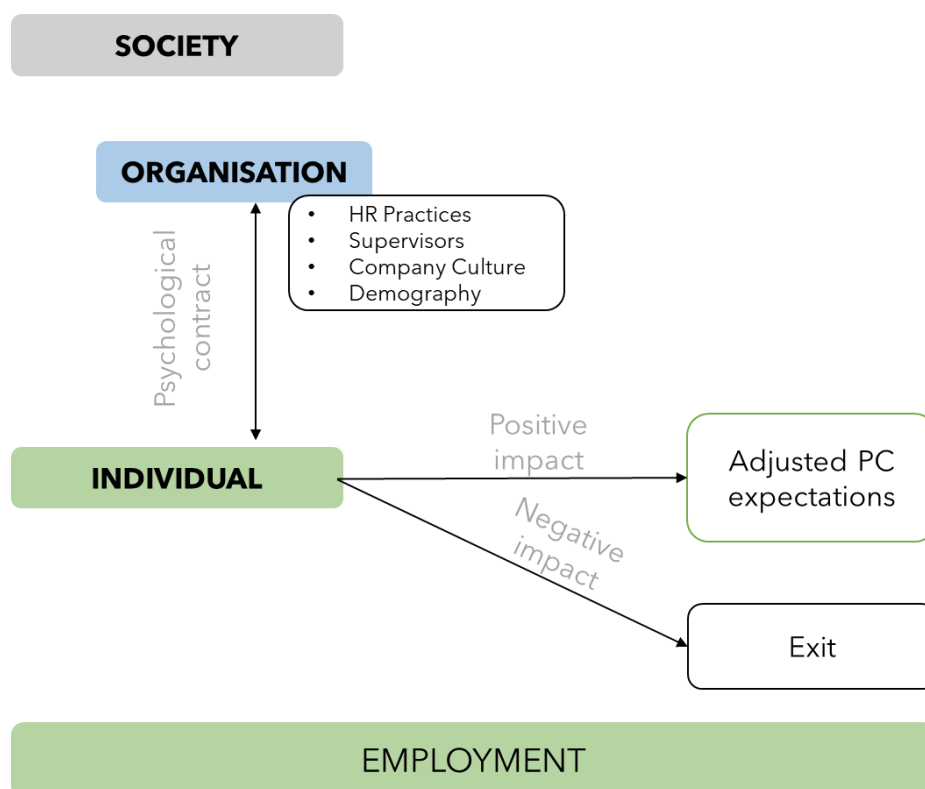
Figure 12: Societal, organisational and individual influences on young professionals' PCs
Own illustration

Subject to societal, organisational and individual influences, the PC of young professionals is most likely to adapt over time. Hence, adjusted PC expectations will occur. If, however, the PC of young professionals is violated or breached, this can lead to severe consequences, including termination. Therefore, this thesis investigates how PCs are formed, taking on a generational perspective to recommend HRM strategies that will support the creation of sustainable PCs. In the next subchapter, the underlying literature will now be explained in more detail.

2.2.2.3 Psychological contracts through the lens of generational theory

As shown in the previous subchapters, a marked upward trend in PC debate has been observed since 1990. These studies primarily reflect on contract types, content, fulfilment, responses to breach or violation and, more recently, the dynamics of the PC (Kraak and Linde, 2019). Although research on generations has emphasised the importance of generational differences for organisations since Mannheim's seminal work in 1928, the conceptualisation of the PC from a generational perspective only started to draw the attention of scholars ten years ago (Hess and Jepsen, 2009; Lub *et al.*, 2016). As discussed in subchapter 2.2.1, generational differences in workplace attitudes and behaviours have been examined in relation to many aspects of the employee lifecycle in HRM, from the attraction of employees and considering careers to leadership, training and development, rewards and working arrangements (Freese and Schalk, 2008; Solomon and Van Coller-Peter, 2019). In general, very little attention has been given to generational differences in the ways in which PCs are experienced (Lub, 2013). Up to this point, most researchers have focused on three cohorts – baby boomers, Generation X and Generation Y – since Gen Z has only just started to enter the workforce. In line with the common literature on generations, these results indicate that different generations may hold different PCs.

Table 4 provides an overview of existing studies on generational differences and PC theory.

Study	Design and approach	Location	Data collection and sample	Key findings
Hess and Jespen (2009)	*Survey*	Australia	345 working adults	Obligations (relational and transactional) were significantly higher for baby boomers than Generation Xers a lesser negative relationship between transactional fulfilment and intention to leave for Generation Yers than Generation Xers.
de Hauw and de Vos (2010)	*Survey*	Belgium	Millennials graduating in 2006 (n = 787) and 2009 (n = 825)	External context recession, Generation Y had lower expectations towards social atmosphere and work-life balance; on the contrary, career development, financial rewards, job content and training remained high; expectations are significantly influenced by individual variables, careerism and optimism.
Lub et al. (2012)	*Survey*	Netherlands	20 hotels, 359 participants; MANOVA and post-hoc analysis	Generation Y expected opportunities for development and challenge, responsibility and task variation; significantly lower commitment and higher turnover intention; Generation X placed high value on autonomy, job security and work-life balance; no differences were found for work atmosphere, salary and task description between the generations.
Lub et al. (2016)	*Survey*	Netherlands	909 participants, TPCQ (Freese et al., 2008)	Generation Y more motivated by job content and career development; baby boomers and Generation X were more encouraged by social atmosphere.
Dautović and Galić (2016)	*Survey*	Croatia	432 participants	Generation Y expected career development, social atmosphere and work-life balance; older generations perceived stronger employer obligations related to organisational policy and stronger employee obligations related to in-role performance.
Pant and Venkateswaran (2019)	*Mixed-Methods*	India	11 focus groups, survey of 1,065 employees from 9 IT and BPM companies	Talent segments framework (performing loyals, performing movers, developing loyals and developing movers); every talent segment can be considered on a continuum rather than a binary construct (talent or no talent).
Magni and Manzoni (2020)	*Survey*	Italy	1,034 participants, measure of PC expectations (Robinson, 1996)	No meaningful differences found; Generation Y expected more than their non-Generation Y colleagues, but the importance ranking of the various dimensions is largely similar across generations.
Bulinska-Stangrecka & Naim (2021)	*Conceptual Framework*	-	Literature review	Proposing a conceptual framework of PC expectations of Generation Z: financial rewards, instant feedback, learning and development, technological use and workplace flexibility.
Egerová, Komárková and Kutlák (2021)	*Survey*	Czech Republic, Slovakia	1,600 participants (CZ: 1,000, SK: 600)	Findings indicate Generations Y and Z are similar regarding their future PC expectations.
Deas and Coetzee (2022)	*Survey*	South Africa	ANOVA test, 293 employees from different generational groups	Generations Y and Z expected to combine work and family life to create a healthy work-life balance; baby boomers and Generation X employees expected meaningful work; Generation Z expected guidance and high-quality feedback.

Table 4: Studies and key findings of generational differences in PCs
Own illustration

As proposed by Lub *et al.* (2014, p. 45), *'distinct generational cohorts arise based on proximity to significant social events and trends during a formative phase in their lives'.* It can therefore be assumed that within organisations, young professionals who have been raised in different societal circumstances compared to their co-workers will develop different ideas about the employee–employer relationship (Lyons and Kuron, 2014). In their data analysis, De Hauw and de Vos (2010) observed that during times of recession, their study participants from Generation Y lowered their expectations regarding work-life balance and social atmosphere. Likewise, other scholars (Dautović and Galić 2016; Lub *et al.*,

2016) have found that Generation Y is more motivated by job content and career development than previous generations. However, one must bear in mind that only a small number of mostly cross-sectional studies on perceptions of and responses to PCs have found evidence that the PC relates differently to work outcomes across generations.

On the contrary, Magni and Manzoni (2020) have found that the various dimensions of PCs are largely similar across generations. Their results are consistent with those obtained by Egerová, Komárková and Kutlák (2021), who examined the PC expectations of Generations Y and Z and found career development, fairness of organisational policies, job content, social atmosphere and rewards are important. Aside from cross-sectional studies, the above-mentioned longitudinal study of Generation Y by de Hauw and de Vos (2010) indicated that certain PC contents – job content, training, career development and financial rewards – remain stable over time. This suggests that the values of a generation generally remain for the rest of their lives and influence their work values and expectations accordingly (Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010).

Conversely, these results do not account for the fact that some PC expectations of generations are tied to life stage. For example, Deas and Coetzee (2022) suggest that for younger generations (i.e., Generations Y and Z), the compatibility of family and work is important, which is plausible given that these generations are largely concerned with family planning. In addition, Generation Y seeks career development (Dautović and Galić, 2016; Lub *et al.*, 2016). The same results are already suggested for Gen Z (Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019; Scholz and Grotefend, 2019a; Leslie *et al.*, 2021). Interestingly, Cennamo and Gardner (2008, p. 904) draw the following conclusion: *'Younger employees may prefer a psychological contract with the organisation, which emphasises freedom, status and social involvement'*. Nevertheless, career development is seen as unimportant for the older generations, as their career or family planning is already being realised. Whether such variations are caused by generational differences or simply related to a stage in one's lifespan is currently the subject of intensive discussion among scholars (Rudolph *et al.*, 2020; Parry and Urwin, 2021).

In addition to life stages, societal and historical events are crucial to embedding differences among various generations. In this sense, scholars have also highlighted that organisational contexts moderate the effects of formative events on generational values and PC perceptions (Lub *et al.*, 2014), which needs to be critically questioned concerning the specific events and contexts. Thus, generational units arise not only geographically, but also in different organisations due to their weighting of generational representatives

and hierarchical structures. In turn, the motivators and preferences of generations and associated work results may be used as an important building block in the development of attractive compensation, benefits packages, efficient recruitment processes and training methods.

Overall, the literature on the PC agrees that employment relationships differ because of various formative experiences and beliefs that individuals bring to the employee–employer relationship (Lub, 2013). Furthermore, these relationships are often negotiated on an individual level and are hence idiosyncratic (Rousseau, 2001). In other words, dynamism is one of the main features of the PC, meaning that PCs can change over time (Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018; Griep, Cooper and Weinhardt, 2019). In the end, it can be assumed that different employees – with different historical and societal influences at different life stages – will have different PC expectations. Nevertheless, most scholars are selective in their choice of method, favouring surveys instead of qualitative investigations, as presented in Table 4.

To sum up, generational theory can be used as a beneficial conceptual background for this thesis, specifically by using the various historical and societal impacts to understand the dynamics of PCs between young professionals and their organisations in the socialisation phase.

2.2.2.4 Formation of psychological contracts

Just as the concept of the PC in the context of generational theory only brings forth a handful of studies, knowledge of how the PC is shaped during the initial formation phase is scarce (Bulinska-Stangrecka and Naim, 2021). Since employee recruitment and retention are becoming increasingly important due to the so-called *war of talents*, a closer investigation of how PCs are constructed can provide a better understanding of how the PCs of young professionals can be more effectively managed and developed to bolster organisational success and competitiveness.

First, several motivations of organisations and scholars are discussed to highlight why the process of PC formation deserves further and more in-depth investigation. Even before newcomers enter organisations, they hold underdeveloped or rudimentary PCs (Thomas and Anderson, 1998; O'Leary-Kelly *et al.*, 2014; Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018) that become more elaborate throughout their tenure with the organisations. Gresse and Linde (2020) claim that this is equally true for students who are about to enter their first work relationships. However, whether young professionals

hold rudimentary PCs is debatable. According to Raeder and Gurtner (2017, p. 147), *'Psychological contracts are formed during organizational socialization, that is, after someone has started to work in an organization.'* Adding to this discussion, comparable studies only present evidence that individual predispositions created by work experience influence how employees view their relationship with the organisation, as well as how they act within the framework of that employment relationship (Thomas and Anderson, 1998; Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000; De Hauw and de Vos, 2010). As young professionals usually do not possess any work experience prior to their first job engagement, this may imply that they have not been able to create even an underdeveloped PC.

Up to this point, relatively few researchers have explored the influence of organisational factors in shaping the PC. Examples of existing research revolve around recruitment activities (Shore and Tetrick, 1994), co-workers (Tomprou and Nikolaou, 2011), supervisors (McGaha, 2018; Petersitzke, 2009) and company policies (Rousseau, 1995). Therefore, richer knowledge of internal influences, such as organisational agents, HR policies, workplace culture and demographics, can support an improved understanding of how PC expectations are shaped.

Besides the organisational influence, the role that societal factors (e.g., high availability of jobs or lockdowns caused by a pandemic) play in the formation of the PC have gained little attention so far (Bordia *et al.*, 2019). Hence, it can be assumed that researchers do not consider these social elements as part of the PC, even though they indirectly influence the individual elements of the employee, who thus creates his or her own expectations of the organisation. Sherman and Morley (2015) argue that an assessment of the preliminary understandings of employees before they enter the workplace can serve as a solid foundation for managing the employer–employee relationship over time. Thus, it is beyond doubt that managing the PC is especially important when introducing new hires to the organisation and that the first month after organisational entry is critical in shaping and stabilizing the PC (Thomas and Anderson, 1998; De Vos, Buyens and Schalk, 2003). As noted in subchapter 2.2.2.2, in a balanced relationship, both employer and employee have similar levels of fulfilment (Mihelič *et al.*, 2021). However, only a few studies have explored the dynamics that pave the way to fulfilment, or the external and internal influences that contribute to a balanced PC. This process is particularly prominent in the early stages of the employment relationship among newcomers to the organisation (Farnese *et al.*, 2018). Table 5 presents an overview of the current studies investigating the formation of PCs.

Study	Design & Approach	Location	Data collection & Sample	Key Findings
Louis, Posner and Powell (1983)	*Survey*	USA	91 alumni under-graduate business school and 126 alumni large uni	Newcomers find different socialisation practices helpful; findings reveal that practices influence newcomers' feelings of subsequent commitment and job satisfaction.
Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, (1994)	*Survey*	USA	260 alumni (MBA) of business schools, longitudinal study	Employees' PC obligations decline over the first two years of employment.
Thomas and Anderson (1998)	*Survey*	United Kingdom	880 recruits (day 1), 314 recruits (after 8 weeks) comparison against 1157 experienced insiders	Newcomers' expectations increased significantly on several dimensions; predicted by learning about army life; adjustments were generally found towards the insider norms of experienced soldiers.
De Vos, Buyens and Schalk (2003)	*Survey*	Belgium	333 new hires, four-wave longitudinal study during first year	Adjustments in newcomers' PC perceptions of the promises they have made to their organisation are affected by their perceptions of their own contributions and inducements received from their organisation.
Tekleab (2003)	*Survey*	USA	71 newcomers and supervisors, 48 items from Rousseau (2000), longitudinal data, pre-interview, pre-employ-ment, post-employment	Over the first three months, perceptions of reciprocal transactional obligations increased while relational obligation decreased; employees tend to exaggerate expectations unrealistically and consequently perceive the most promising side of the hiring organisation.
Sutton and Griffin (2004)	*Survey*	Australia	235 final-year occupa-tional therapy students, two-wave, longitudinal	Post-entry experiences regarding supervision predict PC violation.
Dulac, Coyle-Shapiro (2006)	*Survey*	Belgium	364 newcomers, three waves over one year	Findings indicate information-seeking behavior (supervisor) was positively related to newcomers' perceived organisations fulfillment of PC obligations.
O'Neill and Adya (2007)	*Model*	-	Literature review	Proposition of an integrative model (each stage of employment and HRM initiatives); PCs differ at various stages of employment, several recommendations for effectively managing each type of the PC to reduce perceptions of PC breach.
Lee *et al.* (2011)	*Survey*	China	143 newly hired college graduates, three-wave longitudinal	Employee fulfillment and perceived contributions predicted particular changes in employer PC obligations, changes in obligations were greater in the first year than in the second.
Tomprou and Nikolaou (2011)	*Conceptual model*	-	Literature review	Preliminary expectations of newcomers and their emotions in the context of the PC creation process.
O'Leary-Kelly et al. (2014)	*Interviews*	India	54 employees, semi-structured phone interviews, grounded theory	Rudimentary or underdeveloped PC contracts of job entrants, different PC content and PCs becoming more transactional over time.
Farnese *et al.* (2018)	*Survey*	Italy	500 newly hired and 223 police officers in the following month; twofold cross-sectional	For newcomers, the fulfilment of obligations of each PC party interacts; beyond the reciprocal exchange, effects of independent and interactive contribution of each party were found; during socialisation, such contribution can shift.
Maia, Bal and Bastos (2019)	*Survey*	Brazil	335 newcomers, three-wave (pre-entry, post-entry: 1y and 3y)	During the first three years of employee-employer relationship the obligations decrease.
Yale (2020)	*Interviews*	United Kingdom	6, first-year under-graduates female students, semi-structured interviews	Tutors play a vital role in making, negotiation and shaping of the students' PCs.
Welander, Blomberg & Isaksson (2020)	*Case Study*	Sweden	3 focus group interviews	Over time organisational promises that were fulfilled (co-workers/ supervisors) resulted in stabilised newcomers' PCs.
Gresse & Linde (2020)	*Survey*	South-Africa	316 participants, PC Expectations Questionnaire (PCEQ), exploratory qualitative	Entitlement leads to higher expectations; therefore, entitlement impacts on the anticipation of future employment.
Woodrow and Guest (2020)	*Case Study*	United Kingdom	27 newcomers, first year of employment, several critical incident interviews, longditudinal	Newcomers adjust their PC if they perceive PC fulfillment. Perceived breach can distrub the process,PC events can significantly alter the course of change.
Gresse & Linde (2021)	*Interviews*	South-Africa	18 final-year students	Graduates have a developed mental schema based on entitlement. Some participants displayed pre-employment violations or breach before entering the employment relationship.

Table 5: Studies and key findings of PC formation

Own illustration

Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau (1994) found that over time, newcomers modified their perceptions of reciprocal obligations; the authors also observed rising or declining patterns of fulfilment of some of their obligations towards the organisation and decreasing patterns regarding fulfilment of some of their own obligations (Farnese *et al.*, 2018). Thus, new employees of an organisation adapt their PCs to the PC offered by the employer (De Vos, Buyens and Schalk, 2003). Herriot, Manning and Kidd (1997) and Woodrow and Guest (2017) also confirm that PC deals adjust over time and are influenced by the organisational context. Sherman and Morley (2015) thus propose differentiating between new recruits and novices while examining the dynamics of the PC. Accordingly, Farnese *et al.* (2018) suggest conceiving the PC as a sensemaking process, the main function of which is to reduce uncertainty by integrating all the issues that cannot be addressed in a formal employment contract. In this way, the perceived predictability of the organisational actions and behaviours of new employees can be enhanced (Sutton and Griffin, 2004; Tomprou and Nikolaou, 2011). Furthermore, this attempt helps newcomers' early job expectations and beliefs become more realistic over time and reduces their feelings of unmet expectations. Nevertheless, the process of reducing unmet expectations requires further investigation, particularly regarding how organisational elements, such as agents of the organisation but also the work environment, influence the PC.

In brief, PCs are formed and changed during organisational socialisation. In addition, several researchers confirm (Rousseau, 1995; McLean Parks *et al.*, 1998; Bergman and Lester, 2001; Raeder and Grote, 2012) that PCs are shifting from a long-term relational basis to a short-term transactional contract. Thus, it is essential for this thesis to classify the young professionals under study chronologically by length of employment and to consider this while retrospectively sharing their perceptions of professional experience.

2.2.2.5 Human resources management strategies for young professionals' psychological contracts

Well-functioning SHRM delivers practices, signals, and beliefs that are aligned across levels, from the firm and business unit to employee groups and individual workers. (Mcdermott *et al.*, 2013, p. 291)

With respect to PC fulfilment, Shore *et al.* (1998) advocate three positive aspects of applying the PC concept strategically. First, in general, the negotiation of PCs supports the reduction of insecurity for both employees and employers. Second, employees'

attitudes, expectations and behaviours can be managed. Third, employees can react emotionally to events in the organisation. For these reasons, it is important that the PC is actively managed, especially in the early stages of young talent's career entry, so that a long-term and successful employee–employer relationship can endure.

A broad range of literature presents SHRM strategies for young professionals, which can be allocated to the PC (Mcdermott *et al.*, 2013; Raeder, 2018; Arora and Dhole, 2019; Roehl, 2019; Baruch, 2022), generational theory (Chillakuri, 2020; Klaffke, 2021b; Kraak and Griep, 2022) and talent management (Festing and Schäfer, 2014; Poisat, Mey and Sharp, 2018; Atrizka *et al.*, 2020; Clarke and Scurry, 2020a; Al Jawali *et al.*, 2022), among others. However, the theoretical frameworks presented lack a consistent concept (Poisat, Mey and Sharp, 2018). Furthermore, the literature around the research on SHRM and young professionals' PCs seems fragmented because it is extremely difficult to conceptualise HRM strategies when PCs are found to be inherently perceptual and idiosyncratic (Roehl, 2019). Moreover, assuming that the new Gen Z cohort brings its own different expectations, the current literature in this area is non-existent.

For this research, SHRM is the result of a qualitative investigation, and the outcome is as yet unclear. However, effective onboarding approaches recently presented by Chillakuri (2020), candidate journey models by Klaffke (2021b) or recommendations of talent management strategies suggested by Poisat, Mey and Sharp (2018) offer promising solutions for a positive influence on the PC. Kraak and Griep (2022) have also recently suggested the development of high-quality PCs that are relational in nature and consist of fulfilled obligations between both parties as a means to realise employee commitment and retention. The authors advocate a holistic approach that connects strategic goals, such as retaining talent or employee wellbeing, within a structured HR policy.

To sum up, the purpose of this research is to recommend HRM strategies that coordinate and align HR practices and processes that can result in more consistent messaging about organisations' promises, as well as more congruent and fulfilling PCs for young professionals.

2.2.2.6 General limitations and implications for psychological contract research

After presenting the concept of the PC focused on young professionals, this subchapter critically reflects on the general limitations and implications for PC research.

First, the definition of the PC implies that the employee–employer relationship consists of perceptions of mutual obligations and promises. The PC thus consists of both perceived employee obligations and perceived employer obligations (Freese and Schalk, 2008). Nevertheless, the formation of the PC of young professionals may be solely based on inexperienced preliminary job expectations.

Second, scholars increasingly argue that a PC measurement must include items for types of perceptions from the employee and the employer as well as the results for both types of perceptions. However, organisations consist of many stakeholders and agents, so finding criteria for the organisational influences of the PC can hardly be achieved. In this research, the participants were placed at the centre of attention; therefore, the narrow concept of the PC (Rousseau, 1995) was applied.

Third, the distinction of the contents, dimensions and types of PCs is useful for understanding how individuals view their relationship with the organisation. The above-cited studies show that PCs depend on the duration and degree of employment. For example, full-time and permanent jobs are always associated with a larger scope of obligations and more relational attributes. Not surprisingly, Rousseau's work is the most advanced in the field and is used as the basis for most PC research. However, the typology of PCs needs to be applied carefully since, due to environmental changes, the research outcomes may disclose other results.

Fourth, young professionals' PCs from a generational perspective can reveal a collective understanding of employees' expectations in general towards their employer. Moreover, this approach reveals the extent to which expectations are relevant in employment relationships and the extent to which they are specific (Korczynski, 2022). In agreement with Raeder and Gurtner (2017), an investigation of young professionals' PCs that acknowledges various dimensions and contract contents seems promising for this research endeavour.

Fifth, employee expectations within the PC typically discuss the standardised content of the job, career development, social atmosphere, financial rewards, work-life balance, participation, job security and retention (Smola and Sutton, 2002; De Vos, Buyens and Schalk, 2003; Wittekind, Raeder and Grote, 2010; Zaher and Shaqsi, 2017). The generational research in this area demonstrates that more influential factors may exist than those that have already been investigated. Thus, a generational perspective on the PC in terms of initially defining job expectations offers the opportunity to take a more

selective look at the content, but can also question what may have been missed in previous studies.

Sixth, the higher the consistency of the PC between employer and employee, the greater the employee's satisfaction, commitment and motivation (Turnley *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, it is crucial for organisations to have a comprehensive understanding of the expectations of young professionals and to take them into account when developing their HR practices. In this vein, this research aims to present a comprehensive understanding of newcomers' expectations and to recommend corresponding HR strategies.

Last, classical and modern conceptions differ considerably in their approaches to the formation of expectations and promises. The question of whether it is human needs that contribute to the formation of employee expectations or whether implicit or explicit promises form the basis for PCs can probably not be answered in detail based on the anticipated findings of this research. Rather, it is a matter of viewing the findings as part of a dynamic exchange relationship in organisations and allowing for social, individual and organisational influences to be considered.

2.2.3   Brief concluding summary

The previous subchapters critically reviewed the literature on the societal, organisational and individual influences of young professionals entering organisations and presented the formation and dynamism of job expectations within the context of the PC. Taken together, this literature review highlights several topics deserving further investigation.

As a starting point, the findings on Gen Z indicate that remuneration, flexible work, job security and sustainability are important topics that may influence preliminary PC expectations. However, the studies presented are not convincing and often contradictory.

Moreover, despite the presence of clear indicators and descriptions of the PC formation process in the literature, it is less clear which factors influence the PC expectations during one's first work experience. As a result of the extensive literature review, a framework emerged that illustrates the formation of the PC based on two phases: pre-employment and employment (see Figure 13).
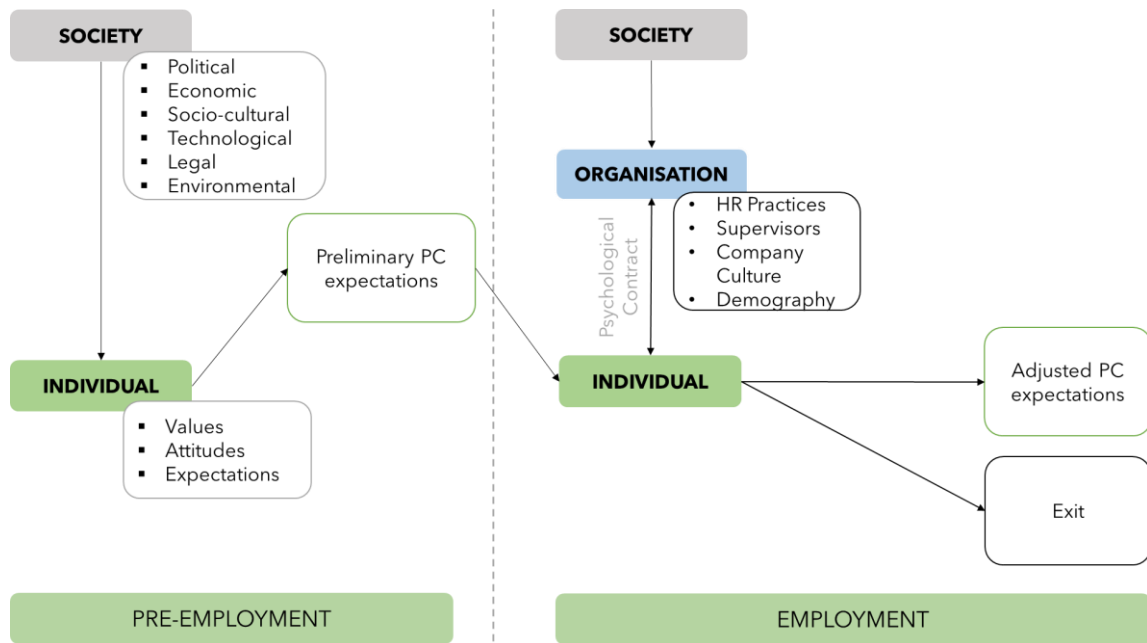
Figure 13: A two-phase framework for investigating the formation of young professionals' PCs
Own illustration

Although criticised earlier in this literature review, this framework considers possible preliminary job expectations attributable to societal and individual elements. After entering employment, the impact of key societal and individual elements will be extended by the organisational factor, which provides the overall context for this research. In addition, the PC concept is intended to provide a theoretical framework in which the research results can be embedded.

According to Bulinska-Stangrecka and Naim (2021, p. 293), *'Future research is encouraged to examine the Gen Z expectations in relation to the psychological contract formation'*. Through the theoretical lens of generational theory, this research aims to offer an in-depth understanding not only of the role of organisations in the initial formation of young professionals' PCs, but also that of the external influences. This knowledge can support the process of (re-)negotiating the PC from day one. Hence, the match between what employees and employers expect from each other can be further developed during the onboarding phase, leading to contract fulfilment. Such an understanding would allow the PC to evolve even before organisational entry, that is, during the pre-employment phase. Furthermore, the generational aspect may inform strategies for integration into the organisation and offer a better understanding of the dimensions and differences involved. For HR professionals, in particular, the opportunity arises to revisit and

readjust their business practices so that workplace environments are created that better suit their newcomer talent pipeline.

The following chapter will explain the philosophical spectrum and methodological composition chosen for this research. The qualitative research design incorporates the rationale for the case-centred research and the data analysis process. Relevant aspects of the research ethics and the role of the researcher are also presented.

3 Research Methodology

Based on the preceding discussion, research on young professionals' entry into organisations from the perspective of the PC is a relatively new area of research. Therefore, a qualitative investigation is appropriate and beneficial to this avenue of study. This chapter presents the methodological composition of the research, starting with an overview of relevant research philosophies and a summary of the research setting. This is followed by a detailed description and justification of the social constructionism approach that provides the theoretical foundation in terms of the axiological, ontological and epistemological position of this research. Next, an explanation is given of the rationales for selecting an inductive approach and a case-centred design. The selection of a multi-method approach (via video statements and focus groups) is explained, including data collection, with descriptions of the sample size and sampling method. The chapter continues by outlining the data analysis process and highlighting the rationale for choosing thematic analysis. The different roles of the researcher are then explained before the research quality is explained. Finally, this chapter provides an overview of the ethical considerations of this research.

3.1 The philosophical spectrum

The philosophical spectrum (see Figure 14) illustrates the stages of the research process that are based on assumptions about the sources and the nature of knowledge, including the paradigm, the approach and the research design.

The research philosophy, also referred to as the paradigm, is a worldview that consists of various philosophical assumptions. Research philosophies have been conceptualised in a variety of ways with the aim of linking a set of shared agreements and beliefs between scholars about how phenomena or problems should be understood and approached. Three types of research assumptions support academics in distinguishing between the various paradigms. First, the *ontology* refers to the science of being and addresses the nature of reality (Raskin, 2011). It is also associated with the central question of whether, for instance, organisations, management and individuals at work should be perceived as objective or subjective. Second, the *epistemological* stance determines the types of questions that are asked and then understood, what data should be collected and how to define research findings to derive answers to these questions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Third, the *axiology* discusses the role of values and ethics within a

research project. Taken together, these principles guide the perspectives, approach and design from which the basis for a concept in this thesis is formed (Raskin, 2008; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).
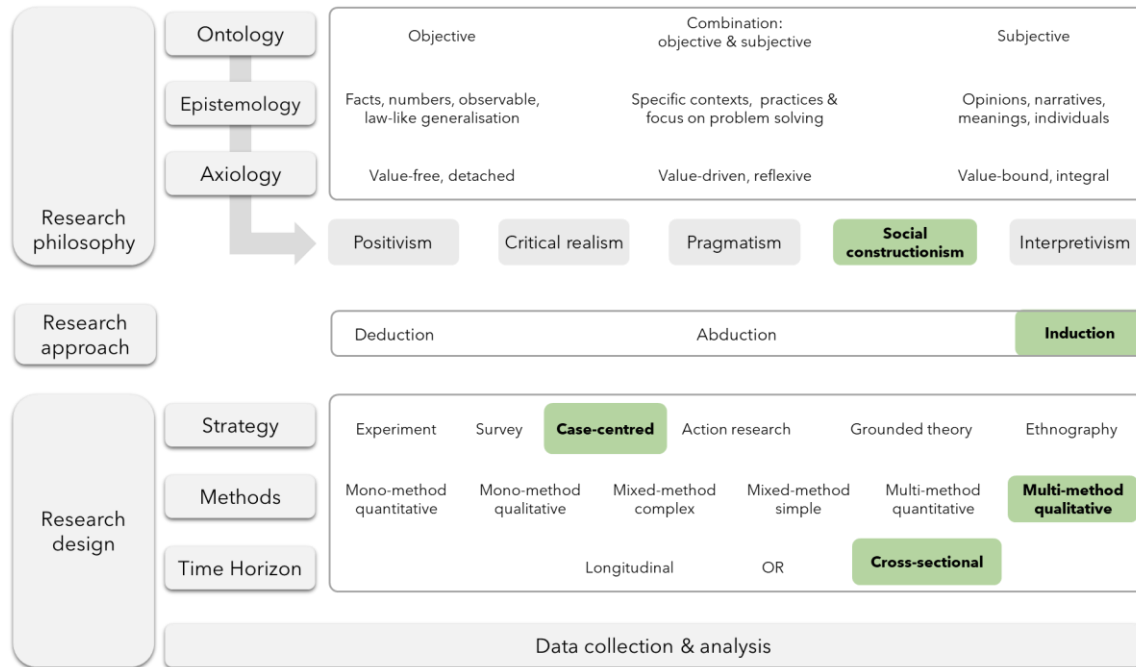

Figure 14: Overview of the philosophical spectrum and design of this research
Adapted from: Easterby-Smith et al. (2018), Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019)

The worldview of researchers is influenced, on the one hand, by the positivist tradition that is commonplace in natural sciences and, on the other hand, by the interpretivist paradigm mostly favoured by social scientists since the mid- to late-20th century (Samul, 2017). Besides the postulated contrast between the assumption of an objective reality *(positivism)* and multiple realities *(interpretivism)*, a *social constructionism* approach facilitates knowledge in the domain of social interchange (Burr, 2015). Evidently, the related discourse has led to a paradigm war, with proponents of differing epistemological and ontological positions advocating designs for research (Klaes, 2012). In addition, the relationship between research philosophies and research designs appears in the literature, such as the 'which came first – the chicken or the egg?' question. To ensure a productive research setting, the research philosophy must first be consistent with the researchers' own beliefs about the nature of reality, which then informs the methodology.

3.1.1 Research background

This study seeks to investigate and develop a profound understanding of young professionals' job expectations. Based on the literature review in chapter 2, the critical examination of the concept of generation raises the question of whether generations exist or not. Nevertheless, generations are a widely accepted theory, and behind it lies a booming industry of managing generations (Rudolph *et al.*, 2020; Parry and Urwin, 2021). Thus, a research philosophy is needed that recognises that the idea of generations is not likely to go away, even though methodological and theoretical justifications are lacking. In response, a qualitative research *'employing interviews and focus group discussions can be conducted to get insights from Gen Z'* (Bulinska-Stangrecka and Naim, 2021, p. 293).

Furthermore, the literature review demonstrated that young professionals expectations towards organisations; hence, the phenomenon under investigation needs further clarification, since the researcher is unsure about its precise nature. Based on this, the researcher expects the study to be flexible and adaptable to change, for example, because of new data or fresh insights. Ultimately, the research aims to recommend organisational practices that support human-centred HRM strategies based on enhanced knowledge around the initial formation of the PC.

3.1.2 Choice of research philosophy

Due to the research setting, it is inevitable that the social study of young professionals anchored in the HR field takes on a constructionist philosophical position. Several paradigms endorse a subjectivist view of knowledge (Creswell and Poth, 2018), three of which – *social constructionism*, *interpretivism* and *pragmatism* – are presented in Table 6, alongside the *positivist* approach from an objective perspective by way of contrast. This subchapter explains how a social constructionism research philosophy is differentiated from alternative philosophies and why it represents the right choice for this thesis to generate insightful conversations and relevant study outcomes.

	SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM	**INTERPRETIVISM**	**PRAGMATISM**	**POSITIVISM**
Ontology is concerned with being.				
Being in the world	indirect access (idealism)	indirect access (idealism)	indirect/direct access (pluralism)	direct access (naturalism)
Reality	socially constructed through cultural, historical and social perspectives; no real world preexists that is independent of human activity or symbolic language	subjectively experienced, multiple meanings and interpretations, realities, flux of processes, experiences and practices	reality is the practical consequences of ideas, flux of processes experiences and practices	real, external, independent, one true reality (universalism), granular (things), ordered
Epistemology is concerned with knowledge.				
Relation between knowledge and reality	meaning comes into existence in and out of the subject's engagment with the realities in our world	subjective knowledge of the world is possible supported by appropriate method, theories and concepts are too simplistic	subjective knowledge and objective knowledge are those that enable successful action, real-world practice-oriented	objective knowledge of the world is possible supported by appropriate scientific method
Role / Goals of Knowledge	theory generation through abstractions or concepts of defined conversation topic or problem	generating rich data, new understandings and worldviews as contribution	problem solving and informed future practice as contribution	law-like generalisations and relationships, numbers, causal explanation and prediction, abstraction, theory verification
Type of knowledge	meaning created from interplay between the subject and object	narratives, stories, perceptions and interpretations	problems, practices and relevance	observable and measurable facts
Basic approach	inductive (can be abductive), meaning and knowledge within a defined social context	inductive, describing and seeking to understand phenomena in context	abductive (inductive), practical meaning of knowledge in specific context	deductive, hypothesis formation and testing
Axiology is concerned with values.				
Fact/value distinction	value-laden, subject constructs reality of the object	value-bound research, acknowledges entanglement	value-driven research, action and change	value-free research, distinction between facts and values
Role of researcher	researcher engaged, reflexive	researcher is part of what is researched, subjective	researcher reflexive, research initiated and sustained by researcher's doubts and beliefs	researcher maintains objective stance
Methodology is concerned with the use of methods.				
Focus	interaction between subject and object	understanding and interpretation	action, change, problem-centred	description and explanation
Research perspective	meaning making of reality is an activity of the individual's mind	embedded in the pheonomena under investigation	following research problem and research question	detached, neutral and independent
Type of investigation	small samples, multiple-participant meanings, in-depth investigations	small samples, individual participant meanings, in-depth investigations	small and large samples depending on chosen method, data through assessment and intervention	highly structured, large samples, measurement
Valued approaches	insight into how individuals engage with and understand their world (social and historical construction)	insight, appreciation of context and prior understanding	emphasis on practical solutions and outcomes	consistency, clarity, reproducibility, rationality, lack of bias
Archetypal research methods	qualitative methods of analysis, interpretation of data	qualitative methods of analysis, interpretation of data	range of methods: mixed, qualitative and quantitative	quantitative methods of analysis, statistical data

Table 6: Overview of research paradigms

Adapted from: Roller and Lavrakas (2015), Burr and Dick (2017), Samul (2017), Easterby-Smith et al. (2018), Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019)

To begin with, the two main branches of constructive theory are social constructionism and constructivism. They are similar in that both perspectives hold firmly to the postmodern idea that knowledge and reality are subjective (Hollinger, 1994). In general, social constructionism and constructionism theories do not reject objective reality (positivism); rather, reality may be considered to exist as an objective and material reality, as well as a subjective reality (Burr, 2015; Grandy, 2018).

Social constructionists posit that knowledge and reality are constructed through debate or conversation, which reflects the interaction between the individual and the organisation in a PC (Burr, 2015). Constructivists, on the other hand, believe that knowledge and reality are constructed within the individual. Thus, social constructionists aim to shed light on what is happening between people as they join to create realities – social interchange. Constructivists, meanwhile, focus on what is happening within the minds of individuals, namely, biological or cognitive processes (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Gergen and Davis, 1985; Edley, 2001; Burr and Dick, 2017).

Historically, these branches of philosophy emerged during the Enlightenment movement. Early conceptualisers in this field were Kant, Nietzsche and Marx, who commonly agreed that knowledge is part of a product of human thought rather than solely grounded in external reality (Burr, 2015). Based on the work of Mead (1934)and Blumer (1962) on the sub-discipline of symbolic interactionism, Berger and Luckmann (1966) made the most recent contribution to this field. They emphasised that the world can be socially constructed through the practices of individuals, but at the same time, they experience it as if the nature of their world is predetermined and fixed. Thus, at the centre of social constructionism are not the ontological what-questions on the essence of things but the epistemological how-questions surrounding the process and emergence of their cognition (Reichertz, 2014).

Because social constructionism is applied in this thesis, the researcher must adopt a critical stance towards the presupposed knowledge for understanding generations and the concept of the PC. Furthermore, this paradigm cautions the researcher to be ever suspicious of assumptions about how the world appears (Burr, 2015), including seemingly conclusive stereotypes in the generational debate. Indeed, it even demands that the researcher should critically reflect on the categories of human beings. From a radical point of view, social constructionism questions whether the categories of generations built on age (i.e., baby boomers, Generations X, Y and Z) are simply a reflection of naturally occurring distinct types of human beings (Burr, 2015; Rudolph

and Zacher, 2017). In this way, generations reflect a mainstream approach that has the task of establishing universal principles of psychological and social functioning. Unlike the interpretivist research philosophy, this thesis does not attempt to understand the human being per se (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Rather, as defined by Gergen and Davis (1985), the researcher believes that the ways of understanding the world – and the categories and concepts used in the process – are historically and culturally specific and shaped by societal influences. In the context of the research aim, these social and interpersonal influences include organisations.

In addition, social constructionists claim that knowledge develops through the daily interactions between people during social life, thereby constructing shared versions of knowledge. The power of the social constructionist position is that one has the capacity to change one's own constructions, which is consistent with the view of the dynamics in the PC (Burr, 2015; Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018). Since the contribution in practice has a strong share of this research and a case-centred design is applied, a pragmatism research philosophy may also be conceivable here. However, the aim of this work is not to solve an organisational problem but to understand how young professionals who are influenced by their organisations understand their world. In contrast to positivism's notion of absolute truth and empirical objectivity, social constructionism does not consider the researcher to be independent from the subject under investigation. Instead, the role of the researcher in terms of axiology is engaged and reflexive (Zikmund *et al.*, 2018). Ultimately, in contrast to the positivist view, applying social constructionism in this thesis will add to an understanding of the world by researching the social processes and interactions through which employees constantly engage with their organisations.

In summary, social constructionism is applicable as a research philosophy because:

- From a generational perspective, young professionals in organisations are social constructs.
- As social constructs, young professionals and their PCs exist because they have a sense-making function.
- The existence and persistence of young professionals' PCs can be explained by various processes of a social construction; hence, they are to be considered dynamic.

As a result, an investigative, qualitative study underpinned by a social constructionism philosophy forms the research framework.

3.2   Research strategy

Researching complex interactions and dynamics in organisational research requires more flexibility in terms of methods than statistical procedures can allow. According to Lee, Mitchell and Sablynski (1999, p. 163), *'[…] this flexibility (or ambiguity) may most sharply differentiate qualitative methods from the more traditional, algorithmic, and rule-driven methods practiced by experimentally and survey-oriented psychologists'.* The following subchapter explains which qualitative methods were considered in the formation of this PC research. In addition, an overview of the research strategies under consideration is reflected upon. Next, the choice of a case-centred strategy incorporating qualitative multi-methods is explained. This research strategy contributes to knowledge by delving into the questions of how and why young professionals' job expectations develop and change through internal (organisational) and external influences.

Existing research designs that focus on the formation of the PC, particularly that of entry-level workers, are presented in Table 5 in subchapter 2.2.2.4. This overview shows that the PC is generally studied from a positivist perspective using surveys. In recent years, qualitative investigations have also started to gain relevance given the significance of the role of chronological and subjective time, the importance of social context and the changing nature of the world (Griep *et al.*, 2019). Based on the preceding subchapters, research on the formation of PCs for young employees is a relatively new area of research. More specifically, most of the studies concerning the newest generation entering the workplace are conducted quantitatively and are based on data collected from (school) students rather than employees with working experience (Dwivedula, Singh and Azaran, 2019; Gresse and Linde, 2020).

Given the current lack of well-founded data on the job expectations of the selected group of participants, a multi-method qualitative investigation was deemed beneficial. This approach enables the researcher to investigate the phenomena from an individual and a group perspective. The first method (video statements) allows participants' voices to be heard and constructed from the perspective of the participants themselves. To gain more holistic insights, the second method (focus groups) provides inspirations for new ideas, thereby exploring the phenomena, countering the replication of findings from the first method and elaborating the emergent themes (Ridder and Hoon, 2009; Acocella and Caraldi, 2021). These multiple sources of information provide a systematic approach to the enquiry into the complex PC that is influenced by various agents and societal events.

Once the idea emerged of incorporating both individual and collective perspectives into the study, a research strategy was needed that could achieve the aims of this thesis. After thorough reflection on the various possibilities, *case-centred research*, *action research* and *grounded theory* were shortlisted (see Table 7).

	CASE-CENTRED RESEARCH	GROUNDED THEORY	ACTION RESEARCH
General Overview			
Authors	Mishler (1996, 1999) Riessman (2008)	Glaser and Strauss (1967) Charmaz (2000, 2006)	Lewin (1946) Argyris et al. (1985) Coghlan (2011)
Background	diverse backgrounds: e.g. psychology, law, political science, medicine, sociology, education	sociology	often interdisciplinary fields: organisational behaviour, business and management
Focus/Goal	focus on investigation of the holistic nature of complex entities / social units; maintaining the cohesiveness of this unit throughout the research process	grounded theory is used when the specific focus of the research is on building theory from data	a sequence of events and an approach to problem solving
Unit of analysis	phenomenon in a bounded entity, events, stories and experiences e.g. unit, group, event, programme, activity	process, action or interaction	research in action, resolving organisational issues
Data collection	multi-methods required, in qualitative research: interviews, observations, focus groups, documents, diaries	primarily interviews	conducted in real time, observations and interventions
Data analysis	description of (cross-) analysis and themes	open coding, axial coding, selective coding	contextually embedded and experimental
Presentation	report (detailed analysis of a complex phenomenon and its themes)	theory illustrated in a figure	theory building and testing in action
Advantages			
	flexibility, emphasis on a social context, holistic interpretation, deriving new hypotheses, capturing participants' viewpoints	new theory for a complex phenomenon, strong determination of phenomenon	offers rich experience for participants involved, organisational development, cultural change, theory development
Disadvantages			
	inherent subjectivity, time-consuming, context-dependent knowledge, difficult to set boundaries	time-consuming, requires skilful researcher, no standard rules available for the identification of categories	resource- and time-consuming, may involve several action research cycles, political concerns (in organisations), intense involvement of researcher

Table 7: Overview of qualitative research strategies considered
Adapted from: Roller and Lavrakas (2015), Creswell and Poth (2018)

The researcher then analysed these three strategies to determine the most flexible strategy in terms of adaptability for investigative research and the possibility of evaluating several perspectives from young professionals engaging with their organisations.

Grounded theory primarily depends on the formation of new theories about a process, action or interaction, whereas this research aims to complement the existing PC concept. Solving a specific problem in practice, as in action research, is also not applicable here. Therefore, a case-centred approach was chosen as it accounts for the different background disciplines, provides a holistic picture of the PC formation and extracts new perspectives from the research participants for HRM purposes.

High-quality case-centred research is the result of a well-defined process that guides the research from beginning to end, with the potential for variation along the way due to the unique purpose of each study. Following Roller and Lavrakas (2015) and Yin (2015), seven steps were identified for this case-centred research using multiple qualitative methods. The research follows a considered process, as presented in Figure 15. Starting with the research proposal, this was followed by the literature review and the identification of the research gap before the unit was selected. Next, the data collection and reflexive thematic analysis provided the basis for the cross-data analysis, followed by the theoretical and practical contributions, which were written up in a final report.

1. Research proposal. The research proposal serves as the basis for this thesis. From the beginning, the theme was geared towards young professionals' job expectations and practical contributions to HRM. Initial considerations were made as to which research methods could be used and which target group would be suitable for investigation. Furthermore, a potential gatekeeper was identified.

2. Literature review and identification of research gap. Once the research priorities were established, the literature review began to determine the theoretical framework of the PC in relation to Gen Z, which guided the case-centred design.

3. Unit selection. Having identified the formation of entry-level PCs as a research gap, the opportunity arose to conduct the research with young professionals pursuing a dual-study programme. The research took place at a university of applied sciences in Hanover, Germany. The multi-method approach allowed the researcher to investigate new insights into the concept of the PC in an isolated entity.
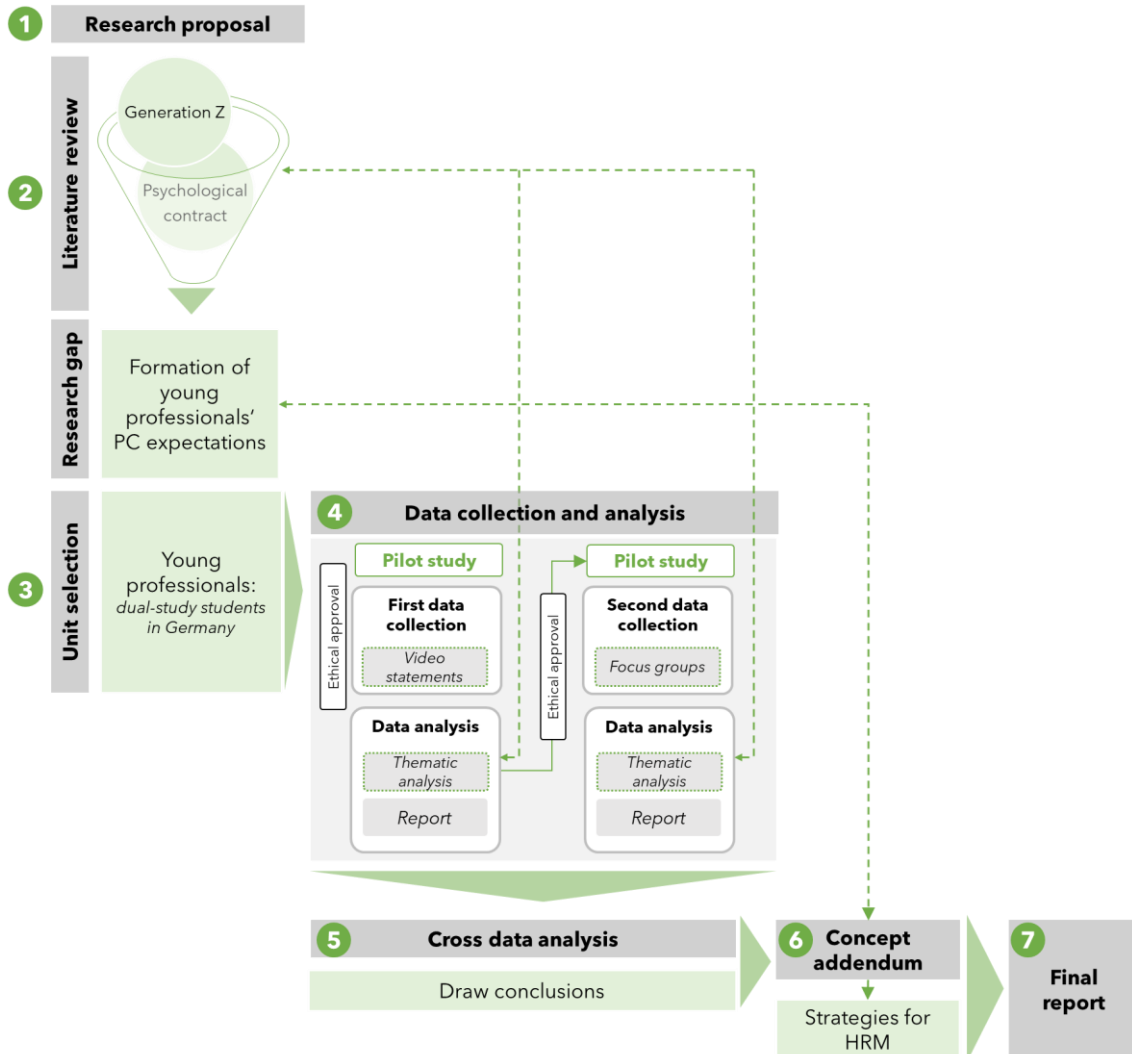
Figure 15: Strategy of the qualitative multi-method research
Own illustration

4. Data collection and analysis. This research considers a contemporary phenomenon influenced by current societal and historical events, including participants who matched the sampling criteria (see subchapter 3.3.3, Figure 18). The institution in which the phenomenon of student job expectations manifests itself (context-bound) is the university of applied sciences. Because the participants belonged to different fields of study (e.g., HRM, business administration, social work, architecture, etc.) and different practice partners, various views and perspectives were captured to offer insights into the existing concept of the PC (Lee and Saunders, 2017). Key themes were identified using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) and how job expectations are influenced by internal and external agents was explored. The methods selected are illustrated in more detail in subchapter 3.3.2.

5. Cross-data analysis. The research verification techniques of triangulation and deviant analysis were built into the case-centred approach by way of its use of multiple methods, which allowed the researcher to compare the data derived from the different methods. It is important to note that the intention of the participant selection was not to indicate that the organisations where the students were employed were examined in depth. Rather, the focus remained on differentiating the research methods according to the individual and collective views of the students, which supported a better understanding of the influences on employees' relationships with their organisations in general. The sequential implementation of the methods allowed for a systematic comparison to reveal patterns between contexts (Roller and Lavrakas, 2015; Yin, 2015). Here, the results can show whether differences or similarities exist between the participants' individual perspectives or the views that emerge from the group discussion. Hence, such cross-data analysis should lead to a better construct (Stake, 2005).

6. Concept addendum. As this research seeks to generate rich data on the initial formation of a PC, it can provide inspiration for new ideas, thereby exploring the phenomena, countering the replication of findings in other areas, and elaborating the emergent themes. Furthermore, the findings can extend the concept of PC through the lens of generational theory by identifying additional components, such as constructs and variables or relationships (Ridder and Hoon, 2009). Thus, the contribution to knowledge in SHRM by identifying anomalies, complementarities, breakdowns or reconstructions can be achieved (Ridder, 2021).

7. Final report. The illustrated research design follows a stringent procedure that allows sufficient flexibility for adaptations necessary in qualitative research. Once the discussion and findings are completed, the case-centred research will be made available to the public. For this purpose, the thesis will be published, and the report addresses recipients from various fields (e.g., science, economy and HRM in particular).

3.3   Data collection

By way of introduction, this subchapter provides an overview of the setting of the case-centred research and the selected research methods for data collection. This is followed by subchapters offering a more detailed description of data collection in each method, as well as sampling and recruitment. In addition, the process of how triangulation is achieved to ensure credibility in this study is outlined. Finally, the pilot study is outlined before introducing the data analysis in the next subchapter.

3.3.1 Setting of the research

This multi-method research scientifically investigated a real-life phenomenon among undergraduate students born between 1995 and 2010, who follow a specific course of study. In Germany, the term *'duales Studium'* (dual studies) refers to a programme of studies that combines practical work placements with academic education. It is not to be confused with dual vocational and education training (VET), which was already in its founding phase in 1870 and is still strongly established in the German training system today and supported by legislation and funding of schools by the government (Greinert, 2006). In 2021, 473,063 apprentices started their VET (BIBB, 2022), while 472,354 first-year students enrolled in universities (Destatis, 2022c). Compared to university studies, apprenticeships and dual-study programmes always require a period of employment with a practice partner. The key difference between a dual-study programme and VET is that the former provides academic training instead of school-based training.

Most young professionals in dual-study programmes are enrolled at a higher education institution called a university of applied sciences, where they pursue a bachelor's degree. In addition, the dual-study students gain practical experience by spending around 70% of their time at their practice partner. As a result, they receive not only academic training financed by their employer, but also earn a fixed salary, which can vary depending on the industry (Bundesministeriums für Bildung und Forschung, 2020). This hybrid study approach was first introduced in Germany in 1970 with the aim of increasing permeability between different, traditionally strictly separated educational sectors. Today, more than 122,000 young people – of whom 40,575 started in 2021 – are now studying annually across over 2,000 dual-study programmes in Germany, and the numbers of these programmes have been rising (BIBB, 2020; Nickel, Pfeiffer, Fischer, Hüsch, Kiepenheuer-Drechsler *et al.*, 2022).

Dual studies are also offered abroad – for example, in Canada as co-operation education or in the UK as apprenticeships – but all programmes differ in their admission requirements, degrees to be achieved and, ultimately, recognition in the labour market. As a result, these hybrid systems are hardly comparable on an international level, and their uniqueness must be considered in corresponding studies. The German dual-study programme prompts challenges that differ from other forms of education. In general, dual-study students experience a high workload. While students in regular programmes have lecture-free periods, dual-study students often have this time scheduled for work placements (Maennig-Fortmann and Poppenhagen, 2019). In addition, dual-study students have contractual obligations with their employers to finish the study

programme. In this way, they gain both an academic degree and practical work experience, which gives them the advantage of earning a double qualification (Nickel, Pfeiffer, Fischer, Hüsch, Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, Lauterbach *et al.*, 2022). It is clear from these examples that young professionals of dual-study programmes are subject to completely unique social influences and framework conditions that form the basis for the target group of young professionals this research.

3.3.2 Data collection methods

Overall, the research design aims to understand the dynamics and processes involved in the formation of the PC from the perspective of young professionals. Qualitative research generally uses a variety of methods (Anderson, Fontinha and Robson, 2020) from which to choose, as shown in Figure 16.
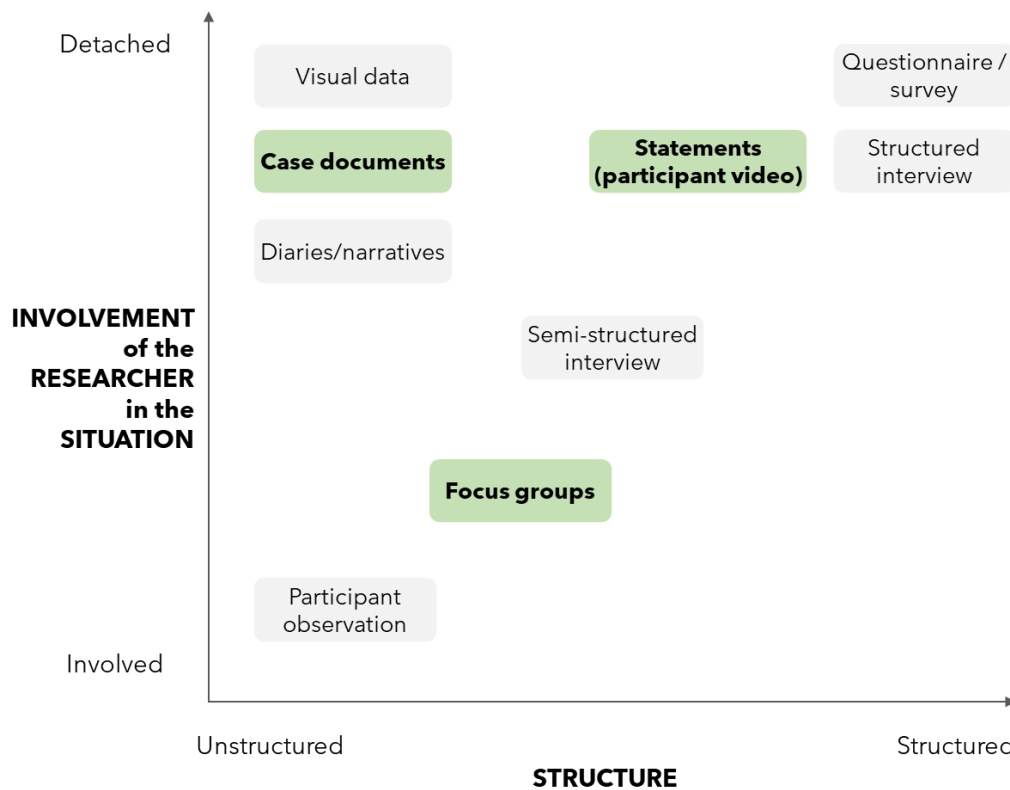

Figure 16: Methods of gathering data
Adapted from: Anderson, Fontinha and Robson (2020)

Given that little understanding exists in the literature on the job expectations of young professionals, a method was required that could capture the perspectives of the participants individually. As suggested by Griep, Cooper and Schalk (2019), this predetermination approach made it possible to identify the key themes in the initial

formation of the PC, which were then investigated in more depth using a second method. During the first data collection phase, it became apparent that the students discussed the topic of job expectations among themselves in a rapid and animated fashion. This observation led the researcher to conclude that a second method would be needed that not only allowed for one perspective, but also captured the social construction among the study participants.

Hence, the research sequentially applied video statements (first method) and focus groups (second method) to collect the primary data for the study. Secondary data documents were used to complement the primary data collection.

Primary data

> *Video statements* are suitable for obtaining structured data on presented topics while using a guideline. Participants express diverse perceptions through self-administered video recordings.

> *Focus groups* are effective for accumulating data on predetermined themes. The comprehensive data collection allows a variety of views to emerge in the discussions at which the researcher is present.

Secondary data

> *Documents* are an optimal supplement to the findings of the primary data and enrich the overall understanding of the context.

These methods are explained in more detail in the following subchapters.

3.3.2.1 Video statements

Video statements are an advanced qualitative data collection method for organisational research. This subchapter describes the circumstances that inspired the researcher to develop this alternative method, followed by a more detailed explanation of the data collection process, including the rationale for using transcribed data for the analysis.

Since the results from the literature review provided contradictory and only scarce quantitative results on the job expectations of Gen Z, this research needed a method for collecting the prerequisite qualitative data to narrow down the field of enquiry. Furthermore, the chosen target group of young professionals differed from other forms of employment groups; hence, different results on PC expectations were expected. The

application of social constructionism research also required that the objects of interest – and their experiences and opinions – were placed at the heart of the analysis (Burr, 2015; Rudolph and Zacher, 2017). Moreover, almost every qualitative study is challenged by the iterative process, meaning that the method needed to adapt flexibly to the circumstances and progress of the research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Although qualitative research usually suggests an interview or open-ended questionnaire as the appropriate method to glean primary data, a video method aroused interest in the context of the emergence of the visually engaged Gen Z (Klaffke, 2021b), who would potentially see video statements as a fun and contemporary way to participate.

Standardised video methods were originally used in experimental research areas. Since access to and application of videos has become more straightforward recently due to advances in technology, it has also gained more attention as a method in ethnographic and social field studies (Tuma and Schnettler, 2019). That said, in the field of organisational studies, video as a method is relatively new (LeBaron *et al.*, 2018). When video methods are used in this area of study, it stands to reason that the research questions gather both dynamic data (processes) and data that can be heard (audio) and observed (visual). These requirements are mainly met when conversations, meetings, interactions or situations are video-recorded in organisational settings; however, this was not the case in this research because initial data that guide the research is of importance here. In response, an alternative video method was designed: video statements. The data collection followed a four-step process, as shown in Figure 17.

Figure 17: Procedure for collecting video statement data
Own illustration

First, the *information* supported the researcher in recruiting potential young professionals from dual-study programmes. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the university campus was closed during the data collection phase. Hence, the researcher informed students using a remote presentation that encompassed a brief outline of the research, the process of

data collection and contact details for the researchers. This approach helped to gain the trust of the students, as well as their informed consent to participate.

Second, the researcher provided the students with *instruction*. This step included the distribution of participant information and the informed consent documents via email. The researcher offered information calls to ensure that the participants understood what was being asked of them, as well as their right to withdraw. After the potential participants showed interest in the study, they received a precise guideline via email (see Appendix 3.4 Interview schedule video statements).

Third, unlike typical video methods, the approach of using video statements is a remote method. Hence, the *production* was solely the responsibility of the participants. As part of their instruction, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions to elucidate their own subjective accounts and explain experiences of the subject matter. The young professionals recorded a video of themselves without the presence of the researcher and were specifically asked to not re-record themselves to capture immediate responses. Furthermore, the participants needed to use a suitable recording device, such as their own mobile phone. The participants then made their videos available to the researcher uploading it to a secure OneDrive provided by the University of Worcester.

Fourth, after receiving the video data, the voice recordings were transcribed into text and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, which will be explained further in subchapter 3.4.

Although video offers the possibility to code the data captured from three different angles (visual, audio and textual; Nassauer and Legewie, 2021), only the transcribed data were used for the analysis for several reasons. The method was initially chosen because video recordings were seen as a convenient and habitual way for the tech-savvy Gen Z target group to participate. In addition, as described above, the participants in this research are heavily involved in their studies and work and show awareness of how to spend their time; since they are not always available due to their changing places of work and study, a method was sought that would appear time-efficient to the participants. Aside from attracting participation, the potential for instant and well-justified statements was deemed beneficial. Hence, the statements play a key role and the visual or audio data could be jettisoned.

To present the findings, the data also needed to take the form of publishable text. Comparing video statements to alternative qualitative methods, video provides a

relatively short recording – three to ten minutes here – capturing the thoughts and experiences of the chosen target group. Compared to responses to open-ended questionnaires with an average of 184.37 words, this data collection method is able to capture more than eight times the word count (for a comparison, see Denscombe, 2008; Walsh and Brinker, 2016). Based on these reasons, this thesis followed the standard practice of data analysis in qualitative research and only transcribed voice recordings into text.

Overall, the field of different video methods is growing dynamically, which goes hand in hand with the continuous further development of these methods (Miller Scarnato, 2019; Ristau and Helbig *et al.*, 2021). The approach chosen in this thesis is an example of the fact that the spectrum of qualitative research methods is becoming ever broader.

3.3.2.2 Focus groups

PCs vary significantly across industries, organisations and even across different departments of the same company. Therefore, Guzzo, Noonan and Elron (1994) and Turnley and Feldman (1999) imply that greater use of ideographic methods to assess individuals' PCs would be suitable to capture and understand the varied individual perspectives. During the first data collection phase, the researcher observed discussions among possible participants. The students were very engaged in debating the topic of expectations towards their employers. Based on these observations, focus groups were chosen for this thesis because responses during discussions are considered far more revealing than those obtained from individual interviews (Acocella and Caraldi, 2021).

A focus group is a group that is focused on a collective activity (Kitzinger, 1995) within a common social category (Tajfel, 1974). Thus, focus groups offer a relatively free-flowing and spontaneous discussion among like-minded people – in this thesis, young professionals. A vivid discussion revealing a range of experiences and perspectives (Morgan, 1996) can yield insights that would otherwise be inaccessible. In addition, focus groups support the development of participants' interpretations of the results of the previous methods used (Acocella and Caraldi, 2021). Hence, this method serves to deepen knowledge (Tremblay, Hevner and Berndt, 2010) of the formation of the PC by understanding how young professionals interpret organisational practices.

On the other hand, focus groups can simultaneously produce data at the individual, group and interactive levels and therefore need to be managed appropriately, which can prove time-consuming (Cyr, 2016). Organising and conducting a group interview is a

much more demanding and strenuous task than conducting an individual interview. Group interviews also require facilitation experience on the part of the researcher to engage the group (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019; Acocella and Caraldi, 2021).

The themes to be discussed in the group interviews for this thesis emerged from the previous findings of the video statements and were guided by the research questions. This supported fruitful discussions and different opinions among the homogenous group of students. New aspects and different perspectives helped to better understand how PC expectations are socially constructed. Through the group discussion, it was also possible to identify ideas for the improvement of employee–employer relationships.

3.3.2.3 Case documents

Collecting documentary evidence offers the opportunity to provide specific details to corroborate information from other sources and may also reveal contradictions (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). In this study, the documents support a response to the research problem. Alongside the data collection, participants provided clues that led to the case documents – such as employment contracts, study programme descriptions and general information on dual-study programmes – being continuously expanded by the researcher. Thus, case documents, including general information on employment-related topics (e.g., pay, benefits, career prospects, working hours, etc.), were collected to supplement and confirm the statements of the research participants. Through these documents, the researcher was able to create more valuable preparatory and supplementary information (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Although such data are non-responsive because they are not created by the research participants themselves, the documents can still bring in a new perspective from the outside, which leads to reflection on the socially constructed phenomenon under study. Therefore, it is also an advantage that the data from the documents are stable and can be repeatedly checked (Zikmund *et al.*, 2018).

3.3.3 Samples

Non-probability sampling, a sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research, is a topic of ongoing concern because it relies on the expertise of the researcher (Saunders and Townsend, 2016; Ridder, 2021). Although this approach may be prone to misjudgement by the researcher, the sampling technique framework in this research

provides an explicit guideline (see Figure 18), thereby excluding arbitrary selection (Acocella and Caraldi, 2021).

This research was undertaken in Lower Saxony, and the participants were born in 1995 at the earliest. Their responses were used to supplement or question the data from the Gen Z literature review. Furthermore, participants who were pursuing a dual-study programme at a university of applied sciences were selected. This ensured that the cases were bounded in time, with people and by location, which is a requirement of a qualitative case-centred research design (Lee and Saunders, 2017). In addition, the participants needed to have at least three months of employment experience in their work placements so that they could retrospectively assess their job expectations. In this way, the dynamics of the PCs could be captured effectively, see Figure 18.
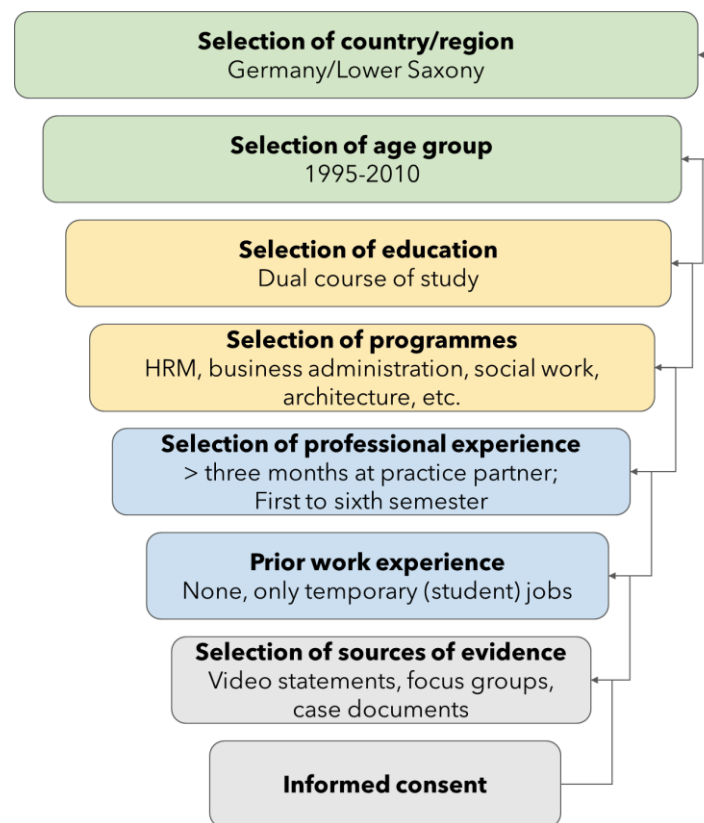

Figure 18: Sample selection
Own illustration

A total of 32 participants contributed to the research, as illustrated in Figure 19 and Figure 20. A more detailed interview schedule including pseudonyms and demographic data can be found in the Appendix 3.4 Interview schedule video statements and Appendix 3.5 Interview schedule focus groups.

In the first phase (video statements), participants were recruited via convenience sampling. In the second phase (focus groups), the researcher selected interview partners from the available participants via purposive sampling. Additional information on achieving saturation is provided in subchapter 3.3.3, and information on the pilot studies is outlined in subchapter 3.3.6.

Convenience sampling was chosen for the video statements because the participants could cooperate based on their availability and interest in taking part in the research. The researcher hoped to gather as many participants as possible in this phase. Initially, a minimum sample size of eight participants for the video statements was determined. During a four-month period from the end of October 2021 until the end of March 2022, 13 video statements were received, see Figure 19.
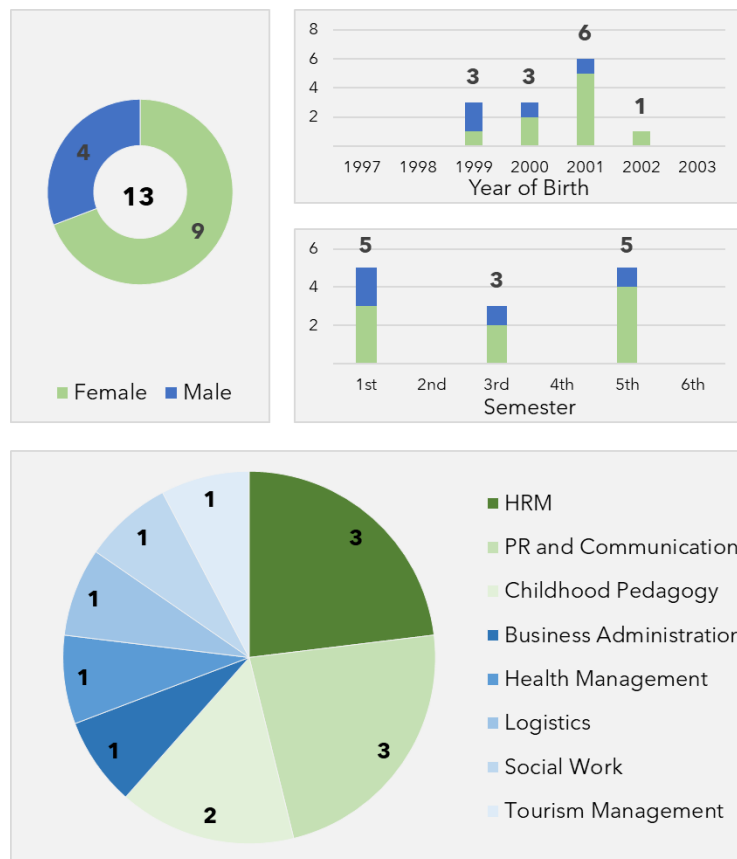

Figure 19: Participants in video statements
Own illustration

Prior to data collection, it was uncertain to what extent the sample may be representative in terms of characteristics (e.g., gender, heritage, etc.). The researcher's efforts in several recruiting activities (e.g., newsletter, postcards, recommendations) resulted in a

balanced group of nine female and four male participants from different semesters (first, third, fifth) and eight different dual-study programmes.

For the second phase of the case-centred research, the selection of participants for the focus groups was based on the researcher's judgement. Referring to Patton (2002, p. 18), purposeful sampling is a *'technique which is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases and the most effective use of limited resources'.* To create a space in which an interesting and lively discussion could be triggered, the researcher composed the focus group of people of different genders (14 female and five male), study programmes (eight) and semesters (second, fourth, sixth). A sample size of at least three participants was established, and six students were invited to each focus group. A total of five focus groups (4-4-4-3-4) were investigated so that rich data were generated in support of an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon, see Figure 20.
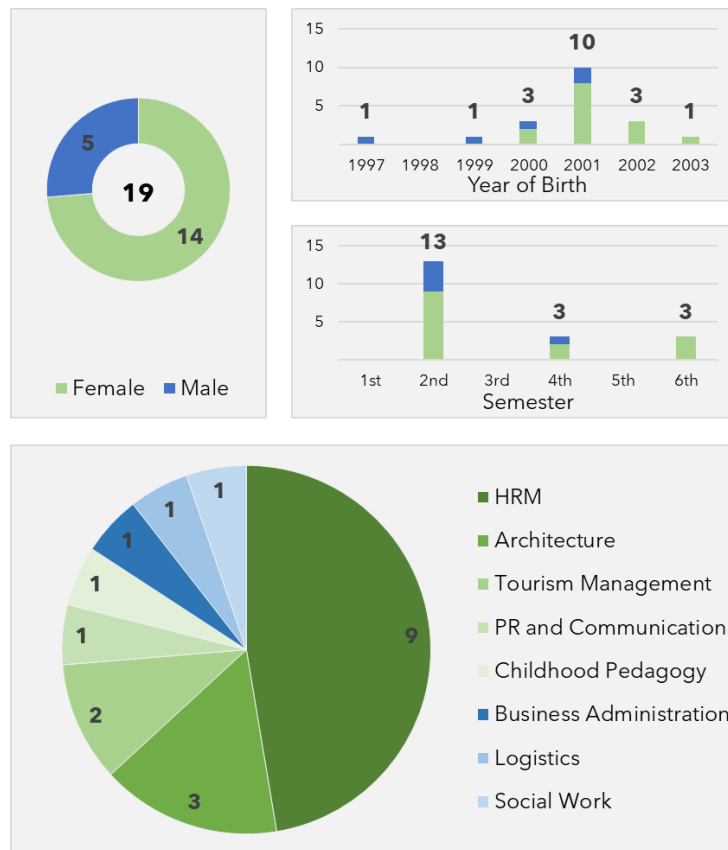

Figure 20: Participants in focus groups (4-4-4-3-4)
Own illustration

Although all non-probability methods of sampling carry the risk of volunteer bias (Kappelides, Cuskelly and Hoye, 2019), the multiple methods analyses can uncover inconsistencies if necessary. Furthermore, the replications can provide ongoing

precision in the understanding of social constructs and offer deeper and more accurate insights into the processes and dynamics involved in the influence and formation of the PC (Ridder, 2021).

3.3.4 Recruitment

After obtaining ethical approval from the University of Worcester's ethics committee (see Appendix 3.1 Ethical approval), the first phase of the case-centred research started with the recruitment of the participants for the video statements. The convenience and purposeful sampling followed predetermined selection criteria. To draw attention to the research, posters were put up on the campus of a university of applied sciences, and postcards were handed out to students and placed at the university's study room. Using the researcher's university email address or a quick response (QR) code leading to the email address, potential participants were able to contact the researcher at any time. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the university campus closed shortly after the data collection phase began. Nonetheless, the gatekeeper allowed the researcher to promote the study in the university's monthly email newsletter.

For the focus groups, the researcher selected further participants from among the former contributors while ensuring that a variety of other criteria (such as gender and study programme) were also met. In addition, it was important to find reliable participants who showed genuine interest in the study. Such contributors are more likely to open up (Acocella and Caraldi, 2021), allowing the researcher to collect comprehensive and in-depth data.

If participants indicated an interest either in the video statements or in the later focus groups, the researcher checked whether the inclusion criteria were met or if there were any exclusion criteria to be considered. After this clarification and completion of the *Participant Information Sheet and Privacy Notice* and *Participant Consent Form*, general information on the video statements (Appendix 3.2 Schedule/Guideline video statements) or focus groups (Appendix 3.3 Schedule/Guideline focus groups) was sent out, as explained further in subchapter 3.7.

To avoid participation in this research affecting the participants' professional lives in any way, no further information or clues were provided about their practice partners and demographic data. This is important, among other things, to the career prospects of the participants. Therefore, in this research, special attention was paid to protecting these

data and ensuring participant anonymity throughout the data collection process for professional and ethical reasons.

3.3.5 Triangulation

As described above, this research involves multiple sources of data from different realities, allowing for an in-depth and triangulated perspective, as required in multi-method research (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The in-depth analyses sought to capture all the necessary data around the PC expectations of young professionals – in detail, from several sources and at several levels of investigation. Through data triangulation, outcomes could be confirmed by these several sources, resulting in a detailed and enriched description of the phenomenon (Stake, 2005; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Thus, triangulation enables the researcher to understand how PC expectations are created, and these descriptions form the basis for ascertaining why this emergence happens in a certain way (Ridder, 2021). According to Farquhar, Michels and Robson (2020), various categories of triangulation have been developed, three of which are applied in this research: *theoretical triangulation*, *data source triangulation* and *method triangulation*.

Theoretical triangulation. Although this research can essentially be classified in the field of HRM, it uses more than one theoretical perspective – sociology (generational research) and psychology (PC) – in the interpretation of findings to facilitate theory extension (Farquhar, Michels and Robson, 2020).

Data source triangulation. Since the collection of data from different groups of people (e.g., supervisors, lecturers, parents) contradicts the narrow concept of the PC explained in subchapter 2.2.2, such data are consistently omitted here. However, the research uses multiple data sources from different student perspectives and different chosen study programmes to deepen and strengthen the construct validity of the research (Yin, 2018).

Method triangulation. The in-depth analysis of this research requires a range of qualitative data sources, primary and secondary, as an instance of within-method triangulation (Cyr, 2016). The methods used to collect data in this research are former studies on Gen Z, case documents, video statements and focus groups (Yin, 2018; Farquhar, Michels and Robson, 2020; Ridder, 2021).

Ultimately, the triangulation applied in this research serves to clarify meaning and verify the repeatability of an observation or interpretation from different perspectives and realities (Stake, 2005), which increases overall credibility.

3.3.6   Pilot study

Reflecting on the research strategy includes refining the data collection and procedures via pilot testing. The aim here was to reflect on the guidelines for participants and gauge whether the questions were sufficient to extract the expected data content (Ridder, 2021). Although it is often recommended to undertake a pilot study among participants who meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study, the researcher decided to widen the scope of the pilot case for two reasons. First, due to the collaboration with only one institution and the entry requirements for the participants, only a few candidates were available for data collection. From a practical point of view the convenience, access and geographic proximity were the main criteria and opened the opportunity to try and test different approaches (e.g., communication, data transfer). Second, applying a wider scope than the ultimate data collection plan addressed also methodological issues (Yin, 2018). The pilot study provided more information about the relevant context in the university of applied sciences leading to adjustments of the interview questions.

According to Lee and Saunders (2017), when conducting an emerging qualitative research project, the data from a pilot study should not be used for ethical and methodological reasons. Other researchers like Yin (2018) argue that data from a pilot study can be included in the analysis, but that this is more common and convenient in quantitative studies. Here, the researcher decided that the pilot data could not be used in the further analysis because the participants did not meet the inclusion criteria. For this reason, the data were deleted immediately after evaluation. Therefore, the researcher tested the methods in a pilot form, but did not include any of their data outputs in the research (Stake, 1995; Lee and Saunders, 2017).

Once the guideline for the video statements and the later focus groups was developed, the researcher asked two students to participate voluntarily in the pilot study for the video statements and a further five students to take part in the pilot study for the focus groups. The students were recruited from one study programme (HRM) and three different cohorts. Since the researcher had already established a relationship and built trust with these participants, they were likelier to provide valuable feedback, including on the user-friendliness of the guideline, the average time spent to complete the video statements or focus groups, and ideas for improvements. Moreover, the pilot focus group supported the researcher in improving her moderating skills. The recommendations from the pilot participants were collected anonymously and applied before the actual data collection began.

3.4   Data analysis

Qualitative research consists of a comprehensive investigation using empirical data collected over a period of time, based on a well-designed research strategy to deliver an analysis of the context (Rashid *et al.*, 2019). In this subchapter, the process of data analysis in this study is explained, including the transcription and translation of data and the systematic collection, aggregation, clustering and analysis of data. In addition, the achievement of saturation and the role of the practitioner researcher are discussed. Consideration is also given to how the researcher accomplished research quality by presenting a concept of understanding the phenomenon of the formation and influence of PC expectations. Finally, ethical considerations are outlined.

3.4.1   Reflexive thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes. (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 4)

This research uses thematic analysis because:

- The researcher actively engages with questions (Howitt, 2019) of the underlying concept of the PC to further explore its formation and influences.
- The method allows the research to generate unanticipated insights by highlighting similarities and differences throughout a dataset (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018).
- This method allows for both social (generational research) and psychological (the concept of the PC) interpretations of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022).
- The twofold data analysis in this research supports the reflexivity demanded by Braun and Clarke (2022) to critically reflect upon the researcher's role and the research process.
- The results can inform policy development and actionable outcomes (Braun and Clarke, 2022) for business strategies and HRM strategies in particular.

In accordance with the social constructionism approach, the analyses of this research needed to reveal how young professionals' job expectations are created and influenced. Thus, thematic analysis helped to identify, analyse and report these patterns in the data following a six-phase process (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The six steps recommended by Braun and Clarke (2022) are embedded into the overall research strategy introduced in subchapter 3.2.

Transcription and translation

First, the researcher familiarised herself with the data by transcribing the voice recordings. Transcription was solely done by the researcher because it was important that the researcher engaged with the data from the beginning and therefore invested extra time and effort to be fully responsible for the transcripts. The video statements and focus groups were collected in Germany and the researcher's first language is German; therefore, the primary language for the coding needed to remain the same to avoid any misunderstandings. Nevertheless, the quotations were translated into English and double-checked by a professional translator. In this way, the researcher ensured the most accurate translation. However, given that language is complex, it must be acknowledged that certain nuances of the German language may have been lost in translation.

Coding with NVivo

Second, the entire dataset was coded, beginning with the video statements, which provided the rationale for the interview schedule in the focus groups. The codes were inductively generated based on phrases that appeared to be of interest and importance to the overall aim of the research and were guided by the research questions. Prior assumptions and concepts derived from the literature review and the researcher's experience guided this coding phase. The coding process was carried out using NVivo 12 software, which allowed the researcher to code and generate themes. After the second dataset from the focus groups was coded, a final set of codes was established.

Generating initial themes

Third, all codes were grouped together by similarity and subsequently collated into potential themes. Identifying significant broader patterns of meaning involved collating data relevant to each theme. Thus, the viability of each theme was achieved (Roberts, Dowell and Nie, 2019). Additional information provided by three case documents complemented the dataset. Furthermore, the researcher kept a journal with notes to reflect on the data analysis process. Codes that did not serve the aim and objectives of the research were discarded into a miscellaneous category (memorable statements). The dataset was repeatedly viewed, listened to read and reviewed to develop a sufficient understanding of the information therein.

Reviewing themes

Fourth, the themes were reviewed by checking the participant themes against the dataset to determine whether they together delivered a convincing story of the data. Moreover, the themes were revised for internal homogeneity (i.e., the extent to which the codes of a theme were related in a meaningful way) and external homogeneity (i.e., the extent to which the codes could be clearly distinguished from each other in the different themes). Before proceeding, this stage also involved refining the themes by splitting, combining or discording them.

Defining and naming themes

Fifth, the themes were defined and named. Informative names for each theme were chosen by developing a detailed analysis of each theme, working out the scope and focus of each theme and determining the story of each (Braun and Clarke, 2022), which resulted in four key themes from the video statements (see Appendix 3.6 Overview of the final code structure and themes of video statements) and eight key themes from the focus groups (see Appendix 3.7 Overview of the final code structure and themes of focus groups). A total of 249 codes were collected in the cross-analysis resulting in six key themes (see Appendix 3.8 Overview of the final code structure and themes of cross-analysis).

Report

Sixth, a report on the reflexive thematic analysis was produced for each applied method and then collated into an analytical narrative to provide a cross-analysis. The report on each method included the key themes and subthemes presented, with examples from the participants. The findings from the video statements and the focus groups were used to produce a final case report that offers a holistic picture of the research outcomes.

3.4.2 Achieving saturation

Reaching a saturation point in qualitative analysis is essential to the validity of qualitative studies, yet the process of achieving saturation is often ambiguous (Ando, Cousins and Young, 2014; Braun and Clarke, 2021). Without predetermining saturation, issues would be encountered in analysing the data to identify themes (Elo *et al.*, 2014). The use of different methods in this thesis, despite all being qualitative, makes it even more difficult for the researcher to determine in advance when saturation may have been

reached. Therefore, two reference indicators were chosen to determine the participation rate in advance: the research design (including the methods) and the project size.

First, Marshall *et al.* (2013) recommend 15–30 participants for case studies after analysing 83 qualitative studies. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) contend that 6–12 participants are sufficient in a homogeneous population. Referring to the methods used, the researcher expected there to be a need for more video statements than focus groups due to the length and variety of information given by the participants. Whereas the video statements had a guideline in place, many possibilities were still available with respect to how the participants could give information without the researcher being present and able to interfere. Compared to the focus groups, the content of interest had already been determined by the video statements; therefore, less participants were needed to expand the data with extensive information.

The second approximation of when saturation could be achieved was identified using the project size. For a DBA thesis of approximately 50,000 words and a project timeline of three years, Braun and Clarke (2013) advocate the use of three to six focus groups, each consisting of three to eight participants.

In sum, data saturation refers to using enough respondents until replication and redundancy of data occur. This requires the researcher to regularly check during the data analysis whether saturation has been achieved or if more participants are needed.

3.5 Role of researcher and reflexivity

A researcher conducting qualitative research must distinguish between his or her roles in relation to the participants or in which context the research takes place (Creswell and Poth, 2018). In this thesis, the researcher is, on the one hand, an outsider researcher who does not belong to the classified group under study, the workplaces or the student body at the university of applied sciences. On the other hand, she is an insider researcher because of her part-time lecturer job at the same university (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

The advantage of being an outsider researcher is that it allows the researcher to be seen as an objective observer. Therefore, observing the participants' video statements can take place without judgment and provide an objective account. Since the researcher has already engaged with the Gen Z literature (chapter 2) and has been teaching for over three semesters, she has become accustomed to the linguistic jargon of the participants, thus helping her to interpret and understand their statements. Although it is not easy to

recruit participants and gain acceptance as an outsider researcher, the researcher has chosen video statements because it is a familiar medium that these young individuals use every day.

To reflect on the ambiguity that being an insider researcher brings, the researcher used a research journal for personal reflexivity (Ortlipp, 2015). Furthermore, she consulted regularly with her supervisors, who supported her reflections around the interaction between the roles of researcher and lecturer. Moreover, this took into account any wider ethical considerations with which the researcher was confronted as part of the ongoing process (Le Gallais, 2008).

In addition, the researcher has presented and discussed her work during conferences and virtual DBA network meetings as well as with experts in academia and practice who have often challenged the scope of this research project. The project started with a comparison of the two Generations Z and Y, but after an in-depth literature review revealed several contradictions, the perspective of the researcher changed. Ultimately, this prompted an adjustment of the research design to deliver meaningful results. Contrary to the widely held and supported acceptance that generations exist, the researcher has developed the understanding of a lifespan developmental perspective, as introduced by Rudolph and Zacher (2017). In combination with the research on PC expectations, this led to the curiosity to discover what influences expectations in the socialisation phase of young employees in their first organisations.

3.6   Research quality

Qualitative research is becoming increasingly established and valued. As such, it must be conducted in a rigorous and methodological manner to validate the transparency and trustworthiness within the data analysis process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stake, 2005; Nowell *et al.*, 2017). This is measured by the quality of an investigation, whether the findings and interpretations are the result of a systematic process and if readers trust the presentation and outcomes (Samul, 2017; Grodal, Anteby and Holm, 2020). This is a challenge that is particularly noticeable with inductive approaches – including reflexive thematic analysis – because the process of analysis is iterative and requires the researcher to be highly involved in the data interpretation (O'Kane, Smith and Lerman, 2021). In response, the transparency and trustworthiness of this thesis are demonstrated in the following subsections.

Transparency refers to the degree of detail and revelation of the specific steps, decisions and judgements made during a research project. Therefore, this thesis provides an overview of the research process (see Figure 15) to explain the strategy and each milestone of the project. Furthermore, the data analysis can be traced, as the data is evaluated via computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) using NVivo software.

Trustworthiness judges the quality of interpretive qualitative research based on four criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

First, *credibility* is demonstrated when researchers understand their context and data by addressing the match between participants' perspectives and the researcher's representation of them (Tobin and Begley, 2004; Vaismoradi and Snelgrove, 2019). In this research project, the researcher delivers credibility through a detailed description of the research process and a broad presentation of the findings, followed by a coherent conclusion. In addition, the researcher showed a prolonged engagement over twelve months since the first data collection was conducted, attending webinars to learn about data analysis, documenting observations in a research diary and applying data collection triangulation (see subchapter 3.3.5).

Second, *dependability* can be established when the researcher can ensure that the process of data collection and analysis is logical, traceable and clearly documented (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). This thesis applied an audit trail by implementing a standardised data collection process, presenting decisions made for the chosen participants, using protocols and scripts and investigating and documenting the data in a CAQDAS. It should be noted that although these steps were implemented to address the concept of dependability, the findings of qualitative data analysis are hardly replicable (Elo *et al.*, 2014).

Third, *transferability* allows the findings of a study to be evaluated in relation to other contexts, which can be demonstrated by providing broad explanations (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). This thesis offers in-depth insights into young professionals' PC expectations; hence, other practitioner-orientated researchers could transfer the findings to their own business environments (Samul, 2017; Anderson, Fontinha and Robson, 2020). Moreover, this research provides rich descriptions of the context and setting of the project, thus highlighting how this study may differ from other research endeavours.

Fourth, *confirmability* is achieved when credibility, transferability and dependability are all reached. Thus, confirmability is concerned with showing consistency and a lack of bias in data analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Thorne, 2000). This thesis outlined the research process by including markers that demonstrated the reasons for theoretical, methodological and analytical choices made throughout the study. Due to the flexibility of thematic analysis, conducting rigorous qualitative research can even cause insecurity for novice scholars. Hence, this thesis initially presented in detail the decision in favour of the social constructionism research philosophy and further applied the six steps of data analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2022; see also subchapter 3.4.1).

Overall, reflexivity is central to this research endeavour. Accordingly, the researcher, who lacked research experience at the outset, presented the research several times to other scholars, attended webinars and workshops on qualitative research and reviewed many academic studies on the subject. In addition, a reflexive research diary was used (Ortlipp, 2015) to record and document the rationales for the decisions made as well as personal reflections on the process.

3.7 Ethical considerations

This research was conducted according to accepted methodological and ethical standards (see Appendix 3.1 Ethical approval). The ethical considerations inherent in this qualitative research proved challenging, as the exact number of participants was difficult to predict in advance when developing the research design (Anderson, Fontinha and Robson, 2020). Moreover, uncertainty arose from the fact that the multi-method approach was conducted sequentially, which required adaptability of the study and the researcher (Lee and Saunders, 2017). Therefore, thorough consideration was given to ethical issues in relation to research design, recruitment, data collection, anonymity, confidentiality and the portrayal of participants in the case report. In addition, a number of restrictions were imposed by the COVID-19 situation, as explained in detail below.

COVID-19 impact. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher had to expect that the resulting restrictions would have a significant impact on the conduct of the researcher. This led the researcher to consider research methods that avoid personal contact which was further recommended by documents provided from the University of Worcester (HM Government, 2020). The video statements in phase 1 of the qualitative research offered the advantage of exchanging data without the need for a face-to-face meeting. Furthermore, the focus groups interviews in phase 2 of the research also provided the

opportunity to meet virtually. The researcher also regularly checked if any restrictions were in place before meeting the participants in person and decided at short notice whether the face-to-face meeting needed to be replaced by a virtual meeting.

Design. As described above, the pandemic had an inevitable impact on the research design. Furthermore, the ethical approval process from the University of Worcester (2020a), the GDPR/UK (2018) by the UK Public General Act and the Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the EU Parliament and Council (GDPR, 2016), the guidance for gatekeepers (University of Worcester, 2020b) and the information of using video for research (Jewitt, 2012) were thoroughly studied to evaluate possible problems in the design of the research. As a result, the researcher decided to obtain approval from the ethics committee three times since the initial data collection required adjustments to the research design.

Recruitment and right to withdraw. The recruitment took place among young professionals at a specific university of applied sciences. As the researcher is a part-time lecturer at this institution, conflicts of interest could have arisen within the teacher–student relationship (Humphrey, 2013), for further explanation see the following section *power relations*. If the participants decided to take part in the research, they were able to withdraw from the study until 14 days following data collection. The researcher ensured that the participants were made aware of the fact that they could withdraw verbally and in writing.

Participant Information sheet and consent form. The participants were invited to take part using postcards, flyers, emails and newsletters. Before they decided to participate, a participant information sheet and a consent form in the German language were distributed to fully inform potential participants about what the research would involve (Rashid *et al.*, 2019). The students were able to ask questions via email at any time. In addition, the researcher offered to set up a video call to ensure that the participants were properly informed (Zikmund *et al.*, 2018). Although the respondents signed the consent form before the data collection, they were also asked by the researcher to repeat their consent verbally during the video statements or the group interviews.

Data collection and sensitive topics. Referring to the social and psychological research context, the respondents in this research were likely to talk about sensitive topics with respect to their experiences with their employers, including supervisors or fellow students. Therefore, special care and sensitivity were required so that the respondents felt comfortable and safe (Yin, 2018). If participants showed signs of reluctance or raised concerns over their well-being, even through unspoken expressions, the researcher

offered to abort the data collection and/or directed participants to supportive resources to outweigh any residual risks of harm.

Confidentiality. From the outset, the researcher disassociated names from the responses using participation numbers. Later, a unique pseudonym was applied to each participant. In addition, all stored transcripts were anonymised so that participants could not be identified, even by mistake.

Power relations. Since the participants were recruited from students, power relationships may have arisen between the researcher (a part-time lecturer) and the students (Humphrey, 2013). Therefore, the researcher engage with literature provided by the research ethics committee from the University of Worcester (BERA, 2011). To prevent power relationships, the data were collected from participants who gave their data freely and not based on encouragement or any other kind of dependability.

Anonymity. Participation was anonymous to guarantee data protection and to avoid any harm to the participants' careers or studies. Video statements and focus groups were transcribed into a Word document but are not included in the Appendix here. Furthermore, it was of utmost importance to select and use direct quotations cautiously to ensure that the identities of the participants could not be revealed.

Data protection, storage and disposal plans. All electronic data were transferred to and stored on the researchers' OneDrive managed by the University of Worcester as soon as it was possible and practical to do so. This OneDrive is backed up and encrypted to ensure data protection and to avoid the loss of data. After completion of the research and in line with university policy, the data are to be retained for ten years post-publication; a data custodian protocol will be established for after the completion of the studies.

Overall, the researcher consulted with her supervisory team for advice and guidance throughout the research process.

3.8   Brief summary

This chapter described the methodological composition of the research. First, the chosen philosophical spectrum of social constructivism was explained, including the presentation of key ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions. Second, the research strategy outlined the case-centred approach and discussed the accompanying methods. Third, the process of data collection was described in more detail, justifying the sampling size, explaining the challenges of recruitment and

providing an overview of how data triangulation was achieved. In addition, the need for a pilot study was highlighted. Fourth, the data analysis – in the form of reflexive thematic analysis – was described in six steps, including a discussion of how data saturation was achieved. Fifth, the role of the researcher was considered, and the means for ensuring research quality were demonstrated. Finally, the ethical considerations guiding the entire research process were presented.

The next chapter describes the findings of the collected data according to the reflexive thematic analysis process described in this chapter. First, the results of the video statements will be presented, followed by the findings of the focus groups. Hereinafter, both datasets were cross analysed to identify the final themes.

4 Findings

The previous chapter provided an overview of the methodological framework for this research on young professionals' PCs. This chapter presents the findings. All results were processed using reflexive thematic analysis and summarised under themes that emerged from the collected data, the literature review and the researcher's experiences as guided by the research objectives. Following the sequential approach to data collection, the findings of the video statements and the focus groups are first presented separately and then linked in the cross-analysis subchapter.

4.1 Video statements

The aim of the video statements was to initially explore the job expectations of young professionals in the target group – dual-study students – since the literature currently available on Gen Z newcomers to the labour market was found to be insufficient. In turn, the findings from the video statements provide insights into the expectations of young professionals towards their organisations (see research question one). Furthermore, the drivers of the transformation of PCs are explored, along with the role that internal and external agents play (see research question two). Each subchapter below offers an outline of the themes, followed by subthemes and major codes.

4.1.1 Psychological contract expectations and obligations of young professionals

To begin with, a common view among the participants in the video statements was that obligations form the basis of their relationship with their organisations. Hence, these obligations are contractually based. On the other hand, expectations describe how obligations should be fulfilled and are therefore values-based. However, according to participants who had just started their dual-study programme, expectations and obligations appeared to be more interrelated at the beginning. The emerging theme presents a general overview of expectations and obligations of young professionals. It is noted that two major codes have developed into themes of their own: *knowledge transfer* associated with obligations and *appreciation* associated with expectations. These two themes will be presented in more detail in subchapter 4.1.4.
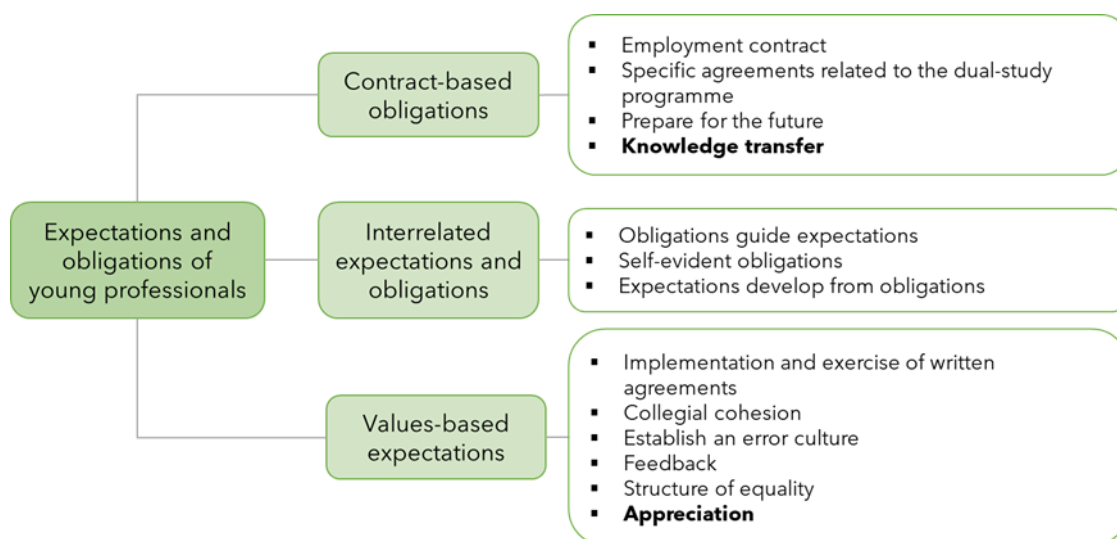
Figure 21: Expectations and obligations of young professionals
Own illustration

Contract-based obligations

To begin, young professionals point to the employment contract as the basis for obligations. Betty, who is in her fifth semester, states:

> […] they [referring to the employer] are obliged to offer me what is stipulated in the employment contract.

Lexie, who is also in her fifth semester, emphasises the difference between her written contract and the unwritten expectations, referring to an obligation as follows:

> […] yes, just all in the contract, the things that are in the contract […].

In addition, she highlights that the written contract must be fulfilled as a minimum requirement and contains *'remuneration'*, *'duration'* and *'instructions'*. The last of these elements refers to specific agreements related to the dual-study programme, such as supervision meetings or time-off during the examination period. Mathew, who had just started his PR and Communication study programme, mentioned that the need to *'[…] apply in practice what we [referring to dual-study students] learned in theory'* is the key obligation of the organisation. Robin from the same study programme confirmed the importance of knowledge transfer, adding that *'being prepared for the professional world'* is of the utmost importance to ensure:

> […] that I am prepared to be able to work elsewhere as well.

Contractual contents are also mentioned; based on the understanding of the young professionals, these form part of their employment contract, even though they are not documented as such. These include, for example, working conditions in general, but also equality, onboarding, job security, training and study tools more specifically. David, first semester, imagines his future as follows:

> *[…] the contract goes on for so long and of course I would like to have generally good working conditions during this time in the three and a half years.*

Interrelated expectations and obligations

Although some participants were able to clearly assign obligations and expectations based on their perceptions, this was more difficult to identify for participants who were at the beginning of their professional careers. Thus, participants sometimes used expectations and obligations synonymously. Additionally, it was observed that study participants from business degree programmes were also able to differentiate more clearly between the two. For example, Joy, who is studying logistics in her third semester, refers to the obligations as follows:

> *My employer is obliged to offer me […] such things as breaks and remuneration. […] Well, and the basis for that is the contract, the law.*

Next, Henry talked about the importance of gaining insight into several departments because he is studying business administration, a study programme that is intended to cover business topics across all departments within an organisation equally:

> *I just expect that because, well, I think that should go without saying.*

Henry thus places his expectations in the context of self-evidence. Although the university provides an overview of the module catalogue, which for some students can be an annex to their employment contract (University of Applied Sciences, 2021b), it is not a legally binding document that obliges the organisation to plan the work locations according to the modules. For Lexie and Amy, who are both studying HRM in the fifth semester, the obligations also represent this contractual basis. However, in their explanations, they mention that expectations develop from obligations. As Lexie said:

> *I expect from my employer, um things that are not […] things that are not directly regulated in the contract but are based on it. […] benefits, […] interesting tasks […] flexible working hours.*

In summary, expectations and obligations can overlap from the point of view of the participants. Therefore, some expectations and obligations may become equally important to them. Robin, first semester studying PR and communication reflects:

> *I think it's actually quite difficult to differentiate somehow [referring to expectations and obligations]. I was just thinking about whether you can say, the obligations, that's just quite normal these things under labour law, which the employer of course has to comply with somehow. […] Um I think my expectations are then specific things. Um, but still somehow represent the obligations, I hope you understood what I mean.*

Values-based expectations

Notwithstanding that expectations and obligations can overlap, the participants shared a variety of expectations towards their organisations that should be fulfilled. As explained previously, the employment contract regulates, for example, working hours and work location. When participants related these general agreements to expectations, they referred to implementation and these basic agreements being executed by the organisation. Regarding working hours, this includes flexitime, overtime and trust-based working hours. Amy, who currently has fixed working hours, said:

> *[…] the possibility of building up overtime goes hand in hand with flexible working hours […] this has many advantages, and I would expect […] the same from my future employer.*

With respect to the place of work, Lexie expects *'home office'*, while Henry expects *'a modern workspace'*. In addition to how regulations are implemented in practice, the participants foregrounded the importance of collegial cohesion. Amy said that *'[…] talk about private things […]'* builds *'trust'*, Betty notes that *'respect'* is important for her, and Robin states that *'being friendly to one another'* helps to forge relationships. Furthermore, Lexie and Henry emphasise that the work environment and workflows that stimulate productivity contribute to communication. Team spirit is also uplifted by using an informal form of address, such as the informal *'Du'* instead of the formal *'Sie'*. As Amy explained:

> *[…] you can have fun and get on well with each other in everyday working life and also talk about private things […] we have a* Du *[referring to the informal you] culture […].*

Alongside collegial cohesion, the participants expect to be working in a work culture characterised by trial and error, where mistakes are appreciated and valued. From the point of view of these young professionals, this *'culture of appreciating errors'* (Betty) arises

when feedback is regularly offered, ideas are valued and everybody can express themselves. Robin also observed:

> *[…] that I have the possibility to talk to someone if there are any problems […] and that one finds a compromise or a solution um so that is very important.*

When talking about expectations, Amy, Emma and Henry shared that they valued *'hierarchy'*, while Betty, Lexie and Joy favoured a *'clear task structure'*. In addition, Lexie, Mathew, David and Henry expect to *'take on responsibility'* and to experience task variation. In this context, the participants emphasised that they were *'treated equally'* and wanted to be a valuable part of the organisation. Henry, who is in his first semester, described how he experienced equality in his organisation right from the start:

> *[…] furthermore, as I said, you don't feel like a dual-study student when you enter the office building, but like one of the others.*

Finally, it should be noted that some of the participants defined expectations as something that did not necessarily need to be written down in an agreement. Lexie, fifth semester, HRM, mentioned:

> *In addition, I expect from my employer, um things that do not have to be directly in the contract, […] I have to think of benefits that you expect from your employer even though you don't specify them in writing beforehand, whether it's a bonus or the possibility of advancement, or even onboarding.*

4.1.2   External and internal agents influence the psychological contract

Expectations and obligations are subject to the influence of external and internal agents. Internal agents relate to the practice partners (e.g., co-workers, supervisors, the organisation in general or the HR department), whereas external agents influence the expectations from the outside (e.g., university, school, society, history or the economy).
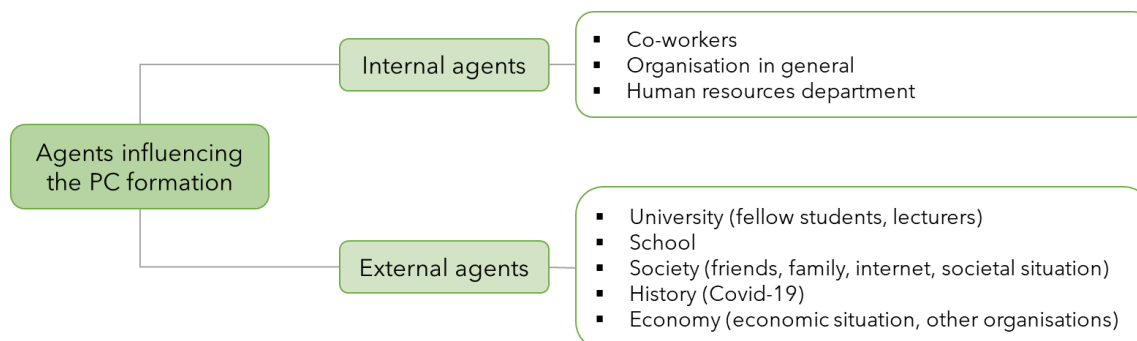
Figure 22: Agents influencing PC formation
Own illustration

Internal agents

Starting with internal agents, eleven participants stated that their co-workers were the main source of influence regarding their job expectations. Hannah said that she trusts the knowledge of her co-workers who have been working in her organisation for a long time:

> *[…] they have been working there for a long time and I trust them in that sense […] what I can expect and which expectations I might have to lower.*

Although the participants did not always refer to it directly, it became clear through descriptive examples that organisations in general, as well as HR departments and supervisors, have an indirect influence on expectations. Henry reflected on his job interview compared to the inducements that he received after joining his organisation:

> *[…] because they [referring to the organisation] have exceeded the expectations, because they have not only given me the things that we agreed upon during the job interview […] but they have exceeded them.*

As well as the organisation in general, the participants further identified the HR department indirectly. Lexie shared that an onboarding process is inevitable, while Robin explained that fair compensation comparing VET apprentices and dual-study students should be offered.

Joy said that she was influenced by what her supervisor said. In addition, other participants highlighted that feedback given by their supervisors was important to them. David described that good working conditions arise when:

> *[…] also, something like […] feedback in the company um so simply the approachability of the bosses is there […].*

External agents

According to the participants, their expectations and obligations were further influenced by external agents. As Mathew points out:

> *[…] I think that my expectations of my workplace are mainly um influenced uhm by my fellow students because we regularly exchange information.*

The participants in this study regularly had the opportunity to compare themselves with other companies through the exchange of information with fellow students. While the main influence came from the context of the university, the participants further

mentioned the economic situation and the COVID-19 restrictions that influenced, for example, their requests to work from home.

Participants' schools, families and friends were seen to have a great impact on their preliminary job expectations. As Amy shared:

> *Since I also exchange information with my friends and acquaintances […], you also get […] to know that some things are better or worse with others, but this has also raised my expectations again.*

Henry also described an internship during his school years and how it developed his knowledge of working life.

4.1.3 Experience drives the transformation of young professionals' psychological contracts

Participants not only referred to agents and societal or historical events changing their PC expectations, but also explained that their experiences had either increased, decreased or remained the same since they joined their practice partners. Therefore, the dynamics of their expectations are affected by their experience of the job.
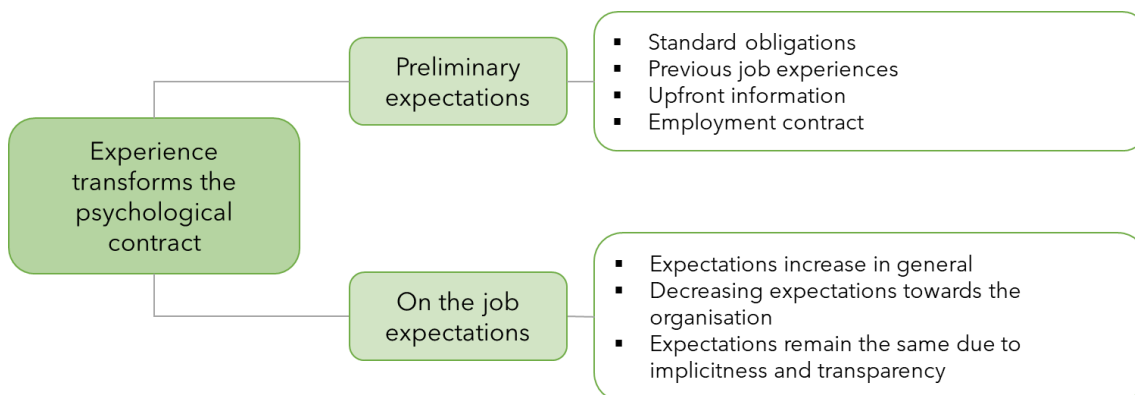

Figure 23: Experience transforms the PC
Own illustration

Preliminary expectations

Participants who had worked on a previous vacation or student job to gain some work experience, who knew what was written in their employment contract, or who had any other kind of upfront information created preliminary job expectations. In addition, the participants described that they had based their experiences on the experiences of family members and friends. Betty has a family member who has worked in social work for

many years. Thus, she developed high expectations of her practice partner before she also started a job in social work. Importantly, some participants regretted not being able to inform themselves sufficiently prior to joining the organisation. Tori, who works in her fifth semester in health managements reflects:

> *It is complex to get many things under one hat. […] I also knew that in advance, um […] but from the Internet from the environment, from families and friends, you thought um that it will be different. So in reality, it is different than you had imagined - and I would have wished that I had informed myself better beforehand.*

On-the-job expectations

If participants were well informed or had a concrete idea of what they could expect from their organisations, their expectations of their practice partners remained relatively stable. However, these statements were made by first-year students. On the contrary, participants in higher semesters reported that their expectations had increased. Amy, who is in her fifth semester, noted that she had no previous touchpoints with work life and that her expectations had increased over the course of time due to external influences. She explained this change in her expectations as follows:

> *In general, Corona has made working from home a big issue, which would not be a mandatory requirement for me, but it would be nice to be able to work from home from time to time.*

For Tori and Hannah, both in their fifth semesters, expectations towards their organisations had decreased. Tori stated that she feels that her supervisor pays no attention to her, which she initially anticipated due to the regulations in her employment contract. Moreover, expectations were seen to decrease when initial expectations were misunderstood or when a manager did not fulfil his or her supervisory role, even if the reasons were well justified. This latter point is described by Hannah, who studies child pedagogy, meaning that her workplace is not a regular office:

> *[…] my expectations towards my employer have […] sunk a bit, […] because I don't think I see my employer that often during my work, so she spends a lot of time in the office […] my employer is also the head of the institution […] so she does a lot of office work […]*

Further interesting comments were made by Amy and Emma. Both reflected on different stages of life, leading to different expectations. Emma said that she and her fellow students are at the very beginning of their careers, and that their expectations depend on

the positioning of experiences that they already bring with them or have made on the job. As Amy pointed out:

> *[…] I think my expectations will also change over time, because they are also influenced by various things, such as the stage of life […]*

This statement shows that both the agents and the experiences of the participants have contributed to the change in their PCs.

4.1.4 Appreciation and knowledge transfer as protagonists of expectations

When participants were asked to state what their job expectations were or what they felt their employer was obliged to offer, two key arguments were repeated several times: appreciation and knowledge transfer. Although knowledge transfer was identified as an obligation by the participants, they classified appreciation as an expectation.
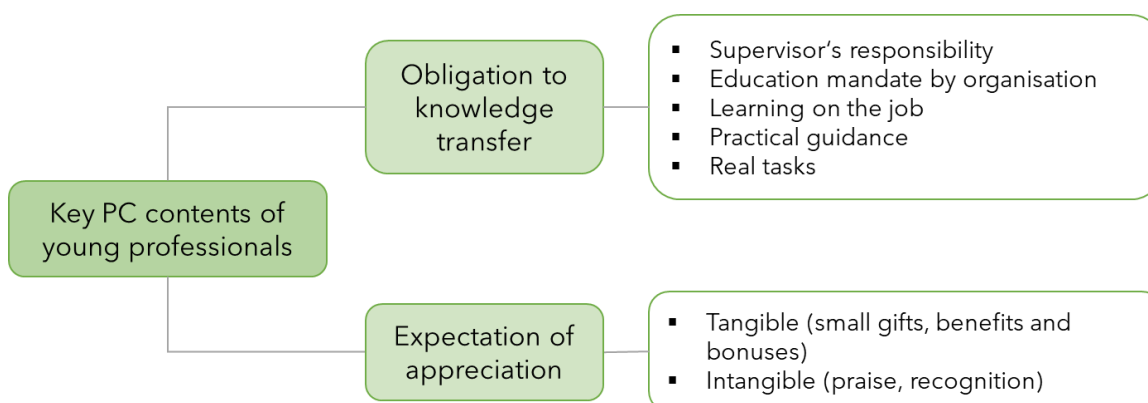

Figure 24: Key PC contents of young professionals
Own illustration

Obligation to knowledge transfer

One of the conditions for participants who complete a dual-study programme is that they see the obligation for the transfer of knowledge between study and work in their organisations. As mentioned by some participants, the education mandate is set out in their employment contract, and therefore, they explicitly request it. Participants gave a more detailed explanation of how this knowledge transfer could be achieved through practical guidance, actual tasks from practice, willingness to support the learning process and visibility of leadership. Mathew experienced this as follows:

> *[…] I'm taken by the hand very well, uh, the theory is linked very well and I'm, uh, I'm given responsibility right from the start, […], and, uh, I personally find that very good.*

Expectation of appreciation

The participants attributed the various behaviours of their organisations to appreciation. For example, both Amy and Henry talked about *'praise and recognition from supervisors'* and small gifts, while Joy mentioned *'being asked for your opinion'* or supervisors and co-workers showing gratitude, which creates a friendly work environment. From Amy's perspective, appreciation comes in many forms:

> *[…] Appreciation. Now, it doesn't matter in what form, whether it is tangible or intangible […].*

4.1.5 Brief summary and identification of key topics for focus groups

To sum up, the study participants have developed their own individual but partly also comparable expectations towards their employers, primarily influenced through the context of their dual-study programme. Figure 25 shows the relationship between the data items and the codes that inform each theme and subtheme.
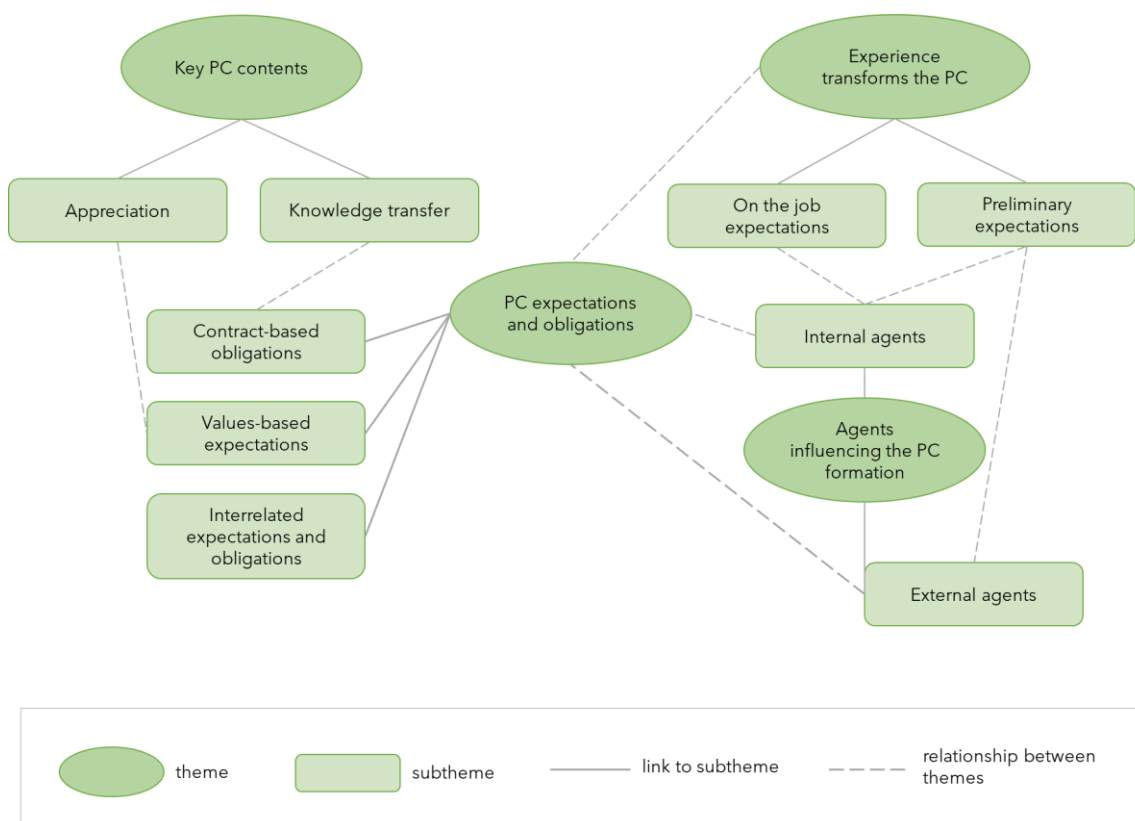

Figure 25: Finalised thematic map of video statements demonstrating four themes

Own illustration

Often, the participants lacked a clear understanding of what the organisation was obliged to offer them or what they should expect. In principle, some participants listed obligations as part of the employment contract and expressed that expectations evolved beyond this. Therefore, the obligations represent what is written in the contract (e.g., 20 working hours per week), and the expectations refer to how the agreements are executed by the organisation (e.g., through flexible or self-determining working arrangements).

Particularly noteworthy here is the development of expectations while gaining work experience. For almost all the participants, these have increased to the extent that they connect to general job expectations that are formed towards possible future employers. However, the mechanisms and processes behind the changing expectations remain unclear and therefore need further investigation in the focus groups.

Additionally, two major themes emerged from the video statements: *appreciation* and *knowledge transfer*. The participants commented on the importance of these two topics several times at different stages of their recordings. Therefore, deeper investigation through the focus groups is needed to understand first how appreciation can be provided by an organisation and second how knowledge transfer can be ensured between the organisation and the student. Finally, a few concrete suggestions for the design of future employee–employer relations emerged from the first data collection phase, particularly around onboarding and error culture. For this reason, the focus group were asked about these topics in more detail to investigate potential HRM strategies.

4.2 Focus groups

The focus groups were convened to further investigate and enrich the initial data from the video statements (see research question one). Through the discussions, it was possible to observe how the participants shared information on the researcher's given topics. The findings of the focus groups offer rich data on how and by which factors the PCs of young professionals are influenced (see research question two). Furthermore, to glean insights into how HRM strategies should be adapted to meet the needs of the participants (see research question three), reflexive thematic analysis was continued as a method to evaluate the data. Each of the following subsections provides an outline of the themes, subthemes and major codes.

4.2.1 Key expectations of young professionals in organisations

During the participants' initial work experience, team-building events, small acts of appreciation and being held accountable for their work contributed to their integration into the organisation.
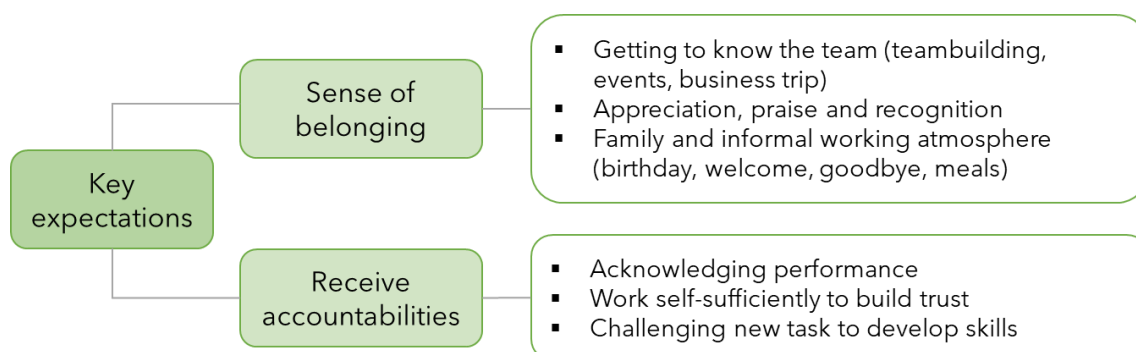

Figure 26: Key expectations
Own illustration

Sense of Belonging

Participants appreciate when their companies accept them as equal members and integrate them into the company. More specifically, various team-building activities add to their feelings of belonging. Likewise, being invited to breakfast or dinner by management, appreciation events, and small parting or onboarding gifts made the participants feel welcomed and/or appreciated. For example, Kai (FG5) pointed to a party and a congratulatory email from management at his company:

> *These are small things where you feel part of the big whole, which are very nice moments.*

Additionally, Kate (FG4) was surprised with a birthday bouquet after six months of her employment and expressed that:

> *[…] that was a very nice family situation, that I felt very comfortable that I was also welcomed and congratulated so nicely by my work there.*

Receive Accountabilities

The participants in all five focus groups described the completion of certain tasks independently and without help or the mastering of a project independently as positive experiences.

As Hannah (FG3) mentioned:

> *I was allowed to lead something on my own. I think I felt somehow confirmed that I was apparently doing it right.*

Rose, who is in her fourth semester (FG3), cited a similar experience: her supervisor told her that she trusted Rose could perform the task on her own. Thus, Rose reflected:

> *OK, you're getting to the point where you realise that you're learning things and can do them on your own at some point.*

Similarly, Mary (FG2) said that she had succeeded with an idea that she had proposed to her company. In addition, she reported that she feels valued when her ideas are perceived, accepted and even implemented.

4.2.2 Disturbances during the formation of psychological contracts

However, disturbances can occur during the formation of the PC. The participants described three key disturbances that they had experienced: being treated disrespectfully (by superiors but also by co-workers), lack of communication and unclarified roles as a young professional of a dual-study programme. These disturbances resulted in confusion and misunderstandings throughout their daily work.
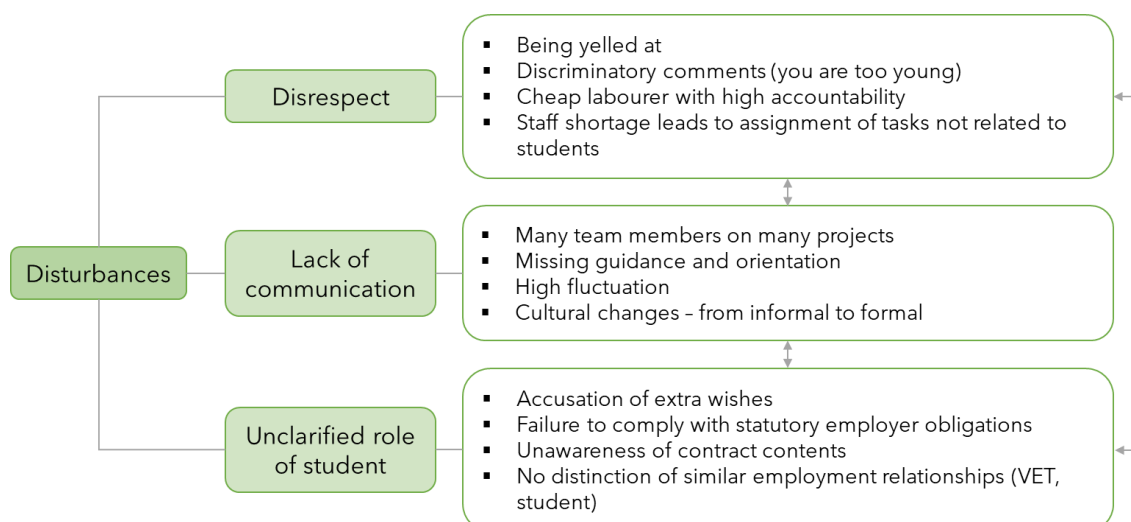
These subthemes are interdependent and closely linked. For example, a lack of communication about the student's role can cause disrespectful behaviour by co-workers.

Disrespect

Joy (FG2) tearfully shared a situation in which a colleague had yelled at her because she was asking the colleague to give her a key to lock her office early:

> […] *"You can't go" [referring to her co-worker]. I replied yes, I had already clarified the matter with my supervisor and so on and she kept interrupting me as she was getting louder and louder. […] But she didn't let me get a word in edgewise and said, […] "you can't request something just because you're something special now".*

In FG2, the participants discussed that due to staff shortages, they had been assigned tasks unrelated to their study programmes or taken on extra workload with a high degree of accountability. Emma (FG2), studying tourism management in a hotel, stated:

> *I am now only seconded to actually clean the toilet. Yes, um we got just a quick thank you for managing everything so well and here is the cleaning plan again.*

Adding to this experience of disrespect from co-workers and supervisors, Diana (FG2) reported that her supervisor was annoyed because she could not complete the tasks in the company's annual report:

> […] *I was quickly confronted with tasks of which I actually had no idea.*

Betty (FG4), who is studying social work, described an example of being left completely alone on duty and not feeling comfortable being responsible for human lives. She cited feeling like she was being treated like *'cheap labour'*.

Lack of communication

Susn (FG2) mentioned that she had been left alone with customers or left not knowing what to do for two hours due to a lack of communication. In FG5, two students from the HRM study programme described that in their industry, personal leasing, the staff turnover was higher than in other industries. Thus, Amy (FG5) says:

> *I believe that this has an impact on the team spirit and cooperation, that you don't really come together as a group and communicate.*

Lucas (FG5) cited similar experiences of working in a project-driven environment. As an example, he describes seven employees working on one project without any of them knowing its current status, which has resulted in mistakes:

> *[…] missing communication when mixing too many projects, it's stressful.*

Unclarified role as a student

All the focus groups shared that the role of their student status is unclear to some of their co-workers and even supervisors. In FG2, Diana shared a situation in which she talked to her supervisor about the difficulties in planning her vacation time between semesters:

> *And she [referring to her supervisor] just said to me, "Yes, I do not care what you do at the university". It was a bit shocking for me to hear that, when you know that the person hired you themselves, that they couldn't care less.*

Hannah (FG3) spoke of similar experiences, including being scheduled for a whole week in the work plan without her university lecture times being factored in. As a result, she felt insecure and did not dare to address the issue at first:

> *I get the work schedule sent to me and I realise that I suddenly must work every day although I am a student and I actually didn't dare to talk about it because I thought to myself, okay, maybe I misunderstood something. […] it was clarified after a few weeks that it was because there was so much staff missing that they [referring to her organisation] simply needed me there.*

On the other hand, expectations are fulfilled when the role of the dual-study student is differentiated from similar contractual relationships, although this is not often the case.

This discrepancy was discussed in FG2:

> *Mary: I think I am treated differently than the trainees [referring to VET], more like an employee, and that is why I think that is also an expectation of mine that is actually fulfilled.*
>
> *Emma: […] I would also agree with that, but […] I was told […] that trainees and dual students are put on the same level and treated the same.*
>
> *Mary: Oh!*
>
> *Emma: […] people don't necessarily know that I am studying, because on my name badge it says: Trainee. […]*

Emma (FG2) further explained that differentiation is needed between trainees and dual-study students because they also have different contractual terms (e.g., working hours) and therefore different needs.

4.2.3 Remuneration, flexible working time and knowledge transfer are key obligations

In addition to disrupting factors of their PC expectations, the focus groups discussed what they expected from their organisations or what they thought their organisations were obliged to do. However, not every participant was able to distinguish between the terms expectations and obligations at first, as Beatrix (FG1) observed:

> *I find it super hard to differentiate.*

During the discussion, the participants agreed that the minimum obligations were written into the employment contract, including contract annexes. At the same time, they highlighted that the dual-study programme has *'no official rules'* (Lucas, FG5). Here, the participant refers to unified rules stipulated by law or those given by the university. In contrast, VET apprentice programmes are covered by vocational training, which is not applicable to dual-study students. Thus, David (FG1) claims that his employer is:

> *[…] obliged to […] inform me transparently about working conditions.*

Crucially, three subthemes – remuneration, flexible working time and knowledge transfer – were discussed repeatedly in the focus groups and referred to solely as obligations.
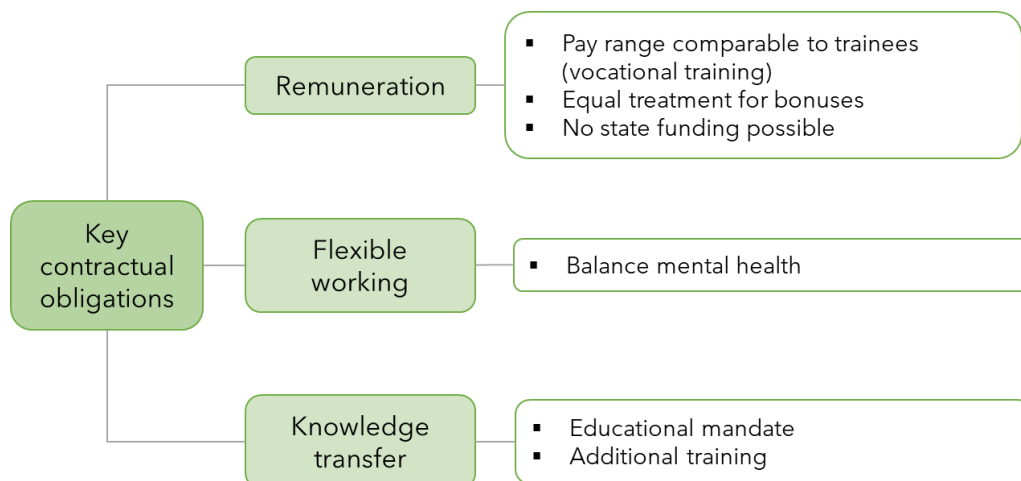
Figure 28: Key contractual obligations
Own illustration

Remuneration

All the focus groups highlighted the importance of remuneration in different ways. They discussed pay ranges and bonuses compared to other employment relations and reflected upon additional payments, such as travel expenses and student loans.

Rose (FG3) explained that she has a mini-job for eight hours a week and earns more there than in her 20-hour job at her practice partner, leading her to question:

> *[…] is the work from the mini-job now valued more than the work you do? […] Of course, you're not as far along in your studies as the others [referring to other employees], but in fact you do the same work. Why is that valued so differently?*

In the same focus group, Hannah added that she had already worked as a temporary worker at her practice partner before her studies and earned more during that time than her practice partner now pays with tuition fees plus salary (University of Applied Sciences, 2021a). As earlier described education in Germany is almost free. However, this dual-study programme is offered by a private university of applied sciences, which charges organisations a yearly increasing monthly tuition fee of around 700 EUR (University of Applied Sciences, 2019). Therefore, employers may offer a lower salary than for VET trainees.

Henry stated that he has a different position as a dual-study student than the VET apprentices in his organisation. Although he mentions taking on more responsibility compared to these trainees, he also admits that his salary is lower:

[…] they [referring to his organisation] also pay my tuition fees. That's why I think it's completely justified.

Overall, the salary range discussed in the focus groups varied from –100 to 1,500 Euros. Rose (FG3) indicated that one of her fellow students must pay his own tuition fees.

Rose: […] and doesn't get that much salary himself and makes a minus every month.

[…]

Henry: Yes, I'm with you there, so that [referring to the tuition fee] should already be included. […]

Ann: But isn't that in the contract that they [referring to the practice partner] are obliged to take over?'

Rose: Well, some employers have extra contracts and if it says that they won't pay, hm.

Ann: Well, I don't think that's ok, because um as a normal employee, if you're not a dual-study student, you don't have to pay back the salary. So no, I don't think that's right at all.

In FG4, Betty explained that dual-study students are not eligible for state student loans under the '*Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz*' (Federal Training Assistance Act) in Germany. Hence, the participants in this study suffered due to a paucity of entitlements due to the form of employment. Often, they were unaware of their rights in this context, including the possibility of housing subsidies or state pension insurance.

Flexible working time

Beatrix (FG1) pointed out that she thinks that the employer is also obliged to take care of its employees' *'mental health'*. She further requested that:

[…] that's also the employer's obligation […] to make sure that I'm not completely overworked, but at the same time to make sure that I don't just sit around and do nothing for eight hours a day.

In addition, Susn (FG4) appreciates that her practice partner allows her study time to cope with the extra workload before exams.

The deadline is coming up [referring to a paper] and I ask him [referring to her supervisor] if I can do something today and take half of the working day off, then he immediately says yes, of course, your studies are the priority. Therefore, I'm really quite happy that they're giving me the chance to somehow manage my personal life on the side.

This aspect of study being the highest priority goes hand in hand with the next subtheme, knowledge transfer.

Knowledge transfer

As Conny (FG1) explained:

There is a special feature [referring to the dual-study programme] that there is somehow already an educational mandate with our practice partner.

Kai (FG5) expects that his organisation is obliged to educate him further. He thus commented that it is the employer's duty to continue to fulfil the educational mandate in full alongside the employee's studies. Kai mentioned (FG5) that this includes extra training as well:

[…] what is totally fulfilled is these opportunities for further education. On the one hand, that's good for your CV, but it's also good for your own job search later on.

David (FG1) is happy that his organisation is paying for his study programme and thus questions:

Is my employer obliged to train me at work as well? I don't know.

Although the participants' views on the educational mandate appeared to differ, most of the students agreed that it was the employer's duty to transfer knowledge from the study programme to working life due to the nature of the dual-study programme.

4.2.4   Non-specific or high expectations characterise the organisational entry

In retrospect, the participants shared their expectations before entering their organisations, and they described that they had either no concrete expectations or high expectations. For the former, Amy (FG5) said:

I started my studies after graduating from school when I had no idea about the world.

On the contrary, other participants had higher expectations based on the information they had received in advance. They also highlighted that their expectations had been influenced by organisational and external agents. The organisational agents mentioned by the participants were the *'interview partners'* (Mary, FG2) and *'HRM staff'* (Beatrix, FG1), while the external agents were *'university staff members'* (Hannah, FG3; Betty, FG4; Susn, FG4;), *'friends'* (Conny, FG1; Amy, FG5), *'family'* (Joy, FG1; Betty, FG4) and *'partners'* (Lexie, FG2). First, the process and influencers of developing high expectations are

described below, followed by a description of why participants may not have developed concrete expectations prior to organisational entry.
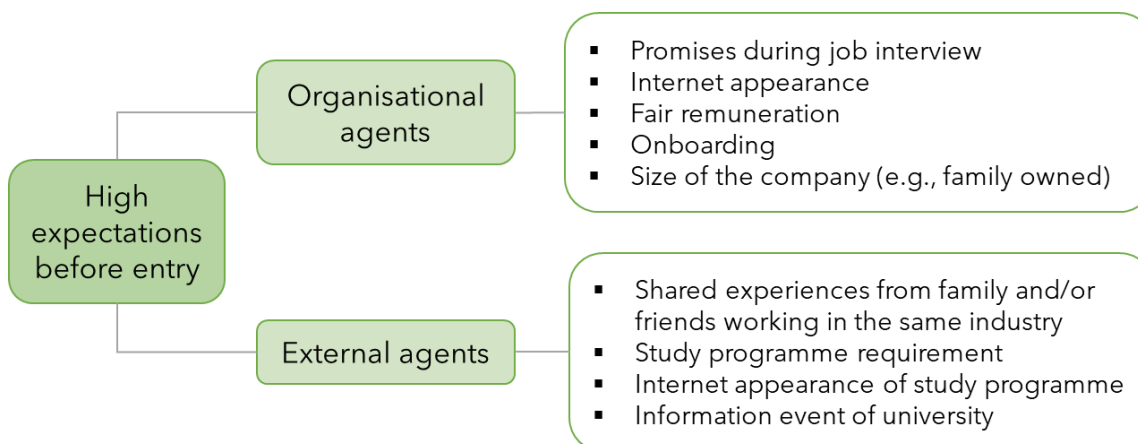

Figure 29: High expectations before entry
Own illustration

Organisational and external agents

In all the focus groups, at least one participant stated that she or he had higher expectations before entering the organisation. Mary (FG2), Ann (FG3) and Lucas (FG5) referred to their job interviews and promises made during recruitment. For Mary (FG2), her future manager offered her a company car, but this inducement was later rescinded. Ann (FG3), in her second semester, was promised that she would receive tasks with responsibility, which had not been fulfilled up to that point. On the contrary, Lucas's (FG5) expectations had been met because he agreed on a remuneration package with his employer that would allow him to live on his own.

Although participants were informed about salary components before signing the employment contract, Emma said she had higher expectations. She described the VET apprentices in her organisation earning higher salaries because her tuition was deducted from her pay:

> It's a very small amount and I've already asked if it would be possible to get a little more, just because I've done tasks that, others didn't even come close to doing them and uh that was only denied.

The job interview is not the only source of information to clarify the expectations of young professionals. They also expect to be employed in several areas according to their study plans. For example, Henry (FG3) explained that his work schedule did not foresee

him being deployed in the marketing or HR department, despite the fact that he was studying Business Administration. As he claimed:

> *[…] that would be totally exciting, and I think you could transfer a lot more things from the university.*

Similarly, Ann (FG2) and Betty (FG3) had developed prior expectations due to the appearance of the organisation on its website or during the interview. In addition, in FG4, participants who had not informed themselves about their future employers in advance via social media or websites used the university as their source of information. As Betty (FG4) reflected:

> *I googled the university […] I found many super super positive evaluations and how great the concept is […] the student advisors have also sold it to us […]*

Betty (FG4) adds that she attended an information event beforehand, at which she was promised by the university staff:

> *[…] you get all the support and if you have any problems, you can contact us, we are always here for you because we are the middleman between you and the company.*

Hence, besides the job interview with her employer, the university's presentation and promises convinced Betty to opt for a dual-study programme.

After entering the organisation, Joy (FG1) and Hannah (FG2) explained that they expected to be welcomed by their co-workers and supervisors; in reality, however, they did not even know that they were coming to the office. Therefore, they had higher expectations with respect to onboarding prior to employment. As Diana (FG2) reflected:

> *Um, there was no real onboarding process at all […]*

Additionally, participants stated that the size of the company could influence their expectations. Ann (FG3), studying tourism management, shared her experiences of entering a family-owned business:

> *[…] it's a very small family business […] just the two managing directors and um there I had already high expectations […] that I will then also get a little more responsibility, because the company is just so small.*

However, Ann's expectations were not met because she *'almost got no responsibility'* (FG3).

In FG4, the participants discussed the difference between working in a family-owned business and working in public service:

> *Susn: [...] It's also relatively familiar and yes, it's quite nice when people think of you and integrate you a bit.*

> *Betty: I don't really have anything like that, but I'm not in a family business or anything like that, I'm currently in the public sector [...].*

Lexie (FG2), who is studying HRM, reported that she and her fellow students were employed in different industries and that their expectations differed accordingly:

> *In a hotel, I might not have such high expectations, and in a large company, I expect things to be more structured and better because they have been around longer and have more money at their disposal.*

In addition, shared experiences with friends and families can lead to higher expectations. As Betty (FG4) explained:

> *Well, my mother is also a social worker, [...] she was a team leader for years, and I thought that somehow that was the standard [...].*

Similarly, Conny (FG1) told her focus group that friends and family informed her about work-related matters, so she developed high expectations for her own organisation before joining.

On the contrary, some participants explained that they had no concrete expectations before entering their organisations, which can be attributed to the external context or organisational agents.
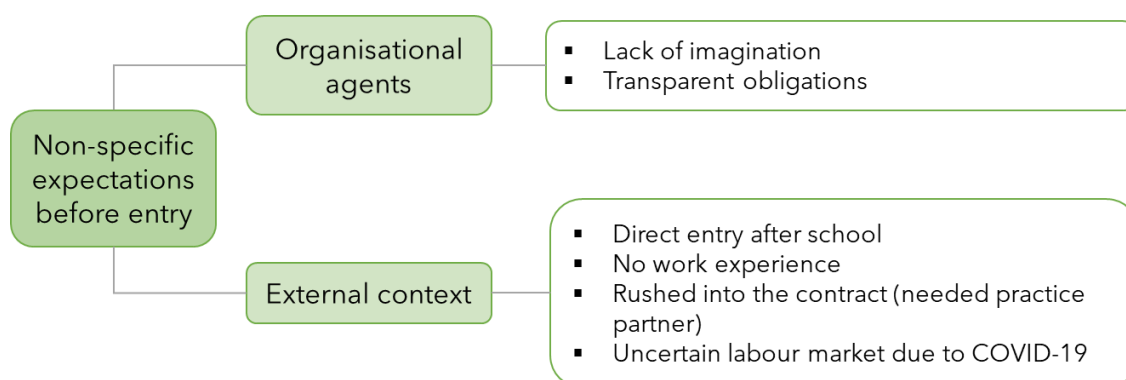

Figure 30: Non-specific expectations before entry
Own illustration

Organisational agents and external context

Having non-specific expectations before entry was often mentioned in connection with entering the practice partner directly after school (Lexie, FG2) or without any work experience (Henry, FG3). Amy (FG5) described her job entry as follows:

> *I accepted the best first offer and had no expectations of the employer, so I was just so happy to find something; everything was relatively spontaneous […].*

Leo (also from FG5) confirmed that he had been glad to find a practice partner who offered him *'a secure place'*. Furthermore, he added examples that underpinned his knowledge of the obligations that his employer offered. Thus, he did not develop higher expectations due to transparent obligations. As the group discussion continued, Kai highlighted another external factor that had influenced his expectations:

> *I also went to many job interviews because I was looking for a practice partner and often, they said OK, we would hire you, but because of Corona this [referring to the dual-study programme] wasn't in the budget, so I was all the more relieved to get an acceptance […].*

4.2.5 Rationales for changes in young professionals' psychological contracts

After the participants started their study programmes and joined their organisations, they reported in retrospect that their expectations had changed. For various reasons, expectations had either increased or decreased over time.

Once the participants started their dual-study programmes, new agents appeared. External agents mentioned by the participants were *'fellow students'* (David, FG1; Joy, FG1; Lexie FG2; Hannah, FG3; Betty, FG4; Amy, FG5) and *'university lecturers'* (Rose, FG3; Hannah FG3), but also *'other companies'* that made job offers through social media channels (Lexie, FG2). In turn, as soon as the participants entered the organisation of their practice partners, organisational agents such as *'co-workers'* (David, FG1; Conny FG1; Ann FG3), *'managing directors'* (Emma, FG1; Ann, FG3; Leo, FG5), *'supervisors'* (Conny, FG1; Mary, FG2; Susn, FG4; Lucas, FG5) and *'other trainees'* (Mary, FG2; Lucas, FG5; Leo, FG5) were highlighted.

Overall, expectations increased in general while gaining their first work experience. Only two participants said that their expectations continued to be relatively stable.
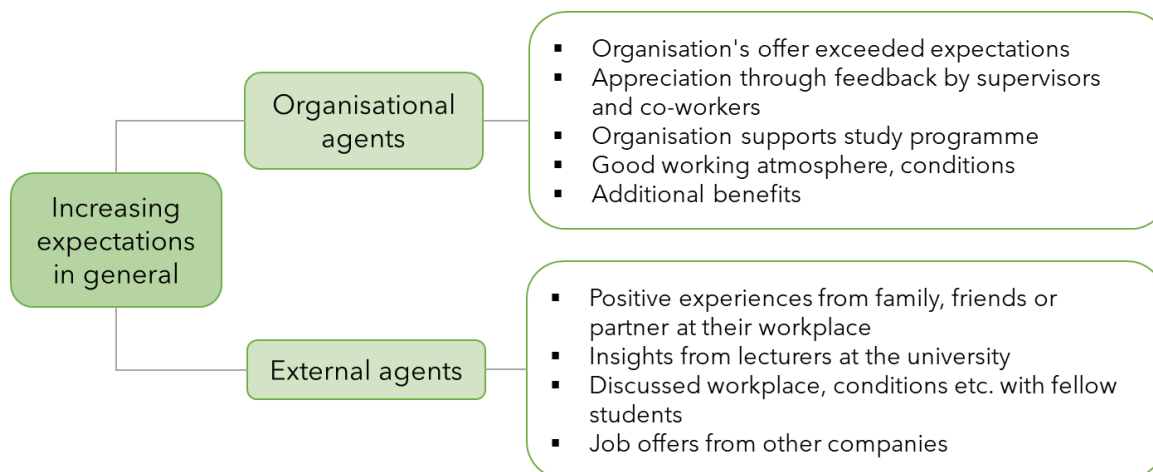
Figure 31: Increasing expectations in general
Own illustration

Increasing expectations through organisational agents

David (FG1) had high expectations when entering the organisation, and they subsequently increased further:

> *I'm satisfied with my employer and, um, now that I know how good it can be, so to speak, I expect it to continue, especially these opportunities for feedback.*

Furthermore, David (FG1) shared that he was happy to receive additional benefits and flexible working hours, just like his co-workers. Furthermore, he described feeling appreciated by his supervisors and co-workers. Joy (FG1) related to this because she felt recognised by her supervisor. The same experience made Henry (FG3), who had not expected anything before entering his organisation, now value the *'team spirit'* he experienced. Besides a good working atmosphere, also mentioned by Leo (FG5), Hannah (FG3) shared that her organisation supports the study programme:

> *[…] if there's not so much work then they say: "Hannah, then just go home early and do something for university, we know how much stress you have with your homework" […] I was quite happy […] they notice when I'm stressed and then they help me.*

Increasing expectations through external agents

In addition to the organisational influence, participants described how positive experiences from friends and family or even partners in the workplace led to the formation of higher expectations towards their own employers. Joy (FG1) shared that her

parents could send sickness notifications online, whereas she must make sure that such a notification reaches her employer on time by post.

In addition, the university has a great influence on increased job expectations. Fellow students often discussed and shared their personal experiences with each other. As Lexie (FG1) pointed out:

> *[…] you have contact with […] your fellow students […] you also get to know how cool it can be at other companies, and the expectations rise more and more. […]*

Likewise, Hannah (FG3) voiced that *'[…] actually, it's the fellow students who influence this [referring to increasing expectations] the most […]'*, which made her wonder, for example, why the remuneration differential among students and also among VET apprentices was so high. In addition, lecturers who have a teaching assignment and who work in practice report back to their students and initiate discussions, which in turn leads to rising job expectations. This was discussed in FG3:

> *Rose: […] we always have lecturers who are very practice-orientated, where you can discuss a lot and with those lecturers, you also get a lot of information from the companies […]*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *Hannah: […] about the point that Rose made, […] we also talk a lot about practice with the lecturers […] and actually I have become more aware of how lucky I am with my practice partner […].*

Another interesting comment was made by Lexie (FG1), who is already in her sixth semester and is about to finish her bachelor's degree. On the subject of receiving job offers from other companies, she observed the following:

> *I think it's […] of all these communication channels that expectations are rising […] and through social media always getting requests like: Hey, just apply, send your CV like that, and I think that raises expectations […].*

Decreasing expectations towards the employer through organisational agents

Despite the fact that external agents influenced participants to increase their expectations, the participants did not place decreasing expectations in the context of external agents. The next topic illuminates how organisational agents may lower participants' expectations of their own organisations.
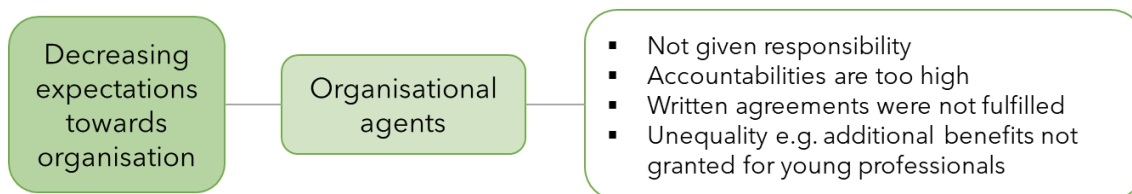
Figure 32: Decreasing expectations towards organisation
Own illustration

Unlike participants who had been given responsibility and whose expectations had increased, the expectations of their employers decreased when they had been given little or no responsibility. As presented in the previous section, Ann (FG3) started with high expectations due to her job interview and explained:

I had already high expectations after our first conversations about what my tasks will be […] that's where my expectations came from, unfortunately they weren't confirmed, so I got almost no responsibility.

On the other hand, when participants felt they had been given too many or too high accountabilities (e.g., Diana, FG3), their expectations also decreased. As Betty (FG4), who is in the sixth semester, states, *'I am disillusioned by now'*.

Another key driver for decreasing expectations towards the organisation is when written agreements are not fulfilled. Mary (FG2) signed a work contract that included a company car but later did not receive one because of her student status, which only allows her to work limited hours.

Betty (FG4) gave another reason why her expectations had fallen: she felt that she was not treated equally compared to other workers. Betty (FG4) described that she does not get paid any travel expenses when visiting clients, but her co-workers receive a reimbursement:

[…] when I think about this fairness again, so on the one hand why do the other colleagues get paid, are they different than I am?

She added to the discussion that she has also not received any COVID-19 support payments, even though these have been given to her organisation by the state. As a result, she thinks that the behaviour of her organisation is *'cheeky'*.

To summarise, participants in higher semesters have resigned themselves to poor working conditions: as Betty (FG4) states, *'My only wish is, please let us finish this safely.'* At the same time, they expect better conditions with future employers (Amy, FG5).

4.2.6 Future prospects for human resources management

The participants were asked which HR strategies they would implement in their organisations and to what extent organisations could implement and ensure knowledge transfer and appreciation. Three subthemes emerged after the discussion: *individual support*, *affirmative work environment* and *integrated career plan*. These subthemes are explained further in the following subsection.
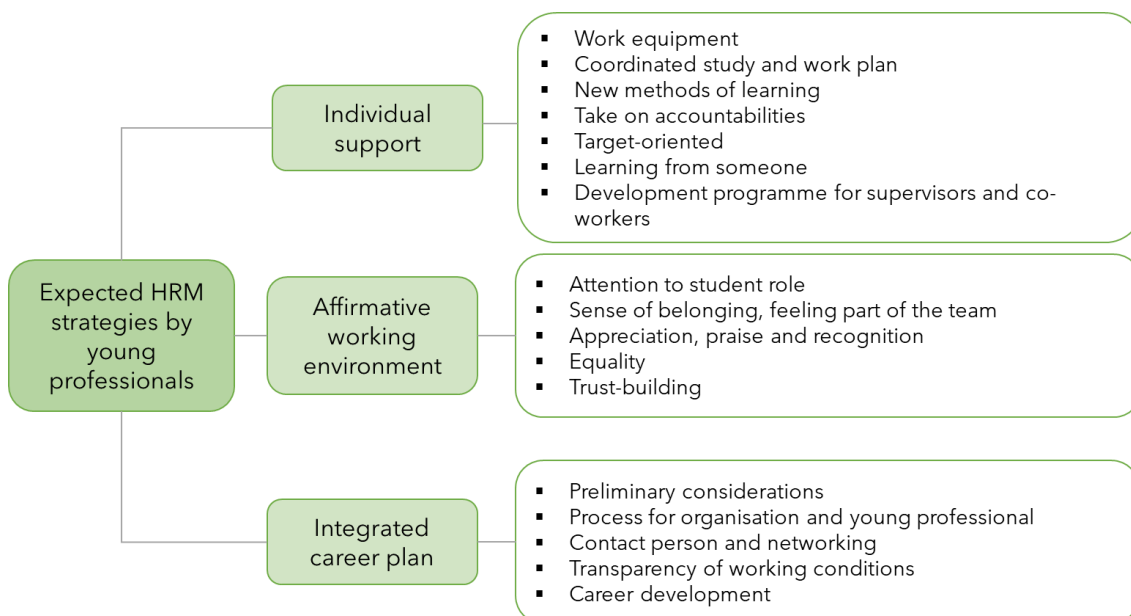

Figure 33: Expected HRM strategies by young professionals
Own illustration

Individual support

Susn and Kate (FG4) discussed the need for work equipment, since their study programme architecture requires them to own architecture software and literature to use not only in their profession but also to complete their study programme. However, problems repeatedly arise here due to the unwillingness of some practice partners to invest in the work equipment required. Susn (FG4) explained that for one module assignment, students were required to open a PDF file in a certain software program that not every student possessed:

> *[…] we can't necessarily afford it, or it's just not certain that each of us will somehow get an extra salary in addition to the tuition fees financed by the practice partner […].*

The situation worsens if the organisation is not willing to invest time in training in the sense of software, tools or applications. Thus, Kate concluded:

> *[…] because if my employer can't show me or teach me that [referring to a software programme], I can't use it at university either and my grades would be worse as a result.*

Similarly, other participants said that they required a laptop or at least a work email address to work with their practice partners. Here, their statements depended on the work environment in general. For example, for Betty in social work (FG4) and Hannah in child pedagogy (FG3), a laptop is less necessary, but the students still need a computer to take part in their study programmes.

Another major code discussed by the participants was the alignment of their study and work plans. Every focus group mentioned this aspect at some point and several times. In FG2, the participants shared their experiences:

> *Lexie: […] Every semester we have this, uh, this plan, the module handbook, what comes up and when, and I think my […] company does deal with it very well looking at, okay: Which subject areas does it have? Maybe you can spend time there [referring to possible department placements]?*
>
> *Diana: So, I would definitely agree with that this is a good way. […] there is this practice guide sent to us by the university of applied sciences […], which I think Lexie also means, um, and with us [referring to the organisation], they just didn't know that it existed. So, no one really looked at it and only when they were made aware of it did they take a look and then they said, OK, maybe we can connect it […].*
>
> *Mary: Yes, I think I would join you there. […]*
>
> *Emma: I think that also has a I do with the study programme? Because in tourism, for example, […] it was decided at the beginning that I had to go through all the areas once. […] and they don't pay any attention to what I'm learning at university and that I could somehow apply it.*

Later, Mary (FG2) added that she wished to establish a plan together with her organisation. The study programme, the *'module handbook'* (University of Applied Sciences, 2021b), the *'organisation's attitude towards the learning transfe*r' and including the *'student in the decision-making process'* were mentioned as important conditions for setting up a coordinated work and study plan for the participants. Based on Diana's (FG2) experiences, she argued that the implementation should also pay attention to new learning methods. From the perspective of the participants, this not only includes receiving increasing responsibilities (as discussed by Kai, Leo and Lucas from FG5), but also attaining individual support from the organisation, mainly based on the time that the organisation spends with its trainees, as recognised by Diana (FG2). This latter aspect

further includes that participants can learn from their supervisors, experts or co-workers (Conny, FG1; Betty, FG3; Henry, FG4; Leo, FG5). To ensure that training is integrated, it is also necessary that contact persons are trained accordingly; it is only when they *'know what they are doing'* (Leo, FG5) that they can transfer knowledge in a targeted way.

Affirmative working environment

As well as individual support, the participants wished for an affirmative working environment. Betty (FG4) expressed that equality and attention are important to her:

> *[…] I would like someone to take the time to explain to us what we are supposed to do […], because I have what you [referring to Susn] have already said, that sometimes you are just the student and sometimes they say you are a full member […].*

She further explained that being treated differently is noticeable in the tone in which her co-workers speak to her and the kind of *'dirty work'* she is assigned. In a similar vein, Lexie (FG1), who already has three years of work experience, described a recent situation in which she was not treated as a full member of the HR team in her organisation by an employee who had asked for a *'proper contact person'*. Lexie voiced that she only wanted to be accepted and respected as part of the team. For Emma (FG2), this includes the coordination of tasks with her supervisor, which gives her the feeling of being part of not only the team but also the work process. Likewise, Hannah (FG3) shared that she was once asked for her opinion:

> *[…] I think when you're asked for your opinion, […] Then I have the feeling that I am somehow really part of the whole and not just the student who has no idea, […] I always feel very valued then.*

The participants also debated the importance of trust in creating an affirmative working environment. Leo (FG5) explained that he had been involved in confidential decision-making processes. Amy (also FG5) reinforced this, adding that trust is also built by receiving responsible tasks and being trusted to complete them successfully.

Integrated career plan

Both appreciation and knowledge transfer – the two key themes that emerged from the first dataset – should be guided by a structured programme. Here, the participants described many HR processes and policies that corresponded with preboarding, onboarding, regular feedback and career planning. Thus, an integrated career plan throughout the lifecycle of young professionals is needed.

First, David (FG1) demanded that:

> *[…] the practice partner should, before he even starts to take on dual-study students, well, think carefully about whether he can offer them […]*

Likewise, Betty (FG4), who was already in her sixth semester, claimed that:

> *[…] what I would also find important is that a company perhaps informs itself beforehand about what it means to take on dual-study students.*

Due to her experience, Betty had developed the feeling that some companies:

> *[…] have no idea at all what that [referring to the dual-study programme] entails, maybe even what it means in terms of work, that we can't take on everything from the first semester onwards, but that we are first of all working for them.*

This also includes the notion that the practice partner should engage with the contents of the study programme. As Rose (FG3) stated:

> *[…] I think that the employer has to deal with the question, if I hire someone, in which areas can I employ him […]?*

Thus, the onboarding process should be arranged in coordination between the organisation and the student. Indeed, preboarding – to which most of the organisations referenced here did not intentionally give planning time – usually starts with the application of the potential student and involves the acceptance of the study place, the signing of the employment contract and further activities up to joining the organisation. Participants claimed that during this phase, they wished to be informed of the working conditions and given more detail about the content of their employment contracts. This aspect was discussed in FG2:

> *Emma: […] If I could change something again, I think it would definitely be that I looked at my contract very carefully. I have read it through completely, but I also have to pay more attention to my needs, because I just accepted it, I just said okay, this is my contract and that's the way it is, but maybe promises that were made to me at the job interview should be recorded, because now I can't insist on them anymore. […].'*
>
> *Diana: I would definitely agree with that, especially because for many people it really is their first employment contract and they [organisations] shouldn't take advantage of us. […].*
>
> *Hannah: […] they want to take advantage!*

In response, the participants suggested that they should have a contact person within the organisation who cares about their needs. This could be a *'coordinator'* (Emma, FG2), the *'HRM department'* (Emma, FG2; Ann, FG3), the *'supervisor'* (Joy, FG1; Rose, FG3; Kate, FG4) or a *'mentor'* (Conny and Joy, FG1; Henry, FG3).

To further collaborate and be better integrated into the company, the participants wished to connect more with their peers. As Amy (FG5) said:

> *[…] If you are a large company and have several […] trainees, […] you might want to organise some event so that they can connect with each other a bit. They can talk about their experiences and somehow offer such events to strengthen the cohesion a bit.*

Moreover, this organisational effort can be further supported by establishing an employee resource group (ERG). As Conny (FG1) suggested:

> *[…] perhaps also, uh, that one [referring to the organisation] opens up the possibility, the younger people um yes, that they can somehow network with each other.*

Rose (FG3) requested that, after the students have joined the company and start to settle in, it is crucial to set out a long-term career plan that includes the period after the completion of the study programme. This was also suggested by Betty (FG4), who is close to finishing her studies and has had no dialogue with her organisation about a potential job offer. She drew attention to the fact that:

> *[…] at the moment, they [referring to her practice partner] need to become a little bit more aware of what they want afterwards. […] I would hope that the company knows all about what it wants and communicates it early enough so that it doesn't get stuck somewhere, because I think most of us [referring to her student cohort] will leave the companies and I don't think the organisations really see that coming and then they will have spent all the money for nothing.*

4.2.7 Brief summary

The focus groups offered rich insights into not only the pre-employment phase, but also the development of participants' expectations during the employment phase. Thus, eight key themes emerged. As with Figure 25 for the video statements, Figure 34 illustrates the relationships among the data items and codes that inform each theme and subtheme from the focus groups.

Before the participants entered their organisations, some had no specific expectations, while others had high expectations. The former group was more influenced by the

context than by external agents, meaning that the pandemic and the fear of not getting a job led the participants to rush into a contractual obligation. The latter group noted that they had work experience and therefore had created realistic expectations. If participants discussed high expectations, they were influenced by friends and family. Organisational agents also influenced the participants beforehand by making promises or through the inducements stipulated in the employment contract.
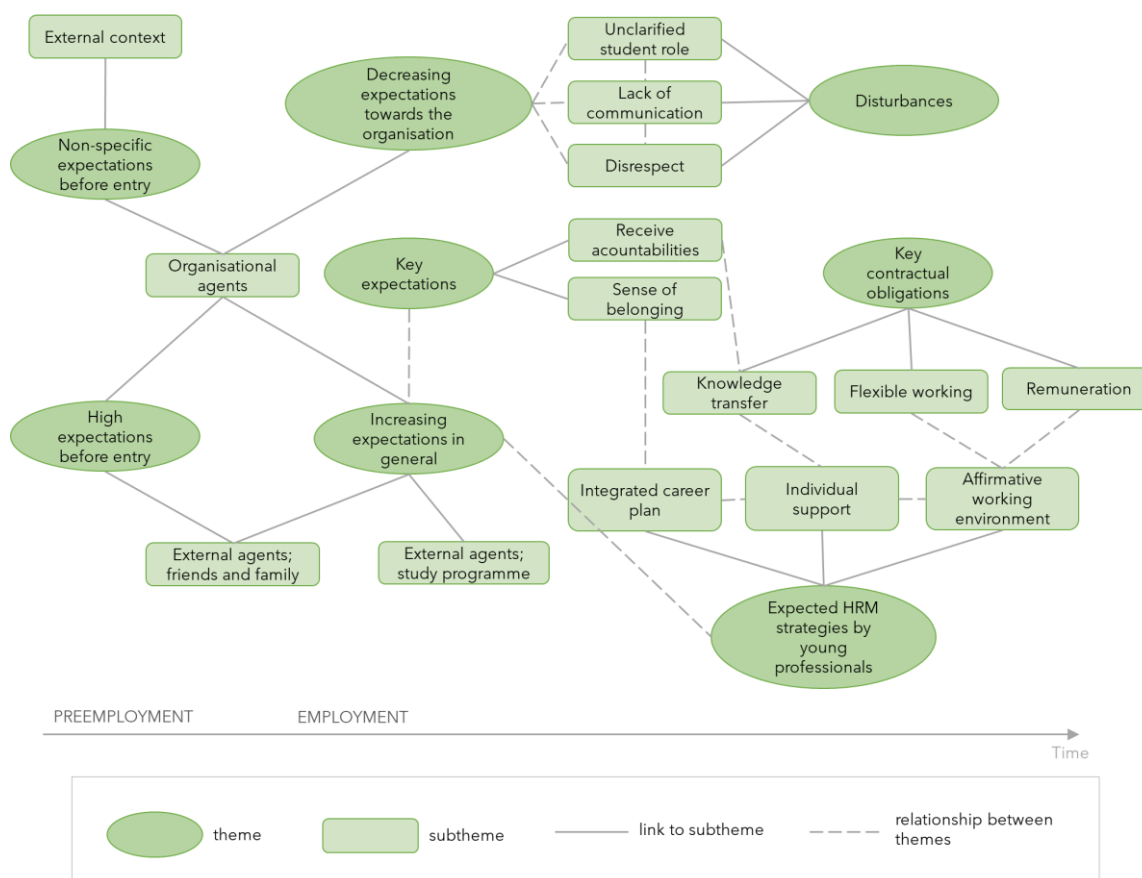

Figure 34: Finalised thematic map of focus groups demonstrating eight themes
Own illustration

Once the participants have joined their organisations, their job expectations towards the organisation often decreased due to disturbances. However, they increased in general because participants formed experiences and were influenced by known agents, such as family and friends, but also by new external agents arising as a result of the study programme, including lecturers and fellow students. Hence, the key expectations and obligations – towards the organisation, but also in general – crystallise more distinctly over the course of time. Overall, the participants' expectations and what they felt their employer was obliged to offer resulted in the following three subthemes: individual support, an affirmative work environment and an integrated career plan.

4.3 Cross-analysis of datasets

The two methods applied in this research differ from one another because the video statements captured less data and therefore provided first insights into the phenomenon at the individual level, whereas the focus groups produced richer data during their discussions. To allow for a comprehensive and rigorous analysis, both datasets were subjected to cross-analysis, and the results were scrutinised, merged and condensed into six key themes. The data triangulation then yielded the final results, which revealed the typical characteristics of an educational PC and can be used to suggest a human-centred HRM strategy for this type of contract. The results are summarised in consolidated form in the following subsections. Consequently, to avoid duplication, participant statements are not repeated.

4.3.1 Psychological contracts of young professionals

Theme 1: Educational psychological contract

Although the PCs of young professionals are idiosyncratic, the findings from the video statements and focus groups revealed that they all have certain attributes in common, most of which emerge from the written employment contract. Table 8 presents the characteristics of the educational PC.

Video Statements	Focus Groups
Fixed-term written contract	Fixed-term written contract
External influences (society)	External influences (university)
Obligation of employer to prepare the student for future professions	Employment follows a specific purpose: education (economic exchange)
	Part-time employee
Collegial cohesion	Belonging to the team/organisation (emotional exchange)
Subjective	Subjective
	Talent management
Rapidly dynamic (from student to professional employee)	Highly dynamic (changing contact persons and work schedule)

Table 8: Theme 1 – Educational PC of young professionals
Own illustration

All participants confirmed that they had a fixed-term employment contract for the duration of their study programmes. Furthermore, the time spent in the workplace is only part-time, typically three days a week or 20 hours; the remaining time is dedicated to the study programme.

The PC is both economic and emotional in nature. First, the economic exchange is rooted in the purpose of the programme: to obtain a bachelor's degree and, for some companies, to have access to a fast-tracked skilled employee with low pay compared to other employment contracts. For the participants in this study, the *economic exchange* took the form of work performance in exchange for knowledge transfer and tuition fees funded by the practice partner. Second, the *emotional exchange* is an expectation described by the participants of this study in many ways. Although only working part-time, the students value collegial cohesion and want to belong to a team and contribute to the organisation's success.

From the perspective of most of the participants, the obligations of the employer as well as of the employee are stipulated in the employment contract. Due to the rising expectations of the participants in general after they have entered the organisation, their PCs develop dynamically. Hence, the mostly unwritten contents of the employment relationship are subjectively interpreted and negotiated depending on the organisation's industry, culture or demographics or the needs of the individual employee. HRM practices can support this process, as described by the participants, in developing guidelines to empower both employees and supervisors in the realisation and retention of young talent.

Theme 2: Affirmation as a values-based expectation

One of the two key contents of the educational PC is affirmation. There are various inducements that a company can offer to attract and retain young talent, see Table 9.

Participants felt appreciated when organisations gave praise and recognition to their efforts and work. The participants from the video statements also mentioned that they felt valued through the sense of collegial cohesion that occurs when the organisation offers collaboration and private time to engage with each other. Conversely, participants complained that miscommunication or disrespect made them feel insecure and not validated in their role as students. Especially in the beginning, it is a challenge for young professionals to find the right place in the company if their roles are not defined and the specifics of the dual-study programmes are not clear to the primary contact persons in the organisation. Accordingly, participants expect their organisations to respect their student status and take a serious interest in their development.

Video Statements	Focus Groups
Praise and recognition	Praise and recognition
Collegial cohesion	Informal working atmosphere
	Team-building
	Additional benefits
	Respect
	Sense of belonging
	Equal treatment (remuneration, workload)
	Flexible work environment
Small gifts	Gifts for special occasions (birthday, thank you)

Table 9: Theme 2 – Affirmation as a values-based expectation
Own illustration

Furthermore, encouraging diverse and inclusive workforces was mentioned by the participants. This includes equal treatment in the work context, which needs to be balanced with individual personal needs. Besides the participants' request for flexibility to manage their work life, most of them said that they wanted to feel a sense of belonging, which is reached when they are present at the office. Therefore, they prefer a flexible working time account with the possibility of doing some home office work over a permanent remote work arrangement. In addition, participants indicated that gifts, treats or favours can be good incentives. Even if such attention is only minor, this gives the participants the feeling of being seen and appreciated, as they reported. Moreover, every focus group discussed that they feel valued if the organisation invests in team-building and creates a more informal working atmosphere. Altogether, the aforementioned aspects are values-based expectations that are generally anticipated by the participants but they do not necessarily have to develop into obligations.

Theme 3: Knowledge transfer as a contractual obligation

The second of the two central contents of educational PCs is knowledge transfer. In contrast to affirmation, this is considered an organisational obligation from the point of view of the study's participants. Hence, as well as the university, the employer is seen to have the duty to provide education in practice, as outlined in Table 10. Both the participants in the video statements and the focus group participants agreed that a training obligation between employer and employee comes into force solely on the basis of the employment contract.

Video Statements	Focus Groups
Employer has an educational mandate	Employer has the educational mandate in practice
Supervisor's responsibility	
Learning on the job	Training on the job and additional training
Real-world tasks	
	Organisation offers individual support
	Work equipment
	Coordinated study and work plan
	New methods of learning
Practical guidance	Learning from someone
	Development programme for supervisors and co-workers

Table 10: Theme 3 – Knowledge transfer as a contractual obligation

Own illustration

Whereas in the video statements, the participants explicitly allocated responsibility for fulfilling this obligation to the supervisor, the focus group participants discussed how the organisation should execute this expectation of knowledge transfer. A common view among the study participants was that they preferred training on the job. This includes actual work tasks, taking on responsibility over time and developing personal and professional skills by achieving results that ideally contribute visibly to the success of the company. In this context, the study participants expected to receive individual support.

At the same time, the participants expected a structured training plan to guide them and give them security to meet their learning targets. According to the participants' discussions, additional training outside the university setting may be needed to pave the way for their future careers during their studies. To meet all these obligations, in the view of the study participants, it is important that the HR department also provide training programmes for supervisors and, where applicable, colleagues. The use of new learning methods can also ensure that knowledge is transferred in an appealing and sustainable way, especially in the context of increasing digitalisation.

Theme 4: Expectations increase in general after organisational entry

Even before joining the organisations, the young professionals' PCs are subject to continuous change. Table 11 summarises the various developments involved and how they are influenced during both the pre-employment and employment phases.

Video Statements	Focus Groups
	Preliminary job expectations (high or none)
Experience transforms the PC (preliminary and on-the-job expectations)	Experiences drive PC changes
Expectations increase in general after entering the organisation	External agents influence that general expectations increase
Expectations towards own organisation decrease	Internal agents influence that expectations towards the organisation decrease

Table 11: Theme 4 – Expectations increase in general after organisational entry
Own illustration

The participants in this study stated that they had high or no preliminary job expectations depending on their precognition before their first day of work. After organisational entry, the participants in both the video statements and the focus groups highlighted that their expectations often increased because of the information given by external agents. However, their expectations towards the employer often decreased once in-post.

During the discussions in the focus groups, the participants noted that internal agents had a huge impact on their PCs. Accordingly, it is particularly relevant for organisations to develop strategies that avoid the occurrence of disruptive factors of the PC, including those mentioned by the focus groups: miscommunication, disrespect and the unclear role of the student. This is because, interestingly, expectations towards future employers increase during the initial socialization phase of young professionals; when expectations at the current workplace are not met, they decrease.

Theme 5: Influences of external context and agents

Indeed, while it is important to understand how PC expectations can change, it is even more valuable to develop HR strategies to identify how the PCs of young professionals are influenced. As presented in Table 12, the participants in both the video statements and the focus groups mentioned influences from their social, historical or university environments.

Video Statements	Focus Groups
University (fellow students, lecturer)	University (fellow students, lecturer)
School	
Society (friends, family, internet)	Society (friends, family, partner)
History (COVID-19)	History (uncertain labour market)
	Direct entry after school
	No work experience
	Rushed into the contract (needed a practice partner)
	Job offers from other companies

Table 12: Theme 5 – Influences of external context and agents
Own illustration

The findings from both datasets revealed that influence from the university, including fellow students and lecturers, had the highest impact on participants' expectations. As a result, the participants in the focus groups vividly discussed their expectations with each other. In the context of the COVID-19 restrictions and the resulting slowdown of social interaction, the participants shared that they still had the opportunity to virtually meet and talk about each other's organisations. Since most of their lecturers are practitioners themselves, they also add to increasing expectations by telling their students about organisations' inducements. In turn, the lecturers shared their expectations and views on 'how it should be'. In this power relation, since they are viewed as experts in their professional and educational fields, the impact of lecturers on young professionals should not be underestimated.

Elsewhere, the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the decision-making of the participants. This was made apparent above all in the statements made in the focus groups. Here, the participants reported that the uncertain labour market made them rush into contracts, satisfied to find at least one organisation that offered them a place. Some students started their study programmes before even signing a contract, meaning that they had to pay for themselves and had to find a practice partner; otherwise, they would have had to drop out of the university due to the mandatory regulations of the programme.

When and by whom young professionals are influenced also change over time. Whereas the participants in the video statements spoke more to the influence of school on their expectations prior to employment, the participants from the focus groups placed greater emphasis on how the external context (e.g., job offers from other companies) influences their PCs.

The sixth theme career-boarding, in particular, gives rise to the need for a long-term HR strategy that goes beyond the usual candidate experience at the start of the employment relationship. Therefore, the presentation of the last theme and a practical demonstration of an integrated career plan is given separately in the next section.

4.3.2 Proposed strategies for a human-centred human resources management

The participants in this research have indicated in many ways what they expect from their organisations and have made suggestions on how they think organisations should implement certain strategies to enhance the employee–employer relationship. In this subchapter the sixth theme illustrates the findings on career-boarding followed by the proposal for an integrated career plan.

Theme 6: Career-boarding

Only focus group participants were specifically asked to discuss ideas on how organisations can improve their HR strategies to attract and retain young professionals. However, even without specific instructions, participants who provided video statements shared tips on possible strategic HR tools. The suggestions are summarised in

Table 13.

Video Statements	Focus Groups
Onboarding	Onboarding
Error culture	On-the-job learning
	Career plan
	Coordinated study–work plan
	Regular review and feedback
	Initiative
	Clarity of role and study programme
	New knowledge for the organisation
	Work equipment
	Individual support
	Responsibility

Table 13: Theme 6 – Career-boarding
Own illustration

The data from the participants in the video statements provided two codes: *implementing onboarding* and *establishing an error culture*. Onboarding mainly included an introduction to the company and the provision of relevant work materials. In connection with living an error culture, mutual feedback, regular dialogue and activities in which one could try

ideas out were ranked most highly. The participants of the focus groups also proposed onboarding, with a focus on knowledge transfer and organising the whole study programme, the employment and a future career plan to meet the needs of these newcomers.

After the presentation of the theme career-boarding, the next section illustrates an extended integration plan consisting of three major steps – *preboarding*, *onboarding* and *career-boarding* – to link together the pre-employment and employment phases that emerged from the data. In line with the six themes demonstrated in subchapter 4.3.1 and 4.3.2, the process is now presented and explained chronologically (see Figure 35).
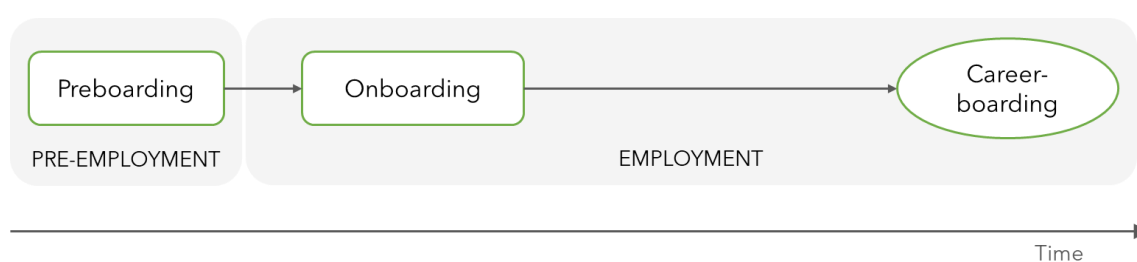
Figure 35: Process of integrating young professionals into the organisation
Own illustration

First, preboarding is the phase that young professionals experience before they enter an organisation. During this time, they seek not only to find a profession, but also (for the group under investigation here) a practice partner together with their study programme. From a strategic point of view, the dual-study programme not only generates a financial investment on the part of the organisations but also requires the employers to commit to this model (comparable to an apprenticeship) and to implement the corresponding support. Therefore, the participants discussed that it is advisable for an organisation to consider in advance whether and how these requirements can be implemented. Once the decision has been made, organisations can begin the process of bonding and integration into the company during the preboarding phase. As the participants reported, the transparency of the application process, the explanation of the employment contract and the support provided before joining the company (including regular information and updates) play a significant role.

Second, the onboarding phase begins immediately after the organisational entry. The participants repeatedly emphasised that they think onboarding is helpful in finding their way around the company and settling in. A mentor or a network of young professionals can be useful in making any initial hurdles easier for newcomers. In addition, the first day of work should be designed as a welcome day that initiates the onboarding process,

including documentation, getting to know the facilities and receiving work equipment. Furthermore, the participants said that they expected their organisations to take the time to give them feedback and support during this phase. Moreover, flexible working conditions, a caring and respectful attitude and being given responsibility for tasks by the organisation were outlined as essential feel-good factors among the participants.

The third phase, career-boarding, represents an addition to the existing candidate experience (preboarding and onboarding) and was created due to the participants' call for a professional forward-looking perspective. Especially given the fixed-term nature of their contracts, the young professionals expressed concerns about their professional futures. The focus here is on the personal and professional development of young professionals. As expected by the participants of the study, it may also be necessary to discuss additional training or the success of their studies in general and to offer support if problems arise. With a targeted transfer plan from student employees to professional employees, organisations can thus secure their future skilled workers.

Overall, the participants expected a structured plan that offers young professionals a guide to balance their study, work and private commitments more effectively during their studies.

4.3.3   Brief summary

The cross-analysis of the datasets from the video statements and the focus groups presents in-depth insights into the formation of young professionals' PC expectations. After completing the analysis of both datasets, six themes remained, as shown in Figure 36.

The first theme, the educational PC of young professionals, is characterised by a fixed-term duration due to the written employment contract. The dual-study system requires that students are employed only part-time at their practice partners, with the remaining time spent studying at the university. Hence, the main purpose of the PC of young professionals is the education and further training of young employees to become professionals.

The second theme, and one of the two main PC contents, is affirmation. In this context, equal treatment of young professionals compared to other workers or trainees is important so that they feel like they belong in the organisation. In addition, organisations are asked to create work environments where young professionals feel appreciated, respected and welcomed so that they can thrive and contribute to the organisation's

success. Through regular communication, the organisation can offer flexibility and individual support to meet the expectations of young professionals.

The third theme, and the other main content of young professionals' PC, is knowledge transfer. The study participants requested a structured development plan and expressed a desire for regular feedback and greater responsibility over time.
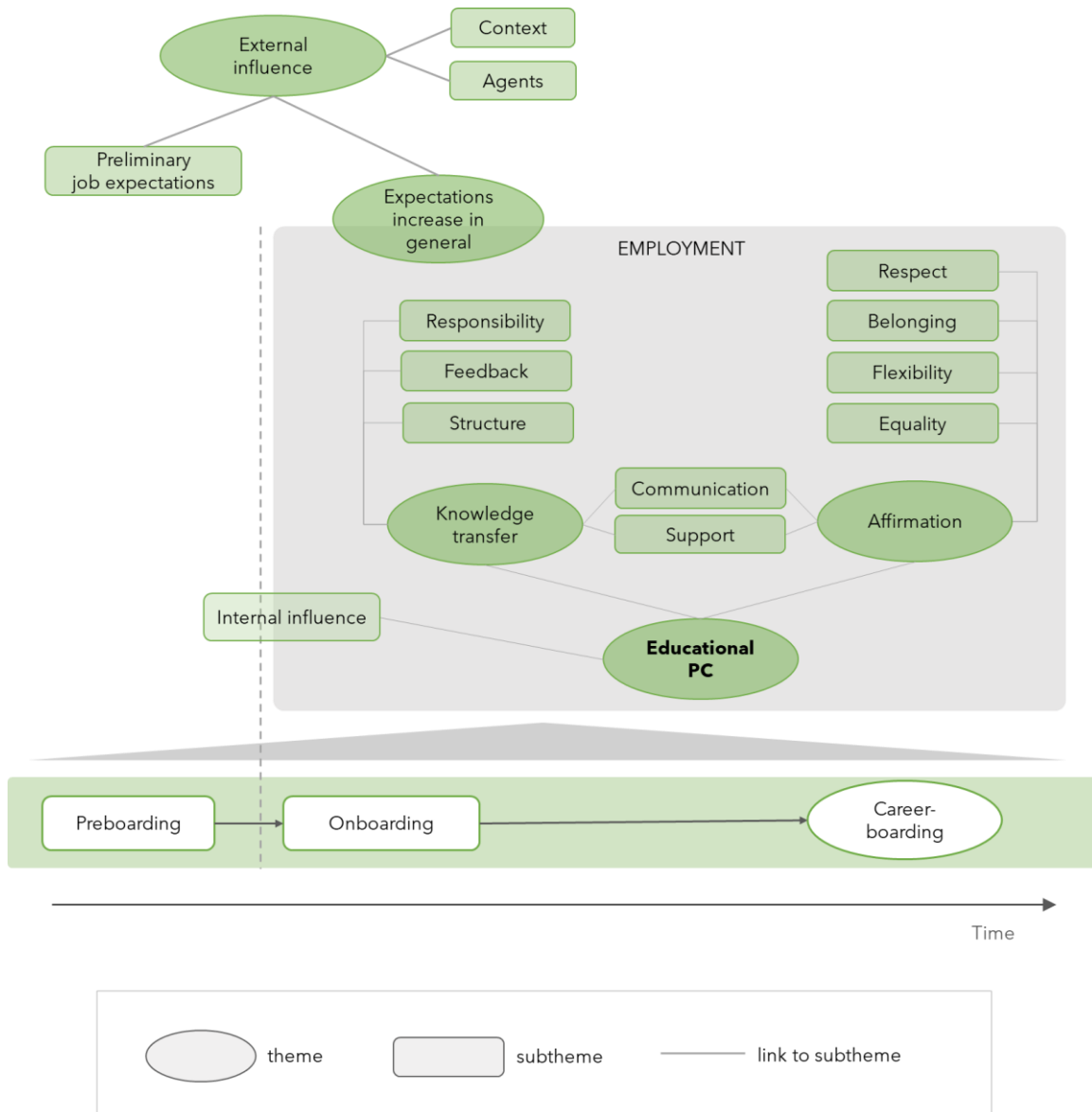

Figure 36: Six emerging themes from video statements and focus groups
Own illustration

Under the fourth theme, young professionals' PC expectations in general can increase even more after their organisational entry because of the subsequent experience gained

and the external influences. Hence, their expectations towards the employer can become more realistic or even decrease over time.

Under the fifth theme, external influences are the key driver of change in the PC in the socialisation phase of young professionals entering organisations for the first time. External context and agents play a crucial role both in the period before employment and during the employment itself. After entering the organisation, these external influences are extended by the university, including fellow students.

Under the sixth theme, even though implementing an onboarding process was primarily addressed by the participants, the students (mainly those in higher semesters) expected that their organisations would support their career development more, including a clear transfer plan from being a student to becoming a professional employee.

The following chapter links the research questions to the discovered themes and discusses how they can be implemented to support managers and HRM departments to better manage young professionals-employer relationships.

5 Discussion

The previous chapter presented the findings of the research. This chapter offers a discussion linking the problem of the research (see chapter 1.2), the literature review (see chapter 2) and the respective findings (see chapter 4).

The overall aim of this research was to complement the literature on the PC formation of young professionals by addressing key issues that have remained scarce. Based on the cross-analysis, six emergent themes were finally identified in the data that responded to the initial research questions:

(1) What PC expectations arise for young professionals as they initially engage with organisations and build relationships during their first work experience?
- Educational PC
- Affirmation as a values-based expectation
- Knowledge transfer as a contractual obligation

(2) How are the PC expectations of young professionals influenced in their very first employment?
- Expectations increase in general after organisational entry
- Influences of external context and agents

(3) How can organisations advance their HRM strategies to meet the expectations of young professionals in pursuit of PC fulfilment?
- Career-boarding

5.1 Educational psychological contract

In PC research, a classification of types is commonly applied. From there, the literature suggests that these particular PC types offer an easier way to compare PCs with each other (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000). To support a better understanding of young professionals' PCs, this approach was also taken here. However, this study appears to be the first to find that the types and dimensions of young professionals' PCs differ from the types introduced by Rousseau (1995) and Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni (1994) or the clusters of PCs introduced by Janssens *et al.* (2003). The findings indicated that the PCs of young professionals pursuing a dual-study programme in Germany brought forward a unique type of PC, here referred to as the *educational PC,* for better differentiation. Even

though the *educational* PC shares some of the attributes of the *transactional, relational* or *balanced* PC, it diverges from the traditional types in many ways. Table 14 outlines the most commonly applied types and dimensions of PC and highlights their differences and similarities compared to the educational PC.

	EDUCATIONAL	Transactional	Relational	Balanced
EMPLOYMENT Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni (1994), Cuyper and Witte (2006)	Temporary	Temporary	Permanent	Permanent
TIME Shore and Tetrick (1994), Rousseau and McLean Parks (1993)	Fixed-term, completion of the study programme	Fixed-term, specific	Indefinite	Permanent (position, project)
STABILITY McNeil (1985)	Highly dynamic	Static	Dynamic	Highly dynamic
FORMALISATION Rousseau (1995), Conway and Briner (2011)	Unwritten	Written	Unwritten	Unwritten
FOCUS Rousseau and Parks (1993); Blau (1994)	Social and economic exchange	Economic exchange	Social exchange	Social exchange
HRM Aggrawal and Bhargava (2009), Shipton *et al.* (2016)	Strategic, securing young talent, training, allocation of responsibility	Operational, monitoring, financial reward, remuneration based on performance	Strategic, job security, allocation of responsibility and power	Strategic, ongoing development, high performance
INCLUSION Rousseau (1995)	Part work, part study	Partial (job-orientated)	Full	Full
INFLUENCE Alcover *et al.* (2017), Clarke and Scurry (2020), Griep *et al.* (2020)	Mostly external influences	Mostly external influences	Mostly internal influences	Mostly internal influences
SCOPE Jensen, Oplan & Ryan (2010), McLean Parks, Kidder and Gallagher (1998)	Narrow	Narrow	Pervasive	Pervasive

Table 14: Comparison of PC types and dimensions
Own illustration

First, the *employment* contract is temporary and lasts only for the *time* of the study programme. As the participants reported, due to the study programme, changes of locations and training places at the organisation and consequently of supervisors and co-workers led to regular adjustments of young professionals' PCs. In terms of *stability*, the PCs of young professionals is therefore highly dynamic. This research confirms that young professionals value stability (Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel, *et al.*, 2019). For their career planning and because it is without exception customary, the students agree to sign temporary contracts which offers them only limited job security.

Second, the *formalisation* of the participants' PCs is unwritten. However, young professionals start their relationship with a fixed-term written contract, which can lead to a transactional perception by young professionals. This circumstance can further indicate and confirm the job-hopping tendencies noted by Gresse and Linde (2020) or the general assumption of a job-quitting tendency within Gen Z (Barhate and Dirani, 2021). To retain young professionals in organisations, this unwritten PC can play a major role in strengthening the bond with the organisation, thereby reducing early termination.

Third, from the perspective of the participants, the *focus* is on a social but also economic exchange. Consequently, the PC of young professionals, especially in the early days, may be more transactional; that is, the exchange of work performance by the student for a study place at the organisation. Over time, the social exchange gains importance, as observed by the participants. Hence, negotiating realistic expectations and being transparent about them, as advocated by Bal, Chiaburu and Jansen (2010) and Kraak and Griep (2022), contribute to the fulfilment of the educational PC.

Fourth, since the dual-study programme and the employment contract are directly related, the PC serves a specific *HRM* strategy: to train young professionals. On the one hand, organisations in Germany are feeling pressure to secure future talent (Stecker and Zierler, 2018; Klaffke, 2021a) in an effort to stay competitive. On the other hand, the participants in this study working in social work and hospitality felt exploited as a form of cheap labour. Based on this contradiction, it can be assumed that some organisations' HRM strategies are to pursue new hires for general tasks in the short term, with the students thus finding themselves in precarious working conditions. Although research in this area is already addressing precarious work for young employees (see Murphy and Simms, 2017), dual-study students remain very much ignored as they belong to an underrepresented group.

Finally, *inclusion* in the organisation is only partial due to the young professionals' study obligations. Although the participants build relationships at work, they must also be committed to the dual-study programme. Hence, above all, this PC is subject to other external *influences.* Furthermore, the findings are in agreement with Sparrow (1996) and Alcover *et al.* (2017), who argued that PCs are sensitive to the impact of numerous internal and external factors and to the content of information obtained from multiple sources. As these influences have particular significance to this research, they are discussed in more detail in subchapter 5.5.

To sum up, the PCs of young professionals are typically compared to the balanced PC. In their investigation of mutual obligations between employees and employers, Mihelič *et al.* (2021) note that, due to the developmental characteristics of young professionals' PCs, they are best compared to the balanced type of PC. The authors base their observations on previous research on newcomers (Hess and Jepsen, 2009) and the anticipatory PC (Zupan, Dziewanowska and Pearce, 2017). Although the balanced type of PC is prevalent for young professionals in the literature, this research shows that the educational PC exhibits features that differ from traditional PC types and dimensions.

Furthermore, the presented attributes of the educational PC match not only young professionals of dual-study programmes, but may also apply to apprentices in vocational training or any other educational setting that combines academics or education and work. Nevertheless, research should carefully consider that the suggestion of an educational type of PC is broad and does not apply to every context. Furthermore, the PC typology in general does not capture the dynamics of the PC, which is especially important to newcomers' PCs. Furthermore, the six clusters of PCs introduced by Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003) do not match the PCs of young professionals either, due to contrasting characteristics, including study programme and company size. Still, the feature-orientated approach of Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003) supports the finding in this research that young professionals may share their own professional category due to common dimensions such as timeframe (close-ended), scope (narrow) and stability (highly dynamic). Consequently, future studies in this area may need to apply new parameters, as presented in this section, to measure the PCs of these newcomers.

As the types and dimensions of the educational PC are explored, the next two subchapters delve deeper into the key contents of this type of young professionals' PC to present more insights into their job expectations.

5.2   Affirmation as values-based expectation

The findings here imply that by familiarising themselves with the organisation and gaining experience, the participants will be increasingly able to formulate their expectations. In general, young professionals agreed that they seek out organisations that validate them and their work and development. Hence, creating an affirmative work environment in which employees feel sustainably appreciated, encouraged and recognised is a key challenge for organisations.

Affirmation in the PC is hard to grasp because the concept is based on the individual perception of how and to what extent the organisation should offer inducements. Although the frequency and intensity of affirmation cannot be generalised to one group of young professionals, the results of this research demonstrate six attributes that are essential to participants: *communication*, *support*, *respect*, *belonging*, *flexibility* and *equality*.

First, regular and targeted *communication* can strengthen the creation of an affirmative working environment. Participants reported that they value praise and recognition because it helps them orientate themselves in the working world. Such appreciation is important not only for Gen Z (Brademann and Piorr, 2018; Calmbach *et al.*, 2020) but also for Generation Y (Twenge and Campbell, 2008; Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010). Clarke and Scurry (2020) add that different promises can be made by several different agents (e.g., supervisor, management board, co-workers), which requires good coordination of clear communication across all levels of the organisation. Furthermore, the participants in this research valued informal communication that made them feel better connected to and integrated within the organisation.

Second, *support* for newcomers is crucial, as they find themselves in a new environment of which they often have no knowledge. Based on the descriptions of the participants, this can be achieved in three ways: *instrumental*, *emotional* and *developmental*. Considering each of these in turn, *instrumental support* is often applied in youth mentoring programmes (see Lyons, McQuillin and Henderson, 2019; Schenk *et al.*, 2021) and is one of the key tasks of supervisors who manage work schedules as part of the dual-study programme. The participants in this research expressed that both the study programme and the work tasks should align; hence, they requested to be guided by professionals in the company. This would include regular check-in sessions to organise tasks, give further work instructions, discuss current challenges and give praise and recognition for achievements. The participants appreciate supervisors they can rely on which has also been found in a study by Grow and Yang (2018). Next, organisations can benefit from offering *emotional*

support, given that studies among young adults in the health sector (Yao, Zheng and Fan, 2015; Shensa *et al.*, 2020) indicate that emotional support increases mental health benefits. This confirms the PESTLE analysis (political) that health-conscious living supported by governmental regulations such as working from home and the possibility of flexible working hours are an increasingly important topic, especially among young people (Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019). Therefore, emotional support can be applied as a preventative method to help young employees become more resilient, especially in times of crisis (Deloitte, 2020b). According to the participants of this study, emotional support can be achieved when the supervisor demonstrates care and compassion, especially for the double workload of dual-study students, or by offering flexibility for extra study time. Therefore, young professionals value a supportive working atmosphere. Finally, *developmental support* – originally located in the research area of pedagogy to examine the developmental stages of children – can be applied in organisations to better assist young professionals with their career steps. For students at universities, Schwieger and Ladwig (2018) have further advised developmental support to track students' progress. In addition, HRM strategies for offering support in organisations would not only match the needs of Gen Z (Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019), as studies have also supported their use for Generation Y (Solomon, 2016; Cross and Burton, 2020). The participants in this research have highlighted that the study programme is part of their personal career plan. Hence, they value assistance from their organisation to reach their goal. Consequently, providing support is crucial to organisations' success in building sustainable PCs; if such support is found lacking, this can lead to PC breach (Woodrow and Guest, 2020).

Third, according to Turnley *et al.* (2003), *respect* is an indicator of employee behaviour in the workplace. Again, if respect is lacking in an organisation, this can lead to PC violation or breach (Othman *et al.*, 2005). Some participants in this research have given examples of when they have not been treated with respect. Consequently, they expect to be treated respectfully in their workplace. Meanwhile, Gen Z studies highlight that supervisors need to earn the respect of these newcomers (Lazányi and Bilan, 2017). Interestingly, this may be related to the fact that newcomers feel that they are treated disrespectfully and therefore, from their perspective, agents of the organisation must earn their respect first.

Fourth, a sense of *belonging* is created when young professionals feel welcomed into the organisation. According to Chillakuri (2020), Gen Z values personal connections with team members and managers in the workplace. Csiszárik-Kocsír and Garia-Fodor, (2018)

argue that a good team can motivate Gen z towards better performance. The findings of this research support this view and furthermore identify team-building events, creating an informal working atmosphere or celebrating personal events as the key factors. However, this sense of belonging is not solely an expectation of Gen Z; it has also been confirmed for Generation Y (Torsello, 2019) employees who find themselves in the early stages of their careers.

Fifth, the participants in this research felt affirmation when their organisations reacted in a *flexible* way to their personal needs. This goes hand in hand with the emotional support that supervisors can offer. Not only Gen Z but also other generations value greater workplace flexibility and work-life balance, not least due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019; Deas and Coetzee, 2022). For the participants in this study, flexibility is currently achieved by being able to balance their work commitments themselves using a working time account. Hence, they are able to flex their schedules to meet the requirements of study, work and private life (Mihelič *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, deciding whether young professionals can do the work from home or at the office allows them to be independent yet collaborative when required (Ozkan and Solmaz, 2015; Deas and Coetzee, 2022). However, the trend towards work-life separation advocated by Scholz (2014) was not witnessed among the participants of this research. Neither does this research confirm that Gen Z expects more leisure time than other generations.

Sixth, *equal treatment* – in the sense that dual-study students are considered professionals by their organisations while at the same time receiving appropriate salaries and the same benefits as other trainees – adds to the feeling of affirmation. The remuneration of the research participants was found to be unequal to the training salaries of dual VET employees. This problem accelerates because pointed out in the PESTLE analysis (economic) education in Germany is usually free. Additionally, regular students can be supported by BAföG to pay for their living expenses. However, the dual-study students who were participants of this study cannot benefit from either of these advantages due to legal regulations. As organisations often deduct tuition fees from the remuneration package, the young professionals are often left with less money than their VET trainees. Significantly, when the participants in this research asked for fairer payment, they compared themselves to the trainee-level remuneration and did not ask for outrageously higher salaries, as shown in many Gen Z studies (Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019; Deloitte, 2020b). Consequently, the participants of this study complained about unfair treatment due to their role as students or because they are young. Besides age

discrimination or the unclarified student role, they did not point to any specific matters regarding gender, race, religion and so on, as highlighted in the literature on Gen Z (Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande, 2003; Berkup, 2014; Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019; Lanier, 2017). Either this means that the participants have not experienced inequality as a problem in the workplace or that it is not a concern from their point of view. However, their more immediate negative experiences of unequal treatment relating to their student role may overshadow other workplace DEI issues. Therefore, the recommendation from Gurtner, Raeder and Kels (2022) for Generation Y not to overestimate generational differences and to treat generations differently compared to other generations only when it is fair and beneficial also applies here for Gen Z.

Overall, the findings here confirm that although educational PCs are idiosyncratic, a collective perspective exists that indicates how an organisation can create an affirmative work environment.

5.3 Knowledge transfer as contractual obligation

The dual-study programme is characterised by a professional placement at a practice partner and a learning phase at a university of applied sciences; thus, the expectations of these young professionals adapt to this context. As a result, the young professionals in this investigation expect their organisations to offer them knowledge transfer between theory and practice.

Referring to the content of the PC, this knowledge transfer falls into the category of career development (Rousseau, 1995) or training (Herriot, Manning and Kidd, 1997). According to Baruch, (2022, p. 237), *'the cycle of career planning and development for each person joining the workforce will start with the establishment of a mutual agreement'*. Although this may be applicable to all young professionals, the dual-study students highlighted that they see knowledge transfer clearly as an obligation of their organisations due to the written employment contract. The request for knowledge transfer also includes how the organisation should provide it and what the employer must offer regarding further training outside the dual-study programme.

Moreover, the PC becomes more complex because the participants in this research have more than just the traditional organisational obligation. Similar conclusions can be found in Baruch and Rousseau (2019), who observed that the presence of multiple obligations inside and outside the organisation constructs a new form of PC with a

different basis for trust and commitment. For the participants of this research, these multiple commitments span the study programme, the organisation, the team and the self. The complex contemporary workplace is also characterised by working from home opportunities, global digitally advanced work environments and new career landscapes, all of which challenge organisations and young professionals alike. More specifically, the findings of this research reveal five attributes that contribute to a successful knowledge transfer: *communication*, *support, responsibility*, *feedback* and *structure*.

First, as well as its role in creating an affirmative working environment, *communication* plays a key role in training young professionals. Referring to knowledge transfer, the participants in this research expected their employers to coordinate and communicate the dual-study programmes better within the organisation. Hence, HRM departments were called upon to perform appropriate information work as a means to avoid misunderstandings between agents in the organisation and the trainees. Direct managers should not only be made aware of information on promises made (Woodrow and Guest, 2020), but they also need to be regularly updated on the training plans of young professionals. Furthermore, communication solely from one supervisor will not suffice at this point, as dual-study students have many contacts within the organisation and visit different departments during their employment there.

Second, as shown in subchapter 5.2 on affirmation, the different approaches to *support* have been introduced in detail here. The young professionals in this study further shared that they lacked an ERG through which they could informally discuss work- or study-related matters. Hence, offering mentoring programmes or ERGs can support young professionals' education and knowledge transfer. Moreover, Wong, Cross and Burton (2020) provide evidence that Gen Z (as well as Generation Y) prefer collaboration and supervisor support, which increases employee motivation. In doing so, both supervisors and co-workers can assist the students in successfully completing their studies by, for example, actively supporting the way in which research is carried out for practical work or in learning. The interweaving of practice and study can thus be realised, which in turn leads to the fulfilment of the PC.

Third, participants in this research expected to take on *responsibility* in their organisations, as echoed in the Gen Z literature (Gurtner, Kels and Scherrer, 2017). Taking on responsibility can include offering a variety of tasks to match the study programme. The participants here wanted to blend into their teams as full members and were willing to learn on the job and from others (e.g., by shadowing). However, if the tasks requested

from the organisations lead to a work overload, are uninteresting or have no purpose, they will represent barriers to motivation, as further confirmed by Kirchmayer and Fratričová (2018).

Fourth, frequent and honest *feedback* between young professionals and their supervisors can bolster understanding of each other's priorities and provide appropriate direction for future tasks. Although widely recommended in various studies (Desai and Lele, 2017; Aggarwal *et al.*, 2020; Chillakuri, 2020), the instant feedback that young professionals are used to receiving through daily communication channels was not cited as a prior expectation of the participants in this research. Most importantly, a regular performance review (i.e., at least once a semester) was requested to document their developmental steps and to discuss their places of assignment. In addition, reciprocal feedback can enhance productivity in an organisation, given the participants' shared motivation to contribute to the company's success and to bring in new ideas. Hence, from the perspective of the participants, feedback needs to be a two-way street.

Fifth, from a generational perspective, Scholz and Grotefend (2019b) have emphasised that Gen Z employees seek *structure* due to having experienced a well-structured school education. Nevertheless, the findings of this study neither confirm nor refute this assumption. Rather, the analysis presented here finds that in this jungle of commitments and constant change, the desire of young professionals for structure and a roadmap for their career development continues to rise. This echoes Mihelič *et al.* (2021) in their study on Generation Y, in which the authors refer to guidance as a way to enhance performance and strengthen the PC.

Supplementary, although the young professionals from the architecture study programme would have wished for more financial support to purchase software, there were no technological barriers such as access to the internet or security concerns such as protecting one's data mentioned by the participants. As already described in the PESTLE analysis (technological, legal), the use of digital media is a basic part of their education and personal life.

Overall, these findings resonate with the PC and Gen Z literature (Kirchmayer and Fratričová, 2018; Steckl, Simshäuser and Niederberger, 2019; Chillakuri, 2020) but also with Generation Y studies (Hess and Jepsen, 2009; Egerová, Komárková and Kutlák, 2021). Hence, organisations that invest in career advancement and knowledge growth will be the ones most likely to motivate and retain their young professionals. In

combination with structure and defined responsibilities, their work and study plans are the ones most likely to succeed.

5.4 Expectations increase in general after organisational entry

This research focuses on the phase of organisational entry and how participants socially construct this phase over time. Starting with the pre-employment phase, some participants retrospectively reported that they either had no expectations towards their future employers or they had higher expectations in principle before they entered the organisation. If the latter, these have been built up due to work experience or information-seeking behaviour. This is in line with findings from other scholars (Dulac, Coyle-Shapiro and Delobbe, 2006; De Vos and Freese, 2011), who describe that employees and students (De Vos, Buyens and Schalk, 2005) alike build up information-seeking behaviour towards their future organisations. High motivation to share information is regularly mentioned in the Gen Z literature (Lazányi and Bilan, 2017; Twenge, 2017; Kirchmayer and Fratričová, 2018; Klaffke, 2021b). Hence, pre-entry information provided by organisations should not only be in line with organisational objectives, as demanded by Welander, Blomberg and Isaksson (2020), but also actively managed by the HR department. One interesting aspect that emerged from the analysis is that although some of the participants in this study had informed themselves up front, they wished that they had done better in referring to the contents of the employment contract. In response, organisations should more transparently disclose information on both the written contract (employment contract) and the unwritten contract (PC) in advance, thereby presenting a more realistic picture of their work conditions to newcomers.

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, some participants in this research had felt rushed into signing a contract in the face of too little choice regarding job offers, expiring deadlines or their own aspirations. Thus, they were not able to develop specific job expectations before organisational entry. Hence, they entered the workplace and built-up general PC expectations that may or may not align with the psychological contract that develops between them and their employee. In the end, these young professionals discover only after entering the organisation what compromises they may have to make. Based on this observation, it is questionable whether the rudimentary PCs suggested by various scholars (Thomas and Anderson, 1998; Hui, Lee and Rousseau, 2004; Alcover *et al.*, 2017; Gresse and Linde, 2020) can be applied to every young professional before they start

working for the first time. If such a rudimentary PC exists, it may depend on the extent to which young professionals have previously gained practical experience, as well as their upfront information-seeking behaviour.

After organisational entry, young professionals use their experiences to adapt flexibly during the socialisation phase. Surprisingly, the participants commented that their expectations in general increased, whereas their PC expectations decreased towards their current organisations if these general expectations were not met. In other words, the PC with the existing employer and possible future employers can develop diametrically, as shown in Figure 37.
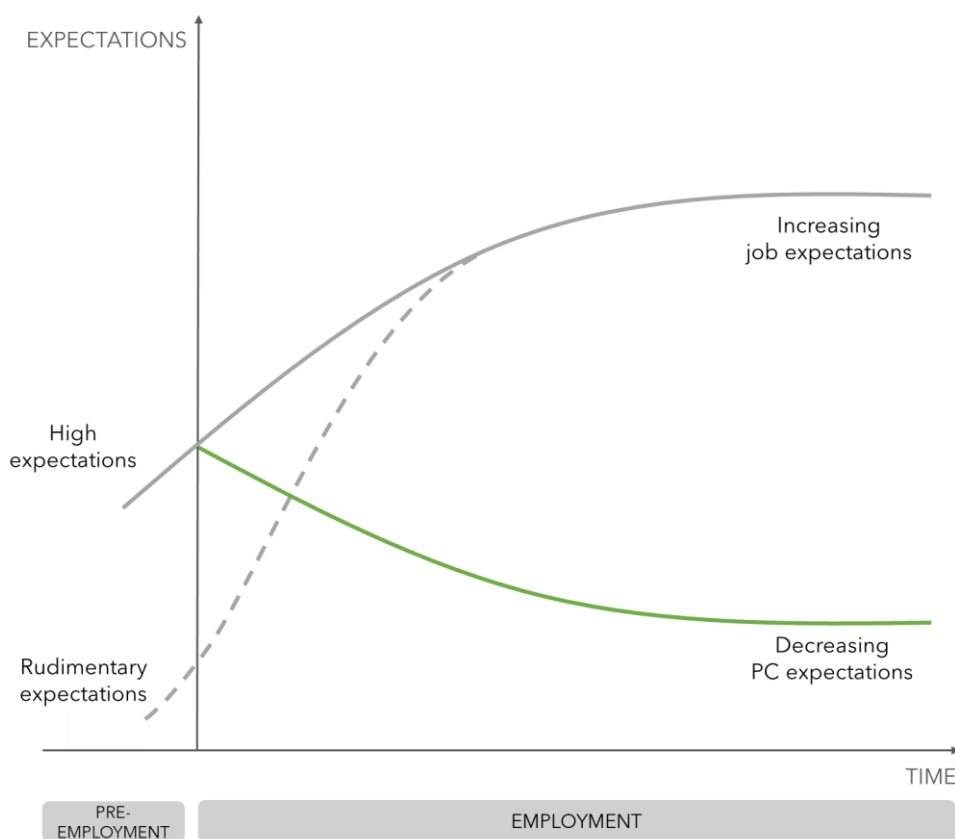
Figure 37: Development of expectations after organisational entry
Own illustration

The participants also shared that their PC expectations became more realistic or even decreased, as confirmed by De Vos, Buyens and Schalk (2003). Hence, in the worst case, this can lead to PC breach or violation and a higher likelihood of intention to leave the organisation. As a further consequence, young professionals may prevail only in an organisation and endure its circumstances due to the possible written obligation of a repayment clause in their employment contract. Hence, this leads to PC breach and quiet

quitting (Turnley and Feldman, 1998, 1999). If the young professionals are not tied to a contractual repayment clause and a better job offer appears, the students are likelier to change their practice partners.

In brief, this research emphasises that the PC needs to be distinguished based on the time of one's initial entrance into work and the following years of employment. Furthermore, their expectations adjust at various times, starting with the pre-employment phase.

5.5 Influences of external context and agents

Unsurprisingly, this research has provided evidence that PCs are dynamic and thus confirms other studies (Farnese *et al.*, 2018; Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018; Griep, Cooper and Weinhardt, 2019; Bankins, Griep and Hansen, 2020). Therefore, it is now worthwhile to understand the influences on the formation of young professionals' PCs. Considering that PCs are individuals' dynamic cognitive schemas (Hansen, 2019), the findings of this study suggest that these newcomers' PCs are mainly influenced by external factors after commencing their employment. This adds to the complexity of the employment relationship between young professionals and their employers, which is an overlooked factor in the current research.

As noted by Dulac, Coyle-Shapiro and Delobbe (2006), individuals' anticipatory PCs develop during adolescence. These PCs are influenced by family, friends, peers, (social) media and personal experiences. This is in line with findings from Bordia *et al.* (2019), who observed that international business students use social and institutional sources to create their PCs. Therefore, the presented research confirms this social influence but adds more detail to the dynamic of the influences. Before organisational entry (i.e., when the anticipatory PC evolved), the participants in this study were mostly influenced by their family members and friends. Only a few participants mentioned other influences, such as the internet, as sources of information about the target organisations or the job interview. Once young professionals have joined the organisation, their information-seeking behaviour decreases over time because, as described by the participants, they rely more on their experiences while engaging with agents in the workplace. However, due to the financial situation the students often cannot afford to live on their own which supports the PESTLE analysis (socio-cultural) of a later weaning from the parental home by Maas (2019); Scholz and Vyugina (2019). Therefore, parental influences can continue after organisational entry.

Unlike the findings of De Vos and Freese (2011, p. 308), who contend that the *'supervisors as the contract makers are the building block of psychological contract formation'*, this research provides evidence that institutional influences (e.g., fellow students, staff and lecturers) prevail, even for participants in higher semesters. Likewise, Bordia *et al.* (2019) confirm that students use social and institutional sources to create their PCs. However, these students have not yet entered their working lives. Nevertheless, all the participants in this research shared that discussion with fellow students was the most frequent information source for their expectations. Moreover, the participants of the focus groups even discussed, confirmed or argued with each other's comments, which could be observed by the researcher. Thus, during the focus groups, the young professionals were able to gain deeper insight into – and points of comparison with – organisations' policies from the other participants.

As presented in Figure 38, the PCs of the study participants are influenced by society, the organisation (Rigotti and Jong, 2019) and the university once they have joined their employers. This framework may also be applicable to trainees or apprentices who attend a VET school or university while working at a practice partner because they find themselves in a similar context.
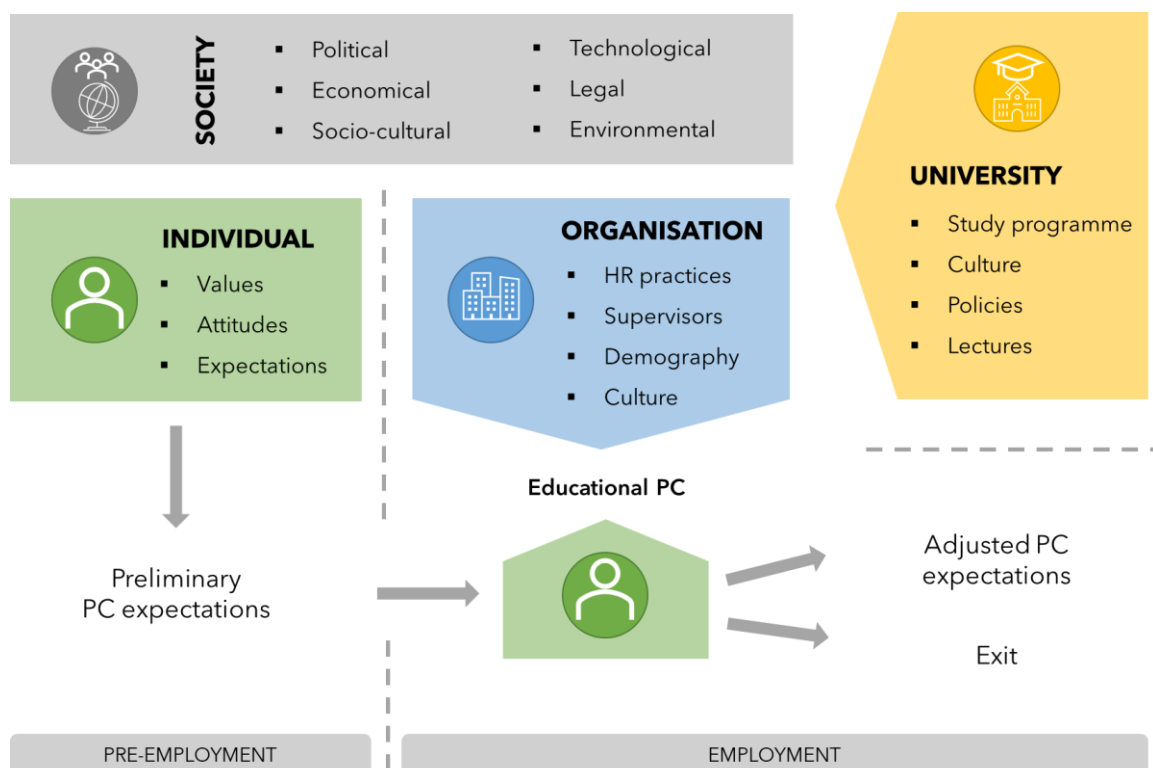
Figure 38: A framework for understanding the initial PC formation of young professionals
Own illustration

Recently, Korczynski (2022) has criticised the concept of the PC for lacking collective understandings of the give-and-take relationships between employees and employer. Building on Conway and Briner (2009) and Troth and Guest (2020), he forwards a new concept in this area called the *'social contract'*. This research confirms the views of these scholars on the collectively held understandings among this homogenous group of young professionals. By combining this perspective with generational theory, it follows that the influences and collectively understood PCs are part of the lifespan in which employees find themselves (Rudolph and Zacher, 2017). Hence, this thesis recognises the existence of continuous developmental influences on PCs, which results in great variation both within and between generations. As a result, organisations need to be careful when interpreting the results of conventional generational research and what influences they have on the PC (see e.g. Albert, Hurrelmann, Quenzel *et al.*, 2019; Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019; Scholz and Grotefend, 2019a; Deloitte, 2020a); on closer investigation, the results are often divergent and contradictory.

5.6   Career-boarding

The generational literature notes that the majority of Gen Z is still in the education system in 2022 (Klaffke, 2021b). In response, the recruitment of young professionals must be geared towards the future. Candidate experience (Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019) or onboarding (Chillakuri, 2020) are models suggested to fulfil the expectations of Gen Z. In addition, the literature is indifferent about whether traditional careers or new career paths should be offered. Nevertheless, an onboarding approach is often short-sighted and serves purely as an operational tool for HRM: the candidate journey often ends after the six-month honeymoon phase in an organisation and does not consider career plans after all. For these reasons, it is inevitable to involve HR departments as the key supporter and designer of employer–employee relationships in strategic decision-making processes and to link the HR strategy for attracting, developing and retaining young professionals with that of the organisation. Moreover, as Cooke, Dickmann and Parry (2022) highlight, the training of the workforce of the future requires coordination between educational institutions such as universities and schools and the employing organisations, although Germany is already a country with a well-developed coordination. Based on Figure 39, the recommendation of an integrated career plan for young professionals is discussed below.
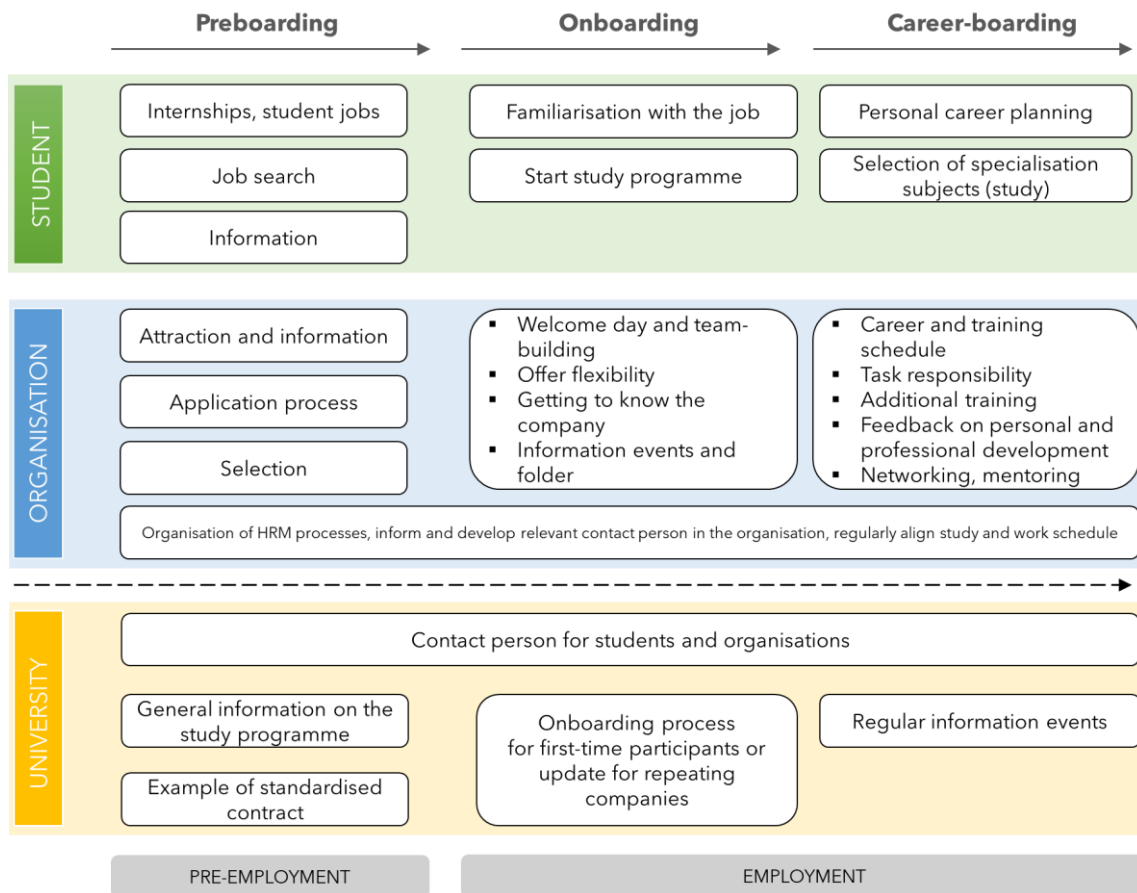
Figure 39: Integrated career plan
Own illustration

Recently, scholars have joined consultancy firms in suggesting onboarding solutions for young professionals belonging to Gen Z (Chillakuri, 2020; Klaffke, 2021b). Nevertheless, the recommendation for a formal introduction process is not new in the PC literature (Robinson and Morrison, 2000). Today, the *candidate journey*, which typically includes preboarding as well as onboarding, can help organisations support the entrance phase of newcomers. Within this candidate journey, the onboarding phase is usually set for the first six months and is connected to the probationary period. Consequently, it ends after the *honeymoon phase*; if regular coordination does not subsequently take place, the young professionals feel isolated. Once the original glamour of the organisation wears off, these young professionals need to forge a sense of belonging. Indeed, the findings here provide evidence that participants in higher semesters were even more critical due to the information and experience they had gained than the students who had just joined. In addition, the (lack of) collaboration between practice partners and the university was also criticised. Therefore, an integrated plan that incorporates preboarding, onboarding

and an additional career-boarding phase needs to be implemented while recognising the importance of cooperation with the university.

Starting with the pre-employment phase, organisations are asked to provide transparent information for potential job applicants to create realistic job expectations. In the context of university-level information meetings, organisations need to be aware of the promises made by the institution and to clarify whether these match their own inducements. Moreover, it is the HR department's responsibility to organise recruitment activities, the application process and candidate selection. Hence, it would be ideal for future supervisors to be included in the design of the preboarding and in the interviews themselves.

In terms of locating their expectations, the participants were more engaged in talking about the appreciation of their work and finding a place where they felt they belonged rather than the remuneration. This contradicts the previous literature on Gen Z, according to which remuneration is the most important factor (Scholz, 2014; Maas, 2019; Steckl, Simshäuser and Niederberger, 2019). Hence, looking beyond the written contract in which the renumeration can be found, the PC expectations from both sides need clarification and potential negotiation to lay a credible foundation for the employment relationship.

After organisational entry, the onboarding phase begins and usually ends after six months or the probationary period. In this phase, the organisation can start with a welcome day and offer information events and folders so that young professionals can start to find their way around the organisation. In addition, supervisors and co-workers can set up an individual study-work plan together with the young professional. This is encouraged since young professionals are interested in the details associated with their day-to-day work and find information exchange critical to success, which is in line with the findings of Chillakuri (2020). One participant expressed that simply knowing what to do – that is, having access to the necessary information – was crucial to job success.

Finally, the young professionals in this research expressed that they want to know where they stand in reaching their career goals and what it takes to achieve the next level which is confirmed by study results from Csiszárik-Kocsír and Garia-Fodor (2018) and Chillakuri (2020). Therefore, this research recommends extending the candidate experience by incorporating a phase of career-boarding. As Gresse and Linde (2020) have reported, even graduates who have not yet entered formal employment relationships have already included short-term and long-term career projections in their

mental schemas, which aligns with the findings of this thesis. Here, the participants not only referred to their current study programmes while sharing their experiences but also made several references to their future career aspirations. This is in line with the literature on Gen Z, which points to the valuing of in-person feedback. At the same time, these young professionals are career-ambitious and interested in knowing about opportunities for career advancement, which can (depending on individual needs) be included in the career-boarding. Nevertheless, supervisors are required to negotiate realistic PC expectations at all times because over-fulfilling inducements can lead to negative reactions (Hansen, 2019).

Overall, this research agrees with Woodrow and Guest (2020, p. 110), who recommend that organisations should attempt to identify *'which promised contributions are important to employees and prioritise their delivery'.* For young professionals in a dual-study programme, only a process that includes additional career planning will suffice. In response, the integrated career plan presented here offers a holistic approach to a human-centred HRM strategy that can thus meet the general expectations of young professionals, as well as their individual needs.

5.7   Brief summary

This research uses two related constructs for further investigation: generational theory and the PC. The discussion combines both approaches and the research findings to discuss the extent to which the research questions can be answered.

The first research question focused on the PC expectations of young professionals. As a result of this research, it became apparent that the contracts of young professionals differ from traditional contract types. Thus, the idea of a separate type – the educational PC – is put forward, the key contents of which are affirmation and knowledge transfer. While the basic assumption of the generational affiliation of individuals can be an important orientation-giving method, this approach can never be the sole instrument in the implementation of HR strategies due to its conscious categorisation. Moreover, as striking differences could not be found between Gen Z and other generations, these results are most likely to be applicable to young professionals in general, regardless of the generation to which they belong.

The second research question investigated the dynamics of the PC formation of young professionals and its influences. The most striking observation from the findings was that

the diametrical development of expectations upon organisation entry towards the employer and in general implies that organisations should reflect much more on external influences in the future.

The third research question aimed to provide HRM strategies that meet young professionals' PC expectations. Based on the findings concerning the first two research questions, an integrated career plan was developed. As a result, the existing candidate experience (preboarding + onboarding) requires a broader perspective, specifically the appending of a career-boarding phase (+ career-boarding).

Attempts were also made to highlight possible differences between the generations to provide recommendations for HRM strategies, but no such evidence was found. Ultimately, the findings revealed that using generational differences in business settings can lead an organisation astray and introduce biases in an ever more diversified world. Tellingly, it seems bizarre to categorise Gen Z in this way while ascribing diversity, equity and inclusion as its main characteristics.

The next chapter highlights the theoretical, practical, and methodological contributions of this research. Furthermore, this chapter includes reflections on research limitations, future research directions. Finally, the chapter concludes with a personal and professional reflection of the DBA journey.

6   Conclusion

This chapter concludes the research by summarising its main findings in relation to the research aims and questions, as well as their contributions and value. Due to the nature of the DBA programme, this research contributes to both theory and practice, particularly in the area of HRM. Additionally, the methodological contributions of this research are presented. This chapter also reviews the limitations of the study, proposes opportunities for further research and reflects on the personal and professional development of the researcher.

6.1   Contribution to theory

The theoretical contributions of this investigation include three pathways that provide insights into the PCs of young professionals: the typology of the PC, the dynamics and influence of the PC during the formation phase, and human-centred HRM strategies to support PC fulfilment.

First, the research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by investigating the PCs of young professionals who are in their socialisation phase and entering work life for the first time. This research points to the fact that the traditional PC types (relational, transactional and balanced) and their associated dimensions are subject to different criteria for young professionals who are studying alongside their jobs. In response, the presentation of the typology of an educational PC offers valuable new insights and provides a better understanding of young professionals' PCs. Knowledge of this unique type of PC can be beneficial to researchers studying the formation of PCs and looking to design appropriate parameters for their research. Furthermore, this study proposes to add another dimension, influence, to the PC types. Indeed, the research has shown that for young professionals, external influences from the university and society are more relevant than organisational influences during the initial PC formation phase.

Second, the dynamics of the formation of the initial PC have not received much scholarly consideration. Therefore, this research draws attention to the complexity of the employment relationship from the point of view of young professionals while exploring the factors influencing their employment relationships. Newcomers socially construct their PC expectations and adapt them multiple times before and after entering their organisations. Besides the social environment, the university or organisational impacts, the current events of the COVID-19 pandemic shape the PCs of these newcomers, which

underlines that the PC concept is implicit, collective and socially discussed (Korczynski, 2022). Furthermore, this research found evidence that expectations can develop diametrically in this sensitive first phase of employment. Hence, young professionals' PC expectations increase in general over this period, but if they are not fulfilled, they decrease towards their own organisations. Paying greater attention to these external influences and acknowledging the socially constructed formation of PCs can support researchers in better assessing the dynamics of the PC (Bankins, Griep and Hansen, 2020).

Third, this research broadens the understanding of employee–employer relations and, keeping an educational context in mind, how organisations can effectively manage the expectations of their young talent. Research in this area can benefit from new insights into elucidating the expectations of young professionals that lead them to remain within the organisation. As career development is a key driver for young professionals, this research contributes to HRM by providing sustainable strategies for the retention of young talent, thereby strengthening the competitiveness of organisations.

Importantly, this research examined job expectations through the lens of generational theory, but refrained from distinguishing between generations over time. Looking at employees under the generational hypothesis deliberately categorises in order to reduce complexity and understand important trends and developments in society, but this labelling inevitably leads to stereotyping. Assumed to be a well-intentioned approach to managing different generations in the workplace, the literature (especially in Germany) has proven to be heavily influenced by consultancies and marketing businesses, with researchers now only beginning to dissociate themselves from such practices due to mixed an inconclusive empirical evidence (Schröder, 2019; Rudolph *et al.*, 2020; Parry and Urwin, 2021; Gurtner, Raeder and Kels, 2022; Rudolph and Zacher, 2022). Moreover, the data analysis of this research could not identify major generational differences. Therefore, researchers need to carefully consider whether PC of different generations are sufficiently distinct before adopting alternative SHRM policies in terms of attraction, recruitment, development, and retention. Rather than following generational variations, future research can instead apply life-stage models (Graf, 2008; Rudolph and Zacher, 2017) or examine employees at the group level considering the context (e.g. regions within countries) to develop more sustainable and tailored strategies for organisations (Peretz, Fried and Parry, 2022).

6.2   Contribution to practice

The practical contributions of this research offer in-depth knowledge of young professionals' expectations that can enable organisations to boost job entrants' interest and enthusiasm in the workplace, thereby likely increasing their levels of productivity and job satisfaction. The three key practical contributions – PC content, the dynamics of PC formation and an integrated career plan – are outlined below.

First, the German labour market is faced with declining workforce potential. Hence, it is becoming increasingly difficult for employers to compete for newcomers. From a strategic perspective, today's newcomers will occupy decision-making positions in organisations within the next ten years. Complementing the existing body of knowledge by investigating the content of young professionals' PCs, this research found that affirmation and knowledge transfer are the keys to a successful start in the employee–employer relationship. Therefore, knowledge of PC content is valuable to organisations seeking to attract, develop and retain young talent. This research shows which topics are currently important to young professionals and thus recommends that HR practitioners actively (re-)negotiate contents of PCs before and after organisational entry, bearing in mind the influence of the external context (e.g. university, historical events, family and friends).

Second, as outlined in subchapter 6.1, young professionals' expectations typically increase upon organisational entry, which can lead to decreasing expectations towards the organisation. Most of the participants in this research reflected on decreasing expectations towards their employers, with only some prevailing in an organisation due to the written obligation of a repayment clause in their employment contracts. In Germany, dual-study students are not as legally protected as their counterpart VET apprentices because the Vocational Training Act simply does not apply to them. Even if political efforts should certainly be made to change this, it is still at least in part up to the organisations to recognise that they should not take advantage of dual-study students in the course of equal treatment; otherwise, the PC may be violated or even breached. HR practitioners can take this opportunity to align and, where possible, harmonise their different employment conditions to ensure greater equality within their workforce.

Third, the research has implications for the management of young professionals' PCs, starting with preboarding, organising onboarding and implementing a new career-boarding phase to offer a longer-term perspective to newcomers. HRM departments can use the proposed integrated career plan, Figure 39, to direct newcomers to more suitable

careers and reduce subsequent workplace turnover. To succeed with a human-centred HRM strategy for young professionals, a flexible process is presented that can meet individual expectations and recognises contextual influences on the PC formation. Therefore, this research follows the call from HRM scholars (Cooke, Dickmann and Parry, 2022; Kraak and Griep, 2022) to advance human-centred HRM strategies to build high-quality employment relationships. In doing so, organisations can benefit from stronger employer–employee relationships that can support them in attracting, developing and retaining young talent.

6.3   Contribution to methodology

A key methodological contribution has been made in this research by introducing an advanced video-based research method: video statements. This concept arose due to the need to reach tech-savvy participants in times of COVID-19 restrictions. This method started with the recruitment of participants and included short presentations, sending a guideline by email and obtaining informed consent; participants then answered open-ended questions in self-recorded video format, and the resulting videos were stored in a data-protected cloud system for later analysis. This cost- and time-efficient approach can be flexibly adapted in different research projects. Hence, this research broadens the methodological perspective on how to gather data in an increasingly global and remote world. Overall, this alternative method can support scholars in providing richer knowledge for business and management research.

6.4   Reflection on the outcomes of the research

This research offers evidence for the shortcomings of previous studies and presents contemporary findings on the formation of young professionals' PC expectations while advancing human-centred HRM strategies. Although the research benefited from applying two different sequential qualitative methods and generated a rich and diverse dataset, the findings need to be investigated further in light of its limitations to identify further research possibilities.

6.4.1   Research limitations

Availability of current studies

As highlighted in the literature review, only a limited number of available academic studies relate to young professionals' PCs, specifically in the employment relations of dual-study systems. Certainly, since young professionals are newcomers to the job market, it is difficult for researchers to access the whole of Gen Z. Therefore, this research focuses on a generational unit. Furthermore, the literature review can only be a snapshot of the current research debate on Gen Z and their PCs and has been updated several times during the past four years of this doctoral journey.

Qualitative research design

Because this study is based on the research philosophy of social constructionism and applies a case-centred research design, the possibility of weak prediction arises, as this is the major limitation of subjective research paradigms in general. Nonetheless, the outcomes of this research developed a socially embedded understanding of the influences that shape young professionals' PCs. Here, positivists could test the relationship between external and internal agents on such PCs. Future research could also develop hypotheses based on the different types of PCs and test them using quantitative methods and a generalisable sample of young professionals.

In addition, this investigative research was based on the researcher's beliefs and interpretations. The process of reflexive thematic analysis is exhaustive and complex, especially for novice researchers and requires the distancing of oneself from the sole generational theory and the PC concept. This made it possible to combine these two research fields in a meaningful way based on the findings, the existing literature and the researcher's extensive experience in HRM practice. Furthermore, the application of a

case-centred approach focused on a rich understanding of young professionals' PC expectations in a particular training environment. Thus, some variable factors analysed in this research may have been reflected in different outcomes if they were studied otherwise in future research. Moreover, the research employed a cross-sectional design by focusing only on students who were gaining their first work experience. Therefore, a longitudinal data collection – for example, using video diaries – could offer a more detailed timeline and overview of the dynamics of the PC in the socialisation phase of young professionals.

Selection of methods

The selected methods: video statements and focus groups may not appeal to introverted participants, who are shy about presenting themselves on video or in a group discussion. The video method has been tested in the pilot study and offered promising results. Nevertheless, the results of data in the main research were limited to only four questions. For the collection of initial data, it was therefore sufficient within the framework of this research but would not be adequate for in-depth data collection. Furthermore, the researcher tried to create a trustworthy environment for the participants of the focus groups. Despite all the effort, members of the focus groups may not have expressed their honest and personal opinions about the topic at hand especially when their thoughts oppose the views of other study participants.

Limited focus on dual-study students in Germany

The study was conducted only at one university of applied sciences in the northern part of Germany. Hence, as with any in-depth qualitative research, the interpretation of results is restricted – in this case, to a sample of students of a dual-study programme within the German labour market. As dual-degree programmes become more popular because students are seeking higher degrees to start their careers, it may be valuable to explore alternative training programmes and comparable training institutions as an extension of this research. Notwithstanding the narrow research focus, the availability of the participants during data collection was restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited access to a broader range of dual-study programmes with different areas of specialisation (e.g., from STEM-related industries), alternative demographic categories (e.g., gender or cultural background) or different regulatory drivers (e.g., German labour law). In addition, the findings are limited to the German labour market; future research may include other countries and/or compare them to the present results.

6.4.2 Future research directions

To complement the recommendations for future research outlined in the previous subchapter, further avenues of investigation are presented here.

First, future research may include the perspectives of external agents to better understand their role in the reciprocal employment relationship. This can be done by investigating organisational or external agents' expectations towards young professionals to gain more valuable results on this crucial working relationship.

Second, using a case-study research design, future studies could implement a participatory and potentially action-based design to evaluate the situations and experiences of young professionals in their daily work contexts. Moreover, this approach can add to a better understanding of the causes of PC violation and breach during organisational entry.

Third, while some organisations have already introduced human-centred HRM strategies, most have not even tested their application. Thus, the long-term effects of implementing human-centred strategies in HRM could be empirically examined to evaluate their impact on the PCs of young professionals.

Last, this research takes forward the called agenda to acknowledge cultural norms within a national group (Peretz, Fried and Parry, 2022). Additional research in this area can investigate changes in employees' expectations as ongoing contextual trends rather than applying generational categories. Wherein focusing on the identification of drivers of heterogeneity within employee groups to gain better understanding of factors (e.g. PESTLE) influencing PCs.

6.4.3 Personal and professional reflections

Although I have long held the idea of writing a doctoral thesis, my research endeavour was decided on during a vacation in the mountains. Ever since that day, a positive feeling has carried me through the ascent of my Mount DBA. I knew right from the start that I needed a partner to support me on my way to the first base camp, and I am very glad that I found the University of Worcester programme.

After successfully completing the taught phase, I was asked to hike alone, not knowing that it would be almost completely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, I can say that my extra role as an academic, alongside my various roles in my personal and professional life, has had a profound impact. In addition, the unforeseen environmental

changes have led me to adapt my working models over time and have often demanded a high level of flexibility on a daily basis. Despite these challenges, I fortunately decided to explore some extra routes and completed the vocational and industrial trainer exam. This education helped me understand how the regulations governing dual VET relate to the dual-study programmes in Germany. In addition, writing my thesis – including the application of scientific methods, presenting my findings at conferences and business events and starting to share my knowledge as a (guest) lecturer for undergraduate and postgraduate students on an (inter-)national level – have broadened my perspective significantly and sustainably.

In my working life, I seek to support employers in understanding the changing world of work, especially in integrating younger employees into organisations. Considering that the concept of the PC is relatively unknown in Germany, I see it as my future task to build a bridge between science and practice in order to pass on this knowledge so that organisations can develop long-term and human-centred HRM strategies.

Finally, I have always been passionate about lifelong learning through a combination of academic and practical knowledge. In hindsight, I can say that the last few years have been an exceptional learning experience for me, sharpening my skills in both respects. I am incredibly proud that, through my research, HRM students from different semesters have met and formed a self-initiated networking group that now regularly exchanges ideas on HRM topics. With these points in mind and with the summit of the mountain now within reach, I hope that one day I can be an inspiration to and a guide for students who want to embark on an educational journey, as I once did.

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Appendix

Chapter 1 – Literature Review

Appendix 1.1 Analysis of search results Generation Z

Documents by year

Year	Count
2014	6
2015	3
2016	2
2017	9
2018	17
2019	26
2020	11
2021	7

Documents by type

- Journal Article – 43%
- Book – 17%
- Report – 16%
- Magazine Article – 8%
- Book Section – 6%
- Conference Paper – 5%
- Research Paper – 3%
- Thesis – 1%
- Document – 1%

Documents by methodology

5%

10%

52%

33%

■ Quantitative ■ N/A ■ Qualitative ■ Mixed

Documents by publication setting

1%

35%

64%

■ Academic ■ Practitioner ■ Other

Documents by country
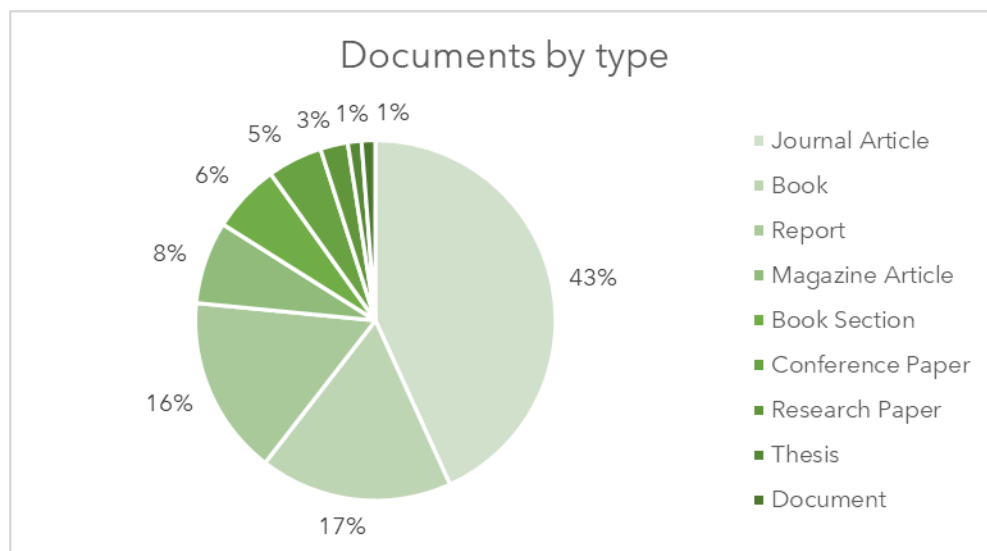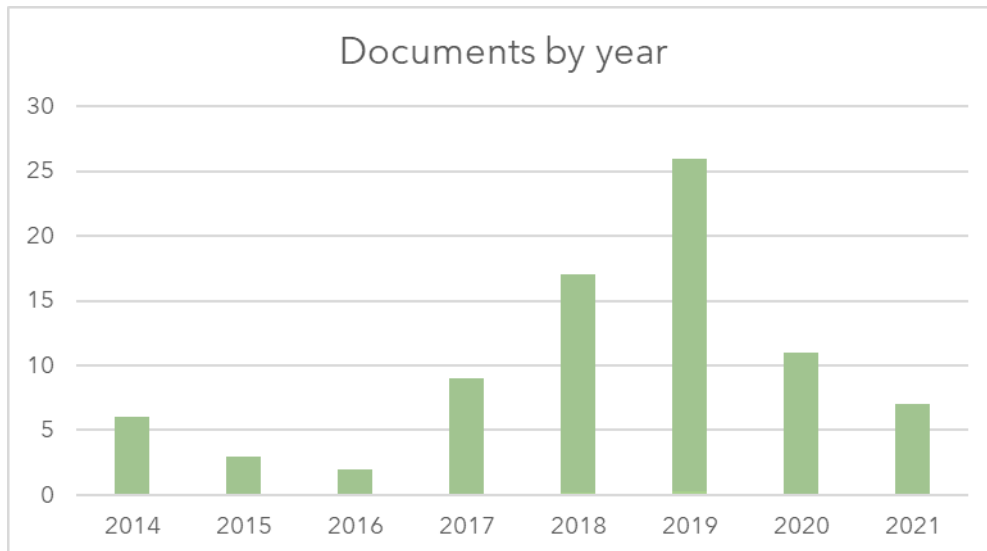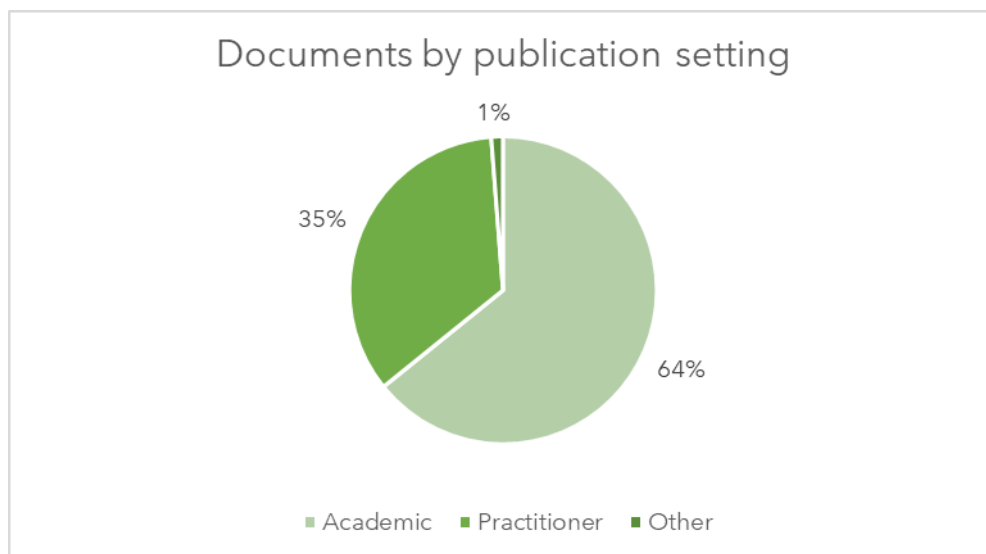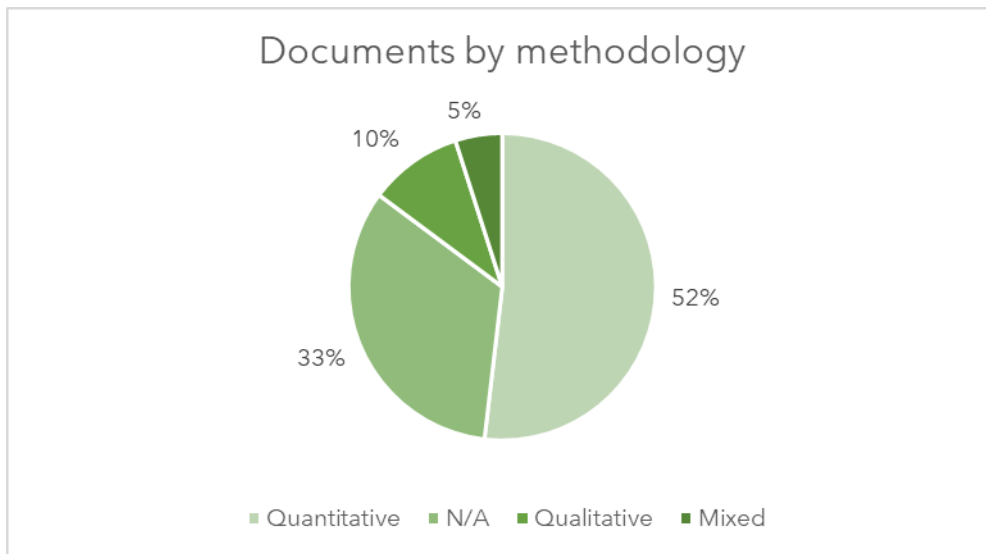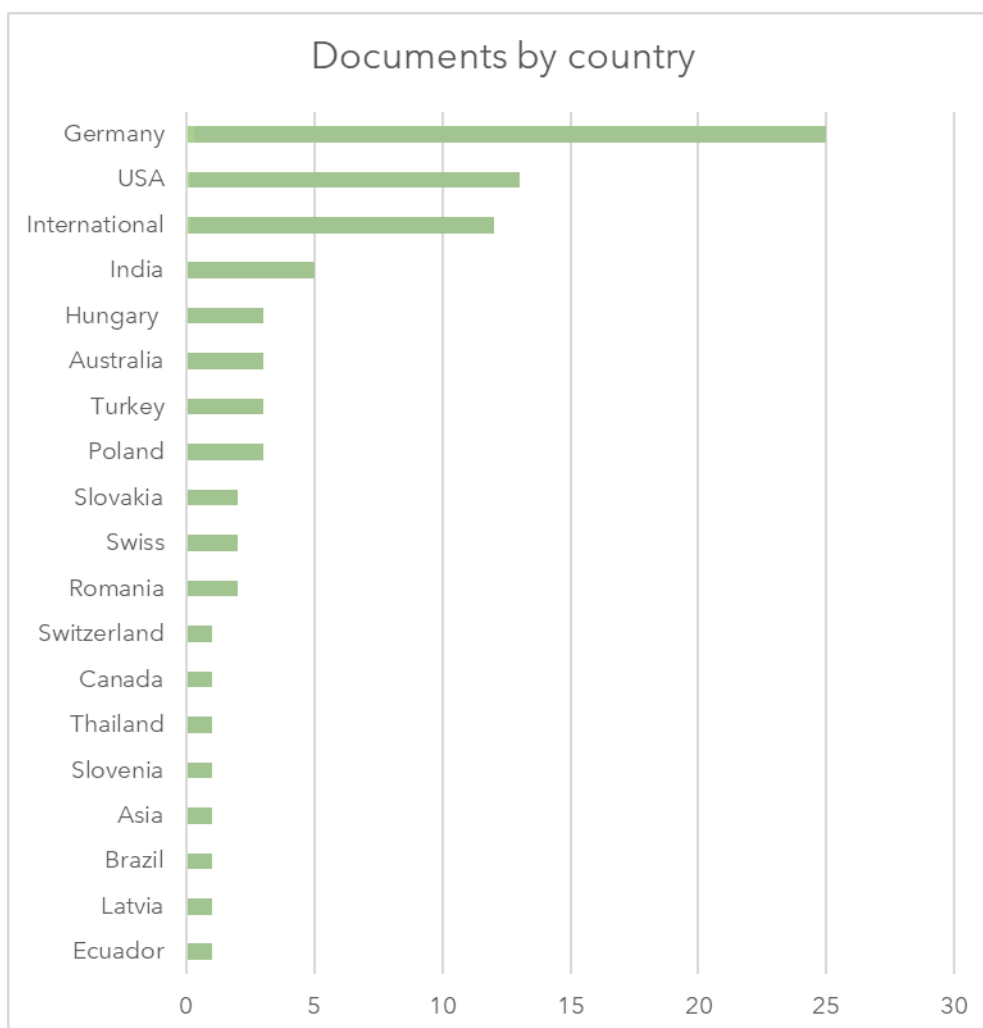
Appendix 1.2 Overview of PESTLE-Analysis Generation Z

Societal (work related PESTLE)			
Topic	**Sub-Topic**	**Statements**	**Authors**
Political	International	Public policy priorities (international) are stability of countrys economy, quality of education and availability of jobs	(IFAC, 2018)
		Worldwide uncertainity	(Eilers, 2019), (Scholz and Grotefend, 2019)
	Germany	Aftereffects of reunification	(Scholz, 2014) (Eilers, 2019)
		Political engagement rising	(Albert *et al.*, 2019)
		Gen Z afraid of Terrorism	(Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019)
		Gen Z afraid difference between poor and rich increases	(Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019)
		Minimum wage	(OECD, 2020)
		Gen Z think politics do not represent interests of Gen Z	(Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019)
Economic	Living	Corona has changed the perception: perspectives of the future, work/school situation and financial situation has worsened	(Schnetzer and Hurrelmann, 2021)
		Better living standards, longer and be wealthier than previous generations	(Scholz and Grotefend, 2019) (Berkup, 2014)
		Polarisation of prosperity / wealth inequality due to tax exemptions (inheritance and capital income)	(Deutscher Bundestag, 2017) (OECD, 2020)
		Gen Z is less confident than other countries, that their finances improve over the next 12 month	(Deloitte, 2020a)
	Labour market	Good promotion prospects	(Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019)
		Low unemployment rate	(Destatista, 2021)
		High tax & social security burden	(OECD, 2020)

		Societal (work related PESTLE)	
Topic	**Sub-Topic**	**Statements**	**Authors**
Socio-cultural	Diversity	Diversity, inclusion and equality	(Berkup, 2014) (Lanier, 2017) (Barnes & Nobel, 2018) (Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019) (Schroth, 2019) Deloitte, 2020b)
		Gender-specific differentiation less of a topic	(Kring and Hurrelmann, 2019) (Maas, 2019)
		Perception towards gender equality different between men and women	(Grow and Yang, 2018)
	Health	Health-conscious living	(Albert *et al.*, 2019) (Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019) (Schnetzer, 2021)
	Education	Increasing education qualification	(Scholz, 2014) (Albert et al., 2019)
		Change of school system (bologna)	(Scholz and Grotefend, 2019)
		50% University degree	(Scholz and Grotefend, 2019)
		Gen Z has entrepreneurial aspirations	(Lanier, 2017)
		Further development of the education system and academisation	Scholz (2014) (Klaffke, 2014)
		Occupational entry regulations	(OECD, 2020)
		Gen Z think they have better chances on the labour market than their parents	(Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019)
		Gen Z and Gen Y said that their employment status has been unaffected	(Deloitte, 2020a)
	Age	Ageing population	(Eilers, 2019) (OECD, 2020)
		Declining birth rate	(Eilers, 2019)
	Immigration	High immigration rate	(Eilers, 2019) (OECD, 2020)
		Multiculturalisation of society	(Klaffke, 2021b) (Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019)
	Family (Gen Z as parents)	Parental leave: men and women (both)	(Albert *et al.*, 2019)
		Men are considered to be the provider of the family	(Albert et al., 2019)
		Traditional family model (women stay at home)	(Albert *et al.*, 2019)
		Women have more family responsibility	(Grow and Yang, 2018)
	Family	Parents & friends are important	(Albert *et al.*, 2019) (Maas, 2019) (Scholz and Grotefend, 2019)
		Mothers often work part-time	(OECD, 2020)
		Missing flexible work arrangements	(OECD, 2020)
		Gen Z are afraid that there is not enough housing	(Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019)
		Later weaning phase from home	(Maas, 2019) (Scholz and Grotefend, 2019)
	East & West	Differences in living and economic conditions between East and West: - Better earning potentials - Job offers - Quality of life	(Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019)

Societal (work related PESTLE)			
Topic	**Sub-Topic**	**Statements**	**Authors**
Technological	Digital Transformation	Company investments in knowledge-based capital (software, databases and organization capital) is low	(OECD, 2020)
		ICT in schools is low (behind other countries), students lack of improving computational thinking and programming skills	(OECD, 2020) (BIBB, 2020)
		High consumers of technology and cravers of the digital world	(Chicca and Shellenbarger, 2018)
		Born into technology	(Berkup, 2014) (Klaffke, 2021a)
	Digital Socialisation	Connect anywhere worldwide	(Berkup, 2014)
		Social media is the most obvious way for socialisation	(Deutscher Bundestag, 2017) (Mangelsdorf, 2017) (Çora, 2019) (Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019) (Klaffke, 2021a)
		Lack of attention span	(Chicca and Shellenbarger, 2018) (Berkup, 2014) (Mangelsdorf, 2017)
		Smartphone is formative for Gen Z	(Schnetzer and Hurrelmann, 2021)
	Work 4.0	Training needed	(Chillakuri, 2020)
		New job/professions arising	(BIBB, 2020)
		Digital savvy employees	(Berkup, 2014) (Desai and Lele, 2017) (Lanier, 2017)
Legal	Unions	Work council gains more importance	(Scholz, 2014)
	Labour Law	Mobile work	(Eilers, 2019)
		Change of working time act	(Deloitte, 2020a)
		Gender pay gap	(Nier, 2020)
		Data protection (GDPR)	(Klaffke, 2021a)
Environmental	Corporate Social Responibility	Sustainability	(Albert *et al.*, 2019)
		Climate-change	(Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019)
		Environmental issues are important	(Kring and Hurrelmann, 2019)
	Social Responibility of the Individual	Female role models	(Kring and Hurrelmann, 2019)
		Less optimistic (27% Gen Y and 28% Gen Z) that the efforts to protect the planet will be effective (than other countries)	(Deloitte, 2020a)

Appendix 1.3 Overview of attitudes, expectations and values of Generation Z

Individual (values, attitudes and expectations)			
Topic	**Sub-Topic**	**Statements**	**Authors**
Extrinsic (Tangible rewards external to the individual)	Respect	Formal Aspects are important	(Steckl, Simshäuser and Niederberger, 2019)
		Flat hierarchies	(Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019)
	Pay	Generous Pay	(Bencsik, Juhász and Horváth-Csikós, 2016) (Berge and Berge, 2019) (Iorgulescu, 2016) (Deloitte, 2019)
		Fair payment	(McCrindle, 2014) (Mangelsdorf, 2017)
		Higher salary motivates for better performance	(Csiszárik-Kocsír and Garia-Fodor, 2018)
		High payment expectations	(Maas, 2019)
		No interest in competition	(Scholz, 2014) (Scholz and Weth, 2015)
		Performance at work should lead to prosperity	(Calmbach et al. , 2020)
		Health-care benefits	(Grow and Yang, 2018)
		Reason for near-term exit: dissatisfied with pay (34%)	(Deloitte, 2019)
		Non-performance related pay	(Scholz, 2014) (Scholz and Weth, 2015)
		High-fix salary	(Scholz, 2014)
		Compensation and Benefits	(Brademann and Piorr, 2018) (IFAC,2018) (Aggarwal et al. , 2020) (Calmbach et al., 2020)
		Payment for extra work	(Schlotter, 2020)
		Transparenct payment structure	(Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019)
		Generous rewards	(Kirchmayer and Fratričová, 2018)
	Advancements	Reason for near-term exit: not enough opportunities to advance (33%)	(Deloitte, 2019)
		Career opportunities/ opportunities for professional advancement	(Scholz, 2014) (Bencsik, Juhász and Horváth-Csikós, 2016) (Iorgulescu, 2016) (Lanier, 2017) (Lazányi and Bilan, 2017) (Kirchmayer and Fratričová, 2018) (Berge and Berge, 2019)
		Value traditional career opportunities	(Lanier, 2017)
		Career orientated	(Maas, 2019)
		Career plan for promotion	(McCrindle, 2014)
		Recognition and self-realization	(Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019)
		Opportunity for promotion at the workplace motivate for better performance	(Csiszárik-Kocsír and Garia-Fodor, 2018)

Individual (values, attitudes and expectations)			
Topic	**Sub-Topic**	**Statements**	**Authors**
Intrinsic (Intangible rewards reflecting inherent interest in work)	Learning	Learning and development	(Scholz, 2014) (Deloitte, 2019) (Chillakuri, 2020) (Gadomska-Lila, 2020)
		Using social media for teaching and learning (Twitter)	(Gupta, 2018)
		Collaborative informal media-based learning formats	(Klaffke, 2021b)
		Focus on learning is lower than Gen Y	(Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019)
		Apply training information to assigend tasks	(Cho, Bonn and Han, 2018)
		Training offer	(Cho, Bonn and Han, 2018) (Jansen, Odoni and Wombacher, 2019) (Berge and Berge, 2019)
	Maintaining skills	Being trained appropriately to use new skills	(Cho, Bonn and Han, 2018)
		Profession that matches one's own abilities and inclinations	(Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019)
	See Results	Personal development	(Maas, 2019)
		Bigger picture	(Chillakuri, 2020)
		Purposeful tasks /meaningful job	(Grow and Yang, 2018) (Kirchmayer and Fratričová, 2018) (Goh and Lee, 2018) (Schnetzer, 2021) (Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019) (Albert et al., 2019) (Chillakuri, 2020)
		Making an impact	(Kirchmayer and Fratričová, 2018) (Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019)
		Ability to see the outcome work	(Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019)
		Personal fulfillment (wins over interest in money)	(McCrindle, 2014) (Grow and Yang, 2018) (Goh and Lee, 2018)
	Creativity	Freedom of how to complete tasks	(Jansen, Odoni and Wombacher, 2019) (Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019)
		Work autonomously	(Mangelsdorf, 2017) (Maas, 2019) (Calmbach et al., 2020) (Klaffke, 2021b)
		Variety of work tasks	(McCrindle, 2014) (Brademann and Piorr, 2018) (Jansen, Odoni and Wombacher, 2019) (Calmbach et al., 2020)
		Independence over authority	(Ozkan and Solmaz, 2015)
		Self-determination and independence	(Cho, Bonn and Han, 2018) (Calmbach et al., 2020)
		Fun at work is the biggest motivator (followed by money and achieving goals)	(Schnetzer and Hurrelmann, 2021)
		Fun work	(Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019) (Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019) (Calmbach et al., 2020)
		Looking for happiness in the workplace	(Ozkan and Solmaz, 2015)

Individual (values, attitudes and expectations)			
Topic	**Sub-Topic**	**Statements**	**Authors**
Supervisory (Interaction with and oversight by supervsor)	Feedback	Fairness and respect	(Mangelsdorf, 2017) (Grow and Yang, 2018)
		Only positive related feedback	(Scholz, 2014)
		Feedback-seeking behavior is valued / instant feedback	(Chicca and Shellenbarger, 2018) (Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019) (Aggarwal *et al.*, 2020) (Chillakuri, 2020)
		In-person performance appraisal	(Lazányi and Bilan, 2017)
		Appreciation	(Gadomska-Lila, 2020)
		Reasurrance about contributions and effectiveness	(Chicca and Shellenbarger, 2018)
	Instructions	Precise instructions	(Mangelsdorf, 2017) (Maas, 2019)
		Transparency	(Calmbach et al., 2020) (Klaffke, 2021b)
		In-person communication with leaders	(Lanier, 2017) (Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019)
		Demand clear structures regarding working time, place of work and tasks	(Scholz and Weth, 2015) (Mangelsdorf, 2017) (Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019)
		Rewards and recognition	(Mangelsdorf, 2017) (Aggarwal *et al.*, 2020) (Chillakuri, 2020) (Gadomska-Lila, 2020)
		Interaction should be based on harmony, appreciative interaction	(Brademann and Piorr, 2018)
	Personal commitments	Managers are leading by example	(Grow and Yang, 2018)
		Inspiring co-creators	(McCrindle, 2014) (Çora, 2019)
		Mentoring	(Iorgulescu, 2016) (Mangelsdorf, 2017)
		Leader must acknowledge personal and societal concepts	(Deloitte, 2019) (Gadomska-Lila, 2020)
		Promoter of work-life balance	(Grow and Yang, 2018)
		Supportive leadership style to achieve goals	(Mangelsdorf, 2017)
		Being close to the supervisor	(Brademann and Piorr, 2018)
Social (Need to belong or to be connected)	Friends	Good friends	(Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019) (Calmbach et al., 2020)
		Social life more important than work	(Maas, 2019)
	Contacts	Gen Z is attracted by interventions to improve the social support	(Bencsik, Juhász and Horváth-Csikós, 2016) (Steckl, Simshäuser and Niederberger, 2019)
		Value Inter-personal relationship	(Gupta, 2018)
		Company climate	(Steckl, Simshäuser and Niederberger, 2019) (Calmbach et al., 2020)
		Social environment is important	(Ozkan and Solmaz, 2015)
		Good work atmosphere	(Schnetzer 2021)
		To work in a good team motivate for a better perfomance	(Csiszárik-Kocsír and Garia-Fodor, 2018)
		Collaboration is more important than intellectual property of a single person	(Mangelsdorf, 2017)
		Teamwork / family environment	(Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019)
		Social support in the team / cooperative working atmosphere; supportive work environment	(Iorgulescu, 2016) v (Grow and Yang, 2018) (Steckl, Simshäuser and Niederberger, 2019) (Jansen, Odoni and Wombacher, 2019) (Berge and Berge, 2019) (Chillakuri, 2020)
	Common Interests	Collaboration, network and skill access are important for the future	(Deloitte, 2019)

Individual (values, attitudes and expectations)			
Topic	**Sub-Topic**	**Statements**	**Authors**
Altruistic (Motivation to help others and society through work)	Helpful to Others	Climate change is top concern (same as Gen Y)	(Deloitte, 2020a)
		Corporate giving programs (people, profit and planet)	(McCrindle, 2014)
		Helpfulness, tolerance and empathie	(Calmbach *et al.*, 2020)
	Worthwhile in Society	Make positive impacts on community / society	(Deloitte, 2019)
		Protect the environment	(Deloitte, 2019) (Schnetzer 2021)
		Volunteering work	(Aggarwal *et al.*, 2020)
Leisure (Opportunity for time outside work)	Vacation	Separation of work and life	(Scholz, 2014) (Scholz and Weth, 2015) (Scholz, 2019)
	Time for Other Things	Work-life Balance	(McCrindle, 2014) (Mangelsdorf, 2017) (Grow and Yang, 2018) (IFAC,2018) (Berge and Berge, 2019) (Calmbach et al., 2020) (Çora, 2019) (Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019) (Chillakuri, 2020) (Jansen, Odoni and Wombacher, 2019) (Gadomska-Lila, 2020) (Schnetzer 2021)
		Flex-time and family time	(Grow and Yang, 2018) (Hesse and Mattmüller, 2019) (Gadomska-Lila, 2020)
		Work remotely	(Grow and Yang, 2018)
		Flexible work practices	(Aggarwal et al., 2020)
		Regulated working time, family orientated	(Maas, 2019)
	Slower Pace	Do not burden your private life with responsibilities, e.g. management tasks at work	(Scholz and Weth, 2015)
		Work should not intruce people's lifes	(Deloitte, 2019)
Stability (Need for long-term certainty)	Job stability	Job security	(Ozkan and Solmaz, 2015) (Iorgulescu, 2016) (Lazányi and Bilan, 2017) (Mangelsdorf, 2017) (Brademann and Piorr, 2018) (Jansen, Odoni and Wombacher, 2019) (Maas, 2019) (Schnetzer 2021) (Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019) (Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019) (Scholz, 2019) (Albert et al., 2019)
		Stable career	(Goh and Lee, 2018) (IFAC,2018)
		Stable Job	(Scholz, 2014) (Chicca and Shellenbarger, 2018)
		Flexibility (in terms of actual working)	(McCrindle, 2014) (Klaffke, 2014)
		Looking for orientation and security	(Klaffke, 2014)
	Health plan	Health	(Hurrelmann, Köcher and Sommer, 2019)
		Heath care benfits	(Grow and Yang, 2018)
	Retirement	Pension benefits	(Scholz, 2014)
	Financial Stability	Financial stability (good pay, retirement benefits and stock options),	(Lanier, 2017) (Grow and Yang, 2018) (Kirchmayer and Fratričová, 2018) (Braun, 2021) (Calmbach et al., 2020)
		Ensure economic freedom	(Ozkan and Solmaz, 2015)
		Stable environment	(Iorgulescu, 2016)

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

Appendix 3.1 Ethical approval

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS, PSYCHOLOGY & SPORT RESEARCH ETHICS PANEL (CBPS REP)

CONFIRMATION OF APPROVAL

22 September 2021

REP CODE: CBPS20210038-R

THE CREATION OF YOUNG EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT EXPECTATIONS -
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY DESIGN AMONG DUAL STUDIES STUDENTS IN GERMANY-

Dear Annica,

Thank you for your application for proportionate review ethical approval to the College of Business, Psychology and Sport Research Ethics Panel on the 20th September 2021.

Your application has been reviewed in accordance with the University of Worcester Ethics Policy and in compliance with the Standard Operating Procedures for proportionate ethical review.

The outcome of the review is that the Panel is now happy to grant this project ethical approval to proceed.

Your research must be undertaken as set out in the approved application for the approval to be valid. You must review your answers to the checklist on an ongoing basis and resubmit for approval where you intend to deviate from the approved research. Any major deviation from the approved application will require a new application for approval.

As part of the University Ethics Policy, the University undertakes an audit of a random sample of approved research. You may be required to complete a questionnaire about your research.

Yours sincerely,

PROFESSOR GYŐZŐ MOLNÁR
Chair – Full Review Panel, College of Business, Psychology and Sport Research Ethics Panel
Chair - College of Business, Psychology and Sport Research Ethics Panel
Ethics@worc.ac.uk

University of Worcester

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS, PSYCHOLOGY & SPORT RESEARCH ETHICS PANEL (CBPSREP)

AMENDMENT OUTCOME

18 March 2022

REP CODE: CBPS20210038-R (Amendment 2)

THE CREATION OF YOUNG EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT EXPECTATIONS - A QUALITATIVE MULTI-METHOD RESEARCH AMONG DUAL STUDIES STUDENTS IN GERMANY-

Dear Annica,

Thank you for your amendment submitted for ethical approval to the Business, Psychology & Sport (CBPS REP) Research Ethics Panel on the 21st February 2022.

Your amendment application has been reviewed in accordance with the University of Worcester Ethics Policy and in compliance with the Standard Operating Procedures for ethical review.

The outcome of the review is that I am happy to grant the amendment to this project ethical approval to proceed.

Please note your research must be undertaken as set out in the approved documents for the approval to be valid. Please ensure you review your answers to the checklist on an ongoing basis and contact the Research Ethics Panel again if you intend to make any further amendments to the approved research.

Yours sincerely

DR BLAIRE MORGAN
Deputy Chair - College of Business, Psychology and Sport Research Ethics Panel
Chair – CBPS REP Proportionate Review Panel
Ethics@worc.ac.uk

Appendix 3.2 Schedule/Guideline video statements

Schedule / General Information
Video Statement

University of Worcester

Interviewee:	Dual Study Students
Title of the Project:	The creation of young employees' psychological contract expectations - A multiple case study design among dual students in Germany-
Name of Researcher:	Annica Lau, M.A.
Contact address	laua1_18@uni.worc.ac.uk

The participants of the study are given the following instructions for the video statements:

Dear participant,

thank you for agreeing to voluntarily participate in my study. This is phase 1 of my study, where a video statement is recorded by yourself or by me. For this purpose, please read the entire guide to the end and **if you have any questions, please contact me**.

General information:
Please keep in mind that I am just as interested in negative comments as positive comments. In order for the video to capture your genuine and spontaneous statements on a question, I would ask you to read through the questions only once beforehand, if possible, and not to answer them in advance or rehearse the answers. It is therefore not necessary to record the video several times to avoid any mistakes you think you may have made. You can also take time during the video recording to think about the question. If you have made a statement that you later want to deviate from, then simply comment on it in the running video. I will create a transcript of your video that I am going to send to you afterwards for review. You will then also have the opportunity to make amendments.

Video recording:
You can use your own equipment (e.g., mobile phone) or ask me to take the video for you. When recording the video, it is important that you first read aloud the question/text to be answered and then answer it, one after the other. Please do not tell your name or your employers name (incl. supervisors) on the video to ensure data protection. You can decide on your own how long your video statement will take; as a guideline, it should not take longer than 5-10 minutes.
If applicable, please send the video after recording to the contact address above.

You can withdraw any time during the video statement without giving reasons and that you will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will you be questioned on why you have withdrawn. If you decide to withdraw after the video recording the timeframe for withdrawal is 14 days.

Your statement:
There are two parts of the video statement. The first part are general questions, which later determine the allocation within the study. It is also important that you give verbal consent to take part in the study. In the second part you will be asked to give your statements.

The purpose of this video statement is to investigate your job expectations towards your employer. Thereby, focusing on your personal experiences and expressions to gain insights into employee-employer relationships. Please give reasons for your answers. You are also welcome to share examples of your current employment relationship.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

1

Guideline
Video Statement

University
of Worcester

Part one – general information:

- Today is the [date]

- My participant number is [please refer to the participation number given to you by the researcher]

- My study programme is [Bachelor in xxx]

- I am [years] old.

- I am currently in my [number] semester.

- I would like to voluntarily participate in this video statement. [Please answer with: yes / no]

- I am aware of the fact that I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons during this recording. After the submission of my statement, I have 14 days to withdraw. [Please answer with: yes / no]

Part two – statement:

- I think that my employer is obliged to offer me [xxx] because [xxx].

- In addition, I expect from my employer [xxx] because [xxx].

- Since the beginning of my employment, my expectations towards my employer [xxx] because [xxx].

- I think that my job expectations are influenced by [xxx] because [xxx].

- In the context of this video statement, I would like to add [nothing/xxx].

Appendix 3.3 Schedule/Guideline focus groups

Schedule / General Information

Focus Groups

University of Worcester

Interviewee:	3-6 Dual Study Students
Title of the Project:	The creation of young employees' psychological contract expectations
	- Qualitative multi-method research among dual studies students in Germany-
Name of Researcher:	Annica Lau, M.A.
Contact address	laua1_18@uni.worc.ac.uk

Introduction

Hi, xxx. Welcome to our session.

The researcher has already had contact with the participant beforehand and as is customary on campus, talk to each other on first name basis using the German 'you' – 'du'.

- How are you doing today?

Thank you for taking your time to join my study. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Worcester, and I want to ensure you that the study is not funded or assign by your employer or the University of Applied Sciences.

I would like to understand the employee-employer relationship that you have with your employer better and will ask you some questions about your experiences. This will give me the opportunity to analyse in-depth how strategies and policies in companies could be changed to better meet the expectations of dual studies students.

This is phase 2 of my study. I have already gathered some data from video statements of dual studies students that helped me to find themes for todays questions.

General information:

Now I will give you some information about the schedule of the session. My role as a moderator will guide the conversation. Please keep in mind that I am just as interested in negative comments as positive comments. If you want to comment, please raise your hand. During the discussion you don't need to agree with the others, but I would kindly ask you to listen respectfully as others share their views.

Starting the interview, I will ask for your verbal consent and request some general questions about your study programme and demographic data. That way we get to know each other.

In the second phase I will then ask you to tell me more about your experiences within your employment relationship. Your information will be always kept anonymous and confidential. Therefore, I am asking you to turn off your mobile phones or any open chat programmes. It is also not allowed for you to record the session nor share information from this discussion with anyone else.

If you have any questions during the interview, please do not hesitate to ask them. The session will take around 60 minutes.

For documentation purposes I would like to record our session and take some notes.

- Is it ok for you that I will be video recording the interview?
- Will it also be ok for you that I take some notes?

Before I start the video recording:

- Do you have any questions?

Ok, thank you.

1

Guideline

Focus Groups

University of Worcester

Part one – general information:
The researcher will briefly interview participants individually about their demographic data and their studies.
■ Do you want to participate in this discussion?
■ Are you aware of the fact that you can withdraw at any time without giving reasons?
■ When is your year of birth? (Year)
■ How would you like to be addressed? (Gender)
■ What is your study programme and in which semester are you? (Name of study programme and semester)
■ Do you have a permanent or a temporary contract with your practice partner?
Ok, then let's begin.

Part two – discussion:
INTRODUCTION ■ Tell me about your fondest memory with your organisation so far. *(Why was it the fondest?)* ■ Tell me about your worst memory with your organisation so far. *(Why was it the worst?)*
KEY THEMES OBLIGATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS ■ Tell me about your obligations and expectations towards your organisation. *(What makes you have these expectations or obligations?)* *(How and why would you differentiate between them?)* CHANGE AND INFLUENCE ■ Do you think that your expectations have changed or will be changing? *(If yes, why?)* ■ Who or what do you think influences your job expectations? *(Has the influenced changed over time?)* APPRECIATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER From my previous data collection, I found out that appreciation is important. ■ How can an employer provide appreciation? *(What do you think about it?)* From my previous data collection, I found out that the knowledge transfer between theory and practice is of utmost importance. ■ How can an employer provide the knowledge transfer (theory and practice) *(What do you think about it?)* POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR HRM Now imagine that you are the Head of Human Resources Management in your organisation. ■ What kind of actions would you suggest for a successful employee-employer relationship? *(What are things that would attract young employees like you?)* *(How would you maintain this interest in your organisation so that dual studies students would choose you?)*

2

REVIEW AND OUTLOOK

To wrap up this conversation:

- Could you please define your ideal organisation in one sentence?
- Is there anything else that we have not covered that you think is important for the purpose of this discussion?

Short summary and thanks for the time. Information on the evaluation and farewells given by researcher.

Appendix 3.4 Interview schedule video statements

Recording Date	Pseudonym	Study Programm	Birthyear	Gender	Employment at practice partner	Semester	Participant Focus Groups
08.11.2021	Amy	HRM	2001	f	fixed term	5. Sem	x
19.11.2021	Lexie	HRM	2000	f	fixed term	5. Sem	x
18.11.2021	Betty	Social Work	2001	f	fixed term	5. Sem	x
20.01.2022	Rose	HRM	2001	f	fixed term	3. Sem	x
16.12.2021	Emma	Tourism Management	2002	f	fixed term	1. Sem	x
16.11.2021	Hannah	Child Pedagogy	2001	f	fixed term	1. Sem	x
07.12.2021	Mathew	PR and Communication	1999	m	fixed term	1. Sem	
06.12.2021	David	PR and Communication	2001	m	fixed term	1. Sem	x
11.12.2021	Robin	PR and Communication	1999	f	fixed term	1. Sem	
02.03.2022	Rick	Child Pedagogy	1999	m	fixed term	5. Sem	
22.01.2022	Tori	Health Management	2001	f	fixed term	5. Sem	
01.02.2022	Henry	Business Administration	2000	m	fixed term	3. Sem	x
14.01.2022	Joy	Logistic	2000	f	fixed term	3. Sem	x

Appendix 3.5 Interview schedule focus groups

Date	Pseudonym	Study Programm	Birthyear	Gender	Employment at practice partner	Semester	Participant Video Statements
FG 1 02/05/2022	David	PR and Communication	2001	m	fixed term	2. Sem	x
	Joy	Logistics	2000	f	fixed term	4. Sem	x
	Beatrix	HRM	2003	f	fixed term	2. Sem	
	Conny	HRM	2001	f	fixed term	2. Sem	
FG 2 09/05/2022	Emma	Tourism Management	2002	f	fixed term	2. Sem	x
	Lexie	HRM	2000	f	fixed term	6. Sem	x
	Mary	HRM	2002	f	fixed term	2. Sem	
	Diana	HRM	2001	f	fixed term	2. Sem	
FG 3 17/05/2022	Henry	Business Administration	2000	m	fixed term	4. Sem	x
	Hannah	Childhood Pedagogy	2001	f	fixed term	2. Sem	x
	Ann	Tourism Management	2001	f	fixed term	2. Sem	
	Rose	HRM	2001	f	fixed term	4. Sem	x
FG 4 07/06/2022	Betty	Social Work	2001	f	fixed term	6. Sem	x
	Susn	Architecture	2002	f	fixed term	2. Sem	
	Kate	Architecture	2001	f	fixed term	2. Sem	
FG 5 14/06/2022	Amy	HRM	2001	f	fixed term	6. Sem	x
	Leo	HRM	2001	m	fixed term	2. Sem	
	Kai	HRM	1997	m	fixed term	2. Sem	
	Lucas	Architecture	1999	m	fixed term	2. Sem	

Appendix 3.6 Overview of the final code structure and themes of video statements

Appendix 3.7 Overview of the final code structure and themes of focus groups

Appendix 3.8 Overview of the final code structure and themes of cross-analysis

Chapter 5 – Selection of Papers and Posters

Appendix 5.1 British Academy of Management 2022 Conference - Manchester

Developmental Paper 5.1.1: Expectations vs. obligations in the psychological contract - Does it make any difference at all to young professionals? (presented, unpublished)

**Expectations vs. obligations in the psychological contract
Does it matter at all to young professionals?**

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Expectations vs. obligations in the psychological contract
Does it make any difference at all to young professionals?

Abstract This development paper addresses the perception of expectations and obligations related to the psychological contracts (PCs) of young professionals in the German labour market. We provide a brief overview of the ongoing debate on PC terminology of expectations and obligations. Based on video statements which constitute the first part of our sequential qualitative multi-method approach, we illustrate the differences between what young professionals believe their employer must offer them in the employment relationship and what they expect beyond that. The findings show that the study participants assign obligations to all explicitly agreed contract contents (What) and expectations represent the implicit execution within the organisation (How). Furthermore, expectations and obligations change with flexible work arrangements. Our findings demonstrate implications for organisations that are in need to attract, recruit, and retain these newcomers in a highly competitive labour market. This knowledge is essential to understand the role of Human Resources Management (HRM) and organisations in managing the changing PCs of young professionals and thus provide clarity on expectations and obligations.

Keywords psychological contract, qualitative study, job expectations, young professionals, Human Resources Management

DEVELOPMENTAL PAPER

Track 10: Human Resource Management

Word Count: 1.994

Introduction and Background

Ongoing changes in the world of work (OECD, 2020) are shaped above all by a new generation of young professionals (Dwivedula, Singh and Azaran, 2019; Ortiz-Pimentel, Molina and Ronda-Pupo, 2020). Initial studies credit these newcomers with having different job expectations than previous generations (Twenge, 2017; Albert *et al.*, 2019; Scholz and Grotefend, 2019b). Young professionals demand work-life separation (Scholz and Grotefend, 2019a) , seek flexible work practices (Aggarwal *et al.*, 2020), value a cooperative work atmosphere (Grow and Yang, 2018; Steckl, Simshäuser and Niederberger, 2019; Chillakuri, 2020), prefer a variety of work tasks (Brademann and Piorr, 2018; Calmbach *et al.*, 2020) and expect job security (Iorgulescu, 2016; Lukeš, Feldmann and Vegetti, 2019).

Therefore, researchers are increasingly interested in investigating the formation of young employees PCs impacted by the ongoing changes in the world of work (Lub *et al.*, 2016; Kappelides and Jones, 2019). Thus, our study aims to provide information on the often unspoken and unwritten expectations of young professionals about their relationships with their organisations. We designed a qualitative research that allows us to thoroughly understand how PC expectations and obligations towards an organisations are created and developed (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000; Alcover et al., 2017; Griep et al., 2020).

In recent years the PC has been conceptualized as a dynamic construct (Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018) as a response to shifting social and economic realities (Ramirez, Vélez-Zapata & Madero, 2015), but little empirical attention has been directed at how PCs evolve from the beginning. Upon organisational entry, young professionals undergo socialization and are exposed to the reality of inducements they receive not only from agents in the organisation but also from their social networks. (De Vos, Buyens and Schalk, 2003) argue that expectations become lower and more realistic over time. However, due to changing work environments and social networks, newcomers might perceive expectations and what they feel their organization is obliged to offer differently which can cause even higher expectations over time. Moreover, terminology used to describe the construct: expectations, obligations and promises vary among academics. Therefore, we were required to look at this aspect in more detail in the context of our study and present our initial results in this developmental paper.

Literature

According to Hansen (2019), just a small number of efforts have been made to explicate and reevaluate the concept of the PC after the reconceptualisation in the 1990s by Rousseau (1989, 1995). Therefore, the PC has been imprecisely operationalized and theorized, which has been considered as a point of controversy even during recent decades. The view on PC has led researchers to offer their own definitions (Sherman and Morley, 2015). Consequently, new researchers are faced with the dilemma that the terms used to describe PC are interchangeable and have simplified definitions (Alcover *et al.*, 2017).

For that reason, it is worth taking a closer look at the 'currency' in which the PC is traded. The terms commonly used are expectations (McLean Parks and Kidder, 1994; Sutton and Griffin, 2004), obligations (Bal *et al.*, 2010; Restubog and Tang, 2017; Coyle-Shapiro and Neuman, 2004), and promises (Montes and Irving, 2008; Woodrow and Guest, 2017). The last term has not been the focus of our data collection, and therefore, we do not go into it further.

- ***Expectations*** "In simple terms, the psychological contract encompasses the actions employees believe are expected of them and what response they expect in return from the employer." Rousseau and Greller (Rousseau and Greller, 1994, p. 386)
- ***Obligations*** '… obligations, defined as the duties or responsibilities one feels bound to perform.' (Rousseau, Hansen, and Tomprou, 2018, p. 1081)

The presented terms appear to be relevant to a PC, although often adapted interchangeably and, in some cases, used in conjunction with other expressions (Conway and Briner, 2011). Thus, no clear picture has emerged from the literature on the relationship between them. Whereas Robinson (1996) states that the focus on perceived expectations is distinct from obligations, Guest (1998) draws attention to the fact that these two terms are only distinct with blurred demarcation. This is based on the belief that 'where expectations end and obligations begin' may be in the minds of the employees. Furthermore, Arnold (1996) argues that individuals form expectations based on 'what I deserve' or 'what would ideally be the case'. Therefore, expectations are highly relevant to PCs, for example, when they relate to issues as central to the individual as to professional objectives. If promises are made in this context, they raise expectations (Guest, 1998). Thus, expectations become part of PCs as soon as an expectation becomes part of an exchange system in which various contributions and incentives are linked together. The ongoing debate on the terms conceptualizing the PC leads academics to often not commenting precisely on the definition, which leads a conflation of the terms, or using one definition and measuring another (Ma, Blenkinsopp and Armstrong, 2020).

In summary, 'whether the employer is expected to deliver a particular resource because it is the norm to do so or because the employer has promised to do so, there is a perceived obligation for the employer to deliver it' (Rousseau, Hansen, and Tomprou, 2018, p. 1083). As a conclusion from the literature, this research adapted the argument that perceived obligations are considered the core belief constituting PCs, and expectations and promises are the key antecedents. Since expectations are already present at the beginning of the PC formation, this was the focus of our study, which investigates the PCs among young professionals.

Methodology

Based on the preceding discussion, research on the formation of PCs for young employees is a relatively new area of research. In addition, most of the studies concerning the newest generation entering the workplaces are conducted quantitatively and based on data collected from (school) students rather than employees with working experience (Dwivedula, Singh and Azaran, 2019; Ortiz-Pimentel, Molina and Ronda-Pupo, 2020). As there are currently no well-founded data available presenting job expectations, we found a multi-method qualitative investigation to be beneficial. Applying a social constructionism paradigm adds to the understanding of the world by researching the social processes and interactions in which young employees constantly engage with their organisations and at the same time being surrounded by external influences e.g., university and social life. Referring to the purpose of the study, we have therefore chosen the following two main methods that were conducted sequentially to gather a comprehensive understanding of the job expectations of dual studies students: (1) video statements (2) focus groups.

The first method (video statements) was chosen because the voices are intended to be heard and constructed from the perspective of the participants. To gain more holistic insights, the second method (focus groups) provides us with inspirations for new HRM strategies, thereby exploring the phenomena, countering the replication of findings from the first method, and elaborating the emergent theory (Ridder and Hoon, 2009).

During the analysis of our first data collection (video statements), we repeatedly noticed that the use and interpretation of the terms expectations and obligations did not correspond to the definition in the literature. For this reason, we developed the following question for this developmental paper.

How do young professionals demarcate expectations and obligations in the first phase of psychological contracting?

Data were collected from October 2021 to February 2022 from dual studies students at a university of applied sciences in Germany. Dual studies in Germany refer to a program of studies that combines practical work placements with academic education, comparable to apprenticeship in the UK. Thus, it provides academic training as well as practical experiences. Because of this specificity, dual study students are a target group with unique characteristics from which we could assume to gain new insights. Since only 4.2 per cent (121,731) of all students in Germany are enrolled in a dual study programme in 2019 (Bundesrat, 2020), a smaller number of participants was sufficient to obtain a reliable sample. The recruitment resulted in 40 interested participants of which 13 have participated to date (28.02.2022). Eight female and four male dual studies students who were born 1995-2002 contributed. The data set consists of different semesters and different study courses.

For data collection, participants received a guideline by email with the instruction to capture a video of themselves answering four open questions. We invited our participants to comment on what they expect from their employer. Furthermore, what they think their organisation is obliged to offer them as part of the employment relationship. Moreover, we were interested in finding out whether expectations have changed over time and by whom or what this expectation is influenced. Reasoned multiple responses were explicitly encouraged in the given guideline. We attempted a distant stance by not interacting with the participants during data collection to minimize influencing the participants.

Once the data were collected, we proceeded with transcribing, coding and identifying the key themes. Doing so, we employed a six steps thematic approach of Braun and Clarke (2022), which helped us explore how job expectations are created and influenced by internal and external agents. After 13 video statements, the categories were well-developed and had clearly elaborated relationships while no new major themes emerge from the data.

Initial Findings and Discussion

We provide a selection of key themes that we identified around the terminology of the PC construct.

When talking about expectation and obligations towards the organisation, dual studies students use the terms interchangeably and have difficulties in making classifications, which one of the participants explains as follows:

> Lexie: '*That's what I expect. Um (.) I find it a bit difficult to differentiate what he is obliged to do and what I expect from him.*'

One striking observation that emerged from the analysis was that the written employment contract always represents an obligation. Therefore, four participants mentioned that the employment contract is the basis for the minimum obligation.

> Betty: '*they are obliged to offer me what is stipulated in the employment contract.*'

Three participants emphasized the difference between their written contract and the unwritten expectations; they pointed out that the written contract must be fulfilled as a minimum requirement.

Employees enter organisations with normative expectations (Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018) but for young professionals this is not true because preexisting experiences are missing. Hence knowledge on expectations or/and obligations rise with experience, as one participant explains.

> Amy: '*Since the beginning of my employment, I think my expectations towards my employer have generally risen, but that's also because I didn't have any contact with the practice of working life before and now I do.*'

Before entering employment for the first time, participants described that they had drawn on the experiences of family members and friends. Importantly, some regretted that they had not been able to inform themselves sufficiently beforehand.

As PC expectations change over time, young professionals describe the key reason for this as being influenced by both lecturers and fellow students.

> Emma: '*perhaps quite different expectations arise than those that one imagines before entering into the employment relationship. Perhaps also by lecturers.*'
> Mathew: '*I think that is one of the main factors with which one constantly compares oneself and compares one's employer, um, exactly, um.*'

Our collected data are consistent with Woodrow and Guest, (2017), who found that newcomers hold underdeveloped PCs. However, we question whether one can even speak of a contract at the beginning of a young professional's employment life, since it is unilateral. With certainty we found that expectations are highly relevant to young professionals' PC (Guest, 1998) as this is the only foundation from which a PC can emerge. Another significant observation developing from our data was that expectations and obligations in PC are ascribed the same attributes. Additionally, they change very fast during the first time due to the influences of the universities network. Thus, our findings support the dynamic model by Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou (2018). Next, we found that expectations become more realistic over time. On the contrary, the expectations can rise and this contradicts De Vos, Buyens and Schalk, (2003).

As the PC is unique (Kraak and Linde, 2019), these results once again highlight that organisations need to individually find out which expectations are important to young professionals and prioritize their delivery (Woodrow and Guest, 2020). Organisations should attempt to provide young professionals with information about the organisation and their learning objectives. Furthermore, train agents, e.g., supervisors, recruiters, to actively manage expectations. Overall, organisations are asked to offer a mentoring program or install trust persons to help young professionals to negotiate the difficult period after organisations entry.

Conclusion and Recommendation for Future Studies
Conducting the first method allowed us to understand that dual studies students perceive expectations and obligations in the PC interchangeably. In doing so, they hold their organisation responsible for elucidation.

We support Griep, Cooper, and Hansen's (2019) call for more conceptual clarity in the employee-employer relationship. Academics are encouraged to explain key terms and reference them adequately to achieve consensus. Nevertheless, Rousseau, Hansen, and Tomprou (2018) advocate a dynamic model of the PC which requires researchers to be open to changing aspects in the PC. The dynamics can consequently affect the meaning of the terms.

We propose that researchers may focus more on what young professionals generally ask of their organisations (obligations) and how organisations should execute these basic requests (expectations). From our first phase of the data collection key themes have emerged that need to be explored further in phase two of the study to examine the phenomenon in its overall context. In this way, we can develop recommendations for new workplaces in the post-COVID era that promote the appreciation and well-being of young professionals, enabling them to thrive and grow.

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Appendix 5.1 British Academy of Management Conference 2022 - Manchester

Developmental Paper 5.1.2: Research remotely: Video statements as an evolved qualitative method in organisational studies (presented, unpublished)

36th BAM Conference
Reimagining business and management as a force for good.
31st August – 2rd September 2022
Alliance Manchester Business School, University of Manchester

**Research remotely: Video statements as an evolved qualitative method
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**Research remotely: Video statements as an evolved qualitative method
in organisational studies**

Abstract Qualitative research methods such as interviews, observation, and focus groups provide us with detailed insights into organisational phenomena (Aguinis et al., 2009; Lund and Wang, 2021). Due to the digital age new methods have emerged, such as videos, which are particularly suitable for capturing participant interaction and obtaining non-verbal cues (LeBaron et al., 2018). Notwithstanding, the traditional focus on interaction, we argue that video data can be collected with the focus on the opinion of the individual. In this developmental paper, we present a video method that concentrates on gathering data remotely and independent of the researcher. Thereby, statements of the target group on previously defined topics can be flexibly collected and allow the analysis of themes that are of particular importance in organisational research. Overall, the video statement method aims to complement current methods to provide richer insights for business and management.

Keywords video statements, research method, digital age, data collection, qualitative research

DEVELOPMENTAL PAPER

Track 27: Research Methodology

Word Count: 1.944

Introduction and background

Videos have quickly become an ubiquitous part of modern life - from television to online video channels to livestreaming of personal channels on social networks. As technology advances, video methods have become indispensable in qualitative research (LeBaron *et al.*, 2018; Tuma and Schnettler, 2019; Ristau and Helbig, 2021). Nevertheless, video methods still tend to follow the old patterns and notions of data collection and analysis. Thereby, the main advantage of the method is used to obtain visual data and investigate non-verbal signs or behaviours and interactions of persons (Rose, 2016; Nassauer and Legewie, 2021). However, the video method offers many more applications, and we present one possible modification: video statements in this paper.

The research for which this video method was developed is in the field of human resource management exploring psychological contract expectations of young professionals also referred to as Generation Z; born 1995-2010 (Strauss and Howe, 1991; Ng and Parry, 2016; Scholz, 2019; Benítez-Márquez *et al.*, 2022). One of the most frequently mentioned characteristics in the literature (Bencsik, Juhász and Horváth-Csikós, 2016; Lazányi and Bilan, 2017; Dwivedula, Singh and Azaran, 2019) is the tech-savviness of these newcomers to the world of work. Generation Z is said to be more comfortable with the use of technology compared to their parents (Barley, Bechky and Milliken, 2017). Precisely because Generation Z are familiar with videos in their everyday lives, the idea arose to select a corresponding method to study these newcomers on the job market.

Literature

Specifically, video methods have become a preferred tool for researchers in experimental research areas (LeBaron et al., 2018). Whereas psychologists tend to have more interest in visual, respectively non-verbal data (Ekman, 1973), linguists are paying more attention to audio, respectively verbal and paraverbal data (Schiffrin, 1987). In terms of video analyses, the method is predominantly influenced by the sociological theory of communicative genres (Luckmann, 1979; Bergmann, 1985; Knoblauch, 2020).

Since the introduction of the first commercial mobile videophone in 1999 (CNN, 1999), technological advancement has produced a new generation: Generation Z surrounded by sophisticated multimedia and information technology (Wang and Lien, 2012). Every day, these 'true digital natives' (Hurrelmann and Albrecht, 2020) intuitively use their mobile phones to create and share digital video content that feeds into social relationships and organisations (Twenge, 2017; Deloitte, 2020). At the same time, video methods have gained more interest in ethnographic and social field studies (Tuma and Schnettler, 2019) capturing natural interactions (Knoblauch and Vollmer, 2018).

Apart from this, in the world of work, the digital transformation has been strongly driven by the COVID-19 pandemic in the last two years. The disruptive development in the workplace led to a huge increase in video as a working tool for videoconferencing, training, advertising, virtual trade fairs and documentation for internal and external consumers. Although academics are already using new methods to collect data, for example, collecting video data from Instagram for sentiment analysis (Sloan and Quan-Haase, 2017), most researchers, however, fall back on tried and tested methods such as interviews or surveys.

Therefore, it is not surprising that in the field of organisational studies video as a method is also relatively new (LeBaron et al., 2018). When video methods are used in this area of study, it is obviously required that the research questions gather both dynamic data (processes) and data

that can be heard (audio) and observed (visual). These requirements are mainly met when conversations, meetings, interactions, or situations are video recorded in organisational settings. Therefore, videos can be an excellent method to bolster data collection efforts in qualitative research such as case studies (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018; Ridder, 2021), grounded theory (Charmaz, 2017; Bryant and Charmaz, 2019) or ethnographic research (Knoblauch and Schnettler, 2012; Slutskaya, Game and Simpson, 2018; Tobin, 2019; Danielsson and Berge, 2020).

As video technologies continue to evolve, it is time for researchers to complement and extend existing research methods by discussing additional possibilities and manifestations of the video method for recording and analysing human behaviour and organisational activities.

Question and objectives

We therefore propose to look beyond the existing qualitative video methods and explore in this developmental paper the following question:

What are the technical, methodological, and ethical requirements associated with remote data collection of video statements, and what possibilities does their use offer?

The purpose of the developmental paper is to introduce a modified video method to researchers. We show the characteristics of video statements and critically examine the advantages and disadvantages. In this way, researchers may make a better decision for or against this alternative method. Thereby, research ethics and data protection requirements are also explained. In addition to a discussion of the challenges and limitations, we provide implications for the future application of the video statement method.

Application of video statements in research

As with any other qualitative method, researchers need to initially choose their approach how to conduct research starting with the philosophy, research design and then applying methods. Video statements capture multiple participant meanings and interpretations shaped by societal and historical events. Thus, research can explore the complexity of views and lends itself to constructivism, interpretivism or even pragmatist worldviews. Nevertheless, this method is recommended for a research design that includes several methods, e.g. case study (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2018) or grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2017). In this case, the method can serve as a complementary tool to verify other research results or provide first impressions of unknown research areas. Here, research questions are typically formulated to narrow down an area thematically, temporally, or geographically, e.g. What are expectations towards an organisation or how have expectations been influenced from the beginning?
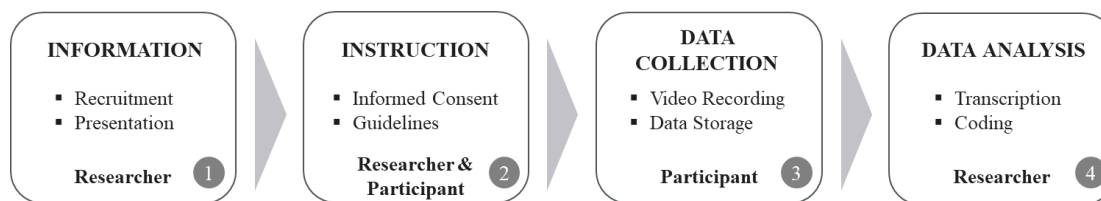
Figure 1: Process for conducting the video statements method (Source: Own Illustration)

Once the components involved in the approach have been decided the process continues with step 1 (see figure 1) the selection of study participants. For this method, we suggest that participants should be experts or privileged witnesses of the topic under study so that they do not need further guidance in their testimonies. Other considerations may be homogeneity or heterogeneity in relation to some properties identified as relevant to the research.

Unlike the usual use of video methods themselves, the approach of using video statements is a remote method. In the phase of contacting the participants, we advocate giving a brief outline of the research to the participants, including the data collection and contact details of the researchers. This supports the researchers' efforts to gain trust and to obtain informed consent (Rose, 2016; Anderson, Fontinha and Robson, 2020). After potential participants show interest in the study, they receive in step 2 a precise guideline via email. As part of this instruction, participants should be asked a series of open-ended questions to incite about their own subjective account and experience on the matter of the study. In step 3 the participants record a video of themselves without the presence of the researcher, thus, participants need to use a suitable recording device such as their own mobile phone. Later, the participants make the video available to the researcher alongside with the consent. Due to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2016) and the UK Data Protection Act (GDPR/UK, 2018), we note that data must be set up for storage in a manner that is compliant with data protection requirements. Data storage should be both secure and accessible only to the individual participant for upload and to researchers.

For data analysis in step 4, it is common in qualitative research to transcribe voice recordings into a written format, which we also recommend here (Moritz and Corsten, 2018). This approach aids the process of coding and further analysis of the data, considering that the aspects of the visual and the temporal are lost in such a strategy (Herb and Gieß-Stüber, 2018). Most qualitative data analysis programs offer the possibility of developing codes and identifying themes from both videos and texts. Although there is no interaction in the video statements, it might be interesting to catch gestures and facial expressions that emphasise what is being said. This expressive content can be analysed using compositional interpretation that focuses strongly on the image itself (Rose, 2016). Content analysis, on the other hand, which looks at the frequency of certain visual elements (Rose, 2016), is hardly appropriate here, as the spotlight is on the individual and the recording of his or her opinion. Furthermore, any microanalysis of the video (Bezemer *et al.*, 2017) would only be valuable if linguistic data (Debski, 2019), such as the Generation Z might enhance the data set.

Technical, methodological, and ethical considerations
In general, the significant differences we can see when comparing video methods to other research methods (e.g., written diaries or voice recordings) are the dynamic-static element of the data as well as its modality capturing textual, audio and/or visual data (LeBaron et al., 2018). Although video statements are closely related to other visual methods, that can capture group meetings to understand interactions within an organisation or digital storytelling (Gubrium, Hill and Flicker, 2014) where individuals produce and share stories that represent their individual experiences, there are a few striking differences. In the following, we introduce the specific characteristics of the video statements and compare them with the common use of visual methods (see Table 1).

Characteristics	Video Statements	Visual Methods
Philosophical Spectrum	Qualitative method easily adaptable to different research philosophies; capturing experiences, views, opinions	Qualitative method easily adaptable to different research philosophies; capture processes, interaction, stories, behaviours, situation, experiences
Application of method	Video recordings of statements by individuals	Video recordings of groups/individuals during interviews, workshops
Number of participants	One per video	One or more
Accessibility of participants	Easy-to-access, hard-to-reach participants	Challenges exist in that data needs to be collected on site
Tool and storage	Researcher: Computer and protected data storage (GDPR) Participants: Camera (mobile phone and/or computer)	Researcher: Computer and protected data storage (GDPR), Camera Participants: None
Convenience of application	Researcher: High convenience (few resources, e.g., time, equipment) Participant: Medium convenience (responsible for video recording)	Researcher: Low convenience (many resources required e.g., time, equipment) Participant: Medium convenience (time-consuming, location)
Flexibility	No appointments, only deadline for data collection	Long-term appointments
Influence by researcher	Low, hence participant information and detailed guideline is required	Medium, the researcher can influence by interview technique
Resources	No travel costs or time	Travel costs, time and equipment
Data	Audio, visual and output can be transcribed No external factors (e.g., smell and situation are not captured)	Verbal and non-verbal data, audio, visual and output can be transcribed External factors can be perceived by researcher

Table 1: Characteristics of video statements vs. video method (Source: Own Illustration)

The video statements are characterised by the preservation of distance between the researcher and the participants. The influence of the researcher is low compared to the common video methods applied for workshops or audio recordings during interviews. Therefore, this method can be rated as reasonably objective for the data collection process because it is not possible for the researcher to ask reconfirming or additional in-depth questions. As participants must record themselves, it is a convenient data collection tool for the researcher, while offering a high degree of time flexibility for both. Another plus point is the resources saved (e.g. travel costs) during data collection. Unfortunately, remote data collection means that external factors such as environment are not perceptible to the researcher in the video statements.

An additional advantage of the video statement is that it can be easily adapted to different research designs. Nevertheless, it may generate brief data and therefore cannot meet the requirements of in-depth methods. Thus, we believe that video statements serve best as a complementary method in a qualitative research project.

As with all research, there are ethical considerations to be made regarding representation, presentation, and ownership (Miller Scarnato, 2019). Prior to data collection, it requires a transparent conversation with research participants about ownership and representation to establish clear agreements. Furthermore, a decision must be made whether sharing video narratives with anyone else is necessary, since the video statements create images that can easily identify individuals (Rose, 2016). Providing the videos will protect the privacy of the participants, then video statements can be expected to solicit an independent account from the participants.

The prerequisite to obtain a digital video and its data analysis is compliance with data protection rights (GDPR, 2016, 2018). If the data can be backed up and encrypted into a cloud, the advantage is that the data can be uploaded and viewed at a desired time. According to LeBaron et al., 2018 this procedure achieves more flexibility. Throughout the duration of the research project the data can be retrieved at any time and therefore also reinterpreted (Wang and Lien, 2012).

Originality and contribution

As the use of technology and its influence on our daily lives continues to increase, practitioner-orientated researchers are faced with the task of conducting qualitative research that incorporates video methods to provide a more diverse and in-depth analysis of organisational phenomena. In this context, video statements stand out as a particularly flexible and easy method for the researcher to collect data remotely.

Future plan for application of video statements

At this point, it must be mentioned that the field of different video methods is in a very dynamic development, which goes hand in hand with a continuous further advancement (Miller Scarnato, 2019). There are other varied possibilities for video methods such as including group videos aiming to capture lively discussions on a particular topic or 'go-along' video recording capturing memories and places with strong meanings for individuals. However, all these evolving methods require their own ethical, methodological, and technical considerations. Our modified video method is just an example of the fact that the spectrum of qualitative research methods is becoming ever broader. At the BAM conference we would like to present our application of the video method. We believe that video statements serve best as a complementary method in a qualitative multi-method research project. It remains to be seen in what other contexts video statements can be used.

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Appendix 5.1 British Academy of Management 2022 Conference - Manchester

Poster 5.1.3: Young Professionals' Psychological Contract Expectations (presented, unpublished)

Appendix 5.2 British Academy of Management Conference 2021 - Online

Developmental Paper 5.2.1: Understanding Generation Z's Psychological Contract Expectations: How work experience leads to adjusted job expectations (presented, unpublished)

35th Conference and 2nd BAM Conference in the Cloud
Recovering from Covid
31st August – 3rd September 2021
Lancaster University, Management School, United Kingdom

A new way of using video data in the digital era

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**Understanding Generation Z's Psychological Contract Expectations:
How work experience leads to adjusted job expectations.**

Summary: By exploring the creation of the psychological contract (PC), this developmental paper offers a new perspective by incorporating the impact of the first work experiences of the youngest generation of employees into the study of the PC.

Upfront, we propose a two-phase based creation framework of the PC (pre-employment and employment) in which the effects of key social, individual, and organisational elements provide context. To better understand the phenomenon, we address the current research findings on the latest generation: Generation Z (born 1995 – 2010) entering the labour market in Germany. We provide a short overview of key elements that have shaped preliminary PC expectations until today. Next, we propose a qualitative research approach to explore how organisational influences contribute to adjustment of job expectations for Generation Z.

Keywords: job expectations, psychological contract creation, generation z, case study

DEVELOPMENTAL PAPER

Track 10: Human Resources Management

Word Count: 1.968

Introduction and Background:

A new generation is entering the workplaces: Generation Z, born between 1995-2010 (Albert *et al.*, 2019; Scholz, 2019). In Germany, this young generation of workers will fill a gap created because about half of the baby boomer generation (born between 1942 and 1962) will retire within the next five years, leading to a shortage of personnel in various occupational fields (Kring and Hurrelmann, 2019; Calmbach *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, German companies are currently experiencing a changing world of work: Work 4.0. This represents high competition in the labour market, an increase in flexible working models, shorter innovation cycles and the use of digital transformation in organisations (Bosse and Zink, 2019). At the same time, the shift in generational values predict an impact on employer-employee relationships. Moreover, the recent major event, the COVID-19 pandemic, has accelerated these developments.

Early research on Generation Z shows key-themes in terms of high salary expectations, work-life balance and job security (Albert *et al.*, 2019; Scholz, 2019; Calmbach *et al.*, 2020). However, most of the studies are conducted quantitatively and based on data collected from students rather than Generation Z with employment experience. In addition, the presentation of generational differences within the literature struggles with methodological inaccuracy and a lack of including societal influences e.g. culture (Rudolph *et al.*, 2020; Parry and Urwin, 2021). Hence, a gap is identified to explore in-depth newcomers job expectations during their first experiences with the world of work (Dwivedula, Singh and Azaran, 2019) and through the employment of qualitative research, aiding exploring and profound understanding.

To investigate this further, the concept of the PC provides a useful tool to analyse employees' often unspoken expectations of their working relationship with their organisation (Lub *et al.*, 2016; Kappelides and Jones, 2019). Extending early theorizing of mutual expectations between the employer and the employee (Argyris, 1960; Levinson, 1965; Kotter, 1973), Rousseau (1989) reconceptualized the PC as 'individual beliefs, shaped by the organizations, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization' (Rousseau, 1995, p. 9). Since 1990 there has been a marked upward trend in PC theory, reflecting contract types, content, fulfilment, the response to breach or violation, and recently the dynamics (Kraak and Linde, 2019). Furthermore, the conceptualization of the PC taking a generational perspective has just started to gain the attention of scholars ten years ago (Hess and Jepsen, 2009; Lub *et al.*, 2016). Despite the general understanding of generation and PC by itself, the literature is largely silent on how the preliminary PC expectations change once employees find themselves working in an organisation.

Consequently, our study will explore how the employer-employee relationships and organisational practices of the youngest generation entering the labour market can provide useful cases, examples, and insights that can be applied to human resource management. This paper aims to contribute to the BAM 2021 conference call and track 10 within Human Resource Management by focusing on research endeavour in the context of managing employment relationships.

Literature:
Building on generational theory of Mannheim (1928), Kupperschmidt (2000) suggests that the shared values of a generational cohort influence an employee's feeling towards the organisation. This view provides an explanation of what employees' desire from work and how they want to satisfy those needs. Nevertheless, limited evidence is available for generational difference in perceived PC obligations (Lyons *et al.*, 2012). Referring to Ingelhart's (1997) theory of intergenerational values change, societal events have a role in the development of an individuals' identity. In the context of the PC, Lub et al. (2014) confirm the emergence of different generational cohorts due to the proximity to significant social events and trends during a formative phase of life. Furthermore, the initial socialization period in an organisation shape the employees' PC (Thomas and Anderson, 1998; Coyle-Shapiro and Neuman, 2004): Newcomers modify their perception of the PC (Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau, 1994; Thomas and Anderson, 1998). For this reason, exploring the underlying process of influences on the sensitive formative phase of young employees is an interesting study area. To illustrate the transition of individuals into working life, we propose a two-phase based creation framework of the PC (pre-employment and employment).
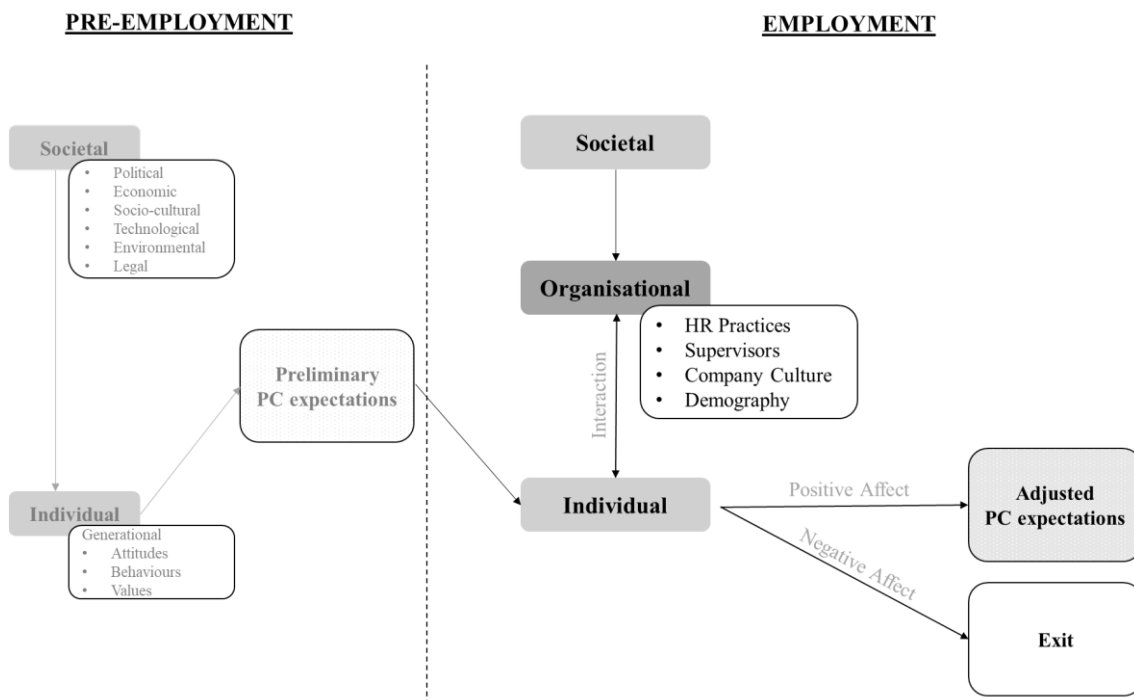
A two-phase based framework for understanding the initial PC creation process
Own illustration

We suggest that societal and individual elements provide the context for preliminary PC expectations. Once employees gain their first work experience, the organisational elements can lead to adjusted job expectations. In this way, we bring the creation process to the forefront of the PC theory, leading to a better understanding of the fundamental building blocks of PCs.

To explore this framework further, we first present a descriptive overview of societal and individual elements that influence Generation Z in Germany. Next, an outlook is given, indicating why job expectations may change after entering the labour market.

Societal Elements

From a *political* viewpoint, the representative-democratic system in Germany that has been established for decades is tottering. Trade politics, immigration, climate-change and the recently flattering stable economy has led to great uncertainty (Scholz and Grotefend, 2019). This is one explanation for the Generation Z's high need for security, equated with a longing for relational PCs. Which is surprising since they have inherited a strong *economy* with an unemployment rate close to zero and do not see themselves as having an obligation of loyalty to the employer (Albert *et al.*, 2019). Thus, they experience outstanding career prospects and less performance pressure in comparison to the former Generation Y (Mangelsdorf, 2017; Scholz, 2017). Referring to the German immigration policy, Generation Z grows up with peers from different *cultures*, building up a tolerance for diversity (Kring and Hurrelmann, 2019). At the same time, there is a return to the importance of family aspects. Generation Z parents, most of whom belong to Generation X, are increasingly taking on a protective role by influencing their children's decision-making (Scholz, 2014). One may speculate whether the parental influence on socialization at work changes at all when new actors, e.g., supervisors, co-workers or works council, appear. Compared to their parents, Generation Z are more familiar at using *technology*. These 'true digital natives' use the devices intuitively for building relationships online (Albert *et al.*, 2019) but little is known of how Generation Z applies technology to socialize in the workplace. Next, e*nvironmental* issues are of existential importance (Deloitte, 2020b). The also called Generation Greta (Hurrelmann and Albrecht, 2020) request the change from everybody rather than only changing their habits, as it has been for previous generations (Albert *et al.*, 2019). From a *legal* perspective, the consideration of the influence of the collective labour law in Germany is of importance. In recent years, the proportion of younger people among trade union members has risen noticeably again (Scholz, 2014).

Individual elements

Influenced by societal elements Generation Z in Germany are often described as tech-savvy (Bencsik, Juhász and Horváth-Csikós, 2016; Maas, 2019; Schnetzer and Hurrelmann, 2021), entrepreneurial and outcome orientated (Calmbach *et al.*, 2020; Deloitte, 2020a), longing for a work-life separation (Scholz, 2014), expect structure and job stability (Iorgulescu, 2016; Albert *et al.*, 2019; Scholz and Grotefend, 2019), seeking for flexible careers (Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell, 2019), preferring autonomy at work (Singh Ghura, 2017) and being economically aware (Hurrelmann and Albrecht, 2020).

To sum up, newcomers on the job market face an uncertain economic future, and they are coming under pressure to fill the gaps in the labour market. Moreover, the findings are based on expectations before the employment phase. Little do we know about what happens after they join the organisation. The influence of new actors on socialization in the workplace and the adaption of job expectations are questions that remain unanswered. All in all, the presented initial findings on Generation Z are limited in their scope and methodology and consequently may tend to create stereotypes (Arnett, Trzesniewski and Donnellan, 2013; Parry and Urwin, 2017).

Research Aims and Questions:
We therefore propose to look beyond the existing quantitative data on Generation Z's job expectations and create a more in-depth understanding of the creation of PCs. Therefore, the first research question is - ***How Generation Z engages with organisations and builds relationships during their first work experience?*** In this way, insight into newcomers' PC expectations will be discerned. Even though there are clear indicators and descriptions in the literature of the PC formation process, it is less clear what factors influence the PC during first work experience. Thus, the study will look in more depth at - ***How are job expectations of newcomers shaped during the initial stage of employment?*** In this way, an overall understanding of the role of organisations in the initial formation of the PCs will be provided. Finally, from a practitioner point of view we will explore organisational practices, particularly Human Resources tools, that attract young employees during this employment stage by asking - ***How organisations meet the job expectations of Generation Z leading to PC fulfilment?*** This third question aims to recommend which organisational practices support the creation of a successful employer-employee relationship.

Methodology
The qualitative research with a social constructionism stance utilizes a case study design to delve deeper into how and why job expectations develop and may change as newcomers enter organisations (Stake, 2005; Burr, 2015). The research is narrowed down to German students (born 1995-2010) who complete a dual course of study and who have at least one year of employment experience at their practice partner. The different fields of study (e.g. social work, tourism, business administration, business IT) allow investigating multiple cases and will be conducted in two steps. First, students are asked to state their job expectations via a short video. The data is analysed to identify key themes and, in conjunction with the preliminary job expectations found in the literature review, to determine focus areas that need to be explored further to examine the phenomenon in its overall context. Second, in-depth interviews will be conducted to explore how job expectations are shaped by organisational, societal, and university influences. During the data collection, the researcher takes on an external role to ensure objective detachment (Creswell and Poth, 2018). By using multiple sources, inductive findings that are based on experiences and interpretations of the employees are generated. This combination adds rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to the contemporary real-life phenomena: creation of newcomers' PC expectations which is very complex and poorly understood (Sherman and Morley, 2015; van der Schaft et al., 2020). The case study strategy adds to the theory construction (Yin, 2018) on managing the PC during the initial creation phase. Unknown facts and relevant questions for further research in the field of Human Resources Management are to be expected (Anderson, Fontinha and Robson, 2020).

Originality and Contribution
The proposed research is of value to Human Resources Management to understand more comprehensively the job expectations of Generation Z. The contribution is related to providing insight into the creation of job expectations within the context of PC theory. This knowledge can support the process of (re-)negotiation of the PC from day one. Hence, the match between what employees and employers both expect from each other can be further developed, which leads to contract fulfilment. This understanding allows the PC to evolve from organisational entry onwards. For Human Resources professionals, the opportunity arises to revisit and readjust their business practices, so workplace environments are created that suit Generation Z.

Future plan for paper development

In the next step, the literature review on PC theory from the perspective of generational theory will be supplemented by the latest study results on Generation Z. Concurrently, the design of the study will be finalized.

An overview of the methodological approach will be presented at the BAM 2021, followed by an outlook on data collection.

This study's findings will complement PC theory and provide a theoretical understanding on the formation of job expectations through initial work experiences. The employing strategies derived from the study results may ultimately improve the employee-employer relationship.

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Appendix 5.2 British Academy of Management Conference 2021 - Online

Award 5.2.2: Developmental Paper Award - Highly Commended - HRM SIG