

## Motivating Employees in the Knowledge Economy to Enhance Performance

Ioana MARIN<sup>1</sup>, Radu MARIN<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest/Romania  
[ioanamun@gmail.com](mailto:ioanamun@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest/Romania  
[radu.marin@digitalaccounting.ro](mailto:radu.marin@digitalaccounting.ro) (corresponding author)

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**Abstract:** The knowledge economy is characterized by globalization and the use of a workforce with a high level of knowledge and qualifications, necessary to be able to cope with the increasingly rapid technological changes and to be able to innovate permanently. This type of economy requires organizations to become more and more performant. Also, human capital, recognized as the most valuable resource of organizations, must be motivated to provide organizations with the knowledge and skills they have. It is important for the organization's management to determine the motivational factors for the organization's employees, a mission that can prove to be difficult, given that they differ from one employee to another and have a permanent evolution over time. The paper aims to demonstrate, based on a literature review and a bibliometric analysis, the fact that there is a strong direct relationship between employee motivation and performance. Bibliometric analysis was made using articles indexed in Scopus, with employee motivation as keyword. The existence of strong links between employee motivation and employee performance, organizational performance, performance, task performance was revealed. It is also worth mentioning that strong links have been identified between the analysed concept (employee motivation) and some job-related attitudes (job satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational commitment), that are important for the performance of organizations.

**Keywords:** motivation, employee motivation, performance, job performance, knowledge economy

### Introduction

Ovcharova, S.K., & Krachunov, H.A. (2007) shows that the knowledge economy is characterized by certain peculiarities: globalization, a high level of digitalization, knowledge becoming new economic resources, technical knowledge acquires a central role, the greatest attention is paid to science and education, and the economy is based on science. In the same direction, Powell and Snellman (2004, p. 201) define knowledge economy as "production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technological and scientific advance as well as equally rapid obsolescence." Starting from this definition, the authors show that the knowledge economy is based mainly on intellectual capacities and less on physical ones and natural resources. The importance of human capital is highlighted also by Peters and Humes (2011), which mentions that special attention is paid to people who know how to learn and carry out a continuous learning process in order to develop the necessary skills and to acquire new qualifications since obtaining wealth and competitive advantage is supported by the ability to innovate.

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Since knowledge workers feel the need for important work, which can lead them to find creative solutions, a very important motivational mechanism is based on work redesign, the process having the role of molding tasks to the motivational needs of employees (Petronio & Colacino, 2008). Todericiu, Serban and Dumitrascu (2013) consider that in today's economy, it is necessary to develop a better structured, individualized motivational strategy for each employee. The authors show that there is no model on motivation that can be applied to all employees and organizations, which is why it is necessary to take into account the skills, motivation, and expectations of each individual within the organization.

## **Literature review**

### ***Defining motivation***

The Cambridge Dictionary defines motivation as "enthusiasm for doing something", "the need or reason for doing something", "willingness to do something, or something that causes such willingness", or "enthusiasm for doing something", or "the need or reason for doing something".

Shanks (2007), considers that motivation is based on the existence of needs. The goal of satisfying these needs and obtaining the desired rewards will lead to the adoption of a certain behavior. The author considers that intrinsic motivation is the one that is identified with the person's inner satisfaction with the results obtained, while the rewards received from the organization lead to the achievement of extrinsic motivation. The way people act can be explained by motivation because their behavior is determined by the desire to achieve the endowed goal (Certo & Certo, 2016). Motivation is considered to be that psychological process that determines the direction, as well as the intensity and duration of the actions that a person is willing to take in order to achieve a certain goal (Blackwell, 1998; Locke & Latham, 2004; Robbins & Timothy, 2017).

Rosak-Szyrocka (2015) considers that, for correct implementation of motivation, in order to develop the organization, it is necessary to identify the motivators, considering the fact that people can be motivated differently and taking into account the fact that each person feels their own needs and desires. The author finds, for example, that according to stereotypes of gender motivators, men are motivated by income, autonomy in the workplace, promotion, recognition, success, and training, while the main motivators for women are: cooperation, working conditions, a good living area and additional benefits. In the opinion of Adair (2006) motivators could be also negative ones, such as fear, along with positive ones, such as money, promotion, and recognition.

Armstrong (2010, p. 20) shows that: "Motivation theory explains how motivation works and the factors that determine its strength. It deals with how money and other types of rewards affect the motivation to work and levels of performance, what creates job satisfaction, and the link between job satisfaction and performance."

Nawaz, Jan, Saif and Khan (2012) consider that motivation theories could be classified either by their nature or by their chronological theories. In an attempt to present the differences between the two main categories of motivation theories. Davis (2020, p.4-5) considers content theories " the various needs, motives, and rewards attempting to be satisfied". The process theories of motivation " focus on the cognitive and behavioral processes that drive motivation" and they examine " how different motivational forces (both extrinsic and intrinsic) interact in ways that motivate individuals" (Davis, 2020, pp.4-5).

***The importance of employee motivation for the performance and development of organizations***

Yudhvir and Sunita (2012) considered motivation to be the catalyst that determines employees' desire to work without pressure. The authors stated that motivating an employee means giving him or her a reason to perform certain tasks, finding that motivation can be used by effective managers to determine ordinary employees to achieve great results. Without motivation, all the skills and experience of an individual are useless, because this is a very important element for obtaining the expected final results from carrying out the activities (Yudhvir & Sunita, 2012; Marin & Marin, 2024). In order to demonstrate the influence of motivation on the competitiveness of the organization, Martín Cruz, Martín Pérez and Trevilla Cantero (2009) determined the importance of intrinsic motivation for the transfer of knowledge within an organization, an important element for increasing the competitiveness of any organization. The study demonstrated that extrinsic motivation is not necessarily to encourage the transfer of information. The authors' explanation, also based on previously published studies, is that employees are either intrinsically motivated to share the knowledge they have gained, or they expect reciprocity from colleagues, in the hope that they will provide them with useful knowledge. It should be mentioned that generally employees are afraid to share their knowledge, fearing that they will be no longer need or that they will lose their hierarchical position (Bratianu, 2022).

In the desire to link motivation to the areas with practical application that it influences, Steers, Mowday and Shapiro (2004, p. 379) considered that "Managers see motivation as an integral part of the performance equation at all levels, while organizational researchers see it as a fundamental building block in the development of useful theories of effective management practice". The same idea can be found in Glišović, Jerotijević and Jerotijević (2019, p. 121), which presents motivation as "process in a person who moves it towards a goal" and considers employee motivation to be one of the most important functions of management. Motivation is based on emotional knowledge (Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2023) and is a driving force for sustainable business development in a long-term perspective (Bratianu & Murakawa, 2004).

Lee and Raschke (2016), based on empirical results organization, consider that better performance for the organization can be provided by motivated employees, and Yeo and Neal (2004), based on previous studies, consider that motivation determines job performance alongside other three factors: cognitive ability, conscientiousness, and goal orientation. Similar factors were also identified by Campbell and Wiernik (2015) who consider that performance in the workplace is determined by individual traits (cognitive skills, personality, physical characteristics and abilities, stable motivational dispositions), state variables (motivational states that can be modified, knowledge and skills, attitudes) and organizational characteristics (management system, reward system), as well as the interactions that are established between these determinants. The authors consider that a clear distinction should be made between performance, its determinants, and its results and that it should not be confounded with indicators, such as productivity and efficiency. In the same vein, Motowidlo, Borman and Schmit (1997, p. 73-74), who define workplace performance as "behavioral, episodic, evaluative, and multidimensional," consider that a distinction must be made between behavior (what people do at work), performance (behavior with a positive or negative evaluative component), and results (the way in which an employee's performance helps the organization to meet or to hinder the achievement of those goals). For this reason, Armstrong (2009) notes that it is necessary to define performance, since without it there is no possibility of measuring and managing it.

A definition of job performance is given by Colquit, Lepine and Wesson (2019, p. 31) who define it as " the value of the set of employee behaviors that contribute, either positively or negatively, to organizational goal accomplishment ". Thus, in order to be able to better define the notion of job performance, Colquit, Lepine and Wesson (2019) divide relevant behaviors that determine it into three broad categories: task performance (those behaviors directly involved in the production of goods and services within the organization), citizenship behavior (voluntary activities of employees, that serve the organization by contributing to the improvement of the framework for carrying out work), and counterproductive behavior ( the behavior of employees that intentionally prevents the organization from achieving its objectives) (Colquit, Lepine & Wesson, 2019, p. 31-39). From a behavioral point of view, Sonnentag and Frese (2002) consider that only those behaviors that are significant for the achievement of the organization's objectives and those that can be measured should be considered to define performance. They look at the notion of performance from two aspects: in the form of an action, determined by the behavior at work, as well as in the form of the result obtained from carrying out this action.

From a motivational point of view, Kanfer (1992) considers that taking into account only the effects on performance produced by behavioral changes, as a result of motivational factors, is not enough, because performance could also be influenced by a series of individual differentiating factors (competences) and environmental factors (certain constraints). This idea is also supported by Pinder (2008) who considers it an error to consider a low performance as being based exclusively on low motivation since there are a number of other factors, including competencies, that interact with motivation to produce performance. The author notes that there are cases in which, although motivation has a high level, performance cannot be achieved due to the lack of necessary skills and he argues that a low level of one of these factors can be compensated by a higher level of the other (Pinder, 2008).

In fact, for an organization to perform, it is necessary for employees to be motivated and this motivation can only be achieved by incorporating the interests of employees into the organization's objectives (Adegoriola, 2018). The hypothesis that work performance presupposes both the existence of motivation and abilities, as well as the fact that employee motivation is defined both by a set of forces specific to the employee and by one that comes from outside the employee (objectives, incentives) is also presented by Colquit, Lepine and Wesson (2019). The authors consider that self-efficacy and difficult goals are the motivational force with the strongest effect on performance, explaining that people who are confident in their own strengths tend to work better and that more difficult goals cause people to perform better (Colquit, Lepine & Wesson, 2019). In the same vein, Locke, and Latham (2002) consider that setting difficult goals has the role of increasing the level of effort and the performance obtained. The explanation lies in the fact that objectives influence performance through four mechanisms. Through the directive function, objectives have the role of identifying the activities that are important for achieving them and directing the effort from the unimportant activities to those that are important for the achievement of the objectives. More difficult goals, through their energizing function, have the role of stimulating the realization of greater efforts and in the same time cause employees to persist for a longer period of time in their fulfilment or to spend the same time, but to intensify their effort. Objectives have the role of indirectly influencing the activity by valuing certain specific knowledge for the accomplishment of the task and lead to satisfaction and discoveries, because all actions are practically a result of knowledge and motivation.

Work motivation is defined by Pinder (2008, p. 11) as " a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual's being, to initiate work-related

behavior, and to determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration". Regarding behavior at work, the author states that it is related to events at work, career, and people's management (punctuality, attitude towards managers' requests, initiatives on improving the ways of performing work). The force component can be interpreted in terms of the fact that the level of motivation can be either weak or strong, and it can vary from individual to individual, or even to the same individual, at different times in time. The author considers the notion of effort as a consequence and the primary indicator of motivation. The term intensity was also analyzed by Brehm and Self (1989), the authors considering that the intensity of motivation represents the magnitude at a given moment of motivational arousal, the magnitude of motivational arousal being defined as the effort made over time by a person to satisfy a certain motive. The authors consider the magnitude of motivation to be expressed by means of a multiplicative function that has as variables the needs, the value of the potential outcomes, and the perceived probability in relation to obtaining the desired effect, in the case of an appropriate behavior. On the other hand, it is considered that motivational arousal does not have the role of satisfying needs or obtaining/avoiding potential results, but only of producing useful behavior (Brehm & Self, 1989). The notion of duration (persistence), being considered as a very important element of motivation, assumes that the achievement of objectives can be a possible result of workplace behavior, but not a necessary one (Pinder, 2008, p. 13). The direction of motivation complements its intensity and duration and is based on elements such as vision, objectives, mission and purpose (Pinder, 2008, p. 12). The authors consider job performance as "the accomplishment of work-related goals, regardless of the means of their accomplishment" (Pinder, 2008, p. 17). This definition is based on the study conducted among American workers by Hall, J. (2014, p. 40), which reveals that a very large part of American workers want recognition of their motivation to perform quality work, want a focus on important activities and finding ways to achieve goals, want to support organizational tasks through their potential, They need the freedom to do their work more importantly and plan their work, as well as the challenges offered by high standards, which would cause them to feel emotionally attached to their work. They believe, on the other hand, that managers force them to direct a large part of their time and efforts towards unimportant activities that are not related to the organization's objectives or their expertise, which leads to a decrease in the performance of their work.

The approach to this problem was also made by Campbell and Wiernik (2015, p. 48-49) who define job performance as "things that people actually do, actions they take, that contribute to the organization's goals". The definition states that important actions must be identified for achieving objectives, and for these, the level of competence of employees must be measured.

Some authors consider that the main motivators perceived by employees are of extrinsic origin, namely salary and benefits, safety and security, labor policies, working conditions and labour relations (Ngwenya, Wellington & Clinton, 2018, p. 1108). Cerasoli, C.P., Nicklin, J.M., & Ford M.T., 2014, p.1) studied the influence of the two aspects, namely intrinsic motivation and extrinsic incentives on performance. Starting from the premise that intrinsic motivation is generated only by personal well-being, without requiring other incentives, while extrinsic motivation is generated by the perspective of some incentives, the authors found that intrinsic motivation maintained its importance in terms of performance even if incentives existed, with the mention that if the incentives were indirectly related to performance, intrinsic motivation became more important, while if incentives were directly connected to performance, intrinsic motivation reduced in importance. The authors' conclusion is that the two aspects of motivation are predictors of performance, intrinsic motivation being a predictor of performance from a qualitative point of view, while extrinsic stimuli are better predictors of performance from a quantitative point of view. In the desire to identify which are the most important

motivators for performance, Uzonna (2013, p. 210) found that these are: recognition, authority, advancement, autonomy, job security, responsibility, job title and challenging work. The research carried out by Adegoriola (2018, p. 627) partially confirms the conclusions of the previous study, namely the existence of a strong relationship between training and development, promotion, and performance, but also identifies a strong relationship between financial incentives and performance. In fact, the model was based on the assumption that performance is determined by indicators of employee dedication, namely training and development, financial incentives, and promotion (Adegoriola, 2018, p. 626). Similar results in relation to the increase in performance as a result of the training had also been obtained by Hafeez and Akbar (2015, p. 61). In fact, the authors identify the following mechanism: training leads to increased professional and moral satisfaction, and employees feel more in control of their work, which leads to increased motivation. The study performed by Pangarso et al. (2014) also identified a very strong relationship between training and performance increase. A strong positive relationship between material incentives and performance has also been identified by Pangarso, Putri, Wulansari, and Setiawati (2015).

## **Methodology**

The research had the following objectives:

O1 – Conducting a literature review regarding the concepts of motivation and performance;

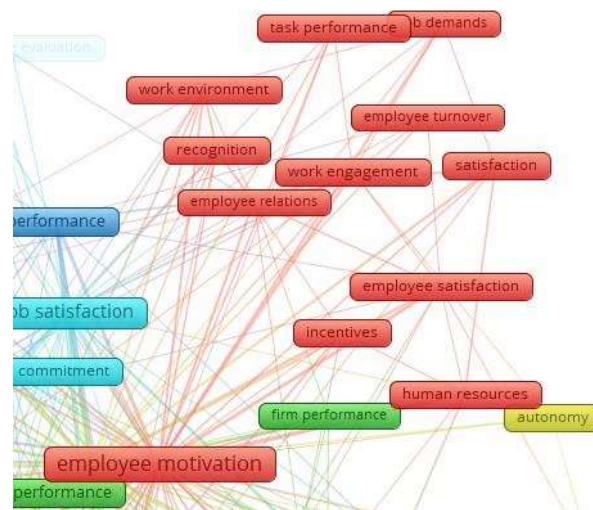
O2 – Analysing the relationships between motivation, employee motivation, and performance highlighted in the specialized literature.

The bibliometric analysis was conducted on papers indexed in Web of Science, the most valuable database worldwide, using VOSviewer 1.6.20.0. To identify the works for the bibliometric analysis, we used “employee motivation” as keyword and “All fields”. The export of the documents was made using as record options “Full Record”. The export was made on April 19, 2024. Web of Science returned 1.194 papers, but we decided to use only the articles indexed in this database (928).

## **Results and discussions**

We performed the bibliometric analysis, using VOSviewer, using “Co-occurrence” as “Type of analysis” and “Author keywords” as “Unit of analysis” which returns nine clusters. After using the option “Thesaurus”, we obtained, from a total number of 2.452 keywords a number of 84 keywords which met the threshold of minimum number of 5 occurrences of a keyword. We eliminated the keywords without interest for our research, and we obtained a number of 64 keywords.

We obtained the following network visualization for the keyword employee motivation (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Employee motivation – Network visualization using VOSviewer**  
(Authors' own research)

We can notice that task performance could be found in the same cluster as employee motivation, this fact demonstrating the semantic connection between the two concepts. In the density visualization, we can find employee motivation at a short distance from performance-related topics (employee performance, firm performance, performance, and organization), the strongest relationship being the one with employee motivation. In the same situation, there are also some job-related attitudes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, employee engagement), which are very important for the performance of an organization (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Employee motivation – Density visualization using VOSviewer**  
(Authors' own research)



The aforementioned results can also be viewed in the table that presents the concepts that have the strongest link strengths with employee motivation (Table 1).

**Table 1. Link strengths between employee motivation and related concepts**

employee motivation	Link strengths
job satisfaction	17
human resources management	12
employee engagement	11
employee performance	9
employee retention	9
motivation	9
performance	8
employee satisfaction	7
corporate social responsibility	7
human resources	6

Source: Authors' own research

It can be seen that bibliometric analysis has highlighted even stronger link strengths between motivation and performance (Table 2).

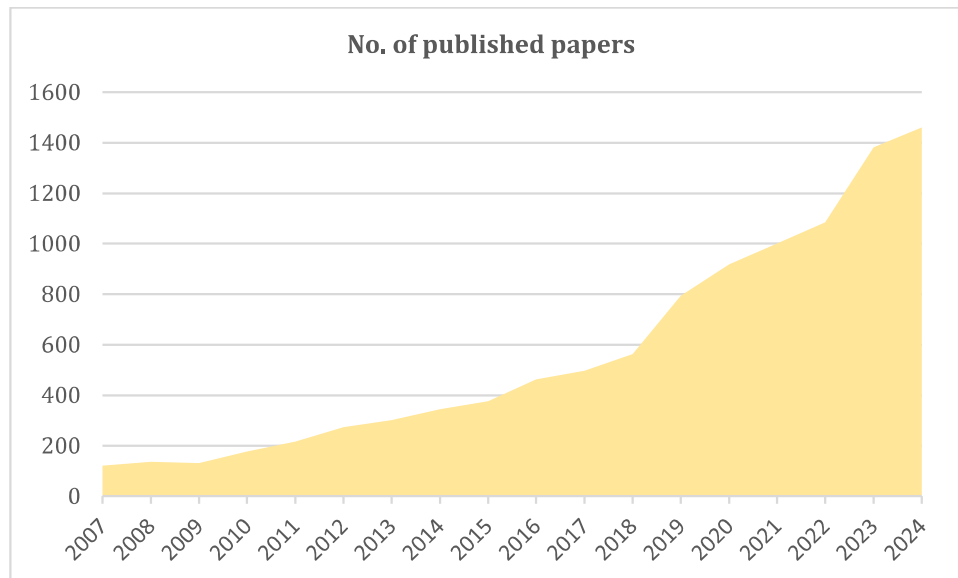
**Table 2. Link strengths between motivation and related concepts**

motivation	Link strengths
job satisfaction	16
performance	14
employees	13
human resources management	10
employee motivation	9
employee performance	8
leadership	7
incentives	6
motivation factors	5
retention	5

Source: Authors' own research

This result can be explained by the fact that the number of papers on the topic of employee motivation has become significant only in the last period of time (analysis made with the articles indexed in Scopus) (Figure 3).





**Figure 3. Employee motivation – Evolution of published papers**  
(Authors' own research)

## Conclusions

Although the literature on motivation is very rich, there are still many aspects that need to be further investigated, especially considering the fact that motivation is found as a topic in various fields: psychology, social sciences (organizational behavior) and management (human resources management). Understanding the mechanisms that lead to the emergence of motivation is very important, as motivation plays an important role in influencing performance within organizations. Performance has three determinants: the opportunity to execute, the ability to execute and the desire to execute, respectively motivation. Therefore, in order to achieve high performance, it is necessary that each of these factors has as high values as possible. Basically, the motivational mechanism within an organization works in the following way: the attempt to satisfy needs or expectations determines the appearance of an action or behavior in an attempt to achieve the desired results, and the level of achievement of the objectives is subsequently compared with the needs that generated the action.

The paper highlighted the existence of some strong links between motivation and employee motivation and topics related to performance: task performance, employee performance, organizational performance si performance. We also consider it important that strong links have been identified between motivation and employee motivation and job-related attitudes) with an essential role in terms of the organization's performance level (job satisfaction, employee engagement, organizational commitment. We believe that this article, by achieving the proposed objectives, contributes to the clarification of some aspects regarding the motivation, employee motivation and performance.

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