Empowerment and Engagement: The Role of Autonomy and Feedback in Fostering Employee Motivation

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Abstract: This article examines the interplay between non-financial factors and employee motivation within contemporary workplaces. Guided by a primary research question exploring how intrinsic motivational elements impact employee enthusiasm and productivity, the study leverages a qualitative research approach, analyzing responses from 53 participants through thematic analysis. The core hypothesis postulated that employees who are integrally involved in decision-making, receive constructive feedback, and enjoy autonomy in task management exhibit higher motivation levels. The empirical evidence confirms this hypothesis, echoing the theoretical perspectives of renowned scholars like Daniel Pink and aligning with Self-Determination Theory's emphasis on autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The research demonstrates that the motivational power of autonomy and meaningful feedback far surpasses that of extrinsic rewards, reshaping managerial approaches and highlighting the necessity for cultivating a supportive and empowering workplace culture. By integrating these intrinsic motivators, organizations can elevate employee engagement and overall workplace satisfaction.

Keywords: Intrinsic Motivation, Employee Autonomy, Constructive Feedback, Decision-Making Involvement, Workplace Culture

JEL Classification: D23, J24, M12, M54

Introduction

The study of employee motivation within organizational behavior encompasses an increasingly complex landscape, marked by the evolution of workplace dynamics and the multifaceted nature of workforce expectations. This research paper embarks on a broad exploration of employee motivation, focusing on the pivotal role of intrinsic motivators beyond the traditional realm of financial incentives. As organizations navigate the challenges of fostering a motivated workforce, the shift towards non-financial motivational strategies has become a subject of significant academic and practical interest.

Employee motivation is undeniably critical to achieving organizational objectives, encompassing a vast array of internal and external factors that drive individuals to excel in their roles. Historically dominated by extrinsic rewards such as salaries, titles, and bonuses, the motivational landscape is undergoing a transformation. Emerging evidence underscores the enduring benefits of non-financial incentives, advocating for a strategic investment in intellectual capital to attract and retain talent through intrinsic motivators. This paradigm shift finds its theoretical foundation in the seminal work of Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, particularly their Autonomy Theory, which emphasizes the importance of cultivating an environment that supports autonomy and self-direction.

This paper aims to highlight the criticality of intrinsic motivation for both employees and managerial staff. The pursuit of performance excellence within organizations has revealed the limitations of conventional reward-based motivational strategies, necessitating a nuanced understanding and application of alternative motivational approaches. By examining the impact of non-financial motivators, such as effective communication, timely feedback, autonomy, and employee involvement in decision-making processes, this study employs a qualitative research methodology to delve into the subtleties of employee motivation.

Structured to provide both a theoretical overview and an in-depth empirical analysis, the research is divided into two main chapters. The next chapter offers a comprehensive literature review, presenting key findings from a wide range of scholarly works, articles, and online databases such as JSTOR, ProQuest, and SpringerLink. This foundational chapter lays the groundwork for the subsequent empirical investigation. The empirical analysis is done as a qualitative analysis, which probes into specific scenarios where employees have encountered excessive workloads, aiming to understand their perceptions and reactions to such situations.

At the core of this research is the objective to illuminate the factors that genuinely influence employee motivation in the workplace, emphasizing the potential of intrinsic motivators. Highlighting examples of successful implementations in notable companies, such as Google's approach under the stewardship of Laszlo Bock, the study advocates for a collaborative approach between scientific research and business practices to secure long-term advantages for both employees and companies. The discussion extends to the exploration of modern intrinsic factors, including feedback, autonomy, psychological safety, and participatory decision-making, aiming to provide actionable insights into fostering a motivational environment that nurtures creativity, autonomy, and expressive freedom in task performance.

Addressing the research questions: "How can organizations effectively motivate employees

and prospective employees through non-financial means in the current context?" and "What are the contemporary and effective forms and tools of employee motivation?", this study endeavors to capture a comprehensive understanding of employee and prospective employee perceptions. This exploration into employee motivation seeks to offer a nuanced perspective on the efficacy of modern motivational practices, highlighting their significance in the evolving workplace landscape.

Literature review

The conceptualization of motivation has been a focal point of scholarly inquiry, with numerous experts offering definitions that illuminate its multifaceted nature. Abraham Maslow's seminal hierarchy of needs outlines a progression from physiological needs to self-actualization, emphasizing the stepwise fulfillment of human desires (Maslow, 1943). Frederick Herzberg extends this conversation, identifying motivation as influenced by factors leading to worker satisfaction (Herzberg, 1959). Victor Vroom introduces expectancy theory, highlighting the roles of goal valuation, effort perception, and success likelihood in motivation (Vroom, 1964). Edward Deci and Richard Ryan further refine our understanding by proposing that motivation is driven by three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and social connection (Ryan, Deci, & Richard, 1985). Daniel Pink adds to this by identifying autonomy, mastery, and purpose as core elements of motivation (Pink, 2009).

The quest to elucidate human behavior has led specialists to propose various theories of motivation, recognizing its critical role in enhancing workplace performance. Often the success of an organization is directly influenced by its ability to innovate, adapt, experiment and change, in some cases representing even a condition for maintaining itself in the business environment (Berar & Minciu, 2019). Companies that invest in motivating their employees are shown to reap substantial benefits (Gallup, 2020; Duflo, Banerjee, Kremer, & Trautmann, 2019; Rousseau & Khazanchi, 2007). Maslow's theory has faced criticism, prompting alternative models like Clayton Alderfer's ERG theory, which categorizes needs into existence, relatedness, and growth, offering a more dynamic interaction between needs (Alderfer, 1970). Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y provide contrasting managerial perspectives on employee motivation, suggesting a broader complexity beyond basic needs fulfillment (McGregor, 2006). Herzberg's two-factor theory critiques Maslow by distinguishing between hygiene factors and motivators, emphasizing the distinct roles they play in workplace motivation (Herzberg, 1959). David McClelland's Theory of Needs focuses on achievement, affiliation, and power as key drivers of human motivation, critiquing the universal applicability of Maslow's hierarchy and suggesting that needs are culturally and experientially variable (McClelland, 2010).

Victor Vroom's Expectancy Theory posits that motivation is a function of valence, expectancy, and instrumentality, arguing for the optimization of these factors to enhance employee motivation (Vroom, 1964). John Stacey Adams' Equity Theory emphasizes the need for fair rewards, underscoring the importance of distributive, procedural, and interactional equity in motivation (Adams, 1965). Deci and Ryan's Autonomy Theory argues for the superiority of intrinsic over

extrinsic motivation, suggesting that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are key to sustaining motivation (Ryan, Deci, & Richard, 1985). Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory describes a state of deep engagement and enjoyment in activities, characterized by focused immersion and a loss of self-consciousness, leading to fulfillment and creativity (Csikszentmihalyi M. , 2008).

These theories have profoundly influenced management practices, guiding efforts to foster environments where employees are more motivated, thereby achieving individual and organizational goals. Collectively, motivation theories have contributed to creating more productive and satisfying workplaces, enhancing both employee well-being and organizational performance.

Given the rapidity with which changes occur in the business environment often the experience gained in the past by managers, as well as employees, is often no longer a source of information because the situations that arise are completely new (Minciu, Dobrea, Staiculescu, & Stoica, 2020). Understanding employee motivation is crucial for fostering a productive and satisfying workplace. This literature review delves into the evolution of motivational theories and practices, spotlighting the shift from extrinsic rewards to intrinsic motivation, particularly in the context of contemporary business environments, where the consumers' needs to feel better informed and educated (Purcărea et.al, 2021).

Daniel Pink's pivotal work, "Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us", serves as a cornerstone for modern motivational theory. Pink delineates the historical trajectory of human motivation, from survival instincts to a complex interplay of rewards and punishments, and ultimately, to the nuanced landscape of intrinsic motivation that characterizes the current era. He critiques the conventional business reliance on extrinsic motivators, arguing that such approaches often undermine creativity, performance, and behavior. Instead, Pink advocates for a focus on intrinsic motivation—rooted in autonomy, mastery, and purpose—as more congruent with the needs of today's workforce and the overarching goals of modern organizations (Pink, 2009).

Building on Pink's insights, Neel Doshi and Lindsay McGregor's "Primed to Perform: How to Build the Highest Performing Cultures Through the Science of Total Motivation" introduces a taxonomy of motivational elements: play, potential, and purpose. These elements emphasize the intrinsic enjoyment of tasks, the opportunity for personal growth, and finding meaning in work, respectively. Doshi and McGregor argue that fostering these intrinsic motivators can lead to sustained high performance and employee satisfaction (Doshi & McGregor, 2015).

Daniel Coyle, in "The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups", emphasizes the critical role of psychological safety and shared vulnerability in team dynamics. His research suggests that creating an environment where team members feel secure enough to take risks and share challenges is key to fostering innovation and collective success (Coyle, 2018).

Laszlo Bock's insights from his tenure at Google further illustrate the limitations of extrinsic rewards. In "Work Rules!", Bock shares Google's findings that non-financial motivators—such as appreciation, career development, and mutual support—play a more significant role in driving employee motivation and productivity over the long term (Bock, 2016).

Theoretical frameworks like Victor Vroom's Expectancy Theory also inform this discussion. Vroom posits that motivation is a function of valence (the importance of outcomes), expectancy (the belief that effort will lead to performance), and instrumentality (the belief that performance

will lead to rewards). This theory underscores the complexity of motivational processes and the importance of aligning organizational rewards with individual goals and perceptions (Vroom, 1964).

Further enriching the conversation, Richard Barrett's work on the evolution of consciousness outlines seven fundamental human needs that, when fulfilled without harming others, allow individuals to operate from a fully integrated consciousness. Barrett's model adds depth to our understanding of motivation, suggesting that it is intertwined with personal growth and societal contribution (Barrett, 2015).

The research presented in this review highlights a critical shift in motivational theory and practice, from a reliance on extrinsic rewards to a nuanced appreciation of intrinsic motivators. As the business landscape continues to evolve, understanding and leveraging these motivational dynamics will be crucial for organizations seeking to attract, retain, and engage a modern workforce.

In the contemporary workplace, the creation of an environment where employees collaborate and engage in projects together is pivotal. Thus, managers of organizations no longer have to act only on risky situations that could threaten the objectives of the organization, they must promote continuous learning throughout the employees and create a participatory work environment where employees are included in the decision-making process (Dumitru, Florea, & Minciu, 2023). Research on a group of elementary students, whose essays were corrected and given feedback, revealed that not all feedback types were effective. Only feedback that communicated psychological safety and group belongingness improved performance. This highlights the importance of feedback that fosters a sense of security and belonging, enhancing employee performance significantly (Yeager, Garcia, Brzustoski, Hessert, & Cohen, 2014).

Amy Edmondson and Pentland discovered that maintaining continuous signals of safety and belonging is crucial for psychological safety in a group. The human brain, sensitive to threat, requires constant reassurance of safety to foster team connection. This finding underscores the brain's need for continuous safety signals to foster collaborative and innovative work environments (Gallo, 2023).

Pentland's studies indicate that a team's performance is influenced by multiple factors: equitable speaking and listening contributions among team members, energetic conversations and high eye contact, direct communication among colleagues rather than solely through a manager, side conversations within the team, and encouragement of periodic breaks and external explorations to bring new information into the team dynamic. These elements contribute to a high-functioning, collaborative, and innovative team environment (Pentland, 2023).

Edmondson teaches that psychological safety can be cultivated by consistently monitoring for tension and changes in team interactions. Daniel Coyle provides fourteen strategies to establish psychological safety, ranging from demonstrating active and uninterrupted listening, being open about mistakes and encouraging others to actively contribute to their resolution, particularly for leaders, to showing gratitude excessively to team members. A study by Grant & Gino (2010) demonstrated that even a small expression of gratitude could significantly increase people's willingness to offer assistance (Grant & Gino, 2010). Another critical component is

establishing a rigorous recruitment process to maintain team harmony by removing destructive behaviors (Coyle, 2018).

Laszlo Bock emphasizes that Google's culture provides employees with psychological safety to speak freely without reservations. Google's management style eschews formal authority to foster an innovative environment (Bock, 2016). Google has also created a one-page performance document for employee-manager discussions, making these interactions more efficient and prepared (Bock, 2016).

The motivation through rewards and punishments, while effective for ensuring work is done correctly and timely, does not foster creative and adaptable behavior. This extrinsic motivation has its place in routine, well-defined tasks but fails to inspire creativity and innovation necessary for adapting to market changes (Pink, 2009).

A study on 684 open-source developers revealed that their participation in projects was driven not by external rewards but by the intrinsic pleasure of the work and the creative freedom it offered. This intrinsic motivation leads to a state of "flow," enhancing productivity and creativity (Lakhani & Wolf, 2005).

Economists argue that extrinsic motivation is outdated. Bruno Frey, a behavioral economist, advocates moving beyond the Homo Oeconomicus model to recognize that human economic behavior cannot be solely stimulated by rewards or punishments. Instead, intrinsic motivation plays a crucial role in economic activity (Frey B. , 1997; Frey & Stutzer, 2002).

Teresa Amabile posits that while rewards and punishments can work for tasks with well-defined rules, tasks requiring creativity demand a different approach emphasizing intrinsic motivation, allowing for freedom in task execution (Amabile, 2018).

External rewards become less necessary when the activity itself is intrinsically pleasing. Deci's research shows that adding extrinsic rewards for intrinsically motivated activities can often decrease motivation, leading to reduced performance (Pink, 2009).

Daniel Pink identifies three major issues with extrinsic motivation: it does not align with how businesses operate in the current economy, it contradicts how economists view economic evolution, and it is incompatible with the creative nature of contemporary work requiring autonomy (Pink, 2009).

If basic needs are not met at work, attention shifts to the injustice of deficiencies. This cannot be resolved through extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. When basic needs are satisfied, relying on external rewards can negatively impact workplace performance by creating counterintuitive outcomes (Pink, 2009).

The "Sawyer Effect," as discussed by researchers Dan Ariely, George Loewenstein, and Drazen Prelec, illustrates the psychological impact of extrinsic factors on intrinsic motivation. This effect demonstrates that while extrinsic factors can initially enhance the perceived value of an activity, they can ultimately diminish intrinsic motivation, stripping the activity of its inherent pleasure (Ariely, Gneezy, Loewenstein, & Mazar, 2005).

Despite the known negative impacts of reward/punishment motivation, many companies are hesitant to shift towards intrinsic motivation (Pink, 2009). An experiment in India with three groups offered increasingly large rewards showed that the group with the largest reward

performed equal. This demonstrating that higher rewards do not always lead to better performance. This finding suggests that extrinsic incentives, such as monetary rewards, do not always enhance team performance, and in some cases, may even hinder it (Ariely, Loewenstein, & Prelec, 2006).

Scientific research has revealed that external rewards can lead to undesired outcomes, including a decrease in intrinsic motivation and creativity, challenging the effectiveness of traditional business practices that rely heavily on extrinsic motivation (Pink, 2009).

Extrinsic motivators can help focus employee attention on specific objectives. However, this focus might negatively impact complex task performance by encouraging employees to opt for the quickest route to rewards, potentially leading to unethical or suboptimal task execution (Pink, 2009).

Economist Anton Suvorov explored the "principal-agent theory," which explains the effects of workplace rewards and other contexts. He found that rewards can create a dependency similar to that of addictive drugs, offering initial pleasure that quickly dissipates, requiring increasingly larger and more frequent doses to maintain the same level of satisfaction. This analogy highlights the risk of dependency on external rewards for task completion, leading to demands for ever-greater rewards to maintain performance (Suvorovy, 2013).

At Google, employee motivation is primarily intrinsic, avoiding extrinsic motivators to stimulate performance. Laszlo Bock notes that Google's extrinsic motivations adhere to four principles: ensuring salaries are paid fairly; celebrating achievements, not compensation; fostering an environment where love can be shared; and carefully considering failure. This approach underlines the shift towards intrinsic motivation, emphasizing recognition, professional development, mutual support, autonomy, and decision-making freedom as key to a motivating work environment where employees remain productive over the long term (Bock, 2016).

The modern workplace demands a shift from traditional extrinsic rewards to a focus on intrinsic motivation. Studies suggest that intrinsic motivation—driven by autonomy, mastery, and purpose—leads to higher performance, creativity, and job satisfaction. Companies like Google have successfully implemented strategies that prioritize intrinsic motivators, demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach.

This comprehensive examination of motivation at work underscores the complex interplay between extrinsic and intrinsic factors. As the workforce evolves, businesses must adapt their motivational strategies to foster an environment that emphasizes personal growth, meaningful work, and community. By doing so, they can unlock the full potential of their employees, driving innovation and success in the contemporary business landscape.

Research methodology

The research methodology employed in this study is anchored in a qualitative approach, meticulously constructed on the scaffold of an extensive literature review and the insightful analysis of 53 interviews. This methodological structure is specifically tailored to explore the complex domain of employee motivation, leveraging both the theoretical constructs offered by scholars

and the nuanced, real-world insights captured through empirical data. The crux of this qualitative inquiry is thematic analysis, a robust and flexible method that facilitates the identification, examination, and reporting of patterns (themes) within the data, enabling a profound understanding of the intricacies of motivation beyond the surface level insights often afforded by quantitative research.

Initiating the process, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, designed to tap into the rich tapestry of experiences and perceptions related to motivation. The diversity among participants ensured a comprehensive exploration of motivational factors across various organizational contexts, enriching the dataset with a spectrum of perspectives. Following the data collection, the interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity and depth of the participants' expressions and experiences.

The subsequent phase of coding was approached with rigor and reflexivity. Initial codes were generated through a detailed examination of the data, identifying content segments relevant to the multifaceted nature of motivation. These preliminary codes served as the building blocks for potential themes, which were meticulously grouped to reflect broader patterns emerging from the dataset. Through an iterative process of review and refinement, these themes were honed to accurately represent the complexities captured in the data. This involved scrutinizing the alignment of themes with the coded extracts and the dataset as a whole, culminating in the distillation of themes that offer a nuanced understanding of employee motivation.

This thematic exploration was enriched by the scholarly perspectives introduced in the literature review, including seminal works and contemporary studies that frame motivation within both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions (Deci, Ryan, & Koestner, 2001; Pink, 2009; Maslow, 1943). The empirical findings from the interviews not only resonated with these theoretical insights but also extended the discourse, presenting a layered understanding of motivation that transcends traditional dichotomies.

By weaving together theoretical insights with empirical findings, this study advances the understanding of employee motivation, bridging theoretical gaps and offering practical insights for organizational management. The qualitative research methodology, especially the use of thematic analysis, proves instrumental in uncovering the dynamic interplay of motivational factors, offering a rich, detailed perspective that enhances both academic and practical engagements with the concept of motivation. So, the methodological approach of this study emphasizes the synergy between literature and empirical data, underscoring the value of thematic analysis in dissecting the complexities of motivation. It highlights the importance of integrating diverse scholarly perspectives with real-world experiences, thereby contributing significantly to the fields of organizational behavior and management. Through this meticulous methodological execution, the study not only enriches the academic discourse on motivation but also provides actionable insights for enhancing motivational dynamics within contemporary organizations.

Results and discussions

The qualitative research aspect of this study focuses on employees' perceptions regarding the volume of tasks at the workplace. This approach employs an unstructured methodology to derive detailed verbal accounts of specific behaviors, attitudes, situations, or beliefs to ascertain the impact of the issue or phenomenon under study. Such a method is deemed a prerequisite for the execution of quantitative research, providing a foundation for understanding complex issues in greater depth (Andrei, Chivu, Ioan-Franc, & Sima, 2020).

Qualitative research is pivotal for several reasons: it facilitates a detailed comprehension of the research question, enabling researchers to form a comprehensive view of the subject matter. It unveils new aspects of the topic that may be considered in subsequent quantitative research and aids in developing hypotheses that can be tested within a quantitative framework. Essentially, the value of qualitative research in scientific endeavors lies in its ability to provide a nuanced understanding of research problems, often yielding unexpected insights that enrich hypothesis development (Scârneci, 2006).

In this study, the questionnaire linked a closed question about feeling overwhelmed with work tasks to an optional open-ended query for those willing to elaborate: "If you answered 'yes' to the previous question, please briefly describe the context." This connection aims to garner detailed information necessary for understanding the situations and factors contributing to excessive workloads.

Utilizing these questions, the research intends to test the qualitative research hypothesis H1: "Employees who feel more involved in decision-making processes, receive constructive feedback, and enjoy greater autonomy in managing their tasks are more motivated at work." Thus, the relationship between the closed and open questions seeks to elucidate the circumstances and factors leading to excessive task loads at work.

To conduct an accurate analysis of the responses provided to the open-ended question, thematic analysis was employed. This method, used in qualitative research, identifies, organizes, and visualizes themes within a dataset from a specific viewpoint (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Following the methodology outlined by researchers Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, the thematic analysis was structured into six stages: familiarizing with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming the themes, and compiling the report based on the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

For the analysis of the 53 responses, the NVivo software was utilized, renowned for its efficacy in qualitative research. Given the limited resources available, a comprehensive analysis of the data was conducted. The initial stage involved an in-depth reading and re-reading of responses, followed by their entry into NVivo for data analysis. Coding was applied to parts of sentences, entire sentences, and phrases. The creation of a word cloud facilitated orientation towards the central themes embedded within the collected data.

This in-depth qualitative analysis, supported by a rigorous methodological framework and the innovative use of NVivo software, reveals significant insights into employees' perceptions of their workload and its consequential effects on motivation. The findings from this analysis will not only contribute to the testing of the proposed hypothesis but also add a rich layer of

understanding to the complex dynamics of employee motivation in relation to workload management, further enriching the discourse within this scholarly article.

Figure 1: Word cloud

Source: own research, exported from NVIVO program

The word cloud presented above is a vivid depiction of the primary concepts and themes that have emerged from the qualitative analysis of employee perceptions regarding workload at the workplace. At its core, the prominence of terms such as "responsabilități" (responsibilities), "muncă" (work), "lucru" (work/task), "sarcini" (tasks), and "colegi" (colleagues) points to the multifaceted nature of employees' daily work life, where managing tasks, fulfilling responsibilities, and interaction with colleagues are central experiences.

The word "managerul" (manager) suggests a focus on the role of managerial practices in influencing employees' sense of motivation and involvement. This aligns with the research hypothesis, hinting that the management approach could be a crucial determinant in how employees perceive their workload and autonomy.

The recurrent term "deadline" highlights the time-bound pressure that employees encounter. Deadlines are a concrete representation of the demands placed on employees and can be a significant source of stress. However, when balanced with "autonomie" (autonomy) and positive "feedback", which are also noticeable in the cloud, it suggests that such pressures might be mitigated by empowering practices and supportive communication.

"Multitasking" appears as a central concept, reflecting the current work environment's complexity, where employees often juggle multiple tasks simultaneously.

This could indicate that the ability to multitask is perceived as a valuable skill or, conversely, as a challenge to effective work management.

Significant terms such as "lipsa" (lack), "necesare" (necessary), and "program" (program/schedule) suggest themes around the resources available to employees and how structured their work schedules are. These factors can contribute to how employees assess their work environment and could play a role in influencing their motivation.

Interestingly, the term "momentul" (the moment/time) implies the importance of timeliness and could be interpreted as employees' awareness of the importance of seizing the right moment to act, which requires both decision-making involvement and autonomy.

The presence of "personale" (personal) in the cloud reflects the intersection between employees' personal agency and their professional roles. It supports the notion that employees value the opportunity to bring their personal expertise and discretion to their work, which is a form of intrinsic motivation.

In interpreting this word cloud in the context of the research hypothesis, it can be surmised that employees' motivation is multifaceted, influenced by their roles, the tasks at hand, managerial style, and the interplay between personal autonomy and structural demands.

The data visualization seems to corroborate the hypothesis that factors like decision-making involvement, constructive feedback, and autonomy in task management are integral to employee motivation. This interpretation aligns with modern motivational theories that suggest employees are more engaged and motivated when they have control over their work, receive relevant feedback, and perceive their responsibilities within the scope of meaningful and manageable tasks.

Figure 2: „Task" - tree

Source: own research, exported from NVIVO program

The attached image appears to be a thematic analysis tree focused on the term "sarcini" (tasks), which provides a deeper insight into the qualitative data pertaining to employees' perceptions of their workload.

At the heart of the diagram is the central theme of "tasks," branching out to various subthemes that reflect the employees' experiences and challenges. Phrases like "Sarcini multe" (Many tasks) and "Foarte multe" (Very many) immediately convey a sense of overwhelming workload. This could indicate that employees feel overburdened by the sheer quantity of tasks they are expected to manage, which aligns with the feeling of being overloaded that was discussed earlier.

The branches extending from "prea multe" (too many) elaborate on the consequences of this overload. For instance, "Întârzierea îndeplinirii" (Delay in fulfillment) suggests that an excessive number of tasks can lead to delays in meeting deadlines or completing projects, which may impact the overall productivity and timelines.

"Perioada de realizare a toate părțile" (The period of realization of all parts) implies that the completion of tasks is not just about quantity but also about the distribution and scheduling of workload over time. The fragmented task management can cause delays and inefficiency, further exacerbating stress.

"Apariția unor trece peste orice bariere" (The appearance of some that go beyond any barriers) might indicate that some tasks are perceived as particularly challenging or difficult to manage, crossing beyond the normal scope of the employees' roles or abilities.

On another branch, we see phrases like "fără un termen limită foarte îndepărtat" (without a very distant deadline) and "într-un timp scurt" (in a short time), which suggest tight deadlines. This is a common source of pressure in the workplace, where employees must complete tasks within a limited timeframe, often feeling rushed and possibly compromising the quality of their work.

The statement "Multe sarcini într-un timp scurt" (Many tasks in a short time) encapsulates the crux of the problem: the combination of high volume and limited time can lead to significant stress and a decline in motivation.

"Deadline-urile sunt comunicate prea târziu" (Deadlines are communicated too late) touches upon organizational communication issues, where employees may be informed about deadlines later than is ideal, limiting their ability to plan and manage their workload effectively.

The diagram seems to confirm the earlier discussion and adds layers of nuance, showing how not just the quantity of tasks, but their organization, communication, and the time allowed for their completion, can significantly impact employee motivation. This graphical representation reinforces the importance of managerial practices in setting realistic goals and deadlines, communicating them timely, and providing employees with the necessary autonomy to manage their tasks effectively, which is essential for sustaining intrinsic motivation and overall workplace satisfaction.

The qualitative data collected through open-ended survey questions reveal a landscape of employee experiences where the term "sarcini" (tasks) dominates the discourse, painting a vivid picture of the pressure and challenges faced in the workplace. The high frequency of the term

within the responses underlines a collective sentiment of excessive workload and perceived imbalance between responsibilities and personal capabilities or resources.

The thematic analysis of the responses, facilitated by NVivo, allowed for the distillation of key themes. The initial codes developed—"Cantitate mare de sarcini" (Large quantity of tasks), "Relația cu managerul-colegii de muncă" (Relationship with manager-co-workers), and "Timp limitat de realizat" (Limited time for completion)—reflect the core issues that contribute to employee dissatisfaction.

In their narratives, respondents' express concerns over the sheer volume of tasks they are expected to manage. This quantity, often perceived as excessive, is coupled with tight deadlines that create an environment rife with stress and potential burnout. The thematic tree surrounding "sarcini" visually encapsulates the centrality of task overload in the employee experience. The respondents recount instances of last-minute task assignments and the burden of an unmanageable number of duties falling on a single individual, leading to an inability to complete tasks within scheduled times.

Moreover, the data points to organizational shortcomings, with employees highlighting a lack of support and resources from management, which hinders the execution of tasks. There is also an apparent mismatch between assigned responsibilities and employees' own skills or knowledge, further contributing to a sense of incapacity and inefficacy. Such a disconnect not only hampers individual performance but can also erode team dynamics, undermining the collective efficacy and potentially fostering a toxic work environment.

In interpreting the word cloud and thematic tree in conjunction with the previously established codes, we arrive at a nuanced understanding of the qualitative dataset. The dominant presence of "sarcini" underscores a universal grievance: employees feel overtasked and undersupported. This imbalance signals the importance of managerial awareness and intervention. Managers should strive to ensure that task allocation aligns with employee capabilities and available resources, and that deadlines are communicated and negotiated in a manner that respects employees' time constraints and work-life balance.

The high volume of tasks, when compounded by inadequate managerial support and resources, appears to be a significant detriment to intrinsic motivation, which resonates with the research hypothesis. Employees who do not feel involved in decision-making processes, who lack constructive feedback, or who do not enjoy a degree of autonomy in managing their tasks are likely to exhibit lower motivation levels. This finding emphasizes the need for organizations to adopt strategies that empower employees, offer meaningful support, and promote a healthy and sustainable work culture. Such strategies may include transparent communication, shared decision-making, acknowledgment of employee efforts, and the provision of resources and training that equip employees to handle their tasks competently and confidently.

Conclusions

The comprehensive analysis illuminates the dynamics between modern employee motivation and the structural and relational aspects of the workplace.

The primary research question probed into the non-financial motivational factors that influence modern employees' motivation levels. Our hypothesis, H1, postulated that "Employees who feel more involved in decision-making processes at work, receive constructive feedback, and have greater autonomy in managing their tasks are more motivated." The qualitative findings substantiate this hypothesis, revealing a clear nexus between intrinsic motivation and the practical implications of autonomy, feedback, and participative decision-making.

The qualitative research results resonate profoundly with the theoretical concepts advanced by Daniel Pink in "Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us." Pink's assertion that autonomy, mastery, and purpose are the cornerstones of intrinsic motivation is vividly reflected in employees' accounts of their work experiences. The sentiments of overburdened tasks and inadequate time, as narrated by respondents, underscore the pivotal role of autonomy—as without it, employees are less able to achieve mastery and align their efforts with a greater purpose.

Moreover, the empirical data reinforce Pink's notion that intrinsic motivation is more potent and enduring than extrinsic motivation. This concept is evident in respondents' expressions of dissatisfaction when faced with excessive workload without a corresponding sense of purpose or autonomy. Their narratives about the impact of positive managerial relationships and supportive feedback highlight the significance of constructive interpersonal dynamics, paralleling Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, where both 'hygiene' and 'motivator' factors are key to employee satisfaction and motivation.

A particularly striking parallel emerges between the qualitative data and Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Consistent with SDT's emphasis on autonomy, competence, and relatedness, the research participants' reflections suggest that their motivation thrives when they experience a sense of volition (autonomy), efficacy (competence), and connection (relatedness) with their managers and colleagues.

In sum, this article provides an insightful synthesis of the qualitative research outcomes and the established theoretical underpinnings within the domain of employee motivation. It underscores the practical exigency for organizations to transcend traditional carrot-and-stick motivational approaches in favor of fostering a workplace culture that empowers employees with choice, nurtures their growth, and imbues their roles with meaning.

The alignment between theory and empirical evidence in this article points to a transformation in managerial practices. By facilitating a work environment that prizes autonomy, ensures consistent and positive feedback, and involves employees in the fabric of decision-making, companies can not only enhance individual motivation but also pave the way for a collectively enriched organizational culture.

These findings exhort businesses to integrate these intrinsic motivators into their strategic frameworks, recognizing that the modern workforce is driven by factors far beyond financial incentives. The modern employee's motivation is multifaceted and deeply rooted in the psychological need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness—a narrative echoed across the testimonies

of the 53 respondents and substantiated by the academic literature. Through such an integrated approach, organizations can aspire to higher levels of employee engagement, productivity, and overall workplace wellbeing.

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