

NON-MATERIAL TOOLS FOR MOTIVATING LOW-PAID WORKERS IN THE CARE SERVICES SECTOR IN POLAND – A CASE STUDY

Kamila GRZESIAK

SGH Warsaw School of Economics, kgrzesia@sgh.waw.pl, ORCID: 0009-0001-6260-4948

Purpose: The aim of the article is to examine the effectiveness of non-material tools for motivating low-paid employees in the Polish care services sector and their influence on both motivation and demotivation. The study is based on a case of a car services company operating in four voivodeships: Łódź, Masovian, Lower Silesian, and Silesian.

Design/methodology/approach: In 2022, a quantitative study was conducted using a survey among 160 low-paid care workers. A Likert-scale questionnaire assessed the motivational potential of selected non-material tools, grouped into three categories: task-related, work environment, and development-related tools.

Findings: The study revealed that non-material motivational tools play a key role in shaping the engagement and satisfaction of low-paid employees in the care services sector. The most effective motivators included job stability, flexible working hours, and favorable working conditions. These factors notably boosted employee motivation and engagement. In contrast, a negative work atmosphere and lack of recognition from managers were identified as critical demotivating factors. The study indicates that the effectiveness of motivational tools varies, and strategies must reflect employees' individual needs and working realities in this sector.

Research limitations/implications: The study is limited to one care services company, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should include additional organizations from other low-productivity sectors and examine long-term effects of non-material motivational tools.

Practical implications: The study's findings hold significant value for management practices in the care services sector. Non-material tools boost engagement, reduce turnover, and improve care quality. Higher motivation can enhance efficiency and lower recruitment and training costs. Introducing development programs and internal training strengthens skills, fosters belonging, and enhances organizational competitiveness and image.

Social implications: The study's results could improve the quality of life for employees in the care services sector by better aligning human resource management policies with their needs.

Originality/value: The article contributes new insights into the use of non-material motivational tools in the under-researched context of low-paid care workers in Poland, offering evidence-based recommendations for improving motivation in this vital yet often overlooked sector.

Keywords: non-material motivational tools, care services sector, low-paid employees, case study, Poland.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The care services sector plays an increasingly important role in aging societies, including Poland, where the demand for professional care for the elderly and dependent individuals is steadily growing. A key challenge for enterprises operating in this sector is ensuring an adequate level of motivation and engagement among employees, who are often low-paid earners.

A low-paid employee is defined as someone receiving the minimum salary set by the government for hired labor, regardless of their skill level or additional compensation components (Ustawa o zmianie ustawy o minimalnym wynagrodzeniu..., 2016). In the author's opinion, these individuals often lack access to better-paying jobs due to insufficient education, high regional unemployment, limited job opportunities, or personal challenges. This group also includes retirees and pensioners who treat employment as an additional source of income.

One of the largest and least compensated groups in the care services sector comprises caregivers of elderly individuals. The author selected this occupational group for analysis because their role in providing care for the elderly and dependent individuals is crucial to the health and well-being of their clients. Moreover, the significance of this profession is expected to grow as society continues to age.

In this specific professional group, non-material motivational tools play an especially important role. They can effectively support daily work, enhance job satisfaction, and reduce employee turnover. Given the challenges faced by the care services sector, effective management of the motivation of low-paid employees is essential to ensuring the quality of services provided and employment stability.

2. Literature Review

The author has categorized non-material motivational tools into three main groups: tools related to task performance, the work environment, and opportunities for development (Table 1). Tools related to task performance, such as autonomy in work, aligning job responsibilities with aspirations, work-life balance, and managerial recognition, support efficiency and job satisfaction. In the care services sector, where tasks demand high levels of commitment, these elements play a critical role in boosting employee morale. The second group of tools, related to the work environment, includes job stability, favorable working conditions, a positive atmosphere, occupational safety and hygiene, flexible working hours, and effective communication between managers and employees. These elements foster a sense of security, comfort, and collaboration, which translates into better efficiency and loyalty among

employees. The third group, concerning opportunities for development, encompasses internal training and personal growth. Providing employees with opportunities to enhance their qualifications and a clear career path strengthens their engagement and sense of belonging to the organization. This is essential for building long-term relationships within the workplace.

The selection of non-material motivational tools for studying low-paid employees in the care services sector was driven by the specific characteristics of this professional group and the nature of work in care services. Each of these categories plays a significant role in fostering employee engagement, efficiency, and loyalty. Modern approaches to motivation increasingly emphasize the importance of these tools as key factors influencing intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction.

Table 1.

Non-material motivational tools for employees

Non-material tools related to		
task performance	work environment	opportunities for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • independence in performing tasks, • aligning responsibilities with aspirations, • work-life balance, • managerial recognition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • job stability, • favorable working conditions, • workplace atmosphere, • workplace safety and hygiene, • flexible working hours, • effective communication between employees and managers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities for personal growth, • enhancing skills through internal training/workshops.

Source: own study.

As noted by K. Darling, J. Arm, and R. Gatlin (1981, pp. 847-855), non-material motivational tools can serve both as a complement to material incentives and as autonomous factors influencing employees' intrinsic motivation. Non-material tools encompass a wide range of organizational, social, and psychological actions that trigger intrinsic motivation and support the realization of inherent values associated with the work performed. A. Broni (2012, pp. 1-5) highlights that the use of non-material motivational tools by managers not only facilitates the achievement of organizational goals but also enhances relationships among employees, boosting their engagement and employment stability. Similarly, Adamska (2018, pp. 7-19) emphasizes that non-material tools play a crucial role in enhancing employee engagement and motivation.

Among tools related to task performance, independence in performing tasks is a crucial factor, as defined by K. Blanchard (2006, p. 156), who considers it a key element of effective work. Managers should create conditions that allow employees to utilize their knowledge and experience without constant supervision. J. Schmidt (2016, p. 123) emphasizes that managerial-granted autonomy involves enabling an employee to perform a specific task, in a specific situation, within a specific timeframe, without external support. Another critical aspect is aligning responsibilities with employees' aspirations, which, according to L. Zbiegień-Maciąg (2005, p. 126), helps unlock an employee's potential and enhances their job satisfaction. Work-life balance also plays an essential role; H.J. Greenhaus (2003) defines it as an equal

commitment to both professional and family roles. Managerial recognition is another effective tool. According to G. Langelett (2014, p. 75), managerial praise strengthens an employee's self-esteem and motivation by acknowledging their achievements. A. Pietroń-Pyszczeak (2014) reinforces this view, highlighting the motivational boost derived from recognition.

In the category of tools associated with the work environment, job stability stands out as a key factor. It provides employees with a sense of security and confidence in their workplace. R. Mierzwiak (2016, p. 131) notes that favorable working conditions, including well-organized workspaces, access to modern technologies, and an ergonomic environment, are essential for effective management. Workplace atmosphere is another significant element. According to B. Tracy (2019, p. 134), the atmosphere depends on the individuals forming the work community, mutual respect, the ability to express opinions freely, and positive interpersonal relationships. A. Raziq and R. Maulabakhsh (2015, p. 720) argue that a good workplace atmosphere is influenced by kindness from both coworkers and managers. They suggest that employees should be able to count on mutual respect, assistance, equitable information sharing, fair task and position allocation, equal treatment regardless of gender, and the prompt resolution of conflicts. These factors collectively create an environment conducive to productivity and employee satisfaction.

A friendly workplace atmosphere fosters employee loyalty, engagement, and creativity, as highlighted by H. Grant and E.T. Higgins (2013). According to D. Ovidiu-Iliuty O.I. Dobre (2013, p. 8), values such as trust, friendship, mutual assistance, and loyalty shape organizational culture and support the achievement of better outcomes. A positive atmosphere, grounded in empathy and care, is essential for team efficiency and fostering strong relationships between employees and managers.

Workplace safety and hygiene, as described by A. Przewoźna-Krzemińska (2017), involve a set of principles aimed at preventing accidents and creating a hygienic work environment. These measures not only ensure physical safety but also contribute to employees' sense of well-being and their overall productivity. Similarly, Kowalski and Nowak (2019) emphasize that investments in occupational health and safety directly enhance employee efficiency and engagement, serving as a key factor in improving organizational effectiveness.

Flexible working hours, according to M. Latos-Miłkowska (2009), allow for the adaptation of schedules to meet the individual needs of both the employer and the employee, ensuring maximum benefit for both parties.

The final element in this category is effective communication between employees and managers, which facilitates the free flow of information and fosters trust. Communication between a manager and an employee is a key non-material motivational tool. A. Przewoźna-Krzemińska (2017) defines it as the exchange of information through various mediums, such as words, gestures, or texts. Effective communication requires clarity of message, ensuring that both the sender and the recipient can understand it properly, which in turn promotes trust-building and efficient collaboration.

As noted by R.E. Petty, J.T. Cacioppo, and R. Goldman (1981), establishing relationships based on partnership and managing employees' emotions can lead to a sustained increase in their engagement. As Kim Scott (2019) emphasizes, the key to building effective relationships at work is to "care personally while challenging directly", which fosters trust, openness, and long-term commitment within teams. Similarly, I. Bessel, B. Dics, A. Wysocki, and K. Kepner (2002) emphasize the importance of flexible working hours, managerial recognition, and opportunities for decision-making, which significantly impact job satisfaction.

Tools related to opportunities for development include personal growth and internal training/workshops, which H. Król and A. Ludwiczynski (2006) identify as key for building career paths. The authors emphasize that a clearly defined career path and opportunities for skill development are significant motivational factors. Similarly, M. Armstrong (2009, p. 48) highlights that respect and recognition can take the form of public praise, promotions, or the opportunity to participate in prestigious projects. Such actions enhance employees' sense of value and belonging to the organization. These tools enable employees to expand their competencies and strengthen their self-worth. Armstrong stresses that professional development and opportunities to work on high-profile projects not only boost employees' sense of belonging but also increase their efficiency.

These tools not only enhance employee satisfaction and engagement but also support their growth and creativity, ultimately leading to improved organizational outcomes. It is particularly important to emphasize the role of a friendly atmosphere, values such as trust and loyalty, and the delegation of responsibilities, which strengthen employees' sense of belonging to the organization.

A key challenge for managers remains tailoring these tools to the individual needs of employees. Doing so allows for the full utilization of their potential and the establishment of lasting relationships based on mutual respect and trust.

3. Research Methodology

The author conducted the research in Poland within a company providing care services in four voivodeships: Łódź, Masovian, Lower Silesia, and Silesian. The study involved 160 low-paid employees, including 139 women (86.9%) and 21 men (13.1%), all employed as caregivers in the examined enterprise.

The research methodology utilized a survey technique due to its quantitative nature and the availability of a large number of respondents. One of the methods used in the operationalization of variables was the Likert scale, where respondents rated statements (Czernek, 2015, p. 177). The questions focused on evaluating the non-material motivational tools used in the company, as well as identifying the tools that most motivated or demotivated employees.

The primary objective of the questions was to identify potentially motivating tools and to determine the strength of motivation for each factor. Respondents rated the motivational impact of each tool on a five-point Likert scale:

- 1 – Strongly disagree.
- 2 – Rather disagree.
- 3 – Neutral.
- 4 – Rather agree.
- 5 – Strongly agree.

The aim of the study was to examine the impact of specific non-material tools related to task performance, the work environment, and opportunities for development on motivating low-paid employees in the care services sector in Poland.

4. Research Results

This subsection presents the research findings regarding employees' opinions on the most motivating and demotivating non-material tools.

Figure 1 illustrates the frequency distribution of responses for the most motivating non-material tools (as perceived by employees). The tools are listed in order of frequency, from the most to the least commonly mentioned.

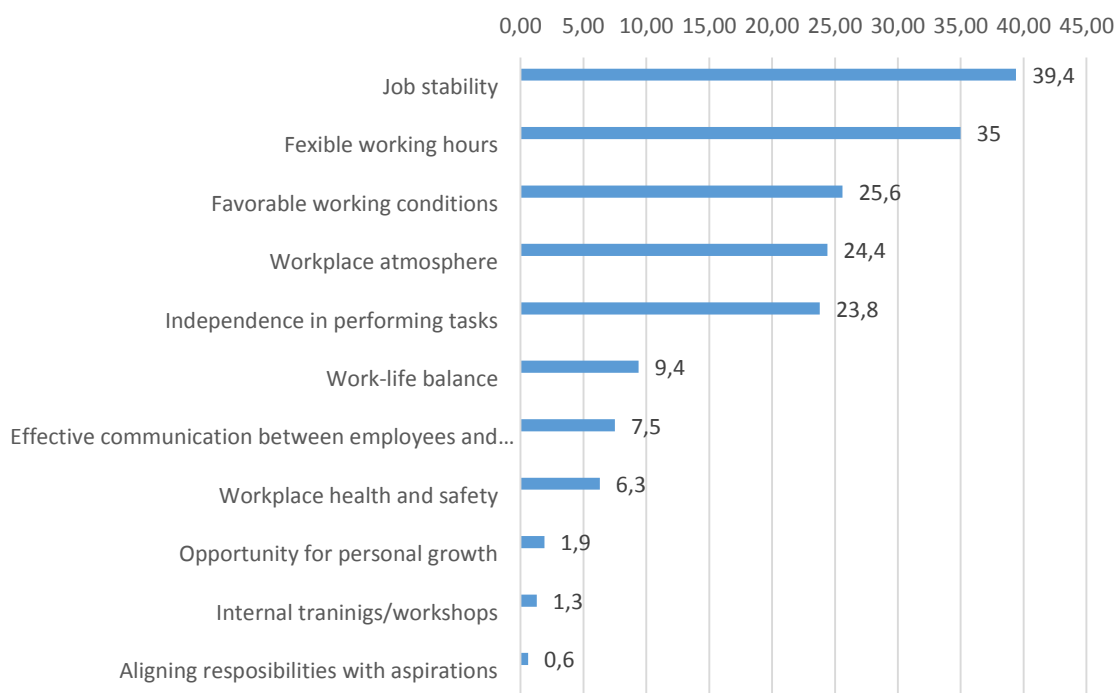


Figure 1. Most motivating non-material tools (in %).

Source: own study.

The data presented in Figure 1 indicates that the most frequently identified non-material motivational tools are job stability (39.4%) and flexible working hours (35.0%). The least frequently selected options were skill enhancement through internal training/workshops (1.3%) and task alignment with aspirations (0.6%). Other commonly mentioned tools included: favorable working conditions (25.6%), managerial recognition (25.0%), workplace atmosphere (24.4%), independence in performing tasks (23.8%).

Figure 2 presents the frequency distribution of responses for the most demotivating non-material tools, as indicated by employees participating in the study.

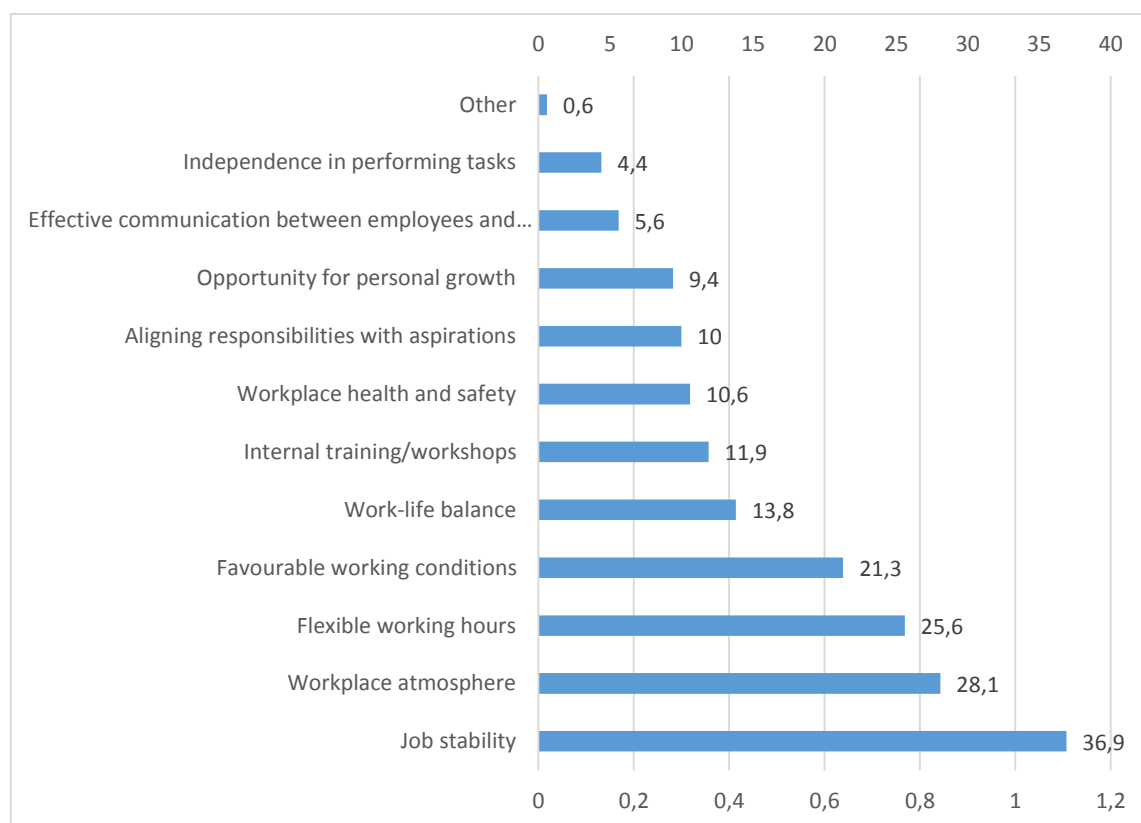


Figure 2. Most demotivating non-material tools (in %).

Source: own study.

The analysis of the data shown in Figure 2 allows us to conclude that respondents most frequently identified **job stability (36.9%)** as the most demotivating factor. Other commonly mentioned factors included **workplace atmosphere (28.1%)**, **flexible working hours (25.6%)**, **managerial recognition (21.9%)**, and **favourable working conditions (21.3%)**. The least frequently mentioned factors were **effective communication between employees and managers (5.6%)** and **independence in performing tasks (4.4%)**.

Table 2 presents the extent to which non-material tools motivate employees. The responses to this question were expressed on a scale of 1–5, where: 1 = to a very small extent; 2 = to a small extent; 3 = neutral; 4 = to a large extent; 5 = to a very large extent.

Table 2.*The extent of employee motivation through non-material tools*

Variable	Parameter		Overall (N = 128)
Extent of motivation through non-material tools	Extent	1	3.9% (n = 5)
		2	8.6% (n = 11)
		3	22.7% (n = 29)
		4	46.1% (n = 59)
		5	18.8% (n = 24)
	Mean scale value 3.7		

Note. **n** – number of responses; % – percentage of selected responses; **N** – total number of respondents who answered the question.

Source: own study.

The data in Table 2 reveals that the median rating for the extent of motivation through non-material tools (as perceived by employees), based on a five-point scale, was 4. This value also represented the mode of this variable, with 46.1% of respondents stating that non-material tools motivate employees to a large extent. Additionally, 18.8% of employees reported that these tools are highly motivating. On the other hand, 8.6% indicated that non-material tools motivate them to a small extent, while only 3.9% stated that their motivation stemming from non-material tools was very low.

The analysis of this subsection's data indicates that the most motivating non-material tools, according to employees, are as follows (in order of importance): job stability, flexible working hours, favorable working conditions, managerial recognition, workplace atmosphere. Conversely, the most demotivating tools identified by respondents were: workplace atmosphere, working hours, lack of managerial recognition, working conditions.

The study results demonstrate that non-material motivational tools are perceived by employees as effective in enhancing their engagement and job satisfaction. The majority of respondents positively evaluated these tools, emphasizing their significant impact on workplace motivation. Only a small percentage of participants considered them less effective, which underscores their overall high utility in personnel management.

These findings confirm that the use of non-material tools can be crucial in building motivation systems, especially within occupational groups with limited financial resources.

5. Discussion

The results of the research on non-material motivational tools for low-paid employees in the care services sector highlight their significant role in fostering employee engagement and work efficiency. These findings align with previous studies emphasizing the importance of non-material tools in motivating employees, particularly in the context of financial constraints across various industries.

F. Galia (2008, p. 56) highlighted the importance of independence and creativity as key motivating factors for employees, which is reflected in this study's results, where independence in performing tasks and work flexibility were rated as crucial motivational tools. K. Kovach underscored the value of recognizing employees' individual needs, which corresponds with the high ratings for managerial recognition and aligning tasks with employees' aspirations (Bessel, Dicks, Wysocki, Kepner, 2002).

Research by J.E. Sharon and K. Beverly (2007, p. 71) emphasized the importance of relationships with direct supervisors and teams. This is consistent with the findings of this analysis, where a positive workplace atmosphere and effective communication were among the most frequently identified motivational tools. Similarly, McKinsey studies have demonstrated that managerial recognition and opportunities to participate in special projects and tasks play a crucial role in employee motivation, often surpassing traditional financial incentives.

A. Wziątek-Staśko (2014, p. 693) emphasized the importance of work-life balance, a finding confirmed in this analysis. This underscores the growing need to incorporate flexible work arrangements and provide support for employees in managing their time. Similarly, Walentek (2019) points out that implementing work-life balance strategies leads to increased work efficiency and job satisfaction, especially when accompanied by organizational support and awareness of employees' individual needs. These insights are further supported by A. Kochmańska (2016), who identified non-material tools such as organizational culture, participation, and task delegation as having a significant impact on pro-organizational attitudes and engagement.

The findings of M. Pęcek and J. Walas-Trębacz (2018, pp. 21-22) also align with the author's research. Factors such as job stability, a positive workplace atmosphere, and clearly defined goals and tasks were rated as key determinants of employee motivation.

A comparison of the results from this study with existing literature unequivocally indicates that non-material motivational tools play a vital role in building employee engagement and work efficiency. Moreover, the study demonstrates that the effective use of these tools, particularly in the care services sector, can significantly enhance job quality and employee satisfaction. This is especially critical in addressing the challenges posed by an aging society.

6. Conclusions

The conducted research confirmed that non-material motivational tools play a crucial role in enhancing engagement and efficiency among low-paid employees in the care services sector. Job stability emerged as the most motivating tool, highlighting the fundamental importance of security and stability for employees in this group. Conversely, internal training proved to be

less effective as a motivator, likely due to its limited perception as a tool that delivers immediate benefits.

The most motivating tools were those related to task performance and the work environment, such as flexible working hours, a positive atmosphere, managerial recognition, and effective communication. These tools not only support current employee engagement but also foster long-term loyalty to the organization. On the other hand, tools related to opportunities for development, such as training or role rotation, were found to be less effective. This indicates the need for better alignment of these tools with employee expectations in this sector.

The study also indicates that negative experiences, such as a lack of recognition, an unfavorable workplace atmosphere, or limited communication opportunities, can act as demotivators, weakening employee engagement. In this context, it is essential to tailor motivational tools to the individual needs and expectations of employees to maximize their potential and mitigate demotivating factors.

In conclusion, the research highlights the importance of non-material motivational tools as an effective method of human resource management in the care services sector. Implementing job stability, work flexibility, a positive atmosphere, and managerial recognition can contribute to increased employee satisfaction, improved service quality, and enhanced organizational efficiency. Further research is recommended to examine the long-term impact of non-material tools on various employee groups and to analyze their effectiveness in other sectors of the economy.

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