

IDENTIFICATION OF KEY MOTIVATORS INFLUENCING EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT IN PROJECT TEAMS

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Purpose: This paper aims to identify the motivational factors that have the most significant impact on employee commitment in project teams and to determine their priority. The research was undertaken to address the issue of under-recognition of the hierarchy of employee commitment motivators in project teams.

Design/methodology/approach: The study was conducted in two phases, conceptual and implementation, between 2023 and 2024. The methodology included an analysis of the literature on factors that motivate and demotivate employees, as well as a questionnaire survey of 100 project staff members from various industries in southwestern Poland.

Findings: The study established a hierarchy of factors that motivate employees to work in project teams. Respondents stated that the most important factors included promotion opportunities upon the project's successful completion, remuneration, a clearly defined objective, financial and material rewards, and a friendly atmosphere.

The study confirmed the central research hypothesis, indicating a strong and positive relationship between the level of motivation and commitment to the project team. As many as 94% of respondents confirmed that a high level of motivation influences commitment to the project team.

Originality/value: The study presented in this paper provides valuable insights for the practice of human resource management, particularly in motivating employees within project teams. The most important finding is the confirmation of a strong link between motivation levels and employee commitment. This means that investment in employee motivation affects their commitment to the project team.

Keywords: motivation, motivators, extrinsic and intrinsic factors, commitment to work, Project management.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Human capital, including the project team's response, is a key factor in project success. The competence and motivation of the project team members are crucial, aside from the project's objective, investor support, and stakeholder commitment (Young, 2016). This is supported by The Standish Group's research, which shows that 32% of a project's success depends on a good location, the project team's competence, and a committed sponsor (Johnson, 2020). The first two factors are primarily determined by people, in particular, the project team.

Despite the widespread importance of project team commitment, there are still situations where individuals with insufficient skills, inadequate training, and low motivation are appointed to the team. Deficiencies in competence and motivation have a significant negative impact on project success.

To achieve a positive outcome in employee motivation within a project team, it is essential to understand the factors that either strengthen or weaken it. Employees' motivators for working in a project team change over time and require an individual approach, as what motivates one employee will not necessarily motivate another. Furthermore, the motivation of each project team member has a direct impact on the project's success and its ability to handle difficulties. As Knap-Stefaniuk, Karny, and Ambrozobe (2018) emphasize, effective motivation is based on understanding employees' needs and expectations, as well as on developing project managers' motivational competencies.

It is therefore crucial to accurately identify employee motivators and to utilize appropriate motivational tools to enhance this motivation or, at the very least, maintain it at a consistent level. Therefore, this paper aims to identify the motivators that have the most significant impact on employee commitment in project teams and to determine their priority.

2. Literature Analysis

Motivation plays a crucial role in ensuring effective work, particularly in project contexts where human capital is vital to success (Peterson, 2007; Pinto, 2008). Motivating employees involves stimulating their energy for action, which in turn leads to increased productivity and the successful overcoming of barriers that arise during a project (Peterson, 2007).

Definitions of motivation vary. Bieniok (1997) defines it as influencing attitudes and behaviour through stimuli. Kozdrój (1990) – as a conscious influence on the motives for behaviour. Reykowski (1979) – as a totality of motives. Borkowska (1985) – as the totality of motives influencing decisions. Schermerhorn (2008) – as the level, direction and sustainability of efforts. Gant (2014) – as the interaction of conscious and unconscious factors. Pink (2011)

emphasises intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and purpose in the 3.0 model. Nguyen (2017) defines motivation as incentives, while Umar (2018) defines it as causes of behaviour.

Two basic types of motivation are distinguished in literature: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation is based on the impact of external factors such as remuneration, benefits, promotions, penalties, and prestige (Ganta, 2014; Walentek, 2019; Kilar, 2018; Kordziński, 2010). In contrast, intrinsic motivation stems from the employee's needs, values, and personal interests (Tian, 2024; Ganta, 2014). Factors influencing intrinsic motivation include interest in the job, job satisfaction, career development opportunities, self-fulfillment, and a sense of freedom (Ganta, 2014; Walentek, 2019; Kilar, 2018; Kordziński, 2010; Pierścieniak, Krent, Jakiela, 2013). Pink (2011) emphasises the role of intrinsic motivation for commitment and satisfaction, promoting autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Both types of motivation are important and require an individual approach.

Motivational factors are also divided into financial (remuneration, bonuses, commissions, profit sharing), material (training, social benefits, perks, rewards in kind, integration) and immaterial (organisational, psychological, technical) (Czarniawska, 1990; Kopertyńska, 2008; Krzysztofek, Kumańska, 2011; Kilar, 2018).

A manager's actions can also hurt employee motivation, leading to a decline in motivation. De-motivators include, but are not limited to: politically motivated actions, unclear expectations, ineffective meetings, lack of information, poor communication and lack of transparency, low standards, being ignored, criticism, ambiguous regulations, excessive workload, lack of autonomy and control, unequal distribution of responsibilities and lack of development opportunities (Spitzer, 1995; Line, 1992; Stelmach, 2005; Westover, 2024).

Numerous studies on motivation have been carried out over the past decade or so. These were focused on, among others: the impact of leadership style on motivation (Schmid, Adams, 2008; Matić, 2024), the effect of motivation on performance (Ganta, 2014; Bai, Hemalatha, 2024; Taning, Tanuwijaya, Gunawan, 2024), the impact of financial and non-financial factors (Umar, 2018), theories of motivation (Peterson, 2007), the impact of motivation on innovation (Tian, 2024) the relationship between strategic goals and motivation (Tuin, Schaufeli, Van den Broeck, Van Rhenen, 2020), the impact of occupational burnout on motivation (Bakker, Demerouti, Sanz-Vergel, 2014, 2024) and the differences in motivational factors concerning: company size and country (Hitka et al., 2021), professions, gender, and age (Hitka et al., 2023a, 2023b), as well as the impact of the Covid-2019 pandemic on employee motivation (Alves-Pereira et al., 2025).

However, these studies do not reflect the specifics of the Polish project implementation environment. The aim, therefore, is to identify motivators in project teams and to prioritise them. Financial and material factors were considered key due to their importance to employees.

3. Research Process

The research process, an integral part of reflective thinking, involves a series of activities (Apanowicz, 2005, p. 48). Despite minor differences in the literature (Apanowicz, 2005; Baran, 2021; Nowak, 2011), the process is characterised by similar stages. The paper adopts the approach of Apanowicz (2005), who distinguishes between theoretical assumptions, research problems, object and purpose of research, thesis and hypotheses, methods, techniques and research tools, population and sample, research area, results, and report. The research, which aimed to identify the factors that motivate employees to work in the project team, was divided into a conceptual phase (X-XII 2023) and an implementation phase (I-XII 2024).

The concept phase started in October 2023 and lasted three months. A literature analysis was conducted to identify the research problem: the insufficient recognition of the hierarchy of motivators influencing employee commitment in project teams. A central question and three specific questions were formulated to address the problem, along with a central hypothesis and six specific hypotheses (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Overview of research questions and hypotheses

Research Questions	Research Hypotheses
Main question: Which motivators have the most significant impact on the commitment of employees to the project team, and what is their prioritisation?	Primary hypothesis: There is a strong, positive relationship between the level of general motivation and commitment in project teams.
Detailed questions: Q1: Which motivators are seen as most important for engagement for project teams? Q2: What is the real impact of individual motivators on different aspects of commitment? Q3: How do changes in the level of key motivators during the project affect commitment?	Detailed hypotheses: H1: Financial rewards and bonuses are seen as one of the most important motivators for the commitment in further projects, but not necessarily the most important compared to other motivators, such as development opportunities. H2: Intrinsic motivators, such as job satisfaction and visible work results, have a more substantial positive impact on emotional commitment than extrinsic motivation factors. H3: A lack of financial rewards, the absence of visible work results, and negative evaluations (reprimands) significantly reduce motivation levels at the end of the project. H4: An established and measurable project objective has the most substantial positive impact on project commitment compared to other project factors. H5: Changes in the level of the most important motivators throughout the project have a proportional impact on changes in the level of commitment. H6: Promotion opportunities following successful project completion have a significantly positive impact on commitment.

Source: own elaboration.

The study identified several variables, encompassing two groups of factors: tangible (financial rewards, bonuses, and non-wage benefits) and intangible (praise, recognition, and personal satisfaction). In addition, incentives that enhance motivation (bonuses, material rewards, praise, satisfaction with performance, and visible work effects) and those that undermine it (absence of bonuses, rewards, praise, satisfaction, and work effects) were considered during the analysis. Factors affecting commitment, such as a precisely defined objective, adequate remuneration, prospects for personal development, a positive team atmosphere, a reward system, and a sense of job satisfaction were also taken into account during the study.

The study used a survey prepared using Google Forms due to its accessibility and broad reach. The survey questionnaire consisted of 27 questions and was divided into blocks that provided information on the research sample, the projects implemented, the level of motivation, and the motivators. It was assumed that the survey would be conducted among employees working in project teams from various industries in southwestern Poland. It was planned that 100 respondents would take part in the survey.

The research began in January 2024 with a survey questionnaire being made available to respondents. Data was collected until mid-March 2024. A statistical analysis of the data was conducted in May 2024, followed by a detailed examination of the impact of motivators on employee commitment and the prioritization of these factors. The research process will conclude with the development of a scientific publication.

4. Results

The survey was conducted online using Google Forms. The study involved 100 respondents from various industries who worked in project teams in southwest Poland. A diverse group of respondents, evenly split by gender (50/50), participated in the survey. Of the respondents, 40% held a Master's degree, 37% a Bachelor's degree or an engineering degree, 13% a doctorate, and 10% a high school degree. The predominant age group was 26-40 (40%), followed by 26-30 (27%), 41-50 (17%), 21-25 (14%), and 2% over 50. Seniority in the current companies varied, ranging from less than two years to more than 20 years.

Respondents worked in a variety of industries, including construction (16%), IT, logistics, and transport (13% each), as well as administration and medical (10% each). All respondents had experience in project work, with most having done so between 1 and 10 times (57%). Their roles mainly involved membership in project teams (47%), as well as acting as project management specialists and project managers (13% each).

Respondents most often implement internal projects (60%), service projects (46%), production projects, and external projects (27% each). In terms of size, respondents are most likely to implement small projects (50%). Most of the projects implemented by respondents are successful, with an overall success rate of 54% and a rate of 34% in most cases. A smaller number of projects fail (54%).

Most respondents (74%) declared themselves motivated during the survey. At the time of the survey, 13% reported a very high level of motivation, and 50% reported a high level of motivation. Opinions were divided on the relative importance of internal and external factors, making it impossible to determine the primary factors.

The most common motivators identified by respondents included financial rewards and bonuses (54%) and personal satisfaction (26%). After the project's completion, motivation is most strongly increased by a financial bonus (74%), visible work results, personal satisfaction, and praise from superiors (40% each). A drop in motivation after the project was associated with receiving reprimands (60%), the lack of visible results (54%), and dissatisfaction (46%).

Most respondents (94%) confirmed the impact of motivation on commitment. Changes in motivation throughout the project affect commitment, with dwindling motivation decreasing it (87%) and rising motivation increasing it (agreement among all respondents). Motivation after one project influences commitment in the next one (64%)—the level of motivation changes throughout the project, as highlighted by 84% of respondents.

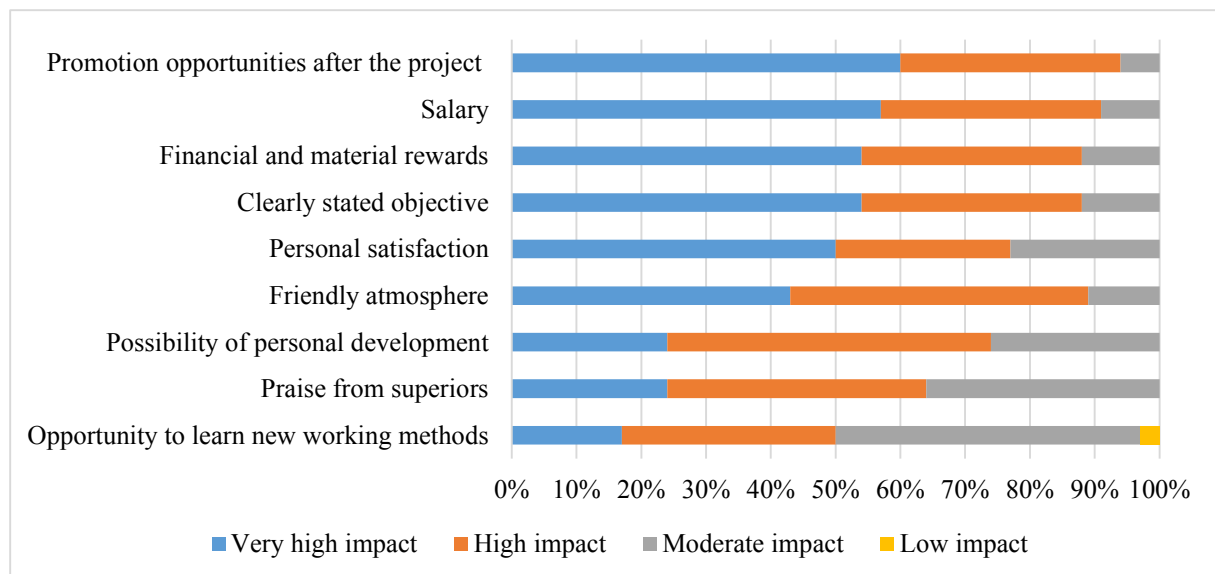


Figure 1. Hierarchy of Motivating Factors Affecting Employee Engagement in Project Teamwork.

Source: own elaboration.

Respondents (94%) also stated that motivation is strongly linked to commitment. Commitment is most strongly affected by promotion opportunities after the project (60% very high, 34% high), salary (57% very high, 34% high), a clearly stated objective (54% very high influence, 34% high), rewards (54% very high, 34% high) and personal satisfaction (50% very high, 27% high). Atmosphere (43% very high, 46% high), development opportunities

(24% very high, 50% high), and praise (24% very high, 40% high) are also important. The hierarchy of motivators is shown in Figure 1.

5. Discussion

The research presented in this paper aimed to identify the motivators that have the most significant impact on employee commitment to the project team and to prioritise them. To this end, answers to three specific research questions were sought (see Table 1). The answers were obtained through a literature analysis and a survey conducted among workers who implement projects in various industries in southwestern Poland. They also allowed to verify the formulated research hypotheses, including one main and six specific ones (see Table 1).

Hypothesis (H1) was that financial rewards are an important but not necessarily the most important motivator compared to development opportunities. The survey allowed to establish a hierarchy of motivators: promotion opportunities (60% rated the influence as very high, 34% as high), clearly defined objective (54% very high, 34% high, 12% medium), salary (57% very high, 34% high, 9% medium), financial and material rewards (54% very high, 34% high, 12% medium), friendly atmosphere (43% very high, 46% high, 11% medium), personal satisfaction (50% very high, 27% high, 23% medium), development opportunities (24% very high, 50% high, 26% medium), praise from superiors (24% very high, 40% high, 36% medium) and the opportunity to learn new ways of working (17% very high, 33% high, 47% medium, 3% low). Respondents most often cited financial rewards (54%) as the primary motivator. These results partly confirm the first hypothesis (H1) – rewards are important, but promotion opportunities and clear project objectives seem more important.

The second research hypothesis (H2) posited a more substantial influence of intrinsic motivation (satisfaction, work outcomes) on emotional commitment compared to extrinsic motivation. The survey found that 40% of respondents cited work outcomes and satisfaction as factors contributing to increased motivation after the project, while 74% cited a financial bonus as an external factor. This hypothesis cannot be unequivocally confirmed or rejected; further research is required.

Another specific research hypothesis (H3) concerned the negative impact of the lack of rewards, work outcomes, and reprimands on post-project motivation. Respondents identified lack of results (54%), reprimands (60%), and lack of bonuses (37%) as factors that reduce motivation. However, the degree to which they reduce motivation was not determined, making it impossible to verify the hypothesis conclusively. Additional research is needed to determine the factors with the most substantial impact on the decline in motivation.

The following detailed research hypothesis (H4) assumed the most potent positive effect of a set objective on commitment. 94% of respondents confirmed the objective's high (34%) or very high (54%) impact. However, salary (57% very high, 34% high) had a slightly more substantial impact, while development opportunities (24% very high, 50% high) and atmosphere (43% very high, 46% high) were also found to be important. The hypothesis was, therefore, partially confirmed.

The fifth research hypothesis (H5) concerned the proportional impact of changes in motivation levels on changes in commitment. As many as 74% of respondents highlighted that the change in their level of motivation during the project has an impact on their work commitment. In addition, up to 87% confirmed that declining motivation translates into a decrease in commitment, and all agreed that a rise in motivation increases it. The findings confirm the link between changes in motivation and employee commitment to the project team.

The last detailed hypothesis (H6) emphasised the strong positive impact of post-project promotion opportunities on employee commitment to working with the project team. The survey confirmed the hypothesis, as 60% of respondents rated the impact of post-project promotion opportunities as very high, and 34% rated it as high.

The results also confirmed the central research hypothesis, indicating a strong and positive relationship between the level of motivation and employee commitment to the project team. The research presented shows that as many as 94% of respondents confirm that a high level of motivation affects employee commitment to the project team.

6. Conclusions

The study's results confirm a direct link between the level of motivation and employee commitment to the project team. The most important motivators identified include: promotion opportunities after project completion, a clearly defined project objective, remuneration, as well as financial and material rewards. The results show that both internal and external factors influence employee commitment to the project team. However, the research did not determine a clear advantage for any of them. Furthermore, it helped identify factors with a strong influence on the decline in motivation, mainly a lack of visible work outcomes, criticism (reprimands), and a lack of bonuses. Changes in motivation throughout the project were found to have an impact on employee commitment: a rising motivation results in increased commitment, while a declining motivation results in reduced commitment. A strong and positive relationship between motivation and commitment to the project team's work was confirmed.

The research carried out enabled the research problem and research hypotheses to be verified and the research questions to be answered. As three of the six hypotheses were partially confirmed, the need for future research to fill the remaining gaps was identified. This research

should be extended to the entire country of Poland to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study and to determine whether similar work motivators can be identified in individual voivodeships. It is also recommended that the survey questionnaire be supplemented with questions to determine the actual importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, as well as the factors that most strongly negatively affect motivation. It is also worth extending the research to include the impact of leadership style on motivation in project teams in Polish conditions and to identify practical motivational tools to optimise commitment to teamwork.

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