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# NON-MATERIAL MOTIVATIONAL TOOLS AND THEIR IMPACT ON EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION IN POLAND'S CARE SERVICES SECTOR: A JOB SATISFACTION INDEX CASE STUDY

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**Purpose:** This article aims to assess the effectiveness of non-material motivational tools used for low-paid employees in the Polish elderly care services sector. The effectiveness of these tools is evaluated using a proprietary Job Satisfaction Index, designed to reflect the actual level of employee satisfaction in financially constrained organizational settings.
**Methodology:** The study is based on quantitative research conducted among 160 caregivers employed in a care services company operating across four Polish regions. A proprietary survey tool assessed the impact of non-material motivational tools – categorized into task-related, work environment-related, and development-related – using descriptive statistics and correlation analyses.
**Findings:** The findings confirm that non-material motivational tools significantly affect job satisfaction among low-paid care workers. Job stability, flexible working hours, and favorable working conditions showed the strongest positive correlation with the Job Satisfaction Index, while lack of recognition and poor workplace atmosphere negatively influenced satisfaction.
**Research limitations/implications**: The focus on selected non-material motivational tools indicates the need to examine their interrelationships with material motivational tools. Future research should adopt comparative and dynamic approaches to explore contextual conditions shaping employee motivation in low-paid sectors.
**Practical implications:** The results provide practical guidance for managers operating in low-budget care organizations. Effective use of selected non-material motivational tools enhances employee engagement and retention, thereby improving service quality. Organizations should focus on consistent and context-sensitive implementation of these tools to achieve sustainable motivational outcomes.
**Social implications:** The study highlights the importance of non-material motivational tools for improving job satisfaction among low-paid employees essential to aging care systems. The findings support sector-level initiatives that complement material motivational tools.
**Originality/value:** The article fills a gap in HRM literature by empirically evaluating non-material motivation in the Polish care services sector. It introduces an original typology of motivational tools and a proprietary Job Satisfaction Index as a methodological contribution.
**Keywords:** non-material motivation, employee satisfaction, care services sector, low-paid workers, Job Satisfaction Index.
**Category of the paper:** case study.

## 1. Introduction

Interest in non-material motivational tools has been growing since the beginning of the 21st century, particularly in sectors with low salary levels facing budgetary constraints. Such tools, which do not entail direct financial expenditures, are increasingly valued for their potential to improve employee efficiency, loyalty, retention, and job satisfaction.

Non-material motivation is especially relevant for low-paid employees, defined as workers receiving remuneration at the statutory minimum level (Dz.U. 2016, item 1265), often including individuals facing social barriers as well as retirees and pensioners. This article focuses on caregivers for the elderly in the Polish care services sector – a physically and emotionally demanding yet poorly compensated occupational group (GUS, 2023) – whose importance continues to grow in an aging society.

The study addresses a research gap by analyzing the effectiveness of selected non-material motivational tools in enterprises providing care services in Poland. A quantitative case study conducted in four Polish voivodeships used a proprietary Job Satisfaction Index to assess the relationship between employees' subjective evaluation of task-related, work-environment-related, and development-related tools and overall job satisfaction, revealing positive correlations of varying strength and enabling the formulation of practical recommendations and directions for further research.

## 2. Non-material motivational tools – research review

Interest in non-material motivational tools has been steadily growing in management research, particularly in the context of employee engagement, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation. One of the earlier contributions in this field was provided by J.E. Sharon and K. Beverly (2007), who pointed out that the most effective non-material motivational tools include the opportunity to perform challenging work, continuous learning, professional development, and collaboration with a supportive team and supervisor.

At the beginning of the 21st century, F. Galia highlighted the role of independence and creativity in enhancing motivation (Galia, 2008). Similar conclusions were drawn by David Rock, a contemporary representative of the neuroleadership approach, who in his SCARF model (Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, Fairness) identifies autonomy as one of five key factors influencing employee motivation and engagement (Rock, 2008). According to Rock, the ability to make decisions and a sense of control over one's work significantly reduce stress and support cognitive processes, thereby increasing satisfaction and performance.

A similar perspective is presented by M.W. Kopertyńska and M. De Pee, who underline that employees want their work and interpersonal relationships to satisfy their needs for belonging, participation, meaningful results, personal engagement, and development (Kopertyńska, 2009; De Pee, 2012). This captures the essence of employee expectations – treating work not only as a source of income but also as a source of recognition, affiliation, and purpose.

A. Broni (2012), on the other hand, argues that well-selected motivational actions contribute to the achievement of organizational goals, foster positive workplace relationships, and support workforce stability. He stresses that a key managerial responsibility is to identify employees' individual needs and motivate them in a way that is appropriate to the context, so as to bring out the best in them.

Comparable conclusions were drawn by A. Czarnecka (2013), who analyzed the role of managerial attitudes in building employee engagement. She highlighted the importance of adopting an individualized approach, accurately identifying employee needs, and creating a work environment conducive to intrinsic motivation. In her view, it is the direct supervisor, through an appropriate leadership style and by fostering a positive organizational climate, who can most effectively influence employee behavior, attitudes, and loyalty.

In the Polish context, the findings of A. Wziątek-Staśko (2014) are particularly noteworthy. She identified the most effective non-material motivational tools as: job security, a positive workplace atmosphere, collegial relationships, promotion opportunities, flexible working hours, and self-actualization. The study also revealed significant differences in the motivational power of individual tools—some (e.g., CSR or equal treatment) are present in organizations but are rated considerably lower by employees in terms of motivational value.

In a similar vein, A. Kochmańska (2016) demonstrated that non-material motivational tools influence the development of pro-organizational attitudes and employee identification with company goals. According to her research, a vast majority of respondents (77.5%) agreed that non-material tools contribute to building such attitudes, while only 22.5% held a different opinion. A follow-up question asked those who answered affirmatively to indicate how significant a role these tools play in fostering pro-organizational attitudes: 55% of respondents stated it was a moderate role, 42.5% indicated it was significant, and only one respondent (2.5%) considered the role to be minor. This suggests a clear correlation between the use of non-material motivational tools and the development of employee identification with the organization.

The analysis further revealed which tools employees consider most important for enhancing their engagement with assigned responsibilities. These include the ability to shape one's career path (67.5%) and development opportunities (62.5%). Other tools ranked by importance included: effective communication systems and leadership style (35%), organizational culture (27.5%), task delegation (20%), employee appraisal systems (17.5%), employee participation (7.5%), and both flexible working hours and verbal praise (2.5%).

M. Pęcek and J. Walas-Trębacz (2018) emphasized that non-material motivational tools have the strongest influence on employee engagement levels. Job stability was identified as a tool present in over half of the surveyed companies (57.79%) and had a significant impact on employee engagement (52.25%). Other highly influential non-material tools included a positive work atmosphere (52.6%), opportunities for development (36.33%), effective workplace communication (41.18%), clearly defined goals and tasks (43.60%), and the possibility of rapid promotion (31.83%). These tools were the most frequently cited by respondents as having a strong impact on their level of engagement, expressed as a percentage.

A study conducted by Ludmila V. Shchetinina (2019) confirmed that the use of non-material motivational measures contributes to increased staff efficiency. The most effective tools identified included: providing training opportunities, recognizing employee contributions, fostering a positive psychological climate at work, and enabling career development. According to the study, these actions have a significant effect on increasing productivity, enhancing employee loyalty, and improving the organization's image.

Similar conclusions emerged from a study conducted by Nikola Papac, Nataša Pejanović-Škobić, and Lidija Lesko Bošnjak (2020)[1]. Their research identified a range of effective practices, including appropriate job design, participative management styles, opportunities for involvement in decision-making, flexible working hours, recognition and constructive feedback, the development of organizational culture, and support for training and career path development. The authors emphasized that these tools contribute to greater employee engagement and improve the quality of services provided.

An analysis of contemporary empirical research indicates that the effectiveness of non-material motivational tools lies not only in their diversity but above all in their alignment with employee needs and coherence with organizational goals. Among the most frequently cited and positively evaluated non-material tools are: respect from supervisors, high-quality interpersonal relationships, a friendly working environment, the opportunity to shape one’s own career path, task autonomy, efficient communication, dialog-based leadership styles, and transparency in employee evaluation systems.

These tools support the development of pro-organizational attitudes and reinforce employee engagement in task execution. The literature underscores that for motivational tools to be effective, they must be implemented in a conscious (Langelett, 2014), contextual, and individualized manner (Dobre, 2013), while also respecting the values represented by the workforce (Aniszewska *et al.*, 2007). A lack of such alignment can lead to demotivation, staff turnover, and, in the long run, strategic failures for the organization (Reddin, 2020).

[1] The authors focused on analyzing strategies for using non-material motivational tools among medical personnel in Mostar (n = 79).

The importance of non-material motivational tools is particularly evident in low-paid sectors such as the care services sector, where limited financial resources often preclude the use of material incentives. In this context, tools such as recognition, opportunities for development, autonomy, flexible working hours, leadership quality, a sense of security, and organizational culture become crucial for maintaining workforce stability, fostering employee engagement, and ensuring an adequate quality of services provided.

## 3. Methodology

To investigate the effectiveness of non-material tools in motivating low-paid employees in the studied branches of the enterprise, a proprietary effectiveness index was applied, with individual scores assigned to the surveyed employees. The study was conducted in a care services company operating across four Polish regions: Łódźkie, Mazovian, Lower Silesian, and Silesian. The research sample included 160 low-paid employees working as elderly caregivers. A quantitative research approach was employed, using a survey method. The questionnaire was designed according to a proprietary typology of non-material motivational tools and aimed to assess their motivational potential in relation to perceived employee satisfaction. For the purpose of this study, non-material motivational tools were classified into three categories: task-related tools, work environment-related tools, and development-related tools (see Table 1). This division was derived from an in-depth literature review as well as practical considerations relevant to the specific working conditions of low-paid caregiving staff.

Task-related tools include elements such as autonomy in performing tasks, alignment responsibilities with personal aspirations, work-life balance, and managerial recognition. Work environment-related tools refer to organizational conditions and interpersonal relations, such as job stability, quality of working conditions, workplace atmosphere, workplace safety and hygiene, flexible working hours, and communication between employees and managers. Development-related tools encompass opportunities for personal growth and skill development through internal training or workshops.

**Table 1.**
*Non-material motivational tools for employees*

| Non-material tools | | |
|---|---|---|
| **task-related tools** | **work environment-related tools** | **development-related tools** |
| • autonomy in performing tasks,<br>• alignment of responsibilities with personal aspirations,<br>• work-life balance,<br>• managerial recognition. | • job stability,<br>• favorable working conditions,<br>• workplace atmosphere,<br>• workplace safety and hygiene,<br>• flexible working hours,<br>• effective communication between employees and managers. | • opportunities for personal growth,<br>• enhancing skills through internal training/workshops. |

Source: own study.

The effectiveness of the applied tools was evaluated using an original Job Satisfaction Index, which reflects the current level of job satisfaction. The JSI was constructed as a composite measure based on respondents' answers to several questionnaire items assessing different dimensions of job satisfaction on five-point Likert-type scales (where: 1 – very dissatisfied, 2 – dissatisfied, 3 – neutral, 4 – satisfied, 5 – very satisfied). The final value of the index was calculated as the arithmetic mean of the ratings of these items. The aim of the study was to identify which of these tools had the greatest impact on motivation and job satisfaction among low-paid employees in the care services sector.

## 4. Results

For the purpose of interpreting the strength of the relationship between variables, the classification of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient according to J. Guilford was applied (A. Aswegen et al., 2009), as presented in Table 2. This classification served as the general interpretive framework for the results discussed below.

**Table 2.**
*Interpretation of the correlation coefficient according to J. Guilford*

| Absolute value of the coefficient (ρ) | Interpretation |
|---|---|
| $\rho < 0.2$ | Negligible correlation – virtually no relationship |
| $0.2 \geq \rho < 0.4$ | Low correlation |
| $0.4 \geq \rho < 0.7$ | Moderate correlation |
| $0.7 \geq \rho < 0.9$ | High correlation |
| $0.9 \geq \rho < 1.0$ | Very high correlation |

Source: own study.

In addition, the sign of the correlation coefficient was also important. A positive Spearman coefficient indicates that as the level of employee satisfaction increases, so does the positive evaluation of a given tool (i.e., its assigned value on the Likert scale, and therefore its rank). Given the nature of the analyzed index, a positive coefficient was considered desirable, as it suggests that more highly rated motivational tools contribute to higher levels of satisfaction.

As previously mentioned, the calculation of Spearman's coefficient was based on ranks assigned to responses rated on a five-point scale. Table 3 presents how ranks were assigned to survey responses—from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree")—in line with increasing approval of the evaluated tools.

**Table 3.**
*Interpretation of the correlation coefficient*

| Score on the scale for evaluating the non-material tool | Most common corresponding answer with assigned number on the scale | Rank used in Spearman's coefficient calculation |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | "1 – Strongly disagree" | 1 |
| 2 | "2 – Rather disagree" | 2 |
| 3 | "3 – Neutral" | 3 |
| 4 | "4 – Rather agree" | 4 |
| 5 | "5 – Strongly agree" | 5 |

Source: own study.

In order to determine the relationship between the use of selected groups of non-material motivational tools and employee satisfaction levels, a Spearman's rank correlation analysis was conducted. The tools were grouped into three categories: task-related, work environment-related, and professional development-related. All analyzed categories of tools exhibit a positive correlation with the satisfaction index, indicating their beneficial impact on employee job satisfaction.

The strongest correlation was found for tools related to the work environment ($\rho = 0.6317$), emphasizing the importance of working conditions, interpersonal relationships, and organizational climate in shaping employees' subjective sense of job satisfaction. A slightly weaker yet still significant correlation was recorded for task-related tools ($\rho = 0.5369$), suggesting that clarity of goals, the meaningfulness of tasks, and autonomy in performing tasks significantly contribute to increased satisfaction. A somewhat weaker, though still clearly positive, correlation was observed for development-related tools ($\rho = 0.4737$), confirming that opportunities for skill enhancement and learning are relevant—though not primary—factors in increasing satisfaction.

These results indicate that, among low-paid employees in the care services sector, the strongest impact on job satisfaction comes from those non-material motivational tools that shape the immediate work environment by offering stability, comfort, and social support.

To assess the strength of the relationship between employees' perceived use of selected non-material motivational tools and their level of job satisfaction, Spearman's rank correlation coefficients were calculated. The analysis included task-related tools, work environment-related tools, and elements supporting employee development. The following table presents the correlation coefficients for each tool, enabling the identification of those with the highest potential impact on employee satisfaction levels in the surveyed enterprise.

**Table 4.**
*Effect sizes for potential relationships between the use of non-material motivational tools (as perceived by employees) and the job satisfaction index*

| Effect size / Type of tool (in the enterprise) | Correlation with job satisfaction (Spearman's ρ) |
|---|---|
| Autonomy in performing tasks | 0.288 |
| Alignment of responsibilities with personal aspirations | 0.389 |
| Work–life balance | 0.487 |
| Managerial praise | 0.407 |
| Job stability | 0.511 |
| Favorable working conditions | 0.495 |
| Workplace atmosphere | 0.377 |
| Workplace safety and hygiene | 0.396 |
| Effective communication between employees and managers | 0.443 |
| Personal growth | 0.458 |
| Internal training/workshops | 0.425 |

Source: own study.

The interpretation of the Job Satisfaction Index in relation to the effectiveness of specific non-material motivational tools was based on an analysis of Spearman's rank correlation coefficients. The results indicate that all examined tools show a positive correlation with the satisfaction index, which means that their use is associated with a higher level of job satisfaction among low-paid employees in the care services sector. However, the strength of this relationship varies, allowing for the identification of tools with the highest motivational potential.

Among the tools most strongly associated with employee satisfaction are: job stability ($\rho = 0.511$), favorable working conditions ($\rho = 0.495$), personal growth ($\rho = 0.458$), effective communication between employees and managers ($\rho = 0.443$), and internal training/workshops ($\rho = 0.425$). These results indicate that employees particularly value factors that enhance their sense of security, comfort at work, opportunities for skill enhancement, and the quality of managerial relationships. The strongest correlation with job stability confirms that, in the context of low-paid care positions, job security is a key motivating factor. Likewise, a well-organized work environment and access to internal training clearly improve employee satisfaction.

Moderate correlations were observed for managerial praise ($\rho = 0.407$), workplace safety and hygiene ($\rho = 0.396$), and a friendly workplace atmosphere ($\rho = 0.377$). Although their impact is somewhat weaker, these tools still play a meaningful role in shaping positive workplace experiences. Recognition and interpersonal climate foster a sense of belonging and being valued by the organization.

The lowest, though still positive, correlations were recorded for autonomy in performing tasks ($\rho = 0.288$) and alignment of responsibilities with personal aspirations ($\rho = 0.389$). This suggests that while autonomy and the alignment of responsibilities with personal aspirations have some motivational value, their influence on job satisfaction in the care services sector is relatively lower compared to more pragmatic and stabilizing factors.

The analysis shows that the greatest impact on job satisfaction among low-paid employees in the care services sector comes from non-material motivational tools that ensure job security, favorable working conditions, and opportunities for development. In contrast, tools that appeal to individual ambition and autonomy have more limited significance. These findings highlight the importance of meeting employees' basic psychological and professional needs in this sector and suggest that effective motivational strategies should focus on security, support, and development, rather than solely on individualism or career aspirations.

## 5. Discussion of results

The analysis made it possible to assess the relationships between the use of non-material motivational tools and the level of job satisfaction among employees in the surveyed enterprise. All the examined tools demonstrated a positive correlation with the Job Satisfaction Index, which means that the more highly employees rated a given tool, the greater their job satisfaction. However, the values of the Spearman's correlation coefficients ranged from low to moderate, which requires further interpretation.

The highest correlations – classified as moderate according to J. Guilford's classification— were found for tools such as job stability, favorable working conditions, work–life balance, managerial praise, and effective communication between employees and managers. These findings indicate that for low-paid employees in the care services sector, job satisfaction is most influenced by tools that provide employment security, workplace atmosphere, and interpersonal support. This confirms previous research suggesting that stabilizing factors and stress-reducing mechanisms are particularly important for this occupational group.

Although material incentives were not directly examined in this study, the findings should be interpreted in relation to employees' pay levels. In the case of low-paid care workers, non-material motivational tools are unlikely to fully substitute for financial rewards; rather, they appear to complement them by strengthening recognition, security, and organizational support. This interpretation is consistent with the relatively strong correlations observed for job stability, favorable working conditions, and communication with managers, which may partly reflect employees' sensitivity to basic economic security. Thus, the positive effect of non-material tools on job satisfaction may depend, at least to some extent, on whether remuneration is perceived as acceptable and fair.

On the other hand, tools such as autonomy in performing tasks, alignment of responsibilities with personal aspirations, workplace atmosphere, and workplace safety and hygiene showed only low correlations with job satisfaction. Based on these results, several important conclusions and future recommendations can be formulated.

First, the weak correlations may suggest that some tools – although theoretically regarded as motivational – do not align with the real needs and expectations of care workers. This applies in particular to aspects such as autonomy or professional aspirations, which may carry greater importance in other labor market segments. This highlights the need to adapt motivational strategies to the specific characteristics of the occupational group, taking into account income levels, the nature of the work, and the value structure preferred by employees.

Second, the limited effectiveness of certain tools may result not from their mere presence but from the way they are implemented and communicated. For example, autonomy can only be motivating if it is accompanied by appropriate levels of support, trust, and competence. Therefore, both the scope and the quality and organizational context of each tool must be considered.

Third, low correlation values may reflect the diverse needs of employees, which supports the necessity of an individualized approach to motivation. It is recommended to implement flexible solutions such as customizable benefit systems, regular motivational conversations, or needs assessments in the form of consultations.

Fourth, it is worth noting that tools with lower correlation strength should not be completely discarded. While their direct impact on job satisfaction may be limited, they can play a complementary role—influencing the workplace atmosphere, building trust, or supporting long-term engagement. In this sense, their function is indirect but still important for shaping organizational culture.

In summary, the analysis demonstrated that the effectiveness of non-material motivational tools in the studied context is varied, and their impact on employee satisfaction depends both on the type of tool and the manner of its implementation. These findings offer practical guidance for HR managers in the care services sector and underscore the need for further, in-depth research – especially of a qualitative nature – to better understand motivational mechanisms within this specific occupational group.

## 6. Final conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of non-material motivational tools on the effectiveness of motivation efforts targeted at low-paid employees in the care services sector in Poland. The analysis was based on a case study of an enterprise operating in four provinces and employed an original Job Satisfaction Index as a measure of motivational effectiveness.

The findings confirmed that all three categories of non-material tools – task-related tools, work environment-related tools, and development-related tools – demonstrated a positive relationship with the Job Satisfaction Index. This indicates that a positive evaluation of applied tools is associated with a higher level of job satisfaction. The strongest, moderate correlations

were observed for environmental and task-related tools, such as job stability, favorable working conditions, work–life balance, effective communication between employees and managers, and managerial praise. These results confirm that effective motivation in the care services sector is primarily based on ensuring security, interpersonal support, and workplace comfort.

At the same time, some tools – such as autonomy in performing tasks, alignment of responsibilities with personal aspirations, and workplace atmosphere – showed only weak correlations with job satisfaction. This suggests that their impact may be limited due to a mismatch with the specific nature of caregiving work, suboptimal implementation, or the varied expectations of employees. Consequently, it is justified to both continue adapting motivational strategies to the realities of care work and conduct further qualitative research to better understand employee needs and perceptions in this sector.

In conclusion, the study confirms that non-material motivational tools can serve as an effective mechanism for supporting employee engagement and satisfaction in the care services sector – provided that they are appropriately selected, effectively implemented, and tailored to the occupational and organizational characteristics of the workforce. From a managerial perspective, this suggests that in low-paid occupations non-material motivational tools should be treated as a complement to fair financial remuneration rather than as its substitute. The case study indicates that, in practice, the most influential tools are those that are pragmatic, stabilizing, and relationship-based, offering clear guidance for managers operating in this segment of the labor market.

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