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EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION IN CURRENT LITERATURE: A SYSTEMATIC SEARCH*

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Abstract. The main objective of this article is to systematise approaches to motivation in current professional literature and identify key factors influencing employee motivation, thereby contributing to both theoretical understanding and practical improvement of human resource management in organisations. To this end, a systematic literature review of professional articles published in the Web of Science database in 2024 is conducted, using the VOSviewer programme to analyse and visualise key concepts and the relationships between them. The results show that employee motivation to enhance work performance is mainly influenced by quality support and leadership from direct superiors, autonomy in decision-making, ethical leadership, the integration of environmental values into human resource management (commonly referred to as green HRM), and the effective use of digital tools and technologies. The analysis also confirms that two main theoretical models dominate the current professional literature, namely the AMO (Ability, Motivation, Opportunity) model and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

Keywords: motivation; employees; human resources; model AMO; systematic literature search

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1. Introduction

In the 21st century, rapid technological developments in various innovations have not diminished the value of human capital. Human capital is considered to be the most valuable capital of companies and acts as a driving force of business activity. The perception of human capital should be vital as it has a real impact on the success of a business. When managing human resources, it is important to bear in mind one of the basic functions of management: motivation, planning and organisation, since an adequately motivated employee is the key to achieving the company's objectives (Machova et al., 2022; Caha & Urban, 2023).

Employee motivation plays a fundamental role in the effective functioning of organisations. As stated by Goel & Rashmi (2023), motivation is a critical factor in employee engagement, and its importance, function and influence can vary significantly depending on the industry or work environment. A well-designed motivational

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system contributes to the creation of positive employee attitudes such as high job performance, job satisfaction or willingness to stay in the organisation (Jarkovska & Jarkovska, 2024).

Although organisations have an interest in maintaining employees motivated at work, they do not always fully understand what really motivates them. While academics agree that monetary factors—including employee wages—significantly affect employee performance and productivity, they do not unanimously rank them among the strongest determinants of employee motivation (Uka & Prendi, 2021). Tamara et al. (2020) argue that employees are motivated by brand management, company vision, owner, employee component, salary, teamwork and promotion.

Employee motivation is essential to employee performance, but organisations often do not understand all the factors that influence it. Soliman & Altabtai (2023) further note that the most important motivational factor is job security, followed by salary and promotion, while taking on responsibility is considered the least motivating. They also found a gender difference in the perception of motivation, with male participants favouring salary and female participants choosing job security. Similarly, Subha & Bhattacharya (2022) confirm that training and incentives positively influence employee efficiency and productivity, which has a major impact on the overall organisational performance.

Nowadays, however, there has been a proliferation of perspectives on how to approach the issue of motivation, and authors have come up with different research approaches, methods and interpretations of motivation itself. Alongside traditional theories, new directions are emerging, such as the emphasis on ethical leadership (Abdi & Rahman, 2024), digital transformation (Stachová et al., 2024), and ecological aspects of human resource management (Alshammari & Asaari, 2024). This makes the topic increasingly broad, diverse and often less clear for practice.

In reality, organisations are challenged with navigating a broad spectrum of information and approaches to select the most suitable way to manage employee motivation that aligns with their specific business style. As pointed out by Xing et al. (2024), supporting employees in developing environmental and digital competencies is an important motivational factor, but it manifests differently across organisations.

Thus, there is a clear societal demand for a deeper anchoring of this issue, a categorization of the different schools of thought, and providing a structured overview of their concepts. This research therefore seeks to provide a better understanding of the issue of employee motivation, to identify the main currents, and to map the ideas that can bring new approaches to human capital management.

In response to societal demand, the aim of this paper is to conduct systematic literature review on the topic of employee motivation. The focus of this study is to systematise the approaches to motivation in the current professional literature and to identify the main factors that influence motivation.

To achieve the objective, the following research questions are set:

RQ1: What factors are repeatedly proven to be crucial for increasing employee motivation and job satisfaction?

RQ2: What theoretical models (methods) appear in the current literature in relation to employee motivation?

2. Theoretical background

Using the right type of motivation is crucial for eliciting positive employee attitudes such as job performance, job satisfaction or voluntary retention, which ultimately leads to greater overall organizational effectiveness. Despite the ongoing academic debate, academics are providing practitioners with mixed findings regarding which motivational factors are relevant for target employee groups whose needs are under economic and socio-psychological pressures of a rapidly evolving environment (Jarkovska & Jarkovska, 2024).

2. 1. Motivation at work

Employee performance and consequently the performance of the business is affected by human resource management. The influence of motivation and the fulfilment of employees' needs is fundamental to improving performance and achieving the desired level of productivity (Hitka et al., 2020). Many factors affect employee

motivation in a company. Some of them are supported by law, others are the result of voluntary activities of the company and the way to some of them has not been found yet (Vavra et al., 2021).

Leaders motivate employees by setting up structures aimed at harnessing the full potential of employees, organizational resources and providing direction. Conversely, they can pose serious challenges to building trust, embracing corporate goals, fostering alignment, and promoting a collaborative environment (Altheeb, 2020). As stated by Ismail et al. (2024), leadership support and on-the-job training opportunities are key elements in keeping employees motivated.

2. 2. Theoretical models

It is well-known that in order to start and complete a certain work, there must first exist a motive that pushes a person to do something. This motive may be related to the satisfaction that the person feels in doing the work, their desire to act or their expectation of the outcome. All of these are related to the motivation that drives a person to perform in a particular way. The higher the motivation, the better the result of the work done. In this way, motivational theories provide an explanation of how individuals should be motivated to perform better, or how employees in an organization should be motivated so that their work leads to the achievement of organisational goals (Bush, 2021).

Motivational theories provide a solid foundation for understanding the multifaceted nature of employee motivation (Kharadze et al., 2023).

The first model is Maslow's theory of needs, which divides needs into five categories: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Central to Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs is the idea of their gradual satisfaction. People only begin to think about satisfying a higher order need when a lower order need is substantially satisfied. The motivational system in Maslow's theory seems to be based on human predispositions: once a need is satisfied, it ceases to be the predominant motivator of human behaviour and the highest need becomes the predominant one (Rojas et al., 2023).

The Ability, Motivation and Opportunity (AMO) framework can be key to identifying what factors can support better project performance. However, despite decades of research, the exact interplay of ability, motivation and opportunity, as well as how they influence behaviour, remains largely unclear (Tuuli & van Rhee, 2021). Benítez-Núñez et al. (2024), Qamar et al. (2024), and Adams et al. (2025) confirm the effectiveness of the AMO model in enhancing employee performance through its comprehensive approach to capabilities, motivation, and organisational opportunities.

3. Research objective and methodology

The aim of this paper is to systematise approaches to motivation in the current literature and to identify the main factors that influence motivation.

In early 2025, a quantitatively oriented literature review will be conducted using the Web of Science database. Relevant publications will be searched using the following search query: (((ALL=(motivation)) AND ALL=(education)) AND ALL=(employee)), with keywords applied across all available categories, including the "Title" and "Abstract" fields.

After the results are downloaded, a multi-stage screening process will follow. In the first stage, all records that are not published in English will be screened out. In the second step, only publications published in 2024 will be included, as the review focuses only on the most recent scholarly production. In the final stage of the selection process, articles that do not fall into the selected subject categories will be excluded from the analysis, namely: management, entrepreneurship, educational research, applied psychology, multidisciplinary psychology, social sciences and economics.

The bibliographic data will then be exported from the Web of Science database in a format compatible with the VOSviewer analysis tool. This software will be used to visualise and analyse the relationships between

publications by creating network maps. To create these networks, a bibliographic data set will be imported into VOSviewer to serve as input data for the generation of the maps.

Several visualisation maps will be created in VOSviewer. In the initial phase, it will be chosen that the analysis will be based on bibliographic data, with the input information read from a file exported from the Web of Science bibliographic database. Subsequently, individual maps will be generated according to the chosen type of analysis. This research will focus on four types of analysis:

1. Co-authorship – enables the identification of collaborations between authors by creating a network map showing the geographical distribution of authors by country.
2. Co-occurrence – analyses the frequency of occurrence and interconnection of keywords within the examined set of publications.
3. Bibliographic coupling – focuses on measuring the relatedness between scientific articles, authors, institutions or countries based on the number of shared references they cite. Through bibliographic coupling, three separate maps will be created showing papers, research organisations and countries of origin.
4. Co-citation – examines which sources (authors, journals) were most frequently cited together within the set of publications studied, thereby revealing influential authors and key scientific sources.

Following the completion of the visual analysis, an evidence review will be conducted based on a more narrowly defined set of articles, selected on the basis of their high thematic relevance and significant contribution to the research problem addressed.

This review will be systematically presented as a table with three columns, the first column containing the main evidence, i.e. the key findings and common topics identified in each study. The second column will focus on the research methods applied in the studies and the last column will list the authors of the relevant studies whose research contributed to the identified evidence.

4. Results

The search results indicated that a total of 3,047 articles on Web of Science include the keywords "motivation," "education," and "employees." These articles were published between 1984 and 2025.

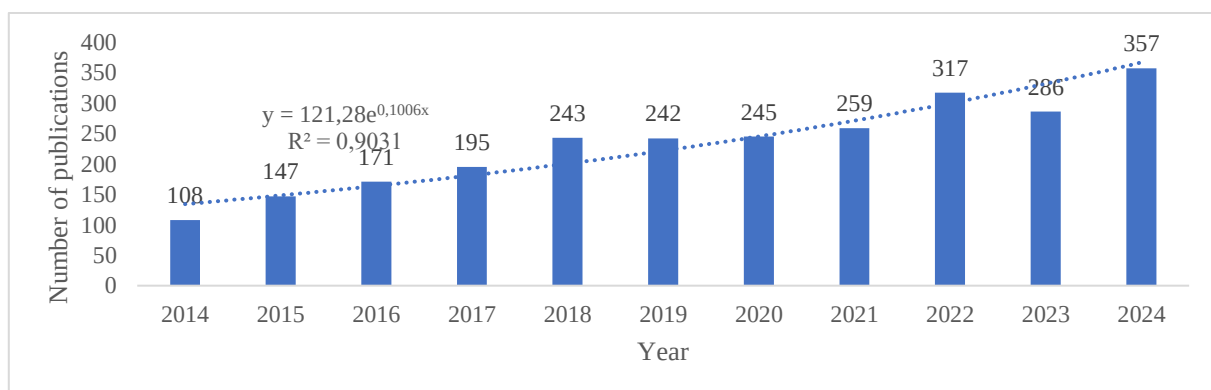


Figure 1. Number of publications from 2014 to 2024
Source: Authors

Figure 1 shows the number of publications published on Web of Science from 2014 to 2024 in all language versions. The graph indicates that the number of publications on employee motivation and training is on an increasing trend, indicating a growing interest of authors in the subject. The aim of the analysis was to identify research publications published in 2024 that relate to the concepts of motivation, education and workers. A total of 3,047 publications were found, but after a screening process (see Figure 1), 193 studies were included in the final set. The higher number of articles at this stage was deliberately retained in order to provide a basis for the

creation of network maps that allowed for better visual representation and a broader understanding of the issues under investigation.

Table 1. Identified and selected topics and types of scientific products

Topic	Identified publications	Selected publications
Motivation + education + employees	3,047	193
Type of publication		
Article	2,280	146
Article; Book Chapter	19	1
Article; Early Access	85	42
Article; Proceedings Paper	6	0
Article; Retracted Publication	1	0
Correction	2	0
Document Type	3	0
Editorial Material	5	0
Note	1	0
Proceedings Paper	581	2
Review	64	2
Review; Early Access	1	0

Source: Authors

Due to such a large sample of articles, the number of articles was reduced according to the following scheme.

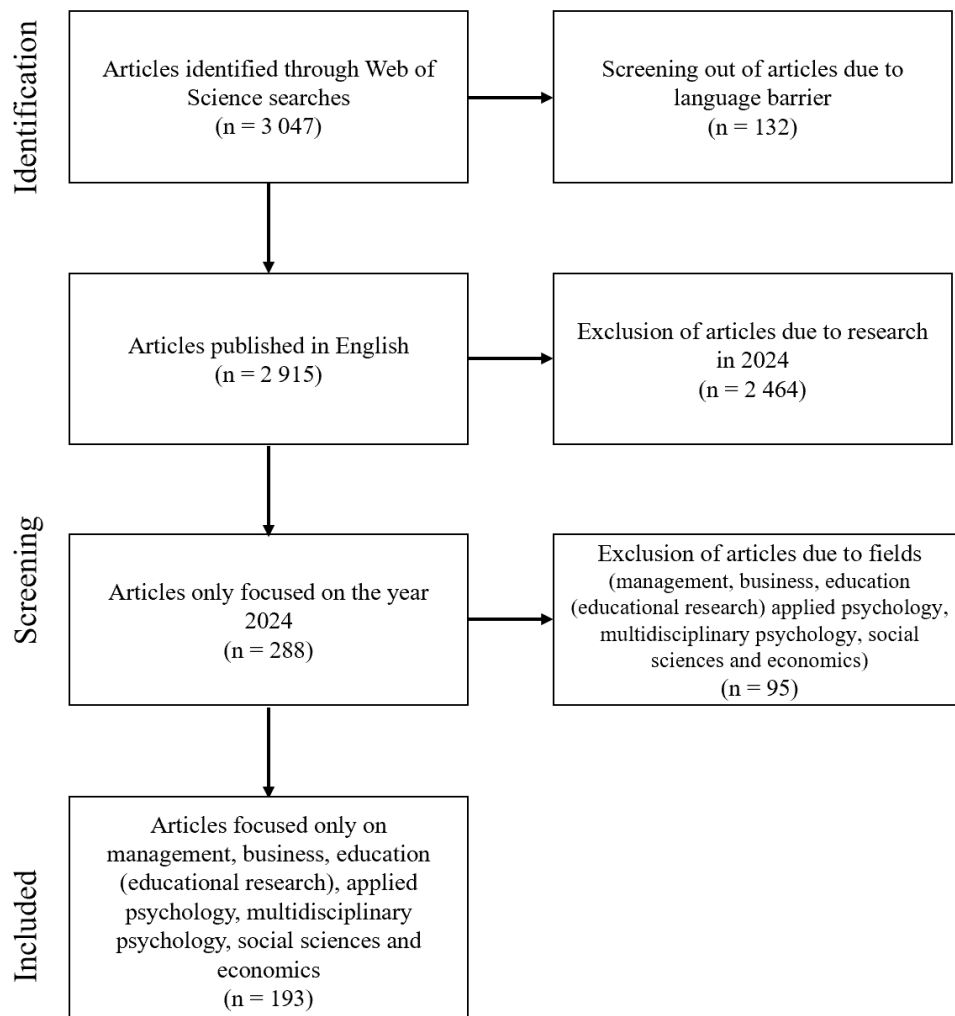


Figure 2. Searching and screening of articles

Source: Authors

Figure 4 focuses on the origin of the authors and shows the collaboration between authors from different countries. The largest node represents "China", indicating that authors from this country are the most active in the research and have extensive international collaboration. Other important nodes are the USA, the Netherlands, Germany, South Korea, India and Malaysia. The coloured clusters indicate regional collaboration.

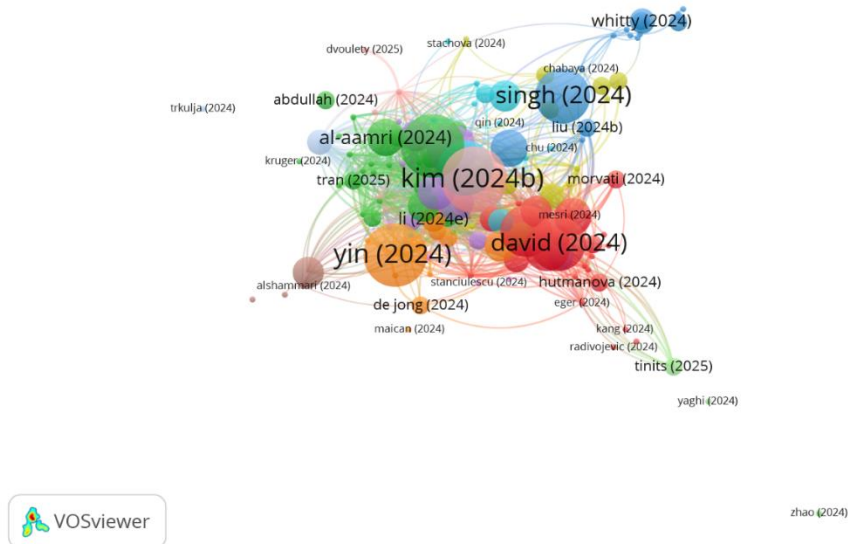


Figure 5. Network Map: Bibliographic Coupling – Documents
Source: Authors

Figure 5 shows how the articles are connected based on the bibliographical coupling. Bibliographic coupling focuses on measuring the relatedness between scientific articles, authors, institutions, or countries based on the number of shared references they cite. The size of the node depends on how important the document is in the network analysed. Large nodes with names such as “David (2024)”, “Yin (2024)” and “Kim (2024)” indicate that these articles are key to the topic of worker motivation and education because they have strong connections to others.

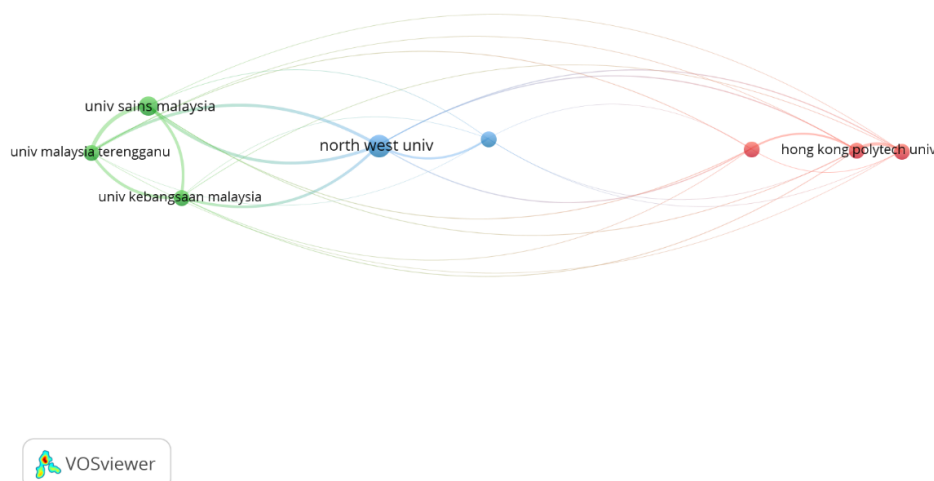


Figure 6. Network Map: Bibliographical Coupling – Organisations
Source: Authors

Figure 6, on the other hand, illustrates how documents are connected between scientific institutions through bibliographic coupling—institutions are thus linked if their authors cite the same sources. The green node shows universities from Malaysia, while the blue node is linked to other institutions, which may indicate that researchers collaborate with multiple research institutions. The red node represents The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

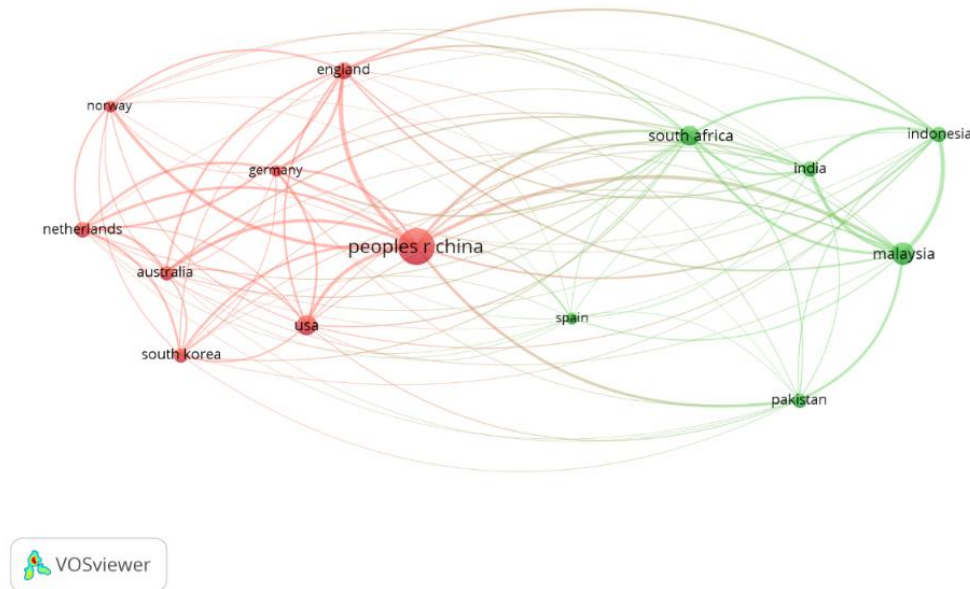


Figure 7. Network Map: Bibliographical Coupling – Countries
Source: Authors

Figure 7 illustrates the relatedness between countries based on the bibliographical coupling. Therefore, in this network map, countries that cite the same scientific papers will be listed. Each node represents one country that contributes to research on motivation and education. The size of a node indicates the importance of that country in the research network, and the lines between nodes indicate the strength of the link between countries. The more cited sources they share, the stronger the line.

The red region (China, Germany, Norway, South Korea) appears to be strongly interconnected through sharing the same citation references. China dominates this area, which indicates that its published research has a significant impact on motivation and education. The green area, on the other hand, shows countries such as South Africa, India, Malaysia, Indonesia.

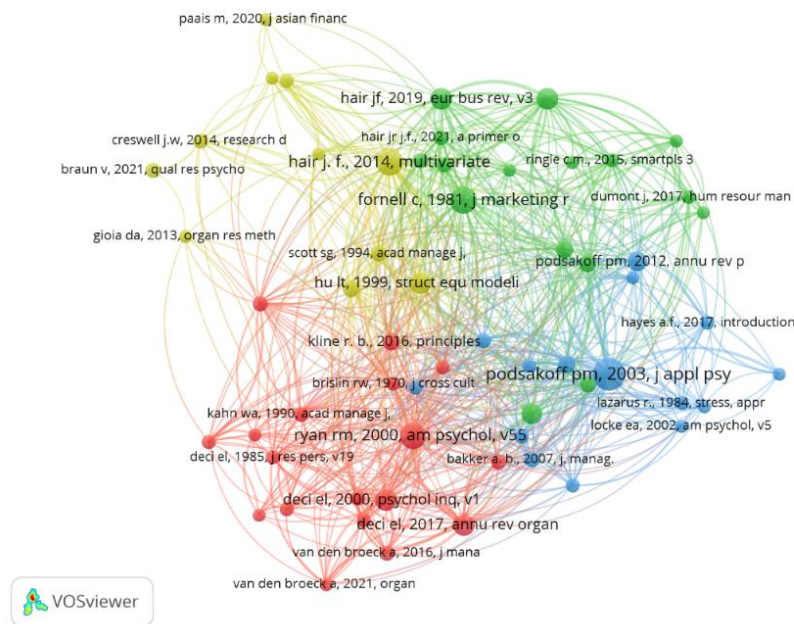


Figure 8. Network Map: Bibliographical Coupling – Cited References

Source: Authors

Figure 8 shows co-citation at the level of cited references, which means that two documents are linked if they were cited together in the same document. Each node represents a specific cited reference, and the size of the node depends on the number of times the reference was cited in the set of documents (in the selected 193 papers). At the same time, the map shows the strength of the connections between references using lines. The more times the references were cited together, the wider the line. The coloured areas then indicate related articles that were frequently cited together.

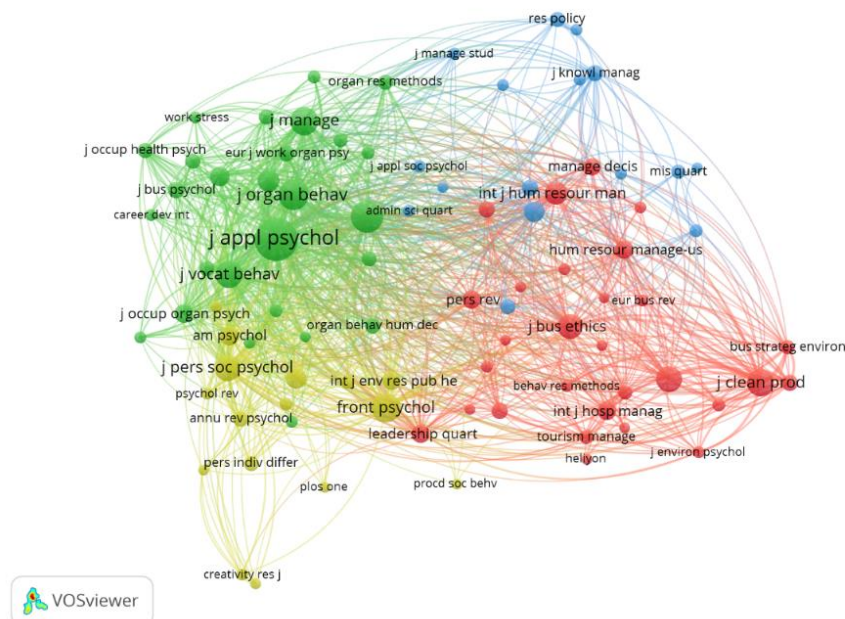


Figure 9. Network Map: Bibliographical Coupling – Cited Sources

Source: Authors

Figure 9 shows co-citation at the level of cited sources (journals). Each node represents a scientific journal, book or another cited source.

The green area includes journals such as the Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Organizational Behaviour, European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, and others. The green part of the map is therefore probably focused on work and organizational psychology.

The red area shows the Journal of Cleaner Production, Journal of Business Ethics, Human Resource Management and others. This section is thus related to management, leadership and business ethics.

The yellow section is represented by Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Frontiers in Psychology, Annual Review of Psychology. The yellow area thus represents articles published by journals that focus on general psychology.

The blue area includes Journal of Management Studies, Journal of Knowledge Management, Research Policy and others.

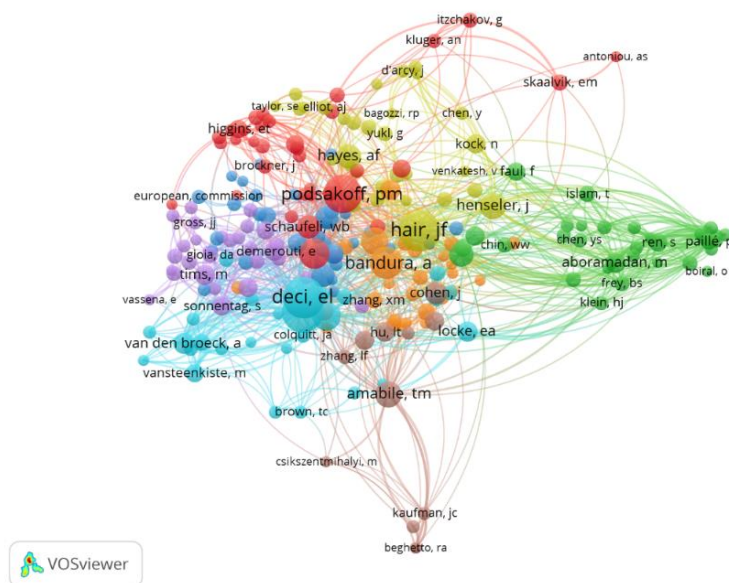


Figure 10. Network Map: Bibliographical Coupling – Cited Authors
Source: Authors

Figure 10 shows co-citation at the level of cited authors. That is, authors are linked if they are cited together in the same paper or document. Each node represents a specific cited author; the size of the node depends on how often the author is cited. The lines again represent the strength of co-citation. The most prominent authors cited are Edward L. Deci, Philip M. Podsakoff, and Joseph F. Hair.

Based on this analysis, an evidence review was conducted using a shortlist of articles carefully selected for their high thematic relevance and their contribution to the research focus.

Table 2. Evidence reviews in terms of main topics and descriptive results

Main Idea	Used Methods	Authors
Motivation is a very crucial factor for an organization because it also affects the organization's performance.	Quantitative survey (questionnaire) Analysis of correlations between digital HRM tools and engagement AMO theory (Ability, Motivation, Opportunity)	(Chanda, 2024) (Stachová et al., 2024) (He et al., 2024) (Issaoui et al., 2024) (Benítez-Núñez et al., 2024)
To be motivated, employees must have support from leaders and benefit from on-the-job training.	Cross-sectional design Structural Equation Modeling (SmartPLS) AMO model	(Ismail et al., 2024) (Benítez-Núñez et al., 2024) (Wu et al., 2024) (Qamar et al. 2024).
Autonomy as one of the basic human needs influences intrinsic motivation and drives job satisfaction.	Hierarchical regression analysis SEM Semi-structured interviews	(Zychová et al., 2024) (Y. Liu et al., 2024) (Mesri et al., 2024) (Gagné & Hewett, 2024) (Spieler, 2024)
Ethical leadership positively influences employees' trust in their leaders, loyalty and motivation. This trust, along with work spirit, has a direct impact on proactive employee behaviour, which in turn leads to better work performance. The result of ethical leadership and a positive work environment promotes employee motivation and engagement.	Quantitative survey among 279 employees, SEM-PLS analysis (Structural Equation Modelling – Partial Least Squares) in SmartPLS 4.1.0.0. program Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)	(Abdi & Rahman, 2024) (Gustari & Widodo, 2024) (Jufrizen et al., 2024)
Green HRM positively influences the environmental behaviour of employees (EEB) through motivators. Employee environmental commitment links the relationships between environmental behaviour, green skills and employee performance. Green skills and motivators positively influence performance. That is, when organisations actively promote green initiatives in human resource management, employees are more motivated to engage in green behaviours in the workplace and are more satisfied in the workplace.	Quantitative approach, online questionnaire, data analysis PLS-SEM method, Structured questionnaire, sample of 308 academics from Malaysian universities.	(Alshammari & Asaari, 2024) (Faezah, Yusliza, Ramayah, et al., 2024) (Farooq et al., 2024) (Xing et al., 2024) (Kurowska-Pysz et al., 2024) (Faezah, Yusliza, Chaudhary, et al., 2024)
Digital tools can improve organisational performance and employee engagement. Effective support for digital transformation in companies depends on the skills, motivation and opportunities of employees.	Analysis of correlations between digital HRM tools and employee engagement. AMO Theory (Ability, Motivation, Opportunity) A qualitative case study of Jiangsu Shangshang Cable Group Structured data analysis according to the Gioia model SEM	(Stachová et al., 2024) (Zhen & Ding, 2024) (X. Liu et al., 2024) (Türkes et al., 2024) (Guan et al., 2025) (Yildiz et al., 2024)
Employees are not expressing their full creative potential because they lack the right motivation and organisational support.	Observation Social information processing theory, structural equation modelling and bootstrapping analysis	(Angelova, 2024) (Li et al., 2024) (Zhu et al., 2024)
The main reasons why employees think about changing jobs include unmet expectations, lack of motivation, inadequate professional skills, low pay, limited career development opportunities and lack of recognition.	Analytical, descriptive, quantitative and statistical methods. Quantitative research (n=294), analysis of employee attitudes. Semi-structured interviews	(Samasonok, 2024) (Paresashvili et al., 2024) (Selesho & Matjie, 2024)

Source: Authors

Table 2 shows the main ideas from the selected set of publications. The first column contains the main evidence, i.e., key conclusions and common themes identified in individual studies. The second column focuses on the research methods applied in the studies, and the last column lists the authors of the relevant studies whose research contributed to the identified evidence.

The results from the table 2 are then shown in a mind map for better clarity, see Figure 10.

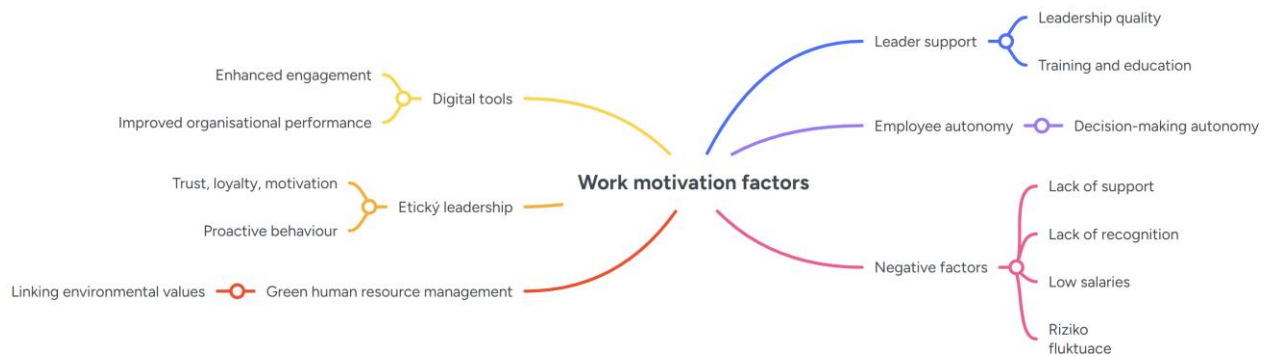


Figure 11. MindMeister mind map of results

Source: Authors using MindMeister

The mind map (Figure 10) shows the main factors that authors of current literature consider to influence work motivation. The main factors include support from managers, employee autonomy, digital tools, ethical leadership, and green human resource management. At the same time, factors that suppress motivation have been identified, including lack of support, lack of recognition, low wages, and the risk of turnover.

5. Discussion

Based on the findings, the research questions can now be answered.

RQ1: What factors are repeatedly proven to be crucial for increasing employee motivation and job satisfaction?

Motivation itself is one of the crucial factors of an organisation, as it affects not only the work commitment or performance of the employee, but also the overall performance of the organisation. (Chanda, 2024; Stachová et al., 2024; He et al., 2024; Issaoui et al., 2024; Benítez-Núñez et al., 2024). Within the analysis, various factors repeatedly appeared in the current publications.

According to Ismail et al. (2024), Benítez-Núñez et al. (2024) and Wu et al. (2024), employee motivation is directly related to quality support from managers (leaders) and professional development opportunities through training.

According to Zychova et al. (2024), Y. Liu et al. (2024), Mesri et al. (2024), Gagné & Hewett (2024) and Spieler (2024), it is necessary to allow employees some autonomy as well, since autonomy is one of the basic human needs that influences intrinsic motivation and controls job satisfaction. Since employees will be given the ability to make decisions about their work, they will also be driven to improve their performance.

Ethical leadership is also one of the factors influencing motivation in the workplace. Leaders who act ethically enhance employee trust and thus strengthen employee loyalty and motivation. This trust, combined with workplace spirit, has a direct impact on proactive behaviour, i.e. acting above and beyond one's normal job duties. Therefore, it appears that ethical leadership and work environment form the basis for employee motivation and commitment (Abdi & Rahman, 2024; Gustari & Widodo, 2024; Jufrizen et al., 2024). In addition to ethical leadership, the concept of green HRM is also gaining importance. This management integrates environmental values into the HR and employee management of companies. Research shows that if a company strives to be green and to lead its employees to do so, employees are more satisfied and thus more motivated to improve performance (Alshammari & Asaari, 2024; Faezah, Yusliza, Ramayah, et al., 2024; Farooq et al., 2024; Xing et al., 2024; Kurowska-Pysz et al., 2024; Faezah, Yusliza, Chaudhary, et al., 2024).

Digital tools represent another factor for higher performance motivation. Such tools can improve the performance of the entire organisation as well as employee engagement. Hence, effective support for digital transformation in companies depends not only on the capabilities, but also on the motivation and opportunities

of employees (Stachová et al., 2024; Zhen & Ding, 2024; Liu et al., 2024; Türkes et al., 2024; Guan et al., 2025; Yildiz et al., 2024).

Conversely, if employees lack sufficient organisational support and are not motivated, they often do not use their creative potential. Lack of recognition and incentives can lead to passivity and reduced performance (Angelova, 2024; Li et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2024). At the same time, employees may also think about changing jobs if their expectations are not met, they are not sufficiently motivated, have low wages or limited career development opportunities, or a lack of recognition. These factors reduce long-term job satisfaction and lead to increased turnover in the company (Samasonok, 2024; Paresashvili et al., 2024).

RQ2: What theoretical models (methods) appear in the current literature in relation to employee motivation?

There are various theoretical models in the field of employee motivation that have been proven to work in the research literature. The main models that appear in the literature include the AMO theory and the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

The AMO (Ability, Motivation, Opportunity) theory is about the need to develop, motivate and create new opportunities for employees to reach their full potential. This model has been used in studies by authors such as Zhen & Ding (2024), Benítez-Núñez et al. (2024) and Qamar et al. (2024).

The other method used is Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The SEM method is widely used for the analysis of complex relationships between variables. Through SEM, Faezah, Yusliza, Chaudhary, et al. (2024) found that green HRM influences employee behaviour. Abdi & Rahman (2024), Guan et al. (2025), Yildiz et al. (2024), Xing et al. (2024), Jufrizen et al. (2024) also used this method in their investigations.

Conclusions

The research investigated what motivational factors affect employee performance. Thus, the aim of this paper was to systematise approaches to motivation in the current literature and to identify the main factors that influence motivation. This systematic literature review represented sources published in 2024 on the Web of Science that address how autonomy, leadership support, training, ethical leadership, work environment and digital tools influence work behaviour and employee motivation. The results show that job autonomy, leadership support, green initiative, and the use of digital technology in HR contribute to the development of proactive behaviours, higher satisfaction, and increased overall performance. It can therefore be said that motivation is a complex process that is influenced by several factors, both internal and external.

At the same time, it was found that academic authors in their research on motivation most often use the AMO (Ability, Motivation, Opportunity) theory, which emphasizes supporting employees' abilities, motivating them and providing them with opportunities to use their abilities. Another important method currently used by the authors is Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), which in turn examines the relationship between variables such as green HRM and employee motivation.

The contribution of this paper lies in providing a clear summary of the factors influencing work motivation, as well as outlining theoretical models that can serve as a basis for further research and practical application in human resource management.

A limiting factor of the research was that only literature from 2024 was examined. Another limitation was the choice of keywords, which were only entered into the Web of Science database. The research was also limited by the selection of only one database. Nevertheless, the findings may still prove valuable for companies aiming to adjust their motivational systems within their organisations or serve as a basis for further research.

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