

The Correlation Between Motivation and Employee Satisfaction in the Service Industry

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse the correlation between the two dimensions of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic), rewards and recognition, and employee performance, being one of the first studies to tackle this problem in the context of the service industry of Southern Romania. The data was collected using a quantitative survey of 161 employees from various service industries, such as retail, hospitality, healthcare, and professional services. The results were analysed using partial least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS4.10 software. Our findings have shown that there is a strong, positive relationship between intrinsic motivation, on the one hand, and extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, and employee satisfaction, as well as between rewards and recognition and extrinsic motivation. Moreover, our research did not find a significant correlation between rewards and recognition and intrinsic motivation, maybe due to the way reward and recognition (RR) was constructed, most items being related to financial, tangible rewards, which tend to have a more significant influence on extrinsic motivation (EM) rather than intrinsic motivation (IM). Our findings might be of use for service managers to better understand how to motivate their employees in order to ensure their maximum performance.

Keywords

Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, Rewards and Recognition, Job Satisfaction, Service Industry

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Introduction

There is a myriad of exploring employee motivation, Herzberg's (1966) hygiene theory being one of the most important. This theory is based on the fact that there are two types of factors that influence employees' job satisfaction: intrinsic factors or motivators (the task's appeal, the feeling of achievement, being recognized by your co-workers and supervisor, responsibility, and personal development) which, when present, lead to employee satisfaction and extrinsic or hygiene factors (wage, promotion opportunities, the managers' supervision style, work climate, and inter-personal relationships with colleagues) which, when absent, lead to employee dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1966).

Our paper aims to study the relationship between rewards and recognition (RR), extrinsic motivation (EM), intrinsic motivation (IM), and employee satisfaction (ES) in the context of the service industry of southern Romania. In order to achieve our research goal, we have tested four research hypotheses on a sample of 183 service sector employees. Our results are showing that both dimensions of motivation (IM and EM) have a strong and direct influence on the employees' satisfaction, while the RR system only influences EM; no significant relationship has been found between the RR system and IM.

The main contribution of our research consists in testing the relationships between the aforementioned variables in the context of the service industry of southern Romania, being one of the first studies which tackles the relationship between motivation, satisfaction and performance in this particular context.

The literature review section addresses the results of the most important studies on this subject, being followed by the description of the research methodology used in this particular case and the discussion of the results of our particular research.

1. Literature Review

Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1999), mentioned by Al-Sada, Al-Esmael and Faisal (2017, p.165), refer to motivation as an “inner force that drives individuals to accomplish personal and organizational goals” or a “state of mind, desire, energy, or interest that translates into action”.

Glaz et al. (2017) argue that motivation should be treated like a process that fosters changes in workplace conditions to increase the employees’ commitment, productivity, and loyalty toward the organization. In addition, highly motivated employees can be seen as a source of competitive advantage since they are more likely to put in extra effort to fulfill their tasks.

Most theories of motivation divide this concept into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which corresponds to Herzberg’s (1966) motivators-hygiene duality. IM is defined as the “doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequence” (Deci and Ryan, 2013, p.56). An intrinsically motivated employee will fulfil their task motivated by their enjoyment of their work rather than some external incentives. According to Herzberg (1966), EM is not a source of satisfaction; instead, the lack of extrinsic factors will lead to dissatisfaction.

EM contributes to the employees’ involvement and commitment to the company (Burlea-Schiopoiu; 2007; Wang et al., 2019), while the management’s leadership behavior contributes to employee performance (Habanik et al., 2020). Parsons and Broadbridge (2006) found that UK charity shop managers registered low satisfaction scores regarding extrinsic factors such as work climate, salary, or professional status, which contradicts Deci and Ryan (2013), that proved that financial benefits, high salaries, job security, training opportunities, autonomy, performance bonuses, and management’s recognition are important extrinsic factors that contribute to employees’ motivation and satisfaction.

IM comes from within the individual and is not dependent on external stimuli. Glaz et al. (2017) argue that IM positively correlates with psychological well-being and contributes to the employees’ social, cognitive, and physical development. Deci and Ryan (2013) highlight two critical elements of IM: professional competence and self-determination or autonomy. For employees to be intrinsically motivated, they must find the task attractive and appealing and perceive it as necessary for their professional development.

Recent studies (Plessis, Douangphichit and Dodd, 2016) proved that several intrinsic factors did not significantly influence employees’ job satisfaction. For example, achievement and recognition registered the lowest scores from all the variables that might influence job satisfaction. In contrast, some extrinsic factors, such as workplace climate and salary, registered the highest score (Sobaih and Hasanein, 2020). one explanation for these contradicting results is the local socio-economic and cultural characteristics of each labor market (Valk and Yousif, 2023).

Rewards and recognition (RR) refer to an organizational system in which intrinsic and extrinsic rewards acknowledge employees’ performance. Al-Sada, Al-Esmael and Faisal (2017) mention financial compensation, training opportunities, promotion, paid time off, and fringe benefits as key elements of an efficient RR system that increases employee motivation and performance.

Deci and Ryan (2013) argue that an efficient RR system should be impartial and used to acknowledge performance, competence, and initiative. An essential component of an efficient RR system is the salary, which Eichenauer et al. (2021) regarded as one of the main drivers for increasing employee performance. Burlea-Şchiopoiu et al. (2016) highlight the importance of objective feedback, autonomy, and responsibility as non-financial incentives that significantly impact employees’ motivation and satisfaction. Salanova and Kirmanen (2010) identify three key aspects of an efficient RR system that must be: adequately correlated with the workload, on par with the competition’s RR systems, and consistent enough in order to motivate the employees to overperform.

When using financial compensation as part of the RR system, the organization should consider three essential elements: the effectiveness of the rewards, the employees’ profile, and that it should be given based on a clear and transparent performance evaluation process (Salanova and Kirmanen, 2010). As we argued before, financial compensation is, according to Herzberg (1966), a hygiene factor which, when present, doesn’t lead to an increase in satisfaction but, when absent, it will lead to dissatisfaction, and thus, it should reflect the employees’ workload and performance.

RR system that uses non-financial benefits should be designed based on the employees’ needs and expectations, which could be related to greater responsibility, decision-making autonomy, or a need for

achievement, affiliation, or power (Salanova and Kirmanen, 2010). At the same time, non-financial benefits may include extrinsic rewards such as paid time off, health insurance, flexible working hours, or positive supervisor feedback and appreciation (Madera et al., 2017).

Employee satisfaction (ES) has been a widely researched topic in recent years, mainly due to its influence on employee commitment, loyalty, and motivation. This concept is defined, according to Valk and Yousif (2023, p.295), as “a positive emotional state resulting from a cognitive and affective, favorable appraisal of the job, leading to the fulfillment of an employee’s needs, goals and values” and it is linked to several organizational aspects such as leadership, motivation, productivity, and culture (Burlea-Schiopoiu et al., 2016; Mihai et al., 2017). Pang and Lu’s (2018) findings suggest that higher levels of satisfaction will improve the organization’s performance, while lower levels will inhibit it. According to Panda, Jain and Nambudiri (2022), three factors influence employees’ satisfaction: demographics (i.e., age, gender, and education), extrinsic factors (i.e., salary, benefits, management style, work climate, relationship with other colleagues), and intrinsic factors (i.e., the nature of the task, sense of achievement, responsibility, autonomy, development opportunities).

Employee satisfaction has been proven to positively influence the employees’ loyalty only if the employees are happy with their salaries and promotion opportunities, feel safe and secure at their job, and their achievements are acknowledged. In addition, they feel that their work is exciting and appealing, contributing to their fulfillment (Leitão et al., 2022). Along the same lines, Pang and Lu (2018) highlight decision-making autonomy, the organization’s brand value, and overall labor productivity as essential factors influencing employee satisfaction. Thus, ES can result in a positive or negative emotional state based on the employees’ evaluation of their work’s appeal and performance. If an organization wants to have a motivated, happy, and satisfied workforce, the employees should be adequately rewarded externally, through tangible, extrinsic rewards, and internally through experience, collaboration, development, competence, and effort (Paais and Pattiruhu, 2020).

Employee motivation is closely linked with the rewards and recognition system and employee satisfaction (Deci and Ryan, 2013; Leitão et al., 2022; Paais and Pattiruhu, 2020; Valk and Yousif, 2023). Moreover, Pool (1997) argues that employees’ motivation and satisfaction should be treated as separate concepts to analyze them and their factors of influence properly. Al-Sada, Al-Esmael and Faisal (2017) have found that both IM and EM positively influence employees’ satisfaction (ES), which in turn leads to an increase in their productivity and the organization’s performance. Furthermore, Pang and Lu (2018) have shown that ey positively influences ES by using an efficient package of financial and non-financial compensation, adequately adapted to the employees’ work-load and the general market conditions, which partially contradicts Herzberg’s (1966) two-factor theory, according to which, hygiene (extrinsic) factors, when present, do not positively influence employee satisfaction, but when absent, will cause dissatisfaction. Similarly, Pool (1997) has found positive correlations between extrinsic factors such as pay-for-performance reward systems and employee satisfaction. Based on previous arguments, we have developed the following two research hypotheses:

H1: There is a strong and positive relationship between extrinsic motivation (EM) and employee satisfaction (ES)/

H2: There is a strong and positive relationship between intrinsic motivation (IM) and employee satisfaction (ES).

Güngör (2011) separates the two motivation dimensions and argues that financial RR influences EM, while non-financial RR (recognition, relationship with peers, working conditions, and supervisors’ leadership behaviour) has a strong influence on IM, which partially contradicts Habanik et al. (2020) who manage to find only a relationship between financial RR and EM, without any significant correlation between non-financial RR and IM. Chipunza and Malo’s (2017) findings show that RR is a strong predictor of ES if the employees understand that their actions and behaviour will lead to concrete compensation, such as higher salaries, performance bonuses, or promotion opportunities. Extrinsically motivated employees tend to be more optimistic because they believe that if they reach the desired organizational results, they will receive a tangible reward. Moreover, intrinsically motivated individuals perform not because of a desire to receive an external incentive but due to their enjoyment of work and other factors such as their feeling of achievement and self-realization. Finally, Leitão et al. (2022) argued that employees who are given extrinsic rewards for their performance, in the long run, will continue to perform only as long as they are rewarded. Thus, EM prevailed over IM. Based on these theoretical implications, we have developed the following research hypotheses:

H3: There is a strong and positive relationship between the rewards and recognition system (RR) and extrinsic motivation (EM)

H4: There is a strong and positive relationship between the rewards and recognition system (RR) and intrinsic motivation (IM)

2. Research methodology

In order to test our hypotheses, we have gathered data using a five-point Likert scale survey with 35 items (7 items for each variable and seven control variables). The survey is based on Salanova and Kirmanen's (2010) research, and it was pre-tested to identify and rule out ambiguous items or double-barrelled questions (MacKenzie and Podsakoff, 2012). All four variables registered Cronbach Alpha values greater than 0.800 (EM – 0.831, IM – 0.899, RR – 0.945, ES – 0.976).

The data was gathered between November 2022 and February 2023, the respondents being selected from various service industry organizations from the south of Romania. The survey was sent to almost 200 service industry employees (contact personnel, line, idle or top management), from which we could use 180 results. These 183 responses were tested using Armstrong and Overton's (1977) theory of non-response bias, leading us to the final number of 161 valid questionnaires.

The structure of the sample is based on seven control variables: gender, age group, industry, position, length of service, contract duration, and working hours. Thus, regarding gender, 53% of our respondents were male, and 47% were female, and regarding the age group, 16% were between 18 and 29 years old, 28% of the respondents were between 30 and 39 years old, 26% were between 40 and 49 years old, 24% were between 50 and 59 years while 6% of our respondents were over 60 years old. Moreover, 7% of our answers came from retail employees, 13% from tourism employees, 19% from professional services, 22% from healthcare, 9% from personal services, 14% from restaurants, 15% from distribution/delivery, and 1% from other types of services. Furthermore, more than half (53%) of our respondents were contact personnel, about a quarter were line managers (24%), 16% were middle managers, while 7% were top management. 9% of these employees worked for less than a year for their current company, 24% between 1 and 3 years, 29% between 3 and 5 years, 24% between 5 and 10 years and 14% worked for more than years in their current organization. Regarding the last two control variables, 65% of the participants in this study had a contract with an indefinite duration, and 35% had a fixed term contract, while 73% of the respondents were working full time (8hrs/day, five days/week) and 27% were working part-time (less than 8hrs/day, five days/week).

We analyzed the data using SmartPLS 4.0's PLS-SEM function, which Hair et al. (2022) suggested is more useful since it uses formative and reflective measurements. Moreover, the use of PLS-SEM in this current research is supported by Manley et al. (2021), which plead for using this method in studies using multiple variables and causal relationships. The values of both indicators, Excess Kurtosis and Skewness, show a symmetrical distribution. The four variables show a variance of Excess Kurtosis from -1.228 to 0.386, which is considered normal by Hair et al. (2022). At the same time, the skewness indicator, although showing larger values (ranging from -1.135 to -0.195), is in the normal range, as defined by Hair et al. (2022).

The covariance matrix shows strong correlations between the four variables, all the values being well above the accepted 0.500 (Hair et al., 2010), ranging from 0.680 (ES-EM) to 0.903 (IM-ES). Moreover, we analyzed the variables' collinearity which showed a low risk of multi-collinearity for each item since the Variance Inflation Factor is lower than the minimum accepted value of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2022).

3. Results

The first step in analyzing the results of our research was to test the model and study the items' outer loadings. Thus, the outer loading of each item is more significant than 0.70, the smallest value (0,710) being registered by IM6 ("I feel that my current job offers me personal and professional development opportunities"), while the largest (0,953) was registered by RR4 ("How satisfied are you with the paid time off that your company is giving you?").

Moreover, we analyzed the composite reliability (CR) of each variable, which registered the following values: 0.903 for Intrinsic Motivation (IM), 0.905 for Extrinsic Motivation (EM), 0.925 for Rewards and Recognition (RR), and 0.939 for Employee Satisfaction (ES). The values prove that the internal reliability of the variables is verified, according to Hair et al. (2022).

Furthermore, we continued our analysis by testing the convergent validity, measuring if the average variance extracted (AVE) registers values larger than 0.5, which it did (ranging from 0.645 for Intrinsic

Motivation to 0.845 for Employee Satisfaction). At the same time, our results have shown that Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) condition was fulfilled, the HTMT (heterotrait-monotrait ratio) criterion registering values lower than 0.9, which, according to Henseler et al. (2015) proved the possibility of discriminant validity.

Finally, the SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) registers a value of 0.073, and NFI (variance inflation factors) shows a value of 0.902, proving the validity of the four variables model, showing that there are no collinearity problems between them.

4. Discussion

In order to test the validity of our hypothesis, we used a bootstrapping process, with a resample amount of 500, a bias-corrected confidence interval of 95% and a two-tailed test. The results are show in table 1:

Table no. 1– Hypothesis testing

HYPOTHESES	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Results
H1: EM →ES	0.195	0.195	0.062	2.903	0.004	Supported
H2: IM →ES	0.342	0.343	0.059	4.245	0.000	Supported
H3: RR →EM	0.584	0.572	0.065	7.903	0.000	Supported
H4: RR →IM	0.002	0.008	0.075	0.053	0.975	Not Supported

Source: authors’ personal analysis

As we can see from Table 1, three of our four hypotheses have been validated. First, our findings strongly correlate motivation’s two dimensions (EM and IM) and the employees’ satisfaction (ES), thus validating **H1** and **H2**. These findings are in line with Paais and Pattiruhu’s (2020) research, which highlights the importance of both internal (such as a pleasant work environment, healthy relationships with colleagues and supervisors, collaboration, exciting tasks, and feeling of achievement) as well as external incentives such as wage increase, performance bonuses, paid time off, training and development opportunities. All these factors actively contribute to employee satisfaction, which in turn helps organizations reach their targets and perform in the market (Eichenauer et al., 2021). Moreover, Al-Sada, Al-Esmael and Faisal (2017) have reached similar results regarding the correlation between motivation and employees’ satisfaction, while Gheitani et al. (2019) found a positive relationship between IM and ES, and Yang et al. (2015) reached similar results regarding IM and ES.

The strong correlation between EM and ES (**H1**) agrees with Valk and Yousif’s (2023) findings but is in contradiction with the results of Stringer et al. (2011), which found a positive relationship only between IM and ES, while EM has been found to have a negative relationship with employee satisfaction. Herzberg (1966), as we stated in the literature review of this paper, also includes intrinsic incentives (merit recognition, interesting tasks, feeling of achievement) as powerful predictors for employees’ satisfaction, which is also supported by Pool (1997) and confirms our results regarding IM’s influence on ES (**H2**).

The validity of **H2**, regarding IM’s influence on ES is supported by many studies, such as Stringer et al. (2011), Eichenauer et al. (2021), and Leitão et al. (2022), which highlight the role of task appeal, responsibility, decision-making autonomy and perceived development opportunities that arise from day-to-day operations in enhancing the employees’ satisfaction, while instilling a sense of accountability and commitment to the task and the organization, in general (Yang et al., 2015; Plessis, Douangphichit and Dodd, 2016). At the same time, our results are in line with the self-determination theory as it was proposed by Deci and Ryan (2013), which suggests that a pleasant work environment, which fosters collaboration and synergy between co-workers, an example of intrinsic motivational factors, in turn, are strong predictors for employees’ satisfaction.

Our results have shown that both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives are shown to have a significant impact on the employees’ satisfaction, and these findings highlight the need for the organization to understand the expectations and wishes of their employees in order to be able to use the correct incentives as well as an adequate reward and recognition system, depending on the situation. Our findings are in consensus with results of Leitão et al. (2022), which found that the organization’s reward system, as well as intrinsic and extrinsic motivational incentives, are mediators for the leadership’s influence on the employees’ job satisfaction. Their results underline the impact of leadership behaviour on the employees’ well-being,

mentioning that leaders should foster close relationships with their employees, be sensitive to their opinions, expectations, and wishes, but at the same time, be able to show authority when the situation asks for it, such as meeting deadlines. Similar to our results, Gngr (2011) proved that the RR system might influence ES only through the mediating effect of IM and EM.

Moreover, our findings show that the rewards and recognition system employed by an organization (RR) directly and positively influences the employees' intrinsic motivation (**H3**). These results are supported by Chipunza and Malo's (2017) research, which states that the leading role of a reward and recognition system is to make employees understand that their behaviour and results, if acceptable, will lead to tangible rewards such as wage increase, performance bonuses, promotions, or less tangible rewards such as appraisal from the manager, recognition within the organization or positive feedback. Along the same lines, Leito et al. (2022) state that the main driver for employee motivation is an RR system based on extrinsic rewards (high salary, paid time off, promotion opportunities, performance bonuses, and training opportunities). Analysing the findings, we conclude that extrinsic motivation is an essential behavioural instrument and is positively influenced by tangible rewards adapted to the employees' needs, wishes, and expectations, which is also stated by Valk and Yousif (2023). However, while highlighting the importance of the RR system on the employees' EM, Stringer et al. (2011) found no significant correlation between the rewards and recognition system and employees' extrinsic motivation, which contradicts our results and Kreps's (1997) agency theory. The sample's structure might explain the reason for this contradiction: Stringer et al.'s (2011) research was focused only on the retail industry, which is known for low salaries, usually just above the minimum legal wage, while our sample focuses on several tertiary industries, of which 41% of the responses came from employees working in healthcare or professional services, which, unlike retail, are using a highly educated workforce, which receive well above average wages and thus, is more likely to consider tangible rewards a basic form of motivation.

We used RR for analyzing both tangible rewards and non-tangible recognition, and our results managed only to find a positive relationship between RR and EM (**H3**). At the same time, the hypothesis related to RR's influence on IM (**H4**) has not been validated, thus partially contradicting Gngr (2011) while being in line with Habanik et al. (2020) and Al-Sada, Al-Esmael and Faisal (2017), whose results, as we have mentioned before, have shown that employees tend to prefer financial rewards. Moreover, in our study, the RR variable consists in 7 items, 5 of which refer to extrinsic, tangible rewards, and thus, this might be one of the reasons that we could not find a positive relationship between RR and IM since tangible rewards tend to develop EM, rather than IM.

Finally, several studies contradict our result regarding RR's lack of influence on IM, such as Deci and Ryan (2013) and Stringer et al. (2011), who analyzed the self-determination theory, which states that performance-related financial rewards might have a positive impact upon the employees' intrinsic motivation, by enhancing the tasks' appeal and encouraging self-respect and decision-making autonomy.

Conclusions and further development

Among the limitations of our research, we should mention the sample's composition, of which 41% of the responses came from the healthcare and professional services industries, known for their highly educated workforce and above-average salaries. This imbalance in the sample's composition might have affected our results, especially those regarding the influence of RR upon EM and IM. At the same time, our study has focused on service industry employees from the southern regions of Romania. Thus, we cannot generalize our results for the whole country, especially considering the ethnic and cultural differences between Romania's northern and southern regions.

The hypothesis regarding the relationship between RR and IM was not validated, mainly due to the items which composed the RR variable, which was mainly related to tangible, extrinsic rewards, which were proven by other scholars as well, to have a stronger influence on EM rather than IM.

The novelty of our research consists in the fact that this study is one of the first which analyses the relationship between motivation, rewards and recognition and employee performance in the context of the service sector of southern Romania. Service managers can use our results in order to better understand how to motivate their employees, which incentives to use in each particular situation, in order to maximise their potential and the organisational performance.

Our research should be considered as a starting point for future studies regarding the relationship between motivation, rewards and recognition, and employee satisfaction, focusing on other regions, industries, or countries and, considering that this topic's relevance for both scholars and practitioners, our research can be extended by including other variables such as leadership, organizational culture, and employee

performance. Further research will be oriented to analyse the relationship among motivational factors that predict the success or the failure of SMEs from different sectors of activities and will also be a development of previous research made by Burlea-Schiopoiu and Mihai (2019).

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