

# Psychological Factors Affecting Employee Motivation and Productivity: A Review of Selected Literature

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## Abstract

This study conducts a systematic review of the literature on psychological factors affecting employee motivation and productivity. Articles were searched on the PsycINFO database and Google scholar. Articles were searched using the following terms in conjunction with Boolean operators (OR/AND): “employees,” “workers,” “staff,” “psychological factors,” “emotional intelligence,” “job satisfaction,” “employee well-being,” “motivated employees,” “motivation level,” “productivity,” “job performance,” “work efficiency,” “task performance,” “job satisfaction.” A total of 11 articles published in English between 2014 and 2024 were included in this review after screening. Reward was observed to significantly impact work motivation but was not significantly related to job satisfaction. It was also discovered that employees with high emotional intelligence can manage their emotions and colleagues; this results in better job performance and increased organizational effectiveness and quality of service. Employee and manager burnout impacts motivation and productivity. Leadership styles, autonomy, and social relatedness were also important factors in employee motivation and productivity. COVID-19 most negatively affected female employee psychology, motivation, and productivity. To ensure a motivated workforce and profitability, organizations should adopt a holistic approach by combining financial rewards with intrinsic motivators while giving priority to the well-being, emotional intelligence, and leadership development of employees.

**Keywords:** Employee productivity, motivation, psychology, health, emotional commitment, leadership, literature review

**DOI:** 10.7176/JBAH/15-1-04

**Publication date:** January 30th 2025

## 1. Introduction

Motivation refers to the internal and external factors that stimulate individuals to work toward goals, while productivity measures how effectively their efforts translate into results (Cook and Artino, 2016; Krekel et al., 2019). These two constructs are deeply interconnected, with motivation often acting as a precursor to productivity and productivity, in turn, reinforcing motivation. Employee motivation and productivity are critical drivers of organizational success, directly influencing performance, innovation, and efficiency. Employee motivation and productivity are shaped by various psychological factors, including intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, emotional well-being, workplace stress, and leadership (Manganelli et al., 2018). Over the years, theories such as self-determination theory, expectancy theory, and Herzberg’s two-factor theory have highlighted the importance of psychological elements like autonomy, recognition, and purpose in enhancing motivation and productivity (Gould, 2024). As organizations face evolving challenges like remote work and employee well-being, understanding these factors becomes even more crucial for maintaining a productive and engaged workforce.

There are many factors affecting employee performance, of which psychological factors make an integral component. Some intrinsic motivators that impact employee’s motivation include personal growth, job satisfaction, and a sense of purpose, while the extrinsic factors include rewards, recognition, and job security (Nyambegera and Gicheru, 2016). Emotional well-being, stress management, social dynamics, and leadership styles also play pivotal roles in shaping how motivated and productive employees feel in their work environments (Kerns, 2018). An understanding of these psychological factors is critical for organizations aiming to create conditions that foster sustained engagement and optimal performance.

In today's competitive and fast-paced global economy, organizations increasingly recognize the importance of understanding what drives employee motivation and productivity. These two interrelated factors are pivotal in determining the success of any organization, as motivated and productive employees are more likely to contribute to improved performance, innovation, and long-term sustainability.

The role of psychological factors in shaping employee motivation and productivity has been the focus of extensive research across multiple fields, including organizational psychology, management studies, and human resource development (Kour, El-Den and Sriratanaviriyakul, 2019; Vo, Tuliao and Chen, 2022). Psychological factors encompass a wide range of elements, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, emotional well-being, job satisfaction, workplace stress, and leadership styles, all of which can significantly impact an employee's engagement and effectiveness in their work (Shahzadi et al., 2014).

### 1.1 Justification of Review Study

Organizational success and productivity are hinged on the level of motivation and productivity of employees. Research indicates that employee motivation is a function of several factors, including employee psychology (Fernet, 2013; Kanfer, Frese and Johnson, 2017; Ahmad, 2021). The changing business environment and modern-day realities make a systematic review of the literature on the relationship between employee psychology and motivation and productivity very much needed. There is extensive literature on psychological factors that affect employee motivation and productivity; however, these factors are often investigated individually. Again, research into psychological factors affecting employee motivation and productivity has shifted from the traditional theories of motivation to newer concepts such as well-being, self-determination, resilience, etc. The modern marketplace is such that organizations are seeking newer ways to keep their employees motivated for maximum productivity. This review considers studies within the last 10 years so as to provide an update set of information on what psychological factors impact the motivation and productivity of an employee.

### 1.2 Aims and objective of the study

This review thus aims to identify new trends and research gaps as well as provide insights for future directions on how organizations can improve their productivity through psychology-based methods of employee motivation. Also, this review will provide a bird 's-eye view of how a total of these factors affect employee motivation and productivity while taking into consideration modern challenges employees face that can affect their motivation and productivity.

The objectives of this review are to synthesize the existing literature, examine the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic factors, and provide insights into how psychological factors can be leveraged to enhance workplace motivation and productivity.

## 2. Literature review

The productivity and motivation of employees are essential elements of an effective organization. By comprehending the psychological dynamics that impact these components, managers and organizations may establish work environments that promote high performance and job satisfaction. In recent times, the relationship between psychological factors and employee motivation and productivity has increased and gained prominence, most especially because of the ever-changing business and work climate. Uka and Prendi (2021) explains that the success of any organization lies in how motivated its employees are and their productivity. Some theories of psychology like 'the self-determination theory (SDT)' among others have been useful in the elucidation of the mechanisms by which intrinsic and extrinsic factors propel the behaviour of employees, which in turn affect productivity negatively or positively.

Intrinsic motivation may be defined as engagement in work basically for its fundamental satisfaction rather than mere external gratification (rewards) (Fishbach and Woolley, 2022). Intrinsic motivation has been identified to be very pivotal in organizations due to its influence on employee engagement and productivity. The self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci, 2000) extensively explains this. According to SDT, employee motivation and productivity are observed to improve with resultant workplace outcomes when basic human psychological needs such as autonomy, proficiency, and kinship are adequately considered and given the right attention. Employees work better, are more motivated, and are highly productive when they view their jobs as their own within the context of the organization (Gagné and Deci, 2005). SDT, therefore, emphasizes the creation of appropriate conditions that promote employee autonomy and room for the display of competence as vital for motivation and productivity.

According to the goal-setting theory, employee productivity is better when specific and challenging tasks are assigned to employees in addition to an adequate feedback system (Locke and Latham, 1990). Going further, Latham (2012) stated that to achieve greater levels of motivation and higher productivity through the input of greater efforts, goal setting is encouraged among employees. This implies that when employees set goals, they feel a high sense of ownership of tasks; this improves active participation and motivation. The foregoing statement agrees with the findings of a study by Locke and Latham (2019), which reported that by setting challenging yet achievable goals, intrinsic motivation is improved, which leads to higher levels of productivity.

There is a very strong link between job satisfaction and employee motivation and productivity. Research indicates that a satisfied employee has the potential to display more commitment to the organization (Judge et al., 2017). This interrelationship between job satisfaction and employee well-being is also a very vital factor to consider. Van Wingerden et al. (2017) reported that in situations where employees strategically customize the resources and demands of their jobs, employee motivation, well-being, and productivity are positively influenced. The feeling of satisfaction by employees based on their roles in the organization has a very important role to play in their motivation levels, which in turn immensely contributes to the success of the organization.

The equity theory of motivation, which was created in the early 1960s by psychologist J. Stacey Adams, is an additional theory that merits discussion. According to Redmond and Housell (2015), the idea suggests that an individual's motivation is determined by what they believe to be fair in relation to others. It acknowledges that an individual's view of fair treatment in social interactions can have an impact on motivation. Comparatively speaking, this theory implies that people desire to receive fair compensation for their services to the company.

In addition, the emotional connection that employees possess with their organization is called organizational commitment, and this has a direct effect on employee motivation and productivity (Bytyqi, 2020). This concept of organizational commitment is very important vis-à-vis the three-component model of commitment; affective, continuance, and normative, by Meyer and Allen (1991). An employee who has a very high affective commitment (more emotionally attached) is most likely to have higher motivation levels and better work performance (productivity) than another who does not (Chudzikowski, 2012). In a report by Albrecht et al. (2015), the importance of employee engagement in the enhancement of an organization's productivity was highlighted, and employee engagement was observed to be a product of robust organizational commitment.

Leadership is another very important factor that impacts and shapes the motivation and productivity of employees. A positive impact is exerted by transformational leadership; leadership hinged on employee inspiration and motivation through a shared vision on both motivation and productivity (Judge and Piccolo, 2014). Transformational leaders encourage supportive environments in which employee autonomy and personal growth are encouraged, and these, in turn, fuel intrinsic motivation and higher productivity. On the other hand, autocratic leadership styles have the potential to produce decreased motivation and lower productivity because employees may have feelings of being undervalued, disconnected, and disengaged from the organization's vision (Bass and Bass, 2009).

From the above brief explanation of the theories and empirical evidences, employee motivation and productivity are influenced by psychological factors, e.g., goal-setting, organizational commitment, intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and leadership styles. A proper understanding of these factors can aid an organization in its quest to create a more conducive work environment that nurtures motivation and improved performance. Modern workplaces continue to evolve, specifically concerning the advent of flexible arrangements and remote work; this, therefore, means, now more than ever before, every organization must put these psychological insights into perspective to ensure competitiveness and relevance in the market.

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1 Research design**

This study adopted a systematic review to explore psychological factors impacting employee motivation and productivity. Systematic review involves a thorough search for literature using key search terms to identify and select studies, evaluate them for quality, and synthesize results.

#### **3.2 Search strategy, data collection**

Articles were searched on the PsycINFO database and manually searched for in Google Scholar. PsycINFO is a reliable database for psychology-related studies. Articles were searched using the following terms in conjunction with Boolean operators (OR/AND): “employees,” “workers,” “staff,” “psychological factors,” “emotional

intelligence,” “job satisfaction,” “employee well-being,” “motivated employees,” “motivation level,” “productivity,” “job performance,” “work efficiency,” “task performance,” “job satisfaction.”

### 3.3 Inclusion criteria

The included studies were published in English between 2014 and 2024 and were available as full texts. More than 90% of the studies included in this study are primary investigations on employee motivation, job satisfaction, employee psychology, and other related studies. All included studies were independently assessed by the authors to ensure their quality before inclusion in the final result synthesis.

### 3.4 Ethical consideration

Best practices were adopted in the writing of this review. Authors were properly cited, and the processes of study selection, data collection, and interpretation were conducted with as minimal bias as possible. Also, any likely conflict of interest was declared.

## 4. Results

A total of eleven (11) studies that met the inclusion criteria of this review were selected, and data was extracted from them. The studies covered a wide range of themes centered on the psychology of employees in the workplace, motivation, job satisfaction, and productivity.

Some themes observed from the literature review on psychological factors affecting employee satisfaction and productivity include employee well-being (Gauche et al. 2017; Krekel et al. 2019), reward and non-reward as motivating factors (Akafo and Boateng, 2015; Ali and Anwar, 2021), employee stress and well-being (Gauche et al. 2017; Aquino et al. 2020), employees and managers burnout (Gauche et al. 2017; Parent-Lamarche and Biron, 2022), leadership style (Schattke and Marion-Jetten, 2022; Ren et al., 2024), impact of COVID-19 on employee psychology (Shin et al., 2022), emotional intelligence (EI), and workplace socialization (Puri and Mehta, 2020; Vo et al., 2022). The findings are summarized in the table 1, arranged in order of increasing years of publication.

### 4.1 Discussion

In this study, the findings from the included articles showed that rewards were shown to have a direct positive relationship with work motivation but not job satisfaction (Akafo and Boateng, 2015; Ali and Anwar, 2021). This finding is in agreement with Herzberg's two-factor theory, which postulates that motivators (e.g., achievement and recognition) fuel job satisfaction while other factors (e.g., company policy and remuneration) mainly forestall dissatisfaction rather than encourage satisfaction (Fugar, 2007). Thus, rewards may be viewed as external motivators, which may not necessarily be contributing factors to intrinsic satisfaction derived by employees from their work. Financial rewards are known to enhance employee motivation, but no concrete correlation has been traced to job satisfaction (Malik et al. 2012). However, adequate and fair compensation has been reported to be a key factor in employees' job satisfaction in the workplace (Dartey-Baah and Amoako, 2011). At its face value, when staff feel that the compensation they receive is equitable and just, they derive higher satisfaction at their jobs, and this, in turn, leads to improved productivity (performance). According to Ryan and Deci (2000), the notion that non-reward incentives, such as recognition and professional growth, exhibit a higher impact on employee performance than financial rewards is in tandem with the provisions of SDT, which places higher importance on intrinsic motivators like autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The main crux of the argument is that intrinsically motivated employees appear to be more engaged, productive, and satisfied with their jobs compared to extrinsically motivated employees. It is thus advisable for organizations to use both reward and non-reward measures to improve employee performance and satisfaction (Matthews and Dickinson, 2000).

Burnout is a psychological syndrome that is identifiable by poor management of chronic workplace stress and is evidenced by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lower level of personal satisfaction (Gómez-Polo et al., 2022). Burnout leads to poor productivity and poor work attitudes among employees and managers. This review has shown that productivity is affected by employee and manager burnout (Gauche et al., 2017; Parent-Lamarche and Biron, 2022). This corroborates the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which puts forward that job demands may cause burnout, but job and personal resources (such as autonomy and support) have the potential to mitigate these effects (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Consequently, employees with more resources feel a higher sense of psychological well-being because they are more resilient to stress. Burnout has been extensively reported to have severe effects on employees and managers (Skakon et al., 2010; Bauer et al., 2014; Arnold et al., 2015). Managers: burnout seriously affects the psychological health of employees, and this ultimately affects productivity (Matziari et al. 2017).

The findings of this review show that employee well-being affects motivation and productivity (Gauche et al., 2017; Krekel et al., 2019; Aquino et al., 2020). A happy employee tends to have higher productivity, which translates to higher profitability for the organization (Cropanzano and Wright, 2001). According to Harter et al. (2002), there is a strong link between employee engagement and different facets of the organization, such as profitability, customer satisfaction, and productivity. They asserted that when employees have a high level of well-being, there is better performance in the business. Also, a study by Majumdar (2022) further showed that the promotion of employee mental health and well-being is very important because it leads to improved productivity, lower cases of reduced absenteeism, and higher organizational overall profitability. Other studies have also supported this idea of employee well-being as a key component of motivation, productivity, and profitability (Goetzel et al., 2014; Oswald et al., 2015). The findings of this present review thus validate the link between employee well-being, productivity, and profitability; hence, organizations must pay adequate attention to it.

The results of the articles included in this study point to the fact that private-sector employees are under more stress and job demand than their counterparts in the public sector (Aquino et al., 2020). The private sector is characterized by severe pressure to achieve targets, meet deadlines, and maintain competitiveness at all times, and this, in turn, causes high stress levels, which reduce job performance (Cooper and Cartwright, 1994). Whereas public sector employees work in a more relaxed environment with job security, a structured work environment, and reduced work performance pressures (Liu et al. 2015). These observations explain the psychological well-being of public sector employees is less likely to be compromised, allowing them to maintain stable performance levels. According to the World Organisation (WHO, 2022), chronic workplace stress does not only lower job satisfaction; it also causes declines in productivity, performance, and overall organizational profitability. However, in the public sector, where lower stress is applied to employees, they tend to maintain better mental health, which supports higher performance levels (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

This review shows that emotional intelligence (EI) is a very important factor in every organization and is linked with productivity and profitability (Puri and Mehta, 2020). EI, which is basically about recognition, understanding, and regulation of emotions, affects employees positively and, ultimately, the organization (Savel and Munro, 2016). Employees with high EI are more able to manage the stress associated with work and maintain relationships with their colleagues, and these two factors affect job performance and organizational productivity. A healthy employee EI aids in improved social interactions and conflict resolution, which improves team dynamics, enhances collaboration, reduces stress, and ensures higher organizational productivity (Côté, 2014). A positive EI also plays a vital role in service delivery, especially among employees who interface with customers (Wong and Law, 2002).

Leadership has a significant impact on employee psychology, and this affects motivation and productivity, as evidenced by the different leadership styles observed in the studies included in this review (Schattke and Marion-Jetten, 2022; Vo et al., 2022; Ren et al., 2024). According to Afsar et al. (2020), transformational leadership is known to encourage employee engagement and inspiration and leads to increased organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and reduced counterproductive work behavior (CWB) as a result of ethical leadership backed by ethics (Afsar et al., 2020). Conversely, transactional leadership, focused on rewards and penalties, can lead to reductions in CWB, especially when it is overtly defined; however, it may unintentionally promote CWB if narrowly focused (Hoch et al., 2018). Research indicates that leaders with a strong LBLM mentality have the potential to create high-pressure work conditions, which will result in increased levels of teams' CWB and unethical behavior (Mesdaghinia et al., 2019). LBLM, backed by the right amount of ethics, leads to more consistency and higher productivity.

The findings of this review indicate that autonomy and social relatedness have positive impacts on employee motivation (Vo et al., 2022). This is in agreement with SDT, which posits that intrinsic motivation is mainly driven by autonomy. In organizations where employees are given autonomy, their motivation is enhanced, and they feel more satisfied with their jobs (Slemp et al., 2018). Also, workplace socialization or connection among colleagues significantly improves employee motivation because employees feel they belong there and enjoy the support of their colleagues (Van den Broeck et al., 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic seriously affected the psychology of employees all over the world, as evidenced in the article included in this study (Shin et al., 2022). Job performance was significantly affected by COVID-19 because employees suffered psychological effects due to the imminent threat of the pandemic on their lives, with some employees even exhibiting CWB (Nemteanu and Dabija, 2021). Uncertainties about jobs were further exacerbated by the advent of COVID-19 (Almeida et al., 2020). The combined effect of job uncertainties, the threat of the pandemic, and work stress was that employee motivation and job satisfaction were significantly

reduced, and this affected organizational productivity (Gouda, 2020). Pandemics such as COVID-19 thus put a strain on the mental health of employees, which consequently affects their motivation, job satisfaction, and, eventually, the profitability of organizations.

## 5. Conclusion

This literature review and analysis on psychological factors affecting employee motivation and productivity makes at least two contributions to the research in theory and practice: Firstly, this study proposed at least five strategies (such as leadership and emotional commitment) for employee motivation based on the analysis of a catalog of theories and empirical evidence, including theories of self-determination, goal-setting, and equity theory of motivation, which were examined to ascertain their implications. This review reinforces the delicate and essential relationship that exists between employee motivation, job performance, job satisfaction, employee productivity, and well-being. It also highlights factors that influence the aforementioned concepts, including leadership style, reward system, workplace stress, and conditions, as well as emotional intelligence. This review accentuates Herzberg's two-factor theory, indicating that although rewards have a positive impact on employee motivation, they do not directly translate to job satisfaction. Non-reward incentives were identified as drivers of intrinsic satisfaction rather than financial rewards, which are mere extrinsic motivators. There are several restrictions on the study. First, certain additional theories of motivation, such as Attribution Theory and McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory, are not included in the current review. This begs the issue of whether adding new theories could improve our understanding of the link between motivation and productivity. The necessity to keep the work reasonable in size without sacrificing goals is the rationale for selecting a small number of important hypotheses.

This review emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence which connected to emotional committed results to organizational commitment at the workplace for employees, and this approach is suggested to be considered in future works. Future research might also look into how different leadership philosophies affect worker productivity and motivation. This can assist in determining the best leadership techniques for developing an inspired and successful staff. Longitudinal research might shed light on how psychological variables affecting productivity and motivation evolve over time. This might assist in determining long-term patterns and the results of consistent treatments. Organizations should adopt a holistic approach by combining financial rewards with intrinsic motivators while giving priority to the well-being, emotional intelligence, and leadership development of employees. By putting this strategy into practice, businesses may foster an atmosphere that encourages worker motivation and output, which will increase job satisfaction and the success of the company as a whole.

## Acknowledgements

Our appreciation goes out to Ms. Titlope Adefolarin Osisanwo and Mr. Favour Oluwapelumi Oyelami for their assistance, which included helpful guidance and support in the creation of the literature review.

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Table 1: Summary of findings

Author(s)/year	Method	Findings
1. Akafo and Boateng, 2015	Descriptive survey	Reward was observed to have a significant positive impact on work motivation but was not significantly related to job satisfaction. The reward system was observed to be fair to employees.
2. Gauche, et al. 2017	Interview	The well-being of employees identified as at-risk of burnout was affected by job and personal resources.
3. Krekel, et al., 2019	Meta-analysis	Higher employer well-being at work has a significant positive correlation with more business-unit level profitability.
4. Aquino, et al. 2020	Structured survey questionnaires.	Work conditions in private and public sector organisations with respect to stress, work demands, and impacts on employee mental health, satisfaction, and performance are clearly distinct.
5. Puri and Mehta, 2020	Questionnaire	Employees with high emotional intelligence can manage their emotions and their colleagues; this results in overall better job performances and increased organisational effectiveness and quality of service.
6. Ali and Anwar, 2021	Quantitative (questionnaire)	Compensation as motivation has a significant positive influence on job satisfaction. Non-reward incentives have a better impact on employee success.
7. Parent-Lamarche and Biron, 2022	Survey	Managers' burnout affects the psychological health of employees and consequently impacts managerial quality.
8. Schattke and Marion-Jetten, 2022	Cross-sectional/prospective	Transactional and transformational leadership styles were shown to affect counterproductive work behaviour and organisational citizenship behaviour.
9. Shin et al., 2022	Survey (online)	pre-COVID cognitive job insecurity significantly indirectly affected mid-COVID job performance through mid-COVID affective job insecurity. The finding showed a higher effect in female employees compared to their male counterparts.
10. Vo, et al. 2022	Survey	Autonomy and social relatedness exert a positive impact on employee motivation, while competence has a negative impact.
11. Ren et al., 2024	Survey	Competitive action intensity in the work environment provokes leader bottom-line mentality (LBLM), which signals to teams the importance of raising sales performance.

The findings of the review of literature are summarized in the table above, arranged in order of increasing years of publication.