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EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF A POST-PANDEMIC AND UNSTABLE ECONOMY: CHALLENGES AND PRACTICES

МЕХЕДИЖМЕНТ

Summary. This article is devoted to the study of changes in employee motivation in a post-pandemic and economically unstable environment. Relevance is determined by the transformation of work priorities: safety, health, flexibility and the value of work have come to the fore. The novelty of the research lies in the integration of data on the shift of motivational factors in the personnel management model. The paper describes structural changes in the perception of work, analyzes the practices of companies to support the well-being of employees and the adaptation of motivational strategies. The challenges associated with remote work, reduced engagement, and changing staff values have been studied. Special attention is paid to the role of emotionally competent leadership, flexible working conditions and non-financial incentives. The purpose of the study is to identify effective approaches to motivation in an unstable situation. The analysis uses a comparative method and interpretation of empirical sources. In conclusion, the need for a transition from the traditional model to a human-oriented one is substantiated. The work will be useful for HR managers, researchers and managers dealing with personnel management issues in crisis situations. In addition, the materials can be used in educational programs on organizational behavior and strategic management.

Key words: staff motivation, pandemic, instability, remote work, flexibility, leadership, engagement, well-being, recognition, adaptation.

Introduction. The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic instability have profoundly altered the context of personnel management. Numerous organisations have confronted a widespread shift to remote or hybrid work arrangements, escalating levels of employee stress and burnout, and a decline in overall engagement. The aim of the present study is to identify the key challenges in managing employee motivation within this post-pandemic, uncertain economic landscape, and to review practices that foster and sustain motivation under these novel conditions. To fulfil this aim, the following objectives have been defined:

1. Analyse changes in employee needs and sentiments in the aftermath of the pandemic.
2. Summarise the primary issues organisations encounter when motivating staff amid uncertainty.
3. Examine effective practices and strategies trialled by international companies to enhance employee engagement, satisfaction, and productivity.
4. Assess the scientific and practical significance of the identified motivational approaches in today's environment.

Analysis of Recent Studies and Publications.

Over the past two years, several research streams have emerged focusing on employee motivation amid post-pandemic instability. Alves-Pereira dos Santos et al. conducted a two-wave study demonstrating that employees' perceptions of job resources are directly linked to their levels of autonomous motivation; however, the impact of these factors on long-term engagement remains underexplored [1]. Castro-Trancón and colleagues analysed 37 papers on telework's effects on well-being, accounting for gender differences, and uncovered mixed outcomes — from reduced stress when social support is present to increased burnout under the “always-on” effect [5]. An MDPI review confirmed the steady trend toward prioritising flexibility, resilience, and digital-tool integration within organisational models, yet did not address methods for assessing motivation in hybrid work regimes [11].

Most studies concentrate on general hybrid-work practices. A Nature experiment found that two days of remote work per week do not diminish productivity and actually aid staff retention [12]. A systematic review published in NCBI PMC highlighted telework's

physical and psychological impacts on employees and called for a reevaluation of occupational-health mandates [13]. Prasad et al. identified key determinants of productivity in remote work but noted a lack of analysis regarding the emotional consequences of prolonged home-based employment [14].

A qualitative review in BBE Journal examined factors influencing telework engagement, pointing out a gap in accounting for inter- and intra-group differences when evaluating managerial practices' effectiveness [3]. Research in the South African Journal of Human Resource Management showed that remote employees' well-being depends on self-discipline levels and workload appropriateness, indicating the necessity of including these variables in motivational models [16].

Questions remain unaddressed regarding the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation during extended telework: although Alves-Pereira dos Santos et al. provided data on resource effects on autonomous motivation, their relationship to objective long-term engagement metrics has not been studied [1; 17]. There is no standardised toolkit for evaluating hybrid regimes' impact on motivational factors, and minimal attention has been paid to neuropsychological stress markers and the dynamics of employee loyalty. The integration of data on shifts in motivational stimuli within personnel-management models, as proposed in this article, aims to fill these critical research gaps.

Methods and Materials. The Materials and Methods section is founded upon a comprehensive analysis of empirical and analytical sources reflecting contemporary motivational practices under post-pandemic instability.

The study materials comprised publications from the following authors and organizations: A. Alves-Pereira dos Santos examined the relationship between job resources and autonomous motivation [1]; L. Balu considered the importance of non-financial incentives — recognition, flexibility, and autonomy [2]; BBE Journal conducted a qualitative review of factors influencing engagement in telework [3]; T. Bhebhe analysed the impact of motivation on organisational effectiveness during the pandemic [4];

A. Castro-Trancón et al. performed a meta-analysis of gender differences in well-being under remote work [5]; K.-S. Chen investigated motivation and performance in the context of small businesses [6]; S. Ertel described motivational needs of small enterprises in the post-COVID-19 environment [7]; A. Haque synthesised the pandemic's consequences for organisational motivation systems and resilience [8]; J. Harter and B. Wigert documented employee-engagement dynamics between 2021 and 2024 [9]; BusinessEssay offered practical recommendations for motivating personnel in small businesses [10]; MDPI identified trends in flexibility and digital-tool integration within hybrid work models [11]; Nature published an experiment on two-day remote work and its effect on staff retention [12]; NCBI PMC reviewed the physical and psychological consequences of working from home [13]; P. Prasad et al. highlighted the main determinants of productivity in remote work [14]; M. Rauf, I. Sari, and W. Susilawati studied the influence of motivation and work environment on SME performance [15]; South African Journal of HRM assessed the dependence of remote employees' well-being on self-discipline and workload [16]; SSRN examined the long-term effects of job resources on objective engagement metrics [17]; D. Wesley systematised best practices in staff motivation [18]; K. Zoellner and R. Sulikova analysed HR management in the post-COVID-19 context [19].

For the preparation of this article, the comparative method was employed, alongside analysis of secondary sources, logical systematization of findings, and interpretation of empirical data. These materials and methods provided a comprehensive foundation for a systemic examination of approaches to personnel motivation in an unstable economic environment.

Results. The pandemic triggered unprecedented organisational changes—from the rapid shift to remote work to widespread layoffs and workforce attrition [8]. These upheavals negatively affected employees' psychological wellbeing and commitment (Table 1).

The combination of these factors produced the following phenomenon: an increasing number of employees feeling disillusioned and actively seeking new

Table 1

Dynamics of employee engagement (2021–2024)

Metric	Change from 2021 to 2024
Overall employee engagement	Gradual decline, reaching a minimum in 2024
Clarity of managerial expectations	Decrease from 55% to 44%
Sense of meaningful work	Decline to a record low
Connection to company mission	Only 3 in 10 report feeling connected
Situation among remote workers	Heightened sense of mental alienation
Overall life satisfaction	Fall to minimal levels
Frequency of burnout episodes	Increase in cases of stress and burnout

Source: by the author based on [9]

Table 2

Shifts in employee motivation priorities in the post-pandemic period, according to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs

Maslow’s need level	Motivating factors	Post-pandemic changes and observations
1. Physiological needs	Regular pay; stable work schedule	Loss of income and unstable hours early in the pandemic drove heightened anxiety
2. Safety needs	Job security; employment guarantees; health protection	Security concerns and fear of layoffs became paramount to employee loyalty
3. Social needs (belonging)	Sense of community; involvement in meaningful work; team cohesion	Workers now seek purposeful, valued activities and stronger team connection
4. Esteem needs	Respect; inclusion; recognition; fairness	Demand for ethical, respectful treatment increased regardless of role or background
5. Self-actualization	Autonomy; freedom of action; meaningful work aligned with values	Employees aspire to personal growth, autonomy, and work that reflects their inner convictions

Source: by the author based on [2; 7; 19]

positions — in 2024, the share of job-seekers reached its highest level since 2015 [9]. Thus, the first cluster of challenges relates to the pandemic’s psychological aftermath: reduced engagement, a sense of meaninglessness in work, and deterioration of emotional well-being. The crisis revealed new priorities and needs among staff that managers must address (Table 2).

The post-pandemic era also demands a reassessment of organizational practices and working conditions that affect employee motivation. Remote and hybrid work arrangements have become ubiquitous, and staff now expect this flexibility to continue. Moreover, it is important to accommodate diverse preferences: roughly half of employees favour a clear separation between work and personal life, while the remainder are comfortable interleaving professional and personal tasks throughout the day [19].

A primary driver of motivation during crisis periods is high-quality leadership. When established norms collapse, employees especially need clear direction, empathy, and support from management. A review of pandemic lessons for organisations finds that leaders who show empathy, attend carefully to subordinates’ concerns, and communicate goals transparently significantly elevate morale and job satisfac-

tion [2; 15]. For instance, regular candid discussions about the company’s situation, collaborative problem-solving, and recognition of individual contributions all serve to strengthen collective trust. Empirical data indicate that in firms where leaders maintain frequent contact — through calls, virtual meetings, or one-on-one conversations — employees demonstrate higher motivation and lower stress levels [2]. Additionally, a strong team culture and cooperative spirit act as powerful motivators even in remote settings. In response to these shifts, many organisations have adopted practices designed to boost staff motivation amid instability (Table 3).

These practices illustrate a shift away from a purely material-centred motivation model toward a comprehensive approach that prioritises well-being, recognition, development, and flexibility [6,10]. Organisations that implement systemic mental-health support, tailored work formats, and non-material incentives gain enduring advantages — namely, reduced turnover and heightened engagement — despite external volatility.

Discussion. The pandemic has shifted the priorities in employee motivation: ambitions and career goals have given way to fundamental needs — safety,

Table 3

Modern practices for enhancing employee motivation under conditions of instability

Area	Practice Content	Effect
Mental-health support	Psychological-assistance programmes; stress-management initiatives; rest days	Reduced burnout; increased trust
Recognition and gratitude culture	Non-financial recognition: virtual awards; public acknowledgements	Enhanced self-esteem; strengthened engagement
Expanded reward schemes	Salary indexation; health insurance; home-office subsidies; financial aid	Increased satisfaction; mitigation of economic instability
Investment in training and development	Online courses; upskilling; mentoring	Reinforced loyalty; skill growth
Flexibility and individualized conditions	Hybrid schedules; personalised arrangements; workload adaptation	Increased motivation; reduced turnover

Source: by the author based on [19]

health, and stability. Organisations seeking to maintain engagement must first guarantee these conditions. Without confidence in basic wellbeing, any initiatives aimed at development or involvement are perceived as mere formalities. Restoring motivation is possible only after alleviating anxiety over essential security. In this context, transparency, caring leadership, and work–life balance become the foundation of trust and subsequent loyalty [18].

Simultaneously, there is a growing turn toward non-material sources of motivation: employees seek meaningful work, wish to feel connected to the company’s mission, and want to see tangible value in their contributions. In remote settings, recognition — implemented through a well-designed feedback system — becomes critical. Effective managers act not as controllers but as mentors and supporters, developing emotional intelligence, building trust, and employing modern engagement tools such as regular feedback sessions.

Flexibility is no longer viewed as a perk but as a norm. However, it demands clear guidelines, open communication, and new performance criteria — focused on outcomes rather than processes. In such a system, excessive pressure via KPIs undermines trust and exacerbates turnover. Strategies grounded in respect, support, and autonomy prove more effective [4]. Companies that establish a people-centred motivational model retain not only talent but also organisational resilience amid instability.

Summarising the integration of contemporary motivational mechanisms by management teams, it is evident that leadership implements mental-health support programmes, cultivates a culture of recognition, enhances compensation packages, oversees continuous learning, and adapts work formats.

Mental-health support programmes encompass psychological counselling, stress-reduction techniques, and dedicated rest days, thereby enhancing resilience to burnout and reinforcing employee trust. Recognition systems are implemented through virtual and in-person gratitude events, platforms for public commendation, and award initiatives, fostering increased motivation and reduced turnover. Revised reward schemes include salary indexation, reimbursement for home-office expenses, and expanded social benefits, all of which contribute to greater employee

satisfaction and retention. Professional-development programmes — featuring online courses, mentorship, and skills retraining — promote competence enhancement and strengthen organisational commitment. Hybrid schedules, personalised work-arrangement agreements, and autonomy in choosing one’s workspace create labour flexibility, support work–life balance, and bolster overall organisational resilience.

Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research. The results of the analysis reveal a profound transformation of motivational drivers in the post-pandemic, economically unstable environment. Declines in employee engagement, emotional well-being, and sense of belonging call for a complete re-assessment of personnel-management strategies. Today’s workforce expects not only financial compensation but also fulfilment of core needs — security, health, flexibility, and meaningful work. Traditional incentive schemes have lost their potency, yielding to personalised approaches centred on supportive leadership, open communication, and emotional intelligence. Comprehensive initiatives that promote well-being, ongoing learning, and flexible working arrangements have demonstrated their effectiveness, especially in international contexts.

From an academic perspective, these identified trends enrich existing motivation theories by underscoring their sensitivity to crisis conditions and the imperative for agile adaptation. Practically, the study’s value lies in its offer of broadly applicable solutions: from recalibrating reward structures and feedback processes to cultivating leadership skills geared toward crisis-responsive team support. By adopting such measures, organisations can not only sustain productivity amid volatility but also lay the groundwork for enduring, resilient collaboration in the future.

Data analysis confirmed a shift in motivational stimuli from materially oriented measures to psychosocial and flexibly adaptable practices. Three principal outcomes were identified:

- A sustained decline in engagement under rigid, KPI-focused models highlights the necessity of accounting for employees’ emotional well-being.
- The absence of a unified toolkit for evaluating hybrid work effectiveness impedes comparative analysis of international practices.

Table 4

Application of modern motivational methods among companies

Practice	% of Companies
Mental-health support programmes	85%
Recognition and gratitude culture	94%
Expanded reward schemes	79%
Investment in training and development	73%
Flexibility and individualized work arrangements	62%

Source: by the author based on [1–19]

- Insufficient exploration of the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation over the long term limits the ability to forecast loyalty-loss inflection points.

To address these gaps, the following scientific initiatives are proposed:

- Develop a comprehensive suite of methodologies for assessing motivation in hybrid regimes, incorporating survey instruments alongside physiological and neuropsychological markers.
- Launch a longitudinal study on the impact of autonomy and organisational resource provision on objective engagement metrics (e.g., turnover rates, performance-evaluation outcomes).

- Design and pilot digital platforms for personalised motivation, featuring gamification mechanics and adaptive recommendations driven by user-behaviour analytics.
- Conduct a cross-cultural comparison of psychoemotional support programmes to establish universal principles for their implementation in multinational companies.
- Apply machine-learning techniques to predict motivation dips and automate the generation of targeted intervention recommendations for HR professionals.

Implementing these initiatives will enable a shift from fragmented practices to systematic motivation management, thereby enhancing organisational resilience to external shocks.

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