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WORK MOTIVATION

An evidence review

Scientific summary

January 2021

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Work motivation: an evidence review

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Acknowledgements

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Publication information

When citing this report, please use the following citation:

Wietrak, E., Rousseau, D. and Barends, E. (2021) *Work motivation: an evidence review*. Scientific summary. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

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1 Rationale for this review

It is widely assumed that employees who are highly motivated will not only be happier, healthier and more fulfilled, but also more likely to deliver better performance, services, and innovation. This assumption lies at the heart of what is often referred to as 'employee engagement', a concept that's become mainstream in management thinking over the last decade. Although this assumption appears to make sense from a managerial perspective, it is yet unclear whether it is supported (or contradicted) by scientific evidence. For this reason, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) approached the Center for Evidence-Based Management (CEBMa) to undertake a review of the research literature to learn more about the evidence on work motivation. We have completed a review of the relevant scientific literature and summarise the findings. This report describes how we undertook the review and summarises the findings. It accompanies three other reviews of the scientific literature on:

- performance outcomes of employee engagement
- antecedents and outcomes of organisational commitment
- antecedents and outcomes of organisational identification.

These scientific summaries and a discussion report are all available at: cipd.co.uk/evidence-engagement

2 Main question: What will the review answer?

What is known in the scientific literature about work motivation?

Sub-questions that form the basis of the review:

1 What is work motivation?
2 How and when are employees motivated to perform a certain task?
3 How can work motivation be measured?
4 What factors are known to drive work motivation?

3 Search strategy: How were the research papers obtained?

To answer the review questions, the following databases were used to identify social theories that provide a logic model for the effect of work motivation: ABI/INFORM Global from ProQuest, Business Source Premier from EBSCO, PsycINFO from Ovid, and Google Scholar. In addition, 23 previous REAs conducted by CEBMa were screened to find additional relevant motivational theories and antecedents. Next, an additional search was conducted to identify meta-analyses and longitudinal studies that may provide additional and/or new insights into the topic of work motivation. For this additional search, the following general search filters were applied:

1 scholarly journals, peer-reviewed
2 published in the period 2000 to 2020
3 articles in English.

We conducted three different search queries which yielded 218 papers. An overview of all search terms and queries is provided in Appendix 1.

4 Selection: How were the research papers selected?

Selection took place in two phases. First, titles and abstracts of the papers identified were screened for relevance. In case of doubt or lack of information, the paper was included. Second, papers were selected based on the full text. This second phase yielded a total number of 13 literature reviews, 48 meta-analyses, and 13 primary studies. An overview of the selection process is provided in Appendix 2.

5 Main findings

Question 1: What is work motivation?

The general term 'motivation' is a rather abstract construct for which numerous definitions are available, such as:

- the reason why somebody does something or behaves in a particular way (Oxford Dictionary)
- a reason for doing a particular activity or behaving in a particular way (Oxford Learner's Dictionary of Academic English)
- the need or reason for doing something (Cambridge Dictionary).

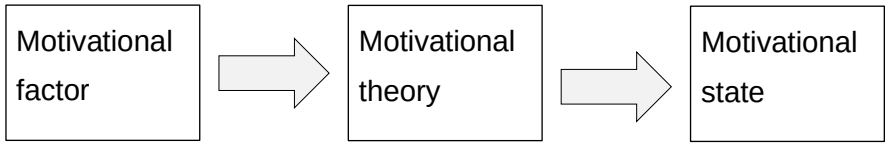
In the realm of work and business, however, definitions are more specific:

- internal and external factors that stimulate desire and energy in people to be continually interested and committed to a job, role or subject, or to make an effort to attain a goal (online Business Directory)
- a set of energetic forces that originate both within as well as beyond an individual's being, to initiate work-related behaviour and to determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration (Pinder 1998).

Because the general construct 'motivation' is rather abstract, in the context of the workplace it is often tied to specific work-related behaviour (for example, the motivation to work from home or the motivation to participate in organisational change) or a specific outcome (for example, task performance or innovation). In the context of this REA, the focus of motivation is an employee's day-to-day job. Thus, 'work motivation' refers to the need or reason(s) why employees make an effort to perform their day-to-day job to the best of their ability.[1]

In the popular management literature, however, the term 'work motivation' can have different meanings. In most cases, it refers to the 'theory' or logic model that explains why a certain factor (motivator) leads to a certain work-related outcome. Thus, 'work motivation' explains why a certain factor (for example financial incentives) stimulates employees to make an effort to perform their job. In some cases, however, 'work motivation' refers to an employee's affective or cognitive state. As such, it refers to the state-of-mind that drives (or discourages) employees to perform their job in a certain way to achieve a desired outcome. In this REA we therefore distinguish three elements: motivational factors (drivers/antecedents), motivational theories (mechanisms), and motivational states (outcome).

Figure 1: Motivation as a logic model



[1] Note that this excludes other forms of work motivation that may be of interest, such as employees' motivation for non-core work tasks, to help colleagues, to engage in change programmes, or to comply with policies or safety standards.

Question 2: How and when are employees motivated to perform a certain task?

Motivational theory is one of the central areas of focus in organisational science. How – and under what circumstances – employees are motivated to perform a certain task is one of the most widely studied topics. As a result, a large number of motivational theories exist. Most of these theories are 'evidence based', that is, they are supported by a large number of high-quality empirical studies. Some theories, however, lack a solid evidence base and should therefore be considered merely as 'ideas'. It should be noted that whether a motivational theory is widely known or popular is not an indication for its trustworthiness. In fact, some theories referred to in the popular (HR) management literature lack a solid evidence base and are therefore considered obsolete by academics.

Below an overview of the most relevant motivational theories is provided. Note that this overview by no means pretends to be comprehensive: it is merely a selection of theories that are widely used by researchers and scholars to explain the causal mechanisms through which a certain motivational factor elicits a positive motivational state.

A. Contemporary evidence-based motivational theories

Social exchange theory

According to this theory, people make attributions regarding the extent to which the favourable treatment they received from others reflects a concern for their wellbeing; such 'benefactors' are considered more trustworthy and likely to provide valued resources in the future (Gouldner 1960; Gergen et al 1980; Eisenberger et al 2019). Thus, employees who have had satisfying experiences with their organisation are more likely to develop a psychological attachment with that organisation. An important element of social exchange theory is the norm of reciprocity, which states that people treat others as they would like to be treated, repaying kindness with kindness and retaliating against those who inflict harm (Brunelle 2013; Gouldner 1960). Thus, when a manager helps their employees in times of need or recognises them for extra effort, the employees will feel inclined to act in a way that is of value to the manager – such as meeting performance goals and objectives (Edmondson and Boyer 2013; Eisenberger et al 1986).

In the past decades, social exchange theory has evolved and is now embedded in a larger theory in which the original 'tit for tat' mechanism is elaborated into a broader concept of social exchange. For example, an employee may be motivated to help a colleague, not only because this meets the social norm of reciprocity, but also because they feel part of the organisational community and helping a colleague meets the organisation's norms and values.

Social identity theory

Social identity theory posits that motivation is not (solely) determined by self-interest, but rather is an outcome of self-categorisation processes (Tajfel 1982). People classify themselves and others into social categories, based on both visible characteristics (for example race, ethnicity, gender), and invisible characteristics (for example political affiliation, social background, taste in music). For example, employees may identify themselves based on their career (for example accountant, nurse, engineer), job level (for example employee, supervisor, manager, executive), or family-member role (for example mother, father, child). Social identity theory states that one can thus predict behaviour by knowing the importance of these various social identities for an individual. For example, if an employee considers the 'family/parent' role to be the most important, you might expect that this employee will be more likely to stay home if their child is sick. In addition, the theory states that when people perceive themselves as belonging to a particular social group, they identify with that group on a positive level, which positively affects their self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy. As a result, individuals who strongly identify with a social group will accept and include people they consider to be like them, while excluding those they perceive to be different. Finally, the theory states that people are motivated to attain goals and objectives that are compatible with their

social identity. Thus, people who identify themselves as 'caring for the environment' will not likely apply for a job at a large multinational petrochemical company, unless they feel they can make a difference.

The theory is related to self-regulation theory (see below), as social identity concerns a higher-order mental category that influences people's motivation and ensuing behaviours.

Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory was developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in the 1970s and 1980s. Although the theory has grown and expanded since then, the basic premises of the theory come from their seminal book, *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-determination in Human Behavior* (1985). According to the main postulate of self-determination theory, all human beings have three basic psychological needs that, when fulfilled, enable psychological growth and wellbeing:

1 **Autonomy:** People need to be (or feel that they are) the master of their own destiny and have control over their own lives. In addition, people want to feel that they are in control of their own behaviour. Note that this does not mean that people have a need to be independent of others.

2 **Competence:** People have a need to build their competence and develop mastery over tasks and activities important to them.

3 **Relatedness:** People need to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness with others – they need to interact with, be connected to, and share meaningful experiences with others.

Self-determination theory is one of the most important motivational theories and has been supported by more than 400 empirical publications since the early 1980s. Self-determination theory is not a single theory, but rather a meta-theoretical framework that encompasses several sub-theories, such as job characteristics theory (see above) and cognitive evaluation theory. Cognitive evaluation theory (CET) focuses exclusively on intrinsic motivation, which comes from the interest or enjoyability inherent in the behaviour itself (Ryan and Deci 2000). More specifically, CET's main concern is how social events impact intrinsic motivation. For example, positive performance feedback enhances intrinsic motivation, because positive feedback leads to feelings of competence. With time, however, Deci and Ryan extended their focus from intrinsic motivation to less autonomous forms of behavioural regulation. They proposed a continuous structure that depicts different forms of motivation, which range from the most autonomous (intrinsic motivation) to the most controlled (extrinsic motivation, which comes from some external outcome). Originally, Deci and Ryan postulated that intrinsic motivation leads to the most beneficial outcomes, and extrinsic incentives (for example, bonuses or praise) diminish a positive effect of intrinsic motivation on performance. However, contemporary research demonstrated that intrinsic motivation and external incentives can jointly improve performance (Cerasoli et al 2014).

Self-regulation theory

Together with self-determination theory, today self-regulation theory is considered the most important contemporary motivational theory. The theory builds on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1977) and has been developed further by scholars such as Carver and Scheier (1981) and Baumeister (Baumeister et al 1994; Baumeister and Vohs 2007). The theory describes the psychological process of conscious self-management that guides people's thoughts, behaviours and feelings in order to reach goals – both in particular situations and in the longer term. According to the theory, the process of self-regulation consists of three stages – self monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-reactions – and involves four components:

1 standards of desired behaviour
2 motivation to meet these standards
3 monitoring thoughts and actions that precede deviating from or breaking a standard
4 willpower to control urges to break a standard.

Self-regulation is mainly about stopping ourselves from doing things we know we should not do because it conflicts with long-term goals. For example, we may be motivated to tell our colleagues or the company's managers that they are stupid and incompetent, but self-regulation helps us overcome this career-limiting impulse. The theory of self-regulation is consistent with current evidence-based cognitive-behavioural models and is supported by empirical studies on brain activity – it explains how higher-order mental categories can activate the process of self-regulation through contextual cues and people's sensory perceptions.

B. Theories that are outdated or integrated in other motivational theories

Reinforcement theory

Reinforcement theory reflects the premises of classical behaviourism (Pavlov 1927) and is based on the principles of operant conditioning (Skinner 1938): behaviours followed by favourable consequences become more likely in future, and behaviours followed by unfavourable consequences become less likely. Reinforcement theory suggests that people behave exclusively as a response to external stimuli and does not account for the finding from empirical studies that behaviour can also be the result of internal processes. For this reason, nowadays, it is considered too limited and no longer relevant. However, the idea of reinforcers eliciting behaviour has inspired a vast number of scholars and researchers, and has been incorporated into contemporary theories of motivation. As such, the theory provides an explanation why financial incentives may motivate employees: if high performance (behaviour) is rewarded with a financial bonus (positive reinforcement), high performance becomes more likely. Of course, instead of reinforcing desired behaviour, one can also negatively reinforce undesired behaviour, for example by withholding a bonus or promotion. Interestingly, the idea of reinforcements is not limited to extrinsic rewards or punishments – it is also visible in factors such as positive feedback or challenging goals, which are related to internal processes and drive intrinsic motivation.

Drive theory

Whereas reinforcement theory states that people's behaviour is a response to external stimuli (reinforcers), drive theory asserts that people's behaviour is first and foremost a response to internal drives or instinctual needs. The theory is based on the central premises that all organisms, including human beings, are born with physical, psychological and sociological needs and that when these needs are not met, a negative state of tension occurs. Thus, according to this theory, people are intrinsically driven (motivated) to choose behaviours that meet their needs and that reduce tension. The research literature differentiates between primary drives that are related to survival (for example the need for food, water, security, order and affection) and secondary drives that are culturally determined or socially learned (for example the need for status, money, independence and social approval).

Drive theory emerged during the 1940s and was originally developed by American psychologists Clark Hull and Kenneth Spence (Hull 1943). Hull and Spence are considered neo-behaviourists: like the classical behaviourists, they believed that human behaviour is a result of reinforcement (see above), but that reinforcement is effective only when it reduces the tension (drive) that results from unmet needs. Many of the motivational theories that were developed in the 1950s and 1960s were based on drive theory, such as Maslow's hierarchical needs theory and Herzberg's motivation–hygiene theory (see below). Although the theory was once the predominant motivational theory, nowadays it is largely irrelevant and integrated in contemporary theories such as self-determination theory and self-regulation theory.

Cognitive dissonance theory

Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957) is a classical motivational theory that states that, when people hold two or more elements of knowledge that are relevant to each other but inconsistent with one another, this creates a state of discomfort (Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones 2007). Festinger called this unpleasant state 'cognitive dissonance'. The theory states that people are strongly motivated by this unpleasant state to reduce the inconsistency and thus change their attitude and/or behaviour. An example is the effect of performance feedback: when confronted with a discrepancy between what they wish to achieve and the feedback received, employees are motivated to attain a higher level of performance. This theory thus explains why informing an employee about the discrepancies between the organisation's standard and their current performance – implying that they are achieving less than most other colleagues – will motivate the employee to work harder (Kluger and DeNisi 1996).

Cognitive dissonance not only arises from knowledge inconsistencies but also from behaviour that may bring about negative consequences (Cooper and Fazio 1984). In fact, motivating people to take particular action or show particular behaviour by arousing fear – also referred to as 'fear appeal' – is a widely used strategy (Tannenbaum et al 2015). In the realm of management and business, fear appeals are ubiquitous: if you don't work hard, you may lose your job. If you don't support the change, the organisation may go out of business.

Similar to reinforcement theory, cognitive dissonance theory is nowadays considered to be too limited to provide a comprehensive explanation for what drives people's behaviour. In particular, scholars argue that the concept of 'cognitive dissonance' in itself is unclear (see, for example, Vaidis and Bran 2019) and that the original research by Festinger has serious methodological shortcomings (Chapanis and Chapanis 1964; Cummings and Venkatesan 1976).

Job characteristic theory

Job characteristic theory was first developed by Richard Hackman and Greg Oldman (1976) and received wide recognition through their book *Work Redesign* (1980). The theory states that there are five conditions (referred to as job dimensions) necessary for people to be intrinsically motivated to perform their job to the best of their ability, that is:

- **skill variety:** the degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities so an employee can use various skills and abilities
- **task identity:** the degree to which a job involves a complete process and identifiable outcome (as opposed to doing only a small part of the job)
- **task significance:** the degree to which a job is meaningful, important, and has a positive impact on people within the organisation or the society at large
- **autonomy:** the degree to which a job allows the employee to work independently, plan the work day and determine how to execute the work
- **feedback:** the degree to which a job (or the supervisor/manager) provides the employee feedback on their performance.

The theory posits that these job dimensions invoke three psychological states: experienced work meaningfulness, experienced responsibility and knowledge of results. These three states result in a positive affect (that is, emotion or feeling) that intrinsically motivates employees and consequently leads to increased job satisfaction, high performance, low absenteeism and other positive organisational outcomes. For example, if an employee has a boring job that they consider trivial and insignificant, has no say in how to plan and execute the work, and receives no feedback from their supervisor or clients, the employee won't be motivated to perform to their best ability.

Job characteristics theory is supported by considerable empirical evidence (Humphrey et al 2007). The theory, however, focuses only on a limited number of contextual variables. For example, it does not address the impact of social and work-level variables, such as working in teams or with customers (Kanfer 2017). In addition, it was found that, consistent with self-determination theory, task meaningfulness is the most important mediator of job characteristics effects on work motivation (Humphrey et al 2007). Given its similar but more limited understanding of motivation-related processes, job characteristic theory has been displaced by self-determination theory.

Expectancy theory

Expectancy theory states that people are motivated to behave or act in a certain way based on what they expect the result of that behaviour or action will be. In the realm of organisational science, the theory was first proposed by Victor Vroom in his seminal book *Work and Motivation* (1964). The theory is also referred to as the valence–instrumentality–expectancy (VIE) model, as the theory suggests that people's motivation depends on whether they expect their effort will lead to a certain performance (expectancy), whether this performance will lead to a certain outcome (instrumentality), and whether this outcome is something they value (valence). Thus, according to this theory, a financial incentive may increase the valence of an outcome, but employees will only be motivated to put in extra effort when they feel – based on past experiences, their self-confidence, required skills or goal difficulty – that their efforts will result in attainment of the desired performance, and whether they believe – based on their trust in management, the perceived fairness of the appraisal process and the transparency of how the decision is made – that they will indeed receive the financial incentive if the performance expectations are met.

Although the theory is supported by empirical evidence (Georgopoulos et al 1957; Mitchell and Nebeker 1973), a number of conceptual and methodological weaknesses were identified (Heneman and Schwab 1972; Van Eerde and Thierry 1996). Partly for this reason, expectancy theory is integrated into self-regulation theory.

Social comparison theory and equity theory

Social comparison theory (Festinger 1954) suggests that people tend to compare themselves with others in order to make judgements regarding their achievements. In the context of the workplace, this means that employees are concerned not only about their own performance, but also about how they measure up in relation to their colleagues – when faced with unfavourable comparative information, they are strongly motivated to put in more effort (as this decreases cognitive dissonance – see above). As such, social comparison theory explains why goal-setting has a stronger positive effect on performance when combined with progress monitoring, especially when the outcomes are reported or made public (Harkin et al 2016). The same counts for the motivating effect of (publicly) recognising employees for their efforts and work accomplishment, as this provides a positive signal about one's competence relative to others, which enhances self-esteem and induces positive affect (Wang 2017). As a result, employees are motivated to attain a high level of performance to increase their chance of receiving recognition.

A related theory is equity theory. This theory states that employees compare themselves with others in terms of input (effort) and outcomes (rewards) to determine whether the balance between these two is equitable/fair (Walster et al 1978). High-performers, seeing that poor performers get lower appraisal scores – and, as a consequence, receive lower rewards – might feel that an equitable balance is established and are thus motivated to continue their high-quality work, whereas underperformers are motivated to put in more effort to achieve a higher level.

Although both theories are supported by empirical evidence, they also receive a fair amount of critique. In particular, scholars have questioned the simplicity of these theories, pointing out that people's motivation is not just a simple calculus of inputs and outputs, and that people's

perceptions of fairness are affected by a wide range of variables. As such, the theory fits in the broader construct of self-regulation and social exchange.

C. Discredited theories

Maslow's hierarchical needs theory

Hierarchical needs theory was developed by the American psychologist Abraham Maslow. Since Maslow first published his theory almost 80 years ago, it has become one of the most popular theories of motivation, especially in the realm of (human resources) management and business. The theory states that people are motivated to achieve certain needs, some needs take precedence over others, and once-satisfied lower-level needs (for example, physiological needs) give way to higher-level ones. According to Maslow, there are five categories of needs, arranged in order of precedence:

- **physiological needs:** air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sleep, clothing, and so on
- **safety needs:** emotional security, financial security, order, predictability, social stability, and so on
- **love and belongingness needs:** affection, friendships, relationships, intimacy, trust, acceptance, and so on
- **esteem needs:** self-esteem, achievement, status, respect, dignity, independence, and so on
- **self-actualisation needs:** realising your full potential, self-fulfilment, personal growth, and so on.

According to this theory, people have an innate desire to be self-actualised, that is, to reach their full potential. However, the theory posits that the five needs are arranged in a hierarchy. Thus, in order to achieve self-actualisation, first the more basic needs must be met (Maslow 1943).

Although Maslow's theory is intuitively appealing – and is still frequently referred to in popular (HR) management literature – empirical studies have demonstrated that there is little to no evidence supporting the existence of a hierarchy of needs (Wahba and Bridwell 1976; Geller 1982) and the theory does not predict specific behaviours (Campbell and Pritchard 1976).

Herzberg's motivation–hygiene theory

Motivation–hygiene theory, also referred to a Herzberg's two-factor theory, states that job satisfaction (and consequently performance) is affected by two types of workplace factors that act independently of each other: intrinsic factors that increase satisfaction (referred to as motivational factors) and external factors that decrease satisfaction (referred to as hygiene factors). According to the founder of this theory, the American psychologist Frederick Herzberg, motivational factors are based on an individual's need for personal growth, such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement or the nature of the work itself. Hygiene factors, on the other hand, are extrinsic to the work itself and represent 'deficiency needs' that can make employees unhappy, such as company policies, working conditions, supervisory support, salary, interpersonal relationships and working conditions. If these factors are not there (or poorly managed), an employee's job satisfaction and performance will decrease.

Although Herzberg's theory is still frequently mentioned in popular textbooks, it is not supported by empirical evidence. In fact, the theory was refuted over 50 years ago (Ewen et al 1966; House and Wigdor 1967; Hinrichs and Mischkind 1967; Hulin and Smith 1967).

Question 3: How can work motivation be measured?

As mentioned above, 'motivation' refers to both the 'theory' that explains why a certain factor leads to a certain behaviour, as well as a the 'state of mind' that energises and drives people to behave in a certain way. In the more than 80 years that human motivation has been a topic

in the research literature, many scales and questionnaires have been developed to measure an individual's motivational state. Given the fact that motivation is often tied to specific behaviour, there are several outcome-specific scales available, such as the 'tourist motivation to consume local food scale' (Kim and Eves 2012), the 'second-hand shoppers motivation scale' (Guiot and Roux 2010), and the 'motivation for taking a cruise holiday scale' (Hung and Petrick 2011). In the context of the workplace, a similar wide range of questionnaires and scales are available – some of which have good psychometric properties. One of the most widely used scales is the Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale (MWMS), which is translated and validated in several languages (Gagné et al 2015). The MWMS is based on the framework of self-determination theory (see above) and not only measures an employee's motivational state, but also assesses the source of an employee's work motivation. A recent version of the scale can be found in Appendix 3.

Note, however, that longitudinal studies have consistently shown that work motivation fluctuates over time, independently from the tasks that the workers do (Navarro et al 2013). Thus, when measuring employees' work motivation, managers and HR workers should first consider such fluctuations as something natural rather than an indication of a work-related problem.

Question 4: What factors are known to drive work motivation?

There are numerous factors that affect employees' motivational state. Below an overview is provided. Again, this overview does not pretend to be comprehensive, as the number of motivational factors is endless – it is merely a (limited) selection of eight factors relevant to HR management that are supported by a large number of high-quality meta-analytic studies. As such, it offers HR managers an evidence-based starting point for interventions that aim to increase employees' work motivation. A detailed description of each factor and how they affect work-related outcomes can be found in CEBMa's rapid evidence assessments (REAs) on these factors. These evidence reviews are available at cipd.co.uk/evidence-engagement

Goal-setting

In one's personal life, a goal is simply something you are trying to do or achieve. In the domain of management, a goal can be defined as an observational or measurable organisational outcome to be achieved within a specified time limit (Locke and Latham 2002). Subsequently, goal-setting is the process of consciously deciding goals employees, teams or the organisation seek to accomplish and within what timeframe. Goal-setting is one of the most researched topics in the field of industrial and organisational psychology. Its positive effect on work motivation can be explained through several motivational theories. For example, consistent with drive theory, goals have an energising function. They energise employees to reduce the tension that their (that is, the goals') very existence has created. As such, high goals motivate more than low goals. Yet, this does not mean that any challenging goal will motivate an employee. It was found that if there is no commitment to the goal, goal-setting does not work. For example, consistent with self-determination theory, a goal's perceived importance or attractiveness, as well as the degree to which an employee believes they have mastered the necessary skills to reach that goal, influence a person's commitment to that goal (Klein et al 1999). In addition, monitoring goal progress is a crucial process between setting and attaining a goal. This means that, consistent with self-regulation theory, the monitoring of progress towards a goal, rather than just the formulation of it, seems to motivate employees (Harkin et al 2016).

Feedback

Feedback is generally defined as information about a person's performance that is used as a basis for improvement. In the domain of management, feedback is referred to as 'feedback intervention' or 'performance feedback', and is often defined as *'actions taken by (an) external agent(s) to provide information regarding some aspect(s) of one's task performance'* (Kluger and DeNisi 1996). The motivational effect of feedback is mainly based on social comparison

theory and self-regulation theory: when confronted with a discrepancy between their own performance and that of peers and/or the organisational (or social) standard, employees are strongly motivated to attain a higher level of performance. Moreover, according to self-determination theory, positive feedback increases perceived competence and drives intrinsic motivation.

Recognition

Recognition is generally defined as the assignment of personal non-monetary rewards for individual efforts and work accomplishment to recognise and reinforce the desired behaviours displayed by an employee (Brun and Dugas 2008). Many organisations recognise employees based on their performance (Frey 2007). For example, organisations can recognise outstanding performers through compliments, gratitude, private notes or emails, public awards, or publication of their achievements in company newsletters. These recognitions are sometimes symbolic and come with no corresponding financial rewards. Empirical studies on the effect of recognition mainly draw on social comparison theory to explain why employee recognition increases performance: receiving (private or public) recognition provides a positive signal about one's competence relative to others, which enhances self-esteem and induces positive affect (Wang 2017). As a result, employees are motivated to attain a high level of performance to increase their chance of receiving recognition.

Monetary rewards

Monetary rewards, often referred to as financial incentives, can be defined as *'plans that have predetermined criteria and standards, as well as understood policies for determining and allocating monetary rewards'* (Greene 2011). In the past three decades, a large number of high-quality studies and meta-analyses have shown that monetary rewards are indeed strongly and positively related to individual performance. Several motivational theories have been used to explain the positive effect of rewards on employees' motivation and subsequent performance, such as reinforcement, equity and self-determination theories.

Perceived work meaningfulness

Early studies defined meaningful work as workers' perception that their work is worthwhile, important or valuable (see, for example, Hackman and Oldham 1976). More recent studies, however, use a broader, multidimensional conceptualisation that include aspects of the self (for example self-actualisation and personal growth) and aspects of being other-oriented (for example helping others and contributing to the greater good). The positive effect of perceived work meaningfulness can be explained through self-determination theory and job characteristics theory. These theories state that work conditions such as skill variety, task identity, task significance and autonomy lead to the perception of meaningful work, which then results in increased work motivation, performance and job satisfaction. In particular, employees experience positive affect when they perform well on a meaningful task. This positive affect is intrinsically motivating and creates a positive feedback loop of high performance, job satisfaction and other positive organisational outcomes (Allan et al 2019; Bailey et al 2019).

Perceived supervisory support

When employees interact with and receive feedback from their manager (supervisor), they form perceptions of how the manager supports them. This perception is based on how the employees feel the manager helps in times of need, praises the employees or the team for a task well done or recognises them for extra effort. This is known as perceived supervisory support. A large number of empirical studies have demonstrated that perceived supervisory support has a large impact on employee motivational states and subsequent performance. This impact can be explained through social exchange theory: when a manager helps their employees in times of need or recognises them for extra effort, employees will feel inclined to

act in a way that is of value to the manager (such as meeting goals and objectives) and thus the organisation as a whole.

Empowerment/autonomy

The scientific literature differentiates empowerment as either structural or psychological. Structural empowerment refers to the delegation of authority and responsibility to employees, whereas psychological empowerment refers to employees' perceptions that they have autonomy to decide how to do their jobs and that their beliefs and behaviour make a difference (Thomas and Velthouse 1990). The positive effect of empowerment on employees' work motivation can be explained by self-determination theory, which states that human beings have a basic psychological need for autonomy that, when fulfilled, leads to a positive motivational state that enables professional growth and wellbeing.

Psychological safety

Psychological safety is a group-level phenomenon that refers to the shared belief held by members that the group is safe for 'interpersonal risk-taking' – a sense of confidence that others will not embarrass, reject or punish someone for speaking up (Edmondson 1999). A large number of empirical studies have demonstrated that a high level of psychological safety motivates employees to actively seek and share information and knowledge, ask critical questions, speak up with suggestions for organisational improvements, and take initiative to develop new products and services. The positive effect of psychological safety on employees' work motivation can be explained by self-determination theory (Huyghebaert et al 2018). For example, a recent study found that when their psychological needs (in particular, the need to feel secure in one's relationships and to have opportunities to express one's abilities) are met, employees were more motivated to accept corrective and positive performance feedback from peers, explanations of feedback and suggestions for improvement (Scheepers et al 2018).

Perceived fairness/justice

Employees have a universal desire for fairness. Perceived fairness or justice, however, does not refer to a universal or absolute form of justice; rather, it is about the fairness as perceived by employees – a subjective experience (Colquitt et al 2005). In the research literature, three forms of justice are distinguished:

- **distributive justice:** the perceived fairness of how resources, tasks, authority and rewards are distributed among members of the organisation
- **procedural justice:** the perceived fairness of decision-making processes and the degree to which they are consistent, accurate, unbiased and open to voice and input
- **interactional justice:** the way in which the decision-making process and outcomes are communicated.

The impact of perceived fairness on employees' work motivation can be explained by equity theory, social exchange theory and self-regulation theory. What is considered by employees as fair is not only set against one's personal/ethical standards, but also based on how their inputs (efforts) and outcomes (rewards) compare with those of peers. For example, getting rewarded too little compared with one's peers (either in money, influence or prestige) may result in frustration or even anger. Getting rewarded too much, on the other hand, may result in feelings of guilt. This negative state of tension motivates employees to invest less effort rather than more, to restore balance (Ten Have et al 2016). In addition, fairness is valued by employees for instrumental reasons (for example, it reduces uncertainty and fears of exploitation) and relational reasons (for example, it communicates positive social worth) (Kanfer 2017). It is therefore not surprising that perceived fairness has a strong effect on a wide range of work-related outcomes (Colquitt et al 2001).

6 Limitations

This review aims to provide an overview of scientific theories that are widely used by researchers and scholars to explain the causal mechanisms through which a certain motivational factor elicits a positive motivational state. However, concessions were made in relation to the breadth and depth of the search process, such as the exclusion of unpublished papers, the use of a limited number of databases and a focus on papers published between 2000 and 2020. As a consequence, some relevant papers may have been missed. Given this limitation, care must be taken not to present the overview as conclusive.

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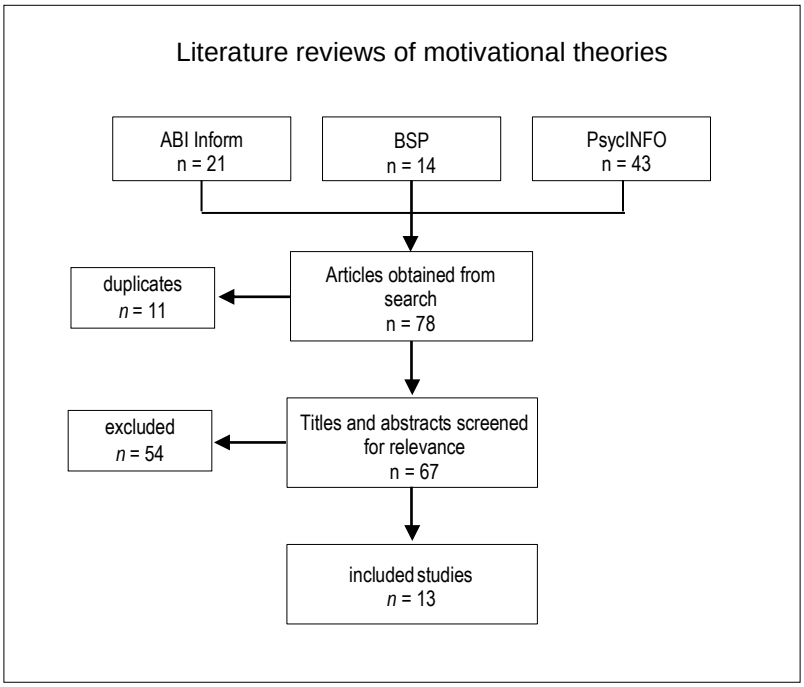
Appendix 1: Search terms and results

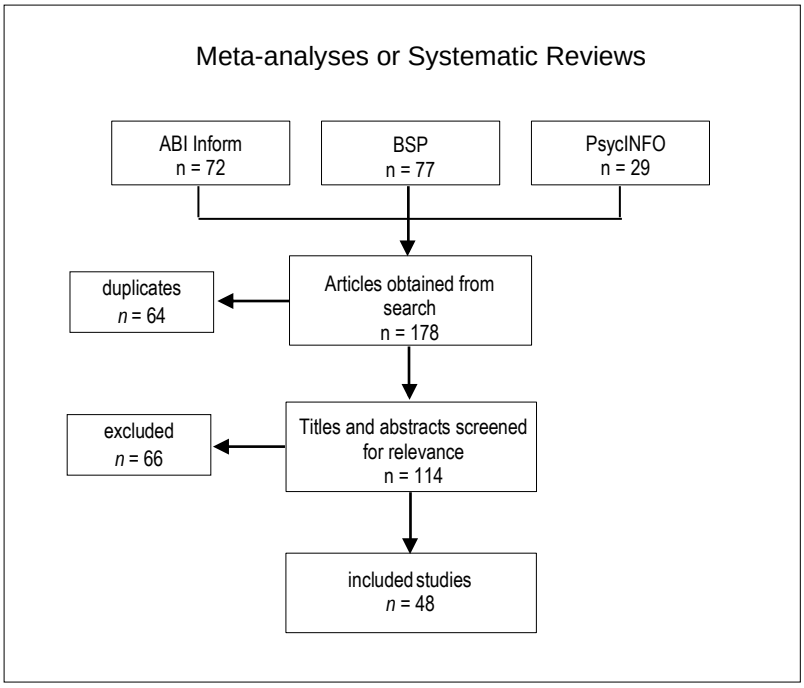
ABI/Inform Global, Business Source Elite, PsycINFO, peer-reviewed, scholarly journals, Sept 2020			
Search terms	**ABI**	**BSP**	**PSY**
S1: ti(motivation*) AND ti(theor*) OR ab('motivational theor*')	574	563	2,356
S2: S1 AND filter literature reviews, limit > 2000	**21**	**14**	**43**

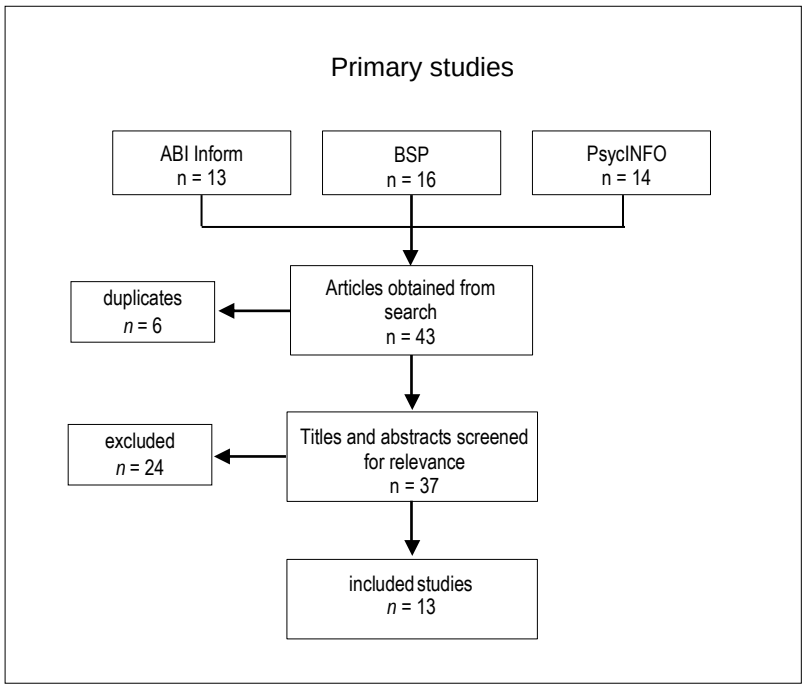
ABI/Inform Global, Business Source Elite, PsycINFO, peer-reviewed, scholarly journals, June 2020			
Search terms	**ABI**	**BSP**	**PSY**
S1: ti(motivat*) OR ab('motivation')	30,460	35,339	73,254
S2: ab(work*) OR ab(employee*)	380,826	467,189	510,396
S3: S1 AND S2	10,127	10,953	14,209
S4: S3 AND filter meta-analyses or systematic reviews, limit > 2000 *PsycINFO: additional filters used (age, non-medical, OB, etc)	**72**	**77**	**29***

ABI/Inform Global, Business Source Elite, PsycINFO, peer-reviewed, scholarly journals, July 2020			
Search terms	**ABI**	**BSP**	**PSY**
S1: ti('work motivation')	203	239	438
S2: S1 AND filter longitudinal or prospective studies, limit > 2000	**13**	**16**	**14**

Appendix 2: Study selection






Primary studies
ABI Inform
n = 13
BSP
n = 16
PsycINFO
n = 14
Articles obtained from search
n = 43
duplicates
n = 6
Titles and abstracts screened for relevance
n = 37
excluded
n = 24
included studies
n = 13

Appendix 3: Measures of motivation

The Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale (MWMS, Gagné et al 2015)

Question root: 'Why do you or would you put efforts into your current job?'

Response options: 1 = 'not at all', 2 = 'very little', 3 = 'a little', 4 = 'moderately', 5 = 'strongly', 6 = 'very strongly', 7 = 'completely'. The scale can be obtained in other languages by contacting the first or second authors.

Amotivation

- Am1 I don't, because I really feel that I'm wasting my time at work.
- Am2 I do little because I don't think this work is worth putting efforts into.
- Am3 I don't know why I'm doing this job; it's pointless work.

Extrinsic regulation – social

- Ext-Soc1 To get others' approval (for example, supervisor, colleagues, family, clients…).
- Ext-Soc2 Because others will respect me more (for example, supervisor, colleagues, family, clients…).
- Ext-Soc3 To avoid being criticised by others (for example, supervisor, colleagues, family, clients…).

Extrinsic regulation – material

- Ext-Mat1 Because others will reward me financially only if I put enough effort in my job (for example, employer, supervisor…).
- Ext-Mat2 Because others offer me greater job security if I put enough effort in my job (for example, employer, supervisor…).
- Ext-Mat3 Because I risk losing my job if I don't put enough effort in it.

Introjected regulation

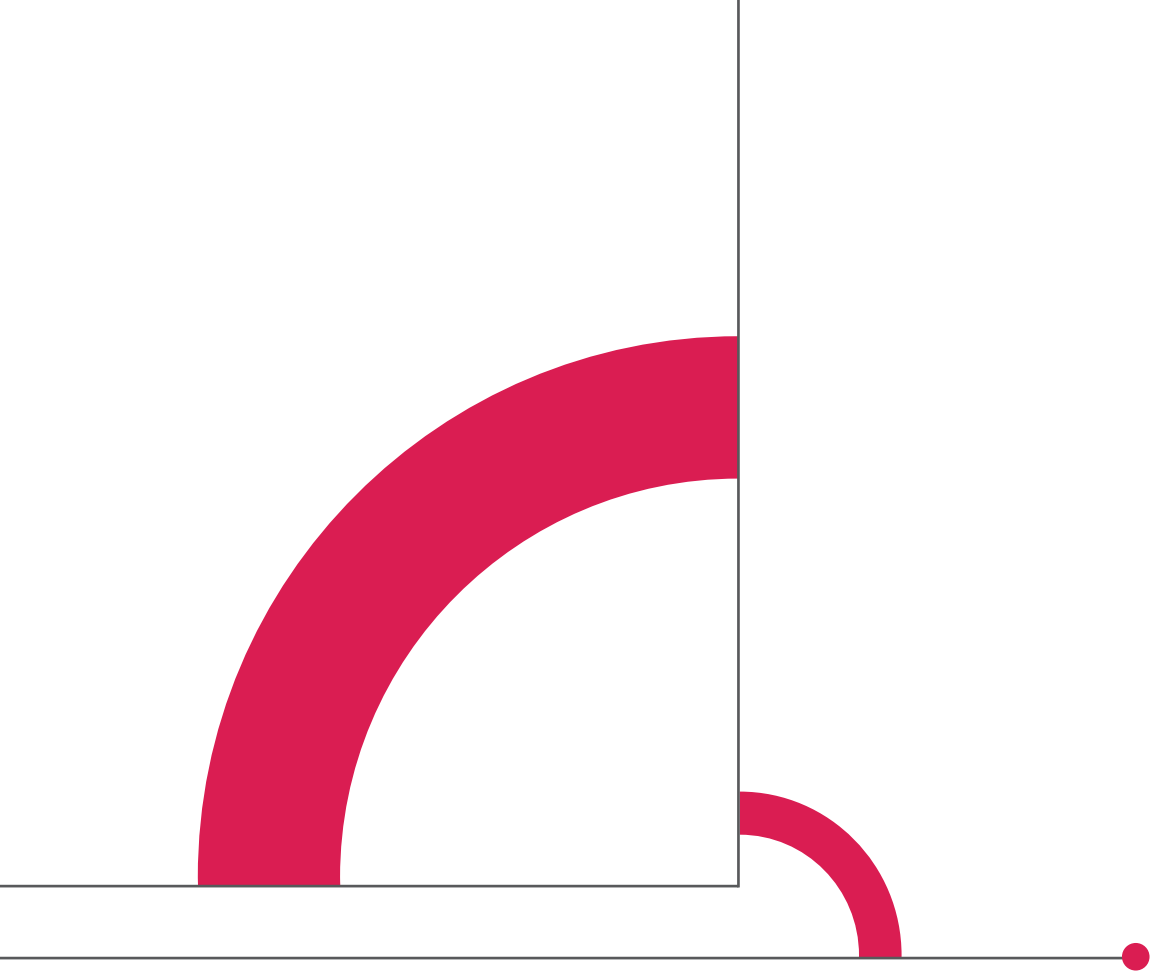
- Introj1 Because I have to prove to myself that I can.
- Introj2 Because it makes me feel proud of myself.
- Introj3 Because otherwise I will feel ashamed of myself.
- Introj4 Because otherwise I will feel bad about myself.

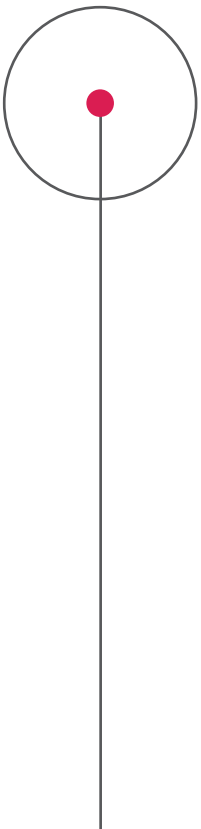
Identified regulation

- Ident1 Because I personally consider it important to put efforts in this job.
- Ident2 Because putting efforts in this job aligns with my personal values.
- Ident3 Because putting efforts in this job has personal significance to me.

Intrinsic motivation

- Intrin1 Because I have fun doing my job.
- Intrin2 Because what I do in my work is exciting.
- Intrin3 Because the work I do is interesting.





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Issued: January 2021 Reference: 8086 © CIPD 2021