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ORIGINAL PAPER

# MOTIVATORS AND DEMOTIVATORS FOR EMPLOYEES

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#### Abstract

Employee motivation is the basis of effective human resource management. A properly designed motivational system and an adequate selection of motivation drivers elicit employee behaviour desirable from the employer's standpoint and thus play a decisive role in the organisation's success. This study aimed to identify factors that have a motivating and demotivating effect on the workforce, as well as to determine the motivational intensity of selected incentives. The empirical research also covered the influence of conflicts – interpersonal and intrapersonal – on the motivation levels among the employees, and the effectiveness of motivational systems applied in the organisations. The findings were obtained through a Web study (CAWI) conducted with the use of a survey questionnaire distributed by electronic means. According to the respondents, the most effective motivation driver is the level of remuneration. This factor is a priority mainly for people with a lower income, lower status and shorter work experience. A positive atmosphere at the workplace turns out to be the second most important driver, whereas non-financial benefits rank third. Furthermore, the poll demonstrates that the level of employee motivation is largely affected by conflicts between employees, employees and their managers, or those of an internal nature. Irrespective of their character and development, antagonisms generate a slew of negative consequences, such as weaker engagement in the job, increased staff fluctuation, a drop in work efficiency and the manifestation of unfavourable attitudes among staff members.

#### CZYNNIKI MOTYWUJĄCE I DEMOTYWUJĄCE PRACOWNIKÓW

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Słowa kluczowe: motywacja pracownicza, motywatory, demotywatory.

#### Abstrakt

Motywacja pracownicza stanowi podstawę skutecznego zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi. Właściwie skonstruowany system motywacyjny oraz odpowiednio dobrane narzędzia motywowania determinują pożądane przez pracodawcę zachowania pracowników, a w rezultacie przesądzają o sukcesie przedsiębiorstwa. Celem publikacji było zidentyfikowanie czynników, które działają motywująco i demotywująco na kadrę pracowniczą oraz określenie siły oddziaływania wybranych bodźców na motywację do pracy. W opracowaniu podjęto również wątki influencji konfliktów interpersonalnych i intrapersonalnych – na poziom motywacji pracowników oraz efektywności systemów motywacyjnych w organizacjach. Zaprezentowane wyniki pozyskano w badaniu online (CAWI), z wykorzystaniem kwestionariusza ankiety udostępnionego drogą elektroniczną. Najskuteczniejszym czynnikiem motywacyjnym, w opinii respondentów, jest wymiar wynagrodzenia. Czynnik ten priorytetowo traktują głównie osoby o mniejszych zarobkach, niższym statusie i stażu zawodowym. Na drugim miejscu w rankingu ważności motywatorów znalazła się dobra atmosfera w miejscu pracy, a na kolejnym benefity pozapłacowe. W wyniku badań sondażowych wykazano również, że na poziom motywacji pracowniczej w dużym stopniu rzutują konflikty uwidaczniające się między przełożonym i pracownikami, współpracownikami, jak również te o wymiarze wewnętrznym. Antagonizmy, niezależnie od ich natury i przebiegu, generują wiele negatywnych następstw, jak chociażby: mniejsze zaangażowanie pracowników, większa fluktuacja personelu, niższa wydajność pracy, ujawnienie się nieprzychylnych postaw członków organizacji.

### Introduction

Despite numerous studies devoted to the problem of employee motivation, the search for answers to the questions: "What motivates people to work, and to what extent?" and "What are the factors demotivating employees?" seems to be still relevant and useful. The problem of motivation and demotivation to work is important from the cognitive and practical point of view. It is undoubtedly an important issue worth studying comprehensively and in-depth. The dynamically changing environment of organisations can "modify" an employees' approach to work and motivation. Therefore, an attempt was made to identify the factors that motivate and demotivate the workforce and to determine the strength of their effect on work motivation. The questionnaire survey was limited to working residents of the Warmia and Mazury Voivodeship.

The findings were obtained through a Web study (CAWI) conducted with the use of a survey questionnaire distributed by electronic means.

# Work motivation – the essence, types and motivating and demotivating factors

Motivation is considered "the driving force" behind human action. It is the "mental regulatory process which fuels human behaviour with energy and gives it a direction" (*Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN*, 2009, p. 185).

Literature usage of the notion is marked with ambiguity. Motivation is often equated with the intention to do something of purpose-driven behaviour (Armstrong, 2007, p. 215). Stevenson (2002, p. 1, 2) defines it as "an incentive, an inducement, or a stimulus for action. [...] anything – verbal, physical, or psychological – that causes somebody to do something in response". Motivation is thought to be an endogenous mechanism triggering and organising human behaviour oriented at the attainment of a goal (Król & Ludwiczyński (eds.), 2019, p. 317-333). Motivation is also "a leadership process that uses knowledge about behavioural factors to influence human behaviour" (Kacprzak-Biernacka *et al.*, 2014, p. 3). In management theory, motivation is a factor determining the level, direction and durability of the work effort (Mazur, 2013, p. 157).

Motivation has many natures and dimensions. It may refer to an individual or a group of workers. Generally, the literature distinguishes intrinsic (autonomous, coming from within) and extrinsic (instrumental) motivation, as well as positive and negative motivation.

Intrinsic motivation arises from within the individual and requires no external impulse (Kozłowski, 2020, p. 206). "It drives us to achieve values for their own sake" (Kacprzak-Biernacka *et al.*, 2014, p. 4). It stimulates job interest and engagement, increases flexibility in thinking and acting, fosters creativity, affects mental health and positively impacts interpersonal relations. The theory of self-motivation relies on three pillars (Pink, 2011, p. 91). These include a sense of:

- autonomy the employee is free to decide what they are working on, how, when and with whom (freedom at the level of tasks, time, methods, relations);
- mastery the employee wishes to grow in the areas they find important (seeking mastery);
- purpose the staff members feel that their work has a meaning; the goal set for the employee must be specific, important and useful.

According to Penc (2000, p. 45-48), intrinsic motivation depends on personal qualities and dispositions, such as perception, amicability, ability to focus or find your place in a situation, learning speed, task engagement and openness.

Extrinsic motivation is oriented to an external gain. Typically, it involves a more or less elaborate system of rewards and punishments complete with rules for their distribution. In an economic organisation, rewards are primarily associated with remuneration (its level, raises) but also other financial and non-financial benefits from the boss, such as words of praise, respect towards the employees and promotion. Punishments include warnings, reprimands, and financial penalties (Michalik, 2005, p. 77).

Negative motivation relies on fear, anxiety, and insecurity which "drive [people] to work by inspiring a sense of threat" (Dolot, 2015, p. 23). It relates to defence mechanisms which, within an organisation, essentially boil down to the fact that employees are strongly motivated in two situations – the fear of losing a reward or facing punishment.

Meanwhile, positive motivation is based on positive reinforcement. It is equated with employee behaviour driven by "aiming for" a higher position, better remuneration or greater autonomy.

The effectiveness of the incentive scheme of an organisation is largely determined by its selection of employee motivation drivers. These constitute an array of both economic (monetary and non-monetary) and non-economic factors. The latter plays a crucial role in three fundamental operational areas of the business (Jaska & Włodarczyk, 2009, s. 71; Kopertyńska, 2002, s. 55):

- organisational (promotion, authority, high level of autonomy and responsibility, flexible hours, access to information, etc.);
  - technological (suitable equipment, ergonomic workstation design, etc.);
- psychological (prestige, recognition, words of praise from the boss, job certainty, friendly atmosphere, opportunity for self-fulfilment).

The available literature devotes considerable attention to wage motivators such as the level of basic pay, pay rise, bonuses and awards (Predki, 2020, p. 165). Increasingly, however, employees value non-wage motivators, which include: the possibility of self-realisation, a pleasant atmosphere in the workplace, opportunities for personal development of employees, promotion and covering the costs of training and workshops (Leśniewski & Berny, 2011, p. 99-105; Nogalski & Niewiadomski, 2019, p. 427-446; Garstka, 2015, p. 53-60). Non-wage motivators reinforce the motivational impact of wage incentives and act autonomously, and "their effectiveness is particularly important to employees with highly developed social and self-fulfillment needs" (Krzętowska & Jagodziński, 2015, p. 50). However, it is impossible to unequivocally state which motivators are more effective for a company, and their selection seems to be an individual issue (Tokarska-Olownia, 2019, p. 163). Although some motivators may strongly influence some organisation employees, motivating them to work, they may influence others to a significantly lesser extent and, for others, they may even be perceived as work demotivators (e.g. travelling to a training course in the form of a dynamic workshop) (Dolot, 2015, p. 26).

Demotivating factors are understood as persistent and annoying events that frustrate employees and reduce the amount of productive energy they use at work (Spitzer, 1995, p. 56-60). These factors include ignoring employees, their ideas and suggestions, receiving praise by an employee for team successes, an absence of interest in an employee as a human being, publicly criticizing staff, inconsistent actions by the supervisor, lack of a clearly defined range of responsibilities, unclear reporting rules and issuing orders without consulting or communicating with employees (Line, 1992, p. 4-7). In the literature

on the subject, attention is also drawn to such demotivators as: underdevelopment or overdevelopment of formal bonds, defectiveness of the system of selection and promotion of employees, the inadequacy of the method of management, formalism, defectiveness of the proportion of rewards and punishments and ritualism (Podgórecki, 1974, p. 61). Demotivation of an employee may result from both factors occurring in the organization (external factors) and factors inherent in the employee (internal factors) (Dolot, 2015, p. 26).

Recent studies devoted to the issue of motivation have focused primarily on non-wage motivation factors affecting employees achieving their own professional and life goals.

Modern organisations depart from the carrot-and-stick approach to employee motivation. Multiple studies have demonstrated that both of these forms of impact on the individual (punishments and rewards) have little effect as motivation drivers. In fact, they often elicit competitive behaviour associated with impaired communication, disinformation, intentional misguidance and less efficient teamwork. Therefore, supporting self-motivation appears to be the key to boosting employee engagement and work efficiency.

Since every person has a value system encompassing both universal and personal values (Stachowska & Czaplicka-Kozłowska, 2017, p. 102), motivation is a complex process that involves a wealth of different aspects.

It is hard to imagine how an organisation could achieve its strategic goals without proper employee motivation. HR managers should be responsible for creating transparent and effective motivational systems based on the criteria of comprehensiveness and individuation. Properly motivated employees exhibit greater involvement in achieving the goals of the organisation, while simultaneously satisfying their own needs, desires, and aspirations (Knap-Stefaniuk *et al.*, 2018, p. 192).

### Research methodology and study sample profile

This study focuses on identifying factors that motivate and demotivate staff and determine the strength of the impact of selected stimuli on work motivation. The study also addresses the influence of conflicts – interpersonal and intrapersonal – on the level of employee motivation and the effectiveness of incentive schemes in organisations. The results presented in the study were obtained through an online survey (CAWI). The research tool was a questionnaire composed of a demographic information part (6 questions) and the main part (13 questions).

The demographic section included questions on age, gender, education, work experience and the gross monthly salary of the respondents. The main part of the questionnaire contained questions relating to the research subject (i.e. associations of the respondents with the word "motivation", factors motivating

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and demotivating to work, the intensity of influence of particular motivators on the surveyed employees, assessment of interpersonal relations and the motivation system). The survey was conducted in the first half of 2019 and was restricted to working residents of the Warmia and Mazury Voivodeship. The survey was voluntary and resulted in 250 completed questionnaires, of which 140 (56%) were completed by women. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions (semi-open responses, and a defined list of responses: single-select and multiselect) and open-ended questions. Scaled questions allowed the respondents to present their feelings, opinions and preferences on the research topic.

Most respondents reported having secondary education (46.8%). A slightly smaller group had a higher education degree (31.6%). The percentages of people indicating lower secondary education and primary education were 6% and 15.6%, respectively. In terms of age, the largest group in the study sample included people aged 25-35. Nearly every fourth respondent fell within the 36-45 age group. The percentages of the youngest (aged 25 or less) and the oldest respondents (more than 55 years of age) were relatively similar (12.8% and 14.8%, respectively). The lowest gross monthly remuneration (less than PLN 3,000) was declared by 44% of the respondents and the highest (more than PLN 7,000) by 12% of the employees, chiefly those in managerial positions. Seventy respondents (28%) reported earnings in the range of PLN 3,001-5,000. The remuneration at the level of PLN 5,001-7,000 was declared by forty respondents (16%). The respondents with the shortest work experience (5 years and less) constituted 39.2% of the sample, whereas those with the longest work experience (more than 15 years) – 26.8%.

## Employee motivation in the light of empirical research

Strongly motivated people have clearly defined goals and take actions aimed at their achievement (Armstrong, 2007, p. 211). Needless to say, such people may uphold their motivation on their own, which seems ideal. However, most people require an external "impulse". Thus, a high level of employee motivation may be attained through the creation of suitable conditions by the organisation.

The issue of motivation is often treated only perfunctorily and reduced to a set of simple operational rules. Meanwhile, it is a complex, multi-dimensional process of a heterogeneous nature, which requires the organisation to skilfully and effectively encourage employees to act towards the achievement of business goals.

The respondents were questioned about their associations with the term "motivation". They provided a total of 18 associations (Tab. 1). Most responses were given multiple times. Additionally, some respondents indicated that motivation "doesn't bring to mind anything", "brings to mind many things", or that it was "difficult to say". The most common associations were "money", "willingness to act", "incentive" and "encouragement".

Table 1 Associations with the word "motivation"

| Association              | % of the responses | Association    | % of the responses |
|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Money/finances           | 23.5               | engagement     | 2.3                |
| Willingness to act       | 17.0               | goal pursuit   | 1.8                |
| Incentive                | 14.4               | support        | 1.5                |
| Encouragement            | 9.7                | afflatus       | 1.2                |
| Reward                   | 7.0                | impact         | 0.6                |
| Bonus                    | 7.0                | ambition       | 0.6                |
| Impulse                  | 5.4                | striving       | 0.3                |
| Inspiration              | 3.2                | internal power | 0.3                |
| Readiness to take action | 2.9                | perseverance   | 0.3                |

Source: own research.

A part of the research was to determine how intensely particular motivators affect the examined employees. According to the respondents – mainly women with the longest work experience and higher education – what does not inspire them to work are reprimands, warnings or participation in planning the tasks and goals of the organisation.

According to the respondents, the most important motivator was high remuneration. Slightly more than 55.5% of the study sample considered it a highly or very highly motivating factor. This response was indicated by respondents having primary education, lower secondary education, most of those with secondary education and a small group of respondents (chiefly male) with higher education. The factor was particularly important for respondents with shorter work experience. To a slightly lesser extent, employee motivation is affected by a positive atmosphere at the workplace (52% of the respondents viewed that factor as highly motivating or very highly motivating) and non-financial benefits (high or very high motivational intensity declared by 49.2% of the respondents). Lower positions in the ranking of importance were occupied by financial rewards, bonuses, a clear path for promotion, the opportunity for skills development at the expense of the company and the potential for self-fulfilment.

Source literature includes not only a broad account of issues relating to employee motivation but also an extensive presentation of demotivation. A demotivated employee has no organisational identification, fails to make an effort or underperforms in the achievement of the organisation's goals. Demotivation has multiple sources, a heterogeneous nature and may have the markings of temporariness or permanence.

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| Factors driving work motivation         | Motivational intensity of the factor |                              |                      |                         |                      |                              |  |
|---|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|--|
|   | not<br>motivating                    | very<br>poorly<br>motivating | poorly<br>motivating | averagely<br>motivating | highly<br>motivating | very<br>highly<br>motivating |  |
| High remuneration                       | 0.0                                  | 12.0                         | 15.6                 | 16.8                    | 20.8                 | 34.8                         |  |
| Financial rewards                       | 0.0                                  | 14.8                         | 20.0                 | 18.6                    | 21.2                 | 25.4                         |  |
| Bonuses                                 | 0.0                                  | 14.0                         | 20.0                 | 19.4                    | 21.2                 | 25.4                         |  |
| Opportunity for self-<br>fulfilment     | 0.0                                  | 16.0                         | 18.6                 | 22.8                    | 22.0                 | 20.6                         |  |
| High level of autonomy                  | 0.0                                  | 13.2                         | 24.0                 | 24.0                    | 19.0                 | 19.8                         |  |
| Opportunity for skills development      | 0.0                                  | 14.8                         | 18.3                 | 20.8                    | 24.0                 | 21.2                         |  |
| Fear of losing the job                  | 0.0                                  | 24.4                         | 25.6                 | 16.8                    | 16.0                 | 17.2                         |  |
| Participation in task and goal planning | 11.2                                 | 14.8                         | 20.4                 | 24.4                    | 12.0                 | 18.1                         |  |
| Clear path for career growth            | 0.0                                  | 16.0                         | 17.6                 | 24.0                    | 21.6                 | 20.8                         |  |
| Appreciation from the boss              | 0.0                                  | 12.8                         | 16.8                 | 20.4                    | 25.6                 | 24.4                         |  |
| Positive atmosphere at the workplace    | 0.0                                  | 12.4                         | 15.6                 | 20.0                    | 25.0                 | 27.0                         |  |
| Non-financial rewards                   | 0.0                                  | 12.4                         | 18.0                 | 20.4                    | 22.8                 | 26.4                         |  |
| Threat of degradation                   | 0.0                                  | 22.0                         | 18.0                 | 22.0                    | 19.6                 | 18.4                         |  |
| Reprimands, warnings                    | 28.8                                 | 25.6                         | 17.6                 | 16.0                    | 8.0                  | 4.0                          |  |
| Partial loss of remuneration            | 0.0                                  | 24.0                         | 23.6                 | 19.6                    | 16.4                 | 16.4                         |  |
| Work-life balance                       | 0.0                                  | 14.4                         | 14.4                 | 27.2                    | 26.4                 | 17.6                         |  |

Source: own research.

The most common demotivating factors indicated by the respondents included low remuneration, the absence of a clear motivational system in the company, stagnant remuneration, the lack of opportunity for career growth and a negative atmosphere at the workplace.

Three of the demotivating factors indicated by the respondents related directly or indirectly to the financial aspects of the job, i.e. the remuneration system. Money (the level of remuneration, raises or cuts, remuneration rules, bonus availability) has varying motivational effectiveness depending on the situation and the employee in question. Therefore, it seems important to profile employee needs and personalise financial incentives to prevent a decline in the levels of work motivation. Research shows that employee demotivation frequently results from factors such as the absence of opportunity for career growth (lack

 ${\bf Table~3}$  Factors affecting employee demotivation

| Demotivating factors                         | Number of responses | Demotivating factors                    | Number<br>of responses |
|--|---------------------|---|------------------------|
| Unclear division of responsibilities         | 59                  | lack of opportunity for career growth   | 128                    |
| Leadership conflict at the organisation      | 3                   | lack of response to the problems raised | 29                     |
| Lack of a clear motivational system          | 142                 | lack of meaning/purpose of the efforts  | 44                     |
| Low remuneration                             | 191                 | lack of appreciation from the boss      | 82                     |
| Remuneration inadequate to the job performed | 66                  | negative atmosphere at work             | 92                     |
| Disinterest in the needs of the employees    | 42                  | lack of bonuses                         | 84                     |
| Lack of respect from the boss                | 48                  | "unhealthy" interpersonal relations     | 45                     |
| Unwarranted criticism from the boss          | 11                  | job uncertainty                         | 6                      |
| Excessive control                            | 26                  | responsibility overload                 | 14                     |
| Stagnant remuneration                        | 132                 | insufficient information flow           | 10                     |

Source: own research.

of perspectives for a promotion or the development of hard skills) and a negative atmosphere at the workplace (for instance: unhealthy competitiveness, envy, unprofessional team leadership)

The findings clearly demonstrate that a significant motivation driver is an atmosphere that stimulates the development of harmonious interpersonal relationships and prevents internal strife. The respondents are aware of the inevitability of conflicts with the organisation, but appear to focus mainly on their negative consequences, even though the literature highlights their stimulating role as well (for instance, their influence on growing employee motivation). The study sample indicated that conflicts (intrapersonal and interpersonal) definitely reduce work motivation (67.6% of the responses). Only 1.8% did not observe their negative impact on employee motivation. According to the respondents, the most common negative consequences of conflict, other than diminished motivation, include weaker engagement in the job, increased staff fluctuation, a drop in work efficiency, the manifestation of unfavourable attitudes among staff members (aggression, hate, disinformation, etc.) and worsening health conditions among the employees.

In their assessment of interpersonal relationships in an enterprise, the respondents considered three areas: the direct manager—subordinate relationship, the employee—employee bond and internal communication.

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Table 4 Interpersonal relations according to the respondents

| Relationship type                       | Assessment of interpersonal relations (% of the responses) |      |            |      |           |
|---|--|------|------------|------|-----------|
|   | very poor  | poor | no opinion | good | very good |
| Direct manager-subordinate relationship | 16.0   | 16.4 | 9.6        | 40.0 | 18.0      |
| Employee-employee relationship          | 11.2   | 14.0 | 10.0       | 37.6 | 27.2      |
| Communication within the organisation   | 12.4   | 17.2 | 13.6       | 38.8 | 18.0      |

Source: own research.

The direct manager—subordinate relationships were assessed at least positively by 58% of the respondents with the prevailing percentage of women having average work experience (6-10 years). As many as 16% of the respondents viewed these relationships as very poor. A relatively high percentage had no clear opinion on the matter. Meanwhile, bonds between co-workers met with a far more enthusiastic appraisal. Nearly every third respondent considered them good, and every fourth considered them very good. Interpersonal communication was viewed positively by almost 39% of the respondents and very positively by 18%. The answers "poor" and "very poor" in this area were marked by 17.2% and 12.4% of the respondents, respectively.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked to assess the motivational system applied by their employers. Approximately 10% of the study sample declared that the employee motivational system at their current work establishment was effective. Nearly 25% regarded it as relatively effective and approximately 32.6% regarded it as rather ineffective. Only 5.4% of the respondents labelled it as ineffective. Relatively many (27%) were unable to provide an unequivocal assessment ("difficult to say").

One of the respondents (employed in the IT industry) included a relatively broad account of the motivational system implemented at his work establishment. He pointed to the use of referral bonuses and spot bonuses. Moreover, his company offers a range of benefits and extra services such as private healthcare (also for family members), a MultiSport card, financing or co-financing of employee training, design of individual career paths, face-to-face meetings between the leader and the employees, regular massage sessions, company parties and outings. Another significant factor is the open-door policy (team leaders are on a first-name basis with employees and share the same rooms), which undeniably contributes to employee integration, greater engagement of the staff and work efficiency.

Almost every eighth respondent was definitely content (mainly women), while every fifth was rather content with their job. 14% of the respondents expressed definite discontent. These opinions found their reflection in the distribution of responses regarding the wish to change jobs. More than half of the respondents were not interested in job offers from other establishments, 27.2% would consider such an option, albeit upon deep thought, analysis or consultation with family members.

### Conclusions

The perception of the employee role in an organisation has evolved over the years. Nowadays, the theory of human resource management places emphasis on treating the staff as subjects. The employee is viewed not only as an important resource but, above all, as a person who creates the image of the organisation. Dedicated employees appear to be one of the crucial values of the company (Rosłon & Ciupiński, 2017, p. 13), so the employers should support their needs of autonomy, their pursuit of mastery and creativity. The opportunity for participation and a role in decision-making undeniably encourages greater affective engagement and more efficient work efforts (Pawlak, 2015, p. 61).

The survey study demonstrates that financial factors (level of remuneration) continue to present the most important incentive for work, even though their importance is particularly accentuated by the less educated employees who occupy lower positions and have shorter work experience. The employees are also highly affected by non-financial motivators such as a positive atmosphere at the workplace or non-financial benefits such as training (traditional and online), private healthcare, life insurance and fitness club cards. Meanwhile, negative factors (warnings, reprimands) prove to have the least effect on employee motivation.

The poll results indicate that many employers seem to recognise the tangible benefits related to proper employee motivation. On the other hand, some businesses can still hardly present a formal motivational system or a set of motivators attractive from the employee's standpoint.

Motivated employees are key to the long-term growth of an organisation. Therefore, it is important to inquire about the expectations, ambitions and professional preferences of prospective workers as early as the level of recruitment. People (or in the context of the findings, motivated people) appear to be one of the most critical investments for an organisation.

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