



Motivation at Work: Rethinking What Drives Employees

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لبيه أعمال
Labayh Business



شركة لبيه للرعاية الطبية لماذا لبيه؟

+1,000
أخصائي معتمد

+ 3 مليون
مستخدم نشط

أدوات عالمية

مقرها في المدينة المنورة والرياض،
ولديها القدرة على الوصول في جميع
أنحاء المملكة وحول العالم

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مؤهلات وخبرة

منصة معتمدة من وزارة الصحة
السعودية فريق إدارة وتوصيل يتمتع
بخبرة ثرية في المنطقة وخارجها

+100
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دقائق المسؤولية الاجتماعية

دعم العربية والإنجليزية

تصميم وتوصيل ودعم باللغتين
العربية والإنجليزية وفي بعض الحالات
اللغات الأخرى

+120
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عدد تقييمات التطبيق

اعتماد وثقة

أدوات للتقييم والتصميم والتوصيل
من بين أفضل الأدوات في العالم
تستخدمها الممارسين المعتمدين

98%
معدل الرضا



لبيه لديها فرعين رئيسيين في المملكة، أحدهما في
المدينة المنورة والآخر في الرياض

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Executive Summary

Motivation in the workplace is no longer a secondary concern, it is a foundational element that shapes performance, wellbeing, retention, and organizational culture. This report brings together current thinking, practical insights, global examples, and regional data to provide a comprehensive view of what drives motivation and how it can be sustained.

Global engagement remains low, with only **15% to 23%** of employees actively motivated at work. While traditional motivators like salary still matter, employee expectations have shifted toward purpose, autonomy, flexibility, recognition, and psychological safety. At the same time, external pressures such as remote work, economic stress, and burnout culture have made it harder to maintain consistent motivation.

The report identifies ten key factors that influence motivation, from meaningful work and growth opportunities to fair leadership and clear roles. It also explores how motivation varies by job type, how it connects to wellbeing, and what happens when it's ignored—lower performance, rising turnover, and cultural breakdown.

Investing in motivation delivers clear returns. Disengagement costs the global economy an estimated **\$8.8 trillion annually**, while presenteeism alone accounts for over 50 lost workdays per employee each year. Case studies from Huawei, as well as research from Saudi Arabia's healthcare and public sectors, demonstrate that simple, well-structured motivational systems can yield significant improvements in engagement, performance, and collaboration.

The report concludes with strategic recommendations organized across four priority areas:

	<p>HR and Leadership Focus: Train managers, promote fairness, and integrate motivation into core processes.</p>		<p>Culture Building: Normalize recognition, protect psychological safety, and encourage employee voice.</p>
	<p>Daily Practices: Use small, consistent actions like check-ins and low-cost appreciation to build connection.</p>		<p>Long-Term Alignment: Design roles, pathways, and workloads that support both purpose and sustainability.</p>



Motivation is not a one-time fix. It is built—and rebuilt—through daily experiences, leadership behavior, and the credibility of organizational systems. This report offers a practical starting point for organizations committed to creating environments where people choose to stay, contribute, and grow.

Foreword & Author's Note

The topic of motivation has long been discussed in management circles, yet few workplaces truly make it a day-to-day priority. In an age where employees are constantly reevaluating what they expect from work, motivation is no longer a personal trait, it is a shared responsibility between individuals, teams, and leadership. This report brings that message to the forefront.

Across industries, organizations are facing similar challenges: loss of engagement, difficulty retaining talent, and a growing sense of disconnection. While some of this is attributed to structural issues or external pressures, much of it comes down to how people feel at work, whether they feel valued, energized, and aligned with what they do. Motivation is at the heart of all of this.

This report was written to support those who shape workplaces every day: organizational leaders, HR professionals, team managers, and decision-makers. It aims to offer insights, practical interpretations, and thought starters based on decades of global discussions and more recent shifts in employee behavior.

If you are responsible for teams, culture, or performance, and if you've ever wondered why some people thrive while others fade quietly into disengagement, then this report is for you.



01

The State of Motivation in

The State of Motivation in Today's Workplace

Global engagement levels remain consistently low. Studies estimate that only 15% to 23% of employees feel actively motivated or engaged at work [1]. The majority operate in a state of quiet compliance, doing what is required, but without commitment or emotional investment.

At the same time, organizations face a growing disconnect between what employees need to stay motivated and what workplaces continue to offer. This disconnect fuels disengagement, lowers productivity, and contributes to long-term dissatisfaction.

Shifts in Employee Expectations

Workplace motivation today is shaped less by traditional incentives and more by values-driven priorities. Employees are increasingly looking for:

- **Purpose** in their work beyond task completion.
- **Recognition** and appreciation that feels authentic and regular.
- **Autonomy** to manage how and when work is done.
- **Flexibility**, especially in managing their time and location.
- **Psychological safety**, where mistakes are not punished and feedback is welcome.

Recent data highlights that many employees now value work-life balance and personal wellbeing more than job security or salary. In fact, a global survey in early 2025 found that over 80% of workers rank flexibility and balance as equal to or more important than compensation [2]. Among younger employees, meaningful work and mental health support are emerging as baseline expectations, not added benefits.

External Pressures on Motivation

Remote and Hybrid Work

The shift to remote work has created both opportunities and risks. On one hand, many employees report higher productivity and satisfaction when working from home. On the other, increased feelings of isolation, unclear boundaries between work and personal life, and a lack of in-person connection have introduced new emotional burdens. Remote employees are more likely to feel unsupported, invisible, or unsure about their future with the organization.

Burnout and Exhaustion Culture

The rise of burnout-related terms like "quiet quitting" and "quiet cracking" reflects a deeper motivational strain. These patterns signal not laziness, but emotional fatigue, lack of recognition, and disengagement. Many employees are no longer willing to push beyond their limits for organizations that appear unresponsive to their needs.

Economic and Technological Disruption

Economic pressure, especially in regions experiencing inflation and stagnating wages, has added financial stress to the workplace. At the same time, increased automation and rapid changes in job expectations have placed new demands on employees to constantly adapt. For many, this creates uncertainty and insecurity, which, in turn, suppresses motivation.

02

Understanding What Drives Motivation

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Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

Motivation is often classified into two broad categories:

- **Intrinsic motivation**

comes from within the individual. It is fueled by personal satisfaction, interest in the work itself, a sense of purpose, or the desire to grow. For example, an employee may feel motivated because they believe their work contributes to a meaningful cause or because it challenges their skills.

- **Extrinsic motivation**

is driven by external rewards or pressures, such as salary, bonuses, promotions, performance reviews, or fear of consequences. While these can produce short-term boosts in performance, they often lose their effectiveness when used in isolation or over time.

In high-functioning workplaces, intrinsic and extrinsic motivators tend to reinforce each other. For example, fair compensation (extrinsic) can create the stability needed for an employee to focus on personal growth and development (intrinsic).

How Motivation Links to Productivity, Loyalty, and Culture

Motivation is not a soft concept, it has direct and measurable effects on organizational outcomes.

- **Productivity:** Motivated employees are more focused, take initiative, and sustain effort over time. They are more likely to identify problems early, offer solutions, and contribute beyond their basic job description.

- **Loyalty and retention:** When employees feel motivated, they are less likely to seek external opportunities. They form stronger connections with their teams and organization, contributing to lower turnover and reduced recruitment costs.

- **Culture and behavior:** Motivation shapes how people interact with each other. Motivated teams are more collaborative, resilient, and constructive. When motivation is missing, the culture often shifts toward cynicism, detachment, or compliance without commitment.

03

Ten Core Factors That Influence Motivation

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Purpose and Meaning

Employees are more motivated when they see the value of their work beyond daily tasks. This includes understanding how their role connects to a larger mission or contributes to the lives of others. When purpose is absent, tasks feel mechanical and unimportant.

Recognition and Appreciation

Consistent, genuine recognition reinforces a sense of progress and worth. This doesn't have to be monetary, verbal appreciation, acknowledgment in meetings, or written notes can significantly boost motivation. Lack of recognition often leads to feelings of being invisible or undervalued.

Autonomy

Employees who have control over how they approach their work tend to feel more engaged. Micromanagement reduces ownership and signals a lack of trust, while autonomy supports initiative, creativity, and responsibility.

Growth and Development

Motivation increases when people feel they are learning and progressing. Opportunities for training, skill-building, career advancement, or even new challenges within the same role can all support this. Stagnation, on the other hand, often leads to withdrawal or disengagement.

Fair Compensation and Benefits

While not the only motivator, fair and transparent compensation is a foundational requirement. If employees feel underpaid or that compensation lacks consistency or fairness, motivation declines, even if other conditions are positive.



Ten Core Factors That Influence Motivation

Leadership and Trust

Motivated employees often report that their direct manager plays a critical role in shaping their experience. Leadership that listens, communicates clearly, respects boundaries, and models ethical behavior helps create a stable motivational environment.

Team Relationships and Belonging

Positive relationships at work, especially among peers, can be a major source of motivation. Trust, collaboration, and a sense of inclusion make employees feel safer, more connected, and more likely to contribute meaningfully.

Psychological Safety

People are more motivated when they feel safe to speak up, admit mistakes, share feedback, or challenge ideas without fear of punishment. Psychological safety allows for honest communication, learning, and risk-taking—all of which support motivation.

Workload and Role Clarity

Motivation is affected by how much is expected and how clearly those expectations are defined. Constant overload, shifting priorities, or lack of role clarity can lead to confusion, stress, and eventual burnout. Clear responsibilities and reasonable demands support sustained motivation.

Flexibility and Work-Life Alignment

Whether through remote work, flexible hours, or understanding personal constraints, flexibility helps employees feel respected and trusted. It allows them to manage energy better and sustain motivation across changing life circumstances.



04

Patterns and Profiles of Motivation

Patterns and Profiles of Motivation

Motivation is not evenly distributed across roles, functions, or individuals. It shifts based on job type, leadership quality, organizational environment, and personal life stage.

Motivation Across Job Types

Different types of roles come with distinct motivational drivers and risks:

- **Knowledge workers (e.g., analysts, researchers, specialists)**
often draw motivation from autonomy, intellectual challenge, and opportunities to innovate. Demotivation arises when work feels repetitive or when their contributions go unnoticed.
- **Frontline and service roles (e.g., customer service, field workers, technical support)**
tend to be highly influenced by recognition, working conditions, and direct feedback. These roles often face more rigid systems, so respect and fairness have a stronger impact on motivation.
- **Administrative roles**
may experience motivation through task completion, structure, and clear responsibilities. A lack of appreciation or stagnant career pathways can create a sense of invisibility or frustration.
- **Leadership and management roles**
are often driven by outcomes, influence, and organizational alignment. However, these roles also carry a high risk of burnout, particularly when expectations are unclear or when leaders feel isolated.



05

Motivation and Wellbeing

Motivation and Wellbeing

Employees who feel motivated typically report higher levels of energy, stronger engagement with their tasks, and a greater sense of meaning in their work. This contributes to:

01 Reduced stress

Motivated employees are more likely to experience manageable workloads and a sense of control over how they work.

02 Higher resilience

When setbacks occur, motivation provides a buffer, helping people bounce back instead of disengaging.

03 Greater job satisfaction

A sense of purpose and achievement contributes to emotional stability and overall positivity toward work.

04 Healthier work-life balance

When people are motivated, they tend to manage their time and energy more effectively, leaving space for personal wellbeing.

When Motivation Declines, Wellbeing Suffers

Lack of motivation often shows up in ways that mirror common wellbeing concerns:

- **Emotional exhaustion:** When effort does not feel connected to value or purpose, energy drains faster.
- **Cynicism and detachment:** Demotivated employees may feel disconnected from their team or organization, which can feed into feelings of isolation.
- **Burnout:** Low motivation sustained over time, especially when combined with high workload or poor support, can accelerate burnout.
- **Physical symptoms:** Demotivation is often accompanied by sleep issues, headaches, or frequent illnesses related to chronic stress.

The recent rise in workplace terms such as “quiet quitting,” “the great exhaustion,” and “quiet cracking” points to a growing overlap between low motivation and poor wellbeing. These trends are not isolated, they reflect structural problems in how work is designed and managed.

06

How Organizations Sustain Motivation

How Organizations Sustain Motivation

The actions and attitudes of direct supervisors play a central role in sustaining motivation. Motivated teams often report that their leaders:

- Listen actively and respond to concerns with respect and transparency
- Provide clarity about goals, responsibilities, and expectations
- Acknowledge effort and progress, not just results
- Model fairness and consistency in decisions
- Encourage autonomy, rather than controlling every step

In contrast, leadership behaviors that harm motivation include micromanagement, vague communication, lack of visibility, or prioritizing output over wellbeing.

Communication Practices That Reinforce Motivation

Clear and consistent communication is one of the most underused motivational tools. Organizations that succeed in this area:

- 01 Provide **regular feedback**, not just during formal reviews
- 02 Make recognition part of team culture, shared publicly, not only privately
- 03 Use communication to **connect individual tasks to broader goals**
- 04 Ensure that policies and decisions are communicated transparently, even when difficult

Motivation is closely tied to whether employees feel informed, included, and respected. Communication is the channel through which that respect is most visibly practiced.

Organizational Practices That Work

Sustaining motivation requires more than good intentions. It relies on structural practices that reinforce a sense of meaning, control, and support. Effective examples include:

- Onboarding programs that focus on purpose and values, not just technical training
- Regular one-on-one check-ins that go beyond performance to explore satisfaction, challenges, and aspirations
- Flexible work arrangements that reflect trust and recognition of different life situations
- Internal mobility and career development opportunities that give employees room to grow
- Peer-led recognition systems that encourage appreciation across levels and departments



These practices don't require major budgets. What they require is consistency, credibility, and leadership that values people, not just output.

07

The Cost of Neglecting Motivation

The Cost of Neglecting Motivation

emotivated employees rarely underperform out of lack of skill, they underperform because they no longer see a reason to invest energy. The signs are subtle at first: missed deadlines, minimal effort, avoidance of initiative. Over time, this results in:

- Reduced quality of work
- Lower attention to detail
- Decline in creativity or problem-solving
- Passive compliance without engagement

Even high-potential employees may disengage if their motivation is repeatedly ignored or misunderstood.

Team and Cultural Effects

Motivation is not just individual, it's contagious. When some team members withdraw, it affects others through decreased morale, trust, and collaboration. This often leads to:

- Team tensions and reduced psychological safety
- Lower cooperation and knowledge sharing
- Resentment toward leadership or high performers
- Breakdown of informal systems that support culture

In environments where motivation is low, teams often begin to operate defensively rather than proactively.

Organizational Outcomes

The longer motivation is left unattended, the more organizations face:

Increased turnover: Motivated employees stay; demotivated ones leave, or worse, stay disengaged.

Higher absenteeism: Emotional fatigue often leads to sick days or avoidance behaviors.

Declining innovation: Demotivated staff are less likely to contribute ideas or challenge outdated systems.

Wasted resources: Training, salary, and benefits have limited impact when employees are mentally checked out.



Many organizations misinterpret the signs, treating poor performance as a skills issue, or blaming employees for disengagement. In reality, these are often symptoms of a motivational breakdown. Left unaddressed, this results in avoidable costs, loss of credibility, and reputational harm

08

The Business
Case for Investing
in Motivation

The Business Case for Investing in Motivation

Neglecting motivation isn't just a human concern, it has clear financial consequences. This section presents the economic impact of low motivation, real-world ROI from investments in motivation and wellbeing, and specific findings from the Middle East and Saudi Arabia.



Economic Impact: Productivity, Recruitment & Presenteeism

- Disengaged employees collectively cost the global economy approximately **\$8.8 trillion per year**, amounting to nearly **9 percent** of global GDP [3].
- In the U.S., the loss in productivity from disengaged workers is estimated between **\$483 billion** and **\$605 billion** annually [4].
- Turnover costs range from **50 percent** to **200 percent** of an employee's annual salary, reflecting recruitment, training, lost productivity, and reduced morale [5].
- Presenteeism, when employees are physically present but not fully functional, leads to higher productivity loss than absenteeism: about **57.5** lost workdays per employee each year versus **4 lost** to absence [6].

09

Global Motivation Programs & Studies

Global Motivation Programs & Studies

Meta-analysis: Leadership & Intrinsic Motivation

A comprehensive meta-analysis of **21,873** participants across **50** studies found significant links between several leadership styles and intrinsic motivation [7]:

- Transformational, ethical, servant, empowering, and leader-member exchange leadership styles positively predicted intrinsic motivation.
- Abusive supervision had a negative association. Empowering, ethical, and servant leadership were strong predictors, often more impactful than transformational leadership

Case Study: Huawei – Knights and Gold Stars InnerSource Incentive System



Huawei's global engineering network faced a challenge common to many large organizations: how to motivate employees to contribute voluntarily to internal collaborative projects without relying on formal top-down mandates.

In response, Huawei introduced an InnerSource initiative, designed to encourage open collaboration across teams by applying principles borrowed from open-source software development.

To strengthen participation and motivation, Huawei layered a gamified incentive system over this model, known internally as "Knights and Gold Stars."

Structure of the Program

The program recognizes individual and team contributions through:

Gold Stars: Awarded for meaningful contributions to InnerSource projects, including code commits, problem-solving, or support. These stars are visible internally and serve as informal signals of expertise and helpfulness.

Knight Titles: Given to high contributors based on peer endorsements and performance metrics. Becoming a "Knight" not only conferred status but also created a pathway for influence within the community.

Rewards included visibility, influence in decision-making, faster career advancement, and access to special internal events or projects. Importantly, these rewards were non-monetary, emphasizing trust, recognition, and purpose.

Outcomes

According to data presented in the 2022 study by Huawei engineers and researchers, the program led to:

- A significant **increase in project contributions**, especially from non-core developers
- Greater **cross-team collaboration** and problem-solving
- Higher **voluntary engagement** with internal tools and processes
- Development of an **informal reputation system**, which positively influenced internal career dynamics



Lessons

Huawei's model shows that motivation can be sustained not only through financial rewards but also through social status, purpose-driven contribution, and recognition by peers. The use of symbolic rewards (titles and stars) taps into intrinsic motivators such as competence, belonging, and autonomy [8].

Saudi-Based Examples: Motivation in Action

Motivation in Healthcare Training – Makkah, Saudi Arabia

A recent study conducted across 43 primary healthcare centers in Makkah looked into what motivates healthcare workers to attend training programs. It involved nearly 300 participants from various roles and backgrounds.

The findings showed that motivation levels were consistently high. Staff were primarily driven by:

- **Financial incentives** – such as allowances or paid time
- **Moral recognition** – like certificates, verbal appreciation, or being acknowledged by management
- **Engaging speakers** – when sessions were interactive or inspiring
- **Connection to national goals** – workers were more motivated when training aligned with the broader health strategy in Saudi Arabia

Interestingly, motivation levels didn't vary much by age, nationality, or job type. Even employees with different levels of education or income showed similar motivation patterns, although those with postgraduate degrees showed slightly more interest in training that contributes to professional growth.

What this tells us: Motivation can be sustained across large and diverse teams when training feels relevant, recognized, and connected to both individual and national goals [9].

Motivation, Engagement, and Performance – Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Another study looked at semi-government organizations in Riyadh and explored how motivation connects to performance. It focused on managers and administrative employees across several institutions.

The researchers found that three things consistently motivated employees to engage and perform better:

- **Recognition** – feeling seen and appreciated
- **Career development** – having clear opportunities for growth
- **Meaningful work** – understanding the value of what they do

But the key finding was this: motivation alone wasn't enough. What really made a difference was employee engagement. When people felt involved, connected to their work, and emotionally invested, their performance improved noticeably.

Engagement acted like a bridge between motivation and actual results. Without it, even highly motivated employees risked becoming detached or passive.

What this tells us: For motivation to turn into real performance, organizations need to create environments where people feel genuinely involved, not just paid or promoted, but heard, trusted, and supported [10].

10

Strategic
Recommendations
for Organizations

Strategic Recommendations for Organizations

Key Focus Areas for HR and Leadership

- **Train managers** to identify and respond to shifts in motivation, not just performance.
- **Integrate motivation into onboarding**, help new employees understand the purpose behind their role.
- **Embed motivation metrics** into staff surveys, engagement tracking, and performance reviews.
- **Promote fairness** in promotion, feedback, and recognition systems. Perceived bias is a major de-motivator.

Culture-Building Around Motivation

- **Celebrate small wins** as often as large achievements. Public acknowledgment builds momentum.
- **Encourage voice and input.** Invite employees to contribute ideas on how to improve processes or team dynamics.
- **Protect psychological safety**, people speak up and stay engaged when they know they won't be punished for mistakes.
- **Recognize effort, not just outcomes.** Motivation thrives when people feel seen, even when results are still in progress.

Practical Daily Practices

- Start team meetings by recognizing a contribution or effort.
- **Rotate responsibility** for running team huddles or presenting updates to build ownership.
- **Check in regularly**, short, structured one-on-one conversations can surface motivation barriers early.
- **Use informal, low-cost gestures** (thank-you messages, visible praise, handwritten notes) to reinforce motivation.

Long-Term Organizational Alignment

- **Design roles around strengths**, not just job titles. People stay motivated when they use their abilities.
- **Create visible career pathways** across all departments, not just technical or leadership tracks.
- **Review workload regularly** to avoid silent burnout that erodes motivation slowly over time.
- **Align motivation with purpose.** The more employees understand the 'why' behind their work, the more motivated they remain over time.

11

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