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## EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION DURING THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS

*The idea of this paper is that employees' efficiency will be limited, unless they are motivated. The results are based on the research conducted in 35 companies operating in Serbia, with: 15 from Serbia, 5 from Austria, 4 from Germany, 7 from Italy, 2 from Croatia and 2 from Montenegro. The effect of certain variables on employee motivation is determined. The analysis was performed by surveying employees. The results show that not all of the investigated factors influence employees' motivation. Therefore, this study supports the inclusion of managers and other employees in the research, but those are analyzed separately to data obtained by crossing out whether and to what extent their views coincide or not. The results show a direct positive relationship between employee motivation and job security, training opportunities and advancement, career planning and participation of employees in decision-making.*

*Keywords:* motivation; managers; career development.

*JEL:* J5, L2.

## Ана Лангович Мілічевич, Тетяна Цветковські, Володимир Томашевич МОТИВАЦІЯ ПЕРСОНАЛУ В УМОВАХ СВІТОВОЇ ЕКОНОМІЧНОЇ КРИЗИ

*У статті показано, що ефективність роботи персоналу буде обмежена, якщо вони не вмотивовані. Представлено результати опитування, проведеного на базі 35 компаній, що працюють в Сербії: 15 з них – сербські, 5 – австрійські, 4 – німецькі, 7 – італійські, а також по 2 – з Хорватії та Чорногорії. Визначено вплив різних змінних на мотивацію персоналу. Окремо проаналізовано відповіді менеджерів, які оцінюють чинники впливу на мотивацію дещо інакше, ніж решта співробітників. Основні чинники впливу на мотивацію персоналу – це збереженість робочого місця, можливість участі у тренінгах та інших видах особистісного розвитку, планування кар'єрного зростання та участь персоналу в прийнятті ключових рішень.*

*Ключові слова:* мотивація; менеджери; кар'єрне зростання.

*Табл. 4. Літ. 32.*

## Ана Лангович Миличевич, Татьяна Цветковски, Владимир Томашевич МОТИВАЦИЯ ПЕРСОНАЛА В УСЛОВИЯХ МИРОВОГО ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОГО КРИЗИСА

*В статье показано, что эффективность работы персонала будет ограничена, если они не мотивированы. Представлены результаты опроса, проведенного на базе 35 компаний, работающих в Сербии: 15 из них – сербские, 5 – австрийские, 4 – немецкие, 7 – итальянские, по 2 – из Хорватии и Черногории. Определено влияние различных переменных на мотивацию персонала. Отдельно проанализированы ответы менеджеров, которые оценивают факторы влияния на мотивацию несколько иначе, чем остальные сотрудники. Основные факторы влияния на мотивацию персонала – это сохранность рабочего места, возможность участия в тренингах и других видах личностного развития, планирование карьерного роста и участие персонала в принятии ключевых решений.*

*Ключевые слова:* мотивация; менеджеры; карьерный рост.

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**Introduction.** As developed and developing countries are feeling the impact of the global economic crisis, further development of business systems and how to enable them pose a number of questions such as: *What business system needs to adapt to these conditions in order to respond to the numerous and rapid changes in the environment? Which is the best strategy is for a business system to meet all the requirements of external environment?* One of the solutions on further development of business systems during the global economic crisis lies in the fact that management recognizes the importance of human resources and of increasing their motivation to contribute to greater efficiency. Particularly noteworthy is the confidence in the ability of employees which is that "the strength of a company lies in the capabilities of all its employees". Understanding what motivates employees has been the subject of numerous research studies beginning with (Terpstra, 1979).

In the context of the greatest challenges of rapidly changing environmental conditions, HR management is getting more significance and its potential benefits are being used in order to realize wider and more flexible objectives of corporations.

**Theoretical basis for the research.** Today businesses operate in the environment that requires innovations, a new way of thinking and a different type of structuring. The age of organizational structure of prevailing bureaucratic and hierarchical relationships within companies is slowly disappearing. At one point, employees were seen as just one input in the production of goods and services. The change of view is associated with the Hawthorne Studies, conducted by Elton Mayo from 1924 to 1932. This study revealed that employees are not motivated solely by money and employees' behavior is linked to their attitudes (Dickson, 1973).

Organizations have serious implications when it comes to human resource management. Activation of human resources in a company necessarily reflect its changes (Bowen & Radhakrishna, 1991). Knowledge becomes the major determinant of change in today's enterprises. Moreover, they have become a fundamental prerequisite for successful business management. This implies that primary competitive advantage of organizations lies in employee motivation which is seen through: people, their ideas, their productivity, their ability to change and learn at all levels.

The power of motivation should never be underestimated, especially the motivation of employees in global corporations. Why do we motivate employees? The answer is: In order to survive! The answer is survival (Smith, 1994). For a better understanding of the research, we will list the concepts of motivation as: the psychological process that gives behavior purpose and direction (Kreitner, 1995); a predisposition to behave in a purposeful manner to achieve specific needs (Buford, Bedeian & Lindner, 1995); an internal drive to satisfy unsatisfied needs (Higgins, 1994); and the will to achieve (Bedeian, 1993).

The subject of this research is to investigate the effect of certain factors on the motivation of employees working in several companies in Serbia. The research examines the motivation of employees in regard of: wages, personal recognition, variety of work, relationship with colleagues, additional training and education, career planning, the sense of security as well as the degree of decentralization.

In addition to the importance of motivation is the fact that motivated employees will remain employed longer in a given company. Retention of employees is essential to the operation of the company. If the company is unable to retain its employees it will

not be able to develop them into "human capital". Employee retention may be particularly important in Serbia, as it has been indicated as a major problem for all the companies in Serbia in which the company management usually does not want spend time and money to develop effective employees. If a company is unable to keep its employees it will not be able to make human "property" segment developed within itself.

The system of employees' participation in decision-making within a company and system productivity based on job security, opportunities for additional education for employees are the variables that are considered to have positive impact on firm's performance. So job security encourages employees to work harder. Studies have indicated that workers will make more efforts only if they expect lower probability of redundancy in the future (Milgrom and Roberts, 1990). It is unlikely that employees will notice changes in the structure of their work, only if changes can lead to the elimination of their job. Therefore, guaranteeing job security should improve the dissemination and transfer of information. Taking these arguments into account, we can conclude that the appropriate actions which should be taken by management in order to increase employees' motivation are: to provide job security as well as to provide opportunities for additional education of employees and participation in decision-making processes.

The impact of HR management in organizations has become the dominant subject of contemporary research. However, it is obvious that this area requires more conceptual and empirical work. The factors that should be investigated separately are:

**Job Security.** Companies that provide employees job security, achieve long-term commitment: "The norms of reciprocity are trying to ensure that this commitment becomes compensated. However, if the employer signals through words and actions that his staff are replaceable, the company will not encourage loyalty, commitment and willingness to invest additional effort for the sake of the benefits". In addition, employment security can assist in linking the interests of employees and their employers.

**Employee Training and Career Planning.** It can be expected that investment in training can have positive impact on succeeding in developing skills and knowledge of employees. Taking into account the limited resources which firms have, an important practice for firms is to invest in training of employees. In companies with good training programs, employees are likely to realize their market value which is developed better than in other companies. Therefore, it is in their interest to remain in the company as long as possible. Employers can also assist employees in career planning. When companies provide this service, an important goal is to define business tasks that help employees achieve the skills and knowledge important for the company. In other words, assistance in career planning can have a positive effect on the level and type of skills and knowledge in the company.

**Decentralization.** Several studies have recognized the decentralization of decision-making as a factor for improved performance, i.e. that it can improve employee commitment to organization. This is consistent with the research showing that employee participation may be statistically significant, although it can have a relatively small positive impact on satisfaction and job performance.

**Employee motivation: the results of the research conducted in Serbia.** Regardless everyday challenges and problems, an increasing number of corporations in Serbia, as

well as globally, are more stable in terms of greater macroeconomics than they were in the past. Namely, small – usually family-run companies have grown into companies with a large number of employees. Although the stock exchange turmoil and the global crisis is increasingly felt at the markets and affects daily operations, executives of these corporations have to deal with the issue of employee motivation to convey that they themselves contributed to corporation's success.

In order to reach this goal each manager is faced with the challenge of finding real solutions that would represent the best kind of encouragement for employees. This decision will depend on the example of the nature of work that the company does, the structure of labor and competition at the market for human resources or the amount of wages that a company can offer. In contrast to material incentives, it is necessary to provide additional motivation of employees. Financial incentives themselves are not sufficient. The question for motivation is present worldwide. According to the results, a large number of employees are enthusiastic when they go to work, but 85% of employee morale decreases after 6 months and continues to decline for years to come. These results are based on the research of 1.2 mln employees at 52, primarily "Fortune 1000" companies from 2001 through 2004, conducted by D. Sirota Survey Intelligence, New York (Sirota, Mischkind & Meltzer, 2006). Hence, lack of motivation occurs when employees feel they are "left out" at work. Social needs of man are directed to the need to establish contact with other employees and the lack of the above may have an adverse effect (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

There is a loss of motivation if the employed do not have a constructive dialogue and open communication with managers (who are usually not aware of the views of employees); if the employed do not have adequate tools and resources to be successful in achieving their objectives; if employed workers often do not understand what is expected from them in the workplace. Demotivated staff are significantly more absent from work and are much less attached to their employers and corporations in general. Due to such lack of motivation, companies can incur major losses annually on the global scale. In accordance with these studies in order to secure better motivation, it is necessary to analyse the factors associated with demotivation. In regard to the global economic crisis, we should bear in mind that the decisions we make today should provide us with prosperity in the future and that the economic crisis will not last "forever". Therefore, it is necessary to clearly and precisely define the expectations of employees; to provide them with adequate tools and resources to accomplish tasks; to establish communication between managers and employees to increase job security, with the possibility of starting the initiative and presenting a proposal in the decision making process. The impact of these activities should be checked once a year using surveys.

In terms of the global economic crisis, many companies have developed numerous intangible strategies such as: job design, management style, participation, management by objectives, flexible working hours, recognition and feedback, organizational culture, training and career development etc. This in addition to financial strategies make up a comprehensive motivational system. Also, widespread mechanisms of motivation is both security and continuity of employment, training and education in business, decentralization of decision-making, on which this paper will be focused on.

**1. Findings.** In order to implement the research the list of 35 local and foreign companies operating in Serbia was compiled. The criteria for companies on the list were for them to be active, to have at least 15 employees working in Serbia for at least 3 years and for them to be located in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Nis, Kragujevac (the 4 major cities of Serbia). Companies with 80% foreigner ownership are seen as foreign firms in this study.

HR managers in each company were contacted and the project explained to them. In most cases, a personal meeting was arranged with managers to further explain the project in order to learn more about the company and to fill out a questionnaire. Those who did not respond to calls were reminded by phone on two occasions to complete the questionnaire. In cases where the questionnaire is not submitted after two telephone calls, additional copies of the letter-reminder was sent via fax followed by the final (third) phone call. It must be noted that the questionnaires that were not completed adequately were not taken into consideration, so the process was completed with 1010 responses.

Among the correspondents 35 of them were HR managers, and who participated in the survey (as managers).

Companies participating were from Serbia and various foreign countries: 15 – from Serbia, 5 – from Austria, 4 – from Germany, 7 – from Italy, 2 – from Croatia and 2 from Montenegro. Participating companies are various in size: 17 firms with 11 to 30 employees, 8 companies of 50 to 99 employees, 5 companies of 100 to 199 employees, 3 companies of 200 to 999 employees and 2 companies of 1,000 employees or more.

The study assesses the motivation of employees in the whole company, so that was crucial to keep the questionnaire as short as possible.

The questionnaire was pre-tested on 10 randomly selected companies from Serbia and minor changes have been introduced. The questionnaire was then translated into English. The following questions were included: assistance to employees in career planning; decentralized decision-making; emphasis on the implementation of training programs for employees and job security.

**2. Characteristics of the sample.** The basic data structure of the sample with respect to the individual characteristics of the respondents is:

- gender of respondents;
- age of respondents;
- level of education of respondents.

**3. The results of the survey.** Based on the analysis of the survey it was observed that the highest percentage of male managers considered that the basis of good staff motivation was salary (28%), followed by personal recognition (19%), opportunity for advancement (19%) and good relationship with colleagues (19%), followed by an interesting and varied job (19%), job security (10%), decentralization (5%) and the ability to acquire new knowledge and skills which was not taken into account.

Female managers favor creating good relationship with colleagues (36%), followed by salaries (29%), having an interesting and varied job (21%), with job security only (7%) as well as decentralization. The participation of employees in decision-making is assessed as insignificant (0%) as well as the ability to acquire new knowledge and skills (0%).

Table 1. The structure of the sample

The structure of the sample		Frequency	Percentage, %
Members-employees	Male	758	75
	Female	252	25
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1010</b>	<b>100</b>
Mangers	Male	21	60
	Female	14	40
	<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>
Age of respondents	18-24	152	15
	25-34	176	17
	35-44	362	36
	45-54	258	26
	Older than 55 years	62	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1010</b>	<b>100</b>
Age of managers	18-24	/	/
	25-34	3	8
	35-44	8	23
	45-54	15	43
	Older than 55 years	9	26%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>
Level of education of respondents	High school	343	34
	College degree	453	45
	University degree	214	21
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1010</b>	<b>100</b>
Level of education of managers	High school	/	/
	College degree	12	34
	University degree	23	66
	<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>

Male employees believe that the motivation in relation to other criteria job security (32%) was primary, but they do not agree on this issue with managers (of both sexes), followed by an important opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills (18%), participation in decision making (17%) and career prospects (16%). Analysis of the survey indicated that employees consider job security essential, whereas managers (male and female) do not have this opinion which could cause lack of understanding and dissatisfaction among employees.

Table 2. Managers and employees: motivational factors

Questions		Alternative/number and percentage of alternative								Answers
Most important motivational factor		Salary	Personal recognition	Ability to acquire new knowledge and skills	Opportunity for advancement	Good relationships with colleagues	Interesting and varied work	Decentralization participation in decision making	Job security	
Mangers	Male	6	4	0	0	4	4	1	2	21
	%	28	19	0	0	19	19	5	10	100
	Female	4	0	0	1	5	3	0	1	14
	%	29	0	0	7	36	21	0	7	100
	<b>Total</b>									
Emp-loyees	Male	89	10	137	118	15	17	131	241	758
	%	12	1	18	16	2	2	17	32	100
	Female	23	13	71	6	7	8	45	79	252
	%	9	5	28	2	3	3	18	32	100
	<b>Total</b>									

The reasons for lack of satisfaction of male members of the companies was if the manager is not willing to listen and understand their personal problems (37%), which would indicate and confirm that they are in creating the atmosphere of safety at work, this factor is very important (Table 3), followed by the inability of managers to involve employees in decision-making (36%) and difficulty in communicating with employees (24%) which in turn can be linked to the sense of job security.

**Table 3. Reasons for the lack of employee satisfaction**

Questions		Alternative/number and percentage of alternative				Answers
<i>If the answer is less satisfactory / unsatisfactory The reason is ...</i>		The manager has difficulties in involving employees in decision-making	The project manager has difficulty hearing and understanding their employees personal problems	The project manager has difficulty in communicating with employees	Other	
Employees	Male	272	278	185	23	<b>758</b>
	%	36	37	24	3	<b>100</b>
	Female	66	101	72	13	<b>252</b>
	%	26	40	29	5	<b>100</b>
<b>Total</b>						<b>1010</b>

Reasons for lack of satisfaction with female members of the business system as with male members is if the leader is not willing to listen and understand personal problems (40%), followed by the inability of managers to involve employees in decision-making (26%), followed by difficulty in communicating with employees (29%).

This analysis of the reasons for the lack of employee satisfaction (Table 3) was carried out because employees added their concerns in relation to dissatisfaction with managers which added to the overall image of employees' satisfaction.

**Table 4. Manager: Employee Motivation**

Questions	Alternative/number and percentage of alternative						Answers
	Male manager	Female manager	Male manager	Female manager	Male manager	Female manager	
<i>What is your experience: Head of company in motivating employees</i>	Very satisfactory		Satisfactory		Unsatisfactory		
Male member employees	20	29	221	195	162	131	<b>758</b>
%	3	4	29	26	21	17	<b>100</b>
Female member employees	25	31	58	67	32	39	<b>252</b>
%	10	12	23	27	13	15	<b>100</b>

According to male respondents the method of motivation was assessed as satisfactory, although more so by male than by female managers. Followed by a large percentage of the employees' motivation assessed as unsatisfactory in their company by managers of both sexes, which can be sensed in the first table due to the disagreement in defining what the main source of motivation is. According, to managers it is salary, personal recognition and job security, employees participation in decision-making and the possibility for further education. An interesting result is that a small percentage was satisfied with employee motivation, which points to open a new field of research – and that is the cause of this discrepancy.

Job security is closely connected with the age of respondents: the highest percentage of respondents (36%) were between 35–44 years, followed by (26%) those who were between 45–54 years and tend to have job security during this period and tend to be involved in decision-making (based on the comments in the questionnaire) as well as having the opportunity for further education, i.e. acquiring new knowledge and skills which in turn can be linked to creating a sense of job security and opportunities for further progress.

The level of education is also an important factor. For example, more educated employees, 45% of college graduated and 21% of university graduates seek to take part in decision-making. The research shows differences related to associates and their educational status on communication, i.e. possible participation of employees in decision-making; communication with coworkers with high school education is characterized by providing less information, less directions and less socio-emotional communication (added in a separate questionnaire in the comments section).

**Conclusion.** Various solutions can be developed on the improval of employee motivation in the context of more efficient targeting of human resources as the most valuable resource in any corporation.

The study indicated that employees believe that the possibility of training, promotion, job security and the ability to influence decisions have a far greater effect than monetary compensation and in turn make them more motivated. Employees value the feeling that their involvement contributes substantially to the success of business, as well as the ability of managers to recognize this and be interested in their personal circumstances. In the times of the global economic crisis it is especially difficult to motivate employees if the crucial material factor is absent, but the research results show that companies should foster the following: the need for research (setting new tasks, changes in roles etc.); creation of a permanent challenge for the capabilities of individuals and groups, positive feedback (emphasizing the importance of the role of each individual to achieve a common goal), as opposed to criticism allowing team members to harbour a greater acceptance of personal responsibility for their decisions (management of work assignments/projects and decision-making).

According to this study job security is considered a crucial factor that contributes to motivation. Providing security to employees without monitoring employee performance does not ensure the appropriate employee behavior. However, employees' safety may be marginally associated with the interests of employees and managers. If an employee fails to work in a way which brings profit to an organization, it may cease to exist, which also ends job security to employees. Furthermore, employees' security sends a signal that the organization is committed to its workforce. If the employee can reciprocate this commitment, the organization should have a workforce with high levels of commitment and motivation. This is the key principle for performance growth and increased commitment to system functioning. Job security has crucial influence on the motivation of human resources and if we take the high unemployment rate in Serbia into consideration we can understand the importance of job security even better. In other words, employees would prefer lower fixed wages, than wages which are larger but uncertain.

This is followed by continuous training and education. Overcoming the crisis and ensuring further growth and development of business is possible if we continue with



further education of employees. The stagnation of developmental programs can lead to demotivation of employees and unused potential in the capacity of companies to overcome the current crisis and can be seen as the inability to adapt to changing global factors.

The reason for giving importance to the progress of this study can be accounted for by the fact that talented employees can change jobs more easily, unless their company does not offer internal career opportunities. Successful organizations are able to retain talents only if they recognise their future opportunities for advancement. In addition, a greater selection of opportunities for advancement in different positions can help companies attract new talented employees.

The results of the study indicate that the role of managers is of great importance in securing further development of business. Managers should encourage staff motivation through appropriate leadership or management. If managers provide words of encouragement, instruction and positive leadership, employees will be able to stay focused and be aware of the value of their contributions. As (McClelland & Burnham, 1976) state, the nature of motivation is to maintain enthusiasm, it is sometimes a sufficient word or a handshake, and in some circumstances can require more complex operations.

The reason why managers should recognise the importance of interesting and varied work can be found in (Campion & Thayer, 1987) who claim that routine and standardized tasks create boredom and are associated with negative outcomes and absenteeism. Specialization is also seen as an inefficient way of organizing work in today's business environment where change is rapid and convenient, and in which employees need to adjust their approach to certain situations when they encounter a problem (Wilson, 1999).

The types of motivation that should be used can vary, but the basic principle remains the same: employees' motivation demands creating a sense of security, training opportunities and education and thus career planning and decentralization of decision-making.

It must be noted that this study indicates that in the views of managers monetary incentives are positively associated with an increased positive result of human resources (motivation, retention and the possibility for development). However, this view did not have the level of importance for other employees. Salaries sometimes can be treated as purely "hygiene" factors, especially as wages can sometimes have symbolic value to employees only meaning that their contribution is recognized. Similarly, the quality of management is also reflected in communication with employees, managers can stir employees in the right direction and affect their willingness to take responsibility when they recognize their potential. Despite these limitations, the theory of two factors may be useful for managers in improving working environment by enhancing motivation.

Employees in management workforce often have more employment options than non-managerial workers. Monetary incentives are the major factor which determine whether managers pass from one boss to another, and this is probably why they stress the importance of salaries, without taking into account what really motivates employees. Moreover, companies which conduct employee training, which is rare in Serbia, are more likely to retain employees because they have the desire to increase

and improve their knowledge. Decentralized decision-making is also significantly and positively related to improved outcomes of human resources (motivation, retention etc.). This makes sense because most of the staff viewed the allocation of responsibilities as trust and an aid in reducing boredom in the workplace. Giving responsibility to employees that participate in decision-making helps companies be more accountable and ready to take advantage of the knowledge of all members in the organization.

The limitations of this research should not be overlooked. They can be seen in the following examples:

- Is it possible to generalize the data obtained from 35 organizations even though the research was directed to a more diverse structure in terms of ownership and size?
- Did the surveyed employees respond truthfully in the questionnaire?
- Can we come to the right conclusion since a closed end questionnaire produces data which does not allow different levels of opinion and verbal expression?

Future research on employee motivation will undoubtedly increase the complexity of human resource management. As it is emphasized throughout the paper, one of the solutions to the problems hindering further development of business is for them to recognize the importance of human resource and adequately address the issues of motivation.

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