

# EMPLOYEES MOTIVATIONAL ENHANCEMENT TECHNIQUES IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC - AN INTERNET BASED BLOG POSTS SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** *The key purpose of this article is to extend insights into how to continue to motivate personnel to work in unsafe environments, especially now with the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus, by examining numerous current literature and using qualitative methodologies to validate this study.*

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** *This research is an internet based blog posts systematic review method.*

**Findings:** *The findings of our study are in the form of guidelines related to the preservation of employee motivation.*

**Practical Implications:** *Organisations impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic will take various measures to sustain employee motivation at work.*

**Keywords:** employee motivation; internet based blog posts systematic review; Covid-19 pandemic.

## 1. Introduction

The year 2020 was in the true sense of the word, a year to remember. And this not only in terms of health hazards and social restrictions that have accompanied us throughout the year, but also in terms of radical changes in work style. Countries around the world were suddenly compelled to introduce policies of stay-at-home directives and social distancing. Because of these regulations, most organizations have no alternative but to move to entirely remote jobs in order to keep their staff safe and stable.

In the pre-COVID world, just 20% of businesses operated from home. Now, 98% of the population is remotely located. It's not easy to work from home in a non-pandemic environment, so it's not shocking that some of the workers during these uncertain periods may feel stressed and less driven. If they are juggling remote employment with a child care or feeling lonely, the emotional well-being of employees will be affected—which directly influences their quality of work and efficiency.

Employers have been forced to comply with new legal regulations on distancing and social isolation and also, to support business in times of crisis. Of course, there were

employers that didn't survived from the beginning of the crisis; others who had to reduce their workforce on low market demand and workload, but still, there are employers who have successfully managed to adapt and continue to function and work, even report economic growth (Fana, Pérez, & Fernández-Macías, 2020).

Certainly the situation proved to be difficult and at least challenging for employers, but it was no less complex also for employees, those who were practically forced to adapt to new working conditions, most of the time working from home/homeoffice, parallel with childcare where appropriate, and with social distancing and/or isolation.

It would be worth mentioning from the beginning that during this period (March-December 2020) personnel fluctuations based on personal choices have decreased, with most of the fluctuations being observed among companies that have reduced their labor force (Marinescu, Skandalis, & Zhao, 2020) by dissolving positions or even entire divisions, for which reason the employees' motivation levers have been designed not so much for their retention, but for the recovery and support of work performance, which has been seriously tested due to work style changing (Kahn, Lange, & Wiczer, 2020).

## **2. Methodology: the internet based blog posts systematic review method**

The aim of a internet based blog posts systematic review is to identify, analyse, appraise and arrive at a considered judgement or set of conclusions based on all the available information and data that adheres to the review's predetermined set of conformities. Similar to all systematic reviews, such piece of research material is examined and compared to other similar studies, resources and summarised accordingly.

Internet based blog posts systematic review are primarily evidence-based pieces of research that methodically compare blog posts published research in an unbiased manner so that the ultimate conclusions stand up in accordance to the evidence presented.

We have proposed this new methodology based on the assumption of Practical Knowledge Gap (Miles, 2017). In his paper, Miles (2017) proposed a new model that consist of seven core research gaps identified in the scientifically literature. In his model, this kind of gap tends to be a discrepancy that can motivate new research in this direction. A practical-knowledge (action-knowledge) disagreement occurs where the real conduct of the practitioners varies from that promoted by them. In this situation, the study will aim to establish the nature of the dispute and to define the reasons for its presence (Müller-Bloch & Kranz, 2014).

There tends to be a functional void – knowledge gap in historical study, research conduct or experience deviates from research outcomes or is not captured by research (Jacobs, 2011; Müller-Bloch & Kranz, 2014; Miles, 2017).

There is a lack of rigorous research in the prior literature of employee evidence-based interventions on sustainable motivation enhancement (Rahman, Abedin, Mohiuddin, 2016). Some of these unexplored motivational enhancement techniques for employees in pandemic times appear to be lacking in the practice of organizational psychology field. The field of organizational human potential optimization is ripe for an investigation of practical focus research on evidence-based organizational methods and techniques to motivate employees. Many of the prior studies focus on the theoretical aspects of the field of employee motivation strategies, but very few in pandemic times. However, there are very few practical studies or

action research in the field of evidence-based employee motivational strategies in pandemic times. This is an important and worthy of investigation in the context of COVID-19 pandemic (Wiradendi, Wolor, Solikhah, Susita, & Martono, 2020). Investigation of these problems is critical because all organizations impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic will take varying approaches to preserving staff morale at work, such as working from home and working shifts, based on their particular work circumstances.

As the use of social media becomes commonplace, interest in the utilization of blogs for research is growing. The extent to which blogs are being used as a research tool by health researchers is, however, unclear. Our interest is in understanding how blogs are being used in health research and whether blogging has potential as a useful qualitative tool for data collection (Wilson, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2015).

It is extremely difficult to publish an evidence based intervention on raising employee motivation in pandemic times in such a short time, instead, practitioners publish professional blogs in relation to systematized large scale organizational techniques they have adopted when dealing with employees motivation enhancement in covid-19 pandemic times, starting with January 2020 and ongoingly.

This research is an internet based blog posts systematic review method which is carried out systematically as an qualitative research method, driven by the urgent need to look at fast evidence based organizational techniques that have proven to be consistent in enhancing and maintaing employees motivation towards work and an active professional interest at the job.

The internet based blog posts systematic review method is fistly proposed in this paper, based on the new emerging qualitative methodological trends for data systematization worldwide. Given the fact that most of our work is deployed in the digital space, a lot of professionals have decided to start blogs about presenting and disseminating different standardized practical methodologies that deal with employees wellbeing management in crisis times. There is not a strict reglementation on how to consider the impact of such blog posts, but it is becoming obvious that the more efficient the presented blog post study case is, the more organizations adopt and implement those strategies, in order to test their effect in own organizational setting. It is only after a period of time that the effectiveness of such an intervention rises, giving time for organizational managers to ajust actions and direct the process towards the desirable effect. We consider that in current times, the internet based blog posts systematic review method especially in the organizational practices topic represents one of the most utilised search strategy by practitioners, especially if the blog post is disseminated in professional groups on social media platforms like LinkedIn. It takes a lot of practice and pacience for professionals to log into prestigious databases, to pay to read research papers and systemstic reviews, to select appropriate strategies and then to implement them and wait for results. On the other hand, if you are an organizational professionist and you are confronted with managing employees in such as COVID-19 pandemic disruptive times, you would probably go to social media professional grups and search for highly read blog posts. Of course the blog posts commentaries represent another important aspect in the decision to select that particular organizational strategy, implement it and measure the short-term and long-term effect over own organizational efficiency.

### **3. Results**

We will summarize below some approaches used to motivate employees during the pandemic in the private system, categorized in 3 topics: new work style optimization approaches, psychological comfort approaches, and financial optimization approaches.

#### **New work style optimization approaches:**

**1. Remote work/Work from Home** - this option existed long before the pandemic has started, in most of the large companies where the industry allowed to work from home (eg non-physical production), nevertheless it was rarely accepted as being full 100% of the work schedule. With the pandemic, working mainly or exclusively from home (Gupta, 2020) for most employees has first of all provided increased protection, by avoiding exposure to large groups of colleagues, limiting exposure to public transportation for those who had to use them to get to work, and in parallel, the reduction to extinct of transport costs, reduction of time spent in traffic, to / from the office and as a result, more time for personal purposes. This was possible with the extension of the digital technology, as Leonardi (2020) mentions in his article, Zoom's daily active user base grew by 67 per cent in March 2020, the number of daily active users of Microsoft Teams grew from 20 million in November 2019 to 44 million in March 2020.

**2. Increased work schedule flexibility** - with the closure of schools and kindergartens, employed parents were more challenged at home, having to support more their children. However, lots of companies took an understanding approach to this inevitability and even encouraged spending time with children, through a flexible work schedule, without the need for additional special requests.

**3. Ensuring optimal working conditions** - even if employees already had a work laptop at their disposal before the pandemic, not long after the work was transferred to home office there were companies that provided other office equipment to their employees in order to use them at home, aiming to ensure optimal working conditions, without additional costs (monitors, office chairs, keyboard, etc.)

**4. Video trainings:** The pandemic good care of the employers happened to include in some cases video training sessions that brought in front of the employees physiotherapists, practical advice on how to take care of the body by maintaining the correct posture during work, (even when faced restrictive conditions such as no desk / professional chair / monitor available immediately at home) and ideas to stay healthy at home, by encouraging exercising at home, including the transfer of the offline sports program to its online version (eg. Office Yoga became Home Yoga).

#### **Psychological comfort approaches** (Van Bavel, Baicker, Boggio et al., 2020).

**5. Coffee Talks** - regular events, either in the form of a weekly informal video calls at a virtual coffee, or in the form of webinars with medical and psychological specialists invited as guests. These were some ideas to substantially reduce anxiety and establish a safe climate: The main purpose of this approach was to inform well the employees, by inviting doctors to talk about the virus and pandemic, explaining how to best protect themselves and how to access, if necessary, services from the private insurances provided by most of the big employers. Secondly, having psychologists invited as well, helped employees to open up, put

their fears on the table and find together the inner motivation to continue performing at work, at home, to motivate their children too, to managed to maintain a harmonious family climate. Moreover, some companies made soon available a psychological line, available 24/7, where employees could get specialized support for free and anonymously.

**6. Keep socializing** – Companies understood quite fast that it's main resource- people need help to adapt to the rapidly changing conditions, therefore launching internal platforms / intranet pages for the employees was part of their effort to contribute to their well being. Pages for chatting or sharing hobbies (eg Pets, Cooking, Travel, Arts) encouraged socialization with other colleagues around the world, each being free to share their own successes or ideas with the rest of the colleagues, in a multicultural circle of online "friends".

**7. Personal development courses** - Providing employees additional online course modules, through which employees can deepen their area of expertise or access new areas of business, from home, without face to face training, giving everyone the chance to never stop their personal growth during the pandemic.

**8. Management transparency (Ask the Leaders)** – Some companies organized regular webinars/podcasts for the top management to openly present the company state, talking about the impact of the pandemic on the business and the measures to be taken, live Q&A allowing employees to adress their questions and get an imediate feedback. This measure was intended to boost the security effect in the middle of the contextual changes, giving the feeling that every employee matters and is heard and that management takes good care of stabilizing the situation.

#### **Financial optimization approaches:**

**9. People Count/ People First Policy** – The initial lockdown and then the folowing smaller ones worldwide put companies in real difficulties, reducing or loosing parts of the business, closing divisions or finding new areas to serve. Nevertheless, there were companies that fought to keep their workforce, so one of their main actions taken was to secure jobs, even if this has come with a price, meaning the cancellation of additional bonuses / increases / benefits (Draghi, 2020).

**10. Technical unemployment** – For those companies which could not secure all the jobs fulltime, sending people in temporarily unemployment (eg: one week / month) or reduction of the daily work schedule (6/8 hours), was a promising solution, possible with the help of the state (Ashraf, 2020).

**11. Keep the benefits** - Some companies cought by the pandemic in a good financial wealth managed to provide sufficient resources to go through the crisis and continued to offer salary increases / bonuses according to the annual schedule or offered the option to replace certain financial benefits more difficult to access during the pandemic (eg holiday vouchers) with vouchers with a longer validity period, so that the financial effect on employees was minimal.

**12. Attractive goodbye packages** – Those companies that had to reduce staff, were usually forced to do it, in order to remain active on the market, instead of loosing everything quickly. Nevertheless, there were companies which adapted to the trend and which afforded to treat people with care and respect, offering up to 5-9 salaries to laid off employees. Such kind of offer was appreciated both by those who had to leave and by those who offered to leave, to

access the package. However, the measure can be considered motivating for the remaining employees as well, acting as a safety net, by reducing the stress on the risks of losing their job and immediately becoming financially incapacitated (Mogaji, 2020).

#### 4. Conclusions

Motivation is one of the most effective ways to recruit and maintain employees in a company and to help them perform the most profitable and successful jobs. Motivational factors and techniques are a critical concept in management practices. Throughout the globe, big, medium-sized global companies and even small businesses realize that there are no better alternative than motivating methods to connect with workers and inspire them to perform the most desirable and profitable jobs in the most efficient manner. The more an organization learns about its workforce base, their desires, the better it is to establish a motivating approach that can relate to these attributes and inspire them further.

In conclusion, each company, depending on its own policy and organizational culture, has strived to come up with practical solutions to keep its employees as much as possible and to support and motivate them to go through the changes that came with the pandemic, managing to remain productive and efficient and, of course, to contribute instead to the smooth running of the business.

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