

MOTIVATING AND REWARDING EMPLOYEES IN CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING SMEs

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Abstract: The article evaluates motivation and reward systems in small and medium-sized enterprises in the Czech construction engineering sector. The research sample involved four companies comprising 53 employees. Our findings showed that firms use various motivation tools stretching over all four quadrants, indicating the worst results in education and development. The employees still mostly appreciate monetary rewards and feel motivated by the company. The reward scheme is different through regions and national salary levels. What strengthens motivation is effective interpersonal communication between managers and workers, focusing on motives and benefits of the least weighted scaling.

Keywords: Human Resource Management; SMEs, Motivation of Employees, Motivation System, Motivation in Construction Engineering, Rewarding Employees, Salaries in Construction Engineering

1 Introduction

Employees are integral to any company and its production process, creating corporate know-how. Developing staff skills and knowledge is natural and essential in modern and effective human resource management (Sitnikov, et al., 2021). Its managers must wisely use relevant tools for people's and the company's profit. Effective human resource management lead to increased performance and personal satisfaction. Rewarding and motivation systems, including, yet not limited to, various benefits, are vital to keeping employees satisfied. Corporate ambitions must, above all, boost manufacturing productivity (Kuznetsova, et al., 2019). Construction engineering is not an exception, coping with turbulent market conditions, escalating costs, energy crisis, exorbitant material prices or scarcity. A lack of corporate funds cannot meet the financial requirements of current employees and may dissuade potential recruits. What also matters is the business size in the Czech construction engineering sector (Paulišová & Hanák, 2018). Specific conditions of small and medium-sized construction engineering enterprises give grounds for exploring reward and motivation systems.

2 Theoretical backgrounds

Rewarding and motivating employees is the bread and butter of highly dynamic human resource management (Sitnikov, et al., 2021), continuously considering and addressing staff needs (Lobos, et al., 2020). Although effective communication is integral for high motivation (Kamal, et al., 2022; Shakeri & Khalilzadeh, 2020), the construction engineering sector falls at the first hurdle (Camngca, et al., 2022). Al Qaydi & Aris (2021) argue that the human resource department should primarily focus on training, developing and rewarding employees, working environment and maintaining an ethical performance atmosphere. The organizational culture may involve other incentives like fighting for a better position in the labour market (Klimecka-Tatar & Niciejewska, 2021). Knowledge of sustainability, environmental protection, and Industry 4.0 also goes a long way (Bonilla, Ribeiro and Gomes, 2022), pointing to the links between human capital and the labour market (Brožek, et al., 2022). The construction engineering sector is the largest global polluter, producing 25-33% of the EU waste (Murtagh, et al., 2020). The industry should reduce costs and emissions (Asah-Kissiedu, et al., 2021).

Human resource management in small companies suffers from a lack of field experts (Atkinson, et al., 2022) and a failure to

follow prescribed rules and procedures (Caha & Urban, 2020). Adhering to the established agenda would boost competitiveness (Elrehaila, et al., 2020) and job satisfaction (Heimerl, et al., 2020; Zhang, et al., 2020), productivity (Koneru, 2019) and performance (Akbiyikli, et al., 2023), reflected in job security (Medina, et al., 2022) and inhouse bonuses (Manzoor, et al., 2021). Staff productivity in the construction sector is critical because of slow work performance (Maqsoom, et al., 2022), incompetent workforce (Wong, et al., 2020), minimum wage (Hitka, et al., 2021) and low salary (Smolarek & Sulkowski, 2020), wage deficiency (Aghayeva & Slusarczyk, 2019), mental distress and low motivation (Bukhari, et al., 2021; Van Tam, et al., 2022).

A failure also encourages employees as they have something to learn from (Lin, et al., 2022). Education is also integral, where uneducated workers are sensitive to the corporate image (Vavra, et al., 2020), improved by staff loyalty (Nadeak & Naibaho, 2020). Nguyena, et al. (2020) claim that education is not statistically significant for corporate faithfulness. Developed knowledge and training help workers assert, engage and make decisions (Pincus, 2022). Staff motivation also depends on goals, attributes and conditions employees want to set out (Bugdol & Jedynak, 2022).

Modern employees require high work-life standards, huge rewards and employee welfare (Yee, et al., 2020). Financial and non-financial rewarding affects motivation and work performance (Matloob, et al., 2021), pushing employers to raise wages far beyond limits prescribed by the law (Marin-Garcia & Martínez-Tomás, 2022; Walczak, 2019) to avoid labour turnover (Hassan, 2022). Salary levels depend on many factors (Postek & Poswiata, 2021), including wage competitiveness, healthy working environment (Anguelov, et al., 2020), personal satisfaction (Jankelová et al., 2020) and attracting recruits (Bussin & Mouton, 2019). Rewarding must also be fair, transparent and free of bias (Stareček, et al., 2021). Although managers can use many reward models (Perekarenkova & Kryshka, 2019), like WorldatWork (Bussin & Brigman, 2019), they should prioritize psychological and social aspects over wages, bonuses and benefits (González, et al., 2022). Wage levels also reflect productivity, labour market conditions and related turnovers to better-paid and more prestigious sectors (Kuznetsova, et al., 2019). Updated, fair and unbiased job perks (Laundon, et al., 2019) are also integral for increasing motivation and reducing labour turnover (Černá & Němec, 2019).

3 Research aims, data and methods

The article aims at evaluating how small and medium-sized companies in the construction engineering sector motivate and reward employees. We formulated the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are reward and motivation systems in SMEs in the construction sector?
- RQ2: What employers want to change to make reward and motivation systems more effective?
- RQ3: How are employees satisfied with reward and motivation systems?
- RQ4: What are the differences in reward and motivation systems in SMEs in the construction engineering sector throughout regions?

We used a semi-structured interview including 11 questions with four employers of small construction companies, sending a questionnaire of 17 items to 53 employees and closely observing one firm. The companies operate in different geographical segments throughout the Czech Republic. We inspected in-house materials, including statements on wages from the CZ-NACE database of economic activities. Mathematical-statistical methods allowed us to compare the data using descriptive

statistics. A Likert scale suggested inquiries comprising a contingency table. All aspects included extent and weight input into WorldatWork modified quadrant.

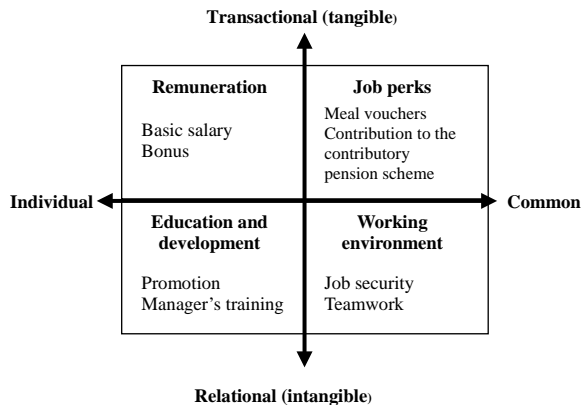


Figure 1: Motivation system quadrants
Source: Author's elaboration according to Armstrong

4 Results and discussion

This chapter suggests and discusses our results.

4.1 Reward and motivation systems in SMEs in the construction engineering sector

Motivation systems observe the quadrant in Fig. 1, including staff motivation aspects. Table 1 depicts individual inducements inquired about in the interview. Red marks untapped stimuli, whereas green refers to widely used incentives.

Table 1: Motivation aspects from the quadrants as used by the companies

Stimulus	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D
Basic salary	Green	Red	Red	Red
Pay rise	Green	Red	Red	Red
Bonuses	Green	Red	Red	Red
Wages performance components	Green	Red	Red	Red
Manager-assigned education	Green	Red	Red	Red
Education at one's own needs	Green	Red	Red	Red
Personal development	Green	Red	Red	Red
Promotion	Green	Red	Red	Red
Active pursuit for further education	Green	Red	Red	Red
In-house education	Green	Red	Red	Red
Flexibility	Green	Red	Red	Red
Contribution to the contributory pension scheme	Green	Red	Red	Red
Holiday contribution	Green	Red	Red	Red
Use of the firm's facilities for private purposes (mobile phone, laptop, car...etc.)	Green	Red	Red	Red
Meal vouchers	Green	Red	Red	Red
Workplace free-of charge-refreshment	Green	Red	Red	Red
Cafeteria (flexible benefits)	Green	Red	Red	Red
Transport to work	Green	Red	Red	Red
Clothing contributions	Green	Red	Red	Red
Other benefits	Green	Red	Red	Red
Job security	Green	Red	Red	Red
Type and nature of the job performed	Green	Red	Red	Red
Position and prestige	Green	Red	Red	Red
Work-life balance	Green	Red	Red	Red
Job organisation	Green	Red	Red	Red
Job satisfaction	Green	Red	Red	Red
Good relationships and effective communication	Green	Red	Red	Red
Delegation	Green	Red	Red	Red
Teamwork	Green	Red	Red	Red
Recognition, praise and constructive criticism	Green	Red	Red	Red
Use of creativity and imagination	Green	Red	Red	Red
Job content changes	Green	Red	Red	Red
Relevant job assignments	Green	Red	Red	Red
Firm's technological facilities	Green	Red	Red	Red
Conveniences (kitchenette, changing rooms...)	Green	Red	Red	Red

Solving difficult tasks	Red	Red	Red	Red
Feedback	Green	Green	Green	Green
Individual job contents	Green	Green	Green	Green

Source: Authors

Although the job perks quadrant shows the hugest differences, all employers think that benefits tailored to the staff's needs are a strong stimulus. The working environment quadrant enjoys the heaviest use where harmonious relationships with workers, effective in-house communication and trustworthiness are integral for efficient human resource management and high corporate performance. Especially investments in good interpersonal communication go a long way.

Interviews also revealed whether the employers use other benefits suggested in Table 2. The red colour marks the unused, while green indicates applied job perks.

Table 2: The use of benefits in the companies

Stimulus	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D
Meal vouchers	Green	Red	Red	Red
Contribution to public transport, local or urban transport	Green	Red	Red	Red
Clothing contribution	Green	Red	Red	Red
Preferred housing	Green	Red	Red	Red
Child care (contribution to nursery schools, kindergartens, children camps)	Green	Red	Red	Red
Holiday contributions	Green	Red	Red	Red
Financial aids	Green	Red	Red	Red
Contribution to the contributory pension scheme	Green	Red	Red	Red
Contribution to life insurance	Green	Red	Red	Red
Above-standard days off	Green	Red	Red	Red
Online medical consultations	Green	Red	Red	Red
Education and development beyond the firm's immediate needs	Green	Red	Red	Red
Free-of charge-refreshment at the workplace	Green	Red	Red	Red
Gifts and vouchers at special occasions	Green	Red	Red	Red
Pet-friendly offices	Green	Red	Red	Red
Physiotherapist in the workplace	Green	Red	Red	Red
Transport to work	Green	Red	Red	Red
Cars for private purposes	Green	Red	Red	Red
Laptop and other IT	Green	Red	Red	Red
Phone and phone operator services	Green	Red	Red	Red
Above-standard healthcare for employees and their relatives	Green	Red	Red	Red
Sport, recreational and cultural activities	Green	Red	Red	Red
Cafeteria (flexible benefits)	Green	Red	Red	Red
A four-day working week	Green	Red	Red	Red
Part-time jobs for parents	Green	Red	Red	Red
Wellbeing established	Green	Red	Red	Red

Source: Authors

Benefits comprise six groups, witnessing equal significance of financial and non-financial bonuses. On top of the listed job perks, employers offer interest-free loans and the use of company facilities and equipment for personal needs.

Well-deserved rewards are strong stimuli, inspiring staff loyalty and reducing labour turnover. Although Graph 1 suggests disparate gross wages throughout the analysed enterprises, they reflect gross incomes commonly received in the Czech Republic, acquired by the mean and median. Firms may use wages to motivate workers and stay competitive in the Czech market, preventing high labour turnover to better-paid companies.



Graph 1: Gross monthly wages in the selected Czech firms
Source: Authors

4.2 How employers of construction SMEs see the future of rewarding and motivating workers?

All strategic visions lead to retaining the workforce. Motivation and reward systems must jointly comply with the staff’s needs, requiring fairness and continuous update to personal satisfaction. The interviews suggest that employers will take essential steps in establishing a new reward and motivation system. The first move involves an annual wage increase and exploring other reward possibilities, including the target or performance bonus components. Managers will also focus on expanding the benefits range, like using contractors’ rebates for personal needs.

4.3 Is staff motivated and satisfied with rewards?

Although motivation systems embrace many aspects, they should always seek harmony between employers and employees. The observation of one of the analysed companies revealed wisely-chosen incentives, stimulating staff performance. The employees responded on their work motivation and satisfaction with the wage system, bonuses and benefits. Forty-six men responded to the questionnaire, excluding administrative, personnel and accountant positions, indicating a return rate of 86.79%. The respondents have predominantly been working in the same post for 4-6 years (34.78%), lacking motivation for higher performance (63.04%), having a worthwhile job (67.39%) and deriving deep job satisfaction (60.87%).

We extended the benefits range to four quadrants, including bonuses, training and development, job perks, and a working environment to wholly understand staff preferences in the construction engineering sector. All quadrants involve several motivation aspects, which employees evaluated on the Likert scale. From calculating the extent, weight, weighted evaluation and max weighted evaluation, we received a rate of 71.61%, indicating generally high motivation.

Workers chiefly appreciate modern technologies in the company (4.65), basic salary (4.21), bonuses (3.93), facilities and conveniences (kitchenettes, changing rooms ...) (3.82), and performance-related wages (3.59). On the other hand, employees the least enjoy delegation (0.67), changes in job objectives (0.93), Cafeteria – flexible benefits (0.96), a possibility to actively look for education (1.00), and the type and nature of the work performed (1.23).

Motivation aspects spread among the quadrants involve bonuses (3.82 = 87.50%), job perks (2.62 = 73.28%), working environment (2.21 = 68.38%) and education and development (1.97 = 63.59%). The quadrant of transactional and individual relationships indicates the strongest motivation, as depicted in Figure 2.

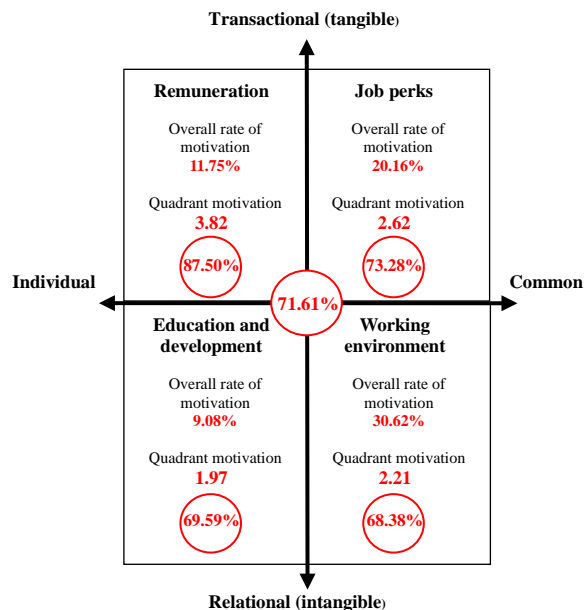


Figure 2: Staff motivation according to the quadrants
Source: Authors

Staff satisfaction with the corporate stimuli peaks at 69.58%, indicating weaker contentment than in previous cases.

Employees scale their happiness about the firm fulfilling as follows: the job perks quadrant (2.82 = 75.67%), bonuses (2.53 = 71.69%), working environment (2.28 = 67.70%) and education and development (1.89 = 61.76%). See Figure 3 for more detail. Workers are the happiest about the company performing transactional and mutual relationships.

Job satisfaction ensures staff’s well-being, encouraging creativity, engagement and high performance. That is why companies incorporated the stimulating working environment into their portfolios.

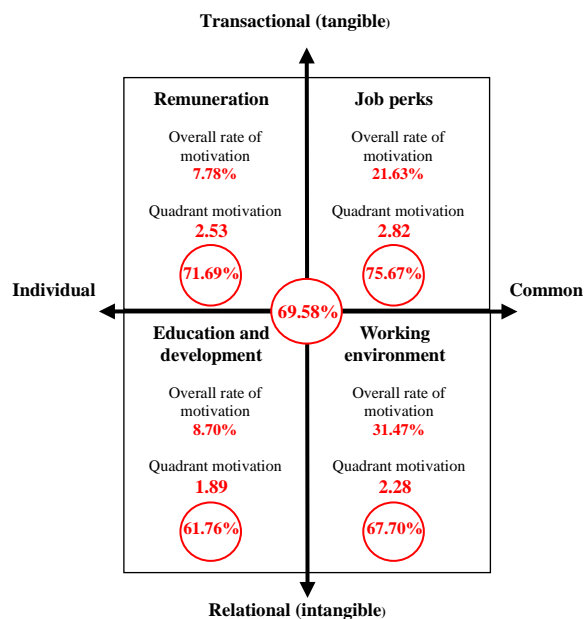


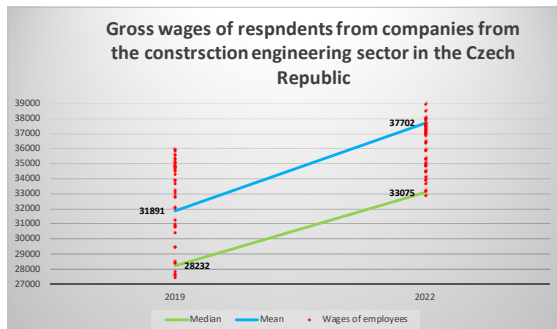
Figure 3: Staff satisfaction according to the quadrants
Source: Authors

Benefits showed a rate of 64.37%, the lowest score in the satisfaction assessment, indicating poor motivation. Employees may not need or profit from them, leading to a lack of stimulation. Companies should survey their impacts and tailor the benefits to the staff's needs.

The job perks fall into six motivation groups according to strength: pension benefits (3.51 = 83.70%), bonuses (2.04 = 66.96%), days off and life benefits (1.86 = 62.28%), workplace and team benefits (1.75 = 61.24%), health perks (1.26 = 50.54%) and extra education (0.72 = 37.83%). Wisely chosen benefits for strengthening staff motivation is integral for cornering the labour market.

Rewarding is another powerful stimulus. Although most employees understand the payroll system (67.39%) and do not think they will get more money elsewhere (63.04%), some workers have no idea about the system functioning (13.04%). The lack of knowledge makes these people think they will be better off elsewhere (26.09%). To talk these workers out of thinking so, employers must educate these workers about the reward system. The quadrants suggest that companies largely accept monetary incentives (43.48%). Financial bonuses may also reflect gross wages between 2019 and 2022. Their median was 33,716 CZK in 2019, rising to 37,000 CZK in 2022.

The standard deviation for 2019 was 2,968.16 CZK of the mean and 5,194.71 CZK of the median, witnessing a fall to 2,189.16 (mean) and 3,624.36 (median) in 2022. Respondents' wages did not deviate from the Czech standard in 2022. The respondents' wage median contains more serious inconsistencies, as its figures are closer to the average than the mean value. See Graph 2 for more detail. We may say that respondents' wages do not depart much from the average payments in other construction companies and are highly competitive in the sector.



Graph 2: Gross wages of respondents from companies from the construction engineering sector in the Czech Republic
Source: Authors

4.4 Differences in motivating and rewarding throughout the SME construction engineering sector in the surveyed regions

The data analysis and previous chapters suggest only minor differences in motivating and rewarding in the sector that depends on the regions (Jihočeský Region, Liberecký Region, Vysočina and Středočeský Region). The quadrants show that all firms use a motivation aspect, suggesting that only Company D does not motivate employees in education and development. All companies agreed that allowing workers to use corporate facilities for private purposes is a great encouragement. Employers think some aspects are not essential, and the staff would not show interest in them. All managers also recommend using benefits, although not all employees would appreciate them.

The last item on the list is wages. Although payrolls vary throughout the observed enterprises, companies try to level them at least with their region. The firm's competitiveness in the regional and know these impacts and align the wages with the region and the Czech Republic to prevent massive labour turnover.

5 Conclusion

The study aimed to evaluate motivating and rewarding employees of SMEs in the construction engineering sector in the Czech Republic. Although all enterprises have human resource management giving employees stimuli like basic salary, education or favourable working environment, staff preferences vary. We used a questionnaire to explore different incentives that employees appreciate. Our findings indicated no differences between the motivation aspects in the selected regions, showing competitive wages with other companies in the same locality. We then calculated the extent, weight, weighted and max weighted assessment. Although the results revealed many stimuli workers benefit from, they generally prefer financial bonuses and individually the firm's technological facilities. Yet, satisfaction with fulfilling these aspects is low, so companies should focus on these encouragements. The study suggests continuously updating the stimuli, as human resource management involves a dynamic process.

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