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### CHARACTERISTICS OF WORK MOTIVATION OF EMPLOYEES IN ORGANIZATIONS DURING CRISIS CONDITIONS

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**Abstract.** This scientific article delves into the examination of how crisis situations affect the work motivation of employees within an organization. The research is grounded in the analysis of theoretical aspects of motivation, the influence of crises on employee incentive mechanisms, and an exploration of employees' attitudes towards various work motivation factors. Encompassing four diverse organizations offering a range of business services, this research aims to determine the impact of crises on employee work motivation across varying contexts.

Data were collected through surveys administered to employees, managers, and leading specialists within these organizations. The surveys were conducted anonymously, adhering to strict confidentiality policies. The survey process consisted of two phases, with 89 out of 117 employees participating in the initial phase and 84 in the subsequent stage.

The findings of the study underscore the importance of effectively managing employee motivation during crises. This involves the swift adaptation of the motivation system, considering both material and non-material incentives, particularly for key specialists. Effective management of salaries and bonuses remains paramount. Furthermore, intangible factors such as involvement in corporate processes, assuming additional responsibilities, and fostering career growth significantly influence employee motivation during times of crisis. Interpersonal relationships and the recognition of employee accomplishments also assume substantial roles in enhancing motivation.

**Key words:** work motivation, employees, motivation factors, crisis, organizations, survey

**Introduction.** Modern society is currently experiencing an ongoing wave of crisis events, including financial crises, economic recessions, pandemics, political instabilities, and other circumstances that induce uncertainty, profoundly impacting organizations and their employees. According to the International Monetary Fund, the number of economic recessions and natural disasters continues to rise, presenting significant challenges for businesses and society as a whole (IMF, 2022). The economic consequences of global crises can remain noticeable for an extended period, and the restoration of stability in organizations may take years. Crisis phenomena compel organizations not only to reconsider established personnel management methods but also to seek new approaches for motivating their employees.

Crisis situations not only structurally change organizations but also give rise to psychosocial difficulties, introducing uncertainty and sudden changes into the work environment. For example, measures taken to combat the pandemic, such as self-isolation, restrictions on mass gatherings, and workplace and school closures, have created an environment that significantly affected both employees and organizations (Pourron, 2020). The International Labour Organization noted in 2021 that workers facing prolonged working hours, reduced leisure time, and concerns about their safety experienced burnout. Those transitioning to remote work felt a sense of isolation and encountered blurred bounda-

ries between the workplace and home environment (ILO Monitor, 2021). In such circumstances, employee motivation, whether they worked on-site or from home, faced serious challenges.

In times of crisis, organizations also face the threat of losing qualified employees (Smirnov, 2007). Moreover, during such periods, organizational leadership often resorts to a directive management style, which is frequently perceived by employees as disrespectful and dismissive of their opinions. This negatively affects the organization's reputation and complicates the recruitment of new talent, who tend to avoid working for the organization due to the risks posed to their professional reputation. Effective motivation management in such situations can contribute to staff retention and organizational sustainability. Many researchers emphasize the importance of work motivation as an element of human resource management that influences performance and organizational competitiveness (Csákay et al., 2021; Uka & Prendi, 2021; Lohela-Karlsson et al., 2022; Azar & Shafaghi, 2013). For instance, a study by Rozi & Sunarsi (2019) identified a significant correlation (0.69) between motivation and employee performance. Work motivation becomes a driving force that sustains employee activity and morale, enabling successful crisis management and organizational development.

However, in crisis situations, tried-and-true methods of work motivation do not always work effectively due to significant organizational changes and employees' psychological states. Uncertainty about the future, stress, emotional difficulties, insecurity, and fear induced by the crisis can alter employees' perception of motivation methods and systems that were successful in more stable times.

The aim of this research is to analyze employee work motivation in an organization during times of crisis. Special attention is given to analyzing factors influencing work motivation and their role in situations of uncertainty and instability. Effective motivation management in such situations can contribute to maintaining high productivity and organizational stability.

To achieve this goal, the following questions were formulated: RQ1: What is employee work motivation, and what factors influence it? RQ2: What peculiarities exist in employee work motivation in crisis conditions?

RQ3: What interventions can organizations implement to enhance employee work motivation during times of crisis?

**Literature review.** In research dedicated to organizations, the motivation of employees in crisis situations holds a special place (Gigauri, 2020). Crisis circumstances can create additional challenges for personnel, which, in turn, lead to changes in motivational factors and mechanisms. The term "crisis" has various definitions (Wang and Hutchins, 2008), but at its core lies the idea that a crisis can emerge suddenly and have a substantial impact on both the internal and external aspects of organizations due to various events. The most comprehensive definition of a crisis is provided by Deming (2000), who defines it as any deviation from the standard functioning mode of a system or a specific element within it. Such deviations can trigger a stress reaction among an organization's employees. A crisis is characterized by the necessity of making non-standard decisions, harnessing the professional and personal potential of the personnel, and experiencing both positive and negative consequences for the organization. Factors contributing to a crisis in an organization may include low labor productivity, customer attrition, difficulties in achieving the organizational goals, high staff turnover, violations of labor discipline, and challenges in personnel recruitment. Understanding the specifics of crisis situations and the employee needs in this context allows organizational leaders to manage employee work motivation more effectively and create a stable and productive work environment during times of uncertainty.

This is particularly important as employee motivation directly influences labor productivity within the organization, ultimately affecting overall performance (Mujeeb & Ahmad, 2011; Adeyeye, 2021). A decline in employee motivation leads to a decrease in job satisfaction. The loss of job satisfaction affects an employee's state, leading to reduced readiness for effective work, irritability, a tendency towards conflicts, decreased interest in their job, and reluctance to cooperate with company manage-

ment and colleagues (Sandiford & Divers, 2011). It's essential to note that reduced motivation or its absence cannot be fully compensated for by other organizational or technical components.

The definition of work motivation can vary depending on different approaches in the fields of organizational psychology and management. Motivation is often regarded as a process that explains the intensity, direction, and persistence of an individual's efforts toward achieving goals (Robbins et al., 2009). Cox and co-authors (2005) define motivation as providing incentives for action to satisfy needs or desires. A well-motivated employee often works more efficiently and productively than an unmotivated one, thereby creating greater value for the organization (Vlacsekova & Mura, 2017; Stachová et al., 2018; Knapkova, Martinkovicova, & Kascakova, 2020; Morkoviciute & Edriulaitiene, 2020; Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020; AlQersh et al., 2022).

Work motivation in management is a tool that helps a manager maintain the productivity and efficiency of employees (Palm et al., 2020). At the core of good work motivation lies the right behavior of the leader with employees, providing appropriate compensation and working conditions (Muliani et al., 2019). Motivation and incentivization of work are necessary both to attract qualified specialists and to retain existing employees in the organization, motivating them to carefully fulfill their work duties (Mineva, 2020).

Work motivation is a key aspect, not only from a managerial perspective but also from a socio-psychological point of view, and it requires special attention (Gagne et al., 2010; Robbins et al., 2009). In times of crisis, employees of organizations face various challenges, including stress, burnout, emotional tension, and fear. The organizational and external environment can also be characterized by the presence of both reliable information and misinformation. For example, crisis situations caused by disease outbreaks, terrorist attacks, or natural disasters can affect not only the structural and operational aspects of the organization but also significantly impact the human factor (Wang & Hutchins, 2008).

In the field of personnel management, motivation is commonly categorized into two main types: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to inspiring employees based on their personal internal drives and desires, including factors such as personal fulfillment, enjoyment of the work itself, and a sense of purpose. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, relies on external factors such as rewards, recognition, or bonuses to motivate employees to perform specific tasks. Hattie and colleagues' research (2020) identifies four important dimensions of motivation. Among them are personality factors, such as personal expectations and self-belief in one's abilities (self-efficacy), social aspects, including the influence of modelling and comparison with others, and cognitive aspects, such as self-regulation. Other dimensions include the goals employees set for themselves and the perceived costs and benefits.

The motivation of each employee depends on a multitude of factors. Internal aspects include individual personality traits, work habits, and internal needs. External factors include the standard of living, moral and value systems, both within the organization and in society, as well as various aspects of relationships within the organization (Rahimić, Resić & Kožo, 2012). Additionally, external factors such as working conditions, leadership and management, and the peculiarities of organizational culture should also be considered. Vavra and et al. (2021) identify seven key motivational aspects, including workplace safety, fair compensation, social security and benefits, work climate, basic rights and freedoms, corporate image, and equal opportunities. According to Machova et al. (2022), one of the most common motivational factors is salary and bonuses. However, Badjrami and et al. (2021) emphasize that job security or the lack thereof can also significantly influence employee motivation. When organizational leaders are informed about the factors influencing employee motivation, they can take appropriate measures to enhance workplace productivity. This, in turn, contributes to the overall economic growth of the company (Cantele & Zardini, 2018; Stacho et al., 2020).

A well-designed and crisis-adapted employee motivation system is crucial for organizational success. Such a system not only satisfies employees' internal needs and values but also encourages high

performance, professional skill development, and increased work efficiency. Research confirms that motivated employees exhibit several characteristics that contribute to both personal and professional growth. They are inclined toward autonomy and freedom in their work, exhibit greater determination, and make more effective use of opportunities for development compared to less motivated colleagues. Such employees also demonstrate a higher commitment to their work and the organization as a whole (Vansteenkiste, Lens & Deci, 2007). However, it is essential to consider that many incentive methods can become obsolete over time, as employees may no longer perceive them as effective means of motivation.

In times of crisis, it is crucial for the motivation system to be adapted to the specificity of crisis and organizational conditions, considering that motivational factors can change rapidly in such situations. Sometimes, more attention is given to support measures that are relevant to the current situation, such as psychological support, flexible work schedules, and the possibility of remote work, which can help employees cope with uncertainty and stress, thereby enhancing their motivation and productivity.

The employee motivation system may encompass various incentives tailored to the needs of the staff, especially key specialists, such as bonuses, rewards, opportunities for professional growth, and more. These measures can serve as powerful motivators for employees, encouraging them to increase their productivity during a crisis. It is crucial for the organization to demonstrate flexibility and adaptability to changing circumstances, thus maintaining a high level of motivation among the staff and ensuring stability and success during periods of uncertainty.

Crisis conditions also emphasize the importance of finding a balance between the interests of the organization and its employees to keep both parties motivated (Pritchard, 1995; Mefi & Asoba, 2021). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, employees primarily aimed at ensuring their health and survival, while organizations sought stability and survival in crisis conditions. Bandura's (2001) social-cognitive theory suggests viewing individuals as agents capable of managing their actions and influencing the organization. Therefore, it is essential to consider the intentionality and self-regulation of employees. Employees are likely to self-regulate their behavior and analyze the situation in the context of a crisis.

Management support should typically be integrated into the company's policies and rules during a crisis, enabling leadership to formulate clear strategies and maintain employee motivation (Wolor et al., 2020). Additionally, it is essential for the leadership to conduct regular reviews and assess the effectiveness of implemented measures to support and motivate employees during a crisis, allowing for quick adjustments in response to changing circumstances and staff needs.

**Research Methodology.** The aim of this research is to investigate the peculiarities of employee work motivation within an organization during times of crisis. This study encompasses the examination of theoretical aspects of work motivation and assesses how a crisis influences the processes of motivating employees within an organization.

To conduct this research, four organizations offering diverse business services were meticulously selected. The spectrum of services included leasing, financial consulting, personnel recruitment and training, logistics and freight transportation, IT support, and more. This selection was driven by the overarching goal of encompassing various business sectors and gaining comprehensive insights into how a crisis impacts employee motivation in distinct contexts.

During the research, surveys were conducted among employees of the organizations, as well as among departmental managers and leading specialists. The aim of the survey was to identify the main reasons for changes in employee work motivation, determine the most significant factors influencing work motivation, and propose possible ways to improve the situation. To adhere to ethical standards, the survey was conducted anonymously, aligning with data privacy and protection policies, with participation being entirely voluntary. Additionally, an analysis was conducted to comprehend the level of motivational activity within these organizations before the onset of the crisis and the subsequent

changes that transpired during its development. Furthermore, financial reports from the previous year were analyzed to gain a better understanding of the crisis's impact on the organization.

The data collection process involved two distinct stages of surveys, with survey questionnaires being disseminated to organization employees via email. In the first survey, which consisted of 11 questions, 89 people participated (out of a total of 117 personnel in the organizations). In the second survey, which had 16 questions, 84 people participated.

The obtained results were analyzed, and based on these findings, conclusions were drawn, and recommendations were developed to improve the situation within the organization.

**Research Results.** The research of employee motivation within an organization was conducted under the challenging conditions of a crisis, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly altered the work environment and conditions. The swift transition to remote work, self-isolation, increased workloads, and uncertainty about the future created significant challenges for employee motivation. It is in this context that conducting the research became extremely important, as it allowed us to identify how these factors affect employee motivation and, consequently, work productivity in organizations. Furthermore, the research enabled the authors to ascertain the influence of various factors that most frequently affected employee performance. To understand the primary reasons for changes and improvements in the situation, employee satisfaction with working conditions was also examined.

The analysis of motivation systems in the examined organizations reveals that, prior to the crisis, various methods of incentivizing and motivating employees existed, primarily focused on financial incentives such as performance-based bonuses, long-service benefits, an extensive social package, annual bonuses, meal subsidies, fitness compensations, and others. However, due to the crisis situation, organizations encountered financial difficulties, leading to a reduction in personnel expenses. This manifested as a decrease in motivational components and changes in work schedules, including the transition to remote work, among other measures. The crisis conditions also resulted in an increased workload for employees, difficulties in delineating the boundary between personal and working time, and challenges in communication with colleagues. Additionally, measures such as salary indexation cancellation, employee salary reductions, bonus cuts, and the suspension of the development and implementation of social packages were observed. Financial statement analysis indicates a decline in profits in these organizations, confirming that they are facing a serious crisis.

During the research, two surveys were conducted among employees, senior specialists, and department managers. In the first survey, 89 respondents participated, accounting for 76.1% of the total personnel of organizations, while in the second survey, there were 84 respondents (71.8%). The first study revealed that many respondents have significant work experience within their organizations: 32.3% have more than four years of experience, 16.9% have worked for 3-4 years, 30.3% for two years, and 20.2% for less than one year. As for their job positions, 49.4% identify themselves as specialists, 27% as senior specialists, 14.6% as junior specialists, and 9% hold managerial and leadership positions. The survey results provide valuable insights that deepen our understanding of the specific factors motivating employees during times of uncertainty and change. A significant majority of respondents, 89.9%, identified salary as a primary motivational factor. This is unsurprising, considering the economic instability brought about by crisis conditions, including the pandemic, and the increased financial demands placed on many employees. Additionally, 79.8% of respondents highly valued additional payments in the form of bonuses and incentives. This suggests that employees desire recognition and rewards for their work during crisis conditions, which can significantly boost their productivity.

The survey results also highlight the importance of investment in professional development, with 50.6% of respondents expressing interest in this area. Furthermore, the organization's commitment to its employees is highly regarded, emphasizing the significance of staff development, training, and

recognizing employees as valuable assets to the organization. An expanded social package, including additional benefits, medical insurance, and other bonuses that enhance employees' quality of life, was identified as a significant motivational factor for 61.8% of employees. These material incentives play a crucial role in maintaining employee motivation during periods of uncertainty.

When it comes to non-material motivators, 71.9% of respondents expressed an interest in career advancement. This indicates that even in times of uncertainty, many employees aspire to develop and progress within the organization. Additionally, 51.7% of employees expressed a desire to increase their influence and level of responsibility, indicating their eagerness to make a greater contribution to the organization's activities.

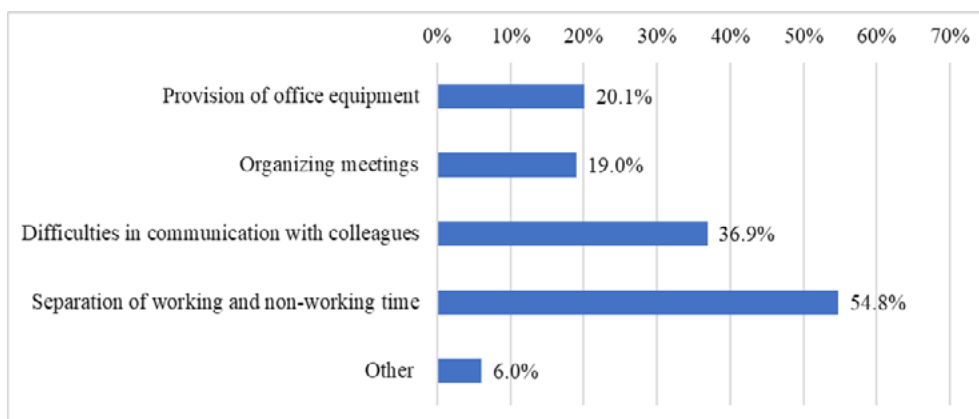
Furthermore, 46.1% of those surveyed expressed a willingness to take on more responsibility and have a greater impact. This fact highlights employees' inclination to actively participate in business processes and assume higher levels of responsibility during times of crisis, which can sustain their motivation and contribute to achieving the organization's objectives.

Finally, 37.1% of respondents consider praise from their managers the most effective form of moral encouragement. This underscores the importance of recognizing and rewarding employees' efforts and achievements during times of crisis, which can promote stronger motivation and enhance overall team effectiveness.

These results underscore the importance of considering both material and non-material factors in employee motivation during periods of instability. They caution organizations against focusing too narrowly on one aspect of motivation, advocating for more flexible management practices to maintain high levels of employee motivation.

The research results further indicate that, despite positive trends, certain issues exist that could adversely affect productivity within the organizations. These problems should not be underestimated, as they may lead to a slowdown in business processes and a reduction in overall effectiveness. According to 36.9% of respondents, one of the primary difficulties is the inefficiency of communication with colleagues in remote settings. The lack of physical presence in the office can compromise the quality of information exchange and collaboration. Organizing virtual meetings and conferences presents challenges for 19% of employees, which can impede decision-making and collaborative efforts.

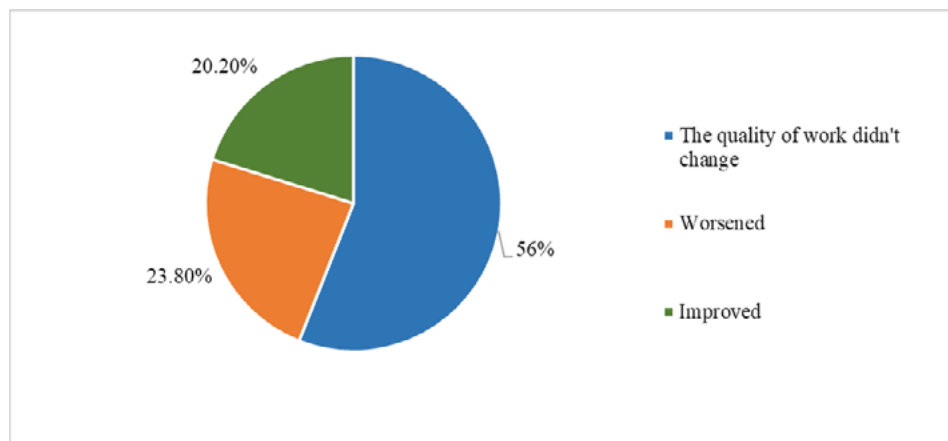
Over half of respondents (54.8%) identified issues related to separating work and personal time. This indicates that remote work can pose challenges in establishing boundaries between working hours and leisure time, potentially leading to overwork and anxiety, thereby impacting employees' health and work-life balance. However, only a small percentage of employees (3.6%) report feeling isolated while working remotely, and even fewer (2.4%) encounter no issues (Figure 1).



**Fig. 1. Problems employees face when working remotely (N = 84)**

This may suggest that the remote work setup is effectively organized or that employees have significant experience in remote work environments. These findings underscore the importance of organization support and adaptation strategies to ensure a successful transition to remote work in challenging circumstances.

Notably, 56% of employees reported that the quality of their work remained unchanged after transitioning to remote work. Additionally, 20.2% of employees reported an improvement in the quality of their work. This suggests that remote work did not significantly affect the quality of professional performance for most workers (Figure 2).



**Fig. 2. The Impact of Remote Work on Work Quality (N = 84)**

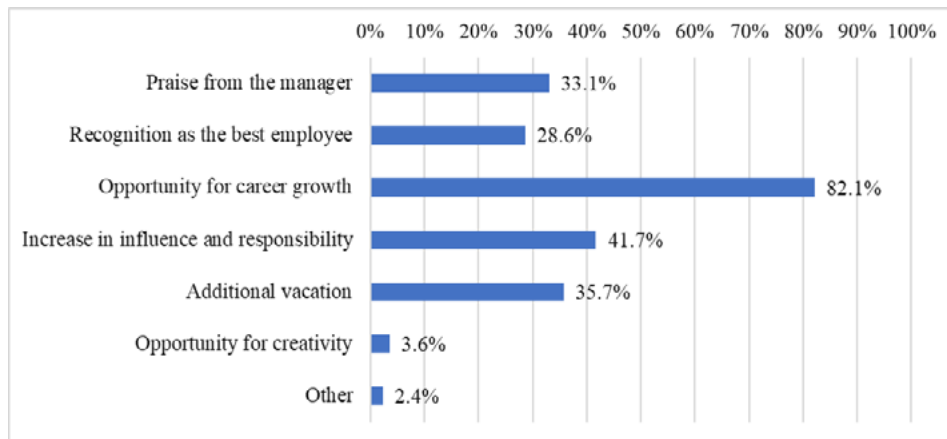
However, it is worth noting that 23.8% of respondents reported a deterioration in the quality of their work. This could be due to factors, such as difficulties adapting to new conditions or inadequate organization of remote work.

This conclusion has significant implications for organizations considering the long-term implementation of remote work. It suggests that, with proper conditions and effective remote work organization, organizations can maintain consistent task quality even in changing work environments during crises.

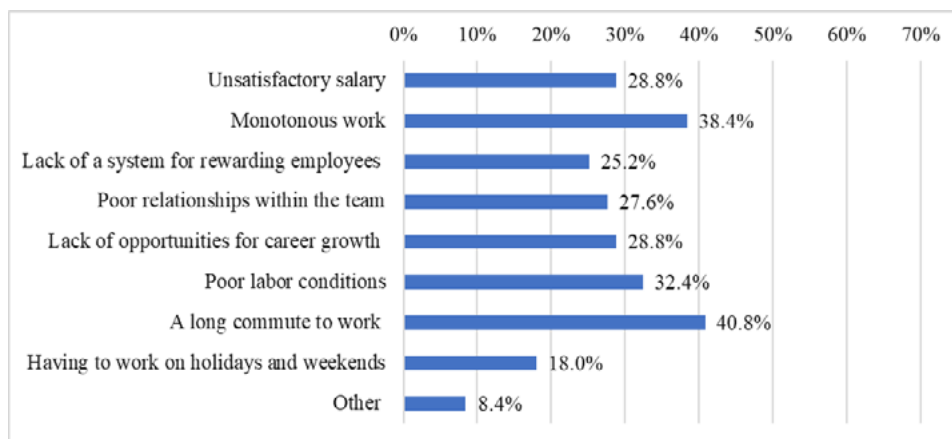
During the survey, we also examined the most preferred non-material forms of employee incentivization, which included praise from supervisors, recognition as the best employee, opportunities for career advancement, increased levels of influence and responsibility, as well as the provision of additional leave and similar measures. Interestingly, a significant majority of respondents, specifically 82.1%, identified career growth as the optimal form of moral incentivization. Additionally, 41.7% of respondents considered increased influence and responsibility within the organization a key form of moral incentivization (Figure 3). This may indicate employees' desire for a more active role in decision-making processes and increased responsibility, potentially boosting motivation and their overall contribution to their work.

These results emphasize the importance of providing employees with opportunities for growth and development, as well as enhancing their influence within the organization as a means of motivation.

As part of the analysis, factors that may influence employees' decisions to change jobs and leave their current organization were also examined. The survey revealed that 40.8% of respondents identified a long commute as a key factor influencing their decision to leave the organization. For many employees, a long and inconvenient commute to the workplace can significantly impact their comfort and motivation. Another significant factor affecting potential employee turnover is monotonous work, highlighted by 38.4% of respondents. Interestingly, 32.4% of respondents would consider changing jobs due to poor working conditions (Figure 4).



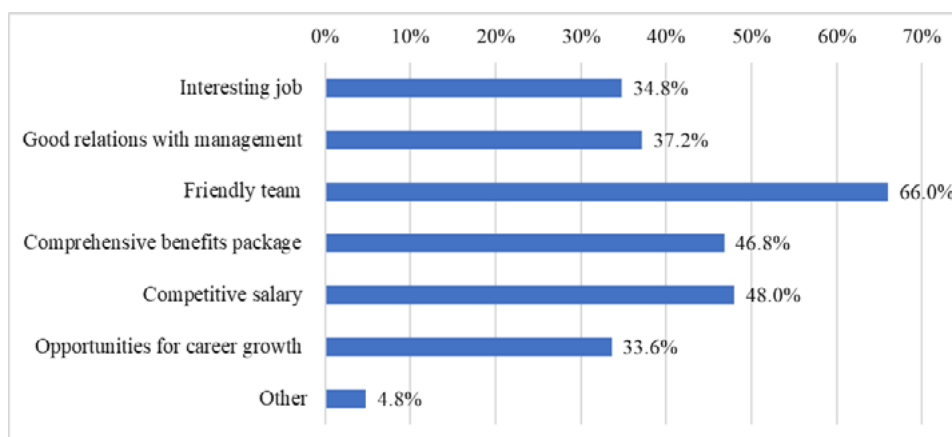
**Fig. 3. Preferred non-material employee incentive forms (N = 84)**



**Fig. 4. Factors influencing employee job change decisions (N = 84)**

These findings emphasize the importance of organizations paying attention not only to motivational factors but also to conditions that can impact employees' decisions to stay or leave the organization.

The analysis of the survey results revealed several key factors that employees consider important for long-term collaboration with the organization, as illustrated in Figure 5.



**Fig. 5. Factors influencing long-term work in an organization (N = 84)**



The most crucial aspect, identified by 66% of respondents, is a friendly atmosphere within the team. This indicates that employees highly value a comfortable and supportive work environment where they enjoy working. Salary also plays a significant role in long-term collaboration, with 48% of respondents highlighting its importance. This underscores the significance of offering fair and competitive compensation to retain qualified employees within the organization.

A comprehensive benefits package is also a key factor for 46.8% of respondents, including additional bonuses and privileges that can improve employees' quality of life and strengthen their connection with the organization. Good relations with management were identified by 37.2% of respondents as a significant factor for long-term employment in the organization. This confirms that interactions with management, including communication and leadership skills, play a substantial role in retaining employees. Additionally, respondents were asked to indicate incentive methods not currently offered by their current employers. Among them, 19.2% of respondents expressed interest in medical insurance, while 13.2% saw value in gifts as an additional form of encouragement.

The analysis underscores the importance of not only material incentives but also creating a pleasant work atmosphere, providing fair compensation, and offering social benefits to retain employees in the long term. It also highlights potential areas for improvement, such as providing medical insurance and gifts as additional incentive measures.

**Discussion.** It should be noted that the results of the authors' research are in line with the study conducted by Zavadsky, Hitka & Potkany (2015), who also investigated employee motivation during periods of crisis and uncertainty in 2008 and 2013. Their work highlights that employee motivation is significantly influenced by changes in the economic situation, and employees become more oriented toward material incentives and interpersonal relationships. Similarly, Marko & Planinc (2012) confirm that financial incentives are the most crucial motivating factor during economic crises.

It is important to note that in crisis conditions, there is often a gap between employees' expectations regarding their salary and the actual payments. This gap can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction and a sense of unfair evaluation of labor results, which, in turn, reduces employee motivation. The study also identified non-material motivation factors, such as the desire for increased responsibility and career growth, which are also important components of employee motivation.

In the study conducted by Mefi and Asoba (2021), particular emphasis is placed on the significance of recognizing and involving employees, as well as setting specific goals for them. The need for expanding employees' rights and opportunities, as well as providing social support, especially during crises like COVID-19, is also discussed. It is recommended to eliminate organizational hierarchies to facilitate more direct communication between employees and top management.

Wolor and co-authors (2020), for example, highlight the necessity of raising expectations for leadership in terms of their ability to effectively manage and motivate people. More frequent use of an individualized approach in interactions with subordinates is recommended. These recommendations also find reflection in our research findings.

However, we also emphasize employees' desire to actively participate in corporate processes and take on more responsibility as significant motivation factors, which may differ from the results of previous research.

In the study by Subrahmanyam and Henari (2022), a significant positive correlation was found between motivation, career growth, and employee performance (the Pearson coefficient was 0.823 at a significance level of  $p < 0.01$ ). The research findings of the authors also confirm this relationship and draw attention to employees' inclination towards professional and career development within the organization, even in times of crisis. Furthermore, the study highlights employees' desire to further enhance their influence and level of responsibility within the organization as additional factors contributing to employee motivation.

Thus, the analysis of comparisons with studies by other authors in this field highlights both commonalities and discrepancies in our research findings, contributing to an enhanced comprehension of employee work motivation amidst crisis and uncertainty.

**Conclusions.** Based on the conducted research, the following main conclusions can be drawn:

- Crisis situations often significantly reduce employee motivation due to disruptions in familiar working conditions and the corporate environment. In such circumstances, employees begin to harbor concerns about their future job security and fear the possibility of job losses. Insufficient response to the challenges presented by the crisis may result in the departure of highly skilled professionals seeking more stable opportunities. As a result, the loss of such talents can exacerbate the organization's structural and operational challenges.
- In times of crisis, organizational leaders should promptly adapt the employee motivation system, taking into account both material and non-material incentives, particularly for key specialists. This will contribute to maintaining a high level of motivation and overall productivity among employees in departments of the organization.
- In organizations, even during times of crisis, competitive salary and bonus payments remain among the most significant motivational factors. These material incentives have a substantial impact on employee motivation in uncertain conditions. It is important for the organization to fairly and justly evaluate its employees' performance and appropriately reward them.
- Non-material factors, such as active involvement in corporate structures, additional responsibilities, and opportunities for career growth, have a significant impact on employee motivation during periods of crisis.
- Positive interpersonal relationships and the recognition of employees' achievements also play a crucial role. Support from management, active participation in corporate processes, and acknowledgment of successful results contribute to their engagement and well-being, thereby strengthening their motivation to work.
- The transition to remote work can pose challenges in terms of communication with colleagues and the separation of work and personal time, which affects employees' satisfaction levels and, consequently, their motivation.

The results of this study, the authors hope, will be valuable for both top executives of organizations and specialists in the field of human resource management (HR). The research underscores the significance of maintaining employee work motivation in times of crisis to preserve productivity and promote effective interaction between employees and organizational leadership.

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During the study, employees, department heads, and leading specialists from four organizations were interviewed. They were informed about the study and provided voluntary consent.

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