

Beyond money: How do personal and organisational factors motivate hotel employees in their work?

A cross-sectional examination of the Vietnam hotel industry

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Dates:

Received: 28 Aug. 2025

Accepted: 11 Nov. 2025

Published: 13 Feb. 2026

How to cite this article:

Nguyen, D.N., & Nguyen, T.T.N.
(2026). Beyond money: How
do personal and organisational
factors motivate hotel
employees in their work?
A cross-sectional examination
of the Vietnam hotel industry.
*SA Journal of Human Resource
Management/SA Tydskrif vir
Menslikehulpbronbestuur*,
24(0), a3305.
[https://doi.org/10.4102/
sajhrm.v24i0.3305](https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v24i0.3305)

Orientation: The hotel industry in Vietnam was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; however, it has regained its vitality thanks to a committed workforce. This is an interesting case that helps us to understand what motivates employees to work.

Research purpose: This study investigates how both monetary and non-monetary work motivators, shaped by cultural and contextual factors, influence the motivation of Vietnamese hotel employees to work.

Motivation for the study: The literature on work motivation in the hospitality industry in Vietnam remains relatively scarce.

Research approach/design and method: This study conducted a self-administered questionnaire survey of 397 hotel employees across 48 establishments in Vietnam.

Main findings: Employees derive stronger motivation from non-monetary benefits, including supportive managers, harmonious relationships with colleagues, professional training and opportunities for personal growth. Notably, the cultural value placed on family financial obligations – not the money itself – was the key factor explaining the modest role of financial income. Job strain was found to increase amotivation, which in turn significantly predicts counterproductive behaviour.

Practical/managerial implications: Culture-informed and person-centred HR management strategies are powerful in motivating the employees to work.

Contribution/value-add: This article provides not only new insights into the meaning of money in motivating employees to work but also practical suggestions for HR management in identifying powerful predictors of work motivation. These insights emphasise the importance of contextually and culturally sensitive, people-centred HR strategies.

Keywords: work motivation; hotel employees; monetary rewards; non-monetary benefits; Vietnam.

Introduction

Work motivation has long been considered essential in work and organisational research. Theoretical analysis and empirical research consistently confirm that work motivation is a key factor in determining employees' productivity and an organisation's success. Understanding employees' motivation to work can help organisation managers boost their work performance and lower the turnover rate (Clark, 1998). Once employees are motivated to work, the organisation can ensure their productivity and customers' satisfaction in the long run (Hekman & Lashley, 2018; Honore, 2009).

Understanding hotel employees' work motivation is of great importance because working in the hotel industry, in particular, and the service industry, in general, is quite challenging, as it requires considerable effort to satisfy the various and changing needs of customers (Civak, 2023; Patah & Zahari, 2022). Unsurprisingly, the turnover rate in this industry is usually high because of low job satisfaction, poor working conditions such as long work hours and low pay (Altinay, 2019; Burke et al., 2008). Hence, many hospitality businesses struggle to retain and recruit motivated employees, often because of a lack of staff (Camilleri et al., 2023). Researchers are also concerned

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about this issue (Latham & Pinder, 2005). A systematic review by Borralha and colleagues in 2019 reveals that hotel employees' job satisfaction, stress, burnout and emotional exhaustion are the most frequently examined issues.

It is worth noting that the lack of motivated staff in the hospitality industry is a serious issue, as this business heavily relies on human resources (HR) (Wiyana et al., 2020). Therefore, it is vital to understand hotel employees' motivation to work and what factors contribute to it. However, despite the importance of the topic, little is known about hotel employees' motivation in Vietnam, where tourism has developed rapidly in recent years (Quang et al., 2020).

Tourism in Vietnam has only recently received significant government investment. In 2011, the Prime Minister approved the 'Vietnam Tourism Development Strategy to 2020, with a Vision to 2030' (Decision No. 2473/QĐ-TTg), which set the goal of 'striving to make tourism a truly spearhead economic sector'. Since then, the tourism industry in Vietnam has developed rapidly. From 2015 to 2019, the number of international visitors to Vietnam increased by about 22% annually. According to annual reports by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), the growth rate of Vietnam tourism before the COVID-19 pandemic ranked among the highest growth rates worldwide (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2023). During the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Vietnam tourism, as in other countries, was severely impacted. In 2020, the country received only 3.7 million international visitors and served 56 million domestic tourists – a decrease of 34% compared to 2019. The average room occupancy rate nationwide fell to just 20%. A total of 52% of tourism employees lost their jobs. At the end of 2021, Vietnam reopened its doors to international tourism and received approximately 3800 international visitors and served about 40 million domestic tourists. The average room occupancy rate was estimated at only around 5%, with just 25% of tourism workers employed full-time. In 2022, the number of domestic tourists significantly increased to 101.3 million – more than one and a half times the target of 60 million and far exceeding the 85 million domestic visitors recorded in 2019 (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2023). At the end of 2023, Vietnam received 12.6 million international visitors, about 3.5 times more than in 2022, exceeding 57% of the original target (8 million arrivals). Domestic visitors reached 108 million trips, exceeding 6% of the plan. In 2024, Vietnam tourism received more than 17.5 million international visitor arrivals, up by 39.5% over 2023 (Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, 2025). This recovery of tourism in Vietnam after the pandemic makes it an interesting case to study what contributes to its resilience in general as well as what motivates its workforce in particular.

Yet the literature on work motivation in general is rich. Even in Vietnam some efforts have been made to examine hotel employees' work motivation, such as the studies of Nguyen et al. (2025), Van et al. (2024), Hoang et al. (2022) and Minh

Duc and Huu-Lam (2019). However, these studies often confirmed the predictors of work motivation as found in previous studies in Western countries. If Vietnam hotel employees share the same motivators as hotel employees in other countries, then what makes the case of Vietnam tourism in general and the hotel industry in particular so special with an impressive growth rate?

Hence, this study aims to re-examine the topic of work motivation and focuses on the following questions:

- To what degree are Vietnamese hotel employees motivated to work in the hotel industry? Whether different demographic groups (e.g. male vs. female, working in their hometown or not) are different in their level of motivation?
- How do the three types of motivation (intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation) contribute to hotel employees' workplace behaviours as job performance, work engagement and intention to quit job?
- How do monetary factors (salary, source of income and breadwinner status) and non-monetary factors in the workplace (professional training, hotel ranking, supportive environment, personal growth and job strain) contribute to employees' work motivation?

Literature review and theoretical framework of work motivation

Work motivation has been a significant concern for researchers and managers in the hotel industry, as it determines the ability of hotels, in general, and employees, in particular, to provide excellent and efficient services (Sabri et al., 2019; Simons & Enz, 1995). Work motivation is found to significantly enhance employees' work engagement (Grobela & Wyszowska-Wróble, 2023) and job performance (Zameer et al., 2014) and also helps to reduce hotel employees' turnover rate (Dipietro & Condly, 2007). Determining the factors that significantly contribute to employees' work motivation is crucial for hotel managers to implement strategies in motivating their staff (Simons & Enz, 1995).

However, the findings from studies on hotel employees' work motivation are inconsistent. Whereas some studies (e.g. Mickel & Barron, 2008; Simons & Enz, 1995; Stavrinoudis & Livadioti, 2011) emphasise monetary benefits as a significant source of work motivation, others support different findings. In a survey involving 246 hotel employees in South Africa, Mhlanga & Oswald (2018) finds that 'responsibility and being appreciated', 'immaterial incentives' and 'teamwork' are the decisive factors influencing hotel employees' work motivation. Qualitative research by Md Sabri et al. (2019) pointed out nine significant factors, of which salary ranked 7th. The study of Alsakarneh et al. (2022) also emphasised the effect of non-material incentives on increasing hotel employees' work motivation. In general, recent studies emphasise factors that contribute to intrinsic motivation – such as a supportive work environment, the meaningfulness

of work and job training – as vital in boosting their employees' work motivation. This trend is in line with a finding that intrinsic motivation is more powerful than extrinsic motivation in energising hotel employees' work performance (Alsakarneh et al., 2019; Chiang et al., 2008).

Although the literature on hotel employees' work motivation is quite rich, two notable gaps remain. Firstly, most of the existing research on hotel employees' work motivation is conducted with high-ranking hotels (4*-5* hotels) (such as Kingir & Mesci, 2010; Sabri et al., 2019). Knowledge of employees' work motivation at low-ranking hotels remains limited. Secondly, existing studies often focus on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among employees but hardly include amotivation. In fact, an employee may lack motivation to work (e.g. because he or she finds the job uninteresting or not beneficial, but when a suitable motivator such as a proper reward is presented, he or she will easily feel motivated to work), but he or she does not necessarily feel demotivated (i.e. when he or she completely finds no reason to work). This leaves a gap in thoroughly and comprehensively understanding the different dimensions of motivation of hotel employees.

To clearly understand motivation, it should be traced back to its origins. The word 'motivation' is initially rooted in the Latin term 'motivus' (a moving cause), referring to the forces on or within the employees which stimulate, inspire, or encourage him or her to perform to his or her best capacity. Later, researchers add that motivation is the force that induces employees to achieve a goal. More specifically, Herzberg (1959) conceptualises work motivation as the desire and willingness of employees to invest their efforts towards achieving organisational goals. According to this author, external factors that motivate individuals to work stem from outside conditions, such as salary, bonuses and work environment. When these factors are unsatisfactory, employees will quickly become dissatisfied with their jobs. However, even when these factors are met, they do not bring job satisfaction; they only reduce dissatisfaction. On the other hand, internal factors (intrinsic motivation) stem from enjoyment and passion for work – for example, being part of a team, achieving work and having a role in the workplace or having decision-making power will bring job satisfaction (Hekman & Lashley, 2018; Mahdza et al., 2023; Pink 2009).

According to Pinder (1998, cited in Latham & Pinder, 2005), work motivation is a set of external and internal factors that initiate employees' behaviour and determine its direction, form, intensity and duration. This definition considers motivation as a result of the interaction between individuals and the environment, and emphasises both processes within the individual and external conditions. Along this view, many studies (e.g. Furnham & MacRae, 2021; Hekman & Lashley, 2018; Tremblay et al., 2009) focus on two dimensions of motivation: intrinsic motivation (the factors within the individual that motivate them to work) and extrinsic motivation (factors outside the individual that motivate them to work).

Deci and Ryan (1985), based on self-determination theory, also conceptualise work motivation into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to the inner strength of each individual that creates the urge to do something. Intrinsic motivation is closely related to commitment to work, love for work and quality of work. In contrast to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation is related to external factors such as the working environment, salary and other external influences.

In summary, the literature shows that authors from different approaches agree on two dimensions of work motivation: the factors inside individuals, such as passion or value, and the factors outside the individual, such as salary or working conditions. This study focuses on how monetary and non-monetary factors influence work motivation.

In addition, the examination of work motivation in this study is based on the fact that cultural context may significantly condition the way individuals feel motivated and how they perceive factors contributing to their motivation (Contiu et al., 2012; Kubátová & Kukelková, 2014; Simons & Enz, 1995). As explained by Simons and Enz (1995:21), much of the scientific research on work motivation is theoretically based on a need or volition approach. However, humans' motivation is not simply based on their internal needs or will. How employees perceive their work conditions (which then turns into their motivation) depends on several factors, such as personal experiences, living context (including the comparative impact of their reference groups) and cultural values and norms. In the same line with this perspective, Erez (1997:569) pointed out that 'the lack of a cross-cultural perspective on organisational behaviour may limit our understanding of why motivational approaches and managerial practices are not always smoothly transferred across cultures, and how to predict the potential effectiveness of various managerial techniques in a given organisational context'. The danger of this cultural gap in understanding motivation is that it may lead managers to make mistakes when trying to motivate their employees. Hotel managers might offer incentives that cost more than they are worth to their employees, and hence, these strategies might become cost-ineffective.

Therefore, this study, instead of inheriting the list of impact factors from previous empirical research in different cultures, is designed to identify contextually and culturally significant factors that motivate employees to work in the hotel industry by investigating insiders' perspectives. It first conducted 27 semi-structured interviews with hotel employees and managers and then applied thematic analysis to identify the common factors contributing to the work motivation of Vietnamese hotel employees. Based on the factors identified through qualitative interviews, a questionnaire was developed to measure the relationship between these factors and hotel employees' work motivation. At this phase, this study refers to previous studies to adopt well-established measures, where

available, to measure the factors identified in the previous phase. The criterion to select an instrument is that it reflects the factor's connotation as provided by Vietnamese hotel employees during the qualitative phase. Regarding the factors for which we could not find suitable instruments, we developed the measuring instruments based on the findings from the qualitative phase. Detailed descriptions of the factors and instruments are provided in Section Instruments.

This article presents the findings from the questionnaire survey to demonstrate how work motivation is affected by both monetary and non-monetary factors.

Research design

Research methodology and participants

This study employed a self-reported questionnaire survey, with participation from 473 hotel employees working in 48 guest houses and hotels, ranging from low-ranking (1–2*) to high-ranking (4–5*), using a snowball sampling strategy. Each invited hotel employee received an invitation letter, accompanied by a leaflet providing information about the study, one questionnaire and an A4 envelope to return the completed questionnaire in a confidential manner. Out of 510 questionnaires sent, 397 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 77.8%.

The sample consisted of both male (40.6%) and female (59.4%) employees. In terms of age, 24.9% of respondents were below 25 years old, 44.2% were between 25 years and 34 years, 22.2% were between 35 years and 45 years and 8.7% were above 45 years old. Regarding education, 7.6% had completed secondary school, 31.7% held a high school diploma, 30.5% had a vocational or technical college degree and 30.2% possessed a bachelor's or master's degree.

A majority of respondents (70.8%) held a qualification or degree in tourism and hospitality, while 29.2% did not. Regarding hotel ranking, 8.3% were working for guesthouses or homestays, 15.9% for one- or two-star hotels, 30% for three-star hotels and 45.8% for four- or five-star hotels.

In terms of work position, most respondents were staff members (73%), followed by middle-ranking managers (25.4%) and general managers (1.5%). More than half of the respondents (58.4%) were working in their hometown, while 41.6% were not. Regarding marital status, 43.1% were single and 56.9% were married.

Regarding financial obligation in the family, 17.4% of respondents reported that they were the sole breadwinner of their family, 59.7% were co-breadwinners of the family and 22.9% were not the breadwinner.

About monthly income from hotel jobs, the lowest income reported was VND4000000, and the highest income was VND30000000, with a mean value of VND8000000 and

standard deviation (SD) = VND3400000. For comparison, the average per capita income in Vietnam at the time of the study, according to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2024), was 4.96 million VND.

A total of 69.5% of the hotel employees who participated in the survey reported that their income from the hotel was their sole source of income, while 27.7% indicated that income from their hotel job was their primary source of income, although they also had other sources of income. Meanwhile, 2.8% stated that they had another source of income that exceeded the income from their hotel job. In addition, 58.4% of respondents indicated that they were working in their hometown, and the other 41.6% were working in a province not their hometown.

Instruments

Work motivation and its effects

Work motivation: This study resorted to the Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale (MWMS) developed by Gagné et al. (2015). This scale contained 19 items. In this study, exploratory factor analysis and then confirmatory factor analysis proposed a three-factor model: intrinsic motivation (7 items), extrinsic motivation (9 items) and amotivation (3 items). All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, from 0 = Completely not true to me to 6 = Completely true to me. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.899.

Job performance: This study used the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire developed by Koopmans et al. (2014). This scale comprised 18 items, organised into three sub-scales: Task Performance, Contextual Performance and Counterproductive Behaviour. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, from 0 = Completely not true to me to 6 = Completely true to me. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.836.

Work engagement: This study uses the 17-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Schaufeli and his colleagues (2006). All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 = I have never felt that to 6 = nearly every day. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.948.

Intention to quit job: This variable was developed based on qualitative findings. It had three answering options: (1) Frequently thinking of quitting this job; (2) Sometimes thinking of quitting this job; and (3) Never thinking of quitting this job.

Monetary factors

Salary: Employees' monthly income from their job in the hotel industry.

Breadwinner status: This variable was developed based on qualitative findings, referring to the employees' financial obligations within their family.

Sources of income: This variable was developed based on qualitative findings, assessing the degree to which the employee was dependent on income from their current job in the hotel industry. There are three options: (1) Income from this job is my only source of income; (2) I have another source(s) of income, but income from this job is my primary source of income; and (3) I have another source(s) of income, and income from this job is not the primary source.

Non-monetary factors

Personal growth: This variable was developed based on qualitative findings. This variable was measured by three indicators: (1) Doing this job helps improve myself; (2) This job brings me many enjoyable experiences; and (3) My hotel provides training to help me improve my competencies. Each indicator was measured on a 6-point Likert scale, with 0 = this statement is completely untrue to me and 5 = this statement is completely true to me. Cronbach's alpha of the scale is 0.833.

Supportive environments: This variable was developed based on qualitative findings, measured by four indicators: (1) 'My relationship with most of my colleagues is quite harmonious'; (2) 'My colleagues are willing to lend me a hand when I need'; (3) 'The managers in this hotel treat me with respect'; and (4) 'Our managers will protect me if a client treats me badly'. Each item was measured on a 6-point Likert scale, with 0 = this statement is completely untrue to me and 5 = this statement is completely true to me. Cronbach's alpha of the scale is 0.902.

Job strain: This variable was developed based on qualitative findings and measured by four indicators: (1) Doing this job sometimes brings me some risks (e.g. being treated badly by clients); (2) My job often requires me to work overtime; (3) I often feel physically exhausted after work; (4) Doing my job is quite mentally stressful. Each indicator was measured on a 6-point Likert scale, with 0 = this statement is entirely untrue for me and 5 = this statement is completely true to me. Cronbach's alpha of the scale is 0.887.

Job training: This variable was developed based on qualitative findings, referring to the extent to which an employee receives adequate training for their current job in the hotel industry. This ordinal variable comes with three options: (1) Having at least a BA degree in tourism or service; (2) Having vocational training with a certificate; and (3) Having no adequate training.

Hometown: This variable was developed based on qualitative findings, referring to the bond between the employee and the province where their hotel is located. It was treated as a dummy variable, asking if the hotel in which the employee was working was located in their hometown or not.

Ethical considerations

To ensure participants' informed consent, an invitation letter, a Question-and-Answer leaflet, a questionnaire and a

written consent form were sent to participants beforehand, allowing them to consider whether they wanted to participate in the survey. These documents also informed participants of their rights when participating in the survey, including the right to withdraw at any time without consequences and the assurance that the information they provided would be treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes. The study was conducted in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration, as revised in 2013.

An application for full ethical approval was made to the Institutional Review Board at VNU-Hanoi University of Social Sciences and Humanities, and ethics consent was received on 19 August 2024. The ethics approval number is 4248/CN-XHNV.

Results

Work motivation among Vietnamese hotel employees

Results, as presented in Table 1, indicate that Vietnamese hotel employees exhibit relatively high levels of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (mean = 26.9 and 36.5, respectively) and relatively low levels of amotivation (mean = 4.09).

The study found no difference in motivation between male and female employees across all types of work settings. In addition, the results reveal no difference in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation between individuals working in their hometown and those working in a province other than their hometown. However, there is a significant difference between those who work in their hometown and those who do not, in regard to amotivation. Those who work in a province other than their hometown have a higher level of amotivation (mean 4.8 and 3.6, respectively) than those who work in their hometown, and the difference is statistically significant, $F(1, 395) = 5.62, p < 0.05$.

Work motivation and workplace behaviours

Work motivation and work engagement

Correlation coefficients indicated that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation were strongly associated with work

TABLE 1: Description of work motivation among hotel employees ($N = 397$).

Motivation types	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Extrinsic motivation	35	0	35	26.90	7.8
Intrinsic motivation	45	0	45	36.50	8.2
Amotivation	15	0	15	4.90	5.0

SD, standard deviation.

TABLE 2: Correlations between work motivation and work engagement.

Variable	Work engagement	Extrinsic motivation	Intrinsic motivation	Amotivation
Work engagement	1.00	-	-	-
Extrinsic motivation	0.62**	1.00	-	-
Intrinsic motivation	0.76**	0.78**	1.00	-
Amotivation	-0.19**	-0.09	-0.13*	1.00

*, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

TABLE 3: Work motivation and intention to quit the job.

Intention to quit job		N	Mean	SD	F(2, 394)	p-value
Extrinsic motivation	Never	220	28.23	7.3	19.05	0.000
	Sometimes	130	26.90	7.1	-	-
	Frequently	47	20.80	9.6	-	-
	Total	397	26.90	7.8	-	-
Intrinsic motivation	Never	220	38.60	7.2	29.40	0.000
	Sometimes	130	35.70	7.1	-	-
	Frequently	47	29.20	10.9	-	-
	Total	397	36.50	8.2	-	-
Amotivation	Never	220	3.50	5.2	6.48	0.002
	Sometimes	130	4.40	4.7	-	-
	Frequently	47	6.30	4.4	-	-
	Total	397	4.10	5.0	-	-

SD, standard deviation.

TABLE 4: Correlations between work motivation and job performance.

Variable	Extrinsic motivation	Intrinsic motivation	Amotivation
Task performance	0.57**	0.62**	-0.25**
Context performance	0.53**	0.55**	-0.06
Counterproductive behaviour	-0.14**	-0.18**	0.70**

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

TABLE 5: Correlations between work motivation and working conditions.

Variable	Extrinsic motivation	Intrinsic motivation	Amotivation
Personal growth	0.515**	0.58**	-0.19**
Supportive environment	0.511**	0.57**	-0.20**
Job strain	-0.108*	-0.14**	0.46**

*, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

engagement ($r = 0.625$ and 0.761 , respectively), whereas amotivation had a mildly negative effect on work engagement ($r = -0.190$) (Table 2).

Work motivation and intention to quit the job

The study examined whether work motivation is associated with employees' intention to leave their current jobs in the hotel industry. Intention to quit a hotel job is divided into three categories: (1) Never thinking of quitting this job; (2) Sometimes thinking of quitting this job; and (3) Frequently thinking about it.

One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) analysis shows that the higher the level of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation the employee has, the lower the level of intention to quit their job in the hotel industry he or she works in (Table 3). Along the same line, the higher the level of amotivation one has, the higher the level of intention to quit the job is.

Work motivation and job performance

Results (Table 4) show that the relationships between extrinsic motivation and task performance, as well as context performance, are both positive and quite strong ($r = 0.566$ and 0.529 , respectively). The relationships between intrinsic motivation and task performance, as well as context performance, are somewhat stronger and positive ($r = 0.620$ and 0.549 , respectively). On the contrary, amotivation decreases task performance and robustly increases counterproductive

behaviours. However, this study finds no association between employees' amotivation and contextual performance.

Monetary factor and work motivation

Remarkably, this study finds that employees' extrinsic motivation and amotivation are not related to monthly income from their job in the hotel industry. However, intrinsic motivation is negatively related to income, although the relationship is relatively weak ($r = -0.109$, $p = 0.03$).

Results show no difference in extrinsic motivation and amotivation between groups in terms of their sources of income. However, differences in sources of income are significantly related to different levels of intrinsic motivation. Employees whose income from the hotel industry is the sole source of their income have the highest levels of intrinsic motivation (mean = 27.2). In contrast, those whose income from the hotel industry is the primary source have lower levels of intrinsic motivation (mean = 26.4), and those whose income from their job in the hotel industry is inferior to another source of income have the lowest levels of intrinsic motivation (mean = 24.5). This difference is statistically significant, $F(2, 394) = 4.08$, $p < 0.05$.

However, employees who were family breadwinners had higher levels of external motivation than those who were not (mean = 27.2 and 24.6, respectively; $F[2,394] = 5.11$, $p = 0.006$), higher levels of intrinsic motivation (mean = 36.9 and 34.0, respectively; $F[2,394] = 5.67$, $p = 0.004$) and a little bit lower level of amotivation (mean = 5.1 and 5.3, respectively, $F[2, 394] = 7.50$, $p = 0.001$).

Non-monetary factors and work motivation

ANOVA results indicated that working in their hometown did not relate to their intrinsic, extrinsic and also amotivation. However, professional training was found to be significantly associated with work motivation. In comparison to those employees who did not received training on tourism, employees who received training in tourism have higher levels of both intrinsic (mean = 37.6 and 34.0, respectively) and extrinsic motivation (mean = 27.9 and 24.7, respectively), and differences are statistically significant, $F(1, 395) = 15.8$ and 14.1 (respectively), $p < 0.01$. On the contrary, their levels of amotivation were lower than those of their counterparts (mean = 3.5 and 5.4, respectively), and the difference was also statistically significant, $F(1, 395) = 11.7$, $p < 0.005$.

One-way ANOVA analysis revealed that the ranking of hotels where employees work did not correlate with employees' motivation. Whether or not employees were working at high-ranking hotels (4*-5*) or low-ranking hotels (1*-2*) or guest houses, their levels of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and motivation were no different.

However, if a hotel employee's job provided them with a sense of personal growth (i.e. they feel that they can improve themselves by doing this job), and if the working environment

promoted mutual support between staff and between managers and employees, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were increased, whereas amotivation decreased.

The results (Table 5) indicated that if the job could help employees to achieve personal growth, both their extrinsic and intrinsic motivation would be significantly heightened ($r = 0.515$ and 0.584 , respectively), whereas amotivation would be lowered considerably ($r = -0.190$). Similarly, supportive working environments increased the levels of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation ($r = 0.511$ and 0.571) and significantly lowered the level of amotivation ($r = -0.203$) among hotel employees. Job strain, on the contrary, slightly weakened extrinsic motivation ($r = -0.108$) and intrinsic motivation ($r = -0.141$) and enormously increased hotel employees' amotivation ($r = 0.463$).

Discussion

This study finds that the levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of Vietnamese hotel employees were pretty high, and the level of amotivation was quite low. In line with previous studies, this study strongly supported the importance of work motivation to hotel employees' performance in the workplace. As data show, if hotel employees feel motivated at work, either intrinsically or extrinsically, they will be more engaged with their work, perform better at work and commit fewer counterproductive behaviours. In general, work motivation can also ensure employees' commitment to their work and their hotel, with a lower level of intention to quit the job.

Interestingly, this study found no difference between male and female employees in their levels of all extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and amotivation. This finding is in the same line with the recent study by Nguyen and his colleagues (2025). By examining the work motivation of employees working in the Food and Beverage industry in Vietnam, this study also found that male and female employees were not different in the degree of work motivation. Similarly, whether the employees are working in their hometown or not was also not related to their intrinsic nor extrinsic motivation. Working in one's hometown only prevents amotivation; however, the effect is not big. This finding is contrary to the findings from qualitative interviews. During the qualitative phase, interviewees often referred to their bond to their hometown and wished to make a contribution to their hometown. According to traditional culture, Vietnamese people often felt strongly bonded to their hometown (Tran, 1997). Therefore, we proposed that if they were working in their hometown, their motivation would be somehow heightened. Yet the survey result showed no relation between working in one's hometown and employees' work motivation. We suggested that the effect of hometown bonding might be moderated by other factors, and further research is needed to clarify this relationship.

The question then is what factors significantly contribute to work motivation. Results from this study suggest that money

does not appear to be a crucial factor in hotel employees' work motivation, as found in some previous studies (e.g. Knani, 2022; Hemdi & Tamalee, 2005; Siu et al., 1997; Simon & Enz, 1995). This study finds that how much Vietnamese hotel employees earn monthly from their job in the hotel industry is not statistically related to their work motivation. In addition, although the hotel in which employees were working was of high-ranking (4–5*) or low-ranking (1–2*), the levels of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation among Vietnamese hotel employees did not differ. This finding differs from other studies, even one conducted in Vietnam. The study of Van and her colleagues (2024) on 277 Vietnamese employees working in restaurants and hotels showed that income was the most influential factor in employee work motivation. The research by Simons and Enz (1995) reported that the three most important things that hotel employees expected from their job are (1) good wages, (2) job security and (3) opportunities for advancement and development.

However, this study shows that the more the employees were dependent on the income from their job in the hotel industry, the more they were motivated to work. That means our survey showed how much money the hotel employees could earn from their job did not affect their work motivation. Instead, how this income (despite it is high or low) contributed to their lives did affect their work motivation. If the income from their job in the hotel industry was the primary source of livelihood, and/or if the employee was the breadwinner of their family, their work motivation would be heightened. These findings suggest that Vietnamese employees seem to care more about their social responsibility and connection than the money itself. To be more exact, they care for money not because of the money itself but because of what the money can bring about for their family.

It must be observed that this finding, although it differs from findings of previous studies, does not refute them. It only provides more insight into why money matters. Money matters because of the practical benefits it contributes to employee's lives, especially in supporting their social connections, such as with family. Notably, the study finds that the employees are strongly motivated to work by their sense of personal growth. That means if the job allows them to improve themselves – such as communication skills, resilience and conflict management skills – so that they feel themselves become better, thanks to doing their job, they will be strongly motivated to work. This finding is quite in line with the finding that if employees receive professional training for doing their jobs, their work motivation is also heightened.

Another remarkable finding of this study is the role of job strain and amotivation. Although job strain affects intrinsic and extrinsic motivation negatively, the magnitude of the effect is not significant. However, job strain strongly heightens the level of amotivation (Pearsons' $r = 0.463$, the relationship is significant at $p = 0.01$). In its turn, amotivation robustly

encourages counterproductive behaviours such as not following rules or purposefully making mistakes (Pearsons' $r = 0.696, p = 0.01$). It should be observed that amotivation has a negative effect on most of the expected behaviours, such as work engagement, task performance or context performance; however, the magnitude of the effects is pretty weak. On the contrary, the impact of amotivation on counterproductive behaviours is impressively significant. This finding is worth considering, especially for organisations that are concerned with reducing their employees' counterproductive behaviours.

Last but not least, the variables selected for analysis in this survey are inferred from previous qualitative interviews, which show that Vietnamese hotel employees highly value their family and their responsibility to the family (e.g. taking care of their old parents, taking care of their family) and their connection with their hometown. Therefore, this study includes variables such as the financial responsibility of the employees in their family (i.e. whether they are the breadwinners or not and whether they are married or not) and whether they are working in their hometown or not. Except for working in their hometown, which is only related to amotivation (working in a province which is not their hometown slightly increases their amotivation in work), the other variables (marital status and breadwinner) are related to work motivation. Employees who are married and/or family's breadwinner have higher levels of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation and lower levels of amotivation. These findings support the viewpoint that previous studies (such as Contiu et al., 2012; Erez, 1997; Kubátová & Kukulková, 2014) have proposed that examining work motivation should be placed in a cultural perspective.

Practical implications

One of the notable findings of this study is that money does not matter as much it seems in motivating employees to work. To be more exact, it is the benefits that salary brings about to employees' lives that matter. When hotel employees are not financially dependent on their wages to sustain themselves and their families, wage increases play a limited role in motivating them to work. Therefore, salary still cannot be a strong motivator for them to work.

The findings of this study suggest that hotels should provide professional on-the-job training for their employees to enhance their work motivation. The more employees are well-trained in their roles, the more motivated they feel to perform their tasks effectively.

Creating a supportive working environment is also effective in boosting hotel employees' work motivation. As reported by the hotel employees themselves, they will feel much more motivated to work in an environment where colleagues support each other and hotel managers provide appropriate protection when risks arise (e.g. being teased or treated poorly by a client).

This finding also suggests that managerial strategies in the hotel industry should consider cultural perspectives to enhance employees' motivation at work. In particular, managerial strategies in Vietnamese hotels should consider employees' family values as a significant source of work motivation.

Last but not least, hotel managers should invest in strategies to enhance their employees' sense of personal growth while working at the hotel, such as improving their interpersonal communication skills and problem-solving abilities. Employees' sense of personal development is critical in motivating them to work because it significantly increases intrinsic motivation, which is the most powerful type of work motivation in boosting employees' work engagement and job performance, while also decreasing their intention to quit their jobs.

Limitations of the study

Because of the scarcity of research on the work motivation of hotel employees in Vietnam, this study aims to explore and describe the work motivation of Vietnamese hotel employees and their related factors from a contextual and cultural perspective. Because of this methodological approach, the findings of this study are based on a cross-sectional analysis. Therefore, it is unable to establish a causal relationship between work motivation and the hypothesised antecedents. We hope that the findings of this study, however, provide some initial, worthy empirical evidence for future research to develop an explanatory design for a better understanding of the underlying causes of work motivation. In addition, although this study explores some cultural aspects of work motivation, the role of culture is not the primary focus of this study. Future research may provide a closer examination of how cultural values, expectations and patterns influence employees' perceptions and assessments of the costs and benefits of their jobs, ultimately affecting their motivation at work.

Conclusion

This study supports the idea that work motivation is vital to employees' success in their occupational lives. The more motivated they are at work, the better they perform their job, the more committed they are to the job and the less likely they are to exhibit counterproductive behaviours. Employees' gender, salary and hotel ranking do not affect work motivation. Job strain – a condition sometimes unavoidable in the tourism and hotel industry – is found to affect intrinsic and extrinsic motivation while positively impacting amotivation negatively. The good news is, however, the more critical the income the employees have from their job as a source of livelihood for themselves and their families, the more support they receive from colleagues and managers, and the more professional training they receive to do their job well, and the more they feel improved when doing their job, the more the employees feel motivated to work. The study also contributes some evidence supporting the importance of cultural perspectives in understanding employees' work motivation.

Acknowledgements

The research was carried out by the financial support of Vietnam National University-Hanoi under the project 'Work motivation of employees in the hotel industry' (code QG.25.77).

Competing interests

The authors of this publication received research support from the Vietnam National University-Hanoi under the project 'Work motivation of employees in the hotel industry' (code QG.25.77), which is developing products related to the research described in this publication. In addition, the authors serve as consultants to the entity and received compensation for these services. The terms of this arrangement have been reviewed and approved by the Vietnam National University-Hanoi.

CRedit authorship contribution

Dung N. Nguyen: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing-original draft, Visualisation, Writing – review & editing, Supervision. Trang T.N. Nguyen: Project administration, Software, Data curation, Funding acquisition. The authors confirm that this work is entirely their own, have reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication and take full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

Funding information

This work was supported by the Vietnam National University-Hanoi under the project 'Work motivation of employees in the hotel industry' (code QG.25.77).

Data availability

The dataset of this study is not publicly available because of participant confidentiality agreements. However, interested researchers may contact the authors directly to discuss potential access under appropriate conditions.

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