



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (IJEMP)

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THE MODERATING ROLE OF WORK CULTURE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FINANCIAL INCENTIVES, ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS, GOAL INTERNALIZATION, INTERNAL SELF-CONCEPT, AND ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES WITH EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION: EVIDENCE FROM MALAYSIA

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 31.03.2025

Revised date: 14.04.2025

Accepted date: 22.05.2025

Published date: 24.06.2025

To cite this document:

Zakaria, Z., Sahar, A. F., Noordin, N., & Azmi, N. A. (2025). The Moderating Role Of Work Culture On The Relationship Between Financial Incentives, Environmental Factors, Goal Internalization, Internal Self-Concept, And Organisational Policies

Abstract:

This study investigates the moderating role of work culture in the relationship between financial incentives, environmental factors, goal internalization, internal self-concept, organizational policies, and employee motivation in the Malaysian public sector, with a specific emphasis on the Social Security Organization (SOCSO) in Penang. This study uses a quantitative cross-sectional survey approach to collect data from all employees in Penang SOCSO, with purposive sampling to provide insights into the elements that drive motivation. The results show that financial incentives, internal self-concept, goal internalization, work environment, and organizational policies all have significant relationships with employee motivation. Notably, work culture was found to moderate this correlation, highlighting the importance of a supportive and collaborative environment in enhancing employee engagement. These findings are consistent with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in promoting intrinsic motivation. Financial rewards, internal self-concept, and

With Employee Motivation: Evidence From Malaysia. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Management Practices*, 8 (30), 257-267.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEMP.830019

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goal appreciation are key extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. A healthy work environment with effective communication and collaboration, as well as organizational rules that promote work-life balance and skill development, are also important. The study suggests that employee motivation is influenced by both internal and external influences, implying that organizations should create an environment that promotes intrinsic motivation while providing competitive financial incentives. Future research should broaden its scope to include other variables and situations, yielding more comprehensive knowledge of employee motivation across a variety of conditions.

Keywords:

Employee Motivation, Environmental, Financial, Organisational Policies, Public Sector Motivation, Work Culture

Introduction

Employee motivation remains a major concern in public administration due to its direct impact on productivity, service delivery, and policy implementation (Ramli, Hassan, and Daud, 2020). Motivated civil servants are essential to achieving government goals, especially in a growing economy like Malaysia. Considering the heightened public scrutiny and expectations for efficient service delivery, understanding what motivates public sector employees is contemporary and critical.

Although many studies have investigated the direct effects of financial, environmental, and organizational policies on employee motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014; Norton, Zacher, & Ashkanasy, 2015), there is still a lack of understanding of how contextual variables such as work culture moderate the sociocultural environment in Malaysia. Work culture, which encompasses shared values, norms, and behavioral expectations, has a significant impact on how employees perceive and respond to policy initiatives (Ahmad & Idris, 2019). Globally, financial incentives such as performance bonuses and salary increases have been found to increase motivation, especially in performance-oriented environments (Cerasoli et al., 2014). However, in collectivist and high-power distance cultures, as seen in many Asian public sectors, intrinsic motivators such as respect, job stability, and group cohesion often outweigh financial drivers (Hofstede, 2011). Similarly, while environmental and sustainability policies have been linked to increased employee engagement in Western contexts (Norton et al., 2015), their motivational effectiveness in Malaysian institutions has been understudied. Previous research in Malaysia (Ramli et al., 2020; Omar, Kasa, & Johari, 2021) found that financial stability, career advancement, and a supportive organizational environment are key motivators for civil servants. However, these studies often fail to consider how cultural dynamics such as hierarchical power, communal values, and attitudes toward change influence perceptions of the success of policy interventions.

According to Ahmad and Idris (2019), the Malaysian public sector has an inflexible administrative culture that can dilute the impact of progressive policies unless they are culturally congruent. Despite ongoing efforts to reform and modernize the Malaysian public sector, motivation among government servants remains a major challenge. Numerous reports and research have shown that low employee engagement, bureaucratic inefficiency, and insufficient responsiveness to policy incentives reduce public sector productivity (JPA Malaysia, 2021; Ramli, Hassan, & Daud, 2020). According to the Public Service Department (JPA) 2021 annual report, only 61% of civil servants reported being “highly motivated” in their

roles, leaving the rest neutral or disengaged. This is despite government attempts like the New Public Service Transformation Framework (MyPSTF) and financial incentive programs. The Malaysian Productivity Corporation (MPC), (2020) has also said that the public sector falls behind the private sector in terms of output efficiency, with motivation and job satisfaction being key contributing factors. A study conducted by Omar, Kasa, and Johari (2021), 43% of respondents at government agencies stated that existing financial rewards were insufficient to motivate them to enhance performance, while more than half cited restrictive organisational structures and a lack of empowerment. Furthermore, while environmental and organisational policies have been embraced as part of the larger sustainability and human capital development objectives, their real impact on motivation is under-researched.

Although Malaysia's Public Sector Green Technology Policy (2019) requires environmentally friendly practices in government operations, there is little empirical evidence that such programs increase staff engagement or motivation (Ahmad, 2022). Critically, much of the available research assumes that policies are uniformly relevant across all departments and areas, ignoring the moderating role of work culture, which differs greatly between Malaysian federal, state, and municipal governments. Work culture, which includes values like seniority, compliance, and group harmony, can either support or inhibit the success of motivational programs (Ahmad & Idris, 2019). Same policy tools produce varied results based on the cultural fit and perspective of employees. However, empirical investigations on this moderating effect are sparse in Malaysia.

Thus, the primary issue addressed in this study is a lack of information of how work culture influences the effectiveness of financial, environmental, and organisational policies on employee motivation in Malaysia's public sector. This gap impedes the development of culturally appropriate and effective policy initiatives to improve motivation, performance, and public service delivery. By combining policy- and cultural-level perspectives, the study provides a sophisticated understanding of public service motivation, with implications for policymaking, leadership, and human resource development in Malaysian civil service and similar bureaucratic systems.

Literature Review

Employee Motivation in the Public Sector

Employee motivation is a critical aspect in determining public organisations' effectiveness and sustainability (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Perry & Hondeghem, 2008). Motivation theories, such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT), emphasise both internal (e.g., acknowledgement, autonomy) and extrinsic (e.g., compensation, advancement) motivations. In the context of public service, Perry's (1996) idea of Public Service Motivation (PSM) is equally important, emphasising compassion and a desire to serve society. However, motivation in the public sector frequently faces institutional and cultural constraints. According to Kim (2005), motivational tactics that work in the private sector may be ineffective in public settings due to bureaucratic limitations and reduced financial incentives.

Financial Policies and Motivation

Financial incentives, such as bonuses, salary increases, and allowances, are commonly utilised to increase motivation. Cerasoli, Nicklin, and Ford's (2014) meta-analysis indicated that extrinsic rewards are positively related to task performance, especially in organised work situations. In Malaysia, Ramli, Hassan, and Daud (2020) discovered that financial

compensation was a strong motivation for civil personnel, particularly those in lower income groups. However, Omar, Kasa, and Johari (2021) found that 43% of civil workers believed financial incentives were insufficient to drive continuous motivation, implying a decline in marginal utility and the need for additional intrinsic motivators.

Environmental Policy and Employee Engagement

Environmental and sustainability policies have gained popularity as a component of corporate social responsibility and green management initiatives. Norton, Zacher, and Ashkanasy (2015) discovered that employees are more engaged when they believe their organisations are ecologically responsible. Environmental policy implementation in Malaysia's public sector continues to evolve. Ahmad (2022) discovered that while government organisations implemented green office practices (e.g., paperless initiatives, energy conservation), the link between these policies and employee motivation was poor unless accompanied by leadership and internal communication methods.

Organisational Policies and Work Environment

Employee motivation is directly influenced by organisational policies such as flexible working hours, professional development programs, and participative decision-making (Boxall & Macky, 2009). In Malaysian government agencies, strict hierarchy and centralised decision-making frequently impede efficient policy implementation (Ahmad & Idris, 2019). Yusof and Halim (2020) discovered that employees were more engaged when provided autonomy and opportunity for skill development, even within bureaucratic constraints. However, the application of progressive HR rules in practice remains patchy.

The Role of Work Culture as a Moderator

Work culture is defined as an organization's common values, beliefs, and behaviours that shape how employees perceive and react to policies (Schein, 2010). Cultural frameworks, such as Hofstede's (2011) dimensions, highlight Malaysian institutions' overall characteristics of large power distance, collectivism, and a propensity for certainty and hierarchy. Ahmad and Idris (2019) emphasised that organisational culture in Malaysian government agencies frequently prioritises compliance over innovation, which may restrict the motivational impact of even well-designed regulations. In support, Zainuddin et al. (2021) discovered that departments with a more open and participative culture had greater alignment between policies and employee motivation, indicating the moderating role of work culture.

Research Gap

Despite these findings, empirical research that explore financial, environmental, and organisational policies in connection to employee motivation while considering the moderating influence of work culture are rare in Malaysia. Most previous research focus on single factors or overlook the cultural dimension, which is crucial for developing effective motivational techniques in the public sector.

Research Methodology

This study used a quantitative research design and a cross-sectional survey approach to collect data from respondents. A survey approach is appropriate for investigating variable relationships and generalising findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The main aim of this study was to examine the moderating role of work culture in the relationship between financial, environmental and organizational policies and employee motivation in the Malaysian public sector. The target population consisted of SOCSO employees in Penang, Malaysia. According

to Ruslin et al. (2022), a target population is a subset of a larger group that researchers wish to investigate, examine or influence through empirical research. The focus of this study was SOCSO Penang, which has two branches in Georgetown and Seberang Jaya and is relevant and accessible in the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia. Purposive sampling was used, with respondents selected based on the researcher's assessment of their ability to offer relevant and informative data (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). This method is excellent for explanatory research where the researcher seeks information from the people who are most knowledgeable or involved in the topic under investigation. Given the manageable population size, a census approach was used. Penang has 176 SOCSO employees, with 75 from the Georgetown branch and 101 from Seberang Jaya. All employees from both branches were invited to participate in this study, ensuring that the sample was representative of the entire population. Data were collected through online survey distribution, which allowed for efficiency, anonymity, and wider reach within the organization. The data obtained were then examined using SPSS Version 25 software for descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression. This statistical tool allowed for a comprehensive study of the relationships between variables as well as an assessment of the moderating effects of work culture on motivational outcomes.

Findings

Demographic Profile

The survey included 146 respondents. In terms of gender distribution, females made up 61.6% of the sample, with males accounting for 38.4%. Regarding age, most respondents (53.4%) were between the ages of 31 and 35. This was followed by individuals aged 36-40 years (29.5%). Respondents aged 25 to 30 made up 11.6% of the total sample, while those aged 41 to 45 and 46 years and above made up 2.7% apiece. The Malay ethnic group had the highest representation, accounting for 74.7% of all respondents. This was followed by Indians at 24.0%, with Chinese and other nationalities accounting for 0.7% apiece. In terms of educational attainment, most respondents (58.2%) had a bachelor's degree, followed by diploma holders (26.7%) and SPM/STPM certificates (13.0%). A lesser percentage (2.1%) held a master's degree. The results also suggest that most respondents had extensive work experience. Specifically, 47.3% had 11 to 15 years of experience, whereas 34.9% had 5 to 10 years. Employees with fewer than 5 years of experience constituted 9.6%, while 8.2% had been in service for more than 15 years. In terms of employment grade, the highest group of respondents (47.0%) were in Grades 19 to 22, followed closely by Grades 12 to 18, which accounted for 43.8%. A lower number (5.5%) belonged to Grades 6 to 11, while only 3.9% were in Grades 23 to 27. In terms of departmental placement, the Administrative and Finance Unit had the most involvement, accounting for 68.0% of the sample. The Counter Unit followed with 42.5%. Both the Beneficial Unit and the Enforcement Unit have equal representation of 23.3%. The Employment Insurance System (EIS) Unit had the lowest participation rate, accounting for 4.1% of respondents.

SOCSO Penang's Employee Motivation Levels

Employee motivation at SOCSO Penang was analysed using mean score analysis, which was based on previously recognised criteria. According to Ghaffari et al. (2017), a mean score greater than 3.75 suggests a high level of motivation, whereas scores less than 3.75 indicate a moderate or medium level of motivation. It provides a valuable interpretive framework for assessing employees' motivational state in organisational settings, notably the public sector. In this study, the mean scores obtained from the survey instrument's motivation-related items

were compared to this criterion to establish the current level of motivation among SOCSO Penang staff, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Means Score for Level of Motivation

| Items | Means | Rank |
|--|-------------|----------|
| I enjoy the tasks given. | 3.98 | High |
| I feel happy with my job. | 4.73 | High |
| I feel a sense of accomplishment in my work. | 4.05 | High |
| I satisfied with my current job. | 3.56 | Moderate |
| My job motivates me for better performance. | 4.11 | High |
| My personal growth and development opportunities in influencing my motivation at work. | 4.72 | High |
| I satisfied with the opportunities for career advancement in my workplace. | 3.50 | Moderate |
| I do receive recognition for my achievements at work. | 3.89 | High |
| N: 146 | 4.07 | |

Source: Field Study, 2024

According to Table 1, the findings reveal that SOCSO staff are highly motivated, with an average mean score of 4.07.

Relationships between Financial, Internal Self-Concept, Goal Internalisation, Environment, and Organisational Policy on Motivation among SOCSO Employees in Penang

To answer research questions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, a correlation analysis was performed using the variables. The results are displayed in the table below.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

| Correlation for Motivation (N = 146) | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | Fin | ISC | Env | OP | GI |
| Motivation | .469** | .584** | .335** | .402** | .238** |
| Financial (Fin) | | .610** | .534** | .558** | .490** |
| Internal Self-Concept (ISC) | | | .706** | .599** | .370** |
| Environment (Env) | | | | .261** | .319** |
| Organizational Policy (OP) | | | | | .427** |
| Goal Internalization (GI) | | | | | |

Notes: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Study, 2024

To investigate the correlations between employee motivation and many independent factors, including financial incentives, internal self-concept, work environment, organisational policy, and goal internalisation, a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed, as shown in Table 2.

H1: Finances and Motivation

Financial incentives and motivation had a low but statistically significant relationship ($r = .469$, $p < .001$). This suggests that increasing cash awards correlate with increased motivation among SOCSO Penang employees. Therefore, H1 is supported.

H2: Internal Self-Concept and Motivation

Internal self-concept and motivation showed a favourable and statistically significant relationship ($r = .584$, $p < .001$). Thus, H2 is supported, indicating that employees who have a strong sense of personal value and role identity are more likely to be motivated.

H3: Environment and Motivation

There was a low but significant relationship between work environment and motivation ($r = .335$, $p < .001$). This finding supports H3, implying that a supportive and favourable work atmosphere boosts employee motivation.

H4: Organisational Policy and Motivation

Organisational policy and motivation had a low but statistically significant relationship ($r = .402$, $p < .001$), supporting H4. Effective policies that are consistent with employee expectations and fairness principles may thus increase motivation.

H5: Goal Internalisation and Motivation

The association between goal internalisation and motivation was low but statistically significant ($r = .238$, $p < .001$). This supports H5, demonstrating that when individuals internalise organisational goals, even at a low level, their motivation improves.

All five hypotheses (H1-H5) were supported, indicating that each independent variable has a substantial significant relationship with employee motivation at SOCSO Penang. Internal self-concept showed the greatest relationship of the five predictors, followed by financial incentives, organisational policy, work environment, and goal internalisation. These findings are in line with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which holds that motivation is impacted by the satisfying of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Internal self-concept and goal internalisation closely reflect competence and autonomy, but organisational policy and environment are related to perceived workplace autonomy and relatedness. Financial incentives, while extrinsic, can influence motivation when they are matched with intrinsic goals or regarded as supportive.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Building on the correlation findings, the following phase of study investigated the moderating effect of work culture on the relationships between the independent variables (finance, internal self-concept, environment, organisational policy, and goal internalisation) and motivation. A multiple regression analysis was used to determine how the work culture moderate the relationship between financial, Internal Self Concept, Environment, Organizational Policy and Goal Internalization on employee motivation at SOCSO Penang. The analysis findings are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple Regression Analysis (N = 146)

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta |
| | 18.717 | 3.112 | |
| Financial | 0.159 | 0.063 | 0.242 |
| Internal Self Concept | 0.497 | 0.101 | 0.696 |
| Environment | -0.150 | 0.067 | -0.238 |
| Organizational Policy | 0.014 | 0.093 | 0.017 |
| Goal Internalization | -0.032 | 0.082 | -0.031 |

Source: Field Study, 2024

Table 3 presented the findings of the multiple regression analysis. According to the Standardised Coefficient Beta, the most significant aspect is internal self-concept. As a result, it was discovered that the work culture moderates the relationship towards SOCSO Penang employees through internal self-concept.

Discussions

The findings of this study indicate that employees at SOCSO Penang are motivated. The findings indicate that employees are generally satisfied with their jobs and believe they have several opportunities for personal growth and development. Employee's report feeling great success at work, and their jobs motivate them to perform well. All motivation assessment items are derived from Bernarto et al. (2020) and Wagner et al. (2020). The findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that public sector employees are highly motivated (Corduneanu et al. (2020); Lapuente and Van de Walle (2020); Schwarz et al. (2020). Furthermore, Ogundare (2022) claims that strong motivation in the Malaysian public and external sectors is driven by both internal and external factors. stability. security, which can enhance motivation (Davidescu et al., 2020; Sapale et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020). Penang. These findings are consistent with previous research, which shows that financial incentives, such as financial rewards, have a significant impact on employee motivation (Al-Belushi & Khan, 2017; Mohamud et al., 2017; Omolo, 2015; Seng & Arumugam, 2017; Seniwoliba & Nchorbono, 2013; Agbenyegah (2019); Gozali, 2022). Providing competitive salaries and financial incentives is important to retain high-performing individuals (Mahadi et al., 2020; Popadinets et al., 2021; Bodur & İnfal, 2015; Fryer, 2015; Khalaila, 2015; Touré-Tillery & Fishbach), 201 The authors have also discussed the relationship between self-concept and motivation. Internal self-concept refers to a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a given situation or achieve a goal. People with high self-efficacy are more likely to be motivated to tackle difficult tasks and persevere in the face of obstacles (Filgona et al., 2020).

A good and powerful internal self-concept increases motivation by instilling feelings of competence, autonomy, and determination to achieve goals (Janurik et al., 2023). Goal integration is another important aspect of motivation. Cook and Artino (2016) and Nabi et al. (2017) found that goal internalization has a significant influence on employee motivation. This study also found a significant association between goal internalization and motivation in SOCSO Penang. Goal internalization has a profound impact on employee motivation, as it fosters a sense of ownership, commitment, and alignment with organizational values (Ababneh, 2020; Saputra, 2021). Employee commitment can be increased by involving them in the goal setting process, as those who actively participate are more likely to internalize these goals and strive to achieve them (Miller & Weiss, 2015). Studies have found that the work environment has a significant influence on motivation. Jufri et al. (2021) and Oktariyanti et al. (2023) found that the environment has a direct influence on employee motivation. Positive employee interactions promote effective communication and collaboration (Jiang & Luo, 2018). Physical workstations also influence motivation (Basalamah & As'ad, 2021).

The data also revealed that organizational policies have a significant impact on employee motivation. Previous research supports this view (Alrawahi et al., 2020; Mohamud et al., 2017; Petrova et al., 2020; Thang & Ngi, 2022). The findings of this study support Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that intrinsic motivation is driven by three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This study found that financial incentives, internal self-concept, goal internalization, environmental factors, and organizational policies all had significant impacts on employee motivation at SOCSO Penang. These elements interacted with the core psychological demands identified in SDT, increasing intrinsic motivation and employee effectiveness.

Conclusion

This study effectively identified five key elements that influence employee motivation in Penang SOCSO: financial incentives, internal self-concept, goal internalization, work environment and organizational policies. These findings are consistent with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), emphasizing the importance of autonomy, competence and relevance in promoting intrinsic motivation. Financial incentives, including bonuses and competitive salaries, have been shown to directly increase motivation, especially when linked to performance and perceived fairness. Internal self-concept emerged as a strong intrinsic driver, with employees' confidence in their own abilities and alignment of work with personal beliefs significantly increasing their motivation. Similarly, goal internalization suggests that individuals are more engaged when organizational goals are aligned with their personal beliefs and aspirations. The work environment, both physical and social, is another important incentive. A welcoming, collaborative environment, as well as ergonomically designed workstations, have been shown to increase employee engagement and productivity. Finally, organizational policies, particularly those related to performance appraisal, recognition, work-life balance and skills development, play a significant influence in building a motivating and supportive work environment. Future research should broaden its geographical scope and consider additional variables such as economic conditions and personal circumstances to gain a more thorough picture of what motivates employees in various settings.

Acknowledgements

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Kedah for the unwavering support and provision of resources. Special appreciation is extended to the

anonymous reviewers who are sincerely thanked for their constructive feedback and insightful comments, which significantly contributed to the refinement and improvement of the article.

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