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DEMORALISATION AND DEMOTIVATION IN THE ORGANISATION

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Abstract. *This paper examines the factors contributing to demoralisation and demotivation within organisations, with a focus on how these issues impact employee performance and overall organisational success. The discussion centers on several key areas, including de-empowerment, lack of control over decisions, and the exclusion of middle management and direct supervisors from senior-level decision-making. Additionally, the financial aspects, lack of development opportunities, alienation from socialisation and team ties, and insufficient management focus on team morale and cohesion are explored. These elements often compound the issue of burnout, especially when organisations focus on resilience without addressing capacity and unrealistic deadlines. By identifying these demotivating factors and their interconnections, the paper highlights how organisations can address these challenges through better engagement strategies, improved decision-making processes, and a more realistic assessment of employee workloads.*

Keywords: Employee demoralisation, organisational demotivation, empowerment, burnout prevention, employee engagement strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

Demoralisation and demotivation are significant challenges facing modern organisations. The competitive nature of today's business environment often forces companies to push their employees toward higher levels of productivity without adequately considering their emotional well-being. When employees feel disconnected from decision-making processes, unsupported in their professional development, or overwhelmed by unrealistic expectations, their motivation and morale suffer.

This paper explores the main causes of demoralisation in the workplace, specifically focusing on how a lack of empowerment, social cohesion, financial instability, and poor management decisions contribute to a disengaged and disheartened workforce. The objective is to analyse these factors and propose strategies for addressing them, aiming to restore a healthy and productive work environment.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO DEMORALISATION AND DEMOTIVATION AT THE ORGANISATION

While situations in each organisation are unique and determined by the field of work, history and years of existence, values, management styles, even regulations and administrative requirements, there are some key factors that can impact any kind of organisation, regardless of their inherent differences.

De-Empowerment and Lack of Control Over Decisions

De-empowerment occurs when employees, particularly middle managers and direct supervisors, feel excluded from critical decision-making processes. In many organisations, senior management often makes strategic decisions without involving those directly responsible for day-to-day operations. This exclusion leaves middle management disempowered and demoralised, as they are unable to influence decisions that directly impact their teams, while their team members expect them to represent their voices, opinions and interest, balancing them out with the ones of the organisation as a whole. The lack of autonomy over key operational decisions fosters a sense of helplessness and disengagement. Employees who feel they have no control over their work environment are less likely to be motivated, leading to reduced job satisfaction and performance.

Empowering employees and including them in decision-making processes is essential to maintain their engagement and commitment to the organisation.

Non-Involvement of Middle Management and Supervisors in Decision-Making

The disengagement of middle management and direct supervisors from senior management decision-making is a crucial contributor to organisational demotivation. Middle management serves as the bridge between the leadership and operational teams, playing a critical role in translating strategy into action. However, when they are excluded from discussions that shape organisational direction, it becomes difficult for them to take ownership of the decisions they must implement. This disconnection results in confusion, lack of alignment, and diminished morale among both middle managers and their teams. Moreover, the communication gap between senior leadership and frontline supervisors leads to inconsistencies in expectations and execution, further exacerbating the issue of demotivation.

“Demotivating for specialists is the influence of their managers through their arrangements, orders, decisions. There is a lack of teamwork and team spirit, and managers in enterprises are essentially characterized according to McGregor's Theory X as authoritarian leaders. Managers oriented to theory X use activities and technologies, design organizational structures that are characterized by little participation of subordinates in decision-making and a high level of authoritarian centralization and formalization of work procedures.

Most managers centralize as much authority as possible, structure the work of their subordinates, give them almost no freedom to make decisions, closely monitor the execution of all work, as a rule, exert economic pressure through threats. Specialists in the studied enterprises value the opportunity to participate in making management decisions, but they do not get the opportunity to do so. Thus, the authoritarian management style demotivates their activity. As a final result for the investigated enterprises, a high degree of demotivation of the specialists, blocking of their initiative, carrying out only the work assigned by the managers can be indicated (Angelova, M., 2014).”

Financial Aspects

Financial insecurity, low compensation, and lack of financial incentives are major contributors to employee demotivation. Employees who feel they are

undercompensated for their work often question the value of their contributions, leading to feelings of being undervalued and demoralised. Moreover, the absence of financial rewards, such as bonuses or performance-based raises, can reduce motivation to excel. Beyond salary concerns, the overall financial health of an organisation also plays a role. Employees working in companies with unstable financial outlooks may feel uncertain about their future, fostering anxiety and lowering morale. Ensuring that employees are fairly compensated and that the organisation communicates financial stability is key to maintaining motivation.

“Companies cannot ignore any of the key motivating factors (employee compensation, working conditions, relationships and communication in the company, training and opportunity for new positions, and the preserved work/life balance and workplace security) without losing employees and/or productivity/efficiency (Anguelov, K., Stoyanova, Ts., Tamošiūnienė, R., 2020)”.

Lack of Development and Career Growth Opportunities

The absence of clear career development paths and opportunities for advancement is another significant demotivating factor in organisations. Employees who feel stuck in their roles without the possibility of growth tend to lose interest in their work, leading to stagnation and reduced productivity. Organisations that do not invest in employee development, through training, mentoring, or promotion opportunities, risk fostering a workforce that lacks enthusiasm and drive. When employees perceive that there is no future within the company, they are more likely to disengage, resulting in higher turnover rates and decreased morale.

As per a Bulgarian study, employees “value the career development opportunities they don’t get. Opportunities for enriching competences are not provided and tasks are assigned outside the competences of the position held, which has a strong negative impact in the direction of dissatisfaction with work (Angelova, M., 2014).”

Alienation, Lack of Socialisation, and Weak Team Ties

Workplace alienation occurs when employees feel disconnected from their colleagues and the organisation’s goals. The lack of opportunities for meaningful socialisation and the absence of strong team bonds contribute to a sense of isolation. When em-

ployees are not encouraged to collaborate and build relationships with their peers, team cohesion suffers. This lack of camaraderie can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and a general feeling of loneliness at work, all of which contribute to demoralisation. Additionally, when employees do not feel part of a cohesive team, they are less likely to be motivated to contribute to collective goals.

Lack of Focus on Team Morale and Cohesion

A critical yet often overlooked aspect of organisational well-being is the focus on team morale and cohesion. Many organisations fail to implement policies and initiatives that actively foster a positive work environment. Without deliberate efforts to build a strong team culture, employees may feel unsupported and undervalued. Managers often focus on achieving targets without considering the emotional and psychological state of their teams, resulting in burnout and low morale. In such environments, productivity declines as employees struggle to find motivation and enthusiasm for their work.

“Usually, when people enter a company, they begin with a high level of energy and a positive attitude (motivation). Subsequently, they increase their motivation or lose it due to the wrong managerial approach, a lack of fairness, low pay, difficult tasks, or a number of other reasons. ... Therefore, job satisfaction and commitment must be worked on as soon as the employee enters the organization (Dimitrov, Y., 2023).”

Alienation from Organisational Goals

In some cases, employees become demotivated because they feel alienated from the organisation’s goals. This alienation occurs when there is a lack of alignment between an employee’s values and the strategic direction of the organisation. When employees are unclear about how their work contributes to the larger mission of the company, or when they do not see their contributions being recognised, they may lose motivation. Creating a clear connection between individual roles and the broader organisational objectives is essential for fostering a sense of purpose and engagement.

As per M. Angelova (2014) there is a “presence in some enterprises of a vision, mission, goals, slogan, which are written on the company’s website, but they are not known to the specialists, they do not try to comply with them, they are not motivated by the company’s culture, traditions, customs. Demotivation for specialists is expressed in a discrep-

ancy between the goals and tasks of the enterprise and the goals and tasks of the specialist, which is justified for various reasons. Enterprises do not carry out studies in connection with establishing values, needs, priorities, including the level of individual motivation, and accordingly actions are not applied to adequately guide the motivational attitudes of the specialists.”

Insufficient Recognition and Reward Systems

The absence of a robust recognition and reward system can also contribute to demotivation. Employees who work hard but receive little acknowledgment for their efforts are likely to feel undervalued. Recognition can take many forms, from formal awards to informal praise, but it must be consistent and meaningful. Without recognition, even highly motivated employees may begin to question the value of their contributions, leading to disengagement and demoralisation.

As per M. Angelova (2014) “managers in enterprises do not adequately use the motivating effects of the human resources management system, as there is no adequate evaluation system, there is no clear and comprehensible regulation for remuneration management, there is a discrepancy between the work performed and the job description.”

Burnout and Unrealistic Expectations

One of the most damaging factors contributing to demoralisation is the emphasis on employee resilience without taking capacity and realistic deadlines into account. Organisations often demand high levels of productivity, with little regard for the limits of human capacity. While resilience training and encouragement can help employees cope with challenges, these initiatives often fall short when they are not paired with realistic workloads and timelines. Employees who are consistently pushed beyond their limits may experience burnout, which is characterised by emotional exhaustion, detachment, and a reduced sense of accomplishment. This state of burnout not only decreases individual performance but also negatively affects the entire organisation, as overworked employees become less engaged and motivated.

In Bulgaria, burnout and workplace demotivation are increasingly significant issues. A European Parliament report estimates that “between 30% and 35% of Bulgarians link their psychological distress”, including burnout and depression, “to workplace problems (Nikolova, 2022)”. Contributing factors

include high job demands, financial instability, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the Bulgarian workforce faces issues like “work without paying social security contributions, work very long hours, or their working environment does not correspond to the type of work concerned (Nikolova, 2022)”, which exacerbates mental health challenges.

From a comparative study across Southeast European countries, Bulgaria falls into the medium range regarding job-related physical and emotional demands. However, it shares a high prevalence of emotional exhaustion, one of the core dimensions of burnout, with neighbouring countries like Croatia and North Macedonia. Job demands and insufficient resources, combined with depersonalization, contribute to a growing sense of disillusionment among Bulgarian employees (Mijakoski, Atanasovska, Bislimovska, Brborović, Brborović, Cvjeanov Kezunović, Milošević, Minov, Ōnal, Pranjić, Rapas, Stoleski, Vangelova, Žaja, Bulat, Milovanović and Karadžinska-Bislimovska, 2023)”.

Key factors contributing to burnout

1. Emotional Exhaustion

Burnout often manifests as a feeling of emotional depletion due to continuous work stress. This leads to a sense of being drained, where individuals find it increasingly difficult to cope with their responsibilities.

2. Depersonalization

People experiencing burnout may begin to feel detached or disconnected from their work. This often results in negative or cynical attitudes towards clients, colleagues, or the tasks they must perform.

Depersonalization is an “impaired and distorted perception of oneself, of others and one’s environment and it manifests itself as an affective-symptomatic lack of empathy (Prinz, Hertrich, Hirschfelder, de Zwaan, 2012)”.

3. Reduced Personal Accomplishment

Burnout also affects an individual’s perception of their professional effectiveness. They may feel inadequate or unsuccessful at work, leading to a lower sense of personal achievement.

4. Workload and Control

Excessive workloads, combined with a lack of control over tasks or decision-making, can significantly exacerbate burnout. Having little autonomy in managing one’s workload heightens stress levels.

5. Lack of Social Support

Insufficient support from colleagues, supervisors, or personal networks can also be a critical factor, leading to feelings of isolation and making it harder for individuals to cope with stress.

6. Mismatch of Values

A misalignment between personal values and the organization's culture or goals may also lead to burnout. This can foster disengagement, as individuals feel that their work lacks meaning or purpose.

These factors, combined, can contribute to a cyclical pattern of stress, reducing overall well-being and job satisfaction. Addressing burnout and demotivation in Bulgaria's workforce requires more focus on mental health, better working conditions, and stronger support systems within organizations. Burnout-related absenteeism can have significant financial impacts, both for individuals and the national economy, necessitating proactive steps in workplace policies.

SOLUTIONS TO PROMOTE MORALE AND MOTIVATION AT THE ORGANISATION

Addressing the issues of demoralisation and demotivation in an organisation requires a multifaceted approach that tackles both structural and psychological factors. Below are several strategies that can help mitigate these challenges and foster a more engaged, empowered, and motivated workforce.

Empowerment and Inclusion in Decision-Making

Organisations need to adopt more inclusive decision-making processes, ensuring that all levels of management, including those closest to frontline employees, are involved in relevant discussions, and that they in turn take into account employee opinions.

Senior management are to be encouraged to include middle managers and supervisors in strategic meetings and discussions that impact their departments. This can be achieved through regular cross-level forums, where feedback from various management layers is actively sought and integrated into decision-making.

Granting employees more control over their work processes would allow them to make decisions on operational issues and encourage them to suggest improvements. This fosters a sense of ownership and pride in their work, which is crucial for maintaining motivation, morale and employees' sense of value.

Addressing Financial Discontent and Incentivisation

Conducting regular salary reviews ensures that compensation aligns with industry standards and reflects the contributions of employees. This review should not only focus on salary but also on bonuses, benefits, and other financial incentives.

Introducing a reward system acknowledges employees' contributions through bonuses, profit-sharing schemes, or even non-monetary rewards like extra vacation days or public recognition. Regular recognition of efforts fosters loyalty and encourages higher performance.

Sharing information about the company's financial health with employees, where appropriate, helps employees understand the organisation's stability and can ease fears about job security and can contribute to a more motivated workforce.

Offering Career Development and Training Opportunities

Employees need to feel that they are growing professionally to remain motivated. A lack of career development opportunities can lead to stagnation, as employees see no future progression within the company. Organisations that invest in employee development not only increase morale but also foster a more skilled and adaptable workforce.

The organisation can provide employees with clear, achievable progression opportunities within the organisation. This could include lateral moves, promotions, or even opportunities to work on special projects that build new skills.

It could also offer regular training sessions, workshops, and mentorship programs. These initiatives not only help employees improve their skills but also show that the organisation values their growth and contributions. In-house leadership programs that prepare employees for higher roles can also be highly motivating.

The organisation could encourage employees to further their education by subsidising relevant courses or certifications. By supporting their professional growth, the organisation fosters a more engaged and future-focused workforce.

Enhancing Socialisation and Strengthening Team Ties

Alienation and weak team ties contribute significantly to demoralisation, as employees who feel disconnected from their colleagues are more likely to

disengage from their work. Organisations that foster strong interpersonal relationships and a sense of community will likely experience higher levels of motivation and morale.

Encouraging regular team-building exercises, both in formal settings (workshops, offsite retreats) and informal gatherings (social events, lunches) activities help build trust, improve communication, and foster stronger connections between team members.

Facilitating collaboration by setting up cross-functional teams and encouraging employees from different departments to work together on projects creates a collaborative environment and fosters shared responsibility and deeper interpersonal relationships.

Ensuring that the physical workspace includes areas where employees can gather informally to socialise encourages spontaneous conversations and interactions, which can strengthen team dynamics and reduce feelings of isolation.

Focusing on Team Morale and Leadership Support

A lack of focus on team morale often stems from a management approach that prioritises targets and outcomes over employee well-being. However, effective leaders understand that motivated, happy employees are more productive and committed. Therefore, management must make morale-building initiatives a core part of their strategy.

Leaders should actively support their teams by providing regular feedback, acknowledging accomplishments, and addressing concerns. Leaders who are approachable and transparent foster an environment where employees feel safe and valued.

Surveys, one-on-one check-ins, and feedback sessions can be used to regularly assess team morale and identify potential issues before they escalate. Being proactive about addressing concerns and taking corrective action when necessary is key to maintaining a positive atmosphere.

Publicly celebrating team and individual achievements, whether through team meetings, newsletters, or awards ceremonies, thus recognising success, boosts morale and strengthens the connection between employees and organisational goals.

Managing Burnout by Balancing Workload and Expectations

One of the most insidious factors contributing to demoralisation is burnout. Employees are often pushed to their limits without adequate consideration of

their workload capacity, especially when there is a misalignment between expectations and realistic deadlines.

Organisations must assess workloads and ensure that deadlines are achievable. Overloading employees with work that exceeds their capacity not only demotivates them but also leads to burnout, reduced productivity, and higher turnover.

Allowing employees flexibility in managing their work hours and location can help them manage stress and maintain a healthy work-life balance. Encouraging remote work or offering compressed workweeks can provide employees with the time they need to recharge.

While resilience programs are important, they should focus not just on individual coping mechanisms but also on reducing overall stress levels by adjusting workloads and expectations. Ensuring that resilience is not seen as an excuse for overwork is essential to prevent burnout.

Improving Alignment with Organisational Goals

A critical aspect of motivating employees is ensuring that they feel connected to the broader organisational goals. When employees do not understand how their work contributes to the organisation's success, they are more likely to disengage.

Ensuring that employees at all levels understand the organisation's mission, vision, and strategic objectives via regular updates and transparent communication from leadership about how the company is performing can increase employee buy-in.

Helping employees see how their individual roles contribute to the organisation's success and setting clear, measurable objectives for each employee that align with larger company goals can give them a sense of purpose and direction.

Managers should regularly provide feedback to employees, recognising how their work is contributing to the achievement of team or organisational objectives. This helps employees feel valued and connected to the organisation's success.

As per Dimitrov, Y. (2023), "as long as the employee has positive feelings linked to the organization, its values, and goals, it is possible that he is not satisfied with his current work duties but still continues to perform them with all his energy and diligence." Dimitrov also mentions that "managing employee performance comes from the development of a strong affective commitment with the organization he works for" and that to develop it the organization should "create an environment in which extra-role

behaviors, informal mentoring, and organizational citizenship behaviors can be spontaneously practiced and to work on building a positive image of the organization, because in such organizations employees become more attached.”

Strengthening Recognition and Reward Systems

Inadequate recognition and reward systems are a common source of frustration and demotivation. Employees who work hard but are not recognised for their efforts are likely to feel unappreciated and may eventually disengage.

Developing structured programs that acknowledge both small and large accomplishments, for example, employee of the month awards, project completion celebrations, and bonuses tied to performance milestones, can help employees feel recognised and motivated. However, these recognitions need to be well-balanced, appropriate, and deemed fair, in order to not backfire by making other hard-working employees feel excluded and unappreciated, or devaluing the whole initiative with false praise.

Cultivating a culture where employees can recognise the contributions of their colleagues by peer recognition can be as powerful as manager recognition in fostering a positive workplace environment.

Managers should be trained to offer regular praise and feedback (vs. only focusing on constructive feedback or providing no feedback at all), ensuring that recognition is timely and specific. Instead of generic comments like “good job,” offering detailed praise about what the employee did well reinforces positive behavior and builds motivation.

CONCLUSION

Demoralisation and demotivation within organisations are complex issues that stem from various interconnected factors. De-empowerment, lack of control over decision-making, insufficient financial incentives, and lack of development opportunities are key contributors to employee disengagement. In addition, alienation from team dynamics and burnout caused by unrealistic expectations further exacerbate the problem.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that involves empowering employees, fostering strong team connections, offering development opportunities, and recognising individual contributions. Organisations that prioritise employee well-being and motivation are more likely to

cultivate a productive and engaged workforce, leading to long-term success.

Tackling the root causes of demoralisation and demotivation requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach that focuses on empowerment, career development, workload management, and social cohesion. By giving employees a sense of control over their work, recognising their contributions, providing opportunities for growth, and fostering a supportive team environment, organisations can mitigate the effects of demotivation and create a more engaged and productive workforce. Successfully managing these issues not only enhances employee well-being but also strengthens the organisation’s long-term success by reducing turnover, increasing productivity, and building a resilient, motivated team.

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