



Exploring Employee Motivational Factors and Strategies During Pandemic: A Case of Telecom Industry Pakistan

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Abstract: *The rising trends of employee well-being and talent retention directed organizational attention toward human capital management. Employee motivation has remained a concern for organizations to stay competitive in a dynamic corporate environment. This paper explores employee motivational factors and strategies telecom companies used to encourage their employees' morale and performance during the pandemic (crisis). To provide theoretical support, we used Herzberg's theoretical framework. We collected the data through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 12 working employees of the telecom sector in Pakistan using a non-probability purposive sampling approach. After achieving data saturation, we transcribed the recorded interviews and generated the themes using the guidelines of Miles et al. (2018). The results suggest that the factors that encouraged employees were financial security, health insurance, job security, teleworking options, work-life balance, supervisor support, career opportunities, recognition, and achievement. Besides, the strategies used by the companies were work-from-home options, helpline centers, and e-learning opportunities. The study is one of the few attempts to address employee well-being and motivation in the context of the telecom sector in Pakistan. The findings of this study provide insights to human resource management specialists in developing talent retention and employee well-being policies during crisis times.*

Keywords: *Herzberg's two-factor theory, Covid-19, Coping strategies, Stress, Motivation.*

Introduction

In a constantly changing corporate environment, firms try to keep themselves competitive and updated by adopting new technologies, strategies, and practices that enhance their performance and innovation. Successful organizations have inherent value for their human capital and continuously seek effective strategies to motivate their employees. These employees are the true assets of organizations and help them achieve their targets and goals by contributing their skills, knowledge, and creativity to organizational success and growth. In a typical organization, employees are the critical components of organizations (Dachner, Ellingson, Noe, & Saxton, 2021). The level of commitment and energy that employees invest in an organization plays a crucial role in determining the overall productivity of an organization. They offer a unique portfolio of skills and expertise necessary for organizational success.

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Employees provide the primary sources of customer interaction and communication. [Abner and Samuel \(2019\)](#) posit that engaged and motivated employees help in customer retention by providing quality services to the organization. Therefore, increasing employee motivation, satisfaction, and engagement are critical concerns for organizations nowadays ([Ali & Anwar, 2021](#)). Organizations also significantly invest in their employees.

Employee motivation is also one of the primary factors of organizational success. Motivated employees achieve organizational outcomes such as corporate innovation, organizational resilience, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and organizational performance. [Siddiqui \(2019\)](#) states that highly motivated employees are more productive than others, and employee motivation determines the level of employee commitment and energy to perform a task.

Literature segregates motivation into two types: (i) intrinsic motivation and (ii) extrinsic motivation ([Camilleri, 2021](#)). Intrinsic motivation is when employees perform tasks due to intrinsic reward and innate satisfaction. It also explains the tendency to look for challenges and novelty to experience and learn within a workplace. Intrinsically motivated employees perform a task due to enjoyment or its challenge. In comparison, extrinsic motivation is when employees perform tasks due to the associated external rewards or physical benefits ([Van den Broeck, Howard, Van Vaerenbergh, Leroy, & Gagné, 2021](#)). It comes when external rewards are associated with the outcomes ([Yusuf, 2021](#)). In extrinsic motivation, the locus of incentive is attached to the result. However, both types of employees flourish in their skill sets to align their personal and organizational goals to achieve efficiency.

Employee motivation encourages employees to engage in knowledge-sharing and corporate learning activities, thus creating a positive feedback loop that fosters a learning culture in the organization. It is a stimulant that directs employee behaviors by influencing their attitudes, emotions, and values. Organizations make efforts to determine the level of employee intrinsic motivation. Based on this information, they create different kinds of rewards and incentives that can enhance the motivation level of their employees. It aims to ensure that the employees are willing and able to achieve the goals and objectives the organizations have set for them.

As human behavior is complex and volatile, it is pertinent to understand the factors influencing employee motivation. The current body of literature suggests that individual, organizational, and contextual or situational factors impact employee level of motivation. At an individual level, employee personality type, self-esteem, resilience, patience, and empathy influence employee motivation ([Nuckcheddy, 2018](#)). At an organizational level, supervisory and administrative support, organizational justice, rewards and benefits, and work environment influence employee motivation to perform tasks efficiently. Likewise, at the contextual level, there are economic conditions, laws and regulations, and crises, such as economic depressions and Covid-19.

The global health crisis of Covid-19 created an environment of fear and uncertainty, which influenced psychological well-being and employee motivation. [Závadský, Hitka, and Potkány \(2015\)](#) emphasize that during a crisis-like situation, employees feel insecure, which decreases employee motivation and lessens employee productivity. This study

also highlights different motivational strategies that previous literature explains, such as creating teams, focusing on developing communication skills in teams, rewarding employee accomplishments, interacting with senior management, encouraging employee autonomy through accepting new ideas, creating harmonization by focusing on creating the strategies that provide solutions to the crisis and support employee motivation to this end. Organizations apply different theoretical frameworks to understand and enhance employee motivation, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Vroom's expectancy theory, McClelland's theory of motivation, and Herzberg's two-factor theory.

Given the crisis-situation companies and employees faced during the pandemic (Covid-19), this study uses Herzberg's two-factor theory to understand employee motivational factors during the Covid-19 crisis. For the following reasons, we did not employ other theories: (i) people do not usually follow the order of needs as mentioned by Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Kaur, 2013); (ii) since self-actualization is not linear as in sometimes people fail to fulfill their basic needs yet they succeed in achieving self-actualization goals; (iii) likewise, Vroom's expectancy theory suggests that individuals perform tasks those provide the most amount of rewards; however, not all efforts get their due reward; (iii) McClelland's motivation theory propounds that employees derive their motivation from the need for achievement, affiliation, and power; however, this theory has limited practical effectiveness, needs are subconscious, and their measurement is difficult (Mehrad, 2020). Therefore, given the limitations of the theories, Herzberg's two-factor theory offers plenty of theoretical underpinnings; it states that the two needs determine employees' motivation at the workplace. These are (i) Hygiene factors and (ii) motivators. Hygiene factors include salary, working conditions, and benefits, while motivators include opportunities, achievements, and recognition.

During the Covid-19 crisis, unlike the other sectors, the telecom sector in Pakistan was witnessing growth (Sarfranz, Rathore, Ali, Khan, & Zubair, 2022). The unprecedented pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 created uncertainty, and 24/7 network availability increased the workloads of employees. It also created a lot of anxiety and doubt among people and increased the demand for reliable and constant network connectivity. As a result, employees had to deal with more work pressure and longer working hours (Kase, Gribben, Guttman, Waldman, & Weintraub, 2022). The literature explains that crisis-like situations influence employee motivation levels. Therefore, this study explores employees' motivational factors and strategies in the telecom sector.

Several scholarships explored the relationship of motivation with other variables, such as employee commitment, retention, and performance. Other scholarships undertaking motivation suggest its positive relationship with employee commitment, retention, and performance. However, the studies exploring employee motivation during the crisis suggest that the significance of employee motivation doubles during periods of uncertainty, such as Covid-19, which caused disruptions and challenges affecting employees' physical and psychological well-being (Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2021). The economic impact of the global pandemic resulted in job insecurity, layoffs, reductions in working hours, pay cuts, and in extreme cases, job losses. Also, the pandemic increased pressure on employees in essential services, such as the health and telecom sectors (Wei, Long, & Katz, 2021).

Considering the mentioned studies on motivation during the crisis, the current literature provides plenty of research on employee motivation. However, a crucial facet is still unexplored, such as the motivation strategies used for employees working in the telecom industry. The Telecom companies of Pakistan are an essential part of the services sector. During the past few decades, the telecom industry in Pakistan witnessed significant growth, and the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated its importance due to the trends of work-from-home and virtual education (Sarfraz et al., 2022). This study selects the telecom sector because of several reasons. First, the telecom sector is one of the active service industries during the pandemic. Second, due to intense competition among four major telecom companies, i.e., Jazz, Telenor, Zong, and Ufone, the telecom sector employees face higher workloads/ work pressure during the pandemic. Lastly, the telecom sector is dynamic, and continuous technological changes significantly change the nature of work. Therefore, it places significant demands on employees to adapt to new skills and learn new ways to perform their tasks (Kaur, 2013). Therefore, tech-based organizations focus more on human resource management.

Considering the gap in the literature, this study explores the strategies that helped tech-based organizations keep their employees motivated during the pandemic by undertaking the theoretical lens of Herzberg's two-factor theory. The specific objective of this research is as follows:

1. To explore the strategies of tech-based organizations (telecom industry) to keep their employees motivated during Covid-19.

This research makes three significant contributions: firstly, it adds new knowledge in the realm of employee motivation; secondly, as the telecom sector is an emerging sector of Pakistan, the employees working in the telecom sector play a very significant role in overall tech companies' performance therefore, their motivation level is a matter of concern. This study provides an in-depth analysis of employee preferences for factors that enhance their motivation during a crisis. Lastly, since this study undertakes the theoretical lens of Herzberg's two-factor theory, it may produce significant theoretical and practical implications. The study may also help managers and HR practitioners design motivational training programs to motivate employees during crises.

Literature Review

Employee motivation: Factors of employee motivation

Motivation is a self-engaged behavior based on the choice of work. Baron (1991) defined that motivation drives employees' "wants to act" and "choose to act" to make the working environment successful. Motivation is energy that encourages and inspires employees working behavior, influences working style, and provides direction. Employee motivation plays an essential role within a workplace as it is one of the determinants of employee performance, autonomy, productivity, and persistence (Shahzadi, Javed, Pirzada, Nasreen, & Khanam, 2014). According to research, motivated employees are independent and self-driven. They are more prone to freedom and autonomy than less-motivated ones.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Motivation remains the primary concern of the organization. Several theories and models are available in the literature to determine employee motivation, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Vroom's expectancy theory, McClelland's theory of motivation, Herzberg's two-factor theory, McGregor's X and Y theory, and Alderfer's ERG theory. The current study undertakes the theoretical lens of Herzberg's two-factor theory to explore the motivating factors. According to Herzberg, employee motivation within a workplace is determined by intrinsic and extrinsic motivations or motivator factors (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). The motivators or intrinsic inspirations, for instance, accomplishment and acknowledgment or recognition, help increase employees' satisfaction at work. In contrast, extrinsic aspects, or hygiene factors, for example, salary and job security, reduce job dissatisfaction. The two-factor motivation theory illustrates that financial factors, for instance, money, do not motivate employees; instead, it reduces employee dissatisfaction and brings them to a neutral phase (Alrawahi, Sellgren, Altouby, Alwahaibi, & Brommels, 2020). Dissatisfaction appears due to unpleasant situations and the absence of hygiene factors, such as job security and better work conditions. On the other hand, motivators or internal factors, including achievement, recognition, promotion, achievement, and growth, help surge employees' motivation at the workplace.

Research supports that motivated employees perform better and have high commitment, satisfaction, and work engagement (ArunKumar, 2014). Further studies also mention that employee motivation helps organizations retain talented employees (Sandhya & Kumar, 2011). Therefore, because of the significance of employee motivation, this study focuses on exploring employee motivational factors. However, the focus is narrowed to the crisis-like situation because research has already explored hygiene and motivators during normal situations.

Impact of the crisis on employee motivation

The Oxford Dictionary defines a crisis as "a time of great danger when problems must be solved, and important decisions are to be made." Human history witnessed many crises, including economic depressions, World Wars, and global pandemics. However, to collect the most recent data, this study undertakes the case of 2019's pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2. A pandemic is an epidemic that occurs on a large scale and affects people worldwide (Qiu, Rutherford, Mao, & Chu, 2017). Scientists and researchers argue for the exact definition of pandemics, and there is no satisfactory definition. However, they agree that the pandemic is the widespread existence of a disease at a rapid pace across the globe. Human history is full of these deadly pandemics, including Tuberculosis, smallpox, influenza, and plague.

Similarly, during 2019-2020, the world experienced one of the deadliest viruses of human history, Covid-19. On 30th January 2020, World Health Organization declared the Coronavirus pandemic a "global health emergency" (WHO, 2020). Global organizations and countries have taken several steps to control this contagious disease, such as imposing strict lockdowns, social distancing, and wearing masks. As Covid-19 increased public

health risks for countries across the globe, different studies analyzed employee motivation at the workplace during Covid-19 (Atikah & Riwayati, 2021).

A review of these studies suggests that Covid-19 resulted in psychological consequences, including anxiety, stress, and other mental issues (Thai, Le, Huynh, Pham, & Bui, 2021). The coronavirus pandemic made employees work in stressful situations. They were either isolated in their homes or instructed to work in virtual settings. However, some companies decided to remain operational amidst the crisis, creating employees' fear and anxiety (Aguilar-Quintana, Nguyen, Araujo-Cabrera, & Sanabria-Díaz, 2021). Moreover, due to the pandemic, employee motivation decreased, affecting their performance. The fear, uncertainty, and anxiety created by the pandemic negatively affected employees' motivation to work. As employees are the true assets of companies, it becomes a challenge for them to motivate their employees during the crisis.

Covid-19 made it a challenge for the fast-growing industry in the country to retain its talent. Singh and Garg (2020) conducted a study in India and found that the pandemic increased the number of subscribers, which also increased workloads for employees in the Telecom sector. During the pandemic, some companies also resulted in layoffs that made employees worry about their job security. To analyze the situation in Pakistan, we have organized this study to explore the motivational factors of employees working in the telecom sector and the strategies used by telecom companies. To this end, the below studies provide the literature on studies undertaking the motivation of employees during a crisis.

Mefi and Asoba (2021) studied employee motivation during crisis times, using a case study approach on the food and retail sector. The findings reveal that employees should have autonomy, and the structural hierarchies must be removed to retain employee motivation during Covid-19. The study also suggested that organizations become flexible enough to adopt all dimensions of employee motivation. Atikah and Riwayati (2021) studied strategies to enhance employee performance during crisis times in Indonesia through motivation and leadership. Algahtani and Javed (2021) investigated the motivation's role in influencing the performance of employees in Saudi Arabia. Carnevale and Hatak (2020) added that the emergence of Covid-19 negatively affected employee motivation, work-life balance, and general well-being.

Employee motivational strategies

Strategy is the set of actions taken to deal with a situation. It is also a plan that determines what actions to be taken in every possible situation, as the fog of uncertainties and changing working conditions influenced the mental conditions of employees (Aguilar-Quintana et al., 2021). Organizations took specific measures to avoid the risk of infection at workplaces. For instance, they issued guidelines for employees to wear masks and avoid physical interactions and handshakes during the pandemic. Similarly, organizations provide work-from-home options for employees to reduce anxiety and fear. In comparison, other organizations provide e-learning and career development programs, including e-training and e-leadership programs to keep their employees motivated (Wiradendi Wolor, Solikhah, Fidhyallah, & Lestari, 2020). However, the motivational factors and strategies

for the Telecom sector in Pakistan are still undiscovered.

Research Methodology

This study adopts qualitative research methods as it explores the strategies of tech-based organizations (telecom industry) to keep their employees motivated during Covid-19. The below section explains the methodology adopted for this study to collect the data from respondents and analyze it using qualitative measures.

Data collection

Since this study undertakes the case of Pakistan's telecommunication (telecom) sector owing to their high investment in technology, all the employees working in this sector are the population of this study. This study adopts the multi-stage sampling technique to select the sample from the population. In the first stage, we assigned equal weight to the number of companies working in the telecom sector of Pakistan, implying that each employee had an equal probability of becoming part of the sample. In the second stage, we purposively selected the employees due to the non-availability of the sampling frame and limited time availability during the pandemic.

We used in-depth semi-structured interviews for the data collection from employees working in telecom companies. Initially, we conducted four in-depth interviews, each with a respondent working in a telecom company. These interviews were exploratory in nature, utilizing the open-ended questionnaire. After the first round of interviews, we revised our study questionnaire and conducted four more interviews, each from a respondent working in a telecom company. We realized that similar types of responses appeared from the interviews. After the second round, we revised our study questionnaire, making it semi-structured in nature. Then, we conducted four more interviews, each from the respondent working in the telecom company. These interviews were confirmatory in nature. Collectively, we gathered data from 12 employees working in telecom companies from March 2021 to July 2021. Upon achieving the data saturation point, we stopped the data collection, as suggested by [Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña \(2018\)](#). Further, to reduce the chances of researchers' bias in the qualitative data collection, we conducted the interviews in an informal setting because an organizational setting can inhibit or influence employees from providing honest responses.

Themes generation: Data analysis

Following the interview guidelines of [Miles et al. \(2018\)](#), we allowed the researchers to collect the data. Considering the study's objective, we revised some guidelines, providing proper directions to the interviewers and interviewees. Interviewers asked interviewees open-ended questions covering motivational factors, strategies, and an employee's experience in the case of Covid-19 infection.

We also took precautions to avoid researchers' influence and get honest responses from interviewees. For instance, we utilized indirect probing questions to explore the undertaken phenomenon. After transcribing the interviews, we sent them to the interviewees for lucid results. We manually generated the first, second, and third-order codes to get the holistic picture.

Results

This section reports the results of the motivational strategies adopted by the telecom sector during crisis times. This study confirms the commonly accepted propositions that the underlining factors in designing motivational strategies by companies were external factors during crisis times. However, motivational strategies containing both factors, hygiene, and motivators, were preferred by the employees.

Employee motivation

Regarding the motivation of employees, several themes emerged from our data that reflect the fact that hygiene/ external factors play a crucial role in motivating employees during crisis times. In normal situations, employee recognition, organizational appreciation, and other internal factors are preferred. However, during crisis times, when the environment is uncertain, employees' expectations and preferences change too. For instance, from the below statement of a respondent:

"I feel good when I work for my company. You do not have to look for external motivators when you own something. However, when it comes to a crisis, we must expect financial stability and insurance benefits from my company, especially when working amid crises." (Sales Manager, Mobilink)

Moreover, factors of employee motivation changed during Covid-19. Most respondents discussed job security and financial stability as primary motivators during the crisis. When asked about what motivates them to work during Covid-19, we got the following response:

"Companies were doing layoffs; many lost their jobs. It made me feel insecure. When you feel insecure, you cannot concentrate on your work. At that moment, all I wanted was job security. When it gets confirmed, our jobs are confirmed. I was totally into my work" (Salesperson, Zong)

Further, when asked about the significance of motivation in their work-life, we get the following:

"Motivation is needed; it works like oxygen, especially when you see stressful news about people dying around you. Now and then, you must follow SOPs and distancing. These reminders, although necessary, constantly create stress in your mind. Even in such a stressful environment, you must keep on

working, and to do so, all you need is motivation, and I believe consistency requires motivation.” (Employee, Mobilink)

No matter the conditions, employee motivation is considered the most crucial component; therefore, most employees regard it as the precursor for employee engagement, performance, organizational commitment, and employee satisfaction. Their statements are as follows:

“Motivation is need or desire, and for me, motivation is everything that pushes me to achieve my goals and desire. It helps us outperform and achieve greater outcomes, and therefore, it is indispensable” (Commercial Experience Executive, Mobilink)

“Motivation is imperative; one cannot perform without motivation. Even during Covid-19, it was my motivation that made me work. I remained engaged in my work, and I even outperformed, and the reason behind it was, of course, ‘motivation’ made me do things I otherwise would not do.” (Customer Representative, Ufone)

“Motivation is required at the workplace and in life. In general, it is something that makes life interesting. You need something that makes you wake up in the morning, and that same thing makes you work hard, and when you go back to bed, you feel satisfied as if you did your best, which is motivation” (Customer Care, Zong)

Herzberg’s two-factors

To determine what motivates employees during the crisis and what factors kept them motivated, for theoretical development, we discussed with them both internal as well as external factors of motivation considering Herzberg’s two-factor theory.

Hygiene factors

During Covid-19, what hygiene factors were preferred by the employees, and what factors were provided to them by the company to ensure employee motivation? We intended to explore those hygiene factors during interviews. The most recurring hygiene factors mentioned by employees were job security, salary, work conditions, healthcare, and insurance benefits. The details are as follows:

Healthcare Benefits and Insurance

To understand employee motivation and company strategies during the pandemic, we asked employees what motivated them at work and which strategy their organization adopted. According to most respondents, “healthcare benefits” were the primary requirement during a pandemic. A few of the statements of respondents are as follows:

“In the Covid-19, employees were seeking healthcare benefits. We were happy knowing that we had health insurance and other benefits” (Sales Representative, Zong)

“Jazz provided us with several opportunities during the pandemic. Employees’ medical was free, even our parent’s medical was free. I got infected, and my company paid all my expenses.” (Commercial Experience Executive, Mobilink)

“I recently joined Zong and was more concerned about it. The fear of getting Covid-19 made me insecure at work, but learning about the healthcare policy made me relaxed and helped me concentrate on my work” (Graduate Trainee, Zong)

“I expect every company should provide healthcare benefits, especially when it is a global pandemic you are dealing with” (Employee, Ufone)

From the above statements, the emerging theme reflected that employees were more prone to healthcare benefits, and companies who incorporated healthcare benefits in their employee motivational strategies during crisis times successfully motivated their employees.

Salary

Salary increments are the second major motivational factor, according to most respondents. Most respondents discussed salary during the transcription as the core element motivating them to work. They further explained that during Covid-19, they preferred financial stability over anything else because their families’ necessities were paramount. A few of the statements of respondents are as follows:

“When the government announced lockdowns, inflation escalated, and I was worried about managing food expenditures and other related expenses. In the middle of a pandemic, we all sought to survive, and salary increments helped greatly in that process.” (Sales Manager, Zong)

“I think, with other factors, salary played a pivotal role in determining one’s motivation. Being an employee, you know you cannot survive if the firm makes any deduction in salary, especially during a global pandemic. All I needed was to make sure my family has good food and have basic facilities” (Employee, Jazz)

“For me, the answer is simple “salary” if your earning is enough, you can go through any disaster without worrying about tomorrow. You live in today” (Software Developer, Mobilink)

Job Security

Job security is the third most preferable factor that motivates employees. Companies that included job security in their employee motivation strategies during a crisis remained successful in keeping employees motivated.

“I was depressed when I learned about the layoffs done by different companies. However, I was back to normality when my company announced they would not be doing any layoffs. It was such a relief for me.” (Commercial Experience Executive, Mobilink)

“How would you work if your job is not secure? So, I believe job security is the thing that I or any employee would seek in a job during the crisis” (Sales Manager, Zong)

“I was not worried because my company gives me confidence concerning job security. Even during the global pandemic, they assured me they would keep me no matter what. This encouraged me to work hard.” (Customer Care Representative, Ufone)

“One of the major elements that kept me motivated during the pandemic was job security” (Employee, Ufone)

Work conditions

To know employees' perceptions of the work environment and how they see its role during the pandemic, we probed them, and the themes emerged that different companies provided different facilities to employees when they were working during the pandemic.

“I felt tense and was constantly concerned about my family when we were supposed to work at the office. I was living with the fear of getting infected. However, I felt slightly relaxed when I observed the sudden changes in our working environment. The SOPS were followed, we were given sanitizers, there were sanitizing doors at the entrance, and there was strict control on several staff members present in the company.” (Manager, Ufone)

“My company allowed us to work from home during the pandemic, benefiting us as employees. We were afraid of getting Covid-19 while working, but we went for it happily when our company provided us with this “work from home” option.” (Commercial Experience Executive, Mobilink)

“I preferred working at the office to working from home, and despite having a virtual working option, I decided to go to the office regularly, and my company allowed me to do so. It made me feel that my company respects my preferences. I was afraid of getting infected, but the working conditions at the office reduced all my stress and anxiety. We got sanitizers. There was proper hygienic care, and we had Covid-19 guidelines, a helpline, free check-ups, Covid-19 tests, and free masks.” (Sales Manager, Zong)

A new theme emerged from the data that reflected that employees' felt motivated when companies provided them with better working conditions. For instance, the work-from-home option reduced employee fear of getting infected and increased motivation. Further, providing masks, sanitizers, and other facilities increased workplace confidence and employee motivation.

Motivating Factors

Further, to explore which companies used motivating factors to retain employee motivation, the following themes emerged from the data.

Growth

No matter the crisis, employees expect professional growth opportunities from their organizations. They felt motivated when organizations offered them such opportunities even amidst the crisis. Results showed that employees felt motivated by promotions and other growth opportunities.

"When the company asked us to work from home, I thought my career was stuck. No growth would be there. However, it was surprising when the company provided online skill development programs. I was super excited while registering for online courses to enhance skills" (Employee, Ufone)

"I thought we would never be able to get promotions, but the company's operations were unaffected. We got promotions, and it made us believe that no matter the conditions, our company would make sure we are growing, we career development" (Sales Representative, Jazz)

"What would happen to my career? This question constantly popped up. However, when I heard about online skill development programs, I realized I was not the one worried about my career. My company is worried about me too. It made me relaxed, motivated, and happy as I realized I am being cared for by my company" (Sales Manager, Zong)

Recognition

Another theme that emerged from the data was recognition. Employees desire to achieve recognition for their efforts. During the covid-19 crisis, those employees whose efforts were recognized sounded happier and more satisfied with their organizations. A few of the statements of such employees are as follows:

"While working from home, I thought my efforts would be undermined. I would not get the recognition that my efforts deserve. However, I became inspired to work more when I got an appreciation for outperforming in the first month of our work-from-home tenure. My company recognized my efforts, and my supervisor admired my efforts in the team and as an individual." (Employee, Zong)

“I was sure my company would not defy my hard work. They recognized my efforts even when things were virtual, which boosted my stamina to work and motivated me” (Customer Care Representative, Jazz)

“I felt motivated when my efforts get recognized by my company even in the crisis” (Employee, Ufone) “As an employee, we prefer recognition more than money sometimes because it is something needed, something that gives mental satisfaction” (Sales Manager, Zong)

From these statements, we learned that recognition was a motivational factor, and all employees admired it. According to them, companies used recognition as a motivational strategy to motivate their employees during the crisis.

Achievement

A sense of achievement is one factor that keeps employees motivated, and any motivational strategy has achievement as an element that helps motivate employees. A few of the statements are as follows:

“While working with Mobilink, I felt valued as our company never let us suffer even in a pandemic, it provides us with online skill development programs, and we get certificates for completing our courses. It made us feel like our career is not compromised even in a crisis.” (Commercial Experience Executive, Mobilink)

“Corona reduced our motivation to work, but when I realized my company is providing e-learning training for work from home, I was so motivated and encouraged, and it was an achievement (for me). It is like in the middle of chaos, you are being provided with an amazing opportunity by your company, and it worked as a motivation booster for me” (Employee, Ufone)

Strategies Used by Telecom Companies

Different companies used different strategies to keep their employees motivated during the crisis. Therefore, several themes emerged in the data regarding motivational strategies. Companies used a hybrid of both factors in designing their motivational strategies. The most used strategies are as follows:

Work from Home

When employees were working physically, they constantly feared getting infected; therefore, to retain employee motivation, companies switched their working conditions from working at physical offices to working from home.

“Work from home is a better option. You work without worry, and no worries means more work. Besides, when you are at home, you can take care of your family and your work simultaneously” (Employee, Zong)

“All I believe in is work, work, and work, but Covid-19 disappointed me. I struggled to cope with the stress of getting the infection and working simultaneously. However, things become easy when Jazz said if you want to work from home, you can” (Commercial Experience Executive, Mobilink)

Helpline Centers

The second strategy used by companies to motivate employees was online help centers and Covid-19 helpline centers. The underlying factors included in this strategy were the hygiene factors, mostly communicating the policies to employees and helping them understand the changing dynamics of the work environment.

“There was miscommunication and chaos due to the pandemic, but our company developed helpline centers for us. It was such a great help, it reduced the stress and anxieties of several employees, and we witnessed their happy faces” (Employee, Ufone)

“Helpline Centers were the needed thing during a crisis. It wiped out the fog of uncertainty created by Covid-19 and helped people adjust to their changing work environments.” (Commercial Experience Executive, Mobilink)

E-Learning Opportunities

Employees also received e-learning opportunities that kept them engaged and motivated during the crisis. These strategies were career growth opportunities. For instance, companies offered skill development programs to their employees,

“Our career was cared for by our companies, we developed new skills, and our company supported us in doing so” (Employee, Ufone) “E-learning is an achievement. It helped us learn new skills and keep ourselves engaged. Along with that, it motivated us and created a sense of achievement during the crisis.” (Commercial Experience Executive, Mobilink)

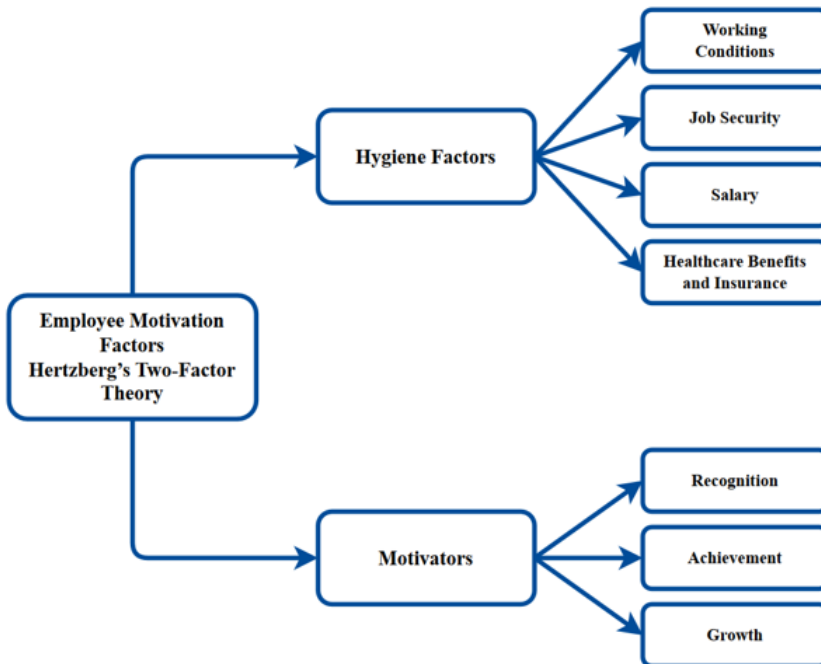
Discussion and Conclusion

This paper aims to identify the gap in the literature on employee motivation factors and strategies. To explore employee motivation factors and motivational strategies used by telecom companies, we identified employees working in telecom companies hired at different positions. Specifically in the realm of (i) employee motivation, (ii) factors of employee motivation, and (iii) employee motivational strategies used by telecom companies. The results of our study confirm the commonly accepted propositions that say hygiene factors are used to reduce dissatisfaction and are, therefore, preferred by employees. These include health benefits, salary, job security, and work conditions, and motivating factors, including achievement, recognition, and growth, are preferred to boost motivation. The results of this study are consistent with previous studies ([Alrawahi et al., 2020](#)),

which found that job dissatisfaction appears due to the absence of hygiene factors and some motivators to increase motivation. Companies must incorporate these factors. Further, the factors discovered by this study are also consistent with those discovered by another study. It says that salary, reward/ recognition, work-life balance, and growth opportunity influence employee motivation to perform well.

Health insurance and health benefits remained the subject of interest for the employees during their interviews. Health insurance and health benefits are the primary factors of employee motivation, and the results of our study are consistent with the previous study that says employees’ interests shifted towards guaranteed financial benefits, including healthcare and insurance benefits, during the crisis (Němečková, 2017). In addition to healthcare benefits, another hygiene factor most preferred by employees was salary. According to Heisenberg’s theory, salary is a primary factor that reduces dissatisfaction. West and Berman (2009) asserted that salary is highly related to job satisfaction research. A study conducted by Asaari, Desa, and Subramaniam (2019) confirms that salary determines motivation.

Figure 1
Employee Motivational Factors During Crisis



Job security also determines job satisfaction and is categorized among hygiene factors. Tu, Li, and Wang (2021) suggested that the pandemic caused layoffs and employee dissatisfaction. It made employees regard job security as a motivating factor. Camilleri (2021)

states that job security is an antecedent for intrinsic motivators, which signifies the importance of job security. Further, work conditions were also the priority of employees in our study. Previous studies also explained that work conditions influence performance. We also used probing questions to explore motivators. It helps us understand achievements and career opportunities. Employee career opportunities are the primary concern for employees. According to a study, employee career opportunities increase employee satisfaction and reduce turnover. Recognition as a motivator is also present in our study. Recognition of efforts increases employee motivation (Alrawahi et al., 2020).

We also asked employees what steps their company had taken during the crisis to explore motivational strategies used by telecom companies during the crisis. Our study found that work-from-home, e-learning opportunities, and helpline centers were the major strategies used by the companies. According to Chanana and Sangeeta (2020), organizations use e-learning and skill development programs to motivate and engage their employees. Besides, Mustajab et al. (2020) suggest that work-from-home options reduce employees' anxiety and stress and enhance employee engagement and motivation. Therefore, these similar strategies are used by telecom companies to ensure employee motivation amidst the crisis. To encapsulate, Covid-19 created dissatisfaction and anxiety among employees (Aguiar-Quintana et al., 2021), and this unpleasant situation of the crisis created dissatisfaction among employees; therefore, motivational strategies used by telecom companies based on hygiene factors reduced that dissatisfaction and those based on motivators boosted the motivation of employees.

Figure 1 summarizes the results of the study and suggests the researchers test it with empirical data/ quantitative data.

Contributions and Limitations

This study made some significant contributions to the literature on human resource management. Firstly, it adds new knowledge to employee motivation during the crisis. Secondly, the study collects data from Pakistan, a developing country where employees' preferences differ as they face several challenges, including poor economic conditions, political instability, and unemployment issues. Thirdly, this study may help Human Resource Management strategically formulate talent management.

Empirical Implications

Concerning the empirical implication of this research, it helps in the strategic process of organizational development, specifically in human resource management. The findings of this study may guide Human Resource specialists in managing talent within an organization, specifically in Covid-19 like times. Further, it may help design strategies to ensure employee motivation during crises. This real-life study provides implications in such a way that it identifies the factors which are more preferred by employees and which play a very pivotal role in keeping employees motivated during crisis times; therefore,

incorporating such factors in designing employee motivational and career development programs may help telecom companies in retain their key talent.

Theoretical Implications

Along with empirical contributions, we believe our study significantly contributes to some aspects of the theories, and it also adds value to the current body of knowledge in the field of human resource management, specifically in employee motivation strategies. The study explores motivational factors that employees prefer during crises and the employee motivation strategies used by (telecom) companies during crises. These findings extend the literature on the two-factor theory on employee motivational factors and strategies during the crisis. Moreover, our findings contribute to talent retention by specifying the preferred employee motivational factors during crisis times. However, we also identified a gap for future research. We believe a study must be conducted in the future with “employee personality” as an added variable that may explore the motivational factors keeping in view the personality differences of employees.

Study Limitations

There are certain limitations of this study. The very first limitation of this study is time constraints, as the researchers’ faced deadlines and time limitations. Although researchers say culture and personality also play a very crucial role in determining employee motivation, however, due to limited resources and for the simplification of the study, we did not add those areas; therefore, in the future, a study must be carried out with the addition of personality and culture. Second, the pandemic conditions may alter the results of our study. Therefore, to further confirm the results, future studies may consider the phenomenon to extend our study.

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Appendix-I: Study Questionnaire

Part A: Motivation

- Explain motivation based on your understanding.

Part B: Benefits during the Pandemic

- Explain the primary benefits your company provided you with during covid-19.
- What do you think a company should provide to make things better during a crisis?
- What critical factors are motivational and mandatory for a telecom company? Explain in detail to us.
- Explain any other outside factors that impacted your motivation or ability to complete your work by given deadlines during the crisis.

Part C: Responsibilities during the Pandemic

- Explain the responsibilities you felt were too difficult or time-consuming to complete during the crisis.
- Explain the achievements you have made during the crisis.
- What were the factors that made you feel the most satisfactory?

Part D: Achievements and Accomplishments

- What do you think was extraordinary that your company did for you during covid-19?
- What different companies did for their employees during the crisis?
- What growth opportunities were you provided with during the crisis?

Part E: Company Strategies

- What steps did your company take to help you in work from home setting? To explore organizational support as a motivation factor
- What policies and procedures did your organization make to handle the crisis
- How do these steps affect you?
- Explain the role of policies and procedures played in your motivation.

Part F: Dealing with Crisis

- When you get infected by covid-19 or one of your employees, get infected with what your company did for the infected employee or you.
- What do you think was most needed that helped you go through your troubled times?
- What do you think your company or any company should have done at that time? Explain in detail to us.
- Explain how your company contributed to your well-being.