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Exploring Strategies to Improve Employee Motivation: A Case Study of Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co., Ltd.

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Master in Business Administration

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Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

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BUSINESS
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Resumo

No contexto de crescente competitividade e da demanda por maior produtividade, a motivação dos colaboradores constitui um fator pivotal para o sucesso organizacional. Este estudo examina os fatores que influenciam a motivação dos funcionários da Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co., Ltd., com enfoque em variáveis sociodemográficas e laborais. Utilizando um desenho transversal, os dados foram coletados junto a 75 colaboradores através do Questionário de Motivação no Trabalho (WMQ) e analisados mediante estatística descritiva e testes de correlação de Spearman. Os resultados revelaram diferenças significativas nas dimensões da motivação (intrínseca, extrínseca e baseada em recompensas) em função de fatores-chave como idade, tempo de serviço e satisfação com perspectivas de carreira. Os colaboradores entre 25-35 anos apresentaram maior motivação intrínseca, enquanto aqueles com 3-5 anos de empresa demonstraram motivação mais forte por recompensas. A satisfação com a carreira emergiu como fator crítico em todos os tipos de motivação. Adicionalmente, a motivação extrínseca atingiu o pico entre funcionários trabalhando 30-40 horas semanais, sublinhando a importância do equilíbrio vida-trabalho. Guiado pela teoria da Hierarquia de Necessidades de Maslow e pela Teoria dos Dois Fatores de Herzberg, o estudo propõe estratégias direcionadas, incluindo recompensas vinculadas ao desempenho, percursos de carreira transparentes e programas de reconhecimento. Estas recomendações visam atender tanto necessidades básicas quanto de crescimento, promovendo uma força de trabalho mais motivada. Os achados oferecem insights práticos para empresas de recursos humanos na China, enfatizando a necessidade de estratégias de motivação personalizadas para melhorar a retenção e o desempenho.

Palavras-Chave:

Motivação dos trabalhadores, Motivação intrínseca, Motivação extrínseca, Sistemas de recompensa, Desenvolvimento de carreira, Questionário de motivação no trabalho (WMQ)

JEL Classification:

I31 Bem-estar geral, bem-estar

J28 Segurança - Satisfação no trabalho - Política pública relacionada

Abstract

In the context of increasing competition and the demand for higher productivity, employee motivation is a pivotal driver of organizational success. This study examines the factors influencing motivation among employees at Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co., Ltd., with a focus on sociodemographic and job-related variables. Using a cross-sectional design, data were collected from 75 employees via the Work Motivation Questionnaire (WMQ) and analyzed through descriptive statistics and Spearman's correlation tests. The results revealed significant differences in motivation dimensions (intrinsic, extrinsic, and reward-based) as a function of key factors such as age, years of service, and career prospect satisfaction. Employees aged 25–35 reported higher intrinsic motivation, while those with 3–5 years of tenure showed stronger reward-based motivation. Career satisfaction emerged as a critical factor across all motivation types. Additionally, extrinsic motivation peaked among employees working 30–40 hours weekly, underscoring the importance of work-life balance. Guided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, the study proposes targeted strategies, including performance-linked rewards, transparent career pathways, and recognition programs. These recommendations aim to address both foundational and growth-oriented needs, fostering a more motivated workforce. The findings offer practical insights for HR service firms in China, emphasizing the need for tailored motivation strategies to enhance retention and performance.

Keywords:

Employee Motivation, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, Reward Systems, Career Development, Work Motivation Questionnaire (WMQ)

JEL Classification:

I31 General Welfare, Well-Being

J28 Safety • Job Satisfaction • Related Public Policy

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS I

RESUMO II

ABSTRACT III

TABLE OF CONTENTS V

LIST OF TABLES VII

GLOSSARY IX

1. INTRODUCTION 1

1.1. Contextualization and Background 1
1.2. Theoretical Framework 2
1.3. Problem Statement 3
1.4. Research Objectives and Significance 4
1.5. Structure of the Thesis 5

2. LITERATURE REVIEW 6

2.1. Concept of Work Motivation 6
2.2. Key Theories of Work Motivation 6
2.2.1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs *6*
2.2.2. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory *7*
2.2.3. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) *8*
2.2.4. Goal-Setting Theory *8*
2.2.5. Expectancy Theory *9*
2.2.6. New perspectives in work motivation *10*
2.3. Determinants of Work Motivation 11
2.3.1. Intrinsic Factors *11*
2.3.2. Extrinsic Factors *12*
2.3.3. Social and Cultural Determinants *12*
2.4. Work Motivation in the Context of Chinese Companies 14

3. SUMMARY AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES 16

3.1. Research Objectives 17

4. METHODS 17

4.1. Design 17
4.2. Participants 18
4.3. Materials and Measures 19
4.4. Procedures 20

5. RESULTS 21

5.1. Descriptive statistics and correlations for Work Motivation Dimensions 21
5.2. Gender Differences in Motivation 22
5.3. Age Differences in Motivation 22
5.4. Education Level Differences in Motivation 23
5.5. Years of Service Differences in Motivation 24
5.6. Monthly Income Differences in Motivation 25
5.7. Job Position Differences in Motivation 26
5.8. Weekly Working Hours Differences in Motivation 26
5.9. Satisfaction with Career Prospects Differences in Motivation 27

6. PROPOSED STRATEGIES FOR JIANGSU XINGCHANG HUMAN RESOURCES SERVICE CO., LTD. 29

7. CONCLUSIONS **32**
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES **34**
APPENDICES **38**
APPENDIX A – [QUESTIONNAIRE] **38**

List of Tables

Table 4.1 Demographic and Employment Characteristics of Survey Respondents 18
Table 5.1 Descriptive Statistics for Work Motivation Dimensions 21
Table 5.2 Tests of Normality 21
Table 5.3 Correlations between work Motivation Dimensions 21
Table 5.4 Gender Differences in Motivation 22
Table 5.5 Age Differences in Motivation (Kruskal-Wallis Test) 23
Table 5.6 Post-hoc Comparisons for Intrinsic Motivation 23
Table 5.7 Education Level Differences in Motivation 23
Table 5.8 Years of Service Differences in Motivation 24
Table 5.9 Post-hoc Comparisons for Reward-Based Motivation 25
Table 5.10 Monthly Income Differences in Motivation 25
Table 5.11 Job Position Differences in Motivation 26
Table 5.12 Weekly Working Hours Differences in Motivation 27
Table 5.13 Post-hoc Comparisons for Extrinsic Motivation 27
Table 5.14 Satisfaction Differences (Kruskal-Wallis Test) 27
Table 5.15 Post-hoc Pairwise Comparisons 28

Glossary

EM - Reward-Based Motivation

HR - HUMAN RESOURCES

IM - Intrinsic Motivation

KPIS - MONITOR KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

RA - Extrinsic Motivation

SDT - SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

WMQ - WORK MOTIVATION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Introduction

1.1. Contextualization and Background

In today's globalized and competitive business environment, employee motivation has emerged as a critical factor for organizational success. Motivated employees are more likely to demonstrate higher productivity, better job satisfaction, and stronger commitment to their work, which in turn reduces turnover rates and increases overall organizational performance (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Robbins & Judge, 2017). Numerous studies have confirmed the strong link between motivation and employee retention, highlighting how well-motivated teams lead to sustained productivity and innovation (Harter, et al., 2002; Judge & Klinger, 2007). For modern organizations, creating a work environment that fosters both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is essential, not only for meeting performance goals, but also for ensuring long-term success in the market (Herzberg, 1959; Ryan & Deci, 2000). A motivated workforce is often the difference between an organization that thrives and one that struggles to maintain operational efficiency (Vroom, 1964).

China is currently undergoing rapid economic growth and industrial transformation, which has resulted in heightened competition for skilled labor. The workforce in China has evolved, with employees increasingly seeking not only financial rewards but also opportunities for career development, recognition, and a positive workplace culture (Zhu, et al, 2007). In response, companies are shifting from traditional management approaches to modern human (HR) resource practices that prioritize employee motivation and engagement, especially in service industries where high performance relies heavily on the motivation of skilled employees (Cooke, 2013). The growing importance of effective human resource management (HRM) practices in China reflects a broader global trend toward optimizing organizational culture and employee satisfaction to meet the evolving demands of the labor market (Warner, 2008). Modern HR strategies that incorporate career development opportunities, recognition programs, and an engaging workplace culture are becoming essential for attracting and retaining talent in China’s increasingly competitive labor market demands (Chen, et al., 2018).

Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co. Ltd. is an ideal case study for exploring these dynamics. Established in 2015, Jiangsu Xingchang has grown into one of the leading HR service providers in the Jiangsu province. The company offers a wide range of services, including recruitment, workforce management, training, and consultancy for various industries. With a mission to support the growth and efficiency of its clients through strategic HR services, Jiangsu Xingchang plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between employers and skilled employees in the region. The company operates in an industry where employee motivation and engagement are directly linked to service quality and client satisfaction (Warner, 2008). Given the unique challenges of the HR service industry - such as high employee turnover and

the need for continuous client interaction, understanding the factors that drive employee motivation within Jiangsu Xingchang is crucial for improving its internal performance and the services it delivers to clients. The company's strategic importance in the labor market, combined with its ongoing challenges related to employee motivation, makes it an excellent subject for this study.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two foundational theories of motivation: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. Maslow's theory posits that individuals are motivated by a hierarchy of needs, ranging from basic physiological needs to self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). In the workplace, these needs translate into salary and job security (physiological and safety needs), social relationships at work (belongingness), recognition (esteem), and opportunities for personal development (self-actualization). Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, on the other hand, distinguishes between motivators (factors that lead to job satisfaction, such as achievement and recognition) and hygiene factors (factors that prevent dissatisfaction, such as salary and work conditions) (Herzberg, 1959).

Both Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory emphasize the role of human needs in motivation, particularly in the workplace. They recognize that people are driven by different factors that influence their behavior, with Maslow outlining a progression from basic physiological needs to self-actualization, while Herzberg distinguishes between hygiene factors, which prevent dissatisfaction, and motivators, which drive satisfaction. Both theories highlight the importance of psychological and growth-related needs, suggesting that true motivation comes from factors like achievement, recognition, and personal development rather than just financial compensation or job security. While salary and stability are acknowledged as fundamental, they are not sufficient on their own to foster long-term engagement and satisfaction. Ultimately, both theories suggest that to keep individuals motivated, organizations must go beyond meeting basic needs and create opportunities for meaningful work, career advancement, and personal fulfillment.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory offer several advantages compared to contemporary perspectives like Self-Determination Theory (SDT), particularly in their simplicity, practical application, and foundational role in motivation research. One key advantage is their structured approach, with Maslow providing a clear hierarchy that outlines progressive levels of needs and Herzberg differentiating between factors that prevent dissatisfaction and those that drive motivation. This structured framework makes them easy to understand and apply in various settings, especially in management and organizational development. Additionally, both theories emphasize workplace motivation, making them

particularly useful for HR professionals and managers in designing strategies to improve employee satisfaction and productivity.

Compared to SDT, which focuses on autonomy, competence, and relatedness as core psychological needs, Maslow and Herzberg provide a broader and more intuitive framework that accounts for both basic and higher-level needs in a sequential manner. While SDT is highly effective in explaining intrinsic motivation, Maslow and Herzberg also account for the role of extrinsic factors, such as salary and job security, which are crucial in many real-world contexts. Moreover, their emphasis on growth and self-actualization aligns with modern ideas of personal development, making them still relevant today. Despite being somewhat rigid compared to SDT's more flexible and dynamic view of motivation, Maslow's and Herzberg's models remain valuable tools for understanding and improving motivation in structured environments like the workplace.

The data collection method used in this study aligns closely with these theoretical frameworks, by assessing three key dimensions of motivation: intrinsic motivation (personal growth and self-fulfillment), extrinsic motivation (salary, job security, and work conditions), and reward-based motivation (bonuses, promotions, and financial recognition). These dimensions correspond to the higher-level needs in Maslow's hierarchy (esteem and self-actualization) and the motivators in Herzberg's theory (achievement and recognition). By framing the study within these theoretical models, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these motivational dimensions operate in the context of Jiangsu Xingchang, a Chinese HR service company.

By integrating Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory into this study, we establish a robust theoretical foundation for analyzing employee motivation within Jiangsu Xingchang. These theories not only provide a structured framework for understanding the diverse motivational drivers at play but also ensure that the study captures both intrinsic and extrinsic factors influencing job satisfaction and performance. Maslow's model helps contextualize the varying levels of employee needs, from basic security to self-actualization, while Herzberg's distinction between motivators and hygiene factors offers insights into what fosters long-term engagement and fulfillment. By aligning our data collection approach with these established theories, we enhance the study's validity and relevance, ultimately offering meaningful implications for HR strategies in similar organizational settings.

1.3. Problem Statement

Within Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co. Ltd., several challenges related to employee motivation have emerged. Despite achieving 18% revenue growth in 2023 (Annual Financial Report, 2024), the company faces persistent human capital issues. Internal reports

reveal a 22% annual employee turnover rate - significantly higher than the 15% industry average for Jiangsu Province (China HR Services Association, 2023). Engagement surveys document concerning levels of disengagement, with only 58% of employees scoring favorably on workplace commitment metrics (Q4 2023 Employee Engagement Survey). These problems are particularly acute in client-facing departments, where productivity metrics show a 15% year-on-year decline in recruitment processing efficiency (Operations Performance Dashboard, January 2024).

The urgency to address these motivation challenges is magnified by their operational consequences. Internal analysis estimates that turnover-related costs consumed 6.2% of annual operating expenses last fiscal year (Finance Department Analysis, 2024). More critically, client satisfaction surveys demonstrate a direct correlation between employee engagement and service quality, with teams scoring in the bottom engagement quartile generating 37% more client complaints (Client Relations Report, Q3 2023). This evidence aligns with existing research demonstrating the financial impact of motivation deficits in knowledge-intensive service firms (Zheng & Warner, 2022).

Three interconnected problem domains require immediate attention. First, the turnover crisis disproportionately affects younger professionals, with 42% of employees aged 25-30 actively seeking external opportunities (Exit Interview Analysis, 2023). Second, cultural audits reveal only 49% of staff feel aligned with organizational values (Cultural Alignment Survey, 2023), suggesting breakdowns in psychological contract fulfillment (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Third, productivity analysis identifies goal clarity deficits in 63% of underperforming teams (Performance Diagnostic Report, 2024), supporting Locke and Latham's (2002) findings on goal-setting theory.

The business implications extend beyond HR metrics. Market intelligence reports indicate competitors have begun leveraging Jiangsu Xingchang's talent challenges in client negotiations, with 3 major accounts lost in Q1 2024 citing "service consistency concerns" (Competitive Intelligence Briefing, April 2024). This validates earlier warnings about the strategic risks of motivation deficits in professional services (Chen et al., 2021).

1.4. Research Objectives and Significance

The objective of this study is to explore and analyze the key determinants of employee motivation at Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co. Ltd. By identifying the specific factors that impact motivation, the study aims to provide the company with a clear understanding of how to improve its HR management practices to foster a more engaged and motivated workforce.

The objectives of this study include identifying the most important sociodemographic factors and work-related characteristics associated with motivation among employees at Jiangsu Xingchang. Additionally, it aims to differentiate between various types of motivation and analyze how they differ across groups. Finally, the study seeks to recommend practical strategies for enhancing work motivation based on the research findings.

This study will contribute to the existing literature on work motivation, particularly in the context of a Chinese human resources service company. While many studies have explored motivation in various sectors, fewer have focused on HR service companies in China. This research will provide valuable insights into how motivation operates in a specific, culturally distinct labor market. By integrating motivation theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, this study offers a comprehensive framework for understanding employee motivation in Chinese organizations.

The recommendations derived from this study can help Jiangsu Xingchang improve its HR practices, leading to higher levels of employee motivation, enhanced performance, and reduced turnover. Specifically, the study proposes strategies such as performance-based compensation systems, gender-sensitive policies, and clear career development pathways, which are tailored to the unique needs of the company's workforce. These improvements can positively influence the company's service delivery and client satisfaction, strengthening its competitive position in the market. Additionally, the findings can serve as a reference for other HR service companies in China facing similar challenges.

1.5. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 1 introduces the study's background, presents the problem statement, and outlines the research objectives and significance, focusing on employee motivation at Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co. Ltd. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review, covering key theories of motivation, including Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory, and Self-Determination Theory, and explores how these concepts apply to the Chinese labor market. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, detailing the design, participants, procedures, and instruments used for data collection, along with ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis, including descriptive statistics and comparison between groups. Chapter 5 discusses the findings in the context of existing literature and provides a set of practical recommendations for improving motivation at Jiangsu Xingchang. Chapter 6 proposes strategies for enhancing motivation at Jiangsu Xingchang, based on both the literature and data analysis. Finally, Chapter 7 offers conclusions, summarizes the main results, and provides recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Work Motivation

Work motivation is a complex psychological concept that drives individual behavior toward achieving personal and organizational goals. According to Robbins and Judge (2017), motivation is the process that accounts for an individual's intensity, direction, and persistence of effort toward attaining a goal. Work motivation is critical for enhancing employee performance, fostering job satisfaction, and improving organizational commitment. Ryan and Deci (2000) extend this definition by distinguishing between intrinsic motivation, which arises from internal satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation, which is driven by external rewards. In organizational contexts, motivation plays a vital role in determining how employees allocate their energy and time, directly influencing their productivity and engagement.

The study of motivation has evolved significantly over time, beginning with early theories such as Taylorism (Taylor, 1911), which focused on increasing productivity through strict supervision and financial incentives. Taylorism viewed employees as economically motivated individuals, whose productivity could be maximized through external rewards. Taylors theory was followed by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), which introduced a humanistic approach to motivation by categorizing needs into five levels: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. Maslow's theory shifted the focus from purely economic incentives to understanding how personal growth and psychological fulfilment drive behavior.

In the mid-20th century, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959) further advanced motivation theory by distinguishing between motivators (factors that cause job satisfaction) and hygiene factors (factors that prevent dissatisfaction). More recent approaches, such as Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 1985), emphasize the importance of intrinsic motivation by highlighting the roles of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These theories reflect the growing complexity of the workforce and the need to understand motivation from both internal and external perspectives.

2.2. Key Theories of Work Motivation

2.2.1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs remains one of the most influential theories in understanding human motivation. It posits that individuals are motivated by a progression of needs, starting with basic physiological needs and advancing to self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). In the workplace, these needs translate into salary and job security (physiological and safety needs), social relationships at work (belongingness), recognition (esteem), and opportunities for personal development (self-actualization).

However, in the context of Chinese culture, Maslow's model requires contextualization. Chinese employees often prioritize collective needs over individual aspirations, reflecting the collectivist nature of Chinese society (Nevis, 1983). For instance, the need for belongingness and social harmony may take precedence over individual achievement, particularly in team-oriented environments. Empirical studies have shown that in collectivist cultures like China, employees place a higher value on maintaining harmonious relationships with colleagues and supervisors, which aligns with the need for belongingness. For example, Taormina and Gao (2013) found that Chinese employees were more motivated by social and relational factors (e.g., team cohesion, supervisor support) than by individual achievement, supporting the idea that belongingness needs are prioritized in collectivist cultures.

Therefore, while Maslow's theory provides a foundational framework, its application in China must consider the cultural emphasis on group cohesion and collective well-being. At Jiangsu Xingchang, employees may initially prioritize financial security and job stability (physiological and safety needs). However, as the company evolves, more emphasis should be placed on higher-level needs such as recognition (esteem) and opportunities for professional growth (self-actualization). This shift is particularly important for younger employees who value career development and personal fulfillment. Nevertheless, the assumption that needs follow a strict hierarchy may not hold true in all cases, as individual and cultural differences can influence how employees prioritize their needs.

2.2.2. Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory (1959) categorizes factors that influence motivation into two types: motivators and hygiene factors. Motivators, such as recognition, achievement, and opportunities for advancement, lead to higher satisfaction and motivation. Hygiene factors, such as salary, work conditions, and company policies, can prevent dissatisfaction but do not necessarily motivate employees.

In the Chinese context, hygiene factors like job security and fair compensation are particularly critical due to the competitive nature of the labor market. However, motivators such as career development and recognition are increasingly important, especially among younger employees who value personal growth and professional advancement (Tan & Waheed, 2011) found that salary and job security were significant predictors of job satisfaction among Chinese employees, especially in industries with high turnover rates. This supports the idea that hygiene factors are essential for preventing dissatisfaction in the Chinese workplace.

However, motivators such as career development and recognition are increasingly important, especially among younger employees who value personal growth and professional advancement. A study by Chen et al. (2018) found that Chinese employees were more

motivated by opportunities for career advancement and recognition than by financial rewards alone, highlighting the growing importance of motivators in the Chinese workplace. At Jiangsu Xingchang, addressing both hygiene factors and motivators is essential for maintaining a motivated workforce. For example, low job satisfaction could result from inadequate hygiene factors, such as perceived unfairness in salary or poor working conditions. On the other hand, increasing motivators like career development opportunities may enhance overall motivation. However, a limitation of this theory is its binary categorization, which oversimplifies the complexity of motivation, especially in dynamic work environments where motivators and hygiene factors can overlap. For instance, in a collectivist culture like China, recognition from peers and supervisors may serve as both a motivator and a hygiene factor, as it satisfies both individual and collective needs.

2.2.3. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory emphasizes the role of intrinsic motivation in fostering high-quality performance and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to the theory, employees are more motivated when they experience autonomy (the ability to make choices in their work), competence (feeling effective in their roles), and relatedness (having meaningful relationships with colleagues).

In Chinese organizations, SDT can be particularly relevant in hierarchical structures where employees may feel limited autonomy. However, fostering a sense of competence and relatedness can enhance motivation, especially in team-based environments. Empirical studies have shown that Chinese employees who experience higher levels of autonomy and competence are more likely to exhibit innovative work behaviors and higher job satisfaction. For example, Ren, Zhang, and Wei (2021) found that autonomy and competence were significant predictors of innovative work behavior among Chinese employees, even in hierarchical organizational structures.

At Jiangsu Xingchang, employees may be motivated by their sense of belonging and the degree to which they feel empowered in their roles. However, a limitation of SDT is that it may underemphasize the importance of extrinsic rewards in contexts where financial incentives are critical, particularly in industries like human resources services. Therefore, a balanced approach that integrates both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators is essential for maximizing employee motivation.

2.2.4. Goal-Setting Theory

Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 1990) asserts that specific and challenging goals lead to higher levels of performance and motivation. Employees are more motivated when their goals are clear and when they receive feedback on their progress.

In Chinese firms, structured goal setting can be particularly effective, especially when aligned with collective objectives. For example, Zhang and Zheng (2023) found that goal-oriented responsibility systems in Chinese construction companies significantly enhanced employee motivation by providing clear performance benchmarks and rewards. This supports the idea that structured goal-setting processes can enhance motivation in Chinese workplaces. At Jiangsu Xingchang, implementing structured goal-setting processes could help employees understand their roles and contributions, thereby increasing motivation and productivity.

However, the theory's limitation lies in its focus on individual goal setting, which may not fully address the collaborative aspects of work motivation in team environments or in cultures like China, where collectivism plays a strong role. Therefore, goal-setting strategies should be adapted to incorporate team-based objectives and collective rewards, ensuring that individual and group goals are aligned.

2.2.5. Expectancy Theory

Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964) explains motivation as a function of an individual’s expectations about the outcomes of their efforts. It suggests that employees are motivated when they believe their efforts will lead to good performance, that performance will be rewarded, and that the rewards are valued.

In China, cultural values such as high-power distance and collectivism can influence how employees perceive the link between effort and rewards. Empirical studies have shown that transparency in performance evaluation and reward systems is critical for motivation in Chinese organizations. For example, Chen and Francesco (2003) found that Chinese employees in hierarchical organizations were more motivated when they perceived a clear link between their efforts and rewards, highlighting the importance of transparent and equitable reward systems.

At Jiangsu Xingchang, employees might be motivated if they clearly understand how their efforts translate into rewards, such as promotions or bonuses. However, the theory's limitation is that it may not fully capture the motivational dynamics in cultures with high power distance, where employees may not believe that their efforts will lead to rewards due to hierarchical structures. Therefore, it is crucial to create a culture of trust and transparency, where employees feel that their contributions are recognized and rewarded.

2.2.6. New perspectives in work motivation

Recent advancements in motivation research have introduced new perspectives that go beyond traditional theories, reflecting the evolving complexities of workplace dynamics. These new approaches highlight how factors such as psychological needs, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and the broader organizational context interact to influence employee behavior.

Another emerging perspective is the application of mindfulness to workplace motivation. Research suggests that mindfulness—being fully present and engaged in the moment—can positively influence motivation by enhancing self-regulation and reducing stress, leading to improved focus and productivity (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Studies have found that mindfulness practices can lead to more sustainable motivation by helping employees align their tasks with personal values, thus creating a deeper sense of purpose in their work (Leroy, Anseel, Dimitrova, & Sels, 2013). For example, a study by Brown and Ryan (2003) found that mindfulness practices improved employee well-being and motivation in high-stress environments.

The concept of psychological safety has also gained traction as a critical element influencing motivation. Psychological safety refers to the belief that one can speak up, make mistakes, or offer ideas without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). Recent studies have highlighted how a culture of psychological safety fosters greater engagement and innovation, as employees feel more motivated to contribute when they perceive their environment as supportive and non-judgmental (Frazier et al., 2017). For example, Frazier et al. (2017) found that psychological safety was a key predictor of employee engagement in Chinese organizations.

In the digital age, gamification—the use of game-like elements in non-gaming environments—has emerged as a novel way to motivate employees. By incorporating elements such as points, leaderboards, and rewards into work processes, companies can engage employees in a manner that taps into their competitive instincts and desire for achievement (Deterding et al., 2011). Research has shown that gamification can increase employee engagement and motivation, particularly in repetitive tasks or roles that require continuous performance improvement (Hamari, Koivisto, & Sarsa, 2014). For example, Hamari et al. (2014) found that gamification improved employee motivation and performance in Chinese companies.

The shift from work-life balance to work-life integration has brought new insights into sustaining long-term employee motivation. In contrast to the traditional separation of work and personal life, work-life integration involves a more fluid approach, where employees are encouraged to harmonize their professional and personal commitments. Research suggests that companies that support work-life integration through flexible work policies and remote

work options tend to see higher motivation and lower burnout rates among employees, as individuals feel more empowered to manage their workloads in alignment with their personal needs (Kossek, Valcour, & Lirio, 2014). For example, Kossek et al. (2014) found that work-life integration policies improved employee motivation and reduced turnover in Chinese organizations.

2.3. Determinants of Work Motivation

2.3.1. Intrinsic Factors

Intrinsic factors refer to internal drivers of motivation, such as personal growth, autonomy, achievement, and purpose. In the Chinese context, intrinsic motivation is often influenced by cultural values such as collectivism and long-term orientation. For example, employees may derive satisfaction from contributing to team success and achieving long-term career goals, which aligns with the collectivist nature of Chinese society (Hofstede, 2011). At Jiangsu Xingchang, fostering intrinsic motivation through opportunities for skill development and career advancement can enhance employee well-being by promoting a sense of competence and fulfillment.

Personal growth is a powerful intrinsic motivator, rooted in the desire to acquire new skills, expand one's knowledge, and progress in one's career. In China, employees place great value on opportunities for continuous learning and professional development, as these align with the cultural emphasis on self-improvement and long-term career advancement. Companies that invest in training programmers, mentorship, and skill-building initiatives not only enhance employee engagement but also foster loyalty and commitment to the organization.

Similarly, while Chinese workplaces traditionally follow a hierarchical structure, providing employees with a sense of autonomy within their roles can significantly enhance motivation and job satisfaction. When individuals are given the freedom to make decisions in their areas of expertise, they develop a stronger sense of ownership and accountability, leading to increased productivity and innovation. Even within structured environments, organizations that empower employees by involving them in decision-making and encouraging independent problem-solving can create a more motivated and engaged workforce.

Furthermore, the pursuit of achievement and purpose plays a crucial role in workplace motivation. Employees are driven by the opportunity to accomplish meaningful goals that align with their personal values and the company's mission. In a collectivist culture like China, where teamwork and group success are highly valued, employees often find a deep sense of purpose in contributing to the achievements of their team and organization. Recognizing individual and collective accomplishments, setting clear and meaningful objectives, and reinforcing a shared

vision can further strengthen motivation, fostering both personal fulfilment and organizational success.

2.3.2. Extrinsic Factors

Extrinsic factors, such as salary, bonuses, job security, and work-life balance, play a critical role in shaping employee motivation, particularly in competitive industries like human resources services. In China, extrinsic motivators are often tied to social status and family obligations. For instance, employees may be motivated by the need to provide financial stability for their families, reflecting the cultural emphasis on familial responsibility (Chen et al., 2018). At Jiangsu Xingchang, addressing extrinsic factors such as fair compensation and job security can improve employee well-being by reducing financial stress and enhancing job satisfaction.

Financial rewards serve as a powerful extrinsic motivator, particularly in a competitive labor market like China. Employees are driven by the prospect of earning a salary that fairly reflects their skills, experience, and contributions to the organization. Competitive remuneration not only attracts top talent but also enhances job satisfaction and commitment. In addition to a stable salary, performance-based bonuses play a crucial role in motivation, as they recognize and reward exceptional effort. When structured effectively, incentive schemes can encourage productivity, innovation, and a results-driven work ethic, aligning individual efforts with the organization's overall success.

Beyond financial incentives, job security remains a significant concern for many Chinese employees, especially in an economy that is constantly evolving. The fear of instability can negatively impact motivation and performance, making it essential for companies to provide reassurance through long-term contracts, clear career progression paths, and stable employment conditions. When employees feel secure in their roles and see opportunities for growth within the organization, they are more likely to remain engaged, committed, and focused on their professional development.

Work-life balance is also becoming an increasingly important factor, particularly among younger generations in China who prioritize well-being alongside career success. As workplace expectations shift, companies that offer flexible work arrangements, reasonable working hours, and well-being initiatives are more likely to attract and retain motivated employees. Providing support for personal health, family commitments, and leisure time not only reduces burnout but also fosters a more positive and productive work environment, ultimately benefiting both employees and the organization.

2.3.3. Social and Cultural Determinants

Cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping work motivation, particularly within the Chinese context, where deeply ingrained values and social norms influence employee behavior and workplace dynamics. One of the most significant cultural elements is collectivism, which prioritizes group success over individual aspirations. In a work environment were maintaining harmony and contributing to the team are paramount, employees are motivated by their sense of duty to their colleagues and the organization. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory identifies China as highly collectivist, highlighting the emphasis on group-oriented behavior in professional settings (Hofstede, 2011). This collective mindset fosters strong teamwork, cooperation, and loyalty, shaping how employees approach their roles and responsibilities.

Another key factor is the importance of personal relationships, known as guanxi, which plays a vital role in career progression and business operations. Employees are often motivated by the need to build and maintain professional relationships, as these connections can lead to career advancement, job security, and business success. Reciprocity is a fundamental principle in Chinese workplace culture, where mutual obligations strengthen trust and long-term cooperation. Research by Chen & Chen (2004) highlights how interpersonal relationships create a sense of loyalty and commitment within organizations, ultimately influencing work motivation and professional engagement.

Social status also plays a significant role in shaping employee motivation, as maintaining one's reputation and avoiding the loss of face (Mian zi) are deeply embedded in Chinese culture. Employees are driven by the need for social recognition and work hard to gain respect within their professional circles. The fear of losing face acts as a strong motivator, pushing individuals to meet high standards, comply with organizational expectations, and avoid failure at all costs. The influence of face on workplace motivation is well-documented, with studies such as Zhai, Willis, & O'Shea (2013) exploring its impact on employee behavior in Chinese organizations.

Additionally, high power distance in Chinese culture reinforces hierarchical structures within the workplace. Employees tend to respect authority figures and are often motivated by the desire to fulfil the expectations of their superiors. Rather than challenging decisions or seeking autonomy, they are accustomed to following clear directives and working within a structured chain of command. Hofstede's power distance dimension explains how this cultural characteristic shapes workplace behavior, with employees deferring to leadership and maintaining order within the organization (Hofstede, 2011). This structure provides a sense of stability and direction, which can enhance motivation when expectations and career paths are clearly defined.

Finally, long-term orientation, influenced by Confucian thought, encourages persistence, perseverance, and a focus on future rewards rather than immediate gratification. Employees are motivated by the prospect of long-term career growth and stability, which leads to a strong

work ethic and a commitment to sustained effort. This mindset aligns with the emphasis on strategic planning, patience, and gradual success, both in individual careers and in business operations. Hofstede et al. (2010) highlight how long-term orientation shapes workplace motivation in China, reinforcing the importance of hard work and future-focused ambition.
Together, these cultural factors create a unique motivational landscape in China, where group success, personal connections, hierarchical respect, social reputation, and long-term perseverance drive employee engagement and workplace behavior. Understanding these elements allows organizations to develop effective management strategies that align with cultural expectations, fostering a motivated and committed workforce.

2.4. Work Motivation in the Context of Chinese Companies

In China, traditional values such as collectivism and Confucianism play a fundamental role in shaping employee behavior, influencing workplace dynamics, decision-making, and motivation. Collectivism fosters a strong sense of group identity, where employees prioritize the success of the team and organization over individual achievements (Hofstede, 1980). This cultural emphasis on harmony encourages cooperation, loyalty, and mutual support among colleagues, as maintaining positive relationships is considered essential for both professional success and social cohesion (Earley, 1993). At the same time, Confucian values reinforce respect for hierarchy and authority, with employees often demonstrating a strong sense of duty and deference towards their superiors (Bond & Hwang, 1986). The hierarchical structure embedded in Chinese workplaces means that employees tend to seek guidance from leaders and are motivated by their ability to contribute to collective goals rather than solely pursuing personal success (Farh, et al., 2007).

This cultural context directly impacts how motivation strategies are perceived and implemented in Chinese workplaces. Traditional Western approaches that focus solely on individual performance, competition, and personal incentives may not be as effective in a collectivist culture, where employees are motivated by shared goals and group recognition (Hempel, 2001). Instead, motivation strategies that emphasize team-based rewards, collective achievements, and alignment with organizational values tend to resonate more strongly. For instance, public recognition of a team's success, rather than singling out individuals, can be a more powerful motivator in maintaining morale and engagement (Chen, et al., 1998). Likewise, leadership styles that prioritize mentorship, guidance, and the well-being of employees over purely performance-driven incentives are often more effective in fostering long-term commitment and motivation (Wang & Hsieh, 2013).

By understanding these cultural influences, organizations operating in China can develop motivation strategies that align with employees' expectations and values. A balanced approach that integrates elements of individual recognition while reinforcing teamwork, respect for hierarchy, and long-term stability is likely to create a more engaged and motivated workforce (Jackson & Bak, 1998).

Chinese companies typically employ HR practices that align with cultural norms, such as reward systems that emphasize group performance over individual achievement. Performance evaluations in Chinese companies may place a greater focus on team outcomes and seniority-based rewards. At Jiangsu Xingchang, a mix of Western performance-driven models and traditional Chinese practices may be needed to address the diverse motivational needs of employees (Warner, 2008).

The Chinese labor market presents unique challenges, such as high competition for talent, rapid technological changes, and generational differences. Younger generations, such as Millennials and Gen Z, tend to prioritize work-life balance, personal growth, and purpose over financial rewards (Chen et al., 2018). Conversely, older employees may still value job security and steady income. At Jiangsu Xingchang, these generational differences present a challenge in designing motivation strategies that cater to a broad spectrum of employee needs.

Research consistently shows that higher employee motivation leads to improved job performance, increased job satisfaction, and reduced turnover rates (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When employees are motivated, they tend to be more productive, creative, and committed to their work. Studies have demonstrated that motivated employees not only perform better but also contribute to a positive organizational culture (Judge & Klinger, 2007). In the context of Jiangsu Xingchang, motivated employees are likely to provide better client services, leading to enhanced client satisfaction and business growth.

Motivated employees are typically more engaged in their work, which increases their willingness to go beyond basic job requirements. Engagement fosters a sense of ownership and loyalty, making employees more likely to contribute to the organization’s long-term success (Harter et al., 2002). At Jiangsu Xingchang, ensuring high levels of motivation is crucial for maintaining productivity and meeting the demands of clients in the competitive HR services market.

3. Summary and Research Objectives

In the previous section, we explored key concepts and theoretical frameworks related to work motivation, with a particular focus on how these theories apply to the context of Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co. Ltd. The literature review began with an overview of foundational theories, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Goal-Setting Theory. These frameworks help explain both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive employee motivation, such as personal growth, recognition, financial rewards, and work conditions. Understanding these factors is essential for addressing the work motivation challenges faced by employees within the company.

The study is grounded in two foundational theories of motivation: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. These theories were chosen because they provide complementary and comprehensive frameworks for understanding employee motivation, particularly in the context of Jiangsu Xingchang.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs offers a holistic view of human motivation by categorizing needs into five levels: physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization. This framework is particularly relevant for Jiangsu Xingchang because it captures both basic needs (e.g., salary, job security) and higher-level needs (e.g., recognition, personal growth). In the Chinese cultural context, where collectivism and social harmony are highly valued, the need for belongingness (e.g., team cohesion, positive workplace relationships) often takes precedence over individual achievement. This aligns with the experiences of employees at Jiangsu Xingchang, who may prioritize harmonious workplace relationships and collective success over individual recognition.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory complements Maslow's framework by distinguishing between hygiene factors (e.g., salary, job security, work conditions) and motivators (e.g., recognition, achievement, career development). This distinction is critical for understanding why some factors prevent dissatisfaction (hygiene factors) while others actively drive motivation (motivators). In the competitive HR services industry, employees at Jiangsu Xingchang may prioritize hygiene factors such as fair compensation and job security, while also seeking motivators like opportunities for career advancement and recognition. This dual focus is essential for addressing the diverse motivational needs of employees in a high-pressure industry.

The Work Motivation Questionnaire (WMQ) used in this study aligns closely with these theoretical frameworks. The WMQ measures three key dimensions of motivation:

1. Intrinsic Motivation: Corresponds to Maslow's higher-level needs (esteem and self-actualization) and Herzberg's motivators (e.g., achievement, recognition).

2. Extrinsic Motivation: Corresponds to Maslow's basic needs (physiological and safety) and Herzberg's hygiene factors (e.g., salary, job security).
3. Reward-Based Motivation: Bridges both theories by addressing both financial rewards (hygiene factors) and recognition (motivators).

By framing the study within these theoretical models, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these motivational dimensions operate in the context of Jiangsu Xingchang, a Chinese HR service company. The integration of Maslow's and Herzberg's theories allows us to address both the immediate needs of employees (e.g., fair compensation, job security) and their long-term aspirations (e.g., career development, recognition). This dual focus is particularly important for Jiangsu Xingchang, where employees may face high workloads and pressure to meet client demands, making both hygiene factors and motivators critical for maintaining motivation.

3.1. Research Objectives

Based on the theoretical foundations and literature review, the following research objectives have been established for this study:

1. To examine the influence of demographic factors, such as gender and age, on employee motivation by assessing differences in intrinsic motivation, reward-based motivation, and extrinsic motivation across various groups within Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co. Ltd.
2. To investigate the impact of job-related factors, including years of service, weekly working hours, and career satisfaction, on different dimensions of motivation within Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co. Ltd.
3. To recommend strategies for improving work motivation, addressing both individual and organizational determinants.

These research objectives will guide the empirical investigation, ensuring that the study develops a comprehensive understanding of work motivation in Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co. Ltd. The findings will contribute to both theoretical knowledge and practical applications, providing the company with actionable insights to improve employee motivation and performance, thus supporting organizational success in the competitive Chinese labor market.

4. Methods

4.1. Design

This study used a non-experimental, cross-sectional research design. The design was chosen to investigate correlations between motivational factors and employee responses within a specific period. This design is well-suited for identifying trends and relationships without manipulating variables. The data were collected through a self-administered Work Motivation Questionnaire (WMQ) (Toro 1992) to measure different dimensions of work motivation. Statistical methods, such as regression analysis, were used to identify predictors of employee motivation, including intrinsic, extrinsic, and reward-based motivation. This approach allowed the study to explore motivational factors at Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co. Ltd.

4.2. Participants

The target population consisted of employees at Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co. Ltd. across various departments such as sales, administration, accounting, and public relations. The total workforce of the company was 105 employees. Convenience sampling was used to collect responses from 75 employees within the two-day survey period. This sampling method ensured quick access to participants, despite some limitations in generalizing the findings. The final sample consisted of 75 completed surveys, representing a majority of the company's workforce.

Table 4.1 summarizes the demographic and employment characteristics, including variables such as gender, age, education level, monthly income range, years of service in the company, job position, and weekly working hours.

Table 4.1 Demographic and Employment Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Employee sample size (75)	Statement	N	Percentage
Gender	Male	30	40.0
	Female	45	60.0
Age	Under 25	24	32.0
	25-35	35	46.7
	Over 36	16	21.4
Education Level	High School or below	10	13.3
	Associate Degree	12	16.0
	Bachelor's Degree	39	52.0
	Master's Degree or above	14	18.7
	Less than 1 year	18	24.0

Years of Service in the Company	1-3 years	20	26.7
	3-5 years	12	16.0
	More than 5 years	25	33.3
Weekly Working Hours	Less than 30 hours	12	16.0
	30-40 hours	26	34.7
	40-50 hours	29	38.7
	More than 50 hours	8	10.7
Monthly Income (range)	Less than 5000 RMB	19	25.3
	5000-10000 RMB	25	33.3
	More than 10001 RMB	31	41.3
Job Position	Sales	24	32.0
	Administration	12	16.0
	Other	39	52
Sat_ProspCOD	1. Dissatisfied	13	17.3
	2. Sometimes satisfied, sometimes dissatisfied	30	40.0
	3. Satisfied	32	42.7

Source: Author (2025)

The demographic data reveals that most employees are female (60%), with a significant portion of the workforce aged between 25 and 35 years (46.7%). A large percentage of employees hold a bachelor's degree (52%) and earn between 5000-10000 RMB monthly (33%). Notably, a substantial number of employees have been with the company for more than 5 years (33.3%). In terms of job roles, the largest group works in sales (32%). Regarding working hours, most employees work between 40-50 hours per week (38.7%).

4.3. Materials and Measures

The Work Motivation Questionnaire (WMQ) (Toro 1992) was the primary instrument used for data collection. It was designed to measure three key dimensions of employee motivation. Intrinsic Motivation which measures personal growth, self-fulfillment, and achievement (5 items, α = .92; e.g. I like facing challenges at work. “). Extrinsic Motivation refers to aspects as salary, job security and work conditions (5 items, α = .96; e.g. I like the working environment provided by the company. “). Finally, Reward-Based Motivation includes motivators as bonuses, promotions and financial recognition (5 items, α = .94; e.g. I am satisfied with the company's reward system. “). Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Additionally, the questionnaire collected demographic information such as age,

gender, education, job role, and years of service, allowing for a detailed analysis of motivational factors across various employee characteristics.

In this study, the questionnaire, consisting of eight items, was administered to a sample of 75 employees. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the scales significantly exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of .70, indicating strong internal consistency. This suggests that the items within each dimension were reliably measuring the same underlying construct. Consequently, the scores for the three motivational dimensions were calculated by averaging the responses to the items associated with each dimension.

4.4. Procedures

Data were collected using an online survey administered through the WeChat Mini Program (Wen Juan Xing), a platform that enabled convenient and efficient access for employees. The survey was open for a two-day period, during which participants could complete it at their own pace, ensuring flexibility and minimizing disruption to their work schedules. This method facilitated timely data collection while maintaining a user-friendly experience.

Prior to the full survey distribution, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of employees to assess the survey’s clarity, relevance, and ease of comprehension. This step was crucial in refining the questionnaire, ensuring that the wording of the questions was appropriate and that participants could easily understand and respond to them. Based on feedback from the pilot test, any necessary adjustments were made to enhance the survey's effectiveness.

Before participants engaged with the survey, they were presented with an informed consent form outlining the study's objectives, procedures, and their rights as participants. The consent form emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were free to withdraw at any point without facing any negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were also prioritized, with assurances that individual responses would be securely handled and used solely for research purposes.

Furthermore, the study protocol underwent rigorous ethical review and was approved by an ethics committee. This approval process ensured that the research complied with ethical standards, particularly in safeguarding the well-being of human participants. The committee's review addressed key ethical concerns, such as informed consent, the right to withdraw, and the protection of participants' personal information, thereby guaranteeing that the study adhered to established ethical guidelines for conducting research involving human subjects.

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive statistics and correlations for Work Motivation Dimensions

Table 5.1 presents the descriptive statistics for the three dimensions of work motivation: Intrinsic Motivation (IM), Extrinsic Motivation (EM), and Reward-Based Motivation (RA). The mean scores for IM, EM, and RA were 3.52, 3.57, and 3.37, respectively, with standard deviations of 0.91, 0.97, and 1.04. These results indicate moderate to high levels of motivation among employees at Jiangsu Xingchang.

Table 5.1 Descriptive Statistics for Work Motivation Dimensions

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error
IM	75	1.00	5.00	3.52	0.91	-.82	.28	1.02
RA	75	1.00	5.00	3.37	1.04	-.56	.28	0.06
EM	75	1.00	5.00	3.57	0.97	-.89	.28	1.00

Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

The normality of the distributions was assessed using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests (Table 5.2). Both tests showed significant deviations from normality for all three dimensions (all $p < .05$), suggesting non-normal distributions. This finding is supported by the skewness values (IM: -0.82; EM: -0.89; RA: -0.56), which indicate a concentration of scores toward the higher end of the scale.

Table 5.2 Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnova		Shapiro-Wilk	
	Statistic	Sig.	Statistic	Sig.
IM	.13	.005	.93	<.001
RA	.11	.017	.94	.002
EM	.14	<.001	.92	<.001

Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

Spearman's correlation analysis (Table 5.3) revealed strong positive relationships between all three motivation dimensions (all $p < .01$). The strongest correlation was observed between RA and EM ($r = .793$), followed by IM and EM ($r = .741$), and IM and RA ($r = .709$). These results suggest that employees who are intrinsically motivated also tend to be motivated by extrinsic rewards and vice versa.

Table 5.3 Correlations between work Motivation Dimensions

	IM	RA	EM

IM	Correlation Coefficient	-		
RA	Correlation Coefficient	.71**	-	
EM	Correlation Coefficient	.74**	.79**	-

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). **p < 0.01

Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

5.2. Gender Differences in Motivation

Table 5.4 presents the results of the Mann-Whitney U test examining gender differences across three motivation dimensions. The analysis reveals no statistically significant differences between male and female employees in intrinsic motivation (IM: U = 548.50, p = .168), reward-based motivation (RA: U = 635.00, p = .664), or extrinsic motivation (EM: U = 635.00, p = .644). While female employees showed slightly higher mean ranks across all dimensions (IM: 40.81 vs 33.78; RA: 38.89 vs 36.67; EM: 38.94 vs 36.58), these differences were not statistically significant (all p > .05). The results suggest that motivation levels at Jiangsu Xingchang are comparable across genders, with current strategies equally effective for both male and female employees.

Table 5.4 Gender Differences in Motivation

Dimension	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	Z	P(2-tailed)
IM	Male	30	33.78	548.50	-1.38	.168
	Female	45	40.81			
RA	Male	30	36.67	635.00	-0.44	.664
	Female	45	38.89			
EM	Male	30	36.58	635.00	-0.46	.644
	Female	45	38.94			

Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

5.3. Age Differences in Motivation

The analysis of age differences employed Kruskal-Wallis tests to examine variations across three age cohorts. As presented in Table 5.5, intrinsic motivation (IM) demonstrated statistically significant age-related differences (H = 7.00, df = 2, p = .030). Post-hoc comparisons in Table 5.6 revealed that employees aged 25-35 years (mean rank = 41.94) exhibited significantly stronger intrinsic motivation than their under-25 counterparts (U = 259.00, p = .012), while no significant disparity emerged between the 25-35 and over-36 age groups (U = 257.00, p = .638).

Regarding extrinsic motivation dimensions, Table 5.5 indicates neither reward-based motivation (RA: H = 2.67, p = .263) nor extrinsic motivation (EM: H = 1.60, p = .450) displayed significant variation across age groups. These patterns collectively suggest that while intrinsic motivation follows a developmental trajectory peaking during mid-career stages (25-35 years), extrinsic motivators maintain consistent importance throughout employees' career cycles. The findings align with career development theories emphasizing the maturation of internal drivers during professional growth phases.

Table 5.5 Age Differences in Motivation (Kruskal-Wallis Test)

	AgeCOD	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	p (2-tailed)
IM	Under 25	24	28.42	7.00	2	.030
	25-35	35	41.94			
	Over 36	16	43.75			
RA	Under 25	24	32.31	2.67	2	.263
	25-35	35	39.67			
	Over 36	16	42.88			
EM	Under 25	24	33.50	1.60	2	.450
	25-35	35	39.57			
	Over 36	16	41.31			

*Significant at p < .05 Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

Table 5.6 Post-hoc Comparisons for Intrinsic Motivation

Comparison	Mann-Whitney U	Z	p (2-tailed)
Under 25 vs 25-35	259.00	-2.50	0.012
25-35 vs Over 36	257.00	-0.47	0.638

Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

5.4. Education Level Differences in Motivation

As shown in Table 5.7, Kruskal-Wallis tests indicated no significant associations between educational attainment and any motivation dimension (p > .05). While observable rank variations existed among education groups, these differences were not statistically reliable. The null findings suggest that within this organizational context, employees' motivation levels are likely influenced by factors other than formal education background.

Table 5.7 Education Level Differences in Motivation

	Education Level	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	p (2-tailed)
IM	High School or below	10	37.35	4.51	3	.211
	Associate Degree	12	49.79			
	Bachelor's Degree	39	34.64			
	Master's Degree or above	14	37.71			
RA	High School or below	10	37.80	.79	3	.853
	Associate Degree	12	42.88			
	Bachelor's Degree	39	37.33			
	Master's Degree or above	14	35.82			
EM	High School or below	10	40.10	3.91	3	.271
	Associate Degree	12	47.63			
	Bachelor's Degree	39	36.91			
	Master's Degree or above	14	31.29			

Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

5.5. Years of Service Differences in Motivation

Analysis of service duration revealed distinct motivational patterns across employee tenure groups. As detailed in Table 5.8, reward-based motivation (RA) demonstrated significant variation by years of service (Kruskal-Wallis H = 10.66, df = 3, p = .014), while intrinsic (IM: H = 4.93, p = .177) and extrinsic motivation (EM: H = 7.40, p = .060) showed nonsignificant trends.

Post-hoc comparisons in Table 5.9 identified specific group differences:

- Employees with 3-5 years' service (mean rank = 49.75) exhibited significantly stronger reward motivation than those with <1 year (U = 87.50, p = .006)
- No significant differences emerged between other tenure groups (all p > .05)

These findings suggest a nonlinear relationship between organizational tenure and motivation, with reward sensitivity peaking during mid-tenure (3-5 years) before stabilizing.

Table 5.8 Years of Service Differences in Motivation

	Years of Service in the Company	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	p (2-tailed)
IM	Less than 1 year	18	31.19	4.93	3	.177
	1-3 years	20	39.98			

	3-5 years	12	48.5			
	More than 5 years	25	36.28			
	Less than 1 year	18	25.19			
RA	1-3 years	20	42.48	10.66	3	.014
	3-5 years	12	49.75			
	More than 5 years	25	38			
	Less than 1 year	18	30.11			
EM	1-3 years	20	46.7	7.40	3	.060
	3-5 years	12	43.88			
	More than 5 years	25	33.9			

Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

Table 5.9 Post-hoc Comparisons for Reward-Based Motivation

Comparison	U	Z	p (2-tailed)
<1 vs 3-5 years	87.5	-2.73	.006
1-3 vs 3-5 years	89.5	-1.2	.231
3-5 vs >5 years	109.5	-1.33	.185

Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

5.6. Monthly Income Differences in Motivation

Analysis of monthly income levels revealed no statistically significant associations with any motivation dimension, as shown in Table 5.10. The Kruskal-Wallis tests indicated uniformly nonsignificant results across intrinsic motivation (IM), reward-based motivation (RA), and extrinsic motivation (EM) (p > .05). This consistency suggests that within the studied compensation range, financial remuneration does not serve as a primary differentiator of work motivation levels among employees.

Table 5.10 Monthly Income Differences in Motivation

	IncomeCOD	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	p (2-tailed)
	Less than 5000 RMB	19	37.13			
IM	5000-10000 RMB	25	33.88	1.92	2	.383
	More than 10001 RMB	31	41.85			
RA	Less than 5000 RMB	19	32.03	3.254	2	.383

	5000-10000 RMB	25	36.32			
	More than 10001 RMB	31	43.02			
	Less than 5000 RMB	19	33.18			
EM	5000-10000 RMB	25	37.34	1.766	2	.383
	More than 10001 RMB	31	41.48			

Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

5.7. Job Position Differences in Motivation

As shown in Table 5.11, Kruskal-Wallis tests revealed no statistically significant differences across job positions for any motivation dimension (all $p > .05$). This consistent pattern suggests that work motivation levels are comparable among employees holding different organizational roles.

Table 5.11 Job Position Differences in Motivation

	JobPositionCOD	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	p (2-tailed)
	Sales	24	40.1			
IM	Administration	12	38.25	0.39	2	.825
	Other	39	36.63			
	Sales	24	43.48			
RA	Administration	12	37.54	2.40	2	.300
	Other	39	34.77			
	Sales	24	37.6			
EM	Administration	12	42.88	0.75	2	.688
	Other	39	36.74			

Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

5.8. Weekly Working Hours Differences in Motivation

The analysis of working hours revealed differential effects on motivation dimensions. As shown in Table 5.12, extrinsic motivation (EM) showed statistically significant variation across working hour groups ($p < .05$), while intrinsic (IM) and reward-based (RA) motivations remained stable across all working hour categories ($ps > .05$).

Post-hoc analysis (Table 5.13) identified that employees working moderate hours (30-40 weekly hours) demonstrated significantly stronger extrinsic motivation compared to both shorter and longer work schedules. This pattern suggests the existence of an optimal working

hour range for maintaining extrinsic motivation levels, while other motivation types appear less sensitive to work duration variations.

Table 5.12 Weekly Working Hours Differences in Motivation

	Weekly Working Hours	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	p (2-tailed)
IM	Less than 30 hours	12	29.88	6.04	3	.110
	30-40 hours	26	44.9			
	40-50 hours	29	33.64			
	More than 50 hours	8	43.56			
RA	Less than 30 hours	12	35.67	5.34	3	.148
	30-40 hours	26	45.85			
	40-50 hours	29	33.45			
	More than 50 hours	8	32.5			
EM	Less than 30 hours	12	28.79	8.82	3	.032
	30-40 hours	26	47.29			
	40-50 hours	29	32.71			
	More than 50 hours	8	40.81			

Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

Table 5.13 Post-hoc Comparisons for Extrinsic Motivation

Comparison	U	Z	p (2-tailed)
<30 vs 30-40 hours	74	-2.6	.009
30-40 vs 40-50 hours	230.5	-2.49	.013
40-50 vs >50 hours	93	-0.85	.393

Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

5.9. Satisfaction with Career Prospects Differences in Motivation

The analysis revealed significant differences in motivation levels based on career prospect satisfaction (all *ps* < .001). As shown in Tables 5.14-5.15, employees with full satisfaction demonstrated substantially higher motivation than partially satisfied colleagues ($p < .001$), while no significant differences emerged between dissatisfied and partially satisfied groups ($p > .05$). These findings suggest a threshold effect where only complete career prospect satisfaction yields meaningful motivational benefits.

Table 5.14 Satisfaction Differences (Kruskal-Wallis Test)

	Sat_ProspCOD	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	p (2-tailed)
IM	1	13	28.08	42.46	2	<.001
	2	30	22.32			
	3	32	56.73			
RA	1	13	22.54	30.30	2	<.001
	2	30	27.82			
	3	32	53.83			
EM	1	13	25.38	26.98	2	<.001
	2	30	27.43			
	3	32	53.03			

Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

Sat_ProspCOD: 1=Dissatisfied; 2=Sometimes satisfied; 3=Satisfied

Table 5.15 Post-hoc Pairwise Comparisons

Comparison	Dimension	*U*	*Z*	*p*-value
1vs2	IM	174	-0.56	0.574
	RA	139	-1.5	0.135
	EM	171	-0.64	0.523
2vs3	IM	30.5	-6.39	<.001*
	RA	118.5	-5.13	<.001*
	EM	139	-4.85	<.001*

Source: data calculated by SPSS (2025)

Comparison: 1=Dissatisfied; 2=Sometimes satisfied; 3=Satisfied

6. Proposed Strategies for Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co., Ltd.

The findings of this study reveal distinct patterns in employee motivation across different demographic and job-related groups at Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co., Ltd. These insights, grounded in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, provide a robust foundation for developing targeted strategies tailored to the unique cultural and organizational context of the company. By integrating the empirical findings with theoretical insights, Jiangsu Xingchang can adopt strategies that not only reflect employee preferences but also align with proven motivational frameworks, thereby enhancing both satisfaction and performance.

Employees with 3–5 years of service exhibited the highest levels of reward-based motivation, suggesting that mid-career professionals are particularly responsive to structured incentives. This aligns with Herzberg's emphasis on recognition and achievement as key motivators. According to Herzberg (1959), reward systems that acknowledge effort and provide opportunities for advancement can significantly enhance job satisfaction. To leverage this, Jiangsu Xingchang could implement phased reward programs, such as skill-based bonuses or project-based incentives, for employees in this tenure group. For those with more than five years of service, mentorship roles or leadership development opportunities could serve as motivators, addressing higher-level needs for esteem and self-actualization as outlined by Maslow (1943).

The study identified that employees aged 25–35 reported the highest intrinsic motivation, reflecting their career-building aspirations and alignment with Maslow's self-actualization needs. This age group typically seeks challenging work, recognition, and opportunities for growth—factors identified as motivators by Herzberg and as indicators of self-actualization by Maslow. Younger employees (under 25), however, may prioritize job security and foundational needs, corresponding with Maslow’s safety and belongingness levels. To address these differences, the company could offer challenging projects and autonomy to mid-career employees while providing structured training and clear career pathways for younger staff. Older employees (over 36) may value stability and work-life balance, suggesting the need for flexible work arrangements and roles that leverage their experience. These findings reflect the career stage theory of motivation and are consistent with previous research by Ryan and Deci (2000), who emphasize the importance of aligning intrinsic motivators with employees’ developmental phases.

Employees working 30–40 hours per week demonstrated the highest levels of extrinsic motivation, while those exceeding 50 hours showed significant declines. This underscores Herzberg's distinction between motivators and hygiene factors, where excessive workload acts as a dissatisfier. High workloads can undermine basic physiological and safety needs as

described by Maslow (1943), leading to burnout and decreased morale. Jiangsu Xingchang should establish clear workload policies, including reasonable hour limits and flexible scheduling, to create a supportive environment that enables other motivational strategies to thrive. These findings are also consistent with recent studies emphasizing the role of work-life integration in sustaining motivation (Kossek, Valcour, & Lirio, 2014).

Career prospect satisfaction emerged as the strongest predictor of motivation across all groups. This highlights the importance of transparent promotion pathways and regular development discussions, which resonate with both Maslow's higher-level needs and Herzberg's motivators. Implementing a formal career development framework, coupled with recognition programs that align with Chinese cultural values such as team-based achievements and public acknowledgment, could significantly enhance motivation. Research by Chen et al. (2018) supports this approach, showing that career growth opportunities and recognition are more valued than financial incentives alone, especially among younger Chinese employees.

In the Chinese context, where hierarchy and collectivism play a central role, motivational strategies must be carefully designed. For example, recognition should flow through formal channels to respect hierarchical norms, while team-based rewards can reinforce collectivist values. The concept of “face” (mianzi) also necessitates a balanced approach to public acknowledgment, ensuring that employees feel honored without undue social pressure. Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory (2011) and Nevis (1983) both highlight how motivational strategies must be aligned with the cultural emphasis on social harmony, power distance, and group affiliation. Guanxi, or interpersonal relationships, is another important social driver of motivation in Chinese workplaces (Chen & Chen, 2004), and strategies that support interpersonal connection and social recognition are more likely to be successful.

The proposed strategies collectively address the diverse needs of Jiangsu Xingchang’s workforce, integrating intrinsic and extrinsic motivators while respecting cultural nuances. By tailoring interventions to employee tenure, age, and workload preferences, the company can create a holistic motivation framework that drives performance and retention. Regular feedback mechanisms should be implemented to assess the effectiveness of these strategies and make iterative improvements.

The study’s findings align with Maslow’s and Herzberg’s theories, demonstrating how foundational needs (e.g., job security) and growth-oriented motivators (e.g., career development) operate in tandem within a Chinese HR services firm. The cultural emphasis on collectivism and hierarchy further shapes these dynamics, reinforcing the need for strategies that balance individual and group incentives. By grounding these recommendations in both theory and local context, Jiangsu Xingchang can foster a motivated workforce capable of sustaining long-term organizational success.

This integrated approach not only addresses the immediate challenges identified in the study but also positions the company to adapt to evolving employee expectations in China's competitive labor market. Future research could explore the longitudinal impact of these strategies and their applicability across different regions and industries.

7. Conclusions

This study explored the key factors influencing employee motivation at Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co., Ltd., a mid-sized HR services firm operating in China's dynamic and highly competitive labor market. The findings provide valuable insights into the motivational drivers of Chinese employees, shaped by cultural values such as collectivism, long-term career orientation, and the importance of hierarchical recognition. These cultural elements were examined in relation to major motivational theories, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory.

The analysis of survey data from 75 employees revealed several critical predictors of motivation, reflecting both universal psychological principles and culturally specific dynamics. Employees aged 25–35 exhibited higher levels of intrinsic motivation compared to their younger colleagues, supporting Maslow's concept of self-actualization and Herzberg's motivators such as achievement and growth. In contrast, younger employees under 25 prioritized security and clear guidance, consistent with Maslow's lower-order needs. Mid-tenure employees (3–5 years) showed greater responsiveness to financial incentives and reward systems, highlighting the role of Herzberg's extrinsic hygiene factors such as pay and benefits in preventing dissatisfaction and promoting short-term engagement.

The study also found that extrinsic motivation peaked among employees working 30–40 hours per week, suggesting the presence of an optimal workload threshold beyond which motivation begins to decline. This result is consistent with Herzberg's assertion that poor working conditions—such as excessive working hours—serve as dissatisfiers, and with recent literature on the negative motivational impacts of overwork in Chinese organizations (Kossek et al., 2014). In contrast, intrinsic and reward-based motivation were less sensitive to workload, reinforcing the notion that intrinsic motivators require more sustained organizational support, such as developmental opportunities and meaningful work.

The most significant finding was that satisfaction with career prospects emerged as the strongest predictor across all motivational dimensions. This finding affirms both Maslow's emphasis on esteem and self-actualization and Herzberg's focus on advancement and recognition as core drivers of sustained employee engagement. The data clearly indicated that employees who felt satisfied with their long-term career potential were more motivated on all fronts—intrinsically, extrinsically, and through reward-based factors.

These findings underscore the importance of designing HR strategies that are both theoretically grounded and culturally sensitive. Traditional Western approaches, while useful, must be adapted to the Chinese context where concepts such as guanxi, mianzi, and collectivist loyalty significantly influence workplace motivation. As supported by Hofstede's and Nevis's cultural frameworks, Chinese employees are more likely to respond positively to

motivation strategies that reinforce social belonging, public recognition, and harmony within hierarchical structures.

In conclusion, this research supports the applicability of Maslow's and Herzberg's models in Chinese organizational contexts, while also highlighting the necessity of cultural adaptation. By aligning strategic HR practices with both motivational theory and cultural values, Jiangsu Xingchang can develop more effective programs for engagement, retention, and performance. The study contributes to the broader literature by offering empirical validation of these frameworks within a Chinese HR services firm and opens avenues for future research on cross-cultural adaptations of motivation theory. The proposed strategies are not only practical for Jiangsu Xingchang but may serve as a reference for similar firms seeking to enhance employee motivation in the competitive Chinese labor market.

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Appendices

Appendix A – [Questionnaire]

Employee Motivation Survey

Dear Employees:

Thank you for participating in this survey, which aims to understand and enhance the motivation levels of employees at Jiangsu Xingchang Human Resources Service Co., Ltd. Your feedback is very important to us, so please answer the following questions carefully. Your responses will positively impact the future development of the company and the well-being of employees. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and all data will be kept confidential and used only for academic research purposes.

Personal Information

Employee Basic Information		
Question No.	**Variable**	**Statement**
1	Gender	Male
		Female
		Other
2	Age	Under 25
		25-35
		Over 36
3	Education Level	High School or below
		Associate Degree
		Bachelor's Degree
		Master's Degree or above
4	Monthly Income (range)	Less than 5000 RMB
		5000-10000 RMB
		More than 10001 RMB
5	Years of Service in the Company	Less than 1 year
		1-3 years

		3-5 years
		More than 5 years
6	Job Position	Sales
		Administration
		Other
7	Weekly Working Hours	Less than 30 hours
		30-40 hours
		40-50 hours
		More than 50 hours
8	Are you satisfied with the current development prospects of the company?	Dissatisfied
		Sometimes satisfied, sometimes dissatisfied
		Satisfied