
**ARE THE MOTIVATIONAL PREFERENCES OF EMPLOYEES WORKING
IN SMALL ENTERPRISES IN SLOVAKIA CHANGING IN TIME?***

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Abstract. Small and medium-sized enterprises constitute a significant part of Slovakia's economy with the greatest potential for growth and the impact on economic stabilization and balanced development of the regions. The employee motivation has a major impact on the performance of employees working in these businesses. Research focused on the exploration of employee motivational preferences was conducted in all regions of Slovakia in 2017 and 2018. The sociological survey method was used through anonymous questionnaires. Overall, 2,646 respondents participated in the research. Based on the research results, it can be stated, that motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia are changing over time. These are primarily motivational factors relating to the social needs and financial motivational factors.

Keywords: employee motivation; small and medium-sized enterprises; Slovakia

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JEL Classifications: J24, M12, O15

1. Introduction and theoretical background

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Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) constitute a significant part of Slovakia's economy with the greatest potential for growth and the impact on economic stabilization and balanced development of the regions (Marková et al. 2016; Lesáková et al. 2017; Mura et al. 2018). In Slovakia, SMEs present 99.9% of the total number of business entities. They offer a number of benefits that large companies are not usually able to provide. The most important are their flexibility, quick response to changes in the environment, ease of decision making, and high market focus (Altinay et al. 2016; Němec et al. 2017; Prange et al. 2017; Sertic et al. 2018; Žul'ová et al. 2018). They also provide employment opportunities for almost three quarters of the active workforce and contribute more than half to creating added value. Thanks to their rapid adaptation to the changing environment and customer needs, small businesses are the carriers of many small innovations (Georgiadis et al. 2012; Jonec et al. 2013; Havierniková et al. 2017; Carreras et al. 2018; Kovalova et al. 2018; Mura & Mazák, 2018). In 2017, the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector developed under conditions of increasing performance of the Slovak economy. Almost all main indicators characterizing the development of SMEs recorded a positive development. SMEs recorded increased employment (+ 1.4%), added value (+ 8.9%), or profit (+ 7.5%), while value added growth in the SME sector was the most significant within the last seven years. However, in the foreign trade area, improvement has not been achieved in the SME sector (Slovak Business Agency 2018).

The performance of these businesses is affected by a number of specific processes (Lesáková 2012; Bielikova et al. 2014; Diaz-Fernandez et al. 2015; Poliacikova 2015; Salyova et al. 2015; Straková et al. 2016; Malá et al. 2017; Musa et al. 2017; Ližbetinová 2017; Urbancova et al. 2017; Aydın et al. 2018; Matraeva et al. 2018; Schouten, 2019). One of them is employee motivation, which is considered a powerful tool to strengthen and trigger the employee's desire to work (Dobre 2013; Cseh Papp et. al., 2018). It is the willingness of the individual to make a special effort to achieve the stated goal and at the same time the willingness of the employee to spend the necessary time to achieve this goal. Weihrich and Koontz (1993) perceive motivation as a cycle where, initially, there is a sense of need that creates wishes. They stimulate the creation of activities that are aimed at fulfilling the desired wishes, which again creates space for the emergence of new needs.

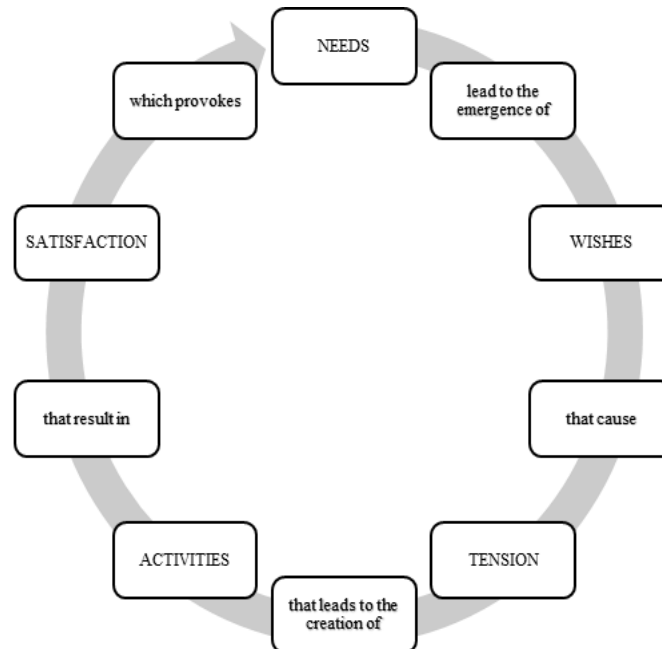


Fig.1. Chain: Need – Desire – Satisfaction

Source: Koontz et al. 1993

Denhardt et al. (2013) are of the opinion that if there is a sufficient number of employees in the company who are willing to work more than expected, then they will achieve higher performance. At the same time, employees are willing to work as long as they know their work performance will be appreciated. According to recent studies (Grossbart 2006; Campbell et al. 2007; Christianson et al. 2008; Eisenberger et al. 2009; Van Herck et al. 2010; Xu et al. 2017), one of the most used motivational factors that is used in practice is money. In addition, the research carried out by Al-Belushi et al. (2017) was also focused on the importance of monetary rewarding as a motivational factor. The results show that, in the opinion of 76.1% of respondents, the financial stimulus is important. It also follows from the cited research that 73.9% of the respondents stated that the wage affects their motivation. Most respondents agree that attractive pay increases their motivation to work. Research has further shown that monetary motivation has a direct impact on the willingness to achieve higher performance. This is confirmed by the research of Kuranchie-Mensah et al. (2016), Carr et al. (2017), Haar et al. (2018), Mészáros (2018) and Chang et al. (2018), which suggest that wages can have a positive impact on an employee's internal motivation by promoting autonomy and self-reliance. In many cases, however, managers make the most common mistake. They mistakenly think that every employee is motivated only by money.

According to Herzberg (1987), the basis of successful motivation is praise, which should come at a reasonable distance from the praised performance, always in an adequate manner that is in compliance with the attributes of praise. In order to praise in an effective way, it should not be repeated as it degrades its value. The importance of praise is confirmed by the research by Al Tareq et al. (2017). Authors say that praise will strengthen the position and recognition of the employee in the enterprise, which results in an increasing motivation to work. The same findings are presented by Belohlavek et al. (2003), based on the research, the awareness of success encourages and delivers a new taste and thrill. The importance of feedback on a fair assessment of employee performance is highlighted by Kozjek and Ovsenika (2017). Research results also show that feedback (without monetary reward) has a significant motivational effect on the employee and leads to long-term motivation. According to Al-Belushi et al. (2017), the growth of employees towards professional development leads to increasing performance and motivation of employees. Current research studies (Kropivšek et al. 2011; Fakhrutdinova et al. 2013; Damij et al. 2015; Kamasheva et al. 2015; Minarova 2015; Ližbetinová et al. 2016; Myint et al. 2016; Vetráková et al. 2016; Wang 2016; Pingping 2017; Bogdanović et al. 2018; Borisov et al. 2018) have shown that there is a number of factors that motivate employees. At the same time, however, the set of motivational factors is changing in time, this happens due to knowledge, age, education, experience, environment and so on (Armstrong 2007). In this context, it is the task of managers to choose such an m program that appropriately ensures maximum performance of employees.

2. Materials and methods

Research focused on the exploration of employee motivational preferences was conducted in all regions of Slovakia in 2017 and 2018. The sociological survey method through anonymous questionnaires was used. Using the random selection method, questionnaires were distributed to employees working in small enterprises.

European Commission Recommendation No. 2003/361/EC defines a small enterprise as an enterprise which employs fewer than 50 persons and whose annual turnover and /or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 10 million.

Total of 1,227 respondents participated in the research in 2017. In 2018, a total of 1,419 respondents participated in the research. A more detailed structure of the research sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Structure of the research sample

Data to identify respondents	2017		2018	
	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
Gender				
Male	705	57.46	827	58.28
Female	522	42.54	592	41.72
Age				
Up to 30 years	268	21.84	237	16.70
31-40 years	432	35.21	435	30.66
41-50 years	366	29.83	423	29.81
51 years and more	161	13.12	324	22.83
Completed education				
Primary	33	2.69	21	1.48
Lower secondary	212	17.28	177	12.47
Upper secondary	634	51.67	686	48.34
Higher	348	28.36	535	37.71
Seniority				
Less than 1 year	114	9.29	81	5.71
1-3 years	338	27.55	288	20.30
4-6 years	300	24.45	336	23.68
7-9 years	227	18.50	252	17.76
10 years and more	248	20.21	462	32.55

Source: Own research

Respondents used a five-point rating scale (5 = very important, 4 = important, 3 = medium important, 2 = less important, 1 = unimportant). 30 motivational factors shown in Table 2 were evaluated. For reasons of not influencing the respondents, motivational factors were arranged alphabetically.

Table 2. The analyzed motivational factors

No.	Motivational factors	No.	Motivational factors
1.	Atmosphere in the workplace	16.	Prestige
2.	Good work team	17.	Supervisor's approach
3.	Fringe benefits	18.	Individual decision-making
4.	Physical effort at work	19.	Selfactualization
5.	Job security	20.	Social benefits
6.	Communication in the workplace	21.	Fair appraisal system
7.	Name of the company	22.	Stress
8.	Opportunity to apply one's own ability	23.	Mental effort
9.	Workload and type of work	24.	Mission of the company
10.	Information about performance result	25.	Region's development
11.	Working hours	26.	Personal growth
12.	Work environment	27.	Relation to the environment
13.	Job performance	28.	Free time
14.	Career advancement	29.	Recognition
15.	Competences	30.	Base salary

Source: Own research

Due to the scope and independence of the sample sets, we tested the zero hypothesis on average equivalence values of motivational preferences according to time (year 2017 and 2018) using the dual choice t-test for independent selections. Basic statistical characteristics were calculated for each motivational factor. These include information about the properties of the basic researched sets using fewer numeric data. In addition to the simple comparison of the values of the basic characteristics, due to the selective character of the obtained data, the conformity of the arithmetic means was tested. In the Student's t-test, we examined the significance of differences in the arithmetic mean of the individual motivational factors in the monitored enterprises so that it was excluded at the chosen level of significance α that the observed differences between the arithmetic mean were not due solely to the representation error. Each motivational factor was summarily described by the basic characteristics of the level and variability of the quantitative features – the arithmetic mean \bar{x} , the standard deviation s_x and the coefficient of variation. Consequently, the results were compared. Testing was performed at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. Then a working hypothesis was defined:

- WH₁ – We assume that motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia do not change over time.

As a test criterion, a random variable t was used which had Student's t distribution in the form:

- if $\mu_{12} = \mu_{22}$; X₁ and X₂ are independent

$$t = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{n_1 \cdot s_1^2 + n_2 \cdot s_2^2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2} \cdot \frac{n_1 + n_2}{n_1 \cdot n_2}}}$$

- if $\mu_{12} \neq \mu_{22}$; X₁ and X₂ are independent

$$t = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{s_1^2}{n_1 - 1} + \frac{s_2^2}{n_2 - 1}}}$$

Subsequently, using cluster analysis, Euclidean distance (Triola 1989; Mason et al. 1990; Scheer et al. 2014) the similar groups of motivational factors preferred by employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia are identified. The Euclidean distance is given:

$$(x_1, x_2) = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_{1i} - x_{2i})^2}$$

where:

- x_{1i} – the value of the i-th variable on the object 1
- x_{2i} – the value of the i-th variable on the object 2
- n – number of variables.

Subsequently, the second working hypothesis was defined:

- WH₂ – We assume that the groups of motivational factors preferred by employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia do not change over time.

3. Results and discussion

When comparing the level of motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in 2017 and 2018, we can see changes in the order of the average values of the analyzed motivational factors (Table 3). Overall, there is a decrease in the level of employee motivational preferences in 2018 (Figure 2).

Table 3. Ranking of the importance of motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018

No.	Motivational factors	2017	Motivational factors	2018
1.	Base salary	4.59	Good work team	4.51
2.	Atmosphere in the workplace	4.55	Atmosphere in the workplace	4.50
3.	Good work team	4.53	Supervisor's approach	4.48
4.	Fringe benefits	4.45	Fringe benefits	4.47
5.	Supervisor's approach	4.43	Fair appraisal system	4.47
6.	Job security	4.40	Job security	4.39
7.	Fair appraisal system	4.39	Communication in the workplace	4.38
8.	Communication in the workplace	4.35	Social benefits	4.30
9.	Working hours	4.29	Working hours	4.29
10.	Work environment	4.26	Work environment	4.26
11.	Social benefits	4.24	Job performance	4.19
12.	Job performance	4.22	Workload and type of work	4.18
13.	Free time	4.20	Career advancement	4.14
14.	Recognition	4.19	Selfactualization	4.13
15.	Workload and type of work	4.15	Opportunity to apply one's own ability	4.11
16.	Information about performance result	4.11	Individual decision-making	4.11
17.	Stress	4.11	Information about performance result	4.09
18.	Opportunity to apply one's own ability	4.10	Stress	4.05
19.	Name of the company	4.09	Competences	3.98
20.	Career advancement	4.09	Physical effort at work	3.92
21.	Personal growth	4.07	Name of the company	3.91
22.	Individual decision-making	4.05	Prestige	3.81
23.	Selfactualization	4.05	Relation to the environment	3.55
24.	Relation to the environment	4.04	Free time	3.22
25.	Mental effort	4.03	Recognition	3.18
26.	Prestige	3.99	Mission of the company	3.17
27.	Mission of the company	3.99	Personal growth	3.15
28.	Competences	3.97	Base salary	3.09
29.	Region's development	3.94	Mental effort	3.01
30.	Physical effort at work	3.93	Region's development	2.95

Source: Own research

Table 4 further defines the frequency of the analyzed samples, the average values of the motivational preferences in 2017 and 2018, the standard deviation and the p-level. Statistically significant differences are highlighted in bold. Significant changes in motivational preferences ($p < 0.05$) occur with factors such as name of the company, prestige, selfactualization, fair appraisal system, mental effort, mission of the company, region's development, personal growth, relation to the environment, free time, recognition and base salary. Figures 3 to 14 illustrate significantly different motivational preferences.

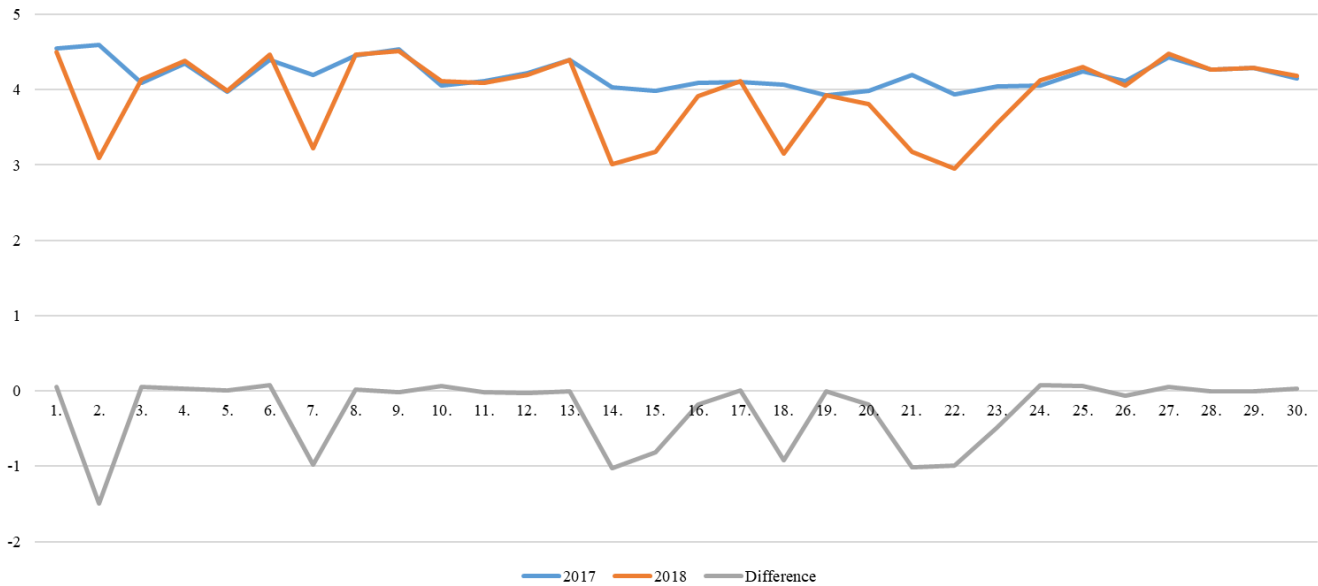


Fig.2. Comparison of motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018

Source: Own research

Table 4. Testing of motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018

Motivational factors	N 2018	N 2017	\bar{x} 2018	\bar{x} 2017	s_x 2018	s_x 2017	t	d_f	p-level
Atmosphere in the workplace	1419	1227	4.50	4.55	0.72	0.67	1.68	2644	0.093
Good work team	1419	1227	4.51	4.53	0.73	0.68	0.85	2644	0.397
Fringe benefits	1419	1227	4.47	4.45	0.75	0.75	-0.57	2644	0.571
Physical effort at work	1419	1227	3.92	3.93	0.92	0.98	0.47	2644	0.641
Job security	1419	1227	4.39	4.40	0.81	0.78	0.39	2644	0.699
Communication in the workplace	1419	1227	4.38	4.35	0.81	0.76	-1.04	2644	0.300
Name of the company	1419	1227	3.91	4.09	1.11	0.93	4.55	2644	0.000
Opportunity to apply one's own ability	1419	1227	4.11	4.10	0.85	0.89	-0.27	2644	0.786
Workload and type of work	1419	1227	4.18	4.15	0.84	0.83	-0.72	2644	0.471
Information about performance result	1419	1227	4.09	4.11	0.92	0.89	0.66	2644	0.509
Working hours	1419	1227	4.29	4.29	0.86	0.82	-0.08	2644	0.933
Work environment	1419	1227	4.26	4.26	0.85	0.77	0.22	2644	0.826
Job performance	1419	1227	4.19	4.22	0.82	0.83	0.86	2644	0.389
Career advancement	1419	1227	4.14	4.09	0.84	0.88	-1.41	2644	0.159
Competences	1419	1227	3.98	3.97	1.00	0.91	-0.35	2644	0.726
Prestige	1419	1227	3.81	3.99	1.06	0.88	4.68	2644	0.000
Supervisor's approach	1419	1227	4.48	4.43	0.82	0.77	-1.82	2644	0.069
Individual decision-making	1419	1227	4.11	4.05	0.89	0.85	-1.78	2644	0.075
Selfactualization	1419	1227	4.13	4.05	0.87	0.86	-2.47	2644	0.014
Social benefits	1419	1227	4.30	4.24	0.80	0.84	-1.61	2644	0.108
Fair appraisal system	1419	1227	4.47	4.39	0.75	0.80	-2.60	2644	0.009
Stress	1419	1227	4.05	4.11	0.95	0.88	1.65	2644	0.099
Mental effort	1419	1227	3.01	4.03	1.08	0.90	26.28	2644	0.000
Mission of the company	1419	1227	3.17	3.99	0.98	0.93	21.75	2644	0.000
Region's development	1419	1227	2.95	3.94	1.04	0.99	25.10	2644	0.000

Personal growth	1419	1227	3.15	4.07	1.11	0.92	23.00	2644	0.000
Relation to the environment	1419	1227	3.55	4.04	1.13	1.00	11.74	2644	0.000
Free time	1419	1227	3.22	4.20	1.12	0.87	24.98	2644	0.000
Recognition	1419	1227	3.18	4.19	1.06	0.86	26.52	2644	0.000
Base salary	1419	1227	3.09	4.59	1.17	0.72	39.11	2644	0.000

Note: Statistically significant motivational factors are highlighted in bold.

Source: Own research

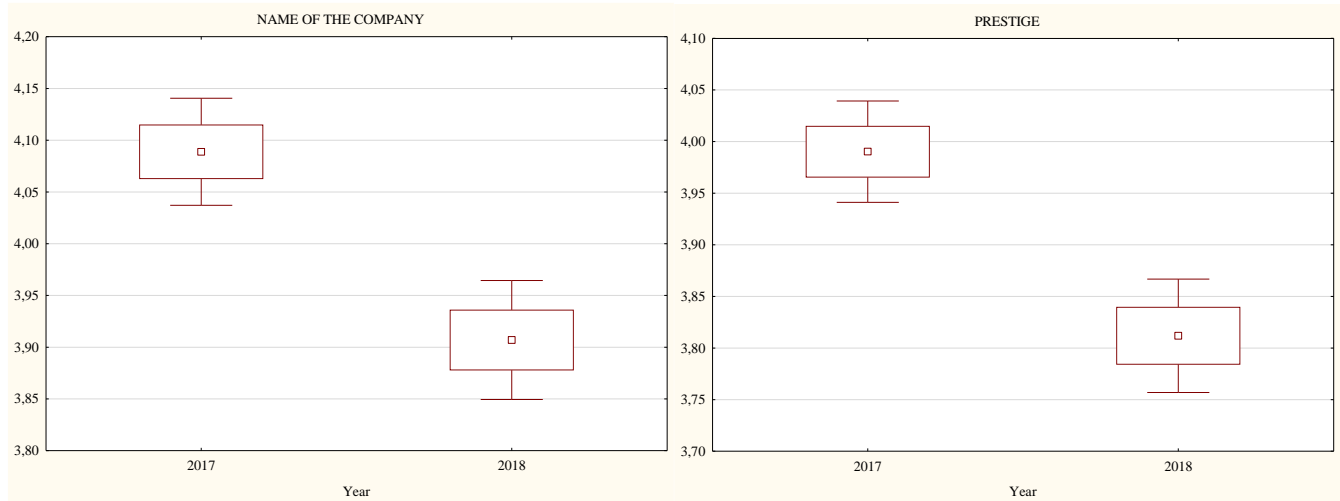


Fig.3. Motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018 – name of the company

Source: Own research

Fig.4. Motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018 – prestige

Source: Own research

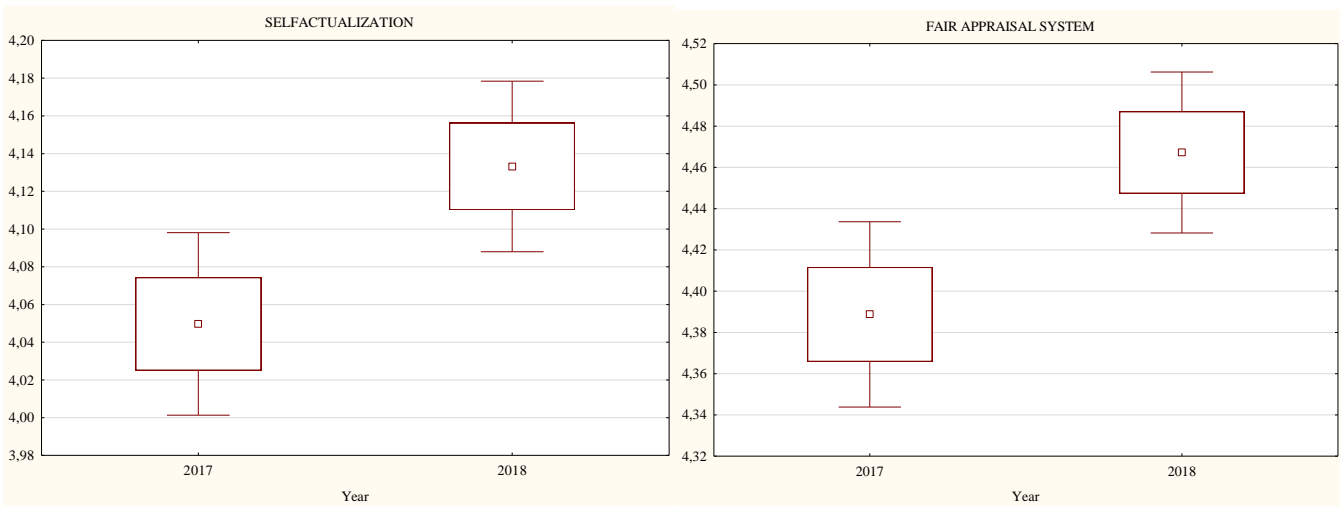


Fig.5. Motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018 – selfactualization

Fig.6. Motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018 – fair appraisal system

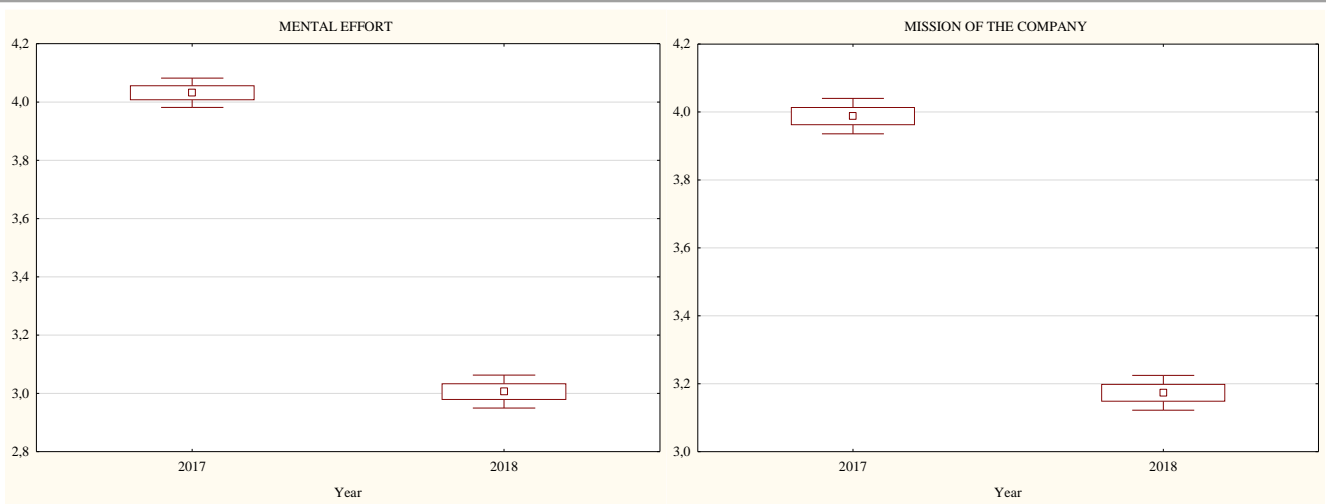


Fig.7. Motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018 – mental effort

Source: Own research

Fig.8. Motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018 – mission of the company

Source: Own research

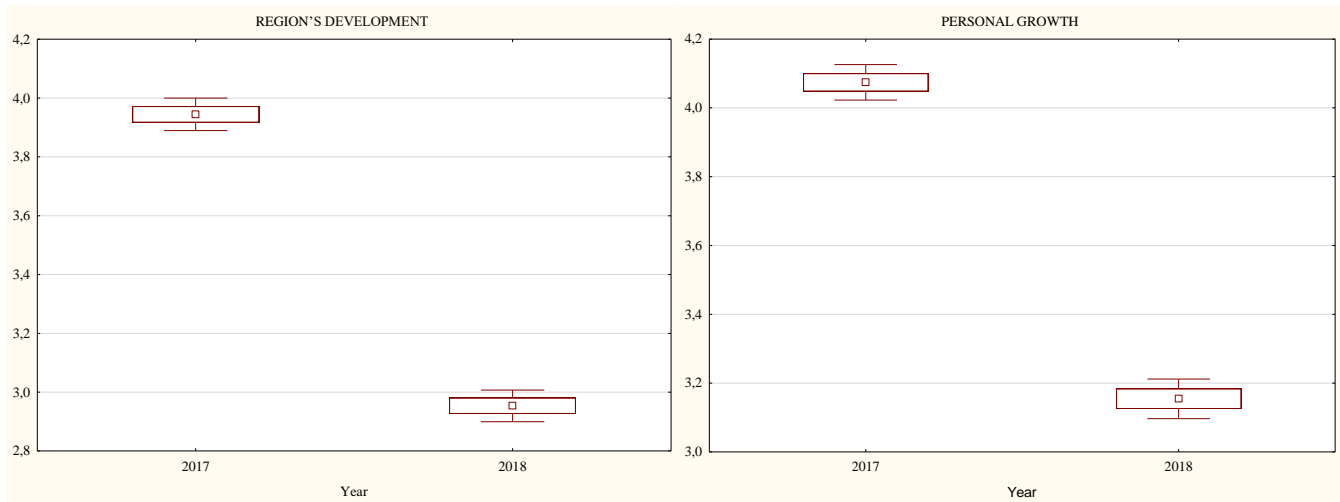


Fig.9. Motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018 – region's development

Source: Own research

Fig.10. Motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018 – personal growth

Source: Own research

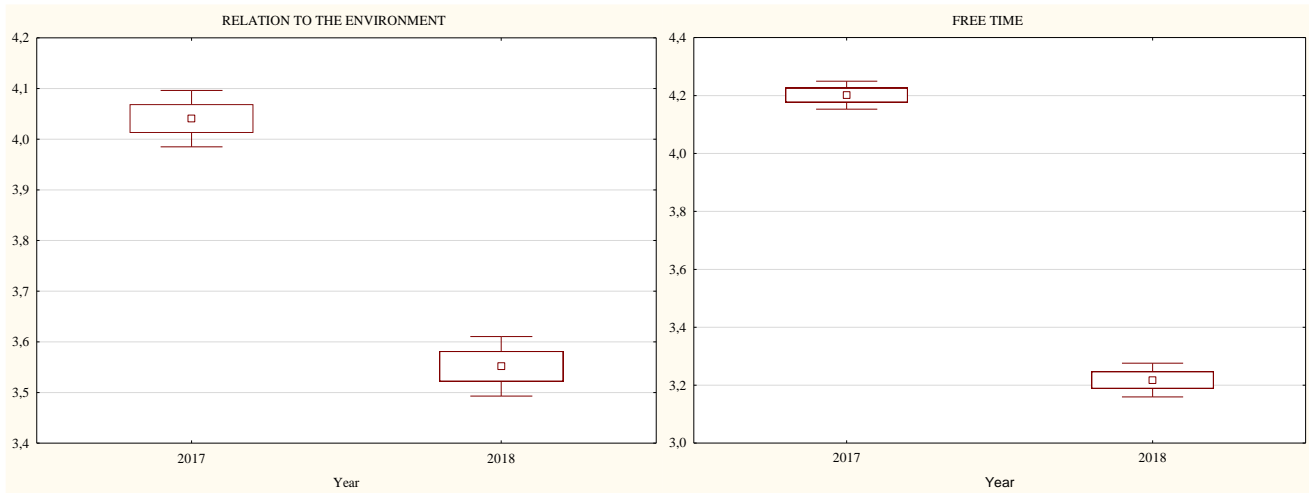


Fig.11. Motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018 – relation to the environment

Source: Own research

Fig.12. Motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018 – free time

Source: Own research

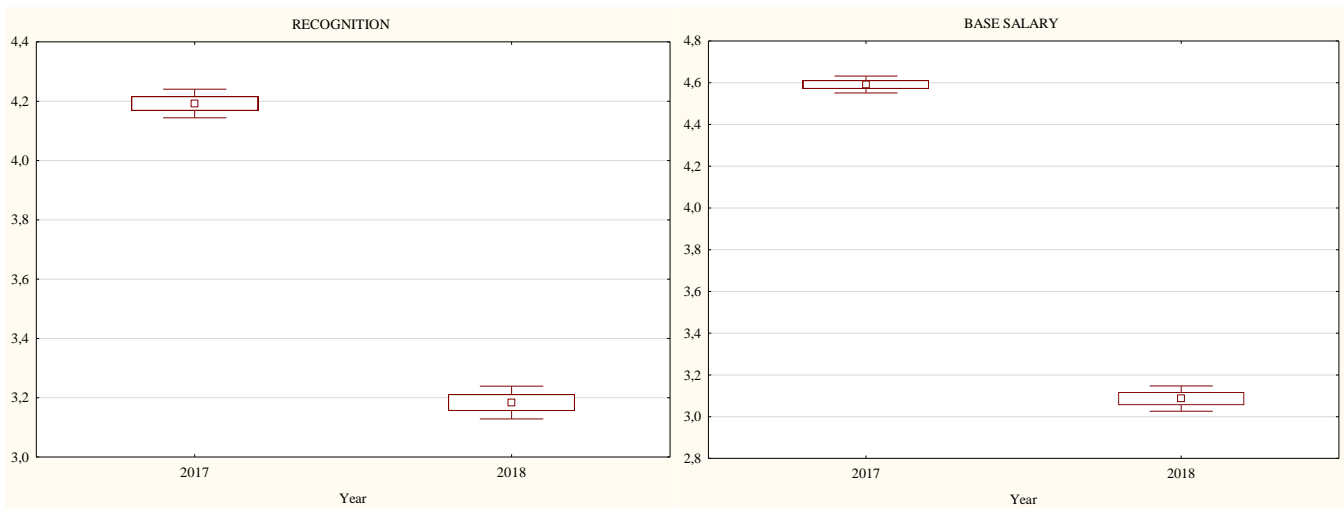


Fig.13. Motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018 – recognition

Source: Own research

Fig.14. Motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018 – base salary

Source: Own research

Based on the research results, it can be said that motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia change over time (within 1 year). This holds particularly true in the motivational preferences related to the social needs (mission of the company, name of the company, region’s development, relation to the environment, free time). Considering the financial motivational preferences, the different factors are base salary and the fair appraisal system. In the motivational preferences related to the work there is a difference in the motivational factor mental effort. Based on the results, it can be said that our working hypothesis (WH₁) has not been confirmed, so that motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia are changing over time. Our findings are consistent with the results of Armstrong (2007) research, which

also stated that the set of motivational factors changes in time. The author cited identified several factors influencing the motivational preferences. It is knowledge, age, education, experience, surroundings, and so on.

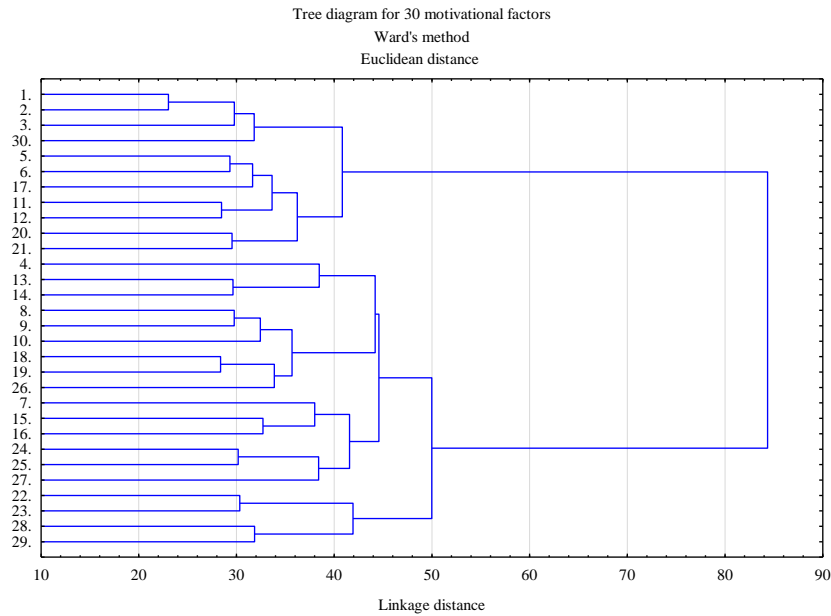


Fig.15. Cluster analysis for motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017

Source: Own research

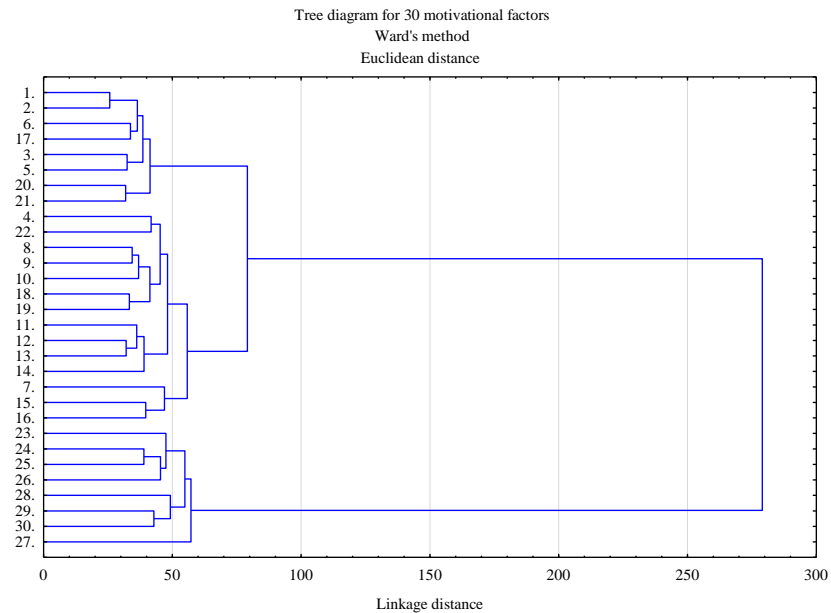


Fig.16. Cluster analysis for motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2018

Source: Own research

Table 5. Distinguishing the groups of motivational factors preferred by employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in 2017 and 2018

2017			2018				
No.	Motivational factors	relating to	No.	Motivational factors	relating to		
Group 1	1.	Atmosphere in the workplace	mutual relationship	Group 1	1.	Atmosphere in the workplace	mutual relationship
	2.	Good work team	mutual relationship		2.	Good work team	mutual relationship
	3.	Fringe benefits	finance		6.	Communication in the workplace	mutual relationship
	30.	Base salary	finance		17.	Supervisor's approach	mutual relationship
	5.	Job security	work condition		3.	Fringe benefits	finance
	6.	Communication in the workplace	mutual relationship		5.	Job security	work condition
	17.	Supervisor's approach	mutual relationship		20.	Social benefits	social needs
	11.	Working hours	work condition		21.	Fair appraisal system	finance
	12.	Work environment	work condition		4.	Physical effort at work	work condition
	20.	Social benefits	social needs		22.	Stress	work condition
	21.	Fair appraisal system	finance		8.	Opportunity to apply one's own ability	career aspiration
Group 2	4.	Physical effort at work	work condition	Group 2	9.	Workload and type of work	work condition
	13.	Job performance	work condition		10.	Information about performance result	work condition
	14.	Career advancement	career aspiration		18.	Individual decision-making	career aspiration
	8.	Opportunity to apply one's own ability	career aspiration		19.	Selfactualization	career aspiration
	9.	Workload and type of work	work condition		11.	Working hours	work condition
	10.	Information about performance result	work condition		12.	Work environment	work condition
	18.	Individual decision-making	career aspiration		13.	Job performance	work condition
	19.	Selfactualization	career aspiration		14.	Career advancement	career aspiration
Group 3	26.	Personal growth	career aspiration	Group 3	7.	Name of the company	social needs
	7.	Name of the company	social needs		15.	Competences	career aspiration
	15.	Competences	career aspiration		16.	Prestige	career aspiration
	16.	Prestige	career aspiration		23.	Mental effort	work condition
	24.	Mission of the company	social needs		24.	Mission of the company	social needs
	25.	Region's development	social needs		25.	Region's development	social needs
	27.	Relation to the environment	social needs		26.	Personal growth	career aspiration
	22.	Stress	work condition		28.	Free time	social needs
	23.	Mental effort	work condition		29.	Recognition	career aspiration
	28.	Free time	social needs		30.	Base salary	finance
29.	Recognition	career aspiration	27.	Relation to the environment	social needs		

Source: Own research

Subsequently, using cluster analysis, the similar groups of motivational preferences of employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia in individual years were identified. Results are presented in Figure 15 and Figure 16. Following the results presented in Figure 15, Figure 16 and Table 5, it can be stated that in the two years analysed, it was possible to distinguish three similar groups of motivational preferences. The first group include motivational factors related to the mutual relationship and finance. The second group include motivational factors related to the work condition and career aspiration. The last group include motivational factors with the prevalence to social needs. Based on the research results, working hypothesis (WH₂) has been confirmed, so the groups of motivational factors preferred by employees working in small enterprises in Slovakia do not change over time.

Appropriately choosing motivational factors that lead employees to performance is the core role of managers because employee performance is reflected on the overall performance of an enterprise. Research by Hersey (2013) confirms the fact that if employees are motivated, they use their skills to 80 to 90%. In the study by Kozjek and Ovsenik (2017), the authors confirmed the importance of positive motivation of employees in the enterprise. Their research has shown that motivation by management is a very important factor and concludes that the manager can influence employee motivation up to 46.7%. Jeffrey and Shaffer (2007) dealt with the importance of motivational preferences. Research was conducted in India in 131 businesses in various areas of the private and public sectors. Businesses spent 1 billion USD to motivate employees, expecting job production to grow by 7%

per year. The study revealed that in enterprises where motivational programs were introduced, production and productivity increased by an average of 41-61%, with the exception of businesses experiencing a severe economic recession. The study confirmed the importance and effectiveness of motivation in the context of the growing performance of the company.

Conclusions

In today's economic conditions, it is essential for management to devote their attention to investing in human resources to increase employee performance (Fumasoli 2014; Hollenbeck et al. 2015; Mura, 2017; Alola et al. 2018; Černevičiūtė et al. 2018; Moskalenko 2018). The management of the company is most involved in the management of work performance, then it is the middle management level, and, last but not least, the employees themselves follow. However, human resources are also indispensable in companies, and where management has understood their role, they are both the initiator and implementer of all performance enhancing tools that guarantee the competitiveness and economic success of the organization. Previous research (Demir et al. 2015; Mura et al. 2015; Ibidunni et al. 2016; Ližbetin et al. 2017; Sardak et al. 2017; Vydrová, 2018; Korauš et al. 2018; Sánchez-Sellero et al. 2018) have confirmed that overall enterprise performance is affected by employees and their motivation. Therefore, in this context, managers of Slovak small enterprises, when creating motivational programs, have to accept the fact that, due to the time, changes in motivation preferences of employees are taking place. If managers accept this change, they can encourage employees to perform better.

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