

# **Enhancing Motivation in Public Organization**

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**Abstract:** Motivation in the workplace is an essential concern for leaders seeking to improve organizational performance. This paper investigates the various aspects of motivation, and, based on different theories and empirical research, it focuses on public organizations and effective methods for increasing motivation. Locke and Latham's Goal-Setting Theory emphasizes the importance of setting effective goals to improve performance, while Public Service Motivation (PSM) the importance of aligning employee values with organizational goals to foster commitment to public service. Motivation in public organizations is influenced by organizational culture, job design, performance management systems, recognition and rewards, and leadership styles. Transformational leadership emerges as a comprehensive approach to motivational enhancement that includes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, personalized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Best practices stress the importance of hiring people with high PSM, creating supportive work environments, encouraging direct interactions with recipients, and developing leaders who embody organizational values. Implementing motivation strategies improves performance and productivity and fosters a sense of purpose and collective impact within public organizations, which benefits both the organization and the communities it serves.

## Introduction

Motivation is one of the most commonly discussed topics in today's workplace. Leaders in a broad range of organizational settings work constantly to find ways to motivate their employees, intending to increase performance and productivity. Numerous studies delve into the multifaceted components that influence employee motivation, resulting in a better understanding of its dynamics.

Motivation can be defined as the force that drives people to take action. In other words, motivation provides a reason to put effort into a certain behavior. According to Timm and Peterson (2000), motivation comes from an individual needs, wants, and desires. In fact, Navandhi et al. (2013) define motivation as the psychological aspect that explains why people tend towards certain rewards. Indeed, motivation is considered one of the most important aspects to have in the workplace, because it helps employees to accomplish the organization's goals (Olulube et al., 2013). In particular, work motivation is described as "a combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that stimulate work behaviors and control its direction and time span" (Ahmed et al., 2023; Rusu & Avasilcai, 2014).

The definitions provided above show the importance of motivation in the workplace ecosystem. It becomes clear that investing in the development of employee motivation is crucial. By doing so, organizations clear the way for the effective achievement of set goals, fostering commitment among staff members throughout the process. This not only increases employee approval but also leads to overall organizational growth and success in the long term.

The objective of this paper is to delve into a comprehensive analysis of motivation in public organizations, intending to identify effective methods to enhance it. It meticulously investigates

various motivation theories and reviews existing literature to identify key factors influencing the concept's efficacy and potential for improvement. Furthermore, in addition to the theoretical examination, it seeks to provide practical examples and best practices collected from research and real-world scenarios. By combining theory and actionable insights, the text not only deepens understanding but also provides organizations with easily implementable strategies for fostering motivation and promoting long-term success.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Goal-Setting Theory**

Most of the time when people think of theoretical academics they think of physics or philosophy; however, there are theories for every realm of academia. In the study of work motivation, one of the current prevailing theories is the Goal-Setting Theory, by Edwin A. Locke and Gary P. Latham (1990). Knowing how to set an effective goal helps the employee to direct attention and action, mobilize and extend the duration of energy and effort, and develop new strategies to achieve the goal.

This theory claims that in order for a goal to be truly effective, it must have specific features. Ryan's influential research on intention-driven behavior (1947, 1970, and 1954) served as the foundation for Locke's studies. The foundation of goal-setting theory is built on three core propositions that have served as the foundation for its development: (1) *Specific high goals lead to higher performance than no goals or even an abstract goal as "do your best"*; (2) *given goal commitment, the higher the goal the higher the performance*; (3) *variables such as monetary*

*incentives, participation in decision making, and feedback or knowledge of results affect performance only to the extent that they lead to the setting of and commitment to specific high goals* (Latham, 2012).

Locke makes some recommendations for an effective goal-setting process, including specificity, attainability, ownership, feedback, evaluation, deadlines, learning orientation, and group participation. To begin, a goal must be specific, serving as a clear target for which to aim while also allowing for progress analysis. Second, it should be challenging but attainable, encouraging people to work hard while staying within their abilities in order not to feel overwhelmed. Importantly, self-selected goals are necessary to foster high levels of commitment, as externally assigned goals frequently result in lower fervor. Participation in the goal-setting process is therefore essential. Furthermore, goals should be accompanied by feedback, which allows individuals to evaluate their performance and identify areas for improvement. The knowledge that goals will be used to evaluate performance makes them more effective. Setting deadlines further increases motivation by instilling a sense of pressure and serving as a time-management tool. This results in greater effort as deadlines approach. Additionally, promoting a learning goal orientation encourages the acquisition of new skills by overcoming challenging scenarios. Finally, involving employees in group goal-setting increases satisfaction and productivity by instilling a sense of shared purpose and mutual support among coworkers. Thus, by incorporating these elements into the goal-setting process, organizations can increase effectiveness while also promoting individual and collective success.

Bradley E. Wright (2007) conducted a detailed examination of how goal-setting theory is related to different types of rewards for employees, particularly those that influence motivation, such as

public service motivation. Notably, Wright discovered that goal-setting theory supports fundamental aspects of the last-mentioned characteristic. As described by the theory above, Wright emphasizes that employees are more likely to commit to performance goals when they believe they are achievable and will produce significant results, acting as an intrinsic reward. Furthermore, he underlined the significance of organizational goal commitment in increasing employees' dedication to these types of goals. In a different article, Wright (2001) explains that this concept is particularly important for public organizations since they usually try to employ people with a high personal connection and commitment to the organizational goals.

Moreover, as opposed to a goal-setting theory concept, Wright (2007) cited a number of studies that contradicted the claim that assigned goals outperform participative set goals. According to these studies, both types of goal setting are equally effective, as long as the goals have a meaningful purpose for the employee (Locke, Erez, Latham, 1988).

On the other hand, extrinsic rewards have the same potential to increase motivation and act as performance incentives, especially when they are directly related to performance and employees recognize the link between the reward and the goal. However, if this link is uncertain the efficacy of this method may be reduced (Lawler, 1994).

### **Public Service Motivation**

Service Public Motivation (PSM) has emerged as an important concept in recent years, attracting a lot of attention in research. Perry and Wise (1990) define PSM as “an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions”, that is an individual’s

tendency to respond to motivations primarily centered in public contests, indicating a willingness to work for the benefit of the community, often within the public sector.

Numerous studies have focused on the question of whether PSM is a state or a trait, with the goal of providing insights into how leaders can effectively manage it in the workplace. According to research, PSM cannot be precisely classified into either the state or trait categories. While it shows only minor fluctuations over time, it is not completely unalterable, indicating a dynamic nature (Christensen et al., 2017). Furthermore, PSM has been demonstrated to have a modest correlation with Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs), which include activities other than formal job requirements such as volunteering, assisting colleagues, and making suggestions for improvement (Paul, 2021). This relationship clearly emphasizes the important role of PSM in positively affecting workplace dynamics and employee behavior. PSM has implications beyond individual motivation, including organizational effectiveness and its impact on society. Understanding and implementing PSM can help to cultivate a workforce more aligned with public service ethics, improving service delivery and fostering community engagement. As a result, recognizing and fostering PSM emerges as a critical endeavor for leaders and policymakers seeking to improve organizational performance and societal outcomes.

## **Factors Influencing Motivation in Public Organizations**

### **Organizational Culture**

To provide effective advice on how to increase employee motivation in public organizations, it is critical to thoroughly examine the factors that influence it. Among these factors, organizational

culture stands out particularly. Organizational culture refers to the principles through which an organization interacts with its workers and clients. It includes both explicit and implicit guidelines for employee behavior, as well as strongly rooted beliefs, values, and principles shared by the entire organization. Understanding organizational culture is critical because it influences employee behavior, decision-making processes, and overall performance. Furthermore, it has a significant impact on organizational strategies and outcomes. Organizational culture has a direct impact on employees' perceptions of their tasks, thus influencing motivation, commitment, and, ultimately, job satisfaction. There are two main types of organizational culture: strong and weak. A strong organizational culture is defined by a deep belief in organizational values and coordinated attempts to disseminate these values among employees, to guarantee broad acceptance and alignment. In contrast, a weak organizational culture puts less emphasis on shared values, instead relying primarily on rules and regulations to regulate behavior (Thokozani, Maseko, 2017).

### **Job Design and Characteristics**

Job design involves the process of identifying employees' roles, responsibilities, work methods, and organizational resources (CIPD, 2023). The Job Characteristics Model, developed by Oldham and Hackman in 1975 (see Figure 1), became pivotal in connecting job design to work motivation and is still the primary framework in current job design research. This model identifies five job characteristics that directly influence employee motivation: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and job feedback. The diversity of tasks within a role is referred to as skill variety; task identity refers to task's definition of its range of action; task significance refers to the



task's impact on people; autonomy denotes employee independence in task execution; and job feedback refers to receiving performance information. The Job Characteristics Model is intended to prevent and reduce employee disengagement and boredom, thereby maintaining organizational productivity (Lucas, AIHR.com).

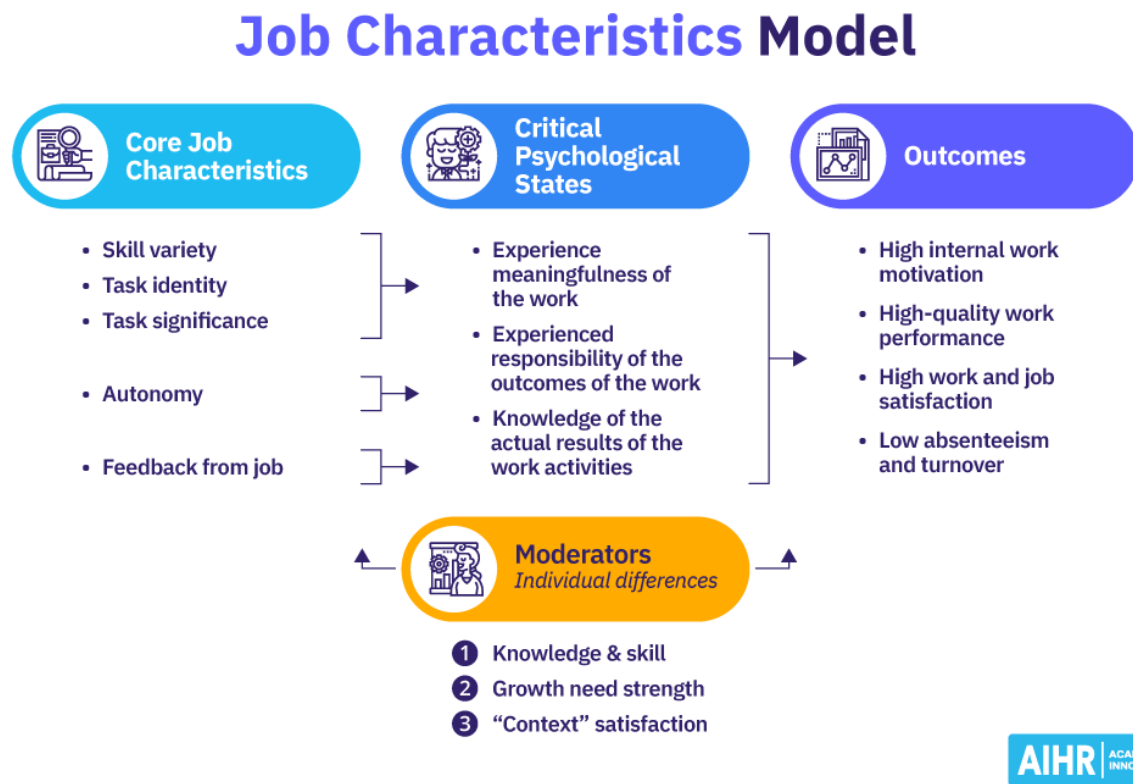


Figure 1. Job Characteristics Model (AIHR.com).

### Performance Management System

A strong performance management system carefully monitors and records employees' job performance, ensuring regular and precise evaluations while aligning them with the company's overall goals. This system supports managers in setting clear performance expectations, encouraging personal accountability, and promoting self-evaluation among employees.

Performance managers perform a variety of tasks, including continuous progress reviews, real-time feedback service, ongoing communication, employee training for performance improvement and goal setting, and recognition and reward distribution (Chellapa, 2023). The link between this system and work motivation relies on goal-setting theory and the importance of feedback. Managers play an important role in instructing staff members to set effective goals and provide valuable feedback to improve their performance (Latham et al., 2008).

An important component that affects the performance management system is the rewards system, which influences both managers and employees. For managers, it serves as an encouragement to ensure proper performance evaluation and adequate reward allocation based on performance, thereby increasing employee motivation. Employees, on the other hand, are motivated to excel and receive valuable feedback that will help them customize their work toward achieving rewards that are important to them (Lawler, 2003).

### **Recognition and Rewards System**

Recognition and rewards are two distinct but essential components of job motivation. Recognition entails special acknowledgment or consideration for a valuable action, which honors the individual who performed it. A reward, on the other hand, is a recompense given in exchange for such an action. Rewards differ from recognition in that they establish an instrumental aspect. This differentiation between the two systems is critical because it highlights the different underlying motivational mechanisms at work. According to Hansen et al. (2002), “understanding employee motivation is really a matter of understanding the nature and the differences of the motivational subsystems”. In general, rewards serve an administrative and maintenance function,

reinforcing behaviors that are consistent with rules or standards, in contrast to recognition that serves a strategic role, especially for "intrinsically motivated behaviors such as inventiveness, commitment, and initiative (ibid.).

### **Leadership Styles and Behaviors**

The final, but most important, factor influencing motivation is leadership style, which has received extensive research attention in the past years. The leader is responsible for directing both the work and the workforce within the organization, and therefore in charge of creating an optimal working environment in order to maximize organizational efficiency. Lawal (1993) defines leadership as influencing others to confidently achieve established goals. Leadership behavior refers to the ways leaders carry out their responsibilities, interact with employees, and apply influence over them. Various leadership styles have been examined, also taking into account the specific requirements of various organizational contexts. Notable leadership styles include transactional leadership and transformational leadership. Transactional leadership prioritizes planning, organizing, controlling, and problem-solving, with an emphasis on results. In contrast, transformational leadership focuses on vision creation, strategy development, employee engagement, inspiration, motivation, trust-building, courage, and action initiation (Burbach, 2023). The Full Range Leadership Model, built from a century of leadership research, combines transactional and transformational leadership, positioning them on a continuum (see Figure 2). Transactional leadership ranges from laissez-faire, the most inactive and generally ineffective type of leadership, to management-by-exception and contingent rewards. Motivation rises with the appearance of transformational leadership styles, which comprehend individualized

consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (Barbuto, Cummins-Brown, 2007).

According to Igbaekemen (2014), effective leadership requires nine qualities: dedication, communication, human relations, crisis management, endurance, administrative skills, decision-making, and expert opinion.

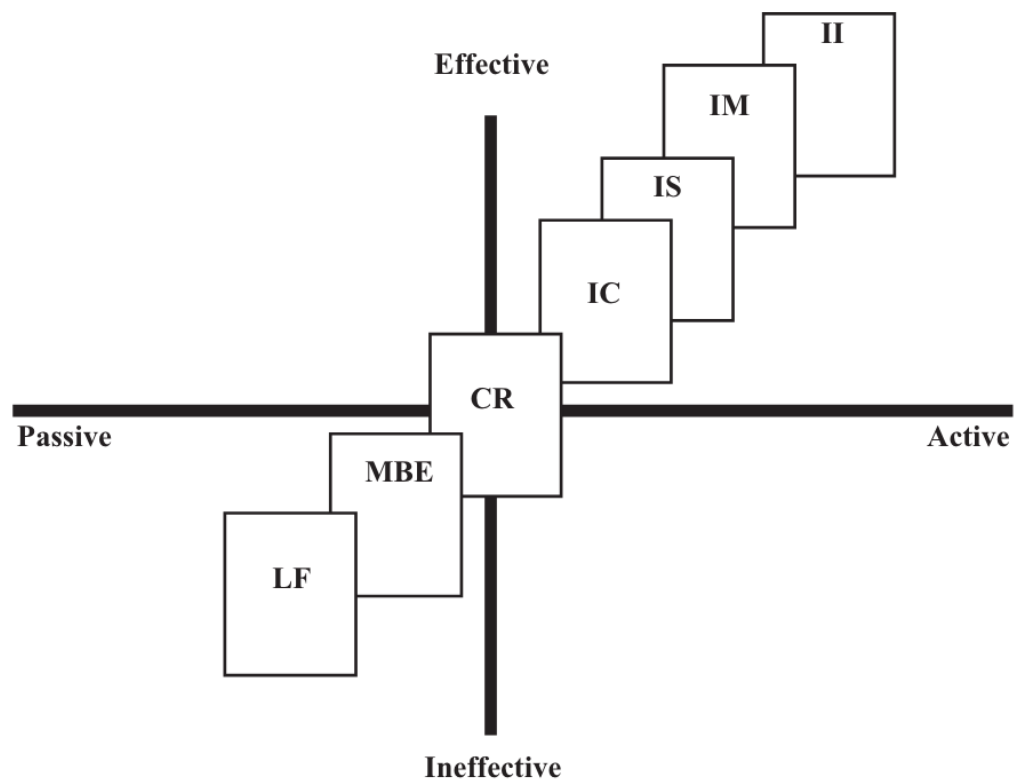


Figure 2. Full Range Leadership Model (Barbuto, Commins-Brown, 2007).

## **Strategies to Enhance Motivation in Public Organizations**

### **Transformational Leadership**

As previously stated, promoting high levels of motivation in public organizations is crucial, because the success and productivity of their services directly impact the community. Based on the theoretical notions above, a specific leadership type or theory encompassing all the characteristics described above is Transformational Leadership. It focuses on fostering organizational change, and the leader who embraces this type of guidance has four major characteristics: energy and determination, vision, provision for challenge and encouragement for subordinates, and an appropriate degree of risk-taking (Van Wart, 2013).

Roberts (1985) states that “the collective action that transforming leadership generates empowers those who participate in the process. There is hope, there is optimism, and there is energy. In essence, transforming leadership is a leadership that facilitates the redefinition of a people’s mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment, and the restructuring of their system for goal accomplishment.”. This specific type of leadership aims to push employees beyond their immediate self-interest by exploiting its four features: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation.

### **Idealized Influence**

According to Bass (1996a), leaders who exhibit idealized influence become examples of admiration among their followers, often serving as role models and strengthening followers' pride, loyalty, and confidence. Such leaders are confident in the organization's mission and vision, constantly showing confidence and a clear sense of purpose, which fosters employee trust. They

instill confidence in the capacity of their employees to overcome obstacles, acting as examples for others to emulate. These leaders choose societal benefit over personal gain by demonstrating integrity, inclusivity, and a firm commitment to a higher purpose (Burbach, 2023). This trait not only fosters greater commitment among employees, who see their leader's enthusiastic dedication to the organization's mission, but it also builds a foundation of trust, which improves leadership effectiveness and employees' job satisfaction.

### **Inspirational Motivation**

When the leader embodies inspirational motivation, their behavior is defined as “articulating in simple ways an appealing vision and providing meaning and a sense of purpose in what needs to be done” (Bass, 1996a). This quality is intrinsically connected to the previous one, as they come together to create a leader who not only pictures a desirable and optimistic future but also explains how to get there, convincing followers of their ability to go over their expectations. Such a leader demonstrates a constant commitment to the organization's goal, setting high-performance standards while displaying determination and confidence (Bass, 1999). Followers tend to gravitate toward this type of leadership, attracted by its ability to uplift and inspire them to perform at their best, particularly those who lack intrinsic motivation (Burbach, 2023). Inspirational motivation has the potential to increase job satisfaction by instilling confidence in employees, encouraging greater commitment to their roles, and creating a more positive work environment.

### **Individualized Consideration**

Bass (1996a) defines individualized consideration as a leader who "diagnoses and elevates the needs of each follower." Subsequent works by the psychologist enlarge on this characteristic, emphasizing the leader's focus on understanding and nurturing their team members' needs for growth. Such leaders provide individualized support and guidance, delegating assignments and responsibilities as opportunities for growth (Bass, 1999). The leader who masters this characteristic acknowledges and appreciates individual differences, offering autonomy and encouraging self-development through ongoing opportunities for growth. They perform coaching and mentoring, identifying areas for improvement and providing compassionate support (Burbach, 2023). This approach improves leadership effectiveness by leveraging personalized relationships and understanding what drives each employee to succeed. It also increases job satisfaction by instilling a sense of connection and significance in employees, making them feel heard and appreciated at work.

### **Intellectual Stimulation**

The last characteristic defines a leader as someone who "stimulates followers to view the world from new perspectives, questions old assumptions, beliefs, and paradigms" (Bass, 1996a). In other words, these leaders encourage employees to express innovation and creativity (Bass, 1999). This behavior includes questioning established assumptions, building an open mindset for evolution, and viewing unexpected circumstances as opportunities for growth. Leaders encourage a variety of perspectives and ideas, including unconventional ones (Burbach, 2023). This trait is extremely important because it increases job satisfaction among employees by making

them feel accepted, heard, and valued for their contributions. Allowing individuals to express their authentic selves strengthens their commitment to organizational goals, increasing motivation to put up effort and give their contribution.

### **Best Practices**

Christensen et al. (2017), in their article, provide five strategies to improve employee motivation in public organizations by leveraging methods to increase public service motivation.

To begin, they encourage prioritizing the attraction and selection of individuals who are highly motivated to serve the public. By doing so, organizations may maximize the benefits of this motivation, improving both employee performance and the organization's goal accomplishment.

Aligning employee values with organizational values promotes a sense of ownership and increases the probability of committed effort. Second, the authors suggest creating a supportive work environment through the implementation of interventions that increase public service motivation while avoiding actions that may undermine it. This approach strengthens the alignment of organizational goals and employee values, thereby improving the overall relationship. Third, Christensen et al. advocate for direct relationships between employees and recipients of their services. Facilitating immediate interaction allows for valuable feedback from beneficiaries, allowing employees to see firsthand the impact of their efforts. This strategy is linked to the concepts of job meaning, job design, and organizational characteristics. Fourth, they recommend giving new employees formal and informal opportunities to get in touch with organizational values and expectations. Onboarding programs and mentoring arrangements help new hires socialize and embrace the organization's culture. Finally, the authors promote the



development of leaders who embody and communicate public service values through the organization's mission and vision. This guidance emphasizes the principles of transformational leadership, highlighting the value of supportive, inspirational leaders who set high standards. Such leaders are associated with increased public service motivation and better organizational outcomes.

Bradley E. Wright's (2007) noteworthy article on work motivation identifies six key factors that can be manipulated to increase employee motivation: mission valence, extrinsic rewards, job importance, job difficulty, self-efficacy, and job specificity. Wright claims that emphasizing mission valence and job importance can significantly increase employee motivation by showing how their efforts benefit society. These concepts are consistent with the characteristics of inspirational motivation and idealized influence defined by transformational leadership. Incorporating principles from the section on idealized influence can effectively cultivate a strong commitment to organizational goals and values, serving as exemplars and inspiring others to work together around common goals. The second factor addresses extrinsic rewards, which include compensation, promotions, and recognition. As previously stated, employees are more likely to work harder to meet performance goals when they believe they will receive significant rewards. Goal-setting theory accurately describes the significance and benefits of job difficulty and job specificity, which are inextricably linked to the concept of intellectual stimulation. Creating an environment that encourages innovation and creativity involves finding a balance between job difficulty and specificity. Finally, Wright indicates self-efficacy as the most important factor, which is influenced by the previous two, job difficulty and job specificity. Employees' confidence in their ability to plan and execute the steps required has a significant impact on the direction and

persistence of their behavior. Thus, applying an individualized approach (individualized consideration) when dealing with employees is critical, developing approaches to each individual's needs and maximizing the potential of every relationship.

## **Conclusions**

The importance of work motivation in today's workplace is widely recognized, and research reveals an intricate network of factors influencing employee engagement and performance. As previously discussed, motivation is intrinsically connected to people's desires, needs, and the organizational context. Locke and Latham's Goal-Setting Theory offers valuable information about setting specific, challenging goals to improve employee performance and motivation. In a similar way and to achieve the same outcome, Public Service Motivation emphasizes the importance of aligning employee goals and values with organizational missions.

Five important variables influence motivation in public organizations: organizational culture, job design, performance management systems, recognition and rewards, and leadership styles. By controlling these factors, leaders and organizations can create a work environment that promotes employee engagement and satisfaction, thereby increasing organizational productivity and success.

Transformational leadership appears as an integrated approach to increasing motivation. Leaders who embody idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation have the potential to help the employees and the organization achieving outstanding outcomes. Cultivating a culture of motivation and

commitment requires establishing a supportive work environment, aligning values, promoting direct interactions with recipients, and fostering leaders who embody organizational values. Furthermore, incorporating best practices from experts such as Christensen et al. (2017) and Wright (2007) may increase employee motivation.

To summarize, implementing motivation in public organizations is critical not only for improving performance and productivity, but also for cultivating a sense of purpose, satisfaction, and collective impact. By adopting the theories and best practices defined above, organizations and their leaders can create environments in which employees are motivated to excel, resulting in positive outcomes for both the organization and the communities they serve.

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