

Gender differences of public service employees' work motivation

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Abstract: This article addresses the issue of gender differences in labour motivation within public sector institutions in Israel. Labour motivation has been examined from various perspectives, and key factors contributing to these differences have been identified. The motivational structures of men and women working in different areas of the public sector were analysed using the 12-factor motivation theory developed by Sh. Ritchie and P. Martin. A statistical analysis of 756 participants revealed significant differences in motivational factors between male and female personnel.

Keywords: motivation, public sector employees, private sector employees, gender.

JEL: J28, M54.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24818/amp/2024.43-09>

Introduction

The public sector plays a significant role in the economic, political, and social life of the state. People involved in state-maintained organs and governmental bodies of power participate in the development of nationwide goals and priorities and in the formation and implementation of diverse aspects of state politics. The exploration of public sector employee motivation is thus of paramount importance due to its influence on each citizen's everyday routine and its unique and complicated environment. Some researchers suggest that public sector employees differ from those in the private sector due to their primary reliance on intrinsic motivation - often described as a "motivation to serve" - rather than extrinsic incentives like financial rewards. As a result, public sector workers need to be driven by internal factors to perform their duties, regardless of the material benefits (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). Numerous studies (Mishchuk et al., 2023; Nica et al., 2022; Lazaroiu et al., 2022; Androniceanu & Georgescu, 2023; Ciobanu et al., 2019) have demonstrated that there are significant differences in the sources and drivers of motivation between

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men and women, particularly in the public sector. While men and women are often motivated by different factors—such as intrinsic motivation (“desire to serve”) versus extrinsic motivation (“financial reward”)—these differences can have a direct impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector employees. Research has shown that women in the public sector tend to be more driven by intrinsic motivation, while men are often motivated by more external factors. Therefore, it is crucial to consider these gender-based motivational differences when designing employee motivation programs in the public sector (Androniceanu et al. 2023). Tailoring motivation strategies to address these differences can lead to enhanced productivity, greater employee satisfaction, and improved overall effectiveness.

1. Literature review

Employee motivation is essential for organisational success, profoundly shaped by both the social and physical environments in which individuals work (Kalash, 2021). Many contemporary researchers have sought to interpret the concept of motivation in various ways. At its core, motivation refers to an individual's willingness to invest maximum effort to achieve organizational goals, contingent upon the fulfilment of their personal needs (Robbins & DeCenzo, 2008). Furthermore, motivation should not only meet people's expectations but also “surprise” them, presenting opportunities for unexpected engagement and satisfaction (Forsyth, 2006).

A motivated workforce is a key determinant of a successful organization. Consequently, managers who effectively employ diverse motivation tools and techniques can gain a competitive edge and drive profitability for their enterprises (Hitka et al., 2019; Robbins & DeCenzo, 2008). Chukwuma and Obiefuna (2014) approach motivation as a psychological process that arises from the dynamic interaction between employees and their working environment. Various factors can ignite motivation in employees, directing them toward specific goals (Hitka et al., 2019). The influence on employees can be both beneficial and detrimental, highlighting the critical role of motivation in shaping their performance and attitudes towards their work. Overall, motivation is a powerful force that significantly influences individuals' behaviour and commitment, ultimately affecting the outcomes they achieve within their organizations (Hitka et al., 2019).

Influence on employees can be both positive and negative, making motivation a critical element in shaping their performance and attitudes towards work. In general, motivation serves as a driving force that impacts individuals' behaviour and dedication, influencing the outcomes they produce within organizational settings.

According to Aarabi et al. (2013), motivation is a multifaceted phenomenon, with personal factors such as age, gender, and work experience, along with job-related characteristics, all playing a role in shaping an individual's job satisfaction.

Motivation encompasses the elements that energize, guide, and sustain behaviour, and several key variables can affect an individual's motivation at work. These variables can be categorised into three main areas: individual characteristics, job characteristics, and characteristics of the work environment (Aarabi et al., 2013).

Furthermore, these factors do not operate in isolation; instead, they establish a network of interdependent relationships (Hitka & Balázová, 2015).

Employees can be inspired by various factors that activate their drive and provide clear direction and goals (Hitka et al., 2019). Research in this domain highlights numerous motivational elements, including salary, opportunities for promotion, bonuses, and other forms of rewards (Fakhrudinova et al., 2013; Dobre, 2013; Androniceanu, 2011).

The motivation of employees in the public sector is closely tied to the organisational context in which they operate. From a theoretical perspective, the institutional theory offers valuable insights into the roots of employee motivation within public institutions. The values and norms inherent in these institutions foster stability and continuity over time. When viewed as organisations, public institutions respond to their external environments, shaping the identities of individual employees. This interaction influences their values and motivations, establishing a framework for acceptable and unacceptable behaviours (Ritz & Brewer, 2013).

Perry and Wise (1990) introduced the theory of public service motivation, suggesting that certain individuals are particularly drawn to and inspired by careers in public service. They categorise the reasons for this attraction into three distinct areas: rational, normative, and affective.

Ritz et al. (2016) identified six key areas of motivation within the public sector, which encompass factors such as performance, effort, quality of work, commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour, job satisfaction, sectoral choice, and person-environment relations. Additionally, they highlighted the potential negative consequences associated with public service motivation, such as over-engagement, presenteeism, workaholism, and burnout, collectively referred to as the “dark side” of public service motivation. Ultimately, public sector employees are often driven by these multifaceted motivations, shaped by both their organisational context and their personal values.

It is well recognised that motivation in the public sector is closely tied to the unique working conditions within state organisations. While similar conditions can also be found in the private sector, they are notably more common in the public sector (Wright, 2001). Research by Kim (2012) suggests that public sector motivation is linked to job satisfaction, both directly and indirectly, through the mediating effect of person-organisation fit. Regarding sectoral preferences, Christensen and Wright (2011) found that individuals with high levels of public service motivation tend to favour roles that emphasise service to others, irrespective of the organisational setting. This finding suggests that there is no clear link between being a public sector employee and the choice of the organisation or sector. Additionally, various factors, including gender, age, and work experience, significantly impact employees' motivation (Davidov, 2023; Davidov, 2024).

Gender differences can significantly impact work motivation, resulting in distinct differences between men and women. Men are often driven by motivations such as financial gain, economic success, autonomy, and personal achievement, and they are

frequently viewed as ambitious, goal-oriented, and proactive. In contrast, traditional gender stereotypes suggest that women should prioritise fulfilling family obligations and nurturing family life. As a result, interpersonal relationships, feelings of security, and social benefits may hold greater significance for women and serve as key motivators in their professional lives (Kalkowski & Fritz, 2004).

Even though many women may be more motivated when given opportunities for career advancement and a better balance between work and family responsibilities, pursuing these ambitions can sometimes lead to negative perceptions. When women seek to achieve leadership roles or assert themselves in the workplace, their actions may be labelled as unfeminine, power-hungry, or merely an attempt to prove a point (World Bank, 2011). This dynamic creates additional challenges for women as they navigate their professional aspirations in a landscape shaped by gender norms and expectations.

Moreover, research indicates that women are three times more likely than men to leave their jobs after becoming mothers (World Bank, 2011). The challenges associated with this transition were intensified by the pandemic in 2020, as many women reported that balancing work and household responsibilities was significantly more difficult for them than it was for their male counterparts (ILO Department of Statistics, 2020). According to Armania-Kepuladze (2010), women place a high value on workplace attributes such as supportive environments, prestige, the significance of their tasks, opportunities for professional growth, collaboration, and job security. In contrast, men typically prioritise financial incentives, promotions, and increased responsibilities. This pattern reflects a broader societal perception that men are generally more motivated by financial considerations than women.

Today, women play an essential role in the workforce, with their involvement in economic activities steadily increasing. However, underestimating and misinterpreting women's work motivation can result in the underutilisation of their skills and experience (Armania-Kepuladze, 2010). The exploration of motivational differences between genders is grounded in the notion of fundamental distinctions between men and women, often framed by gender stereotypes. These stereotypes can be examined within a historical context, where male hegemony (domination and leadership) has been prevalent, influencing how gender differences in priorities and qualitative differences among people are perceived (Weberova et al., 2017).

Several studies have demonstrated that females prioritise the meaning component of eudaimonia more than males (LeFebvre & Huta, 2021). For instance, Kasser and Ryan (2001) discovered that female introductory psychology students rated "community feeling" motives –such as working to improve the world and helping others – more highly. Similarly, Cerinsek et al. (2013) observed that first-year university women had career values more focused on contributing to society. Dietz et al. (2002), who studied a sample with a mean age of 44.2, found that women placed a higher priority on altruistic values. Nurmi (1992), analysing a sample ranging in age from 19 to 64, reported that females had more goals related to others' health.

Additionally, Reker et al. (1987) noted that women aged 30–49 and 60–74 expressed a stronger “will to meaning”.

Research has shown that males may exhibit higher levels of extrinsic motivation compared to females. In a study by Kasser and Ryan (2001), males rated financial success as more important than females. In a subsequent study, Kasser and Ryan (2001) found that males placed greater emphasis than females on extrinsic aspirations such as social recognition, physical appearance, and financial success. Studies have also shown that males place greater importance on the value of power compared to females (Feather, 2004).

Research on gender differences in achievement motivation has evolved noticeably over time. Studies carried out in the 1950s and 1960s (e.g. Veroff et al., 1980) illustrated that women exhibited lower achievement motivation compared to men, reflecting the societal context where women were primarily homemakers with limited presence in the workforce (Ružić & Štefanec, 2016). However, research beginning in the late 1960s (e.g. Jenkins, 1987) indicates a notable increase in women’s motivation, a trend attributed to the effects of the women’s emancipation movement. Hyde and Kling (2001) suggest that this surge in motivation was likely driven by expanded educational and occupational opportunities for women. Further, Greene and DeBacker (2004) highlighted gender differences in the 1960s, observing that men were more oriented towards long-term goals and planning, while women exhibited more altruistic behaviours. In the 1980s and 1990s, studies found stereotypical expectations, where boys were perceived to have higher potential in mathematics and sports, and girls in languages and the arts. More recent research, such as the study by Greene and DeBacker (2004), reveals that although males tend to set fewer goals than females, the goals they do set are generally higher.

Historically, boys and men have often had higher expectations for success than girls and women, a phenomenon that can be attributed to traditional gender roles and stereotypes (Žitniaková-Gurgová, 2007). Řehulková and Osecká (1996) examined gender differences in achievement motivation among school students using Pekrun’s achievement motivation scale. Their results indicated statistically significant differences between boys and girls in individual items of the inventory. However, these differences did not result in a significant gender difference in the overall score of the achievement motivation scale. Greene and DeBacker (2004) uncovered significant gender differences like future goals. Their research revealed that men tend to set higher, but fewer, goals than women. In contrast, women exhibit differences in expectations primarily related to their future careers, with a greater focus on interpersonal goals. This aligns with findings on gender differences in achievement motivation, particularly the desire to avoid success. Plháková (2004) explored this concept among female university students using an unfinished sentences method and discovered that a fear of success was quite prevalent among these women, which was closely tied to the passive, non-competitive roles that society expected them to fulfil at that time. Girls believed that achieving academic success was not considered feminine and feared that ambition would lead to others

treating them condescendingly. Longitudinal research (PlhÁková, 2004) followed the careers of women who graduated from university. It was found that women with a strong desire for successful performance often pursued careers in teaching, but rarely ventured into business or industry. ŽitniakovÁ-GurgovÁ (2007) emphasise that the decision to pursue a teaching career is notably shaped by gender, reflecting societal influences. Women's aspirations often align with prevailing social stereotypes, which affect their professional trajectories. It was found that, in adulthood, these motivations manifested in different ways among the participants. Women with a high need for success, who were primarily family-oriented, put significant effort into their partnerships and family-building, equating success with a fulfilling family life. Conversely, ambitious women who aspired to balance both career and family often entered marriage later in life and dedicated substantial time to advancing their careers before settling down. Currently, the cultural distinctions between male and female roles have evolved significantly, with women increasingly facing the challenge of balancing family and career aspirations.

Current research indicates that, despite numerous similarities between male and female entrepreneurs, distinct differences persist (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Buttner (1993) argues that women are more influenced and motivated by family needs, whereas men tend to prioritise economic motives. Furthermore, many women embark on independent business careers to escape subordinate roles in their previous workplaces. Milne (2007) summarises the gender-based differences in entrepreneurial performance and motivation, attributing them either to women's lower social status or to direct discrimination. The feminist perspective on workplace discrimination against women also acknowledges that flexibility—often related to family responsibilities—and the pursuit of economic wealth are significant motivations for women.

Men and women exhibit different preferences and objectives, leading to variations in their motivational drivers. Typically, men are more strongly motivated by factors such as economic profit, independence, and success. As a result, performance incentives such as financial rewards, career advancement, challenges, opportunities for self-realisation, and autonomy are often more significant for men. Meece et al. (2006) suggest that women are more motivated by incentives tied to family care and the quality of family life. This indicates that factors like interpersonal relationships, a sense of security, social benefits, and a supportive environment play a greater role in motivating women.

Furthermore, Arnanía-Kepuladze (2010) notes that some theories on the successful concept of motivation have been explored through the lens of gender differences, particularly in how men and women approach success. Research indicates that women often focus on preventing or mitigating their success, largely due to their anticipation of negative repercussions, such as social rejection or feelings of inadequacy. Arnanía-Kepuladze (2010) asserts that men and women have distinct goals and needs, which, in turn, influence their motivational drivers. Men are typically drawn toward aspirations of independence, power, status, self-realisation, popularity, and success.

Inceoglu et al. (2012) illustrate that variations in motivation can be observed across different life stages. For instance, women's desire to establish a family may shift their priorities. This remapping of goals can also occur during career interruptions, part-time work, or when faced with stressors at home or in the workplace. Hofstede (2001) identified that the primary motivational factors for men often revolve around income, career growth, and responsibility. In contrast, women tend to value a supportive work environment, prestige, challenging tasks, the significance of their contributions, job security, and collaborative efforts.

Bigoness (1988) found that men often prioritise salary as a primary motivator, whereas women tend to place greater importance on opportunities for professional development. Reif et al. (1976) explored the impact of gender on remuneration for both men and women. Their findings indicated that gender plays a critical role in determining the pay that individuals receive. When examining motivation through the lens of gender stereotypes, it becomes evident that male economic behaviour is often characterised by a pursuit of promotion, recognition, success, and an inclination towards financial independence. Demartino and Barbato (2003) suggest that a greater number of women pursue entrepreneurship as a means to balance work and family commitments, while a larger proportion of men are focused on wealth creation and career advancement.

While there are notable similarities between female and male entrepreneurs, their motivations differ significantly. For men, marriage and children have minimal influence on their entrepreneurial objectives. In line with this, Orhan (2000) posits that women are more often driven to become entrepreneurs by family needs and lifestyle considerations compared to their equally qualified male counterparts. As a result, it can be concluded that women's entrepreneurial motivations are more closely tied to family obligations, whereas men's motivations are primarily driven by economic incentives (Demartino & Barbato, 2003).

On the one hand, it can be seen that the published scientific studies focus on gender differences in occupational motivation regardless of the economic sector. On the other hand, there is extensive scientific literature that deals with the differences between different sectors of the economy. It is important to study gender differences in occupational motivation depending on the sector of the economy.

2. Research results and discussions

This current research was aimed to explore the peculiarities of public sector employees in Israel from the perspective of gender. The sample of the study included the staff of public institutions and private firms engaged in various spheres of professional activity: education, culture, civil service, telecommunications, etc. The study involved 756 people, residents of Jerusalem and its neighbourhood (Israel), with the age of 18-65 years old. The sample distribution according to social characteristics was as follows:

- (1) the staff of public institutions – 585 people employed in different spheres of economy: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Absorption, the Israeli Parliament (Knesset), the National Insurance Institute, the Israel Trade Union, the Jerusalem Municipality, and other institutions.
- gender: 261 males (44%) and 324 females (56%).
 - age: average age – 44 years, median age – 42 years.
 - work experience of the employees: minimum – 1 year, maximum – 44 years average – 14.1 years, median – 14 years.
 - education level: secondary general education – 204 people (34.6%), practical engineering – 169 people (28.7%), first academic degree– 148 people (25.1%), second academic degree – 47 people (8%).
 - status of employees: managerial staff – 169 people (29%), non-managerial staff – 417 people (71%).
- (2) the staff of private firms – 171 people (91 men and 80 women).

Table 1. Table of Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	Public sector (n=585)	Private sector (n=171)
Gender	Males: 261 (44%) Females: 324 (56%) Other: 0 (0%)	Males: 91 (53%) Females: 80 (47%) Other: 0 (0%)
Age	Average: 44 Median: 42	Average: 43 Median: 41
Work Experience (years)	Min: 1 Max: 44 Average: 14.1 Median: 14	Min: 2 Max: 30 Average: 12.5 Median: 10
Education Level	Secondary Education: 204 (34.6%) Practical Engineering: 169 (28.7%) Bachelor's Degree: 148 (25.1%) Master's Degree: 47 (8%)	Secondary Education: 31 (18.1%) Practical Engineering: 15 (8.8%) Bachelor's Degree: 107 (62.6%) Master's Degree: 18 (10.5%)
Employment Status	Managerial: 169 (29%) Non-managerial: 417 (71%)	Managerial: 62 (36.3%) Non-managerial: 109 (63.7%)

Source: Author's processing

To assess how motivational factors affect the motivation of public sector personnel, we analysed data collected through a questionnaire that examined 12 key labour motivation factors (Ritchie & Martin, 1999; French & Emerson, 2014). An individual motivational profile was developed to identify the specific combination of the most and least significant needs for each individual. This profile includes various motivational factors such as monetary compensation and tangible rewards, physical well-being, job structure, interactions with others, relationships, recognition, personal achievement, power and influence, variety and change, creativity, self-development, and the perceived interest and usefulness of tasks.

Gender differences of public service employees' work motivation

An analysis of the average motivation indicators reveals a statistically significant difference in the strength of motivational factors between male and female employees in both sectors - 5 out of 12 factors (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of motivational factors between male and female personnel (general sample)

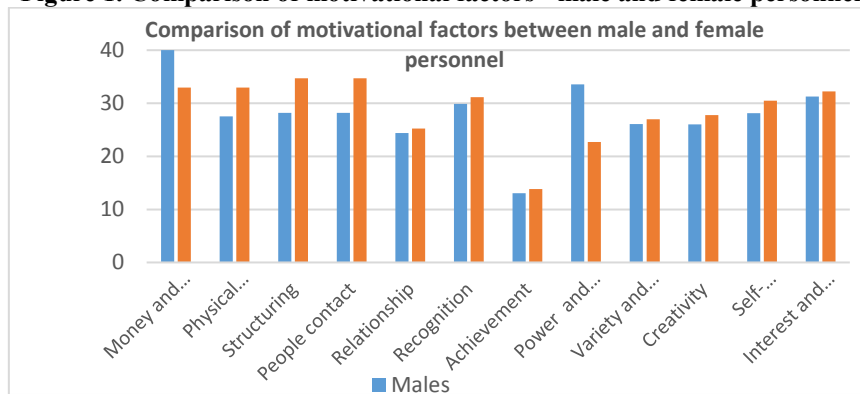
Motivation factors	Males		Females		p-value	Cohen's effect
	mean	std dev	mean	std dev		
Money and tangible rewards	40.57	6.17	32.94	15.54	p<0.001	0.69*
Physical condition	27.52	9.95	32.93	12.65	p<0.001	0.48*
Structuring	28.2	11.65	34.68	12.93	p<0.001	0.53*
People contact	28.21	11.64	34.68	12.92	p<0.001	0.53*
Relationship	24.36	8.11	25.25	7.77	0.31	-
Recognition	29.85	9.48	31.15	10.10	0.09	-
Achievement	13.02	5.55	13.81	3.76	0.115	-
Power and influence	33.53	16.87	22.72	9.12	p<0.001	0.79*
Variety and change	26.09	7.62	27.01	8.15	0.288	-
Creativity	25.99	10.69	27.79	9.69	0.099	-
Self-development	28.14	10.06	30.48	7.54	0.121	-
Interest and usefulness	31.27	8.67	32.25	9.55	0.096	-

* – statistically significant differences

Source: Author's processing

The findings indicate that there are significant differences in motivation structure between male and female employees. The results obtained clearly indicate the fact that the following motivational factors are stronger for the female personnel compared to the male personnel: physical condition, structuring, and people contact and for male personnel, the following motivational factors are stronger compared to the female personnel: money and tangible rewards, power and influence (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Comparison of motivational factors - male and female personnel



Source: Author's processing

Gender differences of public service employees' work motivation

An analysis of the average indicators of motivation sources shows a statistically significant difference in the strength of motivation factors between male and female personnel in the public sector too - 6 out of 12 factors (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of motivational factors between male and female personnel (public sector)

Motivation factors	Males		Females	
	mean	std dev	mean	std dev
Money and tangible rewards	38.98	14.01	32.30	15.26
Physical condition	27.62	10.47	33.01	13.01
Structuring	30.34	12.31	35.26	13.15
People contact	30.34	12.31	35.26	13.15
Relationship	24.47	8.10	25.33	7.74
Recognition	30.03	9.93	33.06	10.31
Achievement	13.44	5.72	13.83	3.87
Power and influence	31.32	15.67	22.89	9.07
Variety and change	26.85	6.36	27.18	8.04
Creativity	26.71	10.32	29.20	8.78
Self-development	29.26	9.68	31.08	7.35
Interest and usefulness	31.88	8.72	32.64	9.41

* – statistically significant differences

Source: Author's processing

The findings indicate that there are significant differences in the motivation structure between male and female employees in the public sector. The results obtained (Table 4) indicate the fact that the following motivational factors are stronger for the female personnel compared to the male personnel: physical condition, structuring, people contact, creativity, and for male personnel the following motivational factors are stronger compared to the female personnel: money and tangible rewards, power, and influence (Figure 2).

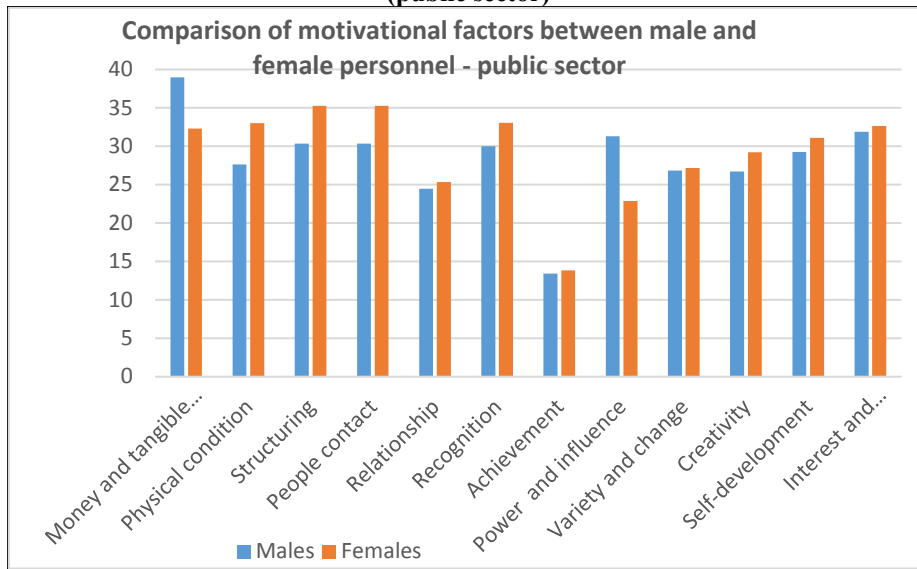
Table 4. ANOVA results comparing motivational factors by gender (public sector)

Motivation factors	Mean Diff.	t-value	Sig.
Money and tangible rewards	6.68	3.727	p<0.001*
Physical condition	-5.39	-3.729	p<0.001*
Structuring	-4.92	-3.158	p=0.002*
People contact	-4.92	-3.158	p=0.002*
Relationship	-0.85	-0.878	p=0.381
Recognition	-3.03	-2.442	p=0.151
Achievement	-0.39	-0.656	p=0.513
Power	8.43	5.375	p<0.001*
Variety and change	-0.33	-0.369	p=0.712
Creativity	-2.49	-2.126	p=0.034*
Self-development	-1.82	-1.726	p=0.086
Interest and usefulness	-0.76	-0.680	p=0.497

* - statistically significant differences

Source: Author's processing

Figure 2. Comparison of motivational factors - male and female personnel (public sector)



Source: Author's processing

3. Conclusions

This study analyses gender differences in the motivational structure of public sector employees in Israel. Both internal and external factors of human motivation were examined. The study revealed significant differences in the strength of motivational factors between female and male personnel in the public sector. We believe these findings can help managers and directors of state institutions in Israel develop motivational programs tailored to the specific sources of motivation among state employees, thereby significantly increasing the effectiveness of these programs. To make informed managerial decisions, it is essential to create a motivational profile for each employee, combining external and internal motivational factor. The strength, stability, and structure of the above-mentioned motivation factors are unique depending on the personality and can influence employees' behaviour in various ways. What may effectively motivate one person might not have the same impact on another.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that the research was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported by the Azrieli College of Engineering – Jerusalem Research Fund.

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