

Article

Sense of belonging as determinants of work motivation in a small Peruvian company

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Abstract: The sense of belonging in any organization is vital to generate a work motivation with the objective of a good organizational performance, because of this, companies usually take this point into account, ensuring that this leads to greater performance. For this reason, the objective of this article is to determine the relationship between the sense of belonging and the work motivation in the workers of a small Peruvian research company. For this purpose, a quantitative methodology was used, with a cross-sectional descriptive design. The instrument used was a survey consisting of 10 items, which were interpreted using the Likert scale. The survey was conducted and delivered to 24 workers, who were selected by non-probabilistic convenience sampling. After verifying the validity of the instrument and the study variables by means of Cronbach's Alpha statistic, we proceeded to determine the existence of correlation between the variables, which, using Spearman's Rho coefficient, obtained a 70.2% which demonstrates a moderate positive correlation, therefore it indicates that employees feel highly motivated as they feel an indispensable part of the company, therefore they feel job satisfaction by being part of the organization.

Keywords: sense of belonging; work motivation; performance; job satisfaction

JEL codes: J53; L25; M12

1. Introduction

The human capital of any company is its most important resource, given that the productivity, competitiveness, and survival of the entity depend on it. One of the most significant concerns of companies in the context of South America, and especially in the Peruvian case, is the high rates of labor turnover. In a journalistic article published by Sudaca (2021), the labor turnover rate in Peru reached 20.7%, while the Latin American average was 10.9%. Similarly, Chang et al. (2022) reported that in public entities in the education sector, the turnover rate was 23% compared to 7% in the health sector. According to the same author, the high turnover rate in education is due to the limited perceived benefits in the sector, as well as age and gender differences between employer and employee.

There are various factors that influence voluntary/involuntary job turnover, with the most common being salary aspects, satisfaction, motivation, and sense of belonging to the entity. The sense of belonging, "key for organizations in a competitive and globalized world, where employees make the difference against market

competition" (Pérez & Campana, 2019, p. 78). Achieving a high level of sense of belonging (SPL) among the employees of a company is only achieved when an employee becomes integrated into the organization, establishing lasting relationships based on mutual respect, satisfaction with their duties and benefits, and a pleasant working environment.

In an attempt to understand the sense of belonging of workers over 50 years old in Germany, Rahn et al. (2021) studied the effects of "threat of social identity in the form of internalized age stereotyping" on sense of belonging, social motivation, and social avoidance. The negative effects of stereotyping were found to induce greater social avoidance, leading to voluntary resignations or retirements. Similarly, Rubin et al. (2019) analyzed the impact of interpersonal and organizational sexism, mediated by sense of belonging, on the mental health and job satisfaction of a group of female workers in male-dominated fields. The results showed mediation of SPL between organizational sexism and mental health and job satisfaction, while interpersonal sexism was only mediated with mental health. That is, due to both types of sexism, there was a low level of SPL resulting in poor mental health and job satisfaction. This was because it created an environment of harassment, rejection, and ostracism from male colleagues and/or superiors.

On the other hand, Pathak and Srivastava (2020) sought to improve work motivation through Self-Determination Theory (SDT), where a climate of support and trust would enhance a better sense of belonging. The authors argue that the psychological needs of SDT - autonomy, competence, and relatedness - lead to internalization of work and a sense of identity, resulting in improvements in job satisfaction and passion for work. Similarly, Boyd and Nowell (2020) evaluated sense of community (SOC), sense of community responsibility (SOC-R), organizational commitment (OC), organizational identification (OI), and public service motivation (PSM). According to their results, SOC had a high mediating impact between PSM and job well-being, while SOC-R significantly influenced PSM and job commitment.

For this reason, the main objective of the present case study is to determine the relationship between the sense of belonging and work motivation among employees of a small Peruvian research company. To achieve this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H: The sense of belonging of employees in the company affects their work motivation.

The importance of this quantitative, cross-sectional, exploratory research is justified by the need to understand the correlation between the sense of belonging and work motivation among employees of the research company in Lima, Peru. This is because, in the available literature, there are limited studies exclusively addressing the sense of belonging in correlation with work motivation in the Peruvian context. Furthermore, due to the exploratory focus of the study, it is emphasized that the results obtained therein are not conclusive for generalization at a local and/or regional level. However, the results are important for interpreting the internal situation of the company.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Sense of belonging in the workplace

In companies, the sense of belonging is a term that is highly valued, as it has a close relationship with the motivation generated in employees. The sense of belonging suggests that individuals foster a conscious behavior towards others, in which they see themselves reflected when interacting with their qualities and customs. It is conceived as the pleasure a person feels in being part of a group. This sense begins in the family, as it represents the first group to which the person belongs. By being loyal to a group and fully adhering to its norms, an individual ends up embracing a personality and a sense of security, which will strengthen over time, giving the individual a sense of security and elevating their social feelings, making them more capable of adhering to social norms. According to Rahn et al. (2021), the sense of belonging includes a cognitive component related to membership in a particular group and an affective component that involves positive/negative effects on the individual.

The feeling of belonging to a group not only significantly influences connections, cooperation, and the work environment, but also contributes to improving inspiration, accountability, performance, and employee retention. For a sense of belonging to exist, individuals need their achievements to be recognized, openly expressed, feel that their commitments are valued, feel comfortable to act naturally, have direct correspondence, and feel valued as individuals (Amaya, 2019).

2.2. Work motivation

The dimension of work motivation, sensitive to factors such as commitment and corporate identity, impacts the perseverance, efficiency, and optimal results in the activities performed by employees of an organization (Macías & Vanga, 2021). In this way, García (2019) mentions that the market and competition demand greater performance, better product quality, and therefore better customer service every day, with the fundamental basis of this process being the employee, becoming very important, and at the same time, indispensable. Companies seek to improve their products; however, not all of them consider the mood, motivation, or health of their employees, without taking into account that this contributes to great organizational performance.

According to Nolasco et al. (2021), work motivation responds to extrinsic and intrinsic factors, known as hygiene and personality factors. Hygiene/extrinsic factors refer to the employee's work environment, aspects over which the individual has no control, such as salary, benefits, work climate, etc. While intrinsic factors, related to professional growth, freedom of action, recognition, and others. Additionally, a high level of work motivation can be subject to economic and affective benefits, as the former ensures the quality of life of employees and their families, while the latter guarantees their psychological well-being through perceptions of personal and professional growth, recognition, etc.

3. Methodology

The research approach employed for the case study is quantitative, with a descriptive cross-sectional design, as data collection was conducted at a specific finite time, where the primary purpose is to describe the variables under study, which are

management and sense of belonging, and work motivation, in a small Peruvian research company. Quantitative design is adopted due the necessity of measure the sense of belonging in relation with work motivation in the company. This research was ordered by principals, in order to evaluate and understand the fate of the organization, due to a decrease in general productivity in the las five months.

4. Sample

Since the case study focuses on a small organization, the available sample size was 24 participants. This small sample size may lead to a possible increase in the margin of error and limited statistical power in the study. On the other hand, the sample selection was carried out using a non-probabilistic convenience sampling method. This, once again, is due to the limited population available for the study in the company. The main drawbacks associated with this method of selection are the high risk of bias and limitations in the statistical inference of the results (Balestrini, 2005).

According to the demographic description (**Table 1**), out of a total of 24 participants, 15 (62.5%) were men, while the remaining 9 (37.5%) were women. This initial approach revealed a relative disproportion between both genders. Regarding marital status, 11 (45.8%) of the participants reported being single, 6 (25%) married, and 7 (29.2%) were either divorced or widowed. The third demographic characteristic of the sample was age, where 9 (37.5%) were between 25-40 years old, 7 (29.2%) between 40-50 years old, 5 (20.8%) between 18-25 years old, and 3 (12.5%) between 55-65 years old. From the age characteristics, it can be affirmed that young adults and middle-aged adults make up the majority of the sample. Regarding length of service, 14 (58.3%) had no more than 5 years of service in the company, 7 (29.2%) were between 5-10 years, and only 3 (12.5%) had more than 10 years of service; it is important to highlight that slightly more than half were relatively new to the company. Finally, 11 (45.8%) of the employees had post-university education, 9 (37.5%) were graduates or had bachelor's degrees, and only 4 (16.7%) had no education or were in an incomplete status.

Table 1. Demographic description of the sample.

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Genre	Male	15	62.5
	Female	9	37.5
	TOTAL	24	100
Marital status	Married	6	25
	Single	11	45.8
	Others	7	29.2
	TOTAL	24	100
Age	18-25	5	20.8
	25-40	9	37.5
	40-55	7	29.2
	55-65	3	12.5
	TOTAL	24	100

	1-5	14	58.3
	5-10	7	29.2
Service time	11-15	3	12.5
	TOTAL	24	100
	Bachelor	9	37.5
	Postgraduate	11	45.8
Instruction grade	Others	4	16.7
	TOTAL	24	100

Note. This table depicts major demographic characteristics of sample, being the most significative the genre, age and service time.

5. Instrument

An instrument was designed for data collection, which was then applied to a group of workers from a small Peruvian research company. It is worth noting that the study sample consisted of 24 workers, who were selected through convenience sampling, as described by Otzen and Manterola (2017), which occurs when participants agree to be included in the interview process for data collection and accessibility to the research. In this way, this method is used to measure their level of satisfaction regarding management and sense of belonging, as well as to understand the level of motivation they have when working. The instrument consists of 10 questions. These questions were interpreted using the Likert scale, with values ranging from 1 to 5, in order to provide a wide variety of response options, thus establishing 5 options:

1. Totally disagree;
2. Disagree;
3. Neutral;
4. Agree; and
5. Totally agree.

The instrument used was constructed from the selection and adaptation of items from validated questionnaires evaluated in previous research. In this regard, items 1 "I feel comfortable with the company" and 2 "I collaborate with other areas to achieve required objectives" were adapted from the Sense of Belonging to Math Scale (Good et al., 2012). Items 8 "Even if I am not praised, I do my best" and 9 "I feel part of this company as if others depended on me" were adapted from SOBI Factors with Factor Structure Item Loading (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995). The remaining items were taken from Pathak and Srivastava (2020).

Table 2 presents the instrument with the 10 specified items. In the table, it can be observed that the items are divided into two dimensions: work belongingness and work motivation. Simultaneously, each item is related to constructs such as work environment, mutual support, human needs, inclusion and acceptance, recognition, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. The theoretical foundation of the constructs is supported by social identity theory, organizational commitment, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's two-factor theory, Vroom's expectancy theory, and self-determination theory.

Table 2. Survey.

Nº	Dimension	Announcement
1	Sense of belonging	I feel at ease in the company.
2		I would like to work in this company until the day I retire.
3		I feel part of this company as if others depended on me.
4		I collaborate with other areas to achieve the required objectives.
5		Even if they don't congratulate me, I give my best.
6	Work motivation	I rarely feel that my work is boring or repetitive.
7		I am pleased to see that monthly productivity is good.
8		I like to do my job well.
9		Additional incentives are needed to work better.
10		I am proud of my job.

6. Results

The results of this research began with the design and application of the selected instrument. This allowed obtaining very interesting results with respect to the company's workers. As already mentioned, the instrument was statistically validated by means of Cronbach's Alpha method, after which the correlation between the items was obtained.

The value obtained after subjecting the instrument to Cronbach's alpha method reveals a result of 0.83 (**Table 3**). This result is calculated after a process of various calculations, which are observed in **Table 3** in the appendices of this article. This value was determined using the statistical program MS Excel, which allows for easy calculation of equation 1 by creating a data table, whose values are given by the participants' responses in the interview, according to the Likert scale used (González & Pazmiño, 2015).

Table 3. Reliability Statistics.

Items Nº	Cronbach's Alpha
10	,832

Similarly, using the same method, the reliability of the variables of this study was measured, in this case, management and sense of belonging, and work motivation. It was obtained that, by means of Cronbach's Alpha, both variables obtained a valuation of .92 and .92, so that a significant valuation higher than .70 is obtained, in this way the reliability of the variables is appreciated.

After having applied the corresponding questionnaires, the results were provided by means of the normality test. The purpose of this test is to check whether the variables are established according to the normality curve. In this case, the Shapiro-Wilk test was applied, supported by the SPSS version 22 statistical software (**Table 4**).

Table 4. Normality test.

Shapiro-Wilk

	Statistics	gl	Sig.
Sense of belonging	,943	24	,193
Work motivation	,949	24	,253

The results allow us to know if the data will be distributed according to a normal distribution or not, for this test was performed, in order to corroborate that the variables are distributed according to the normality test. A higher significance than 5% was obtained, which means that the normality assumption is met, therefore, the model chosen is parametric correlation analysis.

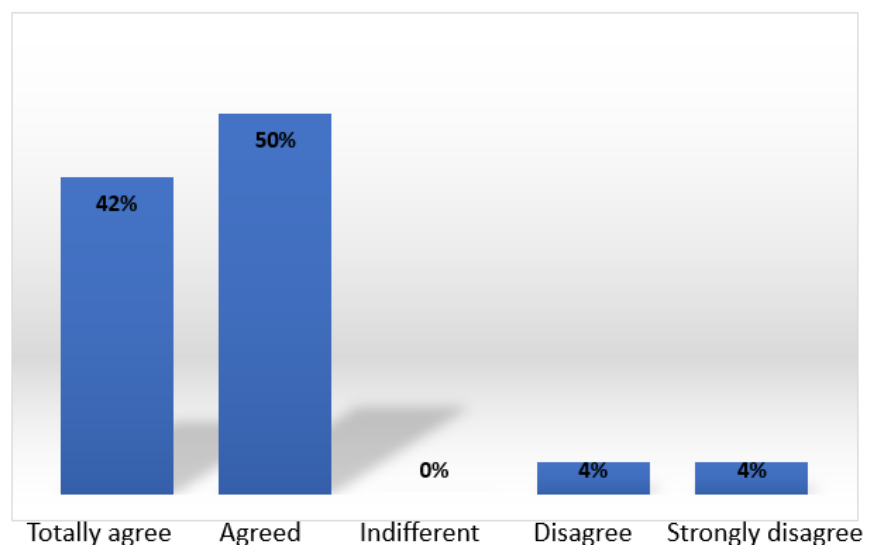
Having said this, the degree of correlation between the study variables was measured using Pearson's parametric Rho test. This test obtained a coefficient greater than .50, so there is a strong moderate positive correlation. This is evidenced by Martinez et al. (2009), who state that if the correlation values of the variables are close to 1, they indicate a strong negative correlation; however, if the values are close to 0, it means that there is no linear correlation. The results are shown in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Relationship between variables.

		Sense of belonging	Work motivation
Sense of belonging	Pearson's correlation	1	,802**
	Sig. (bilateral)	-	,000
	N	24	24
Work motivation	Pearson's correlation	,802**	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	,000	-
	N	24	24

** . Correlation is significative at 0,01 level (bilateral).

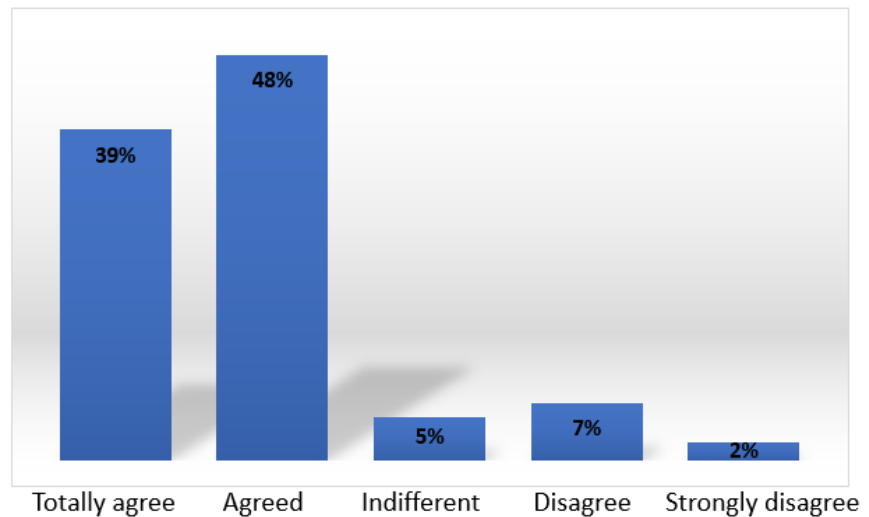
Finally, the results were presented in a descriptive manner. **Figure 1** shows that 42% of the workers agree with the guidelines established in the questionnaire, while only 4% and 8% disagreed and 8% totally disagreed, respectively.



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 1. Work motivation.

Figure 1 shows that 42% of the respondents were in total agreement with their work situation, and 50% of them also decided to agree. Only 4% of the employees disagreed and strongly disagreed. **Figure 2** shows the total number of questions and the general way of describing the research process; it shows that 39% of the questions were answered as totally agree.



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 2. Total number of questions.

7. Discussion

The results obtained show that the workers who participated in the survey to obtain information for this research, there is a direct relationship between the sense of belonging and the work motivation that this generates in employees, in addition to the satisfaction that employees feel in their current positions because they feel an indispensable part of the organization, in turn, they argued that their desire is to be of great contribution for optimal performance and that their availability is at the order of any situation. This is corroborated by the statistical results obtained. The research requirements were subjected to a statistical validation, which resulted in a reliability of .83 by means of Cronbach's Alpha statistic, which means that the instrument used for data collection shows an acceptable and optimal reliability in statistical terms and percentage to be used in favor of the research. A Cronbach's alpha value between .70 and .90 indicates good consistency. Thus, Cronbach's alpha usually appears in the literature as an easy and effective way to validate a scale, and in turn, quantifies the correlation between the items that compose it (Gonzalez and Pazmiño, 2015; Oviedo and Campos, 2005).

From this point it is possible to start to develop and obtain the normality test, measured by the Shapiro - Wilk test (**Table 4**), which shows that there is a parametric relationship between the variables; and likewise, the relationship between the variables is measured by Pearson's Rho (**Table 5**), this analysis shows that there is a significant

relationship ($r = .802$, $p = .000$), indicating that a high index of sense of belonging influences work motivation in the workers of the small company. These results are similar to those presented by Perez and Campana (2019) where their study variables are sense of belonging, and job satisfaction, which do not have a normal distribution because their K – S coefficient is significant at being less than .05, they also show correlation between their variables by obtaining a Spearman's Rho of .704.

In a descriptive way by means of two graphs, in this way it will be possible to explain each of the variables. Therefore, as can be seen in **Figure 3**, with respect to the sense of belonging on the part of the workers, 42% of those surveyed showed great satisfaction in agreeing with the guidelines established in the questionnaire, only 4% and 8% disagreed and totally disagreed, respectively.

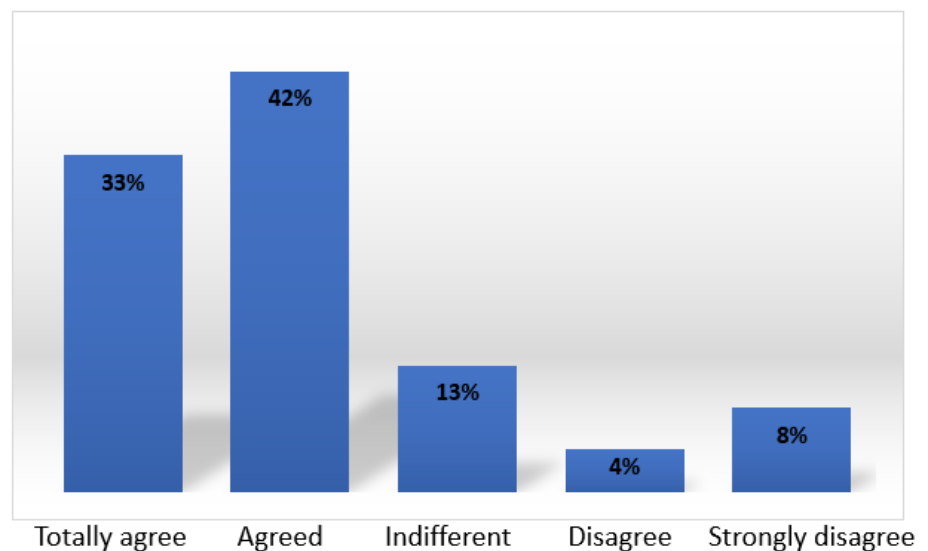


Figure 3. Sense of belonging.

The figures obtained from these results were reflected in the sense of belonging and the motivation instilled in the employees, since they stated that they felt part of the organization as if they were unique and indispensable. As can be seen in **Figure 2**, 42% of those surveyed were in total agreement with their work situation, and 50% of them also agreed with it. In general terms, the approval and acceptance of the workers for their different tasks was rated by them as excellent, and they felt motivated every day. Only 4% of the employees disagreed and totally disagreed, three of whom were young people who had been with the organization for a short time. This data, not minor, can be seen in **Figure 2**, which is a descriptive view of the total number of questions and the general way of describing the research process through the interview process. That said, it can be seen that 39% of the questions were answered with certainty as totally in agreement with the labor and administrative exercises offered by the company. Finally, the workers affirmed, in general, that they feel motivated by feeling part of such a motivated and assertive group that they are willing to give their all for the company.

Similarly, the above result and the one obtained in this research, are similar to those of Lopez (2017) where he highlights motivation as a determining factor for the

creation of a sense of belonging, thus generating a better work environment that motivates and encourages other members of the organization or group and are recognized as fundamental resources of the productive process of the organization. These findings are due to the link generated between the organization and the employee, which makes the worker feel part of the company, in this way could be of much help to other individuals, and create a circle of support for the benefit of all, since not only labor issues would be seen, but also help to solve more internal problems associated with their jobs.

As well as the central objective of this research is to determine the relationship between the sense of belonging and work motivation, several investigations support the same objective, among them Herrera (2012) when conducting a descriptive study as the present one, aimed to establish a relationship between the sense of belonging and job stability of staff working in a Guatemalan company, his method was also measured by a Likert-type survey. The results showed that both the sense of belonging and the labor stability of the personnel are important and at the same time significant for the development of business activities, which led the author to recommend workshops for the employees in order to maintain a high level of identification with the company.

In spite of, Ronquillo (2010) aimed in his research to demonstrate that the sense of belonging influences the work motivation of employees of a company dedicated to the distribution of beverages. The results were measured by means of a multiple-choice survey, in which the workers, depending on the answer they chose, were able to measure the sense of belonging with the company. It was obtained that 56% of the respondents have knowledge about the sense of belonging, the rest lack it. Despite this the author concluded that there is no sense of belonging in the company selected for her study. For this reason, she recommended that a sense of belonging should be fostered in the company through constant training.

Additionally, the results of Macias et al. (2016) were obtained through a survey using a Likert-type scale. It was found that workers at the Soriana market in San Pedro were experiencing a lack of motivation because their superiors did not take them into account and only wanted to see results on a daily basis, even performing tasks that did not involve performing. The survey conducted in this study caused the workers to approach their bosses in a different way and with more determination to ask for a higher salary, in order to achieve greater productivity and better treatment of customers. This request was heard by supervisors and managers, and an agreement was reached. This led to the result of the research having optimal benefits, since the survey conducted pushed managers to take new strategies to provide the required satisfaction and motivation to the employees of the establishment.

The results of the study show a high level of motivation, due to the sense of belonging the employees feel, which generates a higher job satisfaction. The same occurs with the research of Marin and Placencia (2017), in which they determine that there is positive correlation of intensity with .34 between motivation and job satisfaction. This allows inferring that, the higher the degree of motivation in workers, the higher the job satisfaction of the personnel.

Personal motivation, in every sense, greatly influences performance, and seen from a labor approach it influences to a great extent, and this has been corroborated in

the present article. This comes to become the answer to the satisfaction of recognition by the company (Perez and Campana, 2019). It is important that in a workplace there is such a commitment on the part of managers, where they include employees as a fundamental part of any process, and make them feel recognized, generating a good working environment, where such recognition is not only by senior management, but also among the same colleagues, optimizing a better progress for the sake of the organization.

International studies aimed at investigating productivity, work motivation, and satisfaction have discovered that emotional support, particularly in the form of high-quality feedback from a company's leadership, significantly influences worker performance through fostering a sense of belonging (Liu et al., 2022). Furthermore, Boyd and Nowell (2020) propose that "community experiences may serve as potent influencers of employee organizational behavior" (p. 21). These findings align with the organizational context of our study. According to items 3 and 4 of the survey, employees feel an integral part of the company and exhibit no hesitation when inter-departmental collaboration is required. This scenario indicates the formation of a robust community, with the leadership playing a pivotal role in cultivating a congenial environment.

On the contrary, when age-related stereotypes permeate the environment, older workers tend to adopt an avoidant social motivation, which diminishes the sense of camaraderie among co-workers (Rahn et al., 2020). In the realm of psychology, Pathack and Srivastava (2020) assert that empowerment and a sense of belonging are significantly and positively correlated with job passion and satisfaction, thereby motivating employees to excel in every task. Concurrently, Rubin et al. (2020) identified sexism as the primary barrier to a strong sense of belonging, job satisfaction, and mental health, especially in occupations dominated by men. However, "for women who self-reported femininity, this effect was not observed" (p. 12). In the context of our study, issues related to age and gender were absent, primarily because the company's workforce does not exceed 30 members. The small team size and leadership create a comfortable environment where employees build trust among themselves.

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, and having obtained the expected results, the objective of the research was to determine the relationship between the sense of belonging and work motivation on the part of the employees of a small Peruvian research company. These results were satisfactory, since it was possible to prove that work motivation is influenced to a great extent by the sense of belonging on the part of the workers, who in turn assured that they feel very happy to belong to a very human work group. Therefore, it can be inferred that the study demonstrates the degree of belonging necessary for workers to adopt new and better attitudes towards the company. In addition to showing that workers are fundamental pillars, and therefore should be cared for, motivated and valued. It was also shown that workers feel a sense of satisfaction towards their work center, and most of those surveyed even stated their desire to be able to continue working for many more years, and even retire from the

company. The existence of a better work and productive climate is confirmed by the sense of belonging to an organization, which leads to better production and its survival in the global market.

9. Theoretical implications

The sense of belonging within an organization and the work motivation of employees are intimately related and carry significant theoretical implications in the workplace. Sense of belonging refers to the emotional connection that an employee has with their organization, which includes identification with the company's goals and values, job satisfaction, and loyalty to it. When an employee feels a strong sense of belonging to their organization, they are more likely to feel motivated and committed to their work, which can increase their productivity and job performance. On the other hand, if an employee does not identify with their organization, their motivation and commitment are likely to be negatively affected, leading to lower job performance and even high turnover.

From a theoretical perspective, the relationship between sense of belonging and work motivation can be explained through self-efficacy theory and self-determination theory. Self-efficacy theory posits that an employee's perception of their ability to perform tasks influences their motivation and commitment to work. On the other hand, self-determination theory suggests that people have an innate need for autonomy, competence, and interpersonal relationships, and that these needs can be satisfied through work. Consequently, the sense of belonging within an organization and the work motivation of employees are closely related and have significant theoretical implications in the workplace. Fostering a strong sense of belonging and motivation in employees can improve their job performance and reduce employee turnover, which can in turn have a positive impact on the organization as a whole.

10. Practical implications

Sense of belonging and work motivation are two fundamental pillars for the success of a small research company. When employees feel they are an integral part of the organization, not just another cog in the machine, but valuable members whose opinions and work have a real impact, a deeper commitment to the company's goals is generated. This commitment translates into a greater willingness to go beyond the basics, driving innovation and creativity, vital elements in the field of research. Work motivation, on the other hand, is the engine that drives employees to perform their work with enthusiasm and dedication. In a small company, where each team member typically has a more significant role due to the smaller staff size, maintaining high levels of motivation is crucial. A motivated workforce is more productive, less prone to absenteeism, and has a higher likelihood of solving complex problems, which is essential in research.

For a small research company, fostering a strong sense of belonging and maintaining work motivation can mean the difference between surviving and thriving in a competitive market. Implementing human resource policies that promote inclusion, recognizing individual and collective achievements, and providing professional development opportunities are effective strategies to achieve these goals. Ultimately,

when employees feel valued and part of something bigger, their performance and loyalty to the company are intensified, propelling the organization forward in its mission to discover and explore new frontiers in science.

11. Study Limitations

The main limitation of the present research is the sample size, given that the company studied is categorized as a small enterprise according to Peruvian state categorization criteria. In this regard, the immediate effects of the small sample size entail increased margin of error (low precision), reduced statistical power, limitations in generalizing results, and risk of erroneous conclusions. Additionally, the method of sample selection was non-probabilistic convenience sampling, which directly affects the risk of bias and limitations in statistical inference. However, due to the case study nature of this work, both limitations are justified solely for the case of the company under investigation. Therefore, for a comprehensive understanding of the labor situation of workers in the research field in Peru, sample size calculation should be conducted, and samples should be selected using probabilistic methods.

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