

# A Study on Employee Motivation in Small and Medium-Sized Automotive Parts Manufacturing Enterprises

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study is to explore the employee incentive problem in small and medium-sized auto parts manufacturing enterprises. By using the method of questionnaire survey, the employees of these enterprises were investigated to understand their job satisfaction, career development and other related factors. The results show that the incentive level of employees in China's small and medium-sized auto parts manufacturing enterprises is generally low, and most employees are not satisfied with their work. Based on the analysis of the survey results, this paper puts forward some suggestions to improve employee motivation, including providing better career development opportunities, implementing more effective performance appraisal and reward system, and playing a medium and long-term incentive role in the salary incentive system. It is hoped that these suggestions can help small and medium-sized auto parts manufacturing enterprises improve the enthusiasm of employees and ultimately achieve sustainable development.*

**Keywords:** *Employee Motivation, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, Manufacturing Industry, Automotive Components*

## 1. Introduction

In the global economic system, the automotive industry undoubtedly occupies a pivotal position. It is not only the representative of industrial manufacturing, but also the key force to promote employment growth and economic development. As one of the most important industries in the global economy, the automotive industry is not only directly related to millions of jobs, but also has a far-reaching impact on the overall growth of the global economy due to the extensive extension of its industrial chain and technological innovation. In this huge industry, SMEs play an irreplaceable role. Compared with large multinational companies, SMEs often show a high degree of specialization and operational efficiency. They play a vital role in meeting specific market needs, promoting technological innovation and promoting employment growth. However, although the status of small and medium-sized enterprises in the automotive industry can not be ignored, they are facing many challenges, such as the fierce competition of large multinational companies, the rapid change of market environment and the limited resources. In order to maintain competitiveness in such a competitive environment, small and medium-sized enterprises need to constantly explore and optimize various management strategies, in which employee motivation is a key factor. Employee motivation, as a complex process involving internal and external factors of the organization, directly affects employees' work attitude, work performance and willingness to achieve organizational goals. An effective employee incentive mechanism can not only stimulate the enthusiasm and creativity of employees, improve productivity and efficiency, but also reduce the turnover rate of employees, enhance the cohesion and stability of the organization, so as to win valuable competitive advantages for small and medium-sized enterprises in the fierce market competition.

The core purpose of this study is to explore the challenges and problems faced by small and medium-sized auto parts manufacturing enterprises in employee motivation. Through the comprehensive use of questionnaire survey and other research methods, we systematically investigated the key dimensions of employees' job satisfaction, working environment, career development and so on, in order to reveal the key factors affecting employee motivation and its mechanism. We hope to be able to identify the main problems existing in the current small and medium-sized auto parts manufacturing enterprises in employee motivation, such as the imperfect incentive mechanism, the working environment to be

improved, and the unclear path of career development. Further, based on these findings, this study aims to put forward targeted improvement strategies and suggestions, in order to provide valuable reference for small and medium-sized auto parts manufacturing enterprises to optimize employee incentive mechanism, improve employee satisfaction and production efficiency, and promote the long-term sustainable development of enterprises.

## 2. Literature Review

In terms of motivation, since the 1920s and 1930s, foreign scholars have conducted extensive research, forming a rich theoretical system and providing an important foundation for modern motivation research.

Octaviannand et al. (2017) analyzed the impact of job satisfaction and motivation on employee performance in XYZ Shipping Company, and found that lack of motivation in the workplace can affect employee satisfaction and have a negative impact on employee performance<sup>[1]</sup>. Sabbagha et al. (2018) investigated the relationship between employee motivation and job satisfaction in foreign exchange banks and the predictive factors of employee retention, and found that the relationship between employee motivation and job satisfaction and employee retention is highly consistent<sup>[2]</sup>. Meira (2020) believes that the impact of employee turnover is mainly determined by environmental variables, individual variables, structured variables, and mediating variables<sup>[3]</sup>. Boakye (2021) believes that there are multiple factors that can lead to employee turnover, including personal circumstances, work attitudes, external environment, and various systems of the company<sup>[4]</sup>. Alan (2021) believes that justice theories such as social exchange theory and expectancy theory are cited, emphasizing that when superiors abuse power, the likelihood of employee turnover increases<sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, in order to improve the efficiency of enterprises, it is necessary to develop reasonable incentive mechanisms to improve job satisfaction and work motivation.

Ozkeser (2019) identified the degree of impact of training by studying the relationship between training and motivation completed by a large enterprise in the field of market services. The research results indicate that training not only motivates employees, but also increases the enthusiasm of team members, helping to improve the effectiveness of organizational structure<sup>[6]</sup>. Kim W. Chang and Mauborgne (2019) selected a British lubricant company as a case study and found that the fundamental reason for the lackluster attitude of sales personnel towards professional system sales is that the company did not provide systematic training courses for sales staff. Therefore, fairness is an important factor for employees to recognize and support the company<sup>[7]</sup>. Abdul et al. (2022) found in their research and analysis of the driving factors and outcomes of employees in the workplace that knowledge sharing can stimulate their creativity, innovate work behaviors, and improve their task performance<sup>[8]</sup>. These provide a certain reference for small and medium-sized enterprises. Many small and medium-sized enterprises overlook the importance of training, do not pay attention to the cultivation of employees, and do not realize that employee growth is also promoting the development of the enterprise

Efing et al. (2015) analyzed the impact of incentive compensation on 67 banking sectors using wage data from Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. The results showed a significant correlation between incentive compensation and bank transaction income levels. When incentive compensation is low, there is also a downward trend in transaction income brought by employees to the bank. To improve employee work performance and bank transaction income levels, it is necessary to appropriately increase incentive compensation<sup>[9]</sup>.

Hamid Borchiki and John Kimberly (2017) pointed out that managers adopt a humane approach to treating their subordinates, providing employees with a good and suitable working environment, highlighting their value in strategic planning, and proposing that trust relationships are the fundamental prerequisite for time, personality, and resource development<sup>[10]</sup>. Lorincov á et al. (2019) proposed that there are differences in the motivational factors that affect men and women. Women place more emphasis on salary and benefits, work atmosphere and safety, teamwork, and communication, while men also have a superior management model, fair evaluation, work time, and venue on this basis<sup>[11]</sup>.

## 3. Methodology

This article mainly focuses on the employees of a case enterprise as the main research object. Firstly, through literature research, the relevant theories of motivation are studied. Then, data is collected and analyzed using questionnaire surveys and interviews to identify the problems and reasons in employee motivation in the enterprise. Based on the basic knowledge of the two factor theory, optimization

suggestions are proposed, as follows:

**Literature research method:** This article refers to the existing research literature on incentive theory, and on the basis of studying and analyzing the possible problems and future development and changes of employee incentive in the industry, combined with the actual incentive situation of enterprises, finally finds out the problems and makes improvement research.

**Questionnaire survey method:** Taking employees of the case company as the survey object, the questionnaire survey method is used to collect the opinions and opinions of current employees on employee motivation in the company, and to organize and analyze the problems that the company currently faces in employee motivation and the expectations and suggestions of employees, so as to solve the problems in a targeted manner and achieve the goal of improvement.

**Interview method:** Based on the results of a questionnaire survey, typical employees of a case company are interviewed to identify issues related to employee motivation. This allows for a deeper understanding and verification of the current problems in the company, and further analyzes the problems in detail to propose better strategies for improving employee motivation.

#### **4. Theories**

According to the extensive research accumulated in the current academia and industry, incentive theory, a theoretical system to explore how to stimulate the enthusiasm and creativity of individuals or groups, is carefully divided into four main types: content incentive, process incentive, enhanced incentive and comprehensive incentive. This paper aims to conduct in-depth analysis and discussion by integrating these complex incentive theoretical frameworks, especially focusing on Herzberg's two factor theory, the core of content-based theory.

The core of content-based motivation theory, as its name suggests, is to explore the essence of motivation, the internal reasons driving individual action and the key factors that can play an incentive role. Under this theoretical framework, the theoretical contributions of many outstanding scholars have emerged, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which reveals the gradual upgrading process of human needs from basic physiological needs to self realization needs; Herzberg's two factor theory creatively divides the factors affecting job satisfaction into two categories: health care factors (i.e., dissatisfaction factors) and incentive factors; McClellan's achievement need motivation theory emphasizes the individual's pursuit of achievement, power and sense of belonging; Oliver's ERG theory (the need for existence, the need for relationship and the need for growth) further enriches our understanding of the level of human internal needs.

The process motivation theory focuses on analyzing the internal mechanism of the complex psychological process from the initiation of motivation to actual action. Fromm's expectation theory reveals the influence of the relationship between personal expectation and the possibility of achieving goals on motivation; House proposed a more comprehensive motivation model on this basis; Locke's goal motivation theory emphasizes the promotion of concrete and measurable goals on behavioral motivation; Adams' fairness theory reveals how people's sense of fairness or unfairness when comparing their input and return affects their work attitude and behavior.

Reinforcement theory, from the perspective of behaviorism, is based on the principle of reinforcement learning to explore how to understand and adjust human behavior through positive or negative reinforcement. This theory emphasizes the relationship between environmental stimuli and behavioral responses, and provides practical guidance for management and education.

The comprehensive incentive theory is the integration and sublimation of the above theories. It absorbs the essence of demand theory, expectation theory, equity theory and other fields, and constructs a more comprehensive and systematic incentive model, aiming to more accurately predict and regulate the behavior of individuals or groups.

In particular, Herzberg's two factor theory occupies an important position in the content based motivation theory. The theory clearly divides the factors that affect employees' job satisfaction into satisfaction factors (incentive factors) and dissatisfaction factors (health care factors). Satisfaction factors are mainly related to the internal satisfaction brought by the work itself, such as sense of achievement, job recognition, job significance and challenge, sense of responsibility, promotion opportunities and personal development. If these factors are satisfied, they can significantly improve the satisfaction and enthusiasm of employees. Dissatisfaction factors, namely health care factors, are mainly related to the

working environment and conditions, such as company policies, management supervision, salary, colleague relations and working conditions. If these factors are not handled properly, it is easy to cause dissatisfaction and negative behavior of employees. Through in-depth analysis of the two factor theory, we can better understand how to optimize the working environment and stimulate the internal motivation of employees, so as to improve the overall work efficiency and organizational performance.

## 5. Findings and Discussions

The research results of this paper provide insightful enlightenment for small and medium-sized auto parts manufacturing enterprises in employee incentive strategy. We selected several representative small and medium-sized auto parts manufacturing enterprises and conducted in-depth questionnaires and face-to-face interviews with their employees, aiming to comprehensively and carefully analyze various factors affecting employee motivation. Some core findings revealed by the survey not only have profound theoretical significance, but also provide valuable basis for the adjustment of strategies at the practical level.

Firstly, the employee incentive level of small and medium-sized auto parts manufacturing enterprises is generally low. Most of the surveyed employees expressed dissatisfaction with multiple dimensions of work to varying degrees, especially in terms of salary, working environment and career development opportunities. Among many dissatisfaction factors, the salary issue has the most significant impact on employee satisfaction. The unreasonable salary structure and the imperfect performance management system have become the main sources of aggravating employees' dissatisfaction. Specifically, the problems of salary structure are mainly reflected in the lack of scientific design and insufficient incentive. For example, the proportion of basic salary in the overall salary is low, and the post salary lacks a clear and reasonable division standard, which makes it difficult for the incentive mechanism to effectively stimulate the enthusiasm and loyalty of employees. In addition, the unsatisfactory performance management system has also brought great psychological burden to employees. The principle of competitiveness and fairness in salary design and management has not been fully reflected, and the leadership has made performance standards only based on subjective judgment, which undoubtedly exacerbated employees' doubts about the fairness of the performance management system, and then affected their work enthusiasm and engagement. More importantly, when the correlation between salary and performance is not close enough, the payment of employees' bonuses is often out of line with their actual performance, and the incentive effect of the performance system is greatly reduced, which cannot realize its due value.

Secondly, the survey results further reveal the significant weaknesses in the field of employee development in small and medium-sized auto parts manufacturing enterprises. Career development opportunities, especially training opportunities and promotion channels, are clearly recognized as one of the key factors driving employee motivation. Many employees generally have ardent expectations for career promotion. However, when facing the uncertainty and fuzziness of career prospects, this expectation often turns into heavy work pressure. Specifically, some companies stick to the old flat organizational structure, which seriously limits the promotion space of employees, making it difficult for many talented employees to see a clear career development path even if they make more efforts. What is more serious is that some excellent employees who have not been fully recognized and valued by their superiors for a long time have gradually weakened their sense of belonging and identity to the company because they feel that their own values and contributions have not been properly evaluated. They began to feel confused and confused about the future planning. This psychological state not only affected their personal career satisfaction and happiness, but also buried hidden dangers for the long-term development of the company. Over time, if these accumulated psychological pressures cannot be effectively alleviated and guided, they are likely to turn into negative work attitudes and behaviors, and become a stumbling block to the overall development of the company. Therefore, how to optimize the organizational structure, broaden the path of career development, and enhance the employees' sense of occupational safety and belonging have become the key problems to be solved in the auto parts manufacturing enterprises.

Thirdly, the research shows that small and medium-sized auto parts manufacturing enterprises generally have the problem of short incentive cycle, especially the lack of medium and long-term incentive mechanism for key talents. When optimizing the incentive mechanism, enterprises should deeply analyze the level of employees' needs and pay attention to the realization of employees' self-worth. It is worth noting that the medium and long-term incentive has irreplaceable strategic significance in the salary incentive system. For key core talents, due to their generally high salary level, the marginal utility of short-term incentive shows a decreasing trend. In contrast, the medium and long-term incentives are

based on the development dividend of the enterprise, which is more in line with the high-level needs of key core talents for sense of achievement and self realization. When formulating incentive policies, enterprises should focus on the key core talent groups in innovative and competitive enterprises. It is necessary to systematically consider the differential characteristics of short-term incentives such as compensation and performance and medium and long-term incentives, so as to achieve the organic unity of the two. Specifically, we should deeply integrate the medium and long-term incentives with the existing performance management system, pay attention to the synergy effect of material incentives and spiritual incentives, and comprehensively improve the effectiveness of the incentive mechanism through multi-dimensional incentive combination. This integrated incentive strategy can not only meet the diversified needs of employees, but also provide strong talent protection for the sustainable development of enterprises.

## 6. Conclusion

Through systematic questionnaire survey and empirical analysis, this study provides important theoretical basis and practical guidance for the construction of employee incentive system in small and medium-sized auto parts manufacturing enterprises. The study found that the current employee incentive level of such enterprises is generally low, and there are several key factors behind this phenomenon.

The survey results show that job satisfaction has been proved to be the key predictor of employee motivation level, and those employees who are satisfied with their work show better status in enthusiasm, engagement and performance. The employees of the surveyed enterprises generally show a low incentive state, and most employees express obvious dissatisfaction with multiple dimensions of the working environment, especially the salary level, working environment conditions and career development opportunities. At the same time, as an important way for employees' personal growth and value realization, career development opportunities are also clearly defined as another important driving force for employee motivation. Specifically, career development resources, including professional training, skills improvement and promotion opportunities, can not only meet the needs of employees for personal ability improvement, but also be an indispensable part of their career development planning. When employees perceive that the company has the will and ability to provide them with broad career development space, their work motivation and loyalty will be significantly improved. In addition, the medium and long-term incentive measures occupy an important position in the employee incentive system, especially for middle and senior managers. These managers are often closely linked to the fate of enterprises, and their decisions and actions directly affect the strategic direction and long-term competitiveness of enterprises. Therefore, combining the long-term interests of the company with the personal interests of managers can not only deeply stimulate their enthusiasm for work, but also effectively promote their initiative and innovation. There are various forms of medium and long-term incentives, including but not limited to equity incentives, deferred payment of performance bonuses, and performance-based long-term incentive plans. The design of these mechanisms aims to ensure that managers can fully consider the long-term development of enterprises while pursuing personal career achievements, and realize the harmonious unity of personal interests and enterprise interests. When managers realize that their efforts and contributions will be directly related to the future success of the enterprise and the continuous growth of personal wealth, they tend to show a higher sense of loyalty and responsibility, and are more willing to participate in the innovation, reform and strategy implementation of the enterprise. More importantly, the implementation of medium and long-term incentive measures can significantly improve the stability of the middle and senior management team. In the face of fierce market competition and changing market environment, a stable and experienced management team is the cornerstone of the sustainable and stable development of enterprises. By building a reasonable medium and long-term incentive mechanism, enterprises can effectively reduce the loss of key talents, ensure the continuity and stability of the core management, and lay a solid foundation for the long-term development of enterprises

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made to improve employee motivation in small and medium-sized automotive parts manufacturing enterprises. As shown below:

(1) Establish a fair and just salary, benefits, and assessment system. When the company embarks on the optimization of the compensation and welfare system, it must always focus on the actual work performance and performance results of employees to ensure that the compensation and welfare measures can accurately recognize and give back the efforts and contributions of employees. The salary system design of enterprises should firmly establish the performance oriented principle, deepen the application of performance appraisal results in salary distribution, fully highlight the leverage effect of performance

appraisal and stimulate the enthusiasm and creativity of employees by increasing the proportion of special awards in the total salary. In the design of the salary structure, enterprises should adopt a hierarchical and differentiated strategy, combined with the point management mode of paying equal attention to incentives and constraints, and reasonably open the salary gap between employees. This differentiated compensation strategy aims to form a clear performance orientation, encourage employees to pursue excellence, promote the formation of a benign compensation adjustment mechanism of "being able to move up and down, increasing and decreasing", and create a corporate culture atmosphere of fair competition. In the process of establishing the performance appraisal system, enterprises should also comprehensively implement quantitative performance appraisal methods, and scientifically set appraisal indicators and their scores according to the specific job responsibilities and contents of employees. By accurately calculating the actual performance score of each employee, we can intuitively show their personal work effectiveness and ensure the objectivity and impartiality of the assessment results. In order to ensure the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the assessment system, enterprises need to carefully plan each assessment content, clarify the assessment standards, comprehensively consider multiple factors such as work difficulty, actual performance of employees, task completion time and skill requirements, scientifically set performance scoring parameters, and give reasonable weights and scores to all relevant factors. The implementation of this comprehensive assessment system can not only provide clear career development paths and promotion standards for employees, but also promote the formation of a positive working atmosphere within the enterprise, stimulate the internal motivation and innovation ability of employees, and provide solid talent protection and institutional support for the sustainable and stable development of the enterprise.

(2) Appropriately expand the career development space of employees. In order to comprehensively promote the personal growth and career development of employees, enterprises should actively and appropriately expand the career development space of employees. In this process, we can learn from and integrate the concept of horizontal and vertical dual career development mechanism to build a diversified and dynamic career development path. In terms of horizontal career development mechanism, enterprises should encourage and support staff's job rotation and cross departmental collaboration, and help employees explore and find work areas that really stimulate their enthusiasm and potential through scientific planning and rational allocation of internal resources. This process can not only enhance the confidence and motivation of employees to face new challenges, but also promote the exchange and sharing of knowledge and skills within the enterprise and improve the overall efficiency of the team. At the same time, in order to ensure the effectiveness and fairness of the horizontal communication mechanism, enterprises should set a reasonable rotation period, and establish a perfect evaluation and feedback mechanism. For employees who can not adapt to the requirements of the new position, they should be guided to return to the original position in time to prevent the mechanism from being abused, and ensure that every employee can shine and heat in the most suitable position. In terms of vertical career development mechanism, enterprises should focus on the growth needs of employees in technical and management positions, and provide promotion opportunities for employees who show strong will and excellent ability according to the results of performance appraisal, so as to make the career development path of employees more clear and diversified. Especially for technical talents, the optimization of the vertical mechanism can enable them to see that through the improvement of professional skills, they can also obtain the corresponding professional status and treatment, so as to stimulate their innovation vitality and work enthusiasm, and regain the confidence of sustainable development.

(3) Play the role of medium-term and long-term incentives in the salary incentive system. Enterprises should make full use of the dual power of material incentives and spiritual incentives, skillfully integrate the medium and long-term incentives with the existing performance management system, so that material incentives and spiritual incentives complement each other, and work together in the incentive process of employees, so as to significantly improve the overall effect of incentives. Through the implementation of equity incentives, profit sharing plans, deferred bonuses and other medium - and long-term incentive measures, it can effectively realize the deep binding between the personal interests of employees and the long-term development of enterprises. In addition, in order to build a more stable and efficient incentive mechanism, enterprises need to clarify and adhere to their own core values. Through the guidance of values, employees can deeply identify with the development vision and goals of the enterprise and form a strong internal cohesion. Enterprises should always adhere to the advanced development concept of "people-oriented", pay attention not only to the career development of employees, but also to the richness of their spiritual world, and strive to create a harmonious atmosphere of mutual encouragement, benign competition and love within the enterprise. Such an environment can stimulate employees' sense of belonging and responsibility, and promote them to be more active in their work. In order to further

enhance employees' sense of participation and ownership, enterprises should provide employees with diversified speaking channels, actively listen to and widely collect employees' opinions and suggestions. This not only helps the enterprise to capture the real voice from the grass-roots level in time, but also allows employees to pay more attention to and participate in the construction of corporate culture, forming a good situation of unified development. In this way, employees will be able to face challenges more directly in their future work, have the determination and courage to overcome difficulties, and contribute to the sustainable development and innovation of the enterprise.

It is worth noting that although the above suggestions are universal, they may not fully meet the specific needs of all small and medium-sized auto parts manufacturing enterprises. Enterprises need to adopt more personalized solutions to deal with the problems found in employee motivation, and accurately identify the key factors that promote or hinder employee motivation through in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the internal operating environment. This process should include multi-dimensional considerations such as corporate culture, management style, employee needs, and market trends. Through such careful analysis, enterprises can more accurately grasp the incentive points of employees and the shortcomings of existing incentive measures. On this basis, enterprises can start to formulate more targeted incentive strategies, aiming to accurately stimulate the enthusiasm and creativity of employees, and then promote the overall performance and sustainable development of enterprises. Such customized solutions not only help to improve employee satisfaction and loyalty, but also inject stronger market competitiveness and innovation ability into enterprises.

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