



Middle East Human Capital Trends 2025

What moves your people? Tapping into motivation at the unit of one

What is the last mile of human performance? Understanding and capitalizing on what makes the people in your organization tick—at an individual level

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In today's human-centered economy, understanding what truly motivates people has become a strategic imperative. No longer can we afford to treat employees as a uniform group—each individual brings a unique blend of aspirations, emotions, and drivers to their work. And while personalization is common in customer marketing, it remains underutilized in workforce strategy.

Deloitte's 2025 Global Human Capital Trends report identifies motivation as a core factor that connects human potential with organizational outcomes. This insight is especially urgent in regions like the Middle East, where transformation agendas such as Saudi Vision 2030, Qatar National Vision 2030, and UAE Centennial 2071 are reshaping the future of work at unprecedented scale. These national visions are not just economic strategies; they are calling to rethink how talent is developed, engaged, and empowered in rapidly evolving environments.

Understanding motivation also reflects a broader organizational need: to balance competing tensions in how work is designed and experienced. According to the report, organizations today must learn to operate in a world of persistent paradox—between individual empowerment and organizational consistency, between personalization and fairness, and between performance demands and employee well-being. Motivation sits at the heart of these tensions, acting as both a pressure point and a possibility.

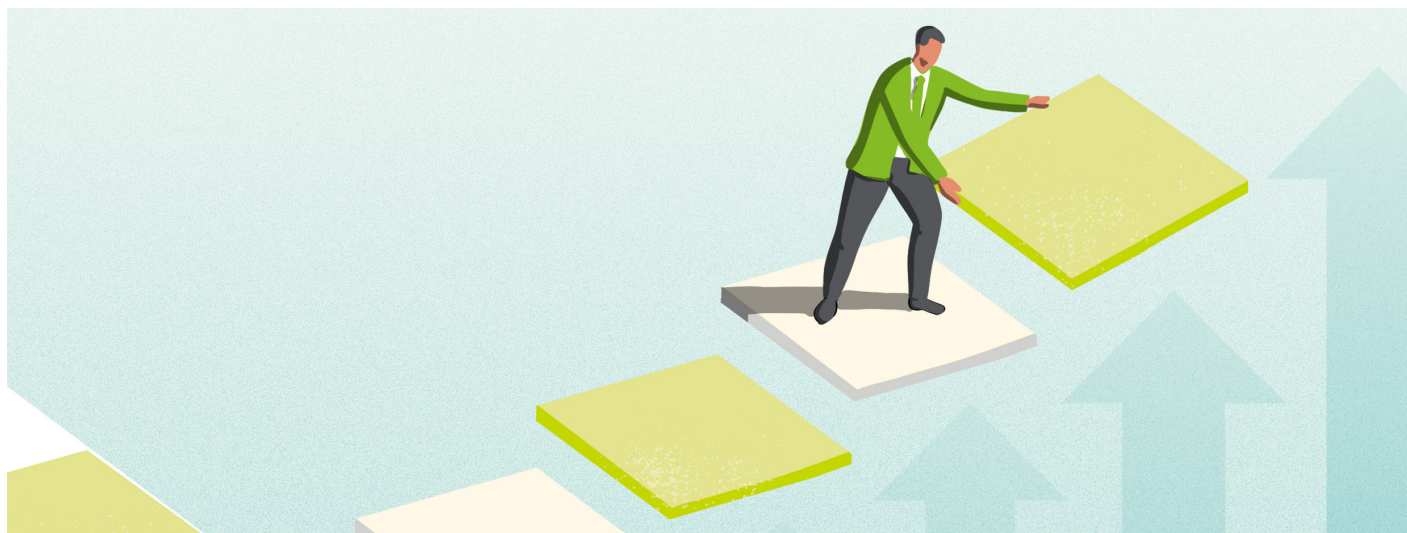
What is Motivation?

Some researchers define motivation as the general desire or willingness of someone to do something¹.

For the purposes of this report, however, we define motivation as the reason why one behaves or acts in a particular way. These reasons may be conscious or unconscious, rational, or emotional, short or long term, internally motivated or externally motivated. Put simply, motivations are the driving force that moves the way an individual thinks, acts, and behaves.

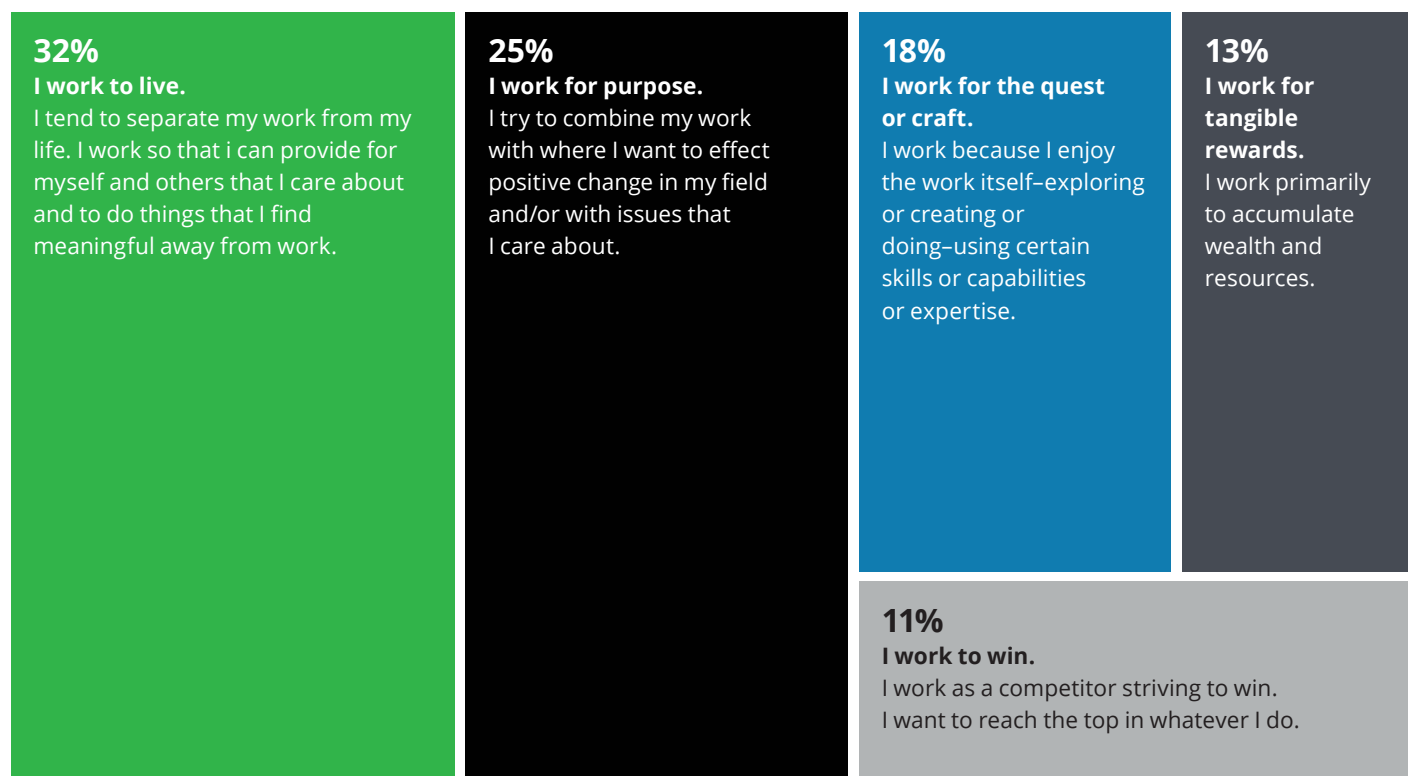
It should also be noted that motivations are not static. Rather, they will inevitably change based on the contexts in which they arise, with the same person motivated by one factor in one situation and a completely different factor in another situation².

While 78% of workers claim to have clarity about their own motivations, only 33% believe their organizations and managers understand those motivations well. And yet, 60% expect their organizations to do more to boost their motivation. This is not a data gap—it is a design gap, one that calls into question how well we are listening to our people and responding with intention³.



Why do we work?

Percentage of respondents answering the question: "Which of the following statements best describes your MOST important rationale for working? Select one."



Source: Analysis of Deloitte's 2025 Global Human Capital Trends survey data.

Motivation as a capability

Motivation is not fixed. It is contextual. It shifts depending on environment, role, and relationships. It is also multidimensional—conscious and unconscious, rational, and emotional, short- and long-term, intrinsic, and extrinsic. Simply put, it is the energy that drives behavior.

To unlock this energy, we must first reframe motivation not just as a trait, but as a capability—something that can be activated, nurtured, and scaled. This perspective positions motivation as a leadership tool, a lens through which performance, retention, and culture can be reimaged.

Across the region, governments and organizations are beginning to respond. In Saudi Arabia, public sector reform includes executive regulations that prioritize identifying, rewarding, and continually motivating high-performing employees. Similarly, Qatar's *Irtiqa'a* program offers personalized development journeys to empower civil servants as active contributors to national transformation⁴. The UAE's Federal HR Authority has issued ethical guidelines for using AI to assess and develop talent, ensuring trust and fairness while embracing innovation⁵.

At Deloitte, we view hyper-personalization as essential for effectively influencing worker behavior. Tapping into motivation as a means of influencing worker behavior to realize both human and business outcomes requires two broad steps: understanding worker motivations through the collection and analysis of data and using hyper-personalization approaches to act on that data in ways that create value for workers and the organization. By achieving motivation at the unit of one, where customization happens at the granular, individual level, we can significantly enhance human performance. Balancing standardization with personalization and centralized control with individual autonomy, hyper-personalization benefits both workers and the organization⁶.

Understanding individual motivations

Hyper-personalization of motivation requires more than empathy—it requires system design. Traditional surveys and demographic segmentation are not enough. What is needed is a more nuanced approach that integrates behavioral data, AI insights, and human judgment to uncover what moves people.

Understanding motivation at scale means shifting from one-size-fits-all practices to architectures that accommodate uniqueness. This is no small feat—it demands data literacy, change readiness, and a shift in culture from managing people to enabling their potential.

Many organizations are beginning to explore three personalization pathways:

- 1. Manager-driven personalization:** Empowering managers to design future-forward development plans through one-on-one conversations that center employee motivation. This does not require significant investment, but it does demand consistent coaching capability. When done well, it builds trust, transparency, and accountability. UAE's 2024 federal rewards system provides a real-world example, allowing direct managers to nominate employees for recognition based on performance beyond formal job duties—recognition that reinforces intrinsic motivation⁷.
- 2. Modular personalization:** Offering pre-set choices tailored to individual preferences—such as compensation models, scheduling, or project work. This ensures fairness and scalability but offers less individual depth. However, it serves as an important bridge between standardization and hyper-personalization. When thoughtfully designed, modular approaches can empower employees with a sense of autonomy and control over their work experience.
- 3. Technology-enabled personalization:** Using behavioral and emotional data (from wearables, feedback platforms, etc.) to dynamically adapt communication, learning, and job fit. Though high in precision, this path requires robust data governance and significant investment. Still, when used responsibly, it enables real-time responsiveness to motivational signals, allowing organizations to support well-being, engagement, and productivity in ways that static systems cannot.

Acting on individual motivations

Across the Middle East region, we are witnessing these models emerge in workforce strategy. In Saudi Arabia, the launch of the National Skills Platform signals a growing recognition of motivation and capability as deeply intertwined⁸. Through AI-powered skills mapping and flexible learning pathways, workers are guided toward roles that reflect both market needs and personal drive.

Similarly, the Human Resources Development Fund is investing in future talent with programs that merge labor market foresight and beneficiary-centered design. These programs empower individuals to build careers aligned with both national priorities and personal aspirations. In doing so, they illustrate how understanding motivation is central to labor market resilience.

In Qatar, *Irtiqa'a* offers a compelling case for capability-based motivation. By tailoring each learning journey to the participant's role, aspirations, and growth trajectory, the program positions civil servants not just as employees—but as empowered agents of transformation. This approach reflects an understanding that public service motivation is not only a function of incentives, but of meaning, mastery, and contribution.

The UAE, through its AI ethics framework in talent evaluation, is establishing procedural safeguards to ensure motivation-based insights are applied ethically and transparently. These efforts support a future where intelligent systems enable—not replace—human judgment, and where personalization enhances equity rather than undermines it.

Conclusion: Designing for motivation, not assuming it

Organizations do not need sweeping reform to start. The shift can begin with one question: What moves your people? Asking this—honestly, persistently, and with curiosity—can unlock insights that no survey alone will surface. It also sends a message: that individuals matter, and that their motivations are not abstract ideas but real forces shaping work and outcomes.

In a world where talent is the true competitive advantage, motivation is not a soft metric. It is the force that converts potential into performance. Understanding it—and acting on it—is how we build not simply better workers, but stronger, more resilient institutions.

Organizations across the Middle East have begun to recognize that motivational design is not an HR trend—it is a leadership responsibility. It is how cultures evolve. It is how institutions grow. And it is how workers thrive.

The question is no longer whether motivation matters. It is how deeply we are willing to understand it—and how boldly we are willing to design it. Those who answer this call will be the ones shaping not just the future of work, but the future of human potential.

Research methodology

The survey for the Deloitte 2025 Global Human Capital Trends report polled nearly 10,000 business and human resources leaders across many industries and sectors in 93 countries, including across the Middle East region. In addition to the broad, global survey that provides the foundational data for the Global Human Capital Trends report, Deloitte supplemented its research this year with worker-, manager- and executive-specific surveys to uncover where there may be gaps between leader and manager perception and worker realities. The survey data is complemented by more than 25 interviews with executives from some of today's leading organizations. These insights helped shape the trends in this report.

Endnotes

- ¹ Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54–67. <https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020>
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- ⁸ HRDF (Human Resources Development Fund, Saudi Arabia). (2024). National Skills Platform Overview. Retrieved from: [https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/news/skills-platform\(https://hrdf.org.sa\)](https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/news/skills-platform(https://hrdf.org.sa))

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