

REVIEW ARTICLE

Fear of losing one's job as a work motivation

ABSTRACT

One of the most complex issues in organizations is work motivation; however, the phenomenon of fear as a motivating force at work has been little examined. Thus, the aim of this paper is to examine fear, understood as a work motivator, to boost performance and productivity. A qualitative methodology with a hermeneutic approach is used to explore the fear of losing one's job as a motivating force in the work environment. Likewise, it is an exploratory and descriptive-analytical approach based on the review of scientific papers and a thematic analysis to identify patterns and recurring themes. The main results reveal that the fear of losing one's job impacts both employees and the organization in general, generating psychological, physiological and behavioral reactions that affect productivity and social interactions, also damaging the culture and work environment. Fear can encourage work efforts in the short term, but it damages emotional and psychological well-being in the long term, decreasing creativity and innovation. In conclusion, based on the theories analyzed, it was found that, although fear can boost temporary performance, its effectiveness as a motivational driver depends on intrinsic factors and the balance between rewards and consequences. Fear can negatively affect competitiveness and organizational sustainability; therefore, leaders are recommended to apply balanced strategies that prioritize employee well-being, avoiding generating unnecessary anxiety, in order to improve performance and quality of work.

Keywords: work attitude; emotions at work; organizational behavior.

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INTRODUCCIÓN

Fear of job loss is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that profoundly influences employee behavior and motivation within organizations. This feeling of job insecurity can act as a powerful motivating force, driving workers to increase their effort and performance in an attempt to secure their position. However, the impact of this type of extrinsic motivation is not unidimensional and can have both positive and negative effects on individual well-being and organizational performance.

According to Bedoya Dorado and García Solarte (2016), fear has influenced human behavior over time and continues to play an important role in today's work environment. This emotion has been analyzed from various organizational perspectives, highlighting both its positive and negative aspects in relation to organizational results.

In this regard, work motivation significantly influences employee well-being, talent retention and productivity, which highlights its unquestionable relevance in the business environment (Madero, 2019); furthermore, productivity is crucial for organizational success and effectiveness (Céspedes, 2018). On the other hand, Chiavenato (2022) emphasizes the close relationship between workers' motivation and their performance, underlining that high performance requires work motivation.

In Ecuador, Ayón *et al.* (2021) define motivation as an internal or external emotion of pleasure when meeting expected results, directly influencing staff performance through the energy, dedication and commitment invested in their work. However, organizations have not yet implemented techniques to enhance motivation, which reflects low levels of initiative and work quality. On the other hand, in Peru, it has been observed that effective management of human talent is deficient; since, according to the Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática (INEI, 2022), incentives and motivation programs are crucial for job satisfaction and organizational development; however, it generates long-term dependency.

In view of the above, in a competitive and constantly changing work environment, this

fear can act as a powerful motivational factor, driving employees to improve their performance and increase their productivity to ensure their permanence in the organization; however, it can also have negative effects, such as increased stress and decreased personal well-being. Therefore, the research question is: How does the fear of losing one's job influence employees' work motivation?

Furthermore, this systematic review aims to comprehensively analyze the existing literature on fear of job loss as a work motivator, examining previous studies that address both its positive and negative effects. This approach will provide a comprehensive view of the phenomenon, assessing how fear is used as a motivational tool and its impact on productivity, the organizational climate, and the emotional health of workers.

The relevance of this study lies in the need to understand how fear of job loss can be efficiently managed by organizations, especially in a constantly evolving work environment where job uncertainty is increasingly common. By providing a clearer view on how fear can be leveraged to improve organizational outcomes without generating a toxic environment, this research offers business leaders and HR managers a solid foundation for designing strategies that promote a healthier work culture. Therefore, this research seeks to shed light on the complexities of fear as a catalyst for motivation in the workplace, exploring its implications and challenges.

Search strategy

To carry out this work on the fear of losing one's job as a work motivation, an exhaustive search for information was carried out in recognized databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar and SciELO. The search included publications in English and Spanish, using keywords such as "fear", "work fear", "motivation" and "work motivation". Below is a review of the literature that compiles and analyzes the most relevant studies related to these topics, with the aim of establishing a theoretical framework that allows us to understand the relationship between the fear of losing one's job and motivation in the work context.

Literature review

This section will provide a solid foundation for the analysis of the results in this study, highlighting the main academic contributions and the existing gaps in the current literature.

In the study by Cano and Ruiz-Alba (2021), they identified that during the COVID-19 pandemic, journalism has suffered a 25% increase in unemployment, generating a climate of uncertainty and fear, especially among women journalists, who are the most affected. This fear of losing their jobs is intensified by job insecurity, which forces many to accept unfavorable conditions that can compromise the quality and ethics of journalism. In addition, the crisis has led to an increase in misinformation, underlining the need for more solid and specialized journalism, despite economic difficulties.

In the academic field, especially at the university level, various problems can be identified that are closely related to job fear. Gender violence (Sandoval and Jiménez, 2022) and workplace harassment (Carrillo Meráz and Montesinos Carrera, 2022) generate an environment of insecurity that can intensify anxiety about teachers' job stability. Likewise, academic performance is affected by the constant pressure to meet high expectations (Pulido-Acosta and Herrera-Clavero, 2016), which can lead to a fear of failure and, therefore, job loss. Stress and mental health problems are also factors that contribute to this feeling of vulnerability (Pulido-Acosta and Herrera-Clavero, 2016), while the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated job uncertainty (Saeed *et al.*, 2023). Finally, social justice issues may influence risk perception among scholars, increasing their fear of job loss in an already challenging environment (Roohi *et al.*, 2023).

Likewise, in the consultation of previous studies, Valerio Alcívar (2021) found a significant correlation between motivation and productivity in a sample of 61 municipal infrastructure management experts, with a Spearman's Rho of 0.974, suggesting that fear of losing one's job can be a strong motivator. Godoy Ramírez (2019) showed a significant relationship between these variables in 80 medicinal chemists, with a

Rho of 0.690, indicating that fear can encourage higher performance. Del Valle Barrera (2022) demonstrated a significant correlation between the evaluation of nursing performance and work motivation in 70 caregivers, with a Pearson coefficient of 0.533, which may reflect that the fear of not meeting post-pandemic expectations motivates employees.

On the other hand, Sánchez Saavedra (2023) identified a moderate relation between productivity and motivation in a ministry agency, with a Spearman's Rho of 0.709, suggesting that concern for job stability influences productivity. Similarly, Delgado Macines (2019) showed a strong correlation between productivity and work motivation in 40 employees, concluding that fear of job loss can increase motivation and performance, although these positive correlations may be accompanied by long-term negative effects on employee well-being.

Fear of job loss has been a significant motivator in Peruvian work culture, where job stability is considered crucial due to economic uncertainty. This pervasive concern has driven workers to strive and excel in their work roles; although work motivation has been widely studied, less attention has been paid to fear of job loss as a potential motivator. The paper by Sánchez-Pacheco *et al.* (2022) highlights the relevance of work incentives in the city of Machala, Ecuador, but more research is needed on this topic. Globally, job insecurity is a common concern, although the dynamics may vary. While in Peru job security is closely linked to fear of job loss, in other cultures other factors such as work-life balance or professional recognition may play a role.

On the other hand, to understand the literature, prominent authors such as Robbins and Judge (2009, cited in Padovan, 2020), support the idea that work motivation is a complex process that involves internal and external factors in the work environment, including the fear of losing one's job as an external factor that can influence workers' motivation. Likewise, the contributions of Herzberg (1968, cited in Madero, 2019) on hygiene elements at work and work motivation enrich the theoretical understanding by highlighting how the absence

of hygiene factors, such as job security, can generate fear and dissatisfaction among employees. These theoretical foundations allow for a deep and exhaustive theoretical reflection and academic discussion on how the fear of losing one's job can affect work motivation and productivity in the work environment. The relationship between productivity and workers' motivation in highly competitive work environments has been the subject of increasing research, revealing a positive correlation between job performance and motivation levels, although fear of losing one's job may be a factor that influences this relationship. Motivation in the workplace is crucial to boost employee engagement and efficiency, which in turn can improve organizational productivity, but this process can be affected by fear of job loss and job insecurity.

These findings support the importance of addressing fear of job loss as an integral part of work motivation management strategies. According to the research of Weihrich *et al.* (2022) in "Management – A Global, Innovative, and Entrepreneurial Perspective", the significant contribution of the Need-Based Theory of Motivation developed by McClelland (1955) is highlighted. This theory formulated an approach that outlined three fundamental motivational needs: the desire for power, affiliation, and achievement, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of motivation. An extensive study has been conducted on the evaluation of people with respect to the above-mentioned three types of needs. According to Maslow (1970, as cited in Feldman, 2022) Maslow's hierarchy refers to the hierarchical arrangement of motivational requirements.

Maslow's theory organizes motivational needs in a hierarchical structure, like a pyramid, in which the fundamental demands are located at the base. It is established because the base of the pyramid represents the most sophisticated desires, while the base represents the most fundamental needs. The fundamental needs are at the top and include essential elements such as water, food, rest, and sexual activity, among others. According to Herzberg's research (1966), as cited in Belausteguigoitia Ruis, 2022), workers' behavior is fundamentally aligned with this notion of motivation.

According to the author, there are two factors that play a decisive role in the way workers behave. The first dimension refers to pleasure or satisfaction, including motivational or internal variables, while the next is unhappiness (see Table 1).

What is fear?

In the context of capitalism, fear plays a fundamental role in the dominant ideology, where wage workers face constant concern about unemployment, precarious working conditions and increasing exploitation, including the risk of dismissal. This fear is closely related to economic crises, which constitute a source of continuous anxiety for those who do not have access to a means of production. On the other hand, the modernity analysis examines how power and its distribution in society influence the management of emotions, including fear (Ochoa-Jimenez *et al.*, 2024).

In this regard, "fear" can be conceptualized as an emotion characterized by the anticipation of a threat or danger, whether real or perceived. This emotional response can manifest itself at cognitive, emotional and physiological levels, triggering adaptive reactions in individuals. The understanding of fear has been the subject of various interpretations in the scientific literature. Fear is an essential and ubiquitous feeling (André, 2005; Rodríguez, 2004), innately rooted in both animals and humans to react and respond to danger in a way that guarantees the survival and preservation of the species (Nardone, 2003). As Goleman (2009) states, the thalamus processes sensory stimuli, mainly visual and auditory, before the neocortex does, which evaluates the information through various levels of circuits in the brain. Behavioral, physiological and psychological reactions are intricately linked and can occur simultaneously or sequentially, presenting various degrees of intensity (Marina, 2006).

Work motivation, a cornerstone of organizational success and sustainability in the contemporary business context, has been addressed exhaustively; however, one of its least explored aspects is the impact of fear of job loss as a motivational driver (Weihrich *et al.*, 2022). This aspect acquires a singular significance in

Table 1
Summary of the Theoretical Framework

Author and Year	Contribution
Sanchez-Pacheco <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Highlights the relevance of work incentives in the city of Machala, Ecuador, emphasizing the need for more research on the fear of losing one's job as a motivator in other work cultures.
Robbins and Judge (2009)	They support the idea that work motivation is a complex process that involves internal and external factors in the work environment, including the fear of losing one's job as an external factor that can influence workers' motivation.
Herzberg (1968)	Highlights the importance of hygiene elements at work and work motivation, emphasizing how the absence of hygiene factors, such as job safety, can generate fear and dissatisfaction among employees.
Wehrich <i>et al.</i> (2022)	They highlight the significant contribution of the Needs-Based Motivation Theory developed by McClelland (1955), which outlined three fundamental motivational needs: the desire for power, affiliation and achievement, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of work motivation.
Maslow (1970)	Maslow's hierarchy of needs organizes motivational needs into a hierarchical structure, highlighting the importance of security needs in work motivation.
Herzberg (1966)	Suggests that workers' behavior is fundamentally aligned with the notion of motivation and satisfaction, where the absence of motivational factors can lead to job unhappiness.

Note. Prepared by the authors.

the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which emphasize the need to promote decent work and inclusive and sustained economic growth (United Nations [UN], 2015). Although traditional attention has fallen on incentives and recognition as motivational drivers, the fear of job loss emerges as a powerful catalyst that impacts workers' performance and productivity. In a work scenario characterized by increasing competition and economic uncertainty, this fear can acquire notable relevance as a motivating force.

However, understanding the effects of fear of job loss on work motivation remains a challenge for many organizations. Leaders and managers must address this complex dynamic, recognizing its potential to boost performance, but also its potential adverse implications on employee well-being and mental health (Wehrich *et al.*, 2022). In this context, this paper aims to examine the fear of job loss phenomenon in depth as a work motivator. Through a meticulous literature review and a multidisciplinary approach, we aim to shed light on the psychological and organizational dimensions that shape this dynamic, as well as identify the most effective strategies and practices to manage and capitalize on this powerful motivator, thus promoting a productive and sustainable work environment, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015).

Based on the above context, Ryan and Oestreich (1991) found that employees, fearing possible negative consequences, chose not to talk about their mistakes. Furthermore, Jericó (2006) identified various manifestations of fear in organizations, drawing up lists that include fears such as fear of change, of dismissal, of losing authority, of lack of knowledge, and of making mistakes, among others.

Bedoya Dorado and García Solarte (2016) argue that in organizations where fear prevails, employee morale deteriorates because they feel undervalued and show low initiative; which leads to conflicts between departments, lack of cooperation, and increasing distrust between bosses and subordinates. Likewise, the work environment becomes hostile, resulting in concealment of errors, decreased participation in improvements, and a reduction in innovation. Employees lose confidence in their ideas, which causes dissatisfaction, high turnover, and absenteeism.

In this regard, Juárez-García *et al.* (2020) found that in Latin America a large part of the workforce operates in the informal economy, exploring how psychosocial factors affect their well-being. A study in Cuernavaca (Mexico) shows that although positive factors predominate, such as rewarding tasks and social contact, fear of job loss and negative interactions can

influence burnout and mental health problems. These findings suggest that managing fear of job loss and negative work relationships is crucial to improving motivation and satisfaction in informal work.

Similarly, Iturralde and Duque (2021) examine, from a Marxist perspective, the essential variables to protect decent work in Ecuador, especially in the context of teleworking intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. It was identified that the Humanitarian Law and Ministry Agreement MDT-2016-0190 contributed to job insecurity, negatively affecting variables such as income, social benefits, working hours, and job stability. This increase in job insecurity is related to a greater fear of losing one's job, underlining the need to adjust regulations to improve the safety and well-being of workers. In this regard, the conceptual aspect of the variables is shown in the following section.

Argumentation

This review paper takes the idea that fear of job loss can act as a powerful motivator in the workplace and has been addressed by several experts in organizational psychology and human resource management. An argument supported by the perspectives of prominent past authors is presented below:

Frederick Herzberg (1968), in his work "One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees?" distinguishes between motivating and hygiene factors, where he differentiates between factors that motivate and factors that prevent dissatisfaction. The fear of losing one's job can be considered a hygiene factor, since its absence can generate dissatisfaction, but its presence does not necessarily motivate. However, this fear can catalyze the search for motivating factors, such as achievement and recognition, to counteract the perceived threat.

Similarly, Douglas McGregor (1960), famous for his Theory X and Y presented in "The Human Side of Enterprise," suggested that management styles influence employee motivation. In the context of fear of job loss, Theory X might be relevant, as it states that some employees are inherently distrustful and avoid work if they are not under pressure. Thus, fear of job loss might be an effective tool for managing such employees.

Abraham Maslow (1954), in "Motivation and Personality", proposed the hierarchy of needs, where security needs occupy a key place. The fear of losing one's job can activate these security needs, leading employees to strive to maintain their job position and, therefore, motivate them to work harder.

Victor Vroom (1964), in "Work and Motivation", developed the "Expectancy Theory", highlighting the relationship between effort, performance and reward. In the context of fear of job loss, employees may perceive that extra effort to maintain their job position translates into the reward of keeping their job. This perception may increase motivation to meet job expectations.

Adam Grant (2013), in "Give and Take", highlights the importance of an equitable work environment. If the fear of job loss is managed fairly and transparently, it can contribute to an environment where employees feel motivated to contribute positively to keep their jobs, fostering a culture of reciprocity and cooperation.

Taken together, these authors support the idea that fear of job loss can be a motivating force, but its effectiveness depends on how it is managed and integrated into the work dynamic, avoiding negative consequences for employee well-being and morale (see Table 2).

Analysis of Workers' Fears in Peru

The analysis of workers' fears in Peru reveals a complex interaction between various factors that go beyond mere financial security. Job stability stands as an unwavering priority, shaped by economic uncertainty and the need for job security. This fear of losing one's job not only responds to concerns about financial stability, but is also deeply rooted in social pressures and family expectations, which act as powerful drivers for job performance. Furthermore, the fear of not meeting social and family expectations can have a direct impact on workers' self-esteem and emotional well-being. In this context, economic crises and exacerbated political changes further intensify these fears, highlighting the critical importance of employment as a fundamental pillar in the lives of Peruvians. In this regard, some motivations are:

- a. *Job Stability as a Priority:* The Peruvian economy, marked by periods of uncertainty, has led employees to highly value job security. The fear of losing one's job becomes a catalyst for engagement and commitment to job performance.
- b. *The Importance of Financial Support:* Many Peruvian workers directly associate their employment with the ability to provide for their families and cover basic needs. The relationship between the fear of losing one's job and financial support is intrinsic. This fear acts as an impetus to maintain high levels of productivity, since job stability translates directly into financial security.
- c. *Social Pressure and Family Expectations:* There is significant social pressure, especially in communities where individual success is directly associated with job stability. The fear of social disapproval and of not meeting family expectations can drive workers to excel in their work roles. This dynamic reinforces the connection between fear of job loss and personal motivation.
- d. *Emotional Repercussions and Self-Esteem:* Job loss is perceived not only as a financial threat, but also as affecting self-esteem and emotional well-being. The fear of losing one's job acts as an emotional stimulus that drives workers to maintain high levels of performance. The connection between emotional well-being and job stability highlights the complexity of this motivational drive.
- e. *Impact of Economic Crises and Political Changes:* Employment fears in Peru intensify during periods of economic crises or political changes. In times of instability, the fear of losing one's job is magnified, becoming a key driver for adaptation and the search for development opportunities.

Labor laws and their relationship with the fear of losing one's job

Employment contract regulations limit flexibility in hiring, which could lead to greater caution on the part of employers when hiring staff, creating a less dynamic work environment. Workers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the laws can influence their level of confidence and the intensity of their fear of losing their job, especially if they perceive a high staff turnover in their workplace.

Practices of workers seeking to keep their jobs for fear of losing them

Workers often adopt various practices in order to keep their jobs and mitigate the fear of losing them. According to Molano Matallana (2018), these practices can vary depending on

Table 2
Summary of the Main Contributions that Support the Theory

Author	Year	Contribution
Frederick Herzberg	1968	Distinguishes between motivating and hygiene factors, where fear of job loss can be considered a hygiene factor that prevents job dissatisfaction, but does not necessarily motivate. However, it can activate the search for motivating factors, such as achievement and recognition, to counteract the perceived threat.
Douglas McGregor	1960	His Theory X suggests that some employees are inherently distrustful and avoid work unless they are under pressure. In this context, fear of job loss could be an effective tool for managing such employees.
Abraham Maslow	1954	He proposed a hierarchy of needs, where security needs occupy a key place. The fear of losing one's job can activate these needs, motivating employees to make efforts to maintain their job position.
Victor Vroom	1964	He developed the "Expectancy Theory", highlighting the relationship between effort, performance, and reward. In the context of fear of job loss, employees may perceive that additional effort translates into the reward of keeping their job, which increases their motivation to meet job expectations.
Adam Grant	2013	Highlights the importance of a fair working environment. If the fear of job loss is managed fairly and transparently, it can contribute to an environment where employees feel motivated to contribute positively, fostering a culture of reciprocity and cooperation.

Note: Prepared by the authors.

the industry, sector, and economic conditions, but some common strategies include:

- *High Performance and Productivity:* Workers often strive to maintain high levels of performance and productivity in their work roles. Dedication to work and the pursuit of excellence are common practices to demonstrate their value and contribution to the company.
- *Continuous Development and Professional Updating:* These are practices adopted by many workers to stay relevant in their roles and in the industry; in this regard, constant updating of skills can increase job security and reduce the fear of obsolescence.
- *Flexibility and Versatility:* The willingness to take on different responsibilities and roles within the organization shows flexibility and adaptability, because workers who can perform various functions may be perceived as more valuable and essential to the company.
- *Maintaining a Positive Attitude:* Maintaining a positive attitude in challenging situations influences employers' perception on adaptability and the ability to handle pressure.
- *Compliance with Rules and Regulations:* Employees often pay close attention to compliance with internal company rules and policies. Following rules and regulations helps maintain a reputation for trust and responsibility.
- *Continuous Performance Evaluation:* Employees can actively seek feedback on their performance and areas for improvement. Self-evaluation and willingness to engage in professional growth are practices that highlight commitment.

The combination of these strategies contributes to the creation of a work environment where workers feel more secure and supported. By demonstrating dedication, competence and adaptability, workers can build strong working relationships and ensure that they are somehow recognized and valued in the companies where they provide services.

METHOD

This chapter presents the methodology chosen to address the understanding of the fear of losing one's job as a motivating force in the work environment, using a hermeneutic approach. This choice is justified by the need to explore the experiences and meanings underlying this phenomenon, recognizing the complexity of individual and social interactions that influence work motivation. Hermeneutics, as an interpretive approach, is based on the interpretation and understanding of social and cultural phenomena (Hernández *et al.*, 2014). The methodological proposal involves the review of various scientific texts and is framed in exploratory research, since it seeks to understand subjective meanings and understandings. As Creswell (2013) mentions, understanding the fear of losing one's job requires a deep immersion in individual experiences, which is effectively achieved through qualitative methods.

Likewise, the methodological approach adopted is part of a qualitative perspective, which seeks to understand and explore in depth the phenomenon of fear of losing one's job as a work motivation from the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Hernández *et al.*, 2014). This approach is considered the most appropriate to address the complexity inherent to the topic, allowing one to delve into the subjective meanings and contextual dimensions that influence work motivation. Regarding the design, a descriptive-analytical approach has been chosen with the purpose of detailing the characteristics and dimensions of the fear of losing one's job as a motivator, as well as analyzing its correlation with other factors and variables present in the organizational environment (Bernal, 2010). This design facilitates the exploration of the experiences and perceptions of the participants, while making it possible to establish connections and patterns relevant to a complete understanding of the phenomenon in question. In addition, an attitude of openness and objectivity has been maintained, recognizing the limitations inherent to the qualitative approach and seeking to minimize biases and prejudices that could

influence the interpretation of the data (Hernández *et al.*, 2014). See Table 3.

In addition, in the data collection process, academic articles, case studies, research reports, and relevant publications were identified and selected from academic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and Scielo. The documents were chosen based on their relevance, prioritizing those that explored the impact of fear of losing one's job on work motivation, published in the last 20 years, due to the lack of current research that addresses the specific topic. Currently, fear is often treated in terms of stress, burnout, and other related concepts, which underscores the need for more focused studies on how fear of losing one's job can serve as both a motivational and destabilizing factor in the work environment. Thus, sources from recognized academic journals were considered and studies with diverse perspectives and contexts were included to obtain a complete view of the phenomenon.

Specific criteria were established to select the texts reviewed, including thematic relevance, ensuring that the studies explicitly addressed the effect of fear of losing one's job. The methodological quality of the studies was assessed, verifying the validity and reliability of the data presented. In addition, studies covering different sectors and geographical contexts were included, in order to ensure a broad and varied representation of the phenomenon in question.

Methodological limitations

A key limitation was the lack of recent research specific to fear of job loss as a motivator, as

most studies addressed general topics such as stress and burnout. To address this limitation, we expanded the search to studies published in the last 20 years and included relevant papers, although not exclusively focused on fear. Furthermore, variability in the approach to fear, when integrated into broader concepts, was handled through detailed qualitative analysis that allowed specific fear-related themes to be extracted. The diversity of contexts in the reviewed studies was mitigated by comparing and adjusting the analysis to identify common patterns and significant differences to ensure the accuracy of the analysis. Finally, we acknowledged that the results might not be generalizable to all industries or regions, highlighting the variability in the contexts studied and suggesting future research to address these limitations and expand knowledge on the impact of fear of job loss.

RESULTS

The results obtained in the research highlight several significant findings regarding the fear of losing one's job as a work motivator. On the one hand, it was found that this fear can act as an important extrinsic driver, leading employees to make greater efforts to maintain their job stability (Aguirre *et al.*, 2019). However, long-term negative consequences were also observed on the emotional well-being of workers due to this fear-based motivation (Feldman, 2022). In addition, it was shown that fear affects job performance, commitment to the organization, and the configuration of the business culture (Chiavenato, 2022). Although it can generate greater short-term performance, it also creates a stressful work environment

Table 3
Summary of the Methodology Used

Methodology	
Approach	Hermeneutic
Type of Research	Exploratory, seeking to understand subjective meanings and understandings.
Approach	Qualitative, to understand and explore in depth the fear of losing one's job as a work motivation from the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Hernández <i>et al.</i> , 2014).
Design	Descriptive-analytical, with the purpose of detailing the characteristics and dimensions of the fear of losing one's job as a motivator, as well as analyzing its correlation with other factors and variables present in the organizational environment (Bernal, 2010).

Note. Prepared by the authors

that harms creativity, innovation, and collaboration among team members.

Another important result is the close relationship between the fear of losing one's job and the basic needs for security and economic stability. Employees expressed their concern about maintaining their ability to provide for their families, which leads them to accept less favorable working conditions and avoid behaviors that may jeopardize their job security (Chiavenato, 2019). Similarly, it was observed that the impact of fear is mediated by individual and contextual factors, such as the sense of control and self-efficacy, as well as economic conditions and labor market stability (Aguirre *et al.*, 2019).

Similarly, fear in the workplace can undermine employee morale, foster distrust, and generate conflict, which affects cooperation and innovation (Bedoya Dorado and García Solarte, 2016). In the informal work environment in Latin America, although there are positive factors, the fear of losing one's job is associated with mental health problems and burnout (Juárez-García *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the intensification of job insecurity during the pandemic has exacerbated these problems, highlighting the need to adjust regulations to better protect workers and reduce the impact of fear (Iturralde and Duque, 2021). These results underscore the importance of managing fear in a balanced way to maximize its motivational benefits while mitigating its adverse effects.

The influence of fear therefore extends to both employees and the organization as a whole, as revealed by organizational-level research. The apprehension experienced by employees triggers a range of psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses that impact their productivity and coworker relationships. In addition to affecting social aspects such as culture and work environment, it also impacts key organizational outcomes such as productivity, innovation, creativity, and long-term vision. Its presence can undermine the organization's ability to respond adequately to work demands, leading to employee blockages or paralysis. From a management perspective, while fear can induce subservient actions, it can also promote

dysfunctional control and diminish the social influence necessary for effective employee management.

The results of the research shed light on the complex dynamics surrounding the phenomenon of fear of losing one's job as a work motivator. Through the exhaustive analysis of the experiences and perspectives of the participants, recurring patterns and themes were identified that deepen the understanding of this phenomenon. Therefore, it is suggested that the detection of fear in organizations can be done through the use of signals and indicators, and that it is possible to manage it through effective leadership. However, fear is an inherent aspect of the human condition and is closely linked to work, which makes it difficult for the organization's management to deal with it, since it manifests uniquely in each employee.

DISCUSSION

Although fear of job loss may initially prevent job dissatisfaction as a hygiene factor, Herzberg's theory suggests that this type of extrinsic motivation has limitations in its durability. Thus, according to Griffin *et al.* (2020), intrinsic motivating factors, such as achievement and recognition, are essential to maintain authentic and long-lasting motivation at work. Therefore, it is crucial to complement fear of job loss with more intrinsic incentives to foster sustained commitment and long-term job performance. However, McGregor's Theory X poses a challenge in managing fear of job loss as a motivator; although it can be effective in controlling and motivating distrustful employees according to Theory X, it is essential to avoid creating a work environment dominated by distrust and control. Leaders must seek a balance, fostering trust and collaboration, aligned with the principles of McGregor's Theory Y (Griffin *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, Maslow's hierarchy of needs highlights the importance of the fear of losing one's job as an initial motivational driver related to security; however, once these basic needs are met, employees tend to seek higher motivations, such as recognition and personal growth. Therefore, organizations must offer development opportunities to maintain commitment and performance in the long term (Griffin *et al.*, 2020). However, Vroom's

theory highlights the relationship between effort, performance and perceived reward, indicating that effective management of the fear of losing one's job can positively influence employees' perception of the likelihood of success and the worthiness of their efforts; however, this perception must be based on fair and equitable criteria to avoid generating unnecessary anxiety (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2019).

In that regard, fear of job loss has been identified as a powerful extrinsic driver that can motivate employees to put in more effort to secure their job stability, as suggested by Aguirre *et al.* (2019). However, this fear-based drive comes at a significant cost to workers' emotional well-being, with negative consequences reflected in increased stress and decreased job satisfaction, according to Feldman (2022). Furthermore, although fear can lead to high performance in the short term, it also results in a stressful work environment that limits creativity, innovation, and collaboration among team members. Fear in the workplace also affects employee morale and fosters distrust and conflict, impairing cooperation and innovation (Bedoya Dorado and García Solarte, 2016). In the context of informal work in Latin America, fear is linked to mental health problems and burnout, highlighting the need to review regulations to improve labor protection and reduce the negative effects of fear (Juárez-García *et al.*, 2020). The intensification of job insecurity during the pandemic has exacerbated these problems, underlining the urgency of regulatory adjustments to better safeguard workers (Iturralde and Duque, 2021). Thus, the analysis of this phenomenon reveals the importance of detecting and managing fear through signs and indicators, highlighting the need for effective leadership to balance the motivational and adverse effects of fear.

Thus, in theoretical implications, the findings on fear of job loss enrich the understanding of work motivation by introducing an additional dimension that should be considered alongside traditional intrinsic and extrinsic factors. This phenomenon suggests the need to adjust motivational theories to include fear as a key factor that can both boost performance and generate adverse effects on

emotional well-being. Furthermore, the relationship between fear and job stress provides a new perspective for stress theories, suggesting that fear of job loss should be incorporated into theoretical models on mental health at work.

In organizational practice, the results underscore the importance of managing fear of job loss to improve both employee motivation and well-being. Organizations should implement policies that offer greater job security and emotional support, as well as foster an environment where employees feel valued and protected. In addition, creating well-being and professional development programs can help mitigate the negative impact of fear, promoting a positive work climate. Training for leaders and managers is essential to identify and address fear in the workplace, transforming it into constructive motivation and maintaining a healthy organizational culture. Adapting work policies and offering psychological support are crucial steps to maximize productivity and job satisfaction.

In sum, the perspectives of theorists Herzberg, McGregor, Maslow, Vroom, and Grant provide a comprehensive overview of the role of job fear as a motivator in the workplace. While initial fear may prevent dissatisfaction and motivate some employees, its long-term effectiveness is questionable. The importance of complementing this fear with intrinsic incentives, such as recognition and personal growth, is highlighted in order to maintain sustained commitment and long-lasting job performance; and the need to manage this fear in a balanced and fair manner, avoiding creating a work environment dominated by mistrust and anxiety, is emphasized. Ultimately, these perspectives underscore the complexity of the job fear phenomenon and the importance of addressing it sensitively and fairly in the organizational setting.

The conclusion should be clearly connected to the initial objectives of the paper, providing practical recommendations based on the findings and possible future research.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the systematic review, the analysis of fear of job loss as a work motivator has

been deepened, examining both its positive and negative effects. It has been established that, although fear can function as a short-term performance driver, its effectiveness as a sustained motivator depends on its interaction with intrinsic factors and an adequate balance between rewards and sanctions. In the long term, fear can cause significant adverse effects, such as increased staff turnover, absenteeism and deterioration of employees' emotional health. These psychological and physiological responses negatively affect work relations and the organizational climate, generating resistance to change and limiting the company's ability to adapt and compete effectively in the market.

Five theories from leading authors are discussed, offering a comprehensive view of how fear of job loss can be a significant work motivation. Understanding this dynamic is essential for leaders and managers to effectively address personnel management and foster a motivating and equitable work environment. In relation to the above, it is evident that fear of job loss has proven to be a complex motivating force in the workplace; that is, while it can drive temporary performance, its sustainability as a motivational driver may depend on other intrinsic factors and the balance between rewards and consequences.

As for the consequences of fear, employees' psychological and physiological responses can lead to ailments that contribute to increased employee turnover and absenteeism rates. Fear causes employees to perceive threats and dangers, which negatively impacts employment relationships, organizational climate and ethos, and job satisfaction, all of which impact organizational goals. Furthermore, fear contributes to resistance to change, as employees prefer to maintain their routines and avoid taking risks, leading to organizational stagnation and a narrow focus on the short term, which negatively impacts the company's ability to compete in the market and develop sustainable strategies.

It has also highlighted an important limitation: the lack of comprehensive and consistent empirical evidence on the effects of fear in different organizational contexts. Existing research has addressed the effects

of fear in a fragmented manner, with no clear correlation between the various forms of fear and their consequences. This lack of clarity highlights the need for more comprehensive and consistent research to better understand the impact of fear in the workplace. In this regard, it is suggested to further explore how different individual factors, such as resilience and self-efficacy, interact with fear of job loss, and how these variables influence employees' motivational and emotional responses. In addition, it would be valuable to investigate how the economic and cultural context affects the perception and impact of fear in various sectors and types of employment, especially in emerging economies and in informal jobs.

Finally, leaders and decision-makers are advised to implement balanced strategies that promote employee well-being without inducing unnecessary anxiety. Organizational policies should seek a balance between motivation and mental health protection, recognizing that effective management and a healthy work environment are critical to improving employee performance and satisfaction. A balanced and careful approach can maximize the motivational benefits of fear while minimizing its adverse effects.

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Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Author Contribution

Rossy Nataly Burillo Terreros (lead author): conceptualization, research, writing (original draft, review and editing).