





Emotional Salary: beyond traditional compensation

Salario Emocional: más allá de la compensación tradicional

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ABSTRACT

Emotional salary is an essential concept in human resources management that goes beyond traditional financial compensation, focusing on meeting employees' emotional and psychological needs in the workplace. Its importance is enhancing employee satisfaction, retention, and engagement, which influences organizational performance. Over the years, various theories have indirectly substantiated the relevance of emotional salary. These include Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and Vroom's Expectancy Theory, among others. These theories have provided a conceptual framework for understanding how emotional dimensions, such as recognition and personal development, can impact employee motivation and satisfaction. This article provides a literature review on emotional salary and its relationship with the work environment. The methodology used for this review was based on the collection and analysis of previous studies and research on the subject. Several key dimensions of emotional salary were identified, including development opportunities, work-life balance, psychological well-being, the work environment, and organizational culture. The results highlight that, despite its growing recognition, the literature on emotional salary still needs to be expanded compared to more traditional organizational variables. Additionally, the need for further research into emotional salary and the formulation of more accurate and accessible measurement methods is emphasized. Emotional salary is an emerging trend expected to rapidly expand the academic literature in human resources and organizational management.

Keywords: emotional salary, literature review, non-monetary compensation, salary.

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RESUMEN

El salario emocional es un concepto esencial en la gestión de recursos humanos que va más allá de la compensación financiera tradicional, centrándose en satisfacer las necesidades emocionales y psicológicas de los empleados en el ámbito laboral. Su importancia radica en la capacidad para mejorar la satisfacción, retención y compromiso de los empleados, que a su vez influye en el desempeño organizacional. A lo largo de los años, diversas teorías han sustentado la relevancia del salario emocional de forma indirecta. Estas incluyen la jerarquía de necesidades de Maslow, la Teoría de los Factores de Motivación e Higiene de Herzberg y el Modelo Situacional de Motivación de Vroom, entre otras. Estas teorías han proporcionado un marco conceptual para comprender cómo las dimensiones emocionales, como el reconocimiento y el desarrollo personal, pueden afectar la motivación y la satisfacción de los empleados. Este artículo presenta una revisión de la literatura existente sobre el salario emocional y su relación con el entorno laboral. La metodología utilizada para esta revisión se basó en la recopilación y análisis de estudios e investigaciones previas sobre el tema. Se identificaron diversas dimensiones clave del salario emocional, como las oportunidades de desarrollo, el equilibrio entre trabajo y vida personal, el bienestar psicológico, el entorno laboral y la cultura organizacional. Los resultados destacan que, a pesar de su creciente reconocimiento, la literatura en torno al salario emocional todavía es limitada en comparación con otras variables organizacionales más tradicionales.

Palabras clave: compensación no monetaria, revisión de literatura, salario, salario emocional.

Clasificación JEL: E24; J24; J52

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary business environment, the concept of "Emotional Wage" has emerged as an essential component in human resources strategy and talent management (Olmedo, 2018) due to the positive and healthy contribution it has



to organizational environments (Rubio et al., 2020) and job performance (Espinoza & Toscano, 2020; Intriago & Zambrano, 2023). As organizations recognize the importance of remunerating their employees with competitive salaries and meeting their emotional and psychological needs (Mitchell & Pattison, 2010), emotional pay has become a growing topic of interest. As stated by Adams in his influential 1963 work on equity theory, employee job satisfaction, and motivation cannot be reduced simply to monetary compensation but have a broader meaning on employees' perception of fairness (Adams, 1963, 1965).

This concept is defined as the sum of all non-monetary benefits that employees receive from their employers that contribute to their psychological well-being at work (Rojas Valero & Blanco Jiménez, 2023). It includes aspects such as work-life balance (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011); recognition, professional development opportunities (Kraimer et al., 2011); work environment, and the quality of interpersonal relationships in the company (Dychtwald et al., 2014). In addition, emotional pay has been associated with job satisfaction, loyalty to the organization (Reis et al., 2018), and employee engagement (Dávila et al., 2022).

The concept of emotional pay, likewise, focuses on the satisfaction of employees' emotional and psychological needs in the work environment. As Maslach (1993) points out, emotional wage refers to the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards that individuals receive at work that significantly impact their emotional well-being and sense of accomplishment. These rewards go beyond financial compensation and encompass intangible aspects, such as recognition, autonomy, personal and professional development opportunities, and a healthy work environment. The notion of emotional pay is based on the premise that employees' emotional well-being has a direct effect on their job performance and commitment to the organization; this perspective is supported by the research of Diener and Biswas-Diener (2008), who highlight that happiness at work is positively associated with productivity and creativity. Therefore, understanding and properly managing emotional pay has become a fundamental objective for companies wishing to attract, retain, and motivate their human talent in a competitive and constantly evolving labor market (Fuchs & Sugano, 2009).

This article explores the concept of emotional pay in the work environment, addressing the historical context and practices associated with this topic. Through a review of the literature, we examine the dimensions of emotional pay as a construct, its relationship with other organizational variables, such as talent retention, job satisfaction and job performance, as well as the strategies that organizations can adopt to implement it effectively. In addition, the implications of emotional pay in the digital era and in an increasingly diverse and globalized world of work are discussed.

METHODOLOGY

Literature review

The methodology employed in this article on the emotional wage is based mainly on a review of relevant academic and professional literature. Systematic searches were conducted in academic databases, such as Web of Science, Scopus, Scielo, Dialnet, and Google Scholar, using keywords from specialized thesauri such as "salary", "emotional wage", "non-monetary compensation", "state of the art" and "systematic review". The results were not affected by the temporality of the published studies, in order to ensure the relevance and historical context of the concept addressed; they were systematized, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Systematization of reviewed literature

No	Title	Author(s) (year)	Methodology	Summary of Content
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Source: own elaboration

Source selection

Studies, books, and papers that significantly contributed to the understanding of emotional wage were carefully selected and reviewed. Special attention was paid to the methodological quality of the studies, their applicability to different organizational contexts, and their ability to provide solid information on the dimensions and effects of emotional pay.

Synthesis and analysis

The literature findings were organized and synthesized thematically to identify the key dimensions or factors of emotional pay, its benefits for both employees and organizations, as well as the implications in the current work context. Comparative analyses were conducted, and emerging trends and approaches in the field of emotional pay were highlighted.

RESULTS

History and evolution of the Emotional Salary concept

The concept of emotional salary, compared to the traditional concept of pay that dates back to ancient civilizations (Varela, 2018), is a relatively recent approach in organizational theory and human resource management. While conventional pay has focused primarily on monetary compensation for work performed, emotional pay has emerged as a more contemporary perspective that recognizes the importance of non-monetary aspects in employee satisfaction and motivation. As organizations have recognized the importance of understanding and addressing the emotional needs of their employees, emotional pay has become a central focus in talent retention and management strategy. To fully understand its development, tracing a brief historical timeline is essential.

In the early 20th century, Frederick Taylor's work in his book *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) laid the foundation for scientific management and efficiency optimization in organizations, focusing on the standardization of tasks and processes to maximize productivity, leaving the concept of salary as primarily a monetary issue, without considering the emotional and psychological needs of employees in the work environment. However, as organizations evolved and became more aware of the importance of people in the work environment, new perspectives in human resource management emerged. In this context of change, in the 1940s, Abraham Maslow presented his influential theory of *The Hierarchy of Needs*, according to which people have a series of needs to be satisfied; from the basic ones, such as food and safety, to the higher ones, such as self-actualization and self-esteem. This approach emphasized the importance of addressing the psychological and emotional needs of employees, and not just material needs (Maslow, 1943; 1954).

In the 1950s, Frederick Herzberg and his colleagues developed the *Motivation and Hygiene Factor Theory* (also known as Herzberg's Theory), which identified two factors influencing job satisfaction: hygiene and motivational factors. Hygienic factors resembled Maslow's basic needs and were related to the work environment and working conditions, such as salary, company policies, and relationship with supervisors. On the other hand, motivating factors were linked to psychological and emotional needs, such as recognition, personal development, and achievement at work. Herzberg's theory emphasized the importance of satisfying both basic and emotional needs to promote employee satisfaction and motivation (Herzberg et al., 1959; Herzberg, 1968). Although these theoretical developments laid the groundwork for considering factors beyond monetary pay in human resource management, various factors continued to be proposed as drivers of motivation and productivity in organizations.

Among the prominent approaches in the field of work motivation, it is essential to mention the *Situational Model of Motivation* proposed by Victor Vroom in 1964. This model is characterized by its recognition of individual differences and the influence of perception on employee motivation. Vroom argued that motivation is not limited only to the financial aspect but is influenced by the perception of productivity and personal achievement. In addition, he emphasized the ability of each individual to influence his or her own productivity, which implied that pay was seen as an outcome and not a means.

Nevertheless, strict approaches to the role of money as an incentive remained on the table (Opsahl & Dunette, 1966), and in 1971, Edward Lawler developed his *Expectancy Theory*, which gave a central role to money as a motivator in the work context. Lawler argued that money can drive not only job performance but also other types of behavior, such as peer collaboration and dedication to the organization. Lawler also pointed out that the motivational power of money has been underestimated due to the misuse many organizations make of it. This suggests that money can be a powerful driver of motivation at work if appropriately implemented and aligned with employee expectations. Another important approach came in the 1980s when Deci & Ryan (1985) developed the *Self-Determination Theory*, which emphasizes the importance of satisfying the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness at work to foster intrinsic motivation. This theory is similar to the idea that emotional pay, which includes recognition and personal development, can increase employee motivation.

It was not until the 1990s that the term "emotional pay" began to gain prominence in the workplace and was a paradigm shift in human resource management, which had historically been focused on monetary compensation. Although there are no specific theories after that date that focus exclusively on emotional pay, several approaches have been developed in human resource management and organizational psychology that support this concept. Among some relevant approaches is Cox & Blake's (1991) theme of inclusion in the workplace, which advocates the creation of a work environment in which all employees feel valued and respected, which aligns with valuing diversity in the emotional wage. Another approach alludes to well-being at work and was developed by Wright & Cropanzano in 2000, who consider emotional and psychological aspects in the work environment and support the importance of the emotional wage in employee satisfaction and well-being.

Concept of Salary, Compensation and Emotional Salary

The concept of salary and its relationship with compensation are fundamental in the field of human resources management, as well as to understand the emotional wage. Chiavenato (2011) states that compensation refers to an individual's remuneration in exchange for his or her contribution and performance in organizational tasks. It is an exchange relationship in which employees transact their work to obtain rewards, which can be financial and non-financial in nature. Financial reward is an essential part of compensation and can be direct or indirect. Direct financial compensation includes employee cash payments, such as salaries, bonuses, awards, and commissions. In contrast, salary is a central component of this financial reward; it is defined as the remuneration in cash or its equivalent that the employer pays the employee for the position held and services rendered during a specific period.

Wages can be either direct or indirect. Direct salary is received as consideration for the work performed in the position held; for example, in the case of hourly employees, it corresponds to the number of actual hours worked per month, while in the case of salaried workers, it refers to the monthly salary received. On the other hand, indirect financial compensation comprises the additional benefits and services provided by the organization; this may include vacations, gratuities, tips, bonuses for special working conditions (unsafe, unhealthy, night work, among others), profit sharing, overtime, and social services, such as subsidized food, subsidized transportation, group life insurance, among others.

The sum of the direct and indirect salaries constitutes the total compensation that an employee receives for his or her work. In this context, compensation encompasses all elements of remuneration, both direct and indirect, and becomes a system of incentives and rewards that the organization establishes to motivate, remunerate, and reward its employees.

It is important to note that compensation is not limited to satisfying people's physiological needs; it also defines the level of importance that a person has for the organization. Thus, emotional pay has become a relevant part of this picture - addressed in the literature as "non-monetary compensation" or "Employee Perceived Value" (Arias, Portilla & Castaño, 2008) - as it considers aspects beyond monetary pay, such as recognition, personal development, and work environment, to motivate and retain employees in an enriching work environment. Likewise, including emotional salary as a direct part of compensation becomes a competitive advantage for the organization (Quintero & Betancur, 2018).

The concept of emotional salary has been consolidated as an essential component in human resources management and talent retention in modern organizations (Hurtado & Taquez, 2020). At its core, emotional wage refers to the sum of all non-monetary rewards that employees receive from their employers that contribute significantly to their emotional well-being and job satisfaction. Unlike monetary pay, which is reflected in financial remuneration, emotional pay encompasses a wide range of intangible aspects that influence employees' work experience.

A broad definition of emotional wage comes from González (2017), who describes it as "all those non-economic retributions that a worker perceives in order to contribute to his or her ability to meet personal and family needs" (p. 80). In addition, the author emphasizes that it is intrinsically linked to the quality of life and productivity of individuals. Its classification is adjusted according to the needs it addresses and is divided into three main categories: welfare, recreational, and supplementary.

Emotional pay includes several interconnected dimensions, such as work/life balance, recognition, development opportunities, work environment, and interpersonal relationships. These dimensions intertwine to form a work environment that employees can perceive as enriching or dissatisfying. For example, recognition for a job well done can enhance an employee's satisfaction, while a negative work environment can undermine their emotional well-being (Gonzalez, 2017). In addition to these dimensions, emotional pay has also been associated with employees'

intrinsic motivation (Eisenbeiss et al., 2014). When employees feel that their work is valued and that they are provided with opportunities for growth and development, they are more motivated and engaged in their roles.

Elements of the Emotional Salary

The emotional salary is composed of various dimensions that influence employees' satisfaction, commitment and well-being in the work environment. Authors such as Quintero & Betancur (2018) argue that any emotional wage model must contain strategic, motivational, human, and value-creating dimensions. The following are the key dimensions of emotional pay, along with their explanations and relevant references.

Table 2.
Dimensions of the emotional salary

Dimension	Explanation	Variables	References
Development opportunities	Includes training, talent management, coaching, mentoring, and career planning that enable employees to grow and advance in their job roles.	- Training and development programs - Talent management - Coaching and mentoring - Career planning	Tannenbaum & Yukl (1992)
Balance of life	It encompasses flexible work schedules, health benefits, family integration, and opportunities for leisure and recreation, promoting a healthy work-life balance.	- Flexibility in work schedules - Health benefits - Family integration - Recreational opportunities	Guest (2002)
Psychological well-being	Refers to recognition, autonomy, professional challenges and the feeling of transcendence in the work community, which contribute to the emotional and psychological well-being of employees.	- Recognition - Autonomy - Professional challenges - Sense of transcendence in the community	Kahn, (1990)
Work environment	It includes a climate of companionship, a sense of family and teamwork, creating a positive and collaborative work environment.	- Climate of companionship - Sense of family - Teamwork	Rousseau (1990)
Work culture	It includes social responsibility, ethics in the workplace and the relationship with the organization's leaders, which define the culture and shared values in the work environment.	- Social Responsibility - Ethics in the workplace - Relationship with leaders	Denison (1990)

Source: Cordero et al. (2022), based on González (2017)

Another perspective that approaches emotional pay from different factors is the "Emotional Salary Barometer" (ESB) proposed by Marisa Elizundia in her article "What is emotional pay? Emotional Salary Barometer" (cited by Basitt, 2022), in which she highlights that emotional salary refers to the non-monetary aspects of compensation that employees receive in their work, such as recognition, professional development, work-life balance, work environment, and interpersonal relationships. It also discusses how emotional pay can significantly impact employee satisfaction and motivation, as well as employee retention within an organization. The Emotional Wage Barometer identifies 10 internal motivators influencing our well-being and inspiring us at work. These include:

1. **Autonomy:** which refers to the freedom to manage work style, projects and work schedule independently.
2. **Belonging:** which implies feeling connected to the team, the organization and colleagues, as well as receiving recognition and appreciation for the role in the company.
3. **Creativity:** is another essential element that allows you to explore and express original approaches to your work tasks, encouraging the personalization of your work.
4. **Direction:** provides the opportunity to choose a career path and make decisions that will help you achieve a successful long-term career.
5. **Enjoyment:** refers to the possibility of having pleasant and authentic social interactions at work, which facilitates moments of spontaneity, appropriate humor and a relaxed atmosphere.
6. **Inspiration:** is experienced through moments when, thanks to work, you gain a new perspective and a sense of possibility that you had not previously considered.

7. **Mastery:** provides the opportunity to acquire greater knowledge in the field over time; allowing you to understand the subtleties of the profession.
8. **Personal growth:** involves learning and growing as an individual within the work environment, increasing self-awareness and flexibility.
9. **Professional growth:** refers to the development of skills through stimulating work and social opportunities, such as knowledge sharing with colleagues, mentoring, supervision and constant improvement of your skills.
10. **Purpose and meaning:** relates to the feeling that work contributes to one's own goals and those of the organization, giving meaning to work efforts.

Perez's study (2019) has validated these dimensions to measure emotional pay, concluding in successful results.

Importance of the Emotional Salary

Emotional pay has become an essential component of today's employer-employee relationship. Understanding its importance involves recognizing how it directly influences employee satisfaction and retention. These two key dimensions are explored below:

Employee satisfaction and retention

Emotional pay plays an essential role in employee satisfaction. When organizations invest in the emotional well-being of their staff, they feel more valued and appreciated, which in turn fosters a sense of belonging and commitment to the company. Employees who perceive that their emotional and professional needs are met tend to be more satisfied in their jobs. Employee satisfaction leads to greater loyalty to the organization and reduces employee turnover. Employee retention is a major challenge in many industries, as hiring and training new workers can be costly and time-consuming. When employees feel they are receiving more than just a financial paycheck, they are more likely to stay with the company long-term (Leal, 2021).

Job satisfaction refers to the degree of contentment that employees experience in relation to their work and work environment. It has been shown to be closely related to emotional pay, as many dimensions, such as recognition, development opportunities, and a positive work environment, contribute to overall job satisfaction (Alegre et al., 2016). Some research supports the positive influence of emotional pay on employee job satisfaction; for example, a study by Deci & Ryan (2000) in the context of self-determination theory found that when employees feel supported, valued, and have opportunities for personal and professional growth, their job satisfaction increases significantly. In addition, recognition and appreciation from the company are key factors that impact job satisfaction. A positive and collaborative work environment has also been shown to be related to higher levels of job satisfaction (Mediomundo, 2023).

Job satisfaction is an important predictor of employee retention and organizational commitment. Satisfied employees tend to stay in their jobs longer and contribute more productively to the organization. Therefore, emotional pay plays a crucial role in retaining talent and creating a work environment where employees feel valued and motivated.

Work performance and productivity

Emotional pay also positively influences employees' job performance and productivity. When workers feel emotionally connected to their work and the organizational culture, they tend to put in more effort and commit to the company's goals. This translates into an increase in the quality and efficiency of their work (Dessler & Varela, 2017). In addition, emotional pay can improve employees' mental and emotional health. Workers who feel valued and emotionally supported by their organization experience lower levels of stress and burnout. This contributes to a healthier work environment and a greater ability to cope with work challenges (Clodagh, 2021).

Employee engagement

Employee engagement is a critical aspect of work dynamics, as it is closely related to employee retention and productivity. Emotional pay plays a fundamental role in shaping this engagement by creating an enriching work environment that goes beyond mere financial compensation (Dávila et al., 2022).

Employee engagement is defined as the extent to which workers identify with their work and organization, from the sense that they are willing to exert themselves beyond their usual tasks and have a sense of loyalty to the company (Coronado et al., 2020). This emotional and psychological connection with the organization is essential for the long-term success of any company.

Some studies have shown that emotional pay is key in shaping employee engagement. As mentioned above, employees feel that their organization values their contributions holistically, they experience greater engagement, and to that extent, recognition for a job well done, provision of development opportunities and a positive work environment are factors that significantly increase employee engagement.

Employee engagement is critical to talent retention. Engaged employees are more likely to stay in their roles and consistently contribute to the organization's success. In addition, an engaged workforce tends to be more productive and generate a positive work environment that attracts other talent (Zhang et al., 2017).

Implementation strategies

Effective implementation of emotional pay requires a solid understanding of the strategies that organizations can use to promote an enriching work environment. Below are some suggested strategies that organizations can use to implement emotional pay, including best practices.

- **Design of emotional pay policies and programs.** Organizations can develop specific policies and programs that promote emotional pay. These can include recognition programs, professional development programs, flexible work policies, and workplace wellness programs. For example, Google is known for its wellness program, which includes workplace gyms and health services.
- **Effective communication.** Transparent and effective communication is essential for employees to understand and value the emotional rewards offered by the company. Organizations must clearly communicate development opportunities, recognition programs, and work/life balance policies. Salesforce is an example of this, a company that excels at communicating its emotional pay initiatives through internal and external channels.
- **Employee engagement.** Involving employees in decision-making related to emotional pay can increase its effectiveness and relevance. Employee feedback can help tailor emotional wage policies and programs to specific employee needs and expectations.
- **Leadership training and development.** Leaders play a crucial role in promoting emotional pay; training leaders to recognize and value employees' emotional contributions is essential. One example is Salesforce; a company that invests in leadership development focused on emotional pay.
- **Continuous evaluation and measurement.** Organizations should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their emotional pay strategies and make adjustments as needed. This may involve job satisfaction surveys, tracking employee engagement, and collecting direct feedback from workers.
- **Positive organizational culture.** Fostering a positive organizational culture that values diversity, inclusion, and equity is critical (Cordero et al., 2022). Companies such as Zappos focus on creating a culture that promotes employee happiness as an integral part of emotional pay.
- **Flexibility and customization.** Recognize that employees' needs and preferences can vary widely and allow for customized options, as a strategy that can include flexible scheduling options, tailored benefits, and development programs tailored to individual goals.

Emotional salary in the digital era

The digital era has revolutionized the employment landscape significantly, and the concept of emotional pay has not been left out of this transformation. In this context, emotional pay adapts to reflect changing employee needs and work dynamics; digital technologies, work flexibility, and the virtualization of work interactions play a crucial role in this evolution (Allen et al., 2015). Digital technologies have expanded opportunities for recognition and emotional connection at work. Verbigracia, corporate social networks, and recognition platforms allow employees to express appreciation and gratitude publicly and quickly; this contributes to strengthening the sense of belonging and recognition, important dimensions of emotional pay (Davenport et al., 2010; Caruso & Salovey, 2004).

Work flexibility enabled by technology has also transformed the work-life balance. As a result of these changes, employees can manage their time more efficiently and adapt their schedules to their personal needs. This flexibility is seen as an emotional reward by many workers, allowing them greater autonomy and control over their work and personal lives (Golden et al., 2008). However, the digital age has also brought challenges, such as digital

disconnection and job burnout due to constant availability. Organizations must set healthy boundaries to ensure that digital flexibility does not translate into constant pressure to be connected.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the obvious benefits of emotional pay, its implementation is challenging. It is important to address them and consider the future of emotional pay in the field of human resource management. One of the key challenges lies in measuring and evaluating emotional pay. Although instruments have been developed to measure it, subjectivity and individual perception complicate obtaining accurate metrics. Continued research and development of effective measurement methods are essential to reliably assess the impact of emotional pay. Additionally, globalization and diversity in the workplace present additional challenges. Cultural differences and the expectations of diverse employees may require careful tailoring of emotional pay strategies. Organizations must be sensitive to these differences and promote an inclusive culture catering to all employees' needs.

Evolving technology also raises future considerations. While digital technologies have improved communication and work flexibility, they can lead to increased disengagement and burnout. Organizations must find a balance that allows employees to benefit from technology without it becoming a source of stress. In terms of future research, it is essential to explore further the long-term impact of emotional pay on employee retention, engagement, and performance. In addition, cross-cultural and cross-national research can shed light on how to adapt emotional pay to diverse work environments. In the realm of human resource practices, organizations should continue developing strategies that effectively promote emotional pay. This includes training leaders, customizing programs, and fostering an organizational culture that values emotional rewards.

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