

Autonomous Work Motivation and IT Professional Retention in Digital Transformation: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Digital transformation has intensified competition for skilled IT professionals, creating unprecedented retention challenges. With tech sector turnover approaching 15% annually, nearly double other industries, organizations are learning that compensation alone won't keep critical talent. This systematic literature review examines how autonomous work motivation relates to IT professional retention during digital transformation. We analyzed 53 studies published between 2020 and 2025, using Self-Determination Theory as our primary framework. This theory suggests that when organizations fulfill three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) employees develop stronger intrinsic motivation to stay.

Our bibliometric analysis used VOSviewer software to map research networks and identify key themes in the field. The findings reveal something interesting: autonomous motivation acts as a bridge between what organizations do and whether employees stay. In digital transformation contexts, this becomes even more important. The research shows that certain practices consistently support autonomous motivation: giving employees meaningful autonomy in their work, assigning challenging projects that matter, providing genuine development opportunities, and offering supportive leadership. Here's the bottom line for organizations pursuing digital transformation: focus on addressing employees' fundamental psychological needs rather than just increasing salaries or benefits. The evidence suggests this approach leads to better retention outcomes.

Keywords: *autonomous work motivation; IT professional retention; digital transformation; Self-Determination Theory; intrinsic motivation; job satisfaction; bibliometric analysis*

1. Introduction

Here's the paradox organizations face today: Digital transformation demands more skilled IT professionals than ever, yet these professionals have never been harder to keep. As technology adoption accelerates, the talent needed to support it has become increasingly scarce and mobile. The challenge goes beyond simple supply and demand raises deeper questions about what motivates technology professionals to stay with organizations navigating digital change. Recent data paints a concerning picture. About 42% of IT professionals are actively or passively job hunting. But here's what's interesting: they're not primarily looking for better pay. Work-life balance and the quality of their relationship with management matter more (Info-Tech Research Group, 2024). This pattern tells us something important, retention strategies need to address psychological and motivational factors that traditional reward systems might miss entirely. Let's consider the numbers. The tech sector experiences turnover rates

approaching 15% annually, nearly double the average across other industries. These departures cost organizations substantially. There are direct expenses for recruitment and training, of course. But the indirect costs hurt more: lost institutional knowledge, disrupted projects, and declining team morale. For digital transformation initiatives specifically, high turnover undermines the sustained technical expertise and organizational learning required for successful technology adoption.

The disconnect between awareness and action is striking. About 74% of organizations express concern about attracting and retaining technical talent, yet only 27% engage in frequent dialogue with employees about retention issues (ISACA, 2025). This gap highlights why we need evidence-based retention strategies grounded in theoretical understanding of motivational processes.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers a compelling framework here. The theory proposes that human motivation stems from satisfying three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2022). When work environments support these needs, people develop what researchers call autonomous motivation, they're intrinsically interested in their tasks and identify with their work goals. The opposite happens when environments frustrate these needs. People then develop controlled motivation, driven primarily by external pressures or internal guilt. Meta-analyses consistently show that autonomous motivation associates positively with better performance, higher job satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment, and lower turnover intentions (Van den Broeck et al., 2021). Digital transformation contexts may amplify how important this becomes. Rapid technological change demands continuous learning, independent problem solving, and adaptive capacity that external controls simply can't foster effectively.

This review addresses three questions. *First*, how does autonomous work motivation relate to retention outcomes among IT professionals in digital transformation contexts? *Second*, what organizational practices and environmental factors either foster or hinder autonomous motivation among technology workers? *Third*, through what mechanisms autonomous motivation influence retention decisions? We're interested in potential mediators and moderators. By synthesizing empirical evidence through both narrative synthesis and bibliometric analysis, we aim to contribute to theoretical understanding and provide practical guidance for organizations trying to retain technical talent during digital transformation.

2. Literature Review

Self-Determination Theory gives us the predominant framework for understanding autonomous motivation at work. The theory distinguishes between different types of motivation along a continuum. At one end, there's amotivation—where people lack motivation entirely. In the middle, controlled motivation—driven by external pressures or internal guilt. At the other end, autonomous motivation, which combines intrinsic motivation (doing something because it's inherently interesting) and identified regulation (doing something because you genuinely value it). Research applying this framework consistently shows that autonomous motivation correlates with better outcomes: enhanced performance, greater persistence, improved well-being, and reduced turnover (Gagné et al., 2022). But what creates autonomous motivation in the first place?

The fulfillment of three basic psychological needs underlies the development of autonomous motivation. First, autonomy: the need to feel volition and self-endorsing of your actions rather than controlled by external forces. It's not about working alone; it's about feeling that your choices matter. Second, competence: the need to feel effective and masterful in producing desired outcomes while experiencing growth. Third, relatedness: the desire for meaningful connections with others and a sense of psychological belonging. Meta-analytic evidence shows that when these three needs are satisfied, good things happen: better performance, less burnout, stronger organizational commitment, and lower turnover intentions (Van den Broeck et al., 2021). The flip side matters too. When environments actively thwart these needs, it leads to controlled motivation, burnout, and withdrawal behaviors.

Recent theoretical developments have extended SDT to address contemporary workplace challenges. Gagné et al. (2022) examined how work context influences these basic psychological needs considering technological innovations and changing work practices. They looked at remote work, virtual teams, and even algorithmic management. Their analysis demonstrates something important: the distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation becomes particularly salient in evolving organizational environments where traditional supervision gives way to self-directed work arrangements. This theoretical foundation proves especially relevant for understanding IT professional retention during digital transformation. Consider the nature of the work: increasingly, it emphasizes innovation, problem-solving, and adaptive expertise. These capabilities flourish under conditions supporting autonomous motivation. They wither under tight control.

3. Material and Method

We employed a comprehensive mixed-method approach, integrating traditional narrative synthesis with advanced bibliometric analysis techniques. Following PRISMA guidelines ensures transparency and replicability, both critical for systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021). Our literature research covered five major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, IEEE Xplore, and ACM Digital Library. We selected these for their comprehensive coverage of relevant disciplines (Pranckutė, 2021). The search strategy used structured Boolean queries combining three concept clusters: motivation constructs, IT professional populations, and retention outcomes. We restricted the temporal scope to publications between January 2020 and December 2025. This captures contemporary research during the global pandemic period and subsequent digital transformation acceleration (Kniffin et al., 2021).

Studies had to meet clearly defined criteria for inclusion. They needed to explicitly examine autonomous motivation or related self-determination constructs. They had to sample IT professionals or technology workers. They must measure retention-related outcomes. And they needed to employ rigorous empirical research designs. Publications had to be available in English. We excluded purely theoretical papers, opinion pieces, and studies with severe methodological flaws. The initial database searches identified 347 potentially relevant articles. Following duplicate removal and sequential screening of titles, abstracts, and full texts, we retained 53 studies for final synthesis.

For bibliometric analysis, we used VOSviewer software version 1.6.20 (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). We performed three complementary forms of analysis. Co-citation analysis identified intellectual foundations, which foundational works researchers cite together. Co-authorship analysis mapped collaboration patterns with whom across institutions and countries. Keyword co-occurrence analysis examined thematic structures—which concepts researchers link together (Small, 1973; Glänzel & Schubert, 2004; Callon et al., 1983).

We exported data from databases in standardized formats. Cleaning procedures removed duplicates, standardized author and institution names, and harmonized keywords (Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020). Data extraction captured publication characteristics, study design features, theoretical frameworks, motivation constructs, retention outcomes, and effect sizes. We used standardized forms that were pilot-tested before implementation (Higgins et al., 2019). Quality assessment employs methodologically appropriate tools. For observational studies, we used the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale. For experimental studies, the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool. For qualitative research, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme checklist. Studies scoring below 60% on quality measures were excluded from synthesis.

The synthesis strategy integrated narrative synthesis with bibliometric findings. We organized evidence around key conceptual themes that emerged inductively from literature (Popay et al., 2006). Major themes addressed theoretical foundations, relationships between motivation and satisfaction, linkages between motivation and retention, digital transformation contextual factors, and organizational practices supporting autonomous motivation. We systematically integrated bibliometric findings to provide complementary perspectives on the research landscape, revealing not only what is known but also how knowledge is organized and by whom it is produced across the global research community.

4. Result

4.1 Descriptive Characteristics of Included Studies

The systematic search identified fifty-three studies meeting inclusion criteria, published between 2020 and 2025. The annual distribution showed increasing research attention, with five studies in 2020, eight in 2021, eleven in 2022, fourteen in 2023, twelve in 2024, and three in 2025. This temporal pattern indicates growing scholarly interest in motivational factors influencing technology professional retention, likely stimulated by pandemic-related workplace transformations and accelerated digital adoption.

Geographically, research originated primarily from North America and Europe, with twenty-three studies from the United States, nine from European countries, eight from Asian countries, six from Australia, four from South America, and three from multiple international collaborations. This distribution reflects both the concentration of technology industries in these regions and the predominance of Western research institutions in producing English-language publications. The limited representation from developing economies suggests potential generalizability limitations and opportunities for future cross-cultural research.

Methodologically, the studies demonstrate diversity. Quantitative approaches predominate (62%), primarily employing survey designs with validated instruments. Qualitative studies (23%) typically used interviews or focus groups to explore lived experiences of IT professionals. Mixed-methods studies (15%) combined both approaches to leverage their complementary strengths. Sample sizes varied considerably, ranging from 8 participants in qualitative studies to over 3,000 in large-scale surveys. Most studies (89%) explicitly referenced Self-Determination Theory as their theoretical foundation. Other frameworks appeared less frequently, including Job Demands-Resources theory (19%), Social Exchange Theory (15%), and Conservation of Resources theory (11%).

4.2 Bibliometric Analysis Results

Co-citation analysis revealed distinct theoretical clusters underpinning research on autonomous motivation and IT retention. The primary cluster centered on Self-Determination Theory, with foundational works by Ryan and Deci appearing as the most frequently co-cited references. This cluster included meta-analyses on need satisfaction and autonomous motivation, empirical studies examining psychological needs in workplace contexts, and theoretical extensions of Self-Determination Theory to organizational settings. A secondary cluster focused on turnover and retention literature, featuring seminal works on job embeddedness, organizational commitment, and turnover intention models. A third cluster emphasized technology work characteristics, including research on job autonomy, skill variety, and work design in IT professions. The co-citation network demonstrated strong interconnections between these clusters, indicating theoretical integration rather than isolated research streams.

Co-authorship analysis identified several active research groups and institutional collaborations. The analysis mapped 132 authors across 89 institutions in 28 countries. The United States, United Kingdom, and Netherlands emerge as major hubs, each with extensive international collaboration networks. A notable finding shows increasing South-to-South collaboration, particularly among researchers in Southeast Asia and Latin America. This suggests growing global engagement with these research questions. The network structure reveals relatively high connectivity, with most research groups maintaining links to at least two other groups, facilitating knowledge exchange and methodological cross-pollination.

Keyword co-occurrence analysis revealed five major thematic clusters. The first cluster centered on "Autonomous Motivation and Well-being," linking concepts like intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and work engagement with frequency counts exceeding 40 co-occurrences. A second cluster emphasized "Retention and Turnover," connecting turnover intentions (45 occurrences), organizational commitment (38 occurrences), and job embeddedness (32 occurrences). The third cluster addressed "Digital Transformation Context," including terms like remote work (28 occurrences), virtual teams (24 occurrences), and technological change (21 occurrences). Fourth came "Leadership and Support," encompassing transformational leadership (29 occurrences), supervisor support (26 occurrences), and organizational support (31 occurrences). The final cluster focused on "Job Characteristics," including job autonomy (42 occurrences), skill variety (23 occurrences), and meaningful work (27

occurrences). These thematic clusters align logically with the theoretical framework and research questions, suggesting coherent conceptual organization within the field.

4.3 Relationships Between Autonomous Motivation and Retention

The synthesis reveals consistent positive associations between autonomous motivation and retention outcomes. Across quantitative studies reporting correlation coefficients, the relationship between autonomous motivation and reduced turnover intentions averaged $r = -0.48$ (range: -0.32 to -0.67). This represents a moderate to strong inverse relationship, as autonomous motivation increases, and intentions to leave decrease. The consistency of this finding across diverse samples, industries, and geographic regions strengthens confidence in the relationship's robustness.

Several studies examined this relationship longitudinally, providing stronger evidence for causal directionality. For example, Fernet et al. (2023) followed 412 IT professionals over 18 months. Baseline autonomous motivation predicted subsequent retention, even after controlling for job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This suggests autonomous motivation isn't merely a proxy for other retention predictors but contributes uniquely to retention outcomes. Similarly, Dechawatanapaisal (2023) tracked 287 technology workers over 12 months, finding that changes in need satisfaction predicted changes in autonomous motivation, which in turn predicted retention decisions.

The relationship appears robust across different retention operationalizations. Whether studies measured turnover intentions, actual turnover, or retention rates, autonomous motivation showed consistent protective effects. Studies using dichotomous retention outcomes (stayed vs. left) reported odds ratios ranging from 2.1 to 3.8, indicating that high autonomous motivation substantially increases staying probability. Research examining retention duration found that IT professionals with high autonomous motivation remained an average of 2.3 years longer than those with low autonomous motivation.

4.4 Organizational Practices Supporting Autonomous Motivation

Research identifies several organizational practices that effectively foster autonomous motivation among IT professionals. Job autonomy emerged most prominently. Studies operationalized this variously, such as decision-making latitude, flexible work arrangements, or freedom in technical approach selection. Regardless of operationalization, greater autonomy is associated with stronger autonomous motivation (average $r = 0.52$). Meaningful work assignments also showed strong relationships with autonomous motivation. When IT professionals perceived their work as significant and aligned with organizational goals, they reported higher intrinsic motivation. Several studies highlighted that digital transformation contexts amplify this effect. Working on projects that visibly advance organizational digital capabilities appear particularly motivating.

Leadership styles significantly influence autonomous motivation development among IT professionals. Studies examining transformational leadership, servant leadership, and autonomy-supportive leadership all found positive associations with autonomous motivation (r ranging from 0.41 to 0.58). The common thread appears to be leaders who support rather than control, who provide rationale for decisions, acknowledge employee perspectives, and offer choice when possible. Slemp et al. (2018)

meta-analysis suggests autonomy-supportive leadership shows particularly strong effects in knowledge work contexts, with standardized mean differences around 0.65.

Training and development opportunities address competence needs while signaling organizational support for employee growth. Studies consistently found positive associations between perceived development opportunities and autonomous motivation ($r = 0.45$ average). Interestingly, opportunity quality matters more than quantity. Having access to relevant, challenging learning experiences that IT professionals choose themselves shows stronger associations than mandatory training programs. Work-life balance support emerged as another key factor, especially in post-pandemic research. Organizations offering flexibility in when and where IT professionals work reported higher autonomous motivation levels.

4.5 Mediating and Moderating Mechanisms

Several studies examined mechanisms linking organizational practices to retention through autonomous motivation. Job satisfaction frequently emerged as a mediator. Organizational practices that support basic psychological needs increase autonomous motivation, which in turn enhances job satisfaction, ultimately reducing turnover intentions. This represents a sequential mediation pattern confirmed across multiple studies. For instance, Kakar et al. (2023) found that organizational support influenced turnover intentions indirectly through autonomous motivation and job satisfaction, with standardized indirect effects of -0.34.

Work engagement appears to operate similarly. IT professionals with higher autonomous motivation show greater work engagement, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in work activities. This engagement then predicts retention. Interestingly, work engagement may partially mediate but also shows independent effects, suggesting multiple pathways from autonomous motivation to retention. Person-organization fit emerged as an important moderator. When IT professionals perceive strong alignment between their values and organizational values, the relationship between autonomous motivation and retention strengthens. This makes intuitive sense; autonomous motivation matters more for retention when people feel they belong to an organization whose mission resonates with them.

The digital transformation context itself appears to moderate relationships. Studies conducted in organizations actively pursuing digital transformation showed stronger associations between autonomous motivation and retention compared to more stable organizational contexts. This supports the theoretical proposition that autonomous motivation becomes particularly salient during periods of rapid change requiring adaptive expertise. Additionally, career stage moderates' relationships, with autonomous motivation showing stronger retention effects for mid-career IT professionals compared to early or late career stages.

4.6 Digital Transformation as Context

Studies specifically examining digital transformation contexts revealed several interesting patterns. The nature of digital transformation work appears to attract individuals high in autonomous motivation. This creates both opportunity and risk. Organizations can leverage this alignment, but they also compete for the same autonomously motivated individuals. Digital transformation appears to heighten the

importance of autonomy and competence. IT professionals working on digital transformation initiatives reported strong desires for meaningful participation in decision-making and opportunities to develop cutting-edge skills. When organizations frustrated these needs through excessive control or limited learning opportunities, turnover intentions increased sharply.

Remote work, which accelerated during digital transformation, showed complex relationships with autonomous motivation. When implemented with trust and clear communication, remote work supported autonomy needs and enhanced motivation. When implemented with surveillance and micromanagement, it frustrated autonomy and increased controlled motivation. The implementation approach matters more than the practice itself. Several studies examined technology-mediated supervision, finding that algorithmic management systems often undermine autonomous motivation by frustrating autonomy needs, even when organizations intend these systems to support flexibility.

5. Discussion

This systematic review reveals that autonomous motivation plays a crucial role in IT professional retention, particularly during digital transformation. The findings support Self-Determination Theory's predictions while extending our understanding of how motivational processes operate in contemporary technology work contexts. The consistent negative correlation between autonomous motivation and turnover intentions (average $r = -0.48$) represents a practically significant relationship. To put this in perspective, IT professionals in the top quartile of autonomous motivation show roughly three times lower likelihood of leaving compared to those in the bottom quartile. This suggests that interventions successfully increasing autonomous motivation could substantially impact retention outcomes.

What's particularly striking is the robustness of this relationship across contexts. It holds regardless of organization size, sector, or geographic region. It persists when controlling for compensation, benefits, and other traditional retention predictors. This suggests autonomous motivation taps into something fundamental about why IT professionals choose to stay.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

These findings extend Self-Determination Theory in several ways. *First*, they demonstrate the theory's applicability to knowledge workers in digital transformation contexts. While SDT has been validated across numerous domains, less research has examined its operation during rapid organizational and technological change. Our synthesis suggests the theory remains highly relevant in these dynamic contexts. *Second*, the mediating role of job satisfaction and work engagement clarifies the pathway from autonomous motivation to retention. Autonomous motivation doesn't directly prevent turnover. Rather, it creates positive work experiences and psychological states that make staying attractive. This sequential process has important implications for intervention timing and design. *Third*, the moderating role of person-organization fit suggests boundary conditions for autonomous motivation's effects. Even high autonomous motivation may not prevent turnover when fundamental value misalignment exists. This highlights the importance of both motivational and identity processes in retention. The digital transformation context appears to amplify motivational dynamics. We propose this

occurs because digital transformation work inherently requires adaptive expertise, creative problem-solving, and continuous learning that flourish under autonomous motivation. External controls prove particularly counterproductive in such contexts. This suggests contextual factors may moderate not just the strength of relationships but their fundamental nature.

5.2 Practical Implications for Organizations

For organizations pursuing digital transformation, these findings offer actionable guidance. Rather than competing primarily on compensation, a strategy that escalates costs without guaranteeing retention, organizations should focus on creating work environments supporting basic psychological needs. Job autonomy emerges as the most consistently supported practice. This doesn't mean eliminating coordination or accountability. It means providing IT professionals with meaningful choice in how they accomplish work, when and where they work, and which technical approaches they employ. Many organizations already espouse such values but undermine them through micromanagement or excessive process requirements.

Development opportunities matter tremendously. Organizations should invest not just in training budgets but in creating cultures where learning is valued and supported. This includes time for exploration, tolerance for experiments that fail, and paths for applying new skills. Critically, IT professionals should have meaningful input into their development priorities rather than following prescribed curricula. Leadership development deserves attention. The data clearly shows that leaders who support rather than control, who provide rationale rather than commands, and who acknowledge perspectives rather than dismiss concerns foster higher autonomous motivation. Organizations should select and develop leaders based partly on their capacity for autonomy-supportive leadership.

Meaningful work assignments present both opportunity and challenge. Organizations can enhance perceived meaningfulness by clearly connecting individual projects to organizational digital transformation goals, involving IT professionals in strategic planning, and ensuring visibility of impact. However, not all work can be inherently meaningful. Leaders must frame even routine maintenance work in ways that highlight its contribution to broader objectives. Remote work policies require careful design. The evidence suggests that flexibility itself doesn't automatically support autonomy. Rather, how flexibility is implemented determines its motivational impact. Organizations should audit their remote work practices for inadvertent controlling elements.

5.3 Limitations

Several limitations warrant consideration when interpreting these findings. *First*, the search was limited to English-language publications. Relevant research published in other languages may exist but was not captured. This could bias findings toward Western, English-speaking contexts. *Second*, the predominance of cross-sectional designs in included studies limits causal inference. While longitudinal studies provide stronger evidence, they remain relatively rare. Most studies measure autonomous motivation and retention intentions simultaneously, making it difficult to establish clear causal direction. The theoretical logic suggests motivation influences retention, but reverse causation or

reciprocal relationships remain possible. *Third*, publication bias may affect the synthesized findings. Studies finding null or negative relationships between autonomous motivation and retention may be less likely to be published. While we attempted to identify unpublished work, the grey literature search was not exhaustive. The true population effect sizes may be smaller than those reported in published studies. *Fourth*, most studies relied on self-report measures for both autonomous motivation and retention intentions. Common method bias could inflate observed relationships. Studies incorporating objective retention data or other-reports remain uncommon. Future research should employ multi-source data collection when possible. *Fifth*, the rapid evolution of digital work contexts means some included studies may already reflect outdated practices. Research conducted in 2020-2021, during pandemic-forced remote work, may not fully generalize to post-pandemic hybrid arrangements. The field continues evolving faster than research can document. *Finally*, while we employed rigorous quality assessment, heterogeneity in measures, samples, and contexts complicates synthesis. Different studies operationalized key constructs differently. Autonomous motivation was measured using various scales. Retention was assessed through intentions, actual turnover, or retention rates. This heterogeneity, while enriching understanding, also introduces complexity in interpretation.

5.4 Future Research Directions

Several promising research directions emerge from this review. *First*, longitudinal studies tracking autonomous motivation and retention over extended periods would strengthen causal inference. Ideally, such studies would measure motivation at multiple time points, assess organizational practices, and track actual turnover rather than just intentions. This would clarify temporal dynamics and identify intervention points. *Second*, research should examine potential negative consequences of very high autonomous motivation. While generally beneficial, extreme intrinsic motivation might create vulnerability to burnout when work demands become overwhelming. The relationship may be curvilinear rather than linear. Additionally, highly autonomously motivated individuals might leave more readily when organizational changes violate their values, creating a different retention challenge.

Third, more research should examine how autonomous motivation interacts with other retention factors. Does it buffer against negative effects of high job demands? Does it amplify benefits of supportive coworkers? Understanding these interactions would enable more nuanced retention strategies tailored to specific organizational contexts. *Fourth*, the field would benefit from experimental or quasi-experimental studies testing interventions designed to increase autonomous motivation. While correlational evidence is compelling, randomized trials of practices like autonomy-supportive leadership training or job crafting interventions would provide stronger evidence for practice recommendations.

Fifth, research should explore potential cultural moderators. Most studies were conducted in Western, individualistic cultures where autonomy is highly valued. The importance of autonomy versus relatedness needs might differ across cultures. Retention strategies may require cultural adaptation. *Sixth*, as artificial intelligence increasingly shapes IT work, research should examine how AI adoption affects autonomous motivation and retention. Does AI augmentation enhance competence and thereby

support motivation? Or does it threaten autonomy and reduce motivation? These questions will become increasingly relevant. *Finally*, more research should examine successful retention among organizations effectively managing digital transformation. Case studies of high-retention technology companies could identify best practices and implementation strategies not easily captured in survey research.

6. Conclusion

This systematic review demonstrates that autonomous work motivation significantly influences IT professional retention in digital transformation contexts. The evidence consistently shows that when organizations fulfill basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, IT professionals develop stronger intrinsic motivation and are substantially more likely to remain with the organization. The findings challenge conventional retention strategies that rely primarily on compensation and benefits. While compensation matters, it addresses only controlled motivation—the external pressures and incentives that can influence behavior in the short term. Autonomous motivation, rooted in genuine interest and value alignment, creates more sustainable retention by making work itself rewarding.

For organizations navigating digital transformation, this presents both challenge and opportunity. The challenge lies in fundamentally rethinking management approaches. Supporting autonomous motivation requires moving from control-oriented management to autonomy-supportive leadership, from prescribed work methods to meaningful choice, from compliance-focused culture to learning-oriented culture. These changes require sustained commitment and cultural transformation. The opportunity lies in creating workplaces that attract and retain the best talent not through escalating compensation wars but through superior work experiences. Organizations that successfully support autonomous motivation can differentiate themselves in competitive labor markets while simultaneously enhancing performance, innovation, and employee well-being.

Digital transformation contexts amplify both the challenge and opportunity. The rapidly changing nature of technology work, the premium on continuous learning and adaptation, and the shift toward remote and hybrid arrangements all heighten the importance of autonomous motivation. Organizations that address this successfully will be better positioned to execute digital strategies requiring sustained commitment from highly skilled professionals. The research synthesized here provides evidence-based guidance, but implementation requires contextual adaptation. Organizations differ in culture, structure, and digital maturity. Leaders must thoughtfully apply these principles to their specific situations, experiment with practices, and continuously learn from results.

Ultimately, retaining IT professionals during digital transformation isn't simply a human resources challenge. It's a strategic imperative requiring organizational commitment to creating work environments where people can thrive. The evidence presented here suggests that organizations investing in supporting autonomous motivation will reap returns not just in retention but in the innovation, adaptation, and sustained excellence required for digital transformation success.

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