

## THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SECTOR: SPECIFICS OF MOTIVATION OF VIRTUAL PERSONNEL

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### Abstract

A development of information technologies and their application in business create new challenges for business organizations. Interchange of information via e-mail, participation in e-mail conferences become a common thing in business activity. The work under new conditions of information technologies' development has not only advantages, but also causes certain problems as well as new conflicts within an organization. As business arena has become much more demanding, the human capital is getting more and more significant for the competing organizations. Recently scientific literature provides some study on virtual organizations as qualitative new structure of organization; however the virtual personnel motivations in these types of entities comparing with others forms of organizations are not amply investigated. In accordance to this, the information technology sector was chosen as an analytical object in order to examine virtual personnel management problems. New virtual personnel management problems arise due to particularity of information technologies. In accordance to this, the following questions will be discussed in the article: how to eliminate emerging problems of motivation of virtual employees in the information technology sector, how to motivate personnel under new conditions and make it strive for reaching of the common goal. Thereto, the first part of the paper analyses concepts of virtual business, assumptions and conditions of new organization forms, problems of personnel management. The authors describe the main study and results of virtual personnel motivation in the information technology sector, assess the motivation factors and summarize the study as well. To reckon up the study results, the virtual personnel motivation scheme of the information technology sector is proposed in the article, which can help organizations to develop good personnel motivation system.

**Keywords:** the information technology sector, information technologies, globalization, virtual personnel, motivation of personnel.

### Introduction

**Relevance and problem of the study.** Recently it is possible to find a few examples of the study

in scientific literature which analyzes virtual organizations as a new qualitative organizational structure, however, the management and motivation of employees of such organizations comparing with other forms of organizations has not been sufficiently analyzed. As the business world has become much more demanding the issues of personnel management and motivation become more topical because of an increasing number of virtual employees. Working under new conditions of information technologies' development has not only advantages, but also causes certain problems as well as new conflicts within an organization. Internet and telecommunications help to solve particular problems related to virtual employee's management in contemporary business environment. Development of information technologies and their application in business create new challenges for business organizations. Information exchange via e-mail, participation in e-mail conferences become more common in business activities. Many people unconsciously make their works insensibly related with certain virtual groups, organizations. Inadequacy of certain models applied in personnel management and current market requirements can determine the decrease of competitive ability for the business organizations, loss of potential markets. Moreover, it can cause social problems, such as unemployment, increase of social disproportion between different countries or regions, migration of qualified staff. Due to the reasons listed, perception of personnel improvement problems and their solutions stand not only for business development factor. These circumstances frame the theme of a thesis subject. Reasons outlined show a necessity of complex personnel management improvement and a need to carry out scientific study. Therefore, it can be stated that topic of scientific study on personnel management in the new business environment influenced by IT development is absolutely relevant.

**Subject of the research:** the information technology sector as an environment for a new form of labor organization – virtual organization, settled in the conditions of information technologies development and virtual personnel as well.

**Aim of the research:** To construct an effective virtual employee's motivation scheme in information

technology sector that creates possibilities to motivate personnel and develop good personnel motivation system.

***Objectives of the research:***

1. To carry out analysis of scientific literature: analysis of organization form origin, advantages and disadvantages pointed out in the scientific literature;
2. To evaluate the achieved workers' motivation study results: elements of virtual employee's motivation in information technology sector with a purpose to implement goals and plans of the organization.
3. To investigate and compare: study objectives involve investigation and comparison of personnel working virtually and traditionally towards the main reasons relating to motivation to set tasks and perform work well.
4. To propose the construction of effective virtual personnel motivation system.

***Methods of the research:***

1. Analysis of scientific literature. Analysis of virtual employee's motivation in the information technology sector.
2. Survey. Preparation of a questionnaire to get dual information needed for the study: determination of internal motivators and evaluation of employee's opinion about present situation.
3. Statistical data analysis. Data analysis of the study was carried out using MS Excel and SPSS 17 software.

**Personnel management in virtual organization**

Problems of employees management were analyzed by many different scientists: Cascio (2003), Moritz (2003), Lengnick, McShane and Von Glinow (2002). Problems of virtual organizations and information technology sector were analyzed by Okkonen (2002), Davidow and Malone (1993), Elskytė (2007) Paliulis, Chlivickas, Pabedinskaitė (2004) and others. Personnel management problems and various features were also evaluated by Lithuanian scientists: Melnikas (2002), who overviewed personnel management problems under conditions of economical systems' transformation, globalization and integration process. Results of this scientist's study revealed the importance of dynamic factor in the rapidly changing background, implementing personnel management objectives in the organization. Butkus (2003) observed personnel management problems in the context of operative management, emphasizing personnel management functions and sequence of their implementation. These scientists offered means of integrated management, which allows harmonizing different

management methods and approaches. Moreover, it proposes methodologically grounded techniques for realization of corporate strategic management model; they emphasized the importance of corporate and personnel management systems improvement in order to strengthen and facilitate integral relations between processes of implementation of strategic, tactical and operative management functions. Tools offered by these scientists create opportunities to form both flexible corporate management and personnel management systems of high efficiency. Daft (2001) analyzed personnel management issues in the perspective of organizational behavior; Fitzenz (2002) examined quantitative and qualitative aspects of employees assessment; Swanson (2001) observed financial benefits provided by employee training and development assessment issues; Cummings (2002) analyzed impact of personnel management on the organizational adaptation in the changing external and internal business environment; Wofford (2002) researched influence of personnel management on organizational strategy creation.

In the theory of organizations the concept of virtual organization is relatively new notion and has not been analyzed properly yet. However, more and more attention is paid to virtual organization study and its activity because of the economy globalization process and information technologies development. Both Ishaya and Macaulay (1999) state that one of the causes of emergence of virtual organizations is various conditions of organization activities during the process of globalization. Originated global virtual market, supported by computer network, has removed boundaries between markets. It is suggested to use the reciprocity criteria of organization characters (Saabeel, 2002) to determine the boundary of virtual organization – what belongs to a virtual organization and what does not. Reasons which rally characters of virtual organization are general idea of trade, inter-assurance, information technologies (Venkatraman and Henderson, 1998). Shao names the purpose, consolidation, technologies and certain limits as a part of virtual organization (Shao et. al., 1998). The purpose is named as the force which unifies members of virtual organization and helps to keep different components together at least for some time.

Individual authors, such as Davidow and Malone (1993), S. L. Goldman and others (1995) notice that the main advantage of a virtual organization is the allocation of knowledge, experience and expertise. Unlike traditional groups, these virtual commands work with disregard for space, time and organizational limits, and they use connections which are supported by networks of communication technologies (Lipman and Stamps, 1997). Virtual organizations help to benefit from international labour division con-

sequences, and it is the obvious advantage in comparison with the usual classical organizations. To have an excellence against competitors traditional industrials or service organizations allocate great expenses for the security of communications between different subdivisions of the organization and most of resources of the organization are being used as well. Trips of employees from one geographical location to another or travelling from one subdivision of organization to another one waste the time; that increases expenses of organization and reduces its possibility to take the opportunity to perform with the biggest efficiency in the market at particular time.

Members of a virtual organization are located in different geographical places. Intercommunication is fulfilled with the help of information technologies because of the distance and difference in time. Members of the organization meet irregularly, thus, communication goes through information technologies. However, majority of informal, personal and tactical aspects of communication is being lost (Hinds, Kiesler, 1995), nevertheless, these aspects are often necessary to achieve common denominators, agreements or studying inside the organization.

The geographic division of organization members increases the satisfaction with one's work due to the flexibility of the timetable (Whiting & Readon, 1996). However, the satisfaction with one's work is decreased due to the physical isolation and lack of social environment which is typical to traditional work place. Every organization faces innovations implementation, unexpected situations, uncertainty, which arise even during routine procedures. Moreover, after the disappearance of a certain work place the partisanship and dedication to the organization disappear as well. Therefore, to secure an effective work in group and achieve common aims, as Sproull (1991) states, it is simply necessary to meet and discuss various points collectively. He implies that it is particularly important to communicate informally without any formal contacts and states that not only verbal, but also non-verbal contact is significant in such communication. Body language can show whether the person is motivated and how that person understands one or another question and what is going on in the organization in general. This nonverbal contact is too limited because of the communication via information technologies when geographical division of people socializing is present.

Ishaya and Macaulay (1999), who point out the difference between a virtual organization and a traditional one, notice that members of a virtual organization do not have a common work place, communicate primarily via information technologies, very often have no physical contact at all, can speak different languages and have different cultural backgrounds, can also have individual character features which ot-

her members of the organization do not know about. Lack of loyalty inside the virtual organization can be seen because of the differences mentioned above. Members of a virtual organization are employed for a certain period of time for the accomplishment of a certain task. Often these members of the organization can be employed from other labour place, basic labour place or partner organization. It means that they take a temporary stand in virtual organization and have position somewhere else at the same time. Therefore, the problem of priorities or loyalty to their labour place can arise. It can be difficult to combine two different jobs, projects or aims. Also the goal of a virtual organization cannot be consistent with the aim of a person or a company where the member of organization works. Problems identified obviously show that a virtual organization faces the same problem as traditional ones – being created on the grounds of personnel suitability (members of virtual organization) for organizational structure, as well as their ranking in the structure. It is important to carry out studies which would help to construct a model of motivation which would help the organizations to pursue their goals.

#### **Study methodology**

The systematic analysis applied allowed to reveal personnel management specifics under the conditions of development of virtual organizations. Methods of comparison and summarization, statistical data processing and other formal methods were used during conduction of the study. In this instance the following quantitative methods were used: questionnaire method, which is one of the sociological study methods. The questionnaire survey has been chosen for the implementation of the study. The aim was to get dual information for the study: a) determination of internal motivators; b) evaluation of employees' opinion about the present situation. 45 questions were given in the study questionnaire. Questions were divided into the following blocks: satisfaction with job; labour conditions; evaluation of stress; personnel trainings; estimation of team spirit; work in team; management efficiency; front office staff assessment; problems of fairness; possibility of promotion; functions of communication; policy of work with clients; effectiveness of payment system.

Questions were graded in ten-point scale where one out of ten possible evaluations in points had to be chosen. Questions 1 and 2 had to be ranked, as variety of parameters was given. All answers of respondents are further summarized in the article.

#### **Effective virtual personnel motivation scheme for IT sector**

It is necessary to find out what factors have influence on the personnel motivation of a virtual and a traditional organization in IT sector, and what funda-



mental diversities between special forms of organizations are in order to achieve the results of study. The most important aim of the study is to explore and compare attitude of employees who work virtually and traditionally towards the main reasons that determine motivation and persuade to do work well, and after work tasks are set strive for the implementation of the plans of business organization.

To achieve such goal empirical study has been carried out. Since relevant studies on virtually working employees have not been performed and required material on this topic has not been saved, initial data was collected for the study. On the contrary, huge amount of studies related with motivation and motivating of workers was performed with personnel who work in traditional companies; therefore, there is a possibility to compare already available data with newly collected study data. There were 100 respondents who answered the questions. MS Excel and SPSS 17 statistical package were used to enter and process questionnaire data. With the help of SPSS package Spearman's rho rate of rank correlation has been calculated. After completion of the correlative analysis, the reliability analysis of the study tool has been performed. Evaluation of reliability can be assigned to means of objective evaluation as strict statistic methods of calculation were used. For the evaluation of study reliability Cronbach alpha rate of calculation method was used (Chwalow, 1995). Cronbach alpha of all summarized factors of the fulfilled study is 0.898, i.e. reliability of internal test consistency is very high and acceptable.

All questions given in the survey were collected to make the identification of motivation factors that have the greatest influence on working employees easier. The following results of the survey show us that the most important and significant for virtual employees are the further mentioned blocks of the questionnaire – groups of motivation factors:

1. Policy of working with clients (arithmetic average 8.70);
2. Efficiency of management (arithmetic average 8.59);
3. Evaluation of team spirit (arithmetic average 8.52);
4. Front office appreciated employees (arithmetic average 8.38);
5. Satisfaction with job (arithmetic average 8.15);
6. Functions of interaction (communication) (arithmetic average 8.00);
7. Work conditions (arithmetic average 7.90);
8. Personnel training (arithmetic average 7.84) and
9. Team work (arithmetic average 7.05).

The arithmetic average of those block questions ranges from 7.05 to 8.70, standard deviation (SD)

(dispersion) is not big – from 0.00 to 0.84. Results of traditionally working employees illustrate that most significant are the following blocks of the questionnaire: policy of dealing with clients – 8.73 (SD 0.59), working conditions – 8.52 (SD 0.17), personnel trainings – 7.93 (SD 0.70), satisfaction with job – 7.60 (SD 0.28), evaluation of team spirit – 7.49 (SD 0.40) and management efficiency – 7.01 (SD 0.46).

For both virtually and traditionally working employees policy of dealing with clients (8.70) is very important. Work conditions are more valued by traditionally working employees (8.52). It is not an important thing for virtual employees, as virtually working employees do not have a physical work place. Effectiveness of management is more appreciated by virtually working people (8.59), whereas traditional employees who work in conventional organizations give it the last place by significance (7.01). With reference to the results of the study all blocks are examined more properly further. Results of satisfaction with job are as follows: most of virtually working employees are satisfied with their work – 27% of them gave 8 points, 21% gave 9 points and 28% of the respondents gave the maximum evaluation (10).

Loyalty of team working in virtual environment or project directly depends on the pride in the company. Employees are proud of working in a virtual company (8.57 points), because their positive results are always noticed by their managers, their payment corresponds to their qualification, so even if equivalent job would be offered in an analogous organization, they would still stay in their current one. On the other hand, traditionally working employees are less proud in comparison with virtual employees while working in traditional organization (7.33 points), though they are involved into decision making and problems solving, and are informed about events in the company directly by management quite often. Besides, they are not very satisfied with the payment which is provided by organization they work at; therefore this causes a lack of satisfaction with their job.

Results of the study also show that satisfaction of virtual employees with their work performance depends on appreciation of front office (8.14 points) and valuable distribution of works thanks to managers (8.14 points), as well as on given possibility to learn and gain knowledge from their colleagues and associates. In addition, satisfaction is also determined by adequate awareness of applied changes in virtual company that mainly give a feeling of safety.

Most of of the questioned virtual employees state that in the organization where they work environment is good, as they have enough resources and tools to work well. Workers continually develop their skills and learn new things which can be useful in the future

work performance, matters related to that are also discussed. Working conditions also have strong relations with the satisfaction with present front office. Absence of tension when dealing with front office creates good working environment. Results of traditionally working people show that they also feel safe working at their work places (8.35 points). Virtual employees state that they have enough awareness to get their work done and they think that this knowledge should be practiced for the maintenance of good relationships with clients. The results of study of traditional employees show that they have enough knowledge to do work in organization (8 points) and, considering that there are enough means and tools and possibilities in the company to do the work best, it allows the management of the organization to be satisfied with the work results.

Studies show that opinion of virtual employees is heard during virtual meetings (8.16). They state that dealing directly with collective helps to perform their work better. They feel being recognized by their associates (8.14) and this produces better work results. Most of virtually working employees state that the collective is very friendly (8.86), therefore, everybody has a possibility to learn from colleagues, associates. Furthermore, good work results are always noticed by the front office. Although the collective is friendly, there are some virtual employees who know the ones who do not carry out their work fully.

Virtually working employees are satisfied with their present front office: it stimulates liberty, always notices good results and involves them in decision making when dealing with troubles and problems. Personnel can always apply to it when they need help or advice. In addition, it distributes work efficiently. The fairness is understood by employees as a payment that corresponds to the functions, responsibilities, expectations, requirements and a reward that employees get for well done job, when the payment they get meets their needs. Moreover, quite important is an indicator which shows that policy and measures of the organization are often applied similarly to all virtual employees – the rate is 8.00 points.

Study shows that most of the virtually working employees think that means to aspire career are formed in the company regularly. They also believe that these means to aspire will be in the future and they know that if any question arises, they can always rely on the front office.

Respondents do not think that only in another organization they will succeed in career promotion. If they intend to achieve that, they can achieve it at their present work place. Present payment does not fully correspond to their existing requirement, but they think that later along with encouragement they will

be paid more. Meetings and associates help them to distribute works better and to do their best in work performance so that the best results are accomplished.

Overview of attitude of younger traditional employees disclosed that they are rather enthusiastic about the opportunity of promotion. In contrary, older people have already achieved what they wanted; therefore the index of this question was about 6.81 points out of 10. Even questioning them whether possibilities of promotion are created did not produce suitable results. Their answers varied, but they did not imply that possibilities are very adequate. On the other hand, at the moment major part of employees at their workplace mostly seek promotion and friendly collective which forms a perfect support for the task aspiration. All workers would learn new things and obtain new skills which could be used at their job with pleasure. It will help them to deal with any assigned task more successfully and will increase their sense of capability.

Payment system recognized in a virtual organization is not satisfactory for all employees. However, the arithmetic average of all respondents' answers is 8.14 points. The strangest thing is that traditionally working employees state that current payment system does not satisfy them completely – 6.67 points in comparison with the attitude of virtual organizations' employees. Virtual workers have been asked the question whether lack of payment makes them seek another job, and all of them answered that it is not so. They told that they are rewarded in accordance with their experience.

Virtually working employees state that the payment corresponds to the experience. They are also satisfied with the position occupied and they are happy with the fact that they are accepted at work and are always informed. For that reason they are not forced by the lack of payment to seek another job, but it obliges to stay in organization where they work now. Traditional employees, however, tend to think that their payment does not match their available work experience very much (6.44 points) and would like it to be a bit higher. By this employees would be more motivated to work and raise qualification.

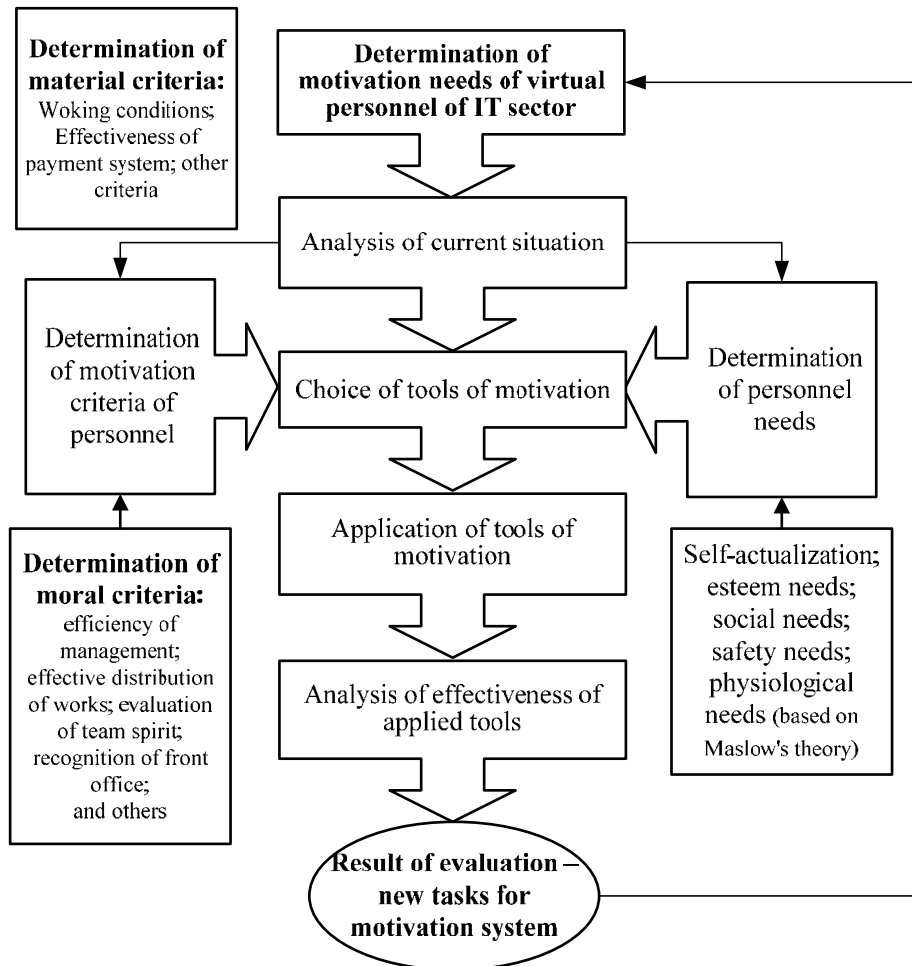
After systematic analysis and following the results of empirical study, virtual personnel motivation scheme for the information technology sector was created (see Figure 1). The scheme consists of the following parts:

*Analysis of the current situation.* At this stage, purpose should be determined, which will help to analyze the recent situation. This is significantly important aspect in the initial phase, as it makes it possible to evaluate the situation efficiently, determine all the options, consider a more detailed investigation.

*Choice of means of motivation.* Depending on the reasoning of the choice accuracy measures, the scheme employed by the organization can give successful results. This phase can be successfully implemented only under condition of careful elaborating of preceding steps.

*Application of means of motivation.* After selection of appropriate measures of motivation, they should be applied in virtual organization. Application

of means should be based on study results. There sample group of the most effective motivation factors should be chosen. In order to reveal the most significant motivation factors managers should organize a survey once a year as needs of employees are changing. The same reasoning means used in the scheme for the long period may be inaccurate, and may result in disappointment of staff.



**Figure 1.** Scheme of motivation of virtual personnel of the information technology sector

Source: J. Merkevičius, L. Uturytė-Vrubliauskienė, 2009

*Analysis of effectiveness of applied measures.* When measures (tools) are chosen, and their application in organization has already started, there is one important link: analysis of effectiveness, which can monitor whether the reasoning of selected measures is applied correctly and whether these measures are appropriate for the staff. The control system includes control performance, the effect of human exposure, control tasks, control restrictions. Its task is required feedback creation. If motivation measures are inefficient, we should return to starting point and then re-analyze the system. Analysis helps to perform a precise checking of all the stages from beginning to end and to find all the errors.

*New tasks for motivation system.* Inverse relationship can be defined as the signal characteristic of a feedback system from the direct impact or connection. Thus, the feedback is one of the most valuable elements of the motivation cycle. The main goal of feedback is to create new tasks for motivation system. The scheme creates opportunities for efficient motivation of virtual personnel. It is adaptive and it allows applying this model in the dynamic business environment, adapting it on the basis of personnel management goals set in the organization. Model application creates assumptions to increase the competitive ability of business organization. It makes possible the attraction of human resources allocated in other regions; it

also promotes better opportunities for organizational activity development.

### Conclusions

1. The entity of virtual organizations is analyzed and the following features are outlined:
  - a) geographically different, spatial arrangement of organization members;
  - b) absence of direct physical contact among members;
  - c) use of the latest information technologies in maintaining members' interrelationship, communication and collaboration;
  - d) connection of resources, knowledge and information by using information technologies;
  - e) other characteristics having impact on personnel motivation tasks.
2. Personnel management issues concerning virtual organization are little-investigated; therefore, theoretical models of personnel motivation and their application in practice do not meet the latter-day market requirements posed by the outspread of information technologies. In scientific studies that analyze personnel management problems, little attention is given to the question of how to motivate employees using the means of information technologies.
3. The main problems arising in virtual organization are such:
  - a) mutual compatibility of organization members, conformity of information communication means with the maintenance of connection, lack of activity coordination and informal interaction, as well as lack of loyalty to the organization itself.
  - b) The problem of partners participating in organization is also open.
4. The main and the most significant groups of the motivation factors for virtual personnel were determined on the grounds of the study. These factors are as follows: policy of dealing with clients, efficiency of management, valuation of team spirit, front office attitude towards employees, satisfaction with work, functions of interaction (communication), working conditions, personnel training, and teamwork. Therefore, the front office of a virtual company should pay attention to the following factors of motivation and apply adequate means of motivation with reference to them. It will make work of personnel more efficient and effective.
5. The effective virtual personnel motivation scheme is proposed and recommended to apply in conditions of globalization in IT sector, which strives to obtain competitive advantage using geographically spread human resources.

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### **Informacinių technologijų sektorius: virtualaus personalo motyvavimo specifika**

#### Santrauka

Šiandieninėje visuomenėje, vykstant sparčiai informacinių technologijų kaitai ir globalizacijos procesui, darbuotojų iniciatyva, žinios, įgūdžiai ir kūrybiškumas išskyla kaip vienas svarbiausių įmonės ilgalaikio konkurencingumo bruožų. Žmogiškasis kapitalas įgauna vis daugiau svarbos, nes būtent jis lemia įmonės pranašumą verslo pasaulyje. Įmonės vadovai turėtų daugiau dėmesio skirti veiksniams, kurie skatina jų pavaldinius geriau atlikti darbą. Problemų sprendimas šioje srityje prisideda prie visos organizacijos veiklos produktyvumo didinimo. Norint užtikrinti įmonės sėkmę konkurencinėje kovoje, svarbu ieškoti ir taikyti priemones, skatinančias darbuotojus imtis iniciatyvos ir siekti kuo geresnių darbo rezultatų. Lietuvoje ši tema nėra plačiai nagrinėta. Tyrinėjimai šioje srityje leistų išsamiau suvokti problemas, susijusias su virtualaus personalo valdymu ir motyvavimu bei padėtų suformuoti naujus motyvavimo

modelius, adaptuotus informacinių technologijų sektoriui.

Straipsnis skirtas informacinių technologijų sektoriaus virtualaus personalo valdymo problemoms spręsti. Straipsnyje, remiantis išnagrinėta mokslinė literatūra ir atliktais tyrimais, siūlomi sprendimai, kaip motyvuoti informacinių technologijų sektoriaus darbuotojus, siekiant įgyvendinti organizacijos tikslus globalizacijos sąlygomis. Straipsnyje trumpai pristatyta tyrimo metodika, tyrimo rezultatų analizė ir gautų rezultatų interpretacija, tyrimo metu išgrynintos pagrindinės motyvacijos veiksnių grupės, kurios buvo panaudotos kuriant motyvavimo modelį informacinių technologijų sektoriuje dirbančiam virtualiam personalui.

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** informacinės technologijos, informacinių technologijų sektorius, virtualus personalas, globalizacija, planavimas, virtualaus personalo motyvavimas.