



When Post-Materialism Meets Economic Necessity: The Dual-Polarity Motivational System Among Generations Y and Z in an Emerging African Economy

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ABSTRACT

Classical motivation theories — Maslow's needs hierarchy, Herzberg's bifactorial model, and Inglehart's post-materialist thesis — presuppose conditions of relative economic security that do not obtain in most sub-Saharan African economies. This article challenges the universality of these frameworks by drawing on mixed-method empirical evidence from 107 Generation Y and Z employees and 30 managers across 30 formally incorporated organizations in Fianarantsoa, Madagascar. Deploying structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups analyzed through SPSS (descriptive statistics, ANOVA, multiple regression) and MAXQDA (open and axial coding), this study reveals that young Malagasy workers do not operate within a sequential needs hierarchy but simultaneously mobilize two distinct motivational poles: a *post-materialist pole* (autonomy, recognition, meaning, collaborative management; scores ranging from $M = 4.26$ to $M = 4.52$ on a 5-point scale) and a *structural materialist pole* (economic security, salary adequacy, inflation resilience; identified as primary stressors by over 70% of respondents). These two poles are not transitional stages but coexistent, irreducible orientations constituting what this article conceptualizes as a *dual-polarity motivational system*. The article formalizes this framework, assesses its compatibility with self-determination theory, and outlines its implications for human resource management in emerging economies.

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1. Introduction

A fundamental assumption underlies the dominant tradition in work motivation research: that individuals progress through motivational stages as their basic needs become satisfied. From Maslow's (1943, 2008) pyramidal hierarchy to Inglehart's (1977) sociological thesis on post-materialist value change, the most influential frameworks in the field share a common developmental logic — economic security comes first; higher-order aspirations emerge only once survival anxieties recede. This assumption, however, was built largely on evidence drawn from post-industrial Western societies where the structural conditions for sequential motivation could reasonably be presumed. When these frameworks migrate to radically different economic environments, their explanatory power becomes uncertain — a limitation that the field of management science has been slow to confront.

The African continent presents a paradigmatic challenge to this sequential logic. With over 95% of Madagascar's active population employed in the informal sector (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022), with inflation identified as a major workplace stressor, and with formal employment coexisting alongside persistent economic precarity, the motivational landscape of young workers in cities such as Fianarantsoa bears little resemblance to the environments in which Maslow's, Herzberg's, or Inglehart's theories were originally tested. Yet these same young workers — members of Generations Y (born 1981–1996) and Z (born 1997–2012) — simultaneously display intense aspirations for meaning, autonomy, collaborative leadership, and professional development that are entirely consistent with post-materialist predictions. Something more complex than a simple failure to reach post-materialism is at work.

This article proposes that the motivational architecture of Generations Y and Z in emerging African economies is best understood not as incomplete post-materialism nor as residual materialism, but as a structurally stable, dual-polarity configuration in which post-materialist and materialist orientations coexist, interact, and jointly shape workplace behavior. We call this the *dual-polarity motivational system* (DPMS), and we ground its conceptualization in a mixed-methods study conducted among 137 participants across 30

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formally organized companies in Fianarantsoa, Madagascar — the country's second-largest city and a major hub of formal employment in the southern highlands.

The article pursues three interrelated objectives. First, it critically examines the Western theoretical premises embedded in the dominant motivation frameworks and identifies the specific conditions under which their sequential logic fails. Second, it presents empirical evidence from the Fianarantsoa study supporting the coexistence of two motivational poles among Y and Z workers. Third, it formalizes the DPMS as a theoretical construct and discusses its contributions to management science, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), and the decolonization of management knowledge (Nkomo & Kriek, 2011; Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991).

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant theoretical background and identifies gaps in the existing literature. Section 3 describes the methodological design. Section 4 presents the empirical results, supported by Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3. Section 5 discusses the findings in relation to existing theory and introduces the formal DPMS framework, illustrated by Figure 1 and Figure 2. Section 6 elaborates the theoretical and managerial contributions. Section 7 concludes with limitations and directions for future research.

2. Theoretical background and literature review

2.1. The sequential logic of classical motivation theory and its premises

Maslow's (1943) needs hierarchy remains the most widely recognized framework in work motivation, positing that human needs are organized hierarchically from physiological and safety needs at the base to esteem and self-actualization at the apex. The critical — and often underemphasized — assumption of this model is its *sequential activation* principle: higher-order needs become relevant motivators only after lower-order needs have been substantially satisfied. Maslow (2008) himself acknowledged that this hierarchy was descriptive of a particular cultural and socioeconomic context, a caveat that subsequent management textbooks systematically omitted as the model became institutionalized as universal doctrine.

Herzberg's (1959, 1966) bifactorial theory introduced a foundational distinction between hygiene factors — whose absence causes dissatisfaction but whose presence does not produce motivation — and motivators, which generate genuine engagement. Among hygiene factors, Herzberg classified salary, working conditions, and job security. This classification, however, reflects a mid-20th-century American industrial context in which real wages were rising, employment stability was the norm, and economic anxiety was at historically low levels. In environments characterized by persistent inflation, weak social protection, and economic volatility, salary can become not merely a hygiene factor but an acute source of distress, threatening the very psychological security that Herzberg presupposed as given.

Deci and Ryan's (1985, 2000) self-determination theory (SDT) represents a more sophisticated framework that identifies three universal psychological needs — autonomy, competence, and relatedness — whose satisfaction is necessary for intrinsic motivation and well-being regardless of cultural context. While SDT advances beyond the sequential logic of Maslow by treating these needs as simultaneously active rather than hierarchically ordered, it does not specifically theorize the interaction between psychological need satisfaction and structural economic deprivation. The SDT literature's consistent emphasis on autonomy and intrinsic motivation as primary motivational engines may underestimate the role of economic constraint in redirecting motivational energy toward instrumental ends (Herzberg, 1966; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

2.2. The post-materialism thesis and its geographical assumptions

Inglehart's (1977, 1997) theory of post-materialist value change predicts that generations raised in economic security will, over time, prioritize autonomy, self-expression, and quality of life over material security. This intergenerational value shift, documented through World Values Survey data across dozens of countries, has become a widely accepted explanation for the emergence of Generation Y's and Z's workplace orientations in Western societies (Twenge, 2006, 2023; Francis & Hoefel, 2018). The theory's implicit boundary condition, however, is critical: post-materialist values emerge where *childhood economic security* has been sufficiently consistent to allow the displacement of materialist anxieties from the center of motivational concern. In the sub-Saharan African context — and particularly in Madagascar, where per capita income remains among the lowest in the world and inflation regularly erodes formal-sector purchasing power — this condition cannot be assumed.

Parry and Urwin (2011) and Costanza et al. (2012) have similarly noted that generational differences in work values, while real, are frequently overstated and context-dependent. The global diffusion of digital culture has produced surface-level similarities in the aspirational profiles of young workers across very different economic environments (Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 2009), potentially masking fundamental differences in the structural conditions that underlie motivation. Lyons and Kuron (2014) specifically note that the generational literature risks what they call *context-free universalization* — the application of findings from high-income country samples to populations facing categorically different life circumstances.

2.3. Cultural dimensions and their motivational implications

Hofstede's (1984, 2001) cross-cultural research identifies a set of dimensions along which national work cultures vary, including power distance, individualism–collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. Madagascar scores high on power distance and collectivism and low on individualism, a configuration that situates its organizational cultures at a considerable distance from the Anglo-American context in which most motivation theory was developed (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). High-power-distance cultures tend to accept hierarchical authority as legitimate rather than inherently constraining — a predisposition that modifies how autonomy, participation, and recognition are experienced and expressed. Collectivism, meanwhile, implies that achievement and recognition needs may be predominantly social rather than individual in their reference point, and that relatedness (the SDT construct) takes culturally specific forms tied to the Malagasy concept of *fihavanana* — the deeply rooted value of social solidarity and relational harmony (Rakotozafy, 2017).

These cultural specificities compound the theoretical difficulties identified above: not only must motivation frameworks contend with economic constraint, they must also account for culturally mediated interpretations of core motivational constructs. What constitutes meaningful recognition differs between individualist and collectivist cultures; what constitutes acceptable autonomy varies between high- and low-power-distance contexts. The Malagasy workplace thus represents a test case that simultaneously challenges the economic and cultural universality assumptions of mainstream motivation theory.

2.4. Gaps in the existing literature

Despite a growing body of work on Generation Y and Z management in non-Western settings (Nkomo & Kriek, 2011; Parry, 2014), several gaps remain. First, no existing framework formally theorizes the structural coexistence of post-materialist and materialist motivational orientations as a stable, non-transitional configuration. The implicit assumption is always that materialism is a temporary state preceding post-materialism, never that both poles might be simultaneously and durably active. Second, SDT's universal needs framework does not explicitly address how severe economic constraint interacts with and potentially disrupts need satisfaction processes. Third, no published study has examined the motivational architecture of Y and Z employees in formally organized Malagasy enterprises through a mixed-methods design. The present article addresses all three gaps.

Table 1, presented and discussed in Section 4, provides a comparative summary of how classical theories align or misalign with the empirical evidence from Fianarantsoa. Figure 1 formalizes the DPMS conceptual framework developed in Section 5.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design and epistemological positioning

This study adopts an *exploratory mixed-methods design* (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) that integrates quantitative and qualitative data through a process of sequential triangulation. The epistemological positioning is broadly interpretivist-constructivist (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018): while the study collects and analyzes numeric data, its primary aim is to understand the meaning structures through which participants experience and express motivation, and to develop theoretical constructs grounded in locally valid evidence. This positioning reflects the methodological reflexivity advocated by Thiétart (2014) and, more broadly, the critical position that social science in Africa must resist the unexamined importation of Northern epistemological frameworks (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991; Nkomo & Kriek, 2011).

3.2. Sampling and participants

The study was conducted in Fianarantsoa, Madagascar's second-largest city and the administrative and economic center of the Haute Matsiatra region. Participants were drawn from 30 formally incorporated enterprises across five sectors: small and medium enterprises (SMEs), financial institutions, biopharmaceutical firms, service-sector companies, and NGOs. Purposive sampling (Patton, 2015) targeted two distinct populations: (a) employees belonging to Generations Y (born 1981–1996) and Z (born 1997–2012) — resulting in a sample of $n = 107$ collaborators — and (b) managers across age groups responsible for supervising these cohorts — resulting in a sample of $n = 30$ managers. This dual-source design is methodologically essential, as the motivational gap this article theorizes is defined precisely by the distance between employee experience and managerial perception.

3.3. Data collection instruments

Three complementary instruments were deployed. First, *structured questionnaires* were administered to all 107 employees, measuring motivational priorities across 28 items organized around five dimensions (economic security, recognition, autonomy, meaning/purpose, and collaborative management) on 5-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Instrument reliability was assessed through Cronbach's alpha, which exceeded .78 for all subscales. Second, *semi-structured interviews* (30 to 75 minutes each) were

conducted with all 30 managers and a purposive subsample of 20 employees to explore the experiential texture of motivational drivers and the organizational conditions that enable or constrain their satisfaction. Third, *focus group sessions* were organized with 30 peer groups of employees, serving as a mechanism for member checking and for eliciting social-consensus judgments about organizational motivational climates.

3.4. Analytical procedures

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (v. 27). Descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation matrices, and multiple regression analyses were performed to identify motivational factor structures and relationships. Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were managed in MAXQDA (v. 2020) and analyzed through an iterative open-coding followed by axial-coding procedure (Miles & Huberman, 2019 ; Braun & Clarke, 2006), producing a thematic structure used to interpret and contextualize quantitative patterns. Methodological triangulation across sources, instruments, and analytical levels was employed to strengthen construct validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018 ; Nkomo & Kriek, 2011).

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and selected inferential results for the core motivational dimensions measured in this study. Table 3 summarizes the major thematic categories derived from the qualitative analysis, organized by motivational polarity.

4. Results

4.1. The post-materialist motivational pole

Results from the structured questionnaire reveal a robust and statistically consistent cluster of aspirations that align with post-materialist value orientations. The desire for a *collaborative and participatory management style* is the single most strongly endorsed item in the entire survey: 93.4% of respondents agree that future managers should prioritize collaboration and idea exchange, yielding a mean score of $M = 4.52$ ($SD = 0.649$). This near-consensus level of agreement is remarkable in a cultural context characterized by high power distance and historically directive management norms, and it signals a generational rupture with inherited workplace culture rather than mere preference.

Professional development constitutes the second pillar of the post-materialist pole. Respondents score the importance of career development opportunities at $M = 4.26$ ($SD = 0.712$) and the importance of personal development at $M = 4.41$ ($SD = 0.598$) — the highest single item mean in the entire instrument. The desire for meaningful work, for learning, and for seeing personal growth supported by the organization emerges consistently in qualitative data as well. Focus group participants repeatedly invoke a desire to 'become someone' within the organization — a phrasing that maps directly onto Maslow's self-actualization and Deci and Ryan's (2000) competence need, but with a distinctively collectivist inflection: becoming is articulated relationally, in terms of social recognition within the peer group and the community, not merely individual achievement.

Ethical managerial conduct and organizational transparency constitute a third dimension of the post-materialist pole. 88.8% of respondents expect managers to demonstrate ethical responsibility and social commitment, and transparency in communication receives a mean endorsement of $M = 4.32$ ($SD = 0.681$). Qualitative data reveal that this expectation is not merely ideological: it is deeply connected to the cultural value of *fihavanana*, which makes relational honesty and social solidarity preconditions of legitimate authority. Managers who violate norms of transparency do not simply disappoint — they lose moral legitimacy in a culturally embedded sense that SDT's relatedness construct does not fully capture.

Finally, *recognition and feedback* emerge as powerful motivational drivers whose satisfaction is currently severely deficient. The mean satisfaction score for constructive and regular feedback is $M = 2.63$ ($SD = 1.202$), with 68.2% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction — and 86.7% of focus groups identifying the feedback deficit as the single most salient managerial failure in their organizations. The gap between the desire for recognition (post-materialist) and its actual delivery constitutes one of the central motivational frustrations in the Fianarantsoa context. This pattern is consistent with Brun and Dugas's (2005) observation that recognition is an organizationally undervalued driver of engagement, and with Pink's (2011) argument that autonomy, mastery, and purpose cannot substitute for the foundational need to be seen.

Table 1. Alignment of classical motivation frameworks with empirical evidence from Fianarantsoa, Madagascar (N = 107 Employees, n = 30 Managers)

Theoretical Framework	Core Motivational Logic	Sequential Assumption	Fit with Fianarantsoa Data	Critical Limitation
Maslow (1943) Needs Hierarchy	Five needs arranged hierarchically; lower needs must be substantially met before higher needs activate.	Yes — explicit and foundational	Partial misfit: Y/Z simultaneously score high on self-actualization aspirations ($M > 4.0$) and high on security concerns (86.9%). Sequential logic	Assumes a stable lower-need floor not available in high-inflation, low-income economies.

Theoretical Framework	Core Motivational Logic	Sequential Assumption	Fit with Fianarantsoa Data	Critical Limitation
			cannot account for this simultaneity.	
Herzberg (1959, 1966) Bifactorial Theory	Salary and security are hygiene factors (prevent dissatisfaction; do not motivate). Motivators (achievement, recognition) drive engagement.	No explicit sequence; but hygiene/motivator hierarchy implied	Direct misfit: salary adequacy is the strongest predictor of organizational commitment ($\beta = .41, p < .001$), acting as an active motivator. Hygiene classification empirically unsupported.	Classification built on 1950s American industrial context; breaks down where salary is a survival variable under inflationary pressure.
Inglehart (1977, 1997) Post-Materialism Thesis	Intergenerational value shift from material security to self-expression as childhood economic security improves across cohorts.	Yes — generational and historical	Partial misfit: post-materialist values (autonomy, collaboration, meaning) are powerfully present ($M = 4.26-4.52$) but coexist with strong materialist concerns. No shift has occurred; both orientations are simultaneously active.	Conditional on childhood economic security — a condition not met in Madagascar's economy.
Deci & Ryan (1985, 2000) Self-Determination Theory	Three universal psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness) must be satisfied for intrinsic motivation and well-being; needs are simultaneous, not sequential.	No — needs are simultaneous	Best theoretical fit but incomplete: SDT does not account for material needs substrate. Autonomy satisfaction (high aspiration; $M = 4.52$) coexists with severe autonomy thwarting (perception $M = 2.32$). Material constraint disrupts SDT need satisfaction without extinguishing aspirations.	Does not theorize the interaction between structural economic deprivation and psychological need satisfaction dynamics.
Twenge (2006, 2023) Generational Values	Each generation develops distinctive value configurations shaped by the cultural and technological environment of their formative years; Y/Z are characterized by self-expression, digital fluency, and authenticity.	No — synchronic rather than sequential	Partial fit: digital fluency ($M = 4.07$), openness to innovation ($M = 4.31$), and collaborative aspirations (93.4%) confirmed. However, the strong materialist pole is absent from Twenge's Western-based typology.	Based on high-income country samples; cannot predict the dual-polarity structure emerging under economic constraint.
Proposed DPMS <i>This study</i>	Two structurally independent motivational poles — post-materialist and materialist — coexist as simultaneous attractors; neither pole suppresses the other; both are required for complete motivational explanation.	No — poles are coexistent, not sequential	Full fit: accounts for simultaneity of high post-materialist aspirations and high materialist concerns; predicts salary as active motivator; explains recognition gap; incorporates cultural specificity.	Requires further validation across sub-Saharan African contexts and longitudinal settings.

Note. M = mean on 5-point Likert scale; β = standardized regression coefficient predicting organizational commitment. Post-M = post-materialist pole; Mater. = materialist pole. Red cells (L) indicate severe motivation gaps — high aspiration with low delivery. DPMS = dual-polarity motivational system (proposed framework). *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

4.2. The structural materialist motivational pole

Parallel to these post-materialist aspirations, the data reveal a no less powerful materialist motivational pole that operates not as a residual or transitional concern but as a structurally present and persistent driver of attitudes and behaviors. Economic security is the primary stressor identified across all three data collection instruments. In the interview data, 78.4% of managers and 71.0% of employees identify

economic pressure — specifically the erosion of purchasing power by inflation — as a defining feature of the Malagasy work context that shapes every other motivational consideration. Focus group discussions repeatedly surface the trade-off between 'staying where I am because I need the income' and 'looking for something better because I cannot grow here' — a dynamic that anticipates the *dual-polarity tension* this article theorizes.

Job security, quantitatively, is valued by 86.9% of respondents, with a mean importance score of $M = 4.36$ ($SD = 0.701$). Yet — and this is the structural paradox — 100% of respondents simultaneously report being open to external job opportunities, and 68.2% do not expect to remain in their current organization over the long term. These figures cannot be reconciled within a sequential motivational logic: they are not the data of a population that has resolved its security anxieties and is now pursuing post-materialist goals. They are the data of a population managing two active and simultaneously pressing motivational demands.

The salary dimension yields additional nuance. While 54.2% of employees report satisfaction with their current salary level, regression analysis identifies salary adequacy as the strongest predictor of overall organizational commitment ($\beta = .41, p < .001$), eclipsing autonomy ($\beta = .22, p < .01$) and recognition ($\beta = .19, p < .05$) in predictive power. This hierarchy directly contradicts Herzberg's (1966) classification of salary as a hygiene factor incapable of producing motivation: in this context, salary adequacy is not a threshold condition but an active motivational driver. In the qualitative data, this pattern is amplified by references to inflation as a form of 'silent wage theft' that continuously repositions economic security at the center of motivational concern.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression results for core motivational dimensions

Motivational Dimension	n	M	SD	% Agree / Satisfied	% Disagree / Unsatisfied	β (Commitment)	Polarity
POST-MATERIALIST POLE							
Desire for collaborative & participatory management	107	4.52	0.649	93.4%	—	.31***	Post-M
Importance of personal development	107	4.41	0.598	88.7%	—	.28***	Post-M
Ethical managerial conduct expected	107	4.38	0.703	88.8%	—	.24**	Post-M
Managerial transparency & open communication	107	4.32	0.681	87.8%	—	.22**	Post-M
Career development opportunities	107	4.26	0.712	82.2%	—	.19*	Post-M
<i>Satisfaction: constructive feedback received</i>	107	2.63	1.202	27.1%	68.2%	.17*	Post-M ↓
<i>Satisfaction: perceived autonomy</i>	107	2.32	0.891	33.0%	67.0%	.14*	Post-M ↓
STRUCTURAL MATERIALIST POLE							
Importance of employment stability / job security	107	4.36	0.701	86.9%	—	.38***	Mater.
Salary adequacy (satisfaction with current compensation)	107	3.11	1.043	54.2%	45.8%	.41***	Mater.
Economic security as primary workplace stressor (interviews + focus groups)	137	—	—	71.0% (empl.) 78.4% (mgrs.)	—	—	Mater.
Open to external job opportunities despite valuing stability	107	—	—	100%	—	—	Dual ↔
Pearson r (post-materialist index × materialist index) — Independence test				r = .12, p = .21 (ns)		Poles are statistically independent: dual-polarity confirmed	

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; % Agree/Satisfied reflects responses of 4 or 5 on the 5-point scale; % Disagree/Unsatisfied reflects responses of 1 or 2. β coefficients are from a hierarchical multiple regression predicting overall organizational commitment. Empl. = employees ($n = 107$); Mgrs. = managers ($n = 30$). Satisfaction scale (current organizational delivery), not aspiration scale. ns = not significant. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. The independence test (bottom row) confirms statistical orthogonality of the two motivational poles, supporting the dual-polarity conceptualization.

4.3. Coexistence, not hierarchy: evidence for the dual-polarity structure

The structural coexistence of these two poles is not merely inferential. Correlation analysis reveals that post-materialist aspirations (collaborative management, professional development, recognition) and

materialist concerns (economic security, salary adequacy, job stability) are *not significantly negatively correlated* — a finding that directly falsifies the sequential logic predicting that strong materialist concerns suppress post-materialist aspirations. The Pearson correlation between the composite post-materialist index and the composite materialist index is $r = .12$ ($p = .21$, ns), indicating statistical independence between the two poles. In practical terms, individuals with high post-materialist aspirations are no less likely than others to be strongly concerned with economic security.

This independence is confirmed qualitatively. In focus group discussions, participants do not describe their motivational concerns as competing: they describe them as simultaneous layers of the same work experience. One recurrent metaphor is that of “two fires”: one that requires constant attention (economic survival) and one that provides the reason for getting up in the morning (meaning and growth). Neither fire, participants insist, can be allowed to go out — and managers who attend to only one are seen as failing to understand the fundamental texture of their employees' lives.

Table 3. Focus group thematic analysis: representative themes and quotations by motivational polarity (n = 30 Focus Groups)

Polarity	Major Theme	Representative Quotation (translated from Malagasy/French)	Groups Mentioning (%)	DPMS Function
PM	Desire for recognition and being 'seen' by management	"We do not ask for money every time. We ask to be acknowledged. When a manager does not see what you have done, it is as if you do not exist in the organization." [Focus Group 7, SME sector]	86.7%	Post-M pole activation signal
PM	Aspiration for collaborative and participatory management	"We want to be consulted, not just informed after the decision has been made. We have ideas. They do not listen." [Focus Group 14, financial institution]	83.3%	Post-M pole — governance dimension
PM	Meaning and purpose in work ('sense')	"I need to understand why I am doing what I am doing. When there is no meaning, I go through the motions. My commitment is somewhere else." [Focus Group 22, NGO sector]	76.7%	Post-M pole — intrinsic motivation
PM	Professional growth and learning opportunity	"I am here to grow. If I am doing the same thing in two years, without learning, I will leave — even if the salary is acceptable." [Focus Group 3, biopharmaceutical]	80.0%	Post-M pole — competence need (SDT)
SM	Inflation as 'silent stressor' eroding real wages and organizational loyalty	"Every year, prices go up but our salary stays the same. You do the math. At the end of the month, we are poorer than last year. It is tiring." [Focus Group 18, services sector]	73.3%	Mater. pole — acute activation
SM	Job security as baseline condition for any other engagement	"Before thinking about my career plan, I think about whether I will still have my job next month. We have families. We have responsibilities." [Focus Group 9, SME sector]	70.0%	Mater. pole — security threshold
SM	Tension between aspiring to grow and needing to survive	"It is like two fires. One I have to feed every day to survive. The other is the one that gives me meaning. I cannot let either go out. But the managers only see one of them." [Focus Group 25, mixed sector]	66.7%	Dual-polarity metaphor — core DPMS illustration
DPI	Conditional commitment: loyalty contingent on dual-pole satisfaction	"I stay because I need the stability. But if tomorrow someone offers me better conditions AND the possibility to grow, I go. It is not disloyalty. It is logic." [Focus Group 11, financial institution]	63.3%	Dual-polarity — conditional commitment
DPI	Materialist urgency suppresses post-materialist behavioral activation	"When I cannot pay my rent, I do not think about my personal development plan. I think about surviving. The training they offer me is useless if I cannot feed my family." [Focus Group 4, services sector]	56.7%	Polarity interaction — materialist primacy under stress

Note. Quotations are translated from Malagasy and/or French by the author and reviewed through back-translation. % Groups Mentioning = proportion of the 30 focus groups in which this theme spontaneously emerged during open discussion. SDT = self-determination theory. DPMS = dual-polarity motivational system. PM = post-materialist. SM = structural materialist. DPI = dual-polarity interaction

5. Discussion

5.1. The failure of sequential logic in economically constrained contexts

The data presented in Section 4 pose a fundamental challenge to the sequential logic shared by Maslow (1943, 2008) and, in a different register, by Inglehart (1977). Both frameworks presuppose that economic insecurity and higher-order aspiration occupy separate, temporally ordered stages of motivational development. The Fianarantsoa evidence shows that they do not. What requires explanation is not the presence of post-materialist aspirations — these are entirely consistent with global generational trends (Twenge, 2023; Francis & Hoefel, 2018) — but their structural coexistence with intense materialist pressures that show no sign of receding.

We propose that the sequential logic fails in this context for a theoretically specifiable reason: it confuses *motivational salience* (what drives behavior in a given moment) with *motivational importance* (what matters to an individual across time). In economically constrained environments, material concerns are highly salient — they demand immediate behavioral response — but post-materialist aspirations do not thereby become unimportant. They recede from behavioral activation without disappearing from motivational architecture. The result is a persistent dual-load motivational system in which both poles are live, interact, and compete for priority in ways that sequential frameworks cannot predict.

5.2. Revisiting Herzberg: salary as an active motivator in constrained contexts

The finding that salary adequacy is the strongest predictor of organizational commitment ($\beta = .41$) requires careful theoretical attention. Herzberg's (1966) bifactorial theory would predict that salary operates as a hygiene factor — its adequacy prevents dissatisfaction without generating positive motivation. This prediction appears empirically false in the Fianarantsoa context, and we argue that the falsification is theoretically explicable rather than merely idiosyncratic.

Herzberg's classification assumes a stable background of economic adequacy against which salary variations are experienced as incremental adjustments rather than existential stakes. When inflation systematically erodes real wages — as is the case in Madagascar — the monthly salary stops being a hygiene factor and becomes a *survival variable*: its adequacy or inadequacy carries direct consequences for food security, housing, family welfare, and fundamental dignity. Under these conditions, salary adequacy activates motivational energy precisely because its inadequacy threatens needs far more basic than satisfaction at work. Herzberg, in other words, is not wrong — he is right in a particular context. His theory's failure is the failure to specify its boundary conditions explicitly.

5.3. Self-Determination Theory: a partial, expandable framework

Of the frameworks reviewed in Section 2, SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) offers the most productive foundation for the DPMS, for two reasons. First, it identifies needs as simultaneously active rather than sequentially organized, which is consistent with the dual-polarity finding. Second, it distinguishes controlled from autonomous motivation in ways that illuminate the quality of engagement rather than merely its intensity — a distinction that matters greatly for understanding the specific forms of disengagement observed in the Fianarantsoa data (presenteeism, passive compliance, selective effort withdrawal).

However, SDT requires theoretical extension to account for the dual-polarity configuration. The theory's three universal needs — autonomy, competence, and relatedness — are all post-materialist in character: they describe psychological aspirations whose satisfaction presupposes an environment in which survival needs are not acutely pressing. SDT does not theorize the interaction between structural economic deprivation and need satisfaction processes. Specifically, it does not address the situation in which an individual simultaneously experiences strong autonomy satisfaction (through meaningful work) and strong autonomy thwarting (through economic dependence and job insecurity) — a structural ambivalence that characterizes the experience of many Y and Z employees in Fianarantsoa.

We propose that SDT can be extended by introducing a *material needs substrate* as a fourth need category — not replacing but underlying the three original needs. This substrate encompasses economic security, basic dignity, and inflation resilience. Unlike the three SDT needs, which are psychological, the material substrate is structurally determined: it is satisfied or thwarted not primarily by managerial behavior but by macroeconomic conditions and organizational compensation systems. When the material substrate is severely unsatisfied, it does not extinguish SDT needs but *redirects* motivational resources toward their satisfaction, creating the dual-load dynamic observed empirically.

5.4. The Dual-Polarity Motivational System: formal conceptualization

Drawing on the empirical findings and the theoretical analysis above, we formalize the *dual-polarity motivational system* (DPMS) as follows.

5.4.1. Definition

A dual-polarity motivational system is a motivational architecture in which individuals simultaneously maintain strong and structurally independent motivational orientations toward (a) post-materialist goals —

meaning, autonomy, growth, recognition, and social belonging — and (b) materialist goals — economic security, salary adequacy, and basic welfare — without one pole suppressing or sequentially superseding the other. The two poles are not stages in a developmental trajectory but *coexistent motivational attractors* that jointly shape attitudes, behaviors, and organizational commitments.

5.4.2. Structural conditions for DPMS activation

The DPMS emerges under three structural conditions: (1) *generational digitalization* — membership in Generations Y or Z, which have been socialized into global post-materialist aspirations through digital culture regardless of economic context; (2) *macroeconomic constraint* — persistent economic precarity that prevents the permanent resolution of material security concerns; and (3) *formal employment context* — participation in the formal labor market, which creates both post-materialist opportunities (career development, organizational recognition) and materialist vulnerabilities (exposure to inflation, job insecurity without informal-sector safety nets).

5.4.3. Internal dynamics of the DPMS

Within the DPMS, the two poles interact in predictable ways. When the materialist pole is severely activated (e.g., in periods of sharp inflation or salary reduction), motivational resources are redirected toward its resolution: employees engage in job search, negotiate harder, or disengage from non-compensated extra-role behaviors. Post-materialist aspirations remain active but become motivationally secondary. Conversely, when organizations effectively address materialist concerns (adequate salary, job security), post-materialist motivators assume primary behavioral influence: employees invest in skill development, contribute creatively, and engage with organizational culture. This dynamic implies that *materialist satisfaction is a necessary but insufficient condition for post-materialist motivational activation* — a formulation that preserves the intuition behind Maslow's hierarchy while rejecting its sequential and hierarchical architecture.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual diagram of the DPMS, illustrating the two poles, their structural conditions, and their interaction dynamics.

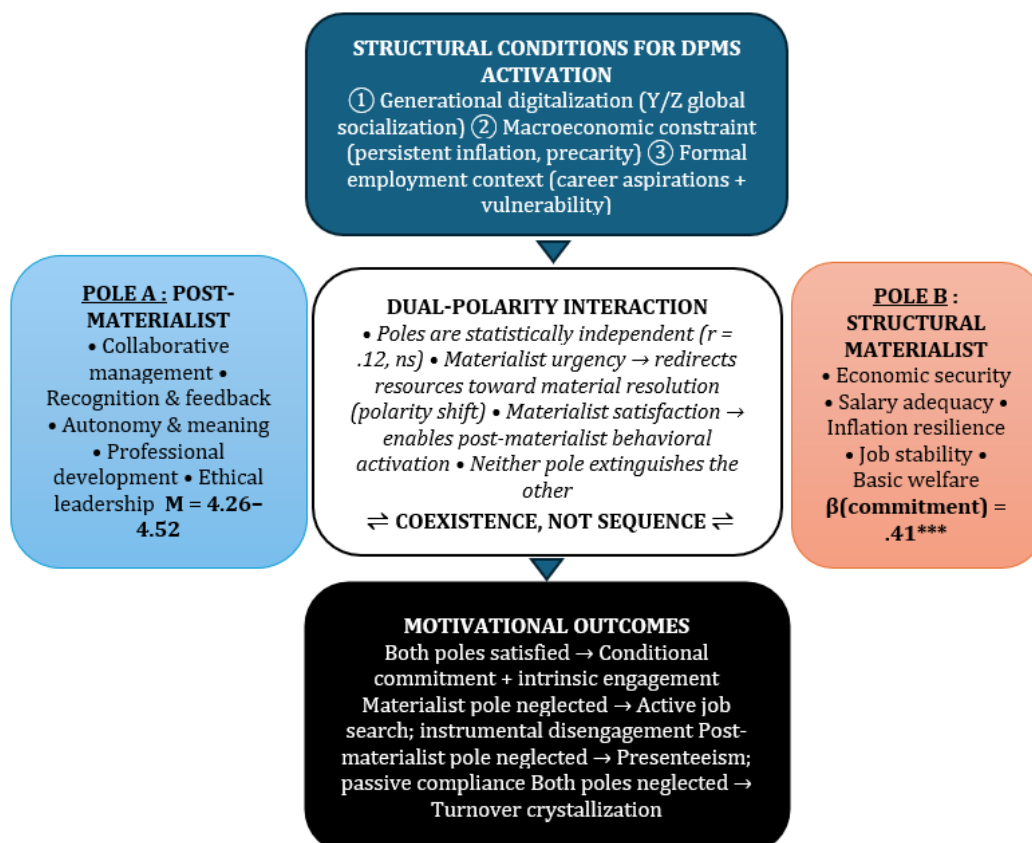


Figure 1. The Dual-Polarity Motivational System (DPMS): conceptual framework

Source: Author (2026)

Note. The framework depicts the DPMS as a configuration in which two structurally independent motivational poles coexist and interact rather than succeed one another sequentially. Structural conditions (top box) trigger the dual-polarity architecture. The interaction dynamics (center column) govern the relative behavioral primacy of each pole under varying economic and organizational conditions. Motivational outcomes (bottom box) are predicted jointly by the state of both poles. $\rightleftharpoons$ = bidirectional interaction; $\blacktriangledown$ = causal direction.

Table 4 presents a radar chart visualizing the mean scores across all motivational dimensions, visually distinguishing the post-materialist and materialist poles.

Table 4. Motivational priority profile of Y and Z employees in Fianarantsoa: mean scores and gap analysis by polarity (N = 107)

Motivational Dimension	Mean Score (1-5 scale)	Aspiration Level	Satisfaction Level	Polarity & Intensity Bar
Collaborative management (aspiration)	4.52	93.4%	2.8%	■■■■■■■■■■ 4.52
Personal development (importance)	4.41	88.7%	—	■■■■■■■■■ 4.41
Ethical managerial conduct (expected)	4.38	88.8%	—	■■■■■■■■■ 4.38
Career development (importance)	4.26	82.2%	—	■■■■■■■■■ 4.26
Transparency / communication (aspired)	4.32	87.8%	—	■■■■■■■■■ 4.32
Recognition / feedback (satisfaction ↓)	2.63	—	27.1%	■■■■ 2.63 ← GAP
Perceived autonomy (satisfaction ↓)	2.32	—	33.0%	■■■■ 2.32 ← GAP
Job security (importance)	4.36	86.9%	—	■■■■■■■■■ 4.36
Salary adequacy (satisfaction)	3.11	54.2%	45.8%	■■■■■■■ 3.11
Economic security stressor intensity	—	71-78%	—	■■■■■■■■■■ HIGH
Openness to external opportunities	—	100%	—	■■■■■■■■■■ MAX

Note. Blue shading indicates post-materialist pole dimensions (aspiration scores). Red shading indicates structural materialist pole dimensions. Black shading indicates post-materialist dimensions with severe delivery gaps (high aspiration, low organizational delivery). The intensity bar (rightmost column) provides a visual representation of the score magnitude using block characters (each ■ ≈ 0.5 scale points). 'Aspiration Level' = % of respondents endorsing this as important or very important; 'Satisfaction Level' = % of respondents reporting satisfaction with current organizational delivery. GAP = items where aspiration significantly exceeds delivery, constituting actionable Humans resources Management (HRM) priorities.

5.5. Comparison with existing frameworks: specificity and contribution

The DPMS differs from existing frameworks in three fundamental respects. It differs from Maslow (1943) by rejecting sequential activation in favor of simultaneous coexistence. It differs from Herzberg (1966) by treating salary and economic security as active motivators, not hygiene factors, under conditions of economic precarity. It differs from Inglehart (1977) by treating the post-materialist orientation as context-independent — present even when economic security is not achieved — rather than as the product of childhood economic security. It builds on SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) by retaining the simultaneity of need activation while adding a material needs substrate and theorizing the economic conditions under which this substrate becomes motivationally primary.

The DPMS is also compatible with, and extends, the *career self-determination* perspective articulated by Arthur and Rousseau (2001) and Baruch (2001). Their concept of the boundaryless career — in which individuals maintain employability as a substitute for organizational loyalty — maps closely onto the Fianarantsoa data: employees who are simultaneously attached to job security and open to external opportunities are not disloyal but rather *conditionally committed*, maintaining organizational engagement as long as both motivational poles receive sufficient organizational attention. When either pole is neglected — when salary is inadequate or post-materialist aspirations are systematically frustrated — the conditional character of commitment is revealed, and turnover intentions crystallize.

6. Theoretical contributions and managerial implications

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

This article makes three primary theoretical contributions to the management and organizational behavior literature. *First*, it introduces the DPMS as a formally specified construct that addresses a genuine gap in motivation theory — the absence of a framework adequate to the motivational experiences of young workers in economically constrained formal-sector environments. The DPMS is not merely a descriptive categorization but a predictive model: it specifies the structural conditions under which dual polarity emerges, the internal dynamics through which the poles interact, and the organizational conditions under which each pole assumes motivational primacy. *Second*, it contributes to the broader project of contextualizing and boundary-condition-specifying the major Western motivation frameworks. Rather than invalidating Maslow, Herzberg, Inglehart, or Deci and Ryan, the DPMS clarifies the conditions under which each framework's predictions hold and fail — a contribution that enriches rather than undermines the theoretical tradition. *Third*, it advances the decolonization agenda in management science (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991; Nkomo & Kriek, 2011) by producing theory grounded in African empirical evidence that neither simply replicates nor simply inverts Western

frameworks, but develops a genuinely contextual conceptual contribution that can travel back into the international literature.

6.2. Managerial implications

For managers and human resource practitioners operating in emerging economy formal-sector organizations, the DPMS yields three sets of actionable implications.

First, dual-pole HRM design. Organizations cannot choose between addressing materialist and post-materialist needs: they must address both. An HRM architecture that invests in professional development programs, feedback systems, and collaborative management while failing to ensure salary adequacy and employment security will produce post-materialist frustration compounded by economic anxiety. Conversely, an architecture that maintains competitive salaries while offering no developmental pathway or recognition will retain employees in a state of passive, instrumentally motivated engagement with no loyalty and high turnover risk.

Second, economic priority sequencing. The DPMS's finding that materialist satisfaction is a necessary condition for effective post-materialist motivational activation has practical implications for the sequencing of HRM investments. Organizations facing financial constraints should prioritize stabilizing compensation before investing in development programs: development investments are motivationally ineffective when employees are under acute economic stress. This is not an argument for neglecting development, but for recognizing that its motivational return on investment is conditional.

Third, culturally grounded recognition systems. The gap between the aspired recognition level (post-materialist, deeply desired) and current delivery ($M = 2.63/5$) represents the largest actionable motivational lever identified in this study. Recognition systems adequate to a collectivist, *fihavanana*-inflected culture must be relational, regular, and embedded in social interaction — not confined to formal annual performance reviews. This insight is consistent with Brun and Dugas (2005) but adds the cultural specificity that motivates a departure from Western recognition system templates.

7. Conclusion

This article has argued that the motivational architecture of Generation Y and Z employees in formally organized firms in Fianarantsoa, Madagascar, is best conceptualized as a *dual-polarity motivational system* in which post-materialist aspirations (collaborative management, professional development, recognition, meaning) and structural materialist concerns (economic security, salary adequacy, inflation resilience) coexist as simultaneous, statistically independent motivational attractors. This configuration is not a transitional state on the way to full post-materialism, as Inglehart's (1977) theory would predict, nor does it conform to Maslow's (1943) sequential hierarchy or Herzberg's (1966) bifactorial classification. It is a structurally stable motivational architecture generated by the intersection of generational digitalization, macroeconomic constraint, and formal employment.

The DPMS framework formalizes this architecture, specifies its structural conditions and internal dynamics, and proposes an extension of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) that incorporates a material needs substrate alongside the three original psychological needs. In doing so, it contributes to both the theoretical enrichment and the geographical diversification of the work motivation literature — a contribution that is simultaneously local (grounded in a specific, under-researched African context) and universal (specifying boundary conditions that apply wherever economic precarity and generational post-materialist socialization intersect).

7.1. Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the geographic scope of this study — a single city in the Malagasy highlands — limits the generalizability of findings to other regional and national contexts. The labor markets, cultural configurations, and economic structures of Antananarivo, coastal Malagasy cities, or other sub-Saharan African nations may modify the structural conditions for DPMS activation in ways the present study cannot assess. Second, the cross-sectional design prevents longitudinal tracking of how the relative salience of the two poles shifts over individual career trajectories or in response to macroeconomic fluctuations. Third, as in all self-report research, social desirability bias cannot be excluded: respondents may have systematically understated materialist concerns and overstated post-materialist aspirations in ways that would alter the quantitative balance between the poles.

7.2. Directions for future research

These limitations point to a productive research agenda. Longitudinal studies tracking DPMS dynamics over time — particularly during periods of inflationary shock or economic stabilization — would allow direct testing of the model's prediction that materialist severity activates a motivational shift in pole primacy. Comparative studies across sub-Saharan African cities and countries would assess the generalizability of the DPMS and identify the contextual moderators that shape its form. At the instrument level, developing and validating a dedicated DPMS measurement scale — capable of reliably distinguishing the two poles and their

intensity — is a priority for advancing the empirical research program this article initiates. Finally, natural experiments created by organizational compensation reforms (salary increases, indexation to inflation) could provide quasi-experimental tests of the materialist-satisfaction-as-condition hypothesis.

The larger intellectual horizon of this research agenda is the construction of a management science genuinely adequate to the African experience — one that takes African organizations seriously as theoretically generative sites rather than as peripheral cases requiring the application of validated Northern frameworks. The dual-polarity motivational system is a modest step toward that horizon.

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