

Money might be more motivating for people in 'WEIRD' countries

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Financial rewards may be more motivating for people living in Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) countries, than for people from non-WEIRD countries, reports a study [published](#) in

Nature Human Behaviour.

Money is often assumed to be a main motivator for effortful behavior, and understanding the effectiveness of monetary and non-monetary rewards has practical implications. However, previous research examining motivation has predominately involved populations from WEIRD cultures, and whether these findings generalize to non-WEIRD cultures is unclear.

Danila Medvedev and colleagues compared how hard people from two WEIRD (U.S. and U.K.) and four non-WEIRD (China, India, Mexico, and South Africa) [countries](#) worked in response to [monetary incentives](#) versus psychological motivators. In the experiments the workers received either a fixed salary, a fixed salary plus a costless psychological intervention, or a fixed salary plus an additional monetary incentive.

They found that [money](#) was more motivating compared to a psychological intervention for individuals in the U.S. and the U.K. than for people from China, India, Mexico, and South Africa. They note that in one of the study's experiments, over half of American participants abandoned their task as soon as they could without the risk of sacrificing payment. For people in Mexico and China, a simple intervention that highlighted a norm to work hard was a more cost-effective way to motivate effort than paying people extra money.

In another experiment, the authors randomly assigned people in India to take the test in Hindi or English to see if this affected motivation. The authors found that participants were 52% more motivated by money than by a psychological treatment when instructions were in English, but this value decreased to 27% when instructions were in Hindi.

The authors suggest that their findings challenge the assumption that [financial incentives](#) are equally motivating across cultures and indicate

that the motivational value of money may be highest for individuals from WEIRD cultures. However, they note that further research is needed to glean whether the influence of money is equally stronger in WEIRD cultures for tasks in which people work with others or in which there is no salary and instead only commission.

More information: Danila Medvedev et al, The motivating effect of monetary over psychological incentives is stronger in WEIRD cultures, *Nature Human Behaviour* (2024). [DOI: 10.1038/s41562-023-01769-5](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-023-01769-5)

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