

# INTRINSIC REWARD SYSTEM AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

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## **Abstract**

*Reward systems are central to the human resource management because it attracts talented individuals, motivate them and retain those that have a better fit with the organization. Organizations need to review their reward systems in order to improve employee motivation, increase performance and stay competitive. The objective of this paper is to examine the effect of intrinsic reward on employee performance. It additionally reviewed other research findings in the range of intrinsic reward systems. It employed Victor Vroom's Expectancy theory to investigate the effects of intrinsic factors on employees' performance. This paper concludes that intrinsic reward system plays an essential role in motivating workers to perform innovatively and remain committed to the growth of the organization and recommends that organizations should implement intrinsic reward package that will continue to enhance the motivational spirit of the employees such that it will make the work environment more challenging and interesting because it leads to better employees' performance which in turn results in organization performance.*

**Key Words:** Reward system, intrinsic reward, motivation, employee performance, organization.

## **Introduction**

As humans, improving the quality of life is a must for most people, and therefore they are likely to seek employment at organizations that provide higher rewards. Rewards are among the important elements that motivate employees to contribute their best effort to generate innovative ideas that lead to improved business and service delivery. According to Anku, Amewugah and Glover (2018), reward is generally understood as the total amount of financial and non-financial compensation or total remuneration provided to an employee in return for labour or service rendered at work. Lin, (2007) noted that an effective reward system can stimulate employees to work harder thus increasing productivity and enhancing job performance. Likewise, Beer (1984), Armstrong (2003), and Nyandoro and Goremusandu, (2016) observe that the coordination of reward systems

underpins the accomplishment of competitiveness and positive employee perceptions towards the organization.

In Nigeria as in other developing countries, the challenge for most organizations is how to improve the performance of their employees. This is because the performance of the employees will directly affect the performance of the organizations. In essence, if the performance of majority of the employees is low, this would inevitably lead to low organizational performance and vice versa. Azuh and Adejumo (2011) opine that the consequences of poor reward may detract from the objective of enhancing organizational productivity and suggest a decline in the quality of performance. In severe cases, it may increase grievances, lead to absenteeism and increase labour turnover. Yet in too many organizations, rewards are solely defined in terms of wages and salaries. However, there is another conception of rewards that relates to the subjective feelings of liking, pleasure or satisfaction such as appreciation and recognition, status, interesting work, training etc. (Schultz, 2006 cited in Santos & Mejia, 2015). These intrinsic rewards are significant factors that can enhance the performance of employees in the workplace. Hence, given that employee performance is an important aspect of organizational process and the use of reward systems ensures the achievement of organizational goals, it becomes a sociological necessity to examine the influence of intrinsic reward system on employee performance.

## **Conceptual Review**

### **Reward System**

Ajani (2008:209), summarized reward as “an event that a person finds desirable, followed by high performance and sense of achievement, based on attaining certain level of excellence, pride in accomplishment and feeling of success and efficacy.” According to Lawler (2003), there are at least two factors that determine the attractiveness of a reward; one is how much of the reward is being offered and the second is how much the individual values the type of reward that is being offered. He argues that, the more the individual values the type of reward and the more of it is being offered, the greater the motivational potential. Although reward means something different to individuals, organizations and society, it is important to all.

Reward system therefore is seen by Armstrong (2006:615) “as containing arrangements in the form of policies, practices, processes, structures, systems and procedures required to ensure that the contribution of people to the organization is recognized by both financial and non-financial means”. Rue and Byars (2004) defined it as a set of mechanisms for distributing both tangible and intangible rewards as part of an employment relationship.

Also according to Armstrong (2010: 268), “reward systems consist of the interrelated processes and practices which combine to ensure that reward management is carried out

effectively to the benefit of the organization and the people who work there." Therefore, reward system is the key to lead and reinforce employees' behaviors to support organization's strategy and this has a substantial effect on organization's performance (Giblin & Gracia-Morin, 1992).

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### **Intrinsic Reward System**

Nabi (2016) denote intrinsic rewards to refer to the rewards that come from the content of the job itself and encompass motivational characteristics of the job such as autonomy role clarity and meaning. It includes further elements such as appreciation, meeting the new challenges, positive and caring attitude from employers, job rotation, sense of achievement, professional growth and individual recognition. Ngwa, Adeleke, Akintola, Agbaeze, Ghosi, and Imhanrenialana (2019) reiterate that intrinsic reward include the non-monetary parts which are intangible non-cash rewards such as scope to achieve and exercise of responsibility, career opportunities, health care, learning and development, career progression, the intrinsic motivation provided by the work itself and the quality of working life provided by the organization. According to Allen, Shore and Griffeth (2004), intrinsic rewards are more psychological in nature and they provide internal satisfaction to employees through satisfaction which comes from the inside. Jaghult, (2005) posits that a word of appreciation and certificates of recognition are other forms of non-monetary part of a reward system. Armstrong (2007) observed that the non-monetary part of a reward system creates a long term effect on employee commitment than the monetary part. However, an effective reward system must contain both components to enhance performance.

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### **Motivation**

Motivation is an important part of understanding behavior. Luthan (1998) defines motivation as a process that starts with a physiological deficiency or need that activates a behavior or a drive that is aimed at a goal incentive. According to MinnerEbrahimi and Watchel (1995), motivation consists of three interacting and interdependent elements, i.e., needs, drives and incentives. Daft (2006) defined it as those internal and / or external forces that trigger actions that persist until a certain goal is achieved. Greenberg and Baron (2003:190) define motivation as "the set of processes that arouse, direct and maintain human behaviour towards attaining some goal. To Stoke (1999, cited in Nabi, Islam, Dip & Hennis, 2017), motivation is a human psychological characteristic that contributes to a person's degree of commitment. Accordingly, organizational goals are unattainable without enlisting commitment of the members of the organization. In the words of Sheldon (2001:25), "no industry can be rendered efficient so long as the basic fact remains unrecognized that is principally human".

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### **Employee Performance**

According to Sanderson, Harshak and Blain (2009), employee performance does not occur in a vacuum. To get the best from the employees, organizations must first address a set of fundamental reward factors to motivate employees to deliver standard performance because the quality of human resource management has a critical influence on the performance of the organization (Sanderson, Harshak & Blain, 2009). According to Armstrong (2006), employees are motivated when they expect that a course of action is likely to lead to the attainment of a goal- a valued reward that satisfies their particular needs. Thus, well-motivated people are those with clearly defined goals who take action that they expect will achieve these goals. In other words, how well or not those activities were executed depends largely on the motivation process that inspires employees to have positive attitude towards the business and perform at high level.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper builds its theoretical foundation on Victor Vroom's expectancy theory (1964). According to expectancy theory, people's performance is rooted in a combination of their ability and their motivation or the choice they make to behave in a certain way. Motivators differ for each individual but always entail the following: (1) expectancy that their efforts will lead to a desired level of performance, (2) belief that their performance will lead to valued outcomes (instrumentality), and (3) value for a given outcome (valence) (Boswell, Colvin, & Darnold, 2008). Thus, Motivation = E × I × V, where E is expectancy, I is instrumentality and V is valence (Isaac, Zerbe, & Pitt, 2001). According to expectancy theory, employees will exert effort to achieve organizational goals if they are offered rewards that are valuable to them. This theory links hard work and high performance with desired rewards. This is in line with the notion of hedonism and the wish for enjoyment, which in this case is rooted in valued rewards. Expectancy theory argues that humans are capable of making choices and are able to think rationally. An important feature of expectancy theory relates to the idea that the value of any reward is in the eyes of the beholder: one person may prefer social status, for instance, while another may value financial incentive. The value placed on rewards not only varies from person to person but can even change over time for the same person (MacMillan, 2007). These individual differences can make the workplace both an interesting and a frustrating place for managers (Porter, Bigley, & Steers, 2003). Managers should therefore attempt to assure their employees that increased effort will lead to higher performance which will hence lead to valued rewards (Ryan & Pinton, 2005).

### **Literature Review**

#### **Intrinsic Reward System and Employee Performance**

Intrinsic motivation is the innate, natural propensity to engage one's interests and exercise one's capacities and in so doing, to seek and conquer optimal challenges (Deci & Ryan

1985). According to Agba (2012), workers in contemporary societies are expressing a strong desire to pursue more than just a job. They are looking for employment opportunities that promise an extension of their interests, personality and abilities. They want a variety of things from their jobs besides a pay cheque and a few fringe benefits and their loyalty to the organization depends upon the degree to which their employer satisfies these wants. Zhou, Qian, Henan, and Lei, (2009) agreed that people are no longer working simply for pay. They pay attention on personal growth such as improvement of capabilities, acquisition of new knowledge and valuable skills. In the past few years, companies have faced a difficult economic environment that has challenged traditional reward practices and strategies (Deloitte Development LLP, 2009). Having experienced the effects of a worldwide economic recession since 2008, human resource managers within organizations face increasing pressure to add value and demonstrate flexibility in dealing with new challenges and opportunities. These challenges require organizations to find new ways to not only reward top performers but to motivate all employees to improve performance while maintaining or increasing business value (Silverman, 2004). Clark, (2009) encouraged intrinsic rewards that (a) promoted individual growth and development, such as educational benefits and on-site training; (b) provide meaningful and engaging work (c) provide perks, such as corporate gym memberships and on-site child care; and (d) encourage non-work related activities, such as annual picnics and holiday parties. According to Osterloh and Frey (2000), reward is intrinsic if an activity is undertaken for one's immediate need satisfaction. Intrinsic reward is valued for its own sake and appears to be self-sustained. They also state that: "the ideal incentive system is in the work content itself, which must be satisfactory and fulfilling for the employees" (p.2). The existence of intrinsic reward shows employees' interest in their work. The authors admit that companies cannot depend solely on their personnel needs and preferences for achieving owners' goals. Even though employees might be satisfied and happy at work, this may not always lead to what the owner's desired results are. Therefore, the authors state that it is important for the company to direct employees' intrinsic motivation in alignment with the organizational goals.

Ryan and Deci, (1985) define intrinsic reward as a driver working towards satisfying one's innate needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness. Feeling of competence arises when employees feel confident about their work tasks and duties, and when they have the necessary skills to perform at work well. Satisfying the need of competence makes employees more interested in learning new things that can later be used in the work process. In order for intrinsic motivation to be created and sustained, the feeling of competence cannot stand alone, but should be supplemented by the feeling of autonomy. Feeling of autonomy arises when employees perceive their behavior as self-determined. According to Ryan and Deci, (1985), intrinsic reward is a good stimulator for fast learning and creativity. If a person has an internal drive toward a specific goal or while executing a

task, he or she will get involved deeper into it until a satisfactory level of achievement is reached. Deeper involvement also means that more effort will be provided, which will lead to better performance. Similarly, Malone and Lepper (1987), see it as what people will do without external inducement. Wexley and Yukl, (1997) define intrinsic reward as the effort expended in employees' work to satisfy their growth needs such as achievement, recognition, capabilities and self-improvement.

Growth and development fall under the motivator factor based in Herzberg's two factor theory. Growth and development is the continuous process of increasing the skill and capabilities of an employee. According to the theory, it is a factor that will drive people to work, achieve and feel satisfied. Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, growth and development is most likely categorized under the self-actualization which is a higher level need on the hierarchy. Growth and development is defined as similar to promotion opportunities. Alharth (2008) said that if employees obtain an opportunity to get promotion or career advancement, it is considered that he is given a chance of growth and development in the organization.

Increased employee control with respect to work tasks has also been found to increase employee motivation, with respect to increased task mastery and seeking out novel challenges (Morgeson, Delany & Hemingway, 2005). In line with such findings, Deci and Ryan, (2000), Gagné and Deci, (2005) postulate that the need for autonomy, or being the perceived origin or source of one's own behaviours is regarded as essential for the emergence or sustenance of intrinsic motivation or the motivation to perform an activity for itself in order to experience the pleasure and satisfaction inherent in the activity (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989). Furthermore, the review by Gagné and Deci, (2005) suggests that employees high in intrinsic motivation are more involved in their jobs and demonstrate greater goal attainment than those less intrinsically motivated. Also, as employees high in intrinsic motivation are more persistent and interested in their work, their work quality should increase to higher levels. Employees with low levels of intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, may not have the drive and engagement to work more independently because they lack purpose or meaning in their jobs, have less persistence, and are less self-driven.

To further explore the link between intrinsic rewards and employee performance, an early American philosopher; William James, said that the deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated (cited in Geller, 1997). Maurer (2001) prescribes recognition as an essential factor in enhancing employee job performance which is directly associated with organizational achievement. Recognition is the demonstration of appreciation for a level of performance, an achievement or a contribution to an objective. Nelson (1994) noted that recognition especially if showed in public in front of the other employees sends favourable signals to the other employees of the kind of behaviour that is favoured and

desirable by the management. Shore and Shore (1995) posit that employees who are able to experience and receive recognition for their work are also able to have a better perception of their work, their workplace and the people they work for. Jeffries (1997) posits that it is possible for organizations to reap the benefits that result from a motivated, enthusiastic workforce that looks forward to making a difference for the organization. Sometimes all it takes is a simple, genuine, spoken 'thank you'. Romano (2003) believes that companies which authentically tap into employee's feelings and harness this emotional power wisely are those that hold the competitive advantage in the market. As Nelson (1994:11) puts it "you get the best effort from employees not by lighting a fire under them, but building a fire within them". This goes a long way in improving the performance to high level and also ensuring the commitment of employees towards the organizational success.

Work can be fulfilling and therefore motivating when individuals feel that what they do is worthwhile and adds value. According to Murlis and Schubert (2001), a bomb disposal expert in Britain who had taken over for a colleague killed by a bomb was asked by a reporter: "you are risking death doing this and only getting paid an army salary. Why do you do such an awful job?" "It isn't an awful job" the bomb expert replied. "It is a very worthwhile job and the danger is worth it to save lives. People respect what I do!"

In other words, employees' psychological connection with their work is of great importance in the workplace because research has revealed that engaged employees are highly energetic, self-efficacious individuals who exercise influence over events that affect their lives and create their own positive feedback, in terms of appreciation, recognition performance and success (Brooks, 2009). According to Locke 1976:1,342), Since satisfaction is an emotional response, job satisfaction may be viewed as the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the perception of one's job as fulfilling or allowing the fulfillment of one's important job values, provided these values are compatible with one's needs. Hence pride in work is a huge motivator and gives employees a purpose and meaning.

Furthermore, no matter how automated an organization may be, high productivity depends on the level of motivation and the effectiveness of the workforce. Staff training is an indispensable strategy for motivating workers. Obisi, (2001) notes that training is a process through which the skills, talent and knowledge of an employee is enhanced and increased. He argues that training should take place only when the need and objectives for such training have been identified. Beggs, (2003) observed that training needs are identified through gaps in skills and knowledge between current and desired performance. Mamoria, (1995) explains that training helps to mould employees' attitudes and help them to contribute meaningfully to the organization. The organization benefits because of

enhanced performance of employees. He further states that a well-trained employee would make a better and economic use of materials and equipment which would go a long way to minimize wastages. This will give the employees opportunities for self-improvement and development to meet the challenges and requirements of new equipment and new techniques of performing a task. In other words, the acquisition of new skills and knowledge and attitude through training enables the employee to perform more effectively. The positive feedback on good performance as a result of training motivates employees to work even better.

Intrinsic rewards provided create a sustainable motivation and win-win situation to both employees and the organizations they served (Thomas, 2009). Dewhurst, Guthridge, and Mohr, (2009:2), posit that "for people with satisfactory salaries, intrinsic motivators are more effective than extra cash in building long-term employee engagement". It will therefore be interesting to see which of these types of reward play determining role in motivating employees in the private sector organization in Nigeria. Milne (2003) maintained that intrinsic reward can be a powerful motivator. Any organization that acknowledges an achievement and also recognizes an individual's commitment to learning can through this act reinforce "an organization's values, promote outstanding performance and foster continuous learning by openly acknowledging role model behavior and ongoing achievement" (Milne, 2007:30). Therefore, a study done by (Pollack, 2004) concludes that intrinsic motivation derived from non-cash rewards will effectively drive-up the performance level among employees.

### **Empirical Studies on the Effects of Intrinsic Reward System on Employee Performance**

Jibowo (1977) studied the effect of motivators and hygiene factors on job performance among a group of 75 agricultural extension workers in Nigeria. The study shows some support for the influence of motivators on job performance. A study by Mansoor, Borhannuddin, and Yusuf, (2012) was conducted in Pakistan to examine reward and performance among bank employees in Punjab. Structured questionnaire surveys were used and data were gathered from 4 bank employees. The value of correlation coefficient for recognition was 0.251 which shows that its relationship with job performance is positive. The findings in this study agree with the findings of Eisenberger and Cammer (1996) and Mumford (2000). They emphasized the importance of intrinsic rewards in influencing workers' performance. They believed that workers do not like to feel that they are performing their task for money. Centers and Bugental (1970) also base their research on Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation which separated job variables into two groups: hygiene factors and motivators. They made use of a sample of 692 subjects to test the validity of the two-factor theory. It was discovered that at higher occupational levels, motivators or intrinsic job factors were more valued while at lower occupational levels



"hygiene factors" or extrinsic job factors were more valued. From this work they concluded that an organization that satisfies both intrinsic and extrinsic factors of work get the best out of them. Aston (1982) also studied the effect of extrinsic and intrinsic job factors on job motivation and satisfaction, which leads to performance. It showed that there was no significant difference in motivational level and job satisfaction across various categories of workers in different organizations.

Khan, Farooq, and Ullah (2010) conducted a study in which he examined the relationship between rewards and employee performance in commercial banks in Pakistan. The study focused on four types of rewards of which one was recognition which he tested through Pearson correlation. The results showed that recognition correlates significantly (0.65) with employee work motivation (Khan et al, 2010). Research conducted by Wiscombe (2002) with managers between September 1999 to June 2000 revealed that 90.5% felt that recognizing employees helps them to better motivate their employees, 84.4% indicated that providing non-monetary recognition to employees when they perform well, helps to increase their performance, 84.4% said that recognizing employees, supplies them with practical feedback, 80.3% felt that recognizing employees for good work makes it easier to get the work done, 77.7% agreed that recognizing employees assists them to become more productive and that 69.3% indicated that providing non-monetary recognition helps the manager to achieve their personal goals (Wiscombe, 2002).

A survey of research findings on work motivation have generally suggested that intrinsic rewards are ranked as better motivators than extrinsic rewards (Kovach, 1987, Harpaz, 1990, Lindsey, 1998). The reason for this however, is not farfetched. According to Aworemi, Abdul-Azeez and Durowoju (2011), in the developed industrialized countries where majority of these researches are conducted, satisfaction of the basic needs of life such as food, shelter and so on are taken for granted by a large majority, hence emphasis has shifted from the extrinsic factors such as pay, incentives, promotion etc, to intrinsic factors such as interesting work, achievement, recognition, challenge and self-actualization. The same, however, cannot be said for the less developed and developing world such as Nigeria (Aworemi et al, 2011).

### The Way Forward

The success of an organization depends on its ability to manage their human resources because they constitute a critical component of strategic success across all types of organizations. Reward is one of the determinants to motivate employees for them to establish the goals of the organization. However, intrinsically motivated employees tend to remain longer with the organizations and this increases the competitive edge. Hence, rewarding employees using the rewards they value matters a lot and should certainly not be ignored by management of the organizations because deliberate ignorance of rewarding

needs will lead to non-motivated, non-committed staff with poor performance. However organizations that make use of only pay must balance between extrinsic and intrinsic needs of the individual employees. This ensures that employees attend to their duties and responsibilities cheerfully, diligently and at the optimum level of performance. The paper recommends that organizations should implement intrinsic reward package that will continue to enhance the motivational spirit of the employees such that it will make the work environment more challenging and interesting because it leads to better employees' performance which in turn results in organization performance.

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