

Management perceptions on effective employee rewards: a case study of Cape Town five- star hotels, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Rewards are effective instruments that management may use to inspire employees. When firms offer rewards, their primary goal is to recruit and keep motivated, effective, and efficient employees. The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the perceptions of five-star hotel managers regarding the effectiveness of employee reward systems. In-depth interviews were conducted with 14 managers from four hotels in the City of Cape Town CBD. The study made use of the semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data. The data was analysed using Creswell's six steps. The findings of the study indicate that hotels offered distinct types of rewards to their employees, which include both extrinsic (financial) and intrinsic (non-financial) rewards. The paper further suggests that hotel managers are of the view that extrinsic (financial) rewards are mostly preferred by employees and are the most effective rewards to motivate employees in five-star hotels. The research concludes by recommending strategies to hotel management for enhancing the effectiveness of employee reward systems with positive impacts on employee motivation and identifying implications for future research.

Keywords: Employee rewards, Hotel managers, Five-star hotels, Employee motivation.



1. INTRODUCTION

One of the strategic tools used for retaining and attracting prospective employees, as well as assisting current employees to better their performance is rewards management (Monteiro *et al.*, 2020). As such, reward systems are important tools that management can use to motivate employees. Similar to this, Emmanuel and Nwuzor (2021) highlighted that an effective reward system has been a successful organisational technique used to increase employee satisfaction, encourage their creative capacity, and facilitate quick response to guest needs. The employee reward systems that the hotels offer are not effectively rewarding and subsequently motivating employees (Prabhakar, 2019). As a result, inadequate rewards may hinder desirable behavioral outcomes, endangering the effectiveness and competitiveness of an organisation. In reality, unmotivated workers may put out subpar work in addition to demonstrating a lack of devotion to their organisation. Several studies conducted by Okoth (2014); Muchir, (2016); Koo *et al.*, (2020); Akgunduz, Adan & Alkan, (2020) around employee reward systems in the hotel industry has successfully been conducted. Nevertheless, this paper is distinctive from these studies because these studies were mainly conducted in the international context; also, studies only focused on employees' views using the quantitative or mixed method. In addition, no similar studies have been conducted in South Africa specifically in five-star hotels focusing on management's perspective. thus, this study fills a gap in the literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reward systems are classified as monetary, non-monetary an organisation provides its employees in return for the efforts and contributions they put into that organisation (Victor & Hoole, 2017). Ali and Anwar (2021), advances that reward systems are put in place to give positive contributions to desired performance, and this is echoed by Islami, Mulolli, and Mustafa (2018); who stated that reward systems are tools which management uses to manipulate or direct motivation in a certain way. Alzyoud (2018) elaborate on this and state that reward systems seek to attract, keep and motivate employees to perform at optimal levels consistently. Kathombe (2018) describe reward systems as a predetermined structural method of evaluating and remunerating employees based on their performance. On the other hand, Okeke *et al.* (2020) have a contrary view in that they state that rewards should be based on a case-by-case basis by identifying the differing needs of employees which essential needs can gratify. Nigusie and Getachew (2019) add that reward systems should have a meaningful combination of these rewards to create a more harmonious relationship between employer and employee. The combination of these rewards includes the two most well-known reward systems (extrinsic and intrinsic) which are discussed in detail below.

2.1 EXTRINSIC REWARDS

Masunga (2019), state that extrinsic rewards are those that are materialistic which employers reward their employees for work they have done in their employment contracts such as wages, bonuses, and extra benefits including but not limited to night allowances, medical aid and transport allowances. In addition, extrinsic rewards may be financial, for example, fringe benefits, incentive payments that stem from employees getting formal recognition by the company and pay and promotions (Victor & Hoole, 2017). Moreover, the above-mentioned extrinsic rewards cover basic living expenses such as bills and job security which the company provides by giving their employees feelings of stability and a sense of being valued by the company (Kikoito, 2014). These sentiments are shared by Kwatsha (2021), who states that money is important as it is a prerequisite to survival and security. Lastly, these authors believe that extrinsic rewards are vital not just as a medium of exchange but are important in recognizing employees' worth and improving their self-esteem, thus giving them a sense of fulfillment (Haruna, Mustapha & Ibrahim, 2019).

Extrinsic rewards are usually used to show that the company values team members of a given team in an organization (Kathombe, 2018). These team bonuses are given on top of an already existing salary (Victor & Hoole, 2021). Team rewards, on the other hand, must be used in such a way that they in no way destroy an individual's intrinsic motivation to do their job (Kilimo, Namusonge, & Makokha, 2017). For an organization to consistently improve, employees need.

to be innovative and produce creative solutions to improve the workplace, increasing customer satisfaction (Haruna, Mustapha & Ibrahim, 2019). The extrinsic rewards companies use are closely linked to team performance. They may cause team members to be money-hungry and undermine their intrinsic interest in their work (Muchiri, 2016).

2.2 ` INTRINSIC REWARDS

Intrinsic rewards are psychological and personal responses to the assigned work that employees perform, which are rooted in the way in which their work is designed (Asaari *et al.* 2019). Intrinsic rewards are self-administered rewards that are related to the job itself as opposed to external sources such as management which would provide them (Victor & Hoole, 2021). Intrinsic rewards include the possibility to perform different or diverse activities; to perform work, which is stimulating, and to take on more responsibility which in turn means partaking in decision making and generally taking joy in the freedom and discretion of one's job (Khan *et al.*, 2017). Examples of intrinsic are achievement, variety, challenge, autonomy, responsibility, personal growth, professional growth, status, recognition, praise from superiors and co-workers, personal satisfaction, and feelings of self-esteem (Victor & Hoole, 2021). Intrinsic rewards increase feelings of self-esteem and accomplishment (Muzafary *et al.*, 2021).

Apart from this, intrinsic rewards come from the task's actual content and may include things like intriguing and difficult work, self-direction and responsibility, variety, opportunities to apply one's talents and abilities, and enough feedback on how well one's efforts were received (Renard & Snelgar, 2016). When employees take pride in their work, feel their efforts are crucial to the team's success, and find their occupations to be enjoyable, challenging, and gratifying, they are thought to be motivated to work hard and create high-quality outcomes (Renard & Snelgar, 2016). Moreover, Victor and Hoole (2021:4), state that intrinsic motivators are likelier to have long-term effects since intrinsic motivators are inherent in individuals. Muzafary *et al.* (2021) state that managers must understand how valuable intrinsic rewards are in the workplace as they are instrumental in unlocking the power of personal motivation.

To reason with Bowen Muzafary *et al.* (2021), a study conducted by Muchiri (2016) on the effects of reward systems on the performance of employees in the hotel and hospitality industry in Kenya. It was concluded that the managers' trust in employees, employees' ability, and employees' view of achievement significantly enhance the performance of employees. Intrinsic rewards can address the employees at the core of their needs and form a good base which motivates and influences employees to higher performance standards.

2.3 EFFECTIVENESS OF THE REWARDS

A reward system is an essential component of any organisation (Victor & Hoole, 2021). Alzyoud (2018) states that reward possesses the potential to actively engage and renew an organisation's overall sense of community and mission. A properly managed reward system can provide a reward for quality workmanship and employee performance. Similarly, an improperly managed reward system can result in low morale, unproductive performance, and even a low percentage of staff turnover (Ghasi & Onyejiaku, 2019). A reward system is effective when the employee recognises its policies as fair, consistent, and relevant (Etalong, Chikeleze & Chukwunyelum, 2022). Employee recognition and reward is a sensitive topic, it can either encourage individuals to seek more efficient ways to do their jobs or completely discourage such efforts. To achieve effective functioning and quality performance, any organisation should have a deep understanding of its employees' needs, which should guide the organisation's appropriate reward systems (Etalong, Chikeleze, & Chukwunyelum, 2022). According to Victor and Hoole (2021), organisations must maximise their resources in order to perform optimally and compete effectively.

In a study by Robescu and Iancu (2016), it was determined that a large percentage of employees agreed that recognition influences and motivates their performance. They said that recognition is a powerful tool that is desired by employees and significantly increases their work performance. Robescu and Iancu (2016) further determined that recognition and payment rewards were equally effective in motivating the employees. Al Darmak *et al.*, (2019) observed the effectiveness of reward system in promoting innovation. Al Darmak *et al.*, (2019) found that there is a

complex relationship between rewards and innovation and that different reward types are suited for various kind and stage of innovation. In China, Zhang *et al.* (2019) found that reward systems were an effective tool to manage new product development. The study showed the importance of non-financial incentives and reward interdependence on new product development.

Ngwa *et al.* (2019) conducted a study in Cameroon on employee performance as a result of reward systems. The study showed that rewards are an important tool that attracts the right employee, retain them as well as to constantly motivate them for optimal performance. Jayawardena and Jayawardena (2020) studied the intrinsic and extrinsic reward systems on employee motivation in a selected company. From the study, employee motivational factors were identified which were mainly extrinsic which reduced labour turnover ratio. In Nigeria, recognition positively correlated with contextual performance in hotels. Employee development was found to be effective in reducing counterproductive behaviours among the hotel employees (Odunayo, 2022).

Studies on rewards and employee performance in the hotel and hospitality industry is important that wherever lacks success, it is clearly noticeable (Odunayo, 2022). Examples in this study, showed how rewards are effective particularly in motivating the employees to continue doing better to increase production. It is vital to focus on the hotel and hospitality sector to determine the importance of rewards to employees in South Africa.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.

The qualitative approach was used in this study (Silverman, 2016) because it has been documented as a suitable approach for gaining a detailed understanding of existing knowledge in a domain (Irene *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for this study since it allows the researcher to answer questions about experience, meaning, and perspective from the participant's point of view. The study made use of the semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data. A total of 14 interviews with managers working in five-star hotels were conducted. A non-probability method was used whereby purposive and convenience sampling was applied.

A purposive sampling approach was adopted to select managers working in administration area in selected five-star hotels. Convenience sampling was applied based on the willingness and availability of these managers. Data was collected by conducting 14 face-to-face interviews. The interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the research participants and lasted slightly more than 40 minutes each. The researcher introduced himself and the study to the participants at the start of the interview and explained why the research was being conducted so that the participants could understand the context of the interview. Statements and words were evaluated in this study to express the participants' ideas. The data analysis of the interview data was guided with the help of following Cresswell's six steps. Data was organised, sorted, and compared with various codes by listening to the recorded interviews. The researcher did the coding for this research study manually.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 MANAGER PROFILES

The participants' demographic profile is reflected below in Table 2, include the participants' gender, level of education, the title of qualification, position, and level of service.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Demographic criteria	Categories	Frequency
Gender	Male	6
	Female	8
Education level	PhD	0
	Masters	0
	Honours	2
	Bachelor	2
	Advanced Diploma	2
	Diploma	4
	Matric	4
Title or designation	HR and learning & development manager	2
	Front office manager	4
	Accounts manager	2
	Reservations manager	4
	Marketing manager	2
Level of service	< 3 years	7
	4 – 6 years	5
	7 – 9 years	0
	> 10 years	2

Source: Researcher's construct

On the participant's demographic profile, females (8) working in a five-star hotel in the administration area are more dominant than males (6) as illustrated in Table 4.1. On the above table, most (10) participants working in the administration have obtained formal tertiary qualifications (Honours, Bachelors, Advanced Diploma and Diploma). There were no participants that went up to Master's and PhD level. Few participants (4) have only a matric certificate (senior certificate). With regards to the level of service the majority (7) of the participants had less than 3 years of working experience. This was followed by workers (5) that had between 4 – 6 years. There were no participants that had between 7 – 9 years of experience and only two participants had more than 10 years of experience. The demographics show that the participants represent a diverse group of managers.

4.2 EMPLOYEE REWARD SYSTEMS

Managers were asked what are the current reward systems that are used in the hotel. Two themes and 16 codes were discovered from the management perception on effective reward systems that are offered to employees at selected five-star hotels in Cape Town C.B.D. Most (12) of the managers stated that they use both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Table below depicts the different current categories of reward systems that are offered to employees.

TABLE 2: CATEGORIES OF REWARDS

Sub-themes	Codes
Extrinsic rewards	Commission
	Salary increase
	Cash (in hand)
	Shopping vouchers
	Provident fund
	Bonus
Intrinsic rewards	Appreciation/ Praising
	Training
	Birthday gifts/ presents
	Recognition
	Employee of the month
	Complimentary stay
	Positive feedback from superiors
	Mentoring
	Meal voucher
	Delegation

Participant (2) responded by saying:

“So currently, obviously, there is the basic, which is financial aspect of a reward system. So, if the hotel does well, how employee’s performance and impact on how the hotel is going to do “financially” ... “If you’re doing excelling in that area, we obviously give a point system, which is one being the lowest, and three being the highest, depending on how you’re doing, if you’re doing great, you’re obviously rated higher. This one is basically not financially reward, it’s not associated to any rewards in terms of finances, it’s basically a touch base and to applaud you where you’re doing well, to point out where you need help even if it’s training that you need to pick out your weak areas”.

Participant 2 identified two types of rewards one being financial reward and other non- financial rewards. Participant 2 further expressed that however financial rewards depend on how the hotel perform and their employees. However, with non-financial rewards they have point system to rate employee’s performance.

4.3 EFFECTIVE REWARDS SYSTEM

When were managers asked what kind/type of rewards systems they consider more effective in motivating their employees? Financial rewards such as (money, shopping vouchers, commission, bonuses, and salary increases were regarded as more effective in motivating employees. Out of 14 managers, 10 mentioned that financial rewards are more effective. 3 mentioned training as effective rewards to motivate employee, while one mentioned career development and complimentary stay in a hotel are effective rewards in motivating employees.

Participant (13) responded by stating:

“More effective would be money like performance based bonuses along with commission”.

Participant 8 also added his view by stating that:

“Money has always been the highest most effective way to reward employees”.

Three managers mentioned training as effective rewards to motivate employee, while one mentioned career development and complimentary stay in a hotel are effective rewards in motivating employees.

Participant (11) shared her views by declaring that:

“Training and development are more effective, because it’s also for the long run, and money doesn’t last you long”

4.4 EFFECTIVE REWARDS IN ATTRACTING AND RETAINING EMPLOYEES

Participants were asked which type of rewards they would consider to be more effective in attracting and retaining employees? Out of 14 managers, 12 mentioned financial rewards as the way to attract employees, 1 mentioned micro-culture to attract employees, while the other 1 manager stated that the hotel group or brand attracts employees. Therefore, financial rewards were seen as the most effective reward in attracting employees, while training was seen as effective in returning employees. Participant 3 stated in the following quote:

“Its money because the industry doesn’t pay much so if you offer more money in your establishment they come and those that are in the company will stay”

Although financial rewards were seen as the way to attract employees, in terms of retaining them, most managers mentioned that training and development is more effective to keep the employees in the establishment. Participant 9 emphasised that training and development keep the employees in the company, stating as follows

“I would say training qualifications, the hotel offers that tend to keep employees but in terms of attracting is money”

Managers noted that there are opportunities for training and development in the hospitality industry. This enables employees in the hospitality industry to improve their skills.

4.5 ABSENCE OF EMPLOYEE REWARDS

Managers were asked what the impact of the absence of the rewards would be? All managers stated that the absence of the rewards would have a negative impact on employees and hotels at large. All the responses of the managers are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3: PARTICIPANTS’ VIEWS ON THE IMPACT OF ABSENCE OF THE REWARDS

Participant	Responses
P1	Hugely demotivating for anybody.
P2	Poor work performance & demotivated staff.
P3	There will be no real enthusiasm
P4	It will have negative impact, there will be a dull working environment with unmotivated associates, high staff turnover, excessive expenditure in recruiting and training.
P5	Demotivated staff, negative working environment
P6	Demotivated employees
P7	Demotivated staff and positive attitude & behaviour will drop
P8	Positive staff behaviour will drop & quality of service
P9	Demotivated staff and low staff moral
P10	Demotivated staff
P11	High staff turnover
P12	Loss of talented employees to other companies.
P13	Massive staff turnover.
P14	Staff turnover & Absenteeism.

Source: Researcher’s construct.

Most managers (12) stated that employees can get demotivated, and their performance can decrease due to the absence of a good reward management system. Managers reveal that the absence or lack of rewards demotivates

and decreases performance in an employee because they do not feel appreciated, resulting in employees resigning and looking for greener pastures elsewhere, whereby there are paying rewards. One of the managers (Participant 9) responded by stating:

“People will be demotivated, the morale will be low, and so employees will come to work because they have to” ...

For more highlighting, another participant 4 said:

“It will have a negative impact there will be a dull working environment with unmotivated associates, you’ll have high staff turnover, excessive expenditure in the recruiting and training”

Other managers (2) also mentioned employee turnover, stating that employees will leave the current establishment for other establishments that offer good rewards systems.

Participant 13 stated the following quotes:

“It would be just a massive staff turnover.”

5. DISCUSSION

On the participant’s demographic profile, females (8) are more dominant than males (6) working in a five-star hotel in the administration area. The findings of this study are supported by literature as it has been argued that females globally constitute a higher percentage of employees in the hotel industry than their male counterparts (Madgavkar *et al.*, 2020; Nyathela, Silo & Bob, 2021). Results from this study show a fair representation of women and this aids to the discernible changes are happening in the industry as predicted by (Olmsted, 2022). Companies and businesses with a percentage of more than 30% women on their managerial teams outperform those with a percentage of less than 30% women (Olmsted, 2022).

The participant profile indicates that most hotel managers working in the administration had tertiary qualification and necessary skills. These findings are consistent with Swanepoel (2020), who argues that five-star hotels want employees to have a relevant qualification to work in the hospitality industry, particularly in the administration area. Booyens (2020) found that the right degree of education in the tourism industry leads to employability skills since it prepares employees to meet the industry’s difficulties and needs.

This study found out that both financial and non-financial rewards are positively perceived by the employees. These findings are consistent with the studies by Aguinis *et al.* (2013), which revealed that the best or most effective rewards and incentives system is a combination of monetary and non-monetary rewards. Therefore, balanced reward systems are considered a basic tool for business industries the growth as well as organisational development (Riaz, Akhtar & Aslam, 2018). According to Chan (2022), human behaviour is driven by a desire to meet hierarchically ordered needs. These desires are associated with both monetary and non-monetary rewards. As a financial incentive, money can meet lower-order physiological and safety needs (Chan, 2022). However, when lower-order needs are met, employees strive for higher-order needs such as social, esteem, and self-actualisation.

Regarding to the types of rewards considered to be more effective in motivating employees, based on the findings, the kinds of rewards employees consider to be more effective in motivating them are financial rewards such as (money, shopping vouchers, commission, bonuses, and salary increases. Ponta, Delfino and Cainarca (2020) state that financial rewards are effective if employees work harder, value monetary rewards, and believe those rewards will result from their increased efforts. It is believed that the design characteristics of financial incentives have a strong motivating effect on employees if they value it, believe high performance is important in obtaining the intended reward, and expect their efforts to result in the desired result (Shah, Shah & Jamali, 2018). Training and development were considered to be effective when retaining employees. This enables employees in the hospitality industry to improve their skills. Hora *et al.* (2020) back up these findings, demonstrating that training programs improved staff skills and knowledge. These findings are supported by Ognjanovi’s (2021) study, which hypothesizes that opportunities for

training and development in the hospitality industry attract potential employees.

Concerning the impact of the absence of a rewards system, the study found that the absence of rewards will have a negative impact on the hotels. The study also reveals that the absence or lack of rewards leads to demotivated employees, low staff morale, a negative working environment, high staff turnover, negative attitude, low staff performance and absenteeism. The findings of this study are supported by Manzoor (2021), who argues that the absence of rewards systems has a negative impact on employees and claims that employees can get demotivated, and their performance can decrease as a result of the absence of a good reward management system. Malik, Choi and Butt (2019) emphasis more and reveals that the absence or lack of rewards demotivates and decreases performance in an employee because they do not feel appreciated, resulting in employees resigning and looking for greener pastures elsewhere there are paying rewards.

6. IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study will assist hotel owners, managers and human resource practitioners to devise and maintain balanced effective employee reward systems. The findings will assist hotel establishments to improve on the existing reward systems to attract, motivate and retain employees. This study enhances the research literature within the hospitality field, and Its results can complement current and future research of scholars, research institutes, and government entities regarding rewards systems used at five-star hotels. Also, it is recommended that hotels must create innovative intrinsic rewards to further drive and maintain company performance.

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