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CAROLAN MCLARNEY

Dalhousie University, Canada

JAMES HANSEN

Dalhousie University, Canada

INFLUENCES ON EMPLOYEE REWARD STRATEGIES IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Abstract:

It is of great importance that organizations seek to have a stable, productive, and motivated workforce. The primary way to accomplish this is through effective reward strategies to compensate employees for their efforts. The challenge for the global organization is to ensure that the rewards offered provide motivation for employees and generate workplace commitment, regardless of location. Three notable influences on reward strategies were summarized, the first being Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow stated that all people have the same needs and are motivated to fulfill these needs as they increase in complexity (Maslow, 1943, p. 370). The second influence was Herzberg's two factor theory, which identified two factors that provide motivation for employees, motivators (job growth, advancement) and hygiene factors (policies, compensation) (Herzberg, 1968, p. 56). The final influence studied was culture, which emphasized Hofstede's cultural dimensions: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede, 1994, pp. 2-5; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, p. 281). The evidence showed that using these influences as indicators along with other factors noted in research, such as organizational goals and demographic employee data, will enable a company to make a more balanced decision with respect to international employee reward strategies. Thus, a variety of factors must be considered when creating or revising reward strategies to ensure that irrespective of location, employees will be motivated by the rewards. Three examples were noted of companies who have faced the challenge of implementing an international reward strategy. Both Colgate-Palmolive and RBC were found to have completed analysis with their reward strategies to ensure their international policies were motivating for staff. Lincoln-Electric was identified as a company who failed in their international reward strategy; they incorrectly assumed the rewards that worked in the U.S. would work overseas, which contributed to losses in their European division and required drastic efforts to correct (Hastings, 1999, p. 171). To support leaders in these decisions, a model for assessing reward strategies in the international environment was presented and discussed. Leaders will find the model useful, as it consolidates the key influences that must be considered when reviewing international reward strategies and can be customized to include additional factors as required.

Keywords:

Human Resource Management, International Business, Banking

I. Introduction

From the early days of commerce to the present, the relationship between a company and its employees has always been of great importance (Tayeb, 2005, p. 5). As business and industry has grown and changed over time, organizations throughout the world aspire to have a highly motivated and committed workforce. Employees are a source of competitive advantage, providing labour, intellect, and innovation, all of which enable a company to generate positive returns for shareholders (Schuler & Rogovsky, 1998, p. 159). In addition, a stable workforce allows a company to reduce the costs of sourcing and recruiting as a result of lower turnover. As such, it is in the organization's best interests to appropriately motivate their employees in order to achieve corporate objectives (Alpander & Carter, 1991, p. 25). The challenge for all companies is to understand what motivates their employees and to implement reward strategies that will create a sense of job satisfaction and commitment. For international organizations, the motivation of employees becomes even more challenging as what may be motivating to employees in one country may be completely the opposite in another. This paper analyzes the key influences of employee motivation and the research that has been conducted on this subject, ultimately providing leaders with a model to use in creating reward strategies in the global environment.

This analysis begins with defining the key terms related to reward and motivation, followed by an overview of two theories of human motivation from Maslow and Herzberg and a review of culture with specific reference to Hofstede. Following this, the scholarly research that has been completed on these influences is discussed, along with the additional reward strategy considerations that have been noted in research. Next, examples are reviewed from companies who have had to face the challenge of rewarding employees globally to provide leaders an opportunity to learn from real world cases. A model for reward strategy considerations is then presented, with the objective that leaders will be able to refer to this model when making reward strategy decisions in an international environment.

For the purposes of this research, the writings of Maslow and Herzberg were reviewed, along with the work of Hofstede. A cross section of evidence was analyzed from researchers across the world who have completed investigations into the subject of human motivation, employee commitment, and their relationship with reward strategies across the globe. The research reviewed comes from a varied background of countries and cultures; certain research was broadly focused on cultural variances whereas other research was specific to an industry within a country. The review of such diverse sources allowed for a thorough discussion with respect to motivation and reward strategies in the global context. The companies referenced as examples have been noted in the press or in their own communications as having experience with global reward strategies; these cases provides leaders with an opportunity to learn from their

experiences. The research reviewed for this paper was collectively used to form the basis for the reward strategy consideration model.

II. Analysis, Findings, and Proposal

1. Research on Reward Strategy Influences

a) Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The impact of the above theories and concepts on reward strategies in an international context has been subject to numerous studies. With respect to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, one study noted that "individuals across the world are motivated by essentially the same fundamental human needs" (Di Cesare & Sadri, 2003, p. 37). These researchers further noted that the drive to achieve the needs in Maslow's hierarchy was similar amongst American and Japanese subjects (Di Cesare & Sadri, 2003, p. 34). This indicates that the achievement of each group of needs is driven out of human instinct as opposed to a cultural phenomenon. Another study from Taiwan aligned components of employee rewards to each need within Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Hong et al., 1995, p. 13). In this case, it was noted that motivation was highest for the rewards that fulfilled the most basic needs, physical (physiological) and security (safety). Maslow (1998) himself noted similar findings with respect to the workplace in the late 1960s; he found that organizations were recruiting new employees by advertising factors other than pay (p. 72). He theorized that those companies were meeting the basic needs of employees and were attempting to appeal to their higher esteem needs (Maslow, 1998, p. 72).

There are however, aspects of Maslow's theory that have been contested in research. One study that focused on applying Maslow's theory to collectivist cultures found that the order of needs varied from Maslow's hierarchy (Nevis, 1983, as cited in Gambrel & Cianci, 2003, p. 156). Researchers associated this variance to the fact that Maslow based his model on American norms and values and as a result, the model reflected the United States being a more individualistic culture (Gambrel & Cianci, 2003, p. 158). Another point of Maslow's theory that has been the subject of some study is his concept of self-actualization. Di Cesare & Sadri (2003) noted a variation between Japanese and American employees on what self-actualization meant and related this to cultural variations (p. 37). Hong et al. (1995) found that the Taiwanese employees placed more emphasis on self-actualization than the preceding social need (esteem), and recommended organizations place emphasis on rewards that satisfy this need (p. 13). Thus, Maslow's theory cannot solely be used to predict how rewards will motivate employees; reference to Herzberg's theory may provide organizations with additional guidance as reward strategies are reviewed.

b) Herzberg's Two Factor Theory

Herzberg's two factor theory was the focus of a study of Indian professionals completed by Tymon Jr., Stumpf & Doh (2010), whereby it was concluded that "By increasing intrinsic rewards, the need to offer higher compensation and benefits so as to enhance employee satisfaction with the organization diminishes" (p. 119). They also proved that while hygiene factors were important and related to motivation, there was greater motivation realized by employees from the level of intrinsic work factors (Tymon Jr., Stumpf & Doh, 2010, p 118). Similarly, the importance of intrinsic rewards was noted in a study of Malaysian university employees, where it was found that a higher proportion of respondents were motivated by intrinsic versus extrinsic rewards (Rahim & Daud, 2013, p. 279). Herzberg's theory was confirmed again in a study of Swedish tourist resort employees where findings indicated there was a higher degree of motivation for the intrinsic factors of work as opposed to the "mundane needs such as wage" (Lundberg, Gudmundson & Andersson, 2008, p. 896).

Conversely, a study of Saudi Arabian banking employees, while not specifically commenting on Herzberg's theory, supported findings that "employees in banking sector [*sic*] give more importance to economic or financial rewards" (Karl and Sutton, 1998 and Houston, 2000, as cited in Jehanzeb, Rasheed, Rasheed & Aamir, 2012, p. 276). Another study indicated similar findings for Hong Kong banking employees, where "HK respondents viewed almost all financial reward items as being significantly important" (Chiang & Birtch, 2005, p. 370). These findings were similarly noted in multiple studies of Pakistani workers where intrinsic rewards were deemed to be less motivating (Raza & Nawaz, 2011, p. 271; Zaidi & Abbas, 2011, p. 993). In the Raza & Nawaz (2011) study, attempts to stretch subjects' roles and span of responsibility were met with apathy and dissatisfaction (p. 271). Similarly, in a study of Malaysian workers, it was found that direct dollar pay was the primary motivator at work (Islam & Ismail, 2008, p. 353). These findings with respect to Herzberg's theory, along with the preceding review of Maslow's theory, reveal that motivational theories alone cannot accurately predict how rewards will be perceived by employees in an international context. As such, the influence of culture on reward strategies must be analyzed.

c) Culture

On their own, the two theories of human motivation reviewed do not completely explain why rewards are motivating to one individual or group and not the other; from the analysis it is apparent that there is a cultural influence on the perception of reward strategies. As such, for international organizations it is crucial to have an understanding of how culture may impact the motivation associated with reward strategies. "Organizations engaged in multi-national activity must be cognizant of the potentially significant influence that culture wields on reward preference" (Chiang & Birtch, 2005, p. 358). In a study of 1005 individuals from four countries, Chiang & Birtch (2007) concluded that "...culture plays an

important role in shaping certain reward preferences” (p. 1322). Similarly, Alpander & Carter (1991) noted that motivation of Japanese employees in the workplace was positively correlated with cultural influences (p. 30). In other research, a study of businesses from ten countries and their respective corporate human resource policies noted that the influence of culture was significant (Aycan et al., 2000, p. 217). Similarly, a study of Haitian public sector employees found that “Cultural factors are of great importance on employee commitment” (Lauture, Amewokunu, Lewis & Lawson-Body, 2012, p. 334), and noted the roots of Haitian culture were a hindrance to organizational commitment (Lauture et al., 2012, p. 338). Thus, it is evident culture must be considered when speaking of how reward strategies influence the motivation and commitment of employees. Given Hofstede’s work on culture, it is important that a review of his cultural dimensions and how employees perceive employer rewards is completed.

Hofstede’s dimensions of culture (1994, p. 5) provides a framework to assist in understanding the complexities and differences amongst cultures. Numerous studies have been completed that have investigated how culture impacts rewards and motivation and have applied Hofstede’s dimensions of culture to their analysis (Chiang & Birtch, 2005, p. 575; Chiang & Birtch, 2006, p. 360; Chiang & Birtch, 2007, p. 1299; Gunkel, Lusk & Wolff, 2009, p. 61). Notably in a 2007 study, Chiang & Birtch stated that with respect to culture “...its influence is not straightforward nor should it be overstated” (p. 1322). They further indicated that while Hofstede’s dimensions are valid, it is critical that they are only used as an indicator of a culture’s preferences as opposed to a definitive measure (Chiang & Birtch, 2007, p. 1321). In an earlier study, the same researchers noted that “The predictive capability of Hofstede’s model with respect to reward preferences is therefore limited” (Chiang & Birtch, 2006, p. 589). These results were confirmed in another study of Chinese, Japanese, German, and American employees where it was concluded that Hofstede’s dimensions were not able to consistently predict reward preferences with accuracy for each of the cultural groups (Gunkel et al., 2009, p. 308). It has been also remarked that Hofstede’s original study may have been biased towards a “Western perspective” (Dartey-Baah, 2013, p. 42), the results of that original study were biased to the employer of the research participants (Schuler & Rogovsky, 1998, p. 174), and that Hofstede’s dimensions do not reflect that culture is dynamic and constantly changing (McSweeney, 2002, as cited in Chiang & Birtch, 2007, p. 1321). As culture changes and evolves, one trend is being noted by researchers: the blending of human culture with the culture of an organization.

For companies that have multiple locations across the world, it is critical that the corporate vision, values, goals, and objectives are known to each of the operating units in order for the company to be successful. As this type of information is shared and disseminated, the potential exists for other corporate policies and procedures to be shared. In doing so, this allows for part of the organizational culture to be transferred to the various operating countries (Gunkel et al., 2009, p. 308). This sharing of information

has been referred to as a “convergence” of culture (Chiang & Birtch, 2006, p. 590) and “hybridisation [sic] of culture” (Dartey-Baah, 2013, p. 43). This merging of organizational and human cultures, while beneficial in some respects, must also be approached with caution as it relates to reward strategies. Companies must ensure that they do not inadvertently implement a company-wide policy or strategy without understanding its impact to staff around the world. Although the creation of consistent company-wide policies may reduce organizational costs and create efficiencies, Gunkel et al., (2009) noted that “This trend might work against the intention of management to leverage the differences in the various institutional frameworks for the profit of the firm” (pp. 308-309). As such, leaders must ensure that all aspects of culture are considered with respect to employee rewards: the human cultural influences as well as the organizational cultural influences. With that said, there is evidence there are other factors beyond culture that must be considered in assessing reward strategies.

d) Additional influences

It is evident that on their own, neither motivational theories nor cultural influences are able to completely predict employee perceptions of workplace rewards. As indicated by Chiang & Birtch (2005), leaders must therefore refer to a combination of influences in order to assess the motivation that will be attained from a particular reward strategy:

The common preference found for performance reward systems and criteria may also be due in part to other non-culture related influences, such as the nature of the organization (profit-oriented, competitive), its goals (efficiency, productivity, performance maximizer) or shocks to the operating environment (Asian financial crisis). The above implies that reward preferences are not wholly conditioned by culture, but also by a host of other contextual variables (p. 371).

This creates additional challenges for organizations as it is apparent that careful consideration must be given when implementing an effective reward strategy. In a study of Mexican manufacturing employees, it was concluded that the gender of the employee was linked to overall satisfaction and commitment to the workplace (Peterson, Puia, & Suess, 2003, p. 84). Their findings showed that the female employees were eager to take on new challenges in their work, including additional responsibility and leadership duties, both of which would be an intrinsic motivating factor under Herzberg’s theory and part of Maslow’s definition of self-actualization. In another study of Mexican employees, it was concluded that age of the employee and years of service with the organization were indicators of overall commitment (Harrison & Hubbard, 1998, p. 619), which was also supported in the study by Peterson et al., (2003, p. 85). With increased commitment to the employer, it would be expected the employees to be equally motivated to ensure their efforts were helping the company succeed.

In addition to physical characteristics, other studies have noted a wide variety of other influences on motivation and commitment. A study of Pakistani teachers found that a driver of work motivation was the relationship between the employees and supervisors. In this example, employees felt more motivated when their supervisor was interested in their well being and worked to provide answers to various employee problems (Shah, Rehman, Akhtar, Zafar & Riaz, 2012, p. 279). In another study of Pakistani telecommunication employees, other factors that were a determinant toward work motivation were marital status and tenure with the organization (Zaidi & Abbas, 2011, p. 993). With respect to commitment, a study of Mexican manufacturing workers noted a positive correlation between commitment and level of education (Peterson et al., 2003, p. 85). Based on this evidence, it is apparent there are numerous considerations for leaders in assessing how rewards will be perceived by employees. With such a breadth of factors to consider, it can appear overwhelming for leaders to understand how an effective international reward strategy can be implemented. Reviewing the research and public information provides three examples of companies who have attempted a reward strategy in an international location.

2. Company Examples

It is beneficial to review examples of organizations that operate internationally who have had to address the challenge of rewarding employees in other parts of the world. While no two businesses are the same, these cases provide an opportunity to learn from the successes and failures of others.

a) Colgate-Palmolive

One company that has been noted to have achieved success in its global operations is Colgate-Palmolive. With brands that are sold in virtually every country of the world, the consumer goods company places culture and diversity fundamental to its operations (Soloman & Schell, 2009, p. 315). From recruitment to training, culture is treated as paramount to the success of the company; within Colgate-Palmolive, culture speaks to both human culture and organizational culture (Soloman & Schell, 2009, p. 315). In doing so, the company hopes to integrate their corporate culture into the practices of their local managers, while at the same time, learning from the local culture in order to appeal to consumers (Soloman & Schell, 2009, p. 316). The company expects this effort in sharing and learning of cultures will enable the company to generate further sales and to be more successful (Soloman & Schell, 2009, p. 316).

With respect to reward strategies, the company takes a similar approach. Their human resource teams learn what motivates in local markets and will adjust extrinsic motivators such as pay and incentives accordingly (Soloman & Schell, 2009, p. 318). As an example with incentive plans, Colgate will consider whether or not a specific culture of employees is more collectivist than individualist and adjust how the bonus will be paid

(Soloman & Schell, 2009, p. 318). In the case of a collectivist culture, this ensures no one single person is singled out, rather, the team benefits from the overall success (Soloman & Schell, 2009, p. 318). For intrinsic motivators, the company has worked to develop a career paths and competency models for roles within the organization; this enables staff to tailor training and development accordingly if they wish to move within the organization as the roles are common across the globe (Anfuso, 1995, p. 52). It is evident that this company truly seeks to understand the countries and cultures with which it does business. While the motive is to increase their product penetration and to return more favourable profits, it also ensures the company is viewed as being respectful of culture and a solid corporate citizen.

b) Royal Bank of Canada (RBC)

RBC provides another example of an organization that successfully operates with a global mindset. As Canada's largest financial institution, RBC has operations in the U.S. and in 44 other countries (RBC, 2013, para. 3), and therefore, international human resource strategies must be considered for those employees outside of Canada. From an extrinsic perspective, the company has ensured that remuneration and benefits are aligned with the practices of the specific country; there is great care taken to ensure that Canadian practices are not simply transferred globally. This includes local currency wage scales that reflect particular cost of living differences in countries, to something as simple as the frequency of wage payments. For example, employees in the United Kingdom are paid monthly to reflect local customs (RBC, 2013, para. 1). Similarly, RBC applies cultural thought with respect to incentives, bonus plans, and monetary gifts. In Japan for example, employees are eligible for monetary gifts with an eligible family event such as marriage, birth of a child, or death in the family (RBC, 2013, para. 2), such gifts are nonexistent (and non-customary) in Canada.

For intrinsic motivators, the company encourages employees across the globe to learn and develop in their roles; this not only provides linkage to corporate goals and objectives, it also provides opportunities for employees to grow within the company. "To our employees, our reach means you'll have the scope to learn, to grow and to fulfill your potential. We pride ourselves on finding the best people, and we're passionate about giving you the support and recognition you need" (RBC, 2013, para. 4). Thus, it is evident that RBC is working to appeal to the intrinsic and extrinsic needs of employees with their global reward strategies in an effort to ensure employees remain motivated to work for the company's goals and objectives.

c) Lincoln-Electric

Lincoln-Electric provides an example of a company who erred in their international strategy (Caligiuri, Lepak & Bonache, 2010, p. 9; Steers et al., 2010, p. 283). In business since 1895, Lincoln-Electric is a manufacturing operation, producing electrical

components for welders (Hastings, 1999, p. 164). The company was particularly proud of their incentive plan which paid annual bonuses to qualifying staff, and had done so since its inception in 1934 (Hastings, 1999, p. 164). The plan combined a regular bonus and payment for the number of pieces manufactured (Hastings, 1999, p. 164). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the company expanded internationally, and “without truly exploring the idea, we assumed the incentive system would be accepted abroad” (Hastings, 1999, p. 165). This was perhaps the biggest error the company could have made respect to rewarding employees. In literature it has been noted that “...it does not seem advisable for multinational corporations to transplant incentive schemes from the home country to others without collecting information on the relative values of satisfaction, preference, and institutional framework” (Gunkel et al., 2009, p. 308). Unfortunately for Lincoln-Electric, no such information gathering was conducted. The company later found that the bonus plan, which was so highly regarded by U.S. employees, was met with contempt by the European employees (Hastings, 1999, p. 166). The company quickly amassed significant losses in its European division, and was forced to implement a dramatic plan to return the company to profitability (Hastings, 1999, p. 171). Among the host of errors made in their expansion strategy was the assumption that Lincoln Electric’s incentive plan would motivate all employees, regardless of culture (Hastings, 1999, p. 178). While the company’s expansion plans were ambitious, they appeared to be made with haste and without consideration for the numerous complexities of operating globally.

3. Model for reward strategy considerations

Given these real world cases, along with the definitions, summaries, and research presented earlier, a model for reward strategy considerations for international organizations is presented. [Refer to Appendix IV for model diagram]. This model links together motivational theories, key influences, and culture; the objective is to provide leaders with a tool to assist in the creation or modification of employee rewards in global jurisdictions.

The central focus of the model is employee motivation and employee commitment, which is considered to be the goal for the organization’s reward strategy. From this core, a number of branches extend outward, each identifying one of the influences on reward strategy. Most critical to the model is culture, which is the light blue coloured ring that links together each of the branches. (Note: For the purposes of this model, culture is an all encompassing term which would include Hofstede’s dimensions of culture for consideration.) By linking each of the branches together, this serves as a reminder for leaders that no one part of the model should be viewed in isolation. This reinforces the notion that it is crucial in a reward strategy assessment that influential factors are considered in conjunction with one another, and always within a cultural context.

It is important to note that within the model, the two theories of human motivation have been separated. For Maslow's theory, physiological and safety are combined, love and esteem are combined, and self-actualization is on its own. This allows consideration to be specifically given to each of these components as required, given the previous discussion that certain aspects of Maslow's theory may not be as applicable to certain cultures. Similarly, Herzberg's two factor theory was separated to ensure that equal consideration is given to each, which again speaks to the cultural perceptions of these factors.

The model is simplistic in its design, acting as a referral point when assessing a particular reward strategy. The tool has been created to be flexible for all organizations as additional branches can be added as necessary. In doing so, this ensures that organizations are not limited by the suggested influences. It is expected that the model will be useful to leaders, generating discussion and dialogue when considering the numerous influences in reward strategy decisions. As organizations use the model, it is expected greater emphasis and consideration will be placed on the influences in these crucial decisions; the objective is to ensure that companies make the best decisions that provide the greatest motivational impact to their employees.

III. Conclusion

The importance of effectively rewarding employees cannot be understated for any organization. This paper provided the key definitions, influences, and research that has been completed with respect to implementing reward strategies for international organizations. For these companies, the evidence showed there are numerous influences on reward strategies that must be considered. This analysis also revealed that there is not one sole theory or influence that provided a complete explanation of employee motivation, rather, each factor adds a new dimension that a company must take into account. The discussion of motivation theories revealed that no one theory will be able to accurately predict if a particular strategy will result in increased motivation or commitment. Similarly, a company must be cautious not to view culture on its own when reviewing employee rewards. The research shows that culture must be used as a guideline in determining motivation; it is crucial that leaders do not simply stereotype or generalize when reflecting on culture. It was also found that given the discussion of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, leaders must not rely on a single source in assessing the influence of culture. Further, it is evident that there are a myriad of demographic and situational factors that also must be considered; this makes the reward strategy decisions even more complex. Finally, reviewing the examples of companies who have faced the challenge of implementing rewards in a global environment provides leaders with an opportunity to learn from the successes and failures of others. The reward strategy consideration model that was presented will be a valuable tool for leaders in the review of any reward strategy decision.

It is the opinion of this researcher that the evidence is very strong in that there are numerous influences and considerations for leaders who are implementing these crucial employee rewards. The arguments do reveal that it is dangerous for leaders to rely on any one given influence when considering reward strategies; even worse is the assumption that what is acceptable locally is acceptable globally. The various factors in reward strategy consideration certainly provide areas for further research, however, the indication that there is a blending of human culture and organizational culture provides an exciting avenue for further analysis and review. As organizations extend their reach and become more global, one wonders if this trend is going to become more and more evident, or if there will be some form of cultural protection to avoid this blending of cultures. This promises to be an engaging area for researchers; if the trend continues, it may very well lead to the homogenization of certain aspects of human culture. While some leaders may see this as making it easier to conduct business, others may see it as a complete loss of uniqueness and character. As the world becomes more interconnected, only time will tell how culture will evolve; the impact to international organizations and their reward strategies will certainly be substantial.

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