

A Review of the Impact of Motivational Factors on Employee Performance

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Abstract

Amidst the swift global economic development and the influence of globalization on market dynamics, the pivotal role of human resources in the survival and progress of Chinese enterprises becomes apparent. High-performing employees are recognized as a crucial factor enabling companies to secure a competitive edge. Employing a narrative literature review, this article explores the impact of incentive factors on employee performance, providing insights for future research while considering China's distinctive national conditions. Employee performance, with diverse definitions in the literature, spans employees' comprehensive job proficiency and long-term work results. Incentives considered the "core of organizational behaviour," exhibit varied effects on employee performance, with compensation as an external motivator playing a pivotal role in driving higher productivity and directly influencing employee performance. Additionally, a positive work environment, encompassing factors like noise, office furniture, ventilation, and lighting, has been substantiated to significantly influence employee performance. In the era of global economic integration, Chinese enterprises must establish a rational and effective incentive system to ignite employees' enthusiasm and work passion, thereby elevating performance levels and sustaining competitiveness amidst fierce market competition.

Keywords: Employee Performance, External Motivation, Motivational Factors, Compensation, Work Environment.

Introduction

Against the backdrop of rapid global economic development, market competition is becoming increasingly fierce (Wu Xiaobo, 2023). In this context, human resources are not only a critical element for the survival and development of Chinese enterprises but also a primary source of organizational creativity (Shi Yang, 2020). Performance management holds a central position in human resources management within enterprises (Zhang, 2023). According to Zheng (2019), low employee performance may compromise the quality of products or services, decrease customer satisfaction, and damage the reputation of the company. Research by Xuan (2019) indicates that a decline in employee performance may lead to an increase in employee turnover. Additionally, recruiting new employees may become more challenging, affecting team stability and increasing labor costs for companies (Cui, 2020). Juan (2023) points out that low-performing employees make it difficult for companies to achieve strategic goals and business plans, affecting long-term development. To gain a strong competitive advantage in intense market competition, businesses need to have high-performance employees. High-performance employees can assist organizations in achieving their strategic goals, producing high-quality products, and providing high-standard services, thereby enabling the firm to establish a steady presence in the market (Wang Jie, 2023). Recent empirical studies on employee performance by scholars such as Yin and Liu (2023) have revealed that incentive factors are key determinants influencing employee performance. Findings from Kuswati's research (2020) indicate that a decline in employee performance can be attributed to a decrease in the level of employee motivation. Various factors influencing insufficient employee motivation have been explored by existing scholars. According to Dong (2023), low compensation and perceived unfairness and irrationality of compensation may lead to reduced employee motivation. Li (2023); Huang (2022) suggest that a poor work environment weakens employee motivation, resulting in decreased productivity. Thence, a reasonable and viable incentive system will effectively stimulate employees' enthusiasm and work passion, leading to higher levels of performance (Zheng Yajun, 2022).

Therefore, to gain a deeper understanding of the incentive factors influencing employee performance and how they further benefit organizations, this paper reviews recent research on how incentive factors impact employee performance. Based on literature review, it has been found that both monetary incentives and workplace environment incentives play a significant role in enhancing the performance of employees in manufacturing companies as well as hospitals. Given China's unique national conditions, this paper aims to provide insights for future research in this field.

Study Methodology

This study, based on a narrative literature review, employed a research methodology that encompassed consulting books, journal articles, and papers within the relevant research field. A systematic checklist was systematically utilized to collect basic information in an organized manner. Conceptual analysis was conducted through a literature review, with a specific focus on the correlation between external motivational factors (such as compensation and work environment) and employee performance. The primary objective of the literature review was to identify, select, and critically evaluate research, aiming to accurately define relevant concepts and formulate research questions. In the actual study, the understanding of the definitions of all concepts and variables will be applied.

An Understanding of the Concept of Employee Performance

Employee performance has consistently been a focal point of organizational attention (Zheng Yuen, 2023). Currently, there is no unified definition for employee performance. According to Li Yuanyuan (2023), employee performance is conceptualizable, reflecting the employee's overall job level and long-term work outcomes. Scholarly research statements suggest that the definition of employee job performance can be categorized into three types: first, employee performance is considered as an outcome; second, employee performance is understood as behaviour; and third, employee performance is a combination of both outcome and behaviour (Lei Xin, 2022; Liang Xinbi, 2020).

(1) Employee performance is the result.

From an organizational perspective on the outcomes achieved by employees, employee performance is defined. This definition emphasizes that employee performance is the result of an employee's work, rather than focusing on the processes the employee engages in during work (He Xinyu, 2023). In the early days, Bernardin and Beatty (1984) proposed that employee performance is a product record generated by employees in specific job positions, completing tasks assigned by the organization within specified optimal times. Kane (1996) argued that employee performance is not just about satisfying customer needs; it is something "in and of itself," existing independently of organizational goals or tasks. Li Baoyuan (2003) interpreted Kane's concept of "something in and of itself" as an achievement expressed by employees in terms of production efficiency and quality within a specific period. Ma Yongxia (2023) suggests that employee performance is the optimal foundation of a series of outcomes related to the realization of organizational values.

(2) Employee performance is behaviour.

Looking at employee performance from the perspective of employees' behaviour at work or within the organization, this definition has been popular since the 1960s. It emphasizes that employee performance is about the processes and behaviours employees engage in during work (Campbell, 1990; Murphy, 1989; Smith, 1976). Hall and Goodale (1986) suggest that employee performance comprises a series of behaviours undertaken by employees to fulfil the expectations, specifications, or requirements of the organization within their roles. Van Dyne (1995); Brief & Motowidlo (1986) argue that employees exhibit certain behaviours indirectly related to organizational tasks, such as extra-role behaviours, organizational citizenship behaviours, and prosocial behaviours, which are also factors constituting employee performance.

(3) Employee performance is a combination of results and behaviour.

Looking at employee performance from the perspective of the results employees achieve within the organization and their behaviours towards the organization, this definition emphasizes that employee performance should not only focus on their behaviours at work but also on the completion of their tasks. Borman and Motowidlo (1997) proposed in their research that the definition of employee performance should incorporate both behavioural and results perspectives, meaning that employee performance is a comprehensive, truthful, and fair evaluation of achieving organizational goals through the behaviours specific to employees' job functions. Moeheriono (2012) views employee performance as a description of the results in achieving organizational goals. Linrong (2019) suggests that to have employees complete mid-term tasks assigned by the organization, their process is reflected

in their job functions, and leaders provide a truthful and accurate evaluation based on employees' behaviours.

An Understanding of Employee Motivation

Generally, motivation is considered the "core of organizational behaviour" (Gagne, 2014). This is because employees' enthusiasm significantly influences their performance and productivity (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Cerasoli, 2014). External motivation leads to employee engagement when material or social factors are acknowledged (Amabile, 1994). Conversely, when employees are internally motivated, they engage in tasks that interest and bring enjoyment (Amabile and Pratt, 2016; Deci, 1999). However, employers cannot assume that their employees always have internal motivation, as only a minority find their work interesting enough without compensation or other benefits (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Therefore, to consciously enhance employee performance, external motivation factors such as compensation and work environment elements must also be considered (Fischer, 2019). These factors have been identified to impact employee enthusiasm, thereby influencing employee performance (Ryan and Deci, 2017).

An Understanding of the Concept of Compensation

Deluca (1993); Rajkumar (1996) define compensation as remuneration, rewards, wages, or the management of salaries and wages. According to Mondy (2002), direct compensation is a form of cash payment that employees directly receive, including wages, economic benefits, bonuses, and commissions. Hasibuan (2003) defines compensation as rewards, either in the form of money or goods, that employees directly or indirectly receive as a return for their services to the company. Hollenbeck et al (2004) emphasize from an organizational perspective that compensation is a crucial function of human resource management, encompassing various types of compensation systems, both direct and indirect payments, monetary and non-monetary rewards, and various forms of recognition designed to reward outstanding employees for their work or services. Milkovich and Newman (2008) view compensation as part of the employment relationship, representing all forms of financial returns and tangible services that employees receive, usually serving as a primary source of financial security for employees.

Arif (2019) defines compensation as all rewards that employees receive for their services or contributions to the achievements of an organization or company. Hermawan et al (2021) point out that compensation can be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic parts. Intrinsic compensation refers to rewards employees receive for completing challenging tasks, often manifested in positive values or satisfaction with oneself. Extrinsic compensation includes direct, indirect, and non-monetary aspects. Direct compensation comprises basic salary, overtime pay, incentives, allowances, and bonuses, while indirect compensation includes social security, insurance, pensions, severance pay, leaves, training, and vacations. Non-monetary compensation refers to satisfaction derived from the job itself or the psychological and physical work environment, including safety, a comfortable work environment, self-development, career flexibility, opportunities for income increase, status symbols, praise, and recognition. Du Peitao (2022) suggests that compensation consists primarily of monetary compensation and non-monetary compensation. Common forms of monetary compensation include direct compensation, mainly expressed in cash, such as position salaries, variable compensation, and various allowances, characterized by a basic, economic, and explicit nature. Non-monetary compensation is mainly reflected in non-cash forms, including welfare

choices, social insurance, and maternity leave, typically possessing welfare and security characteristics. Non-monetary compensation focuses on employees' psychological needs related to achievements within the company's internal environment and their work, essentially reflecting psychological effects.

An Understanding of the Concept of Work Environment

Spector (1997) pointed out that the work environment can be divided into two aspects: physical conditions and social conditions. Sedarmayanti (2001) suggested categorizing the work environment into physical and non-physical aspects. In terms of the physical work environment, includes all physical conditions around the workplace that may directly or indirectly affect employee performance. The non-physical work environment involves all conditions related to work, including relationships with supervisors, colleagues, or subordinates. Junzhi (2014) defined the work environment as the conditions surrounding the processes that affect manufacturing and product quality, which may include human factors (such as psychological and social aspects) and physical factors (such as temperature, humidity, cleanliness, dust, etc.). Physical factors generally include factory maintenance, lighting, noise, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, electrical equipment control, and safety hazards related to factory maintenance.

Anggi (2015) sees the work environment as the place where employees carry out their daily activities, including indicators such as lighting, air temperature, noise, decoration/layout, and employee relations. Yuting (2020) defines the work environment as the social and physical environment related to work and conducts analysis at the individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels. The individual level includes environmental conditions that directly impact work, the interpersonal level includes the convenience of conversations in the workspace, layout features, and symbolic effects, while the organizational level encompasses a wide range of physical environments.

Literature Review Findings

(1) Employee performance and compensation

Taylor (2008) posits that money is the most crucial factor in motivating employees to achieve higher productivity in the industry. This type of compensation creates satisfaction among employees and directly impacts their performance. Therefore, compensation is not only important for employee performance but also critical for the organization (Nagaraju, Pooja, 2017). Kalia and Bhardwaj (2019) conducted a survey of 350 hotel industry employees, finding that simple job changes without corresponding salary increases do not improve employee performance. Kadir (2019) discovered through a survey of lectures at XYZ College and Okoth and Oluoch (Kenya Kisumu County Avenue Hospital) that compensation has a positive impact on employee performance. Vinoy and Kumar (2019) believe that positive motivation is reward-based. Incentives include salary increases, promotions, and job recognition. Employees voluntarily enhance their task performance through incentives. Putra et al (2021) found that compensation has the greatest impact on employee task performance. In their view, companies pay wages in the best way to encourage employees to perform at their best, thereby improving employee performance. Aggarwal (2022) sampled 493 Generation Z employees and found a positive correlation between compensation, benefits, and the performance of Generation Z employees.

(2) Employee performance and Work Environment

The study of work environment and its impact has been extensively conducted, as the environment can inhibit, interfere with, or restrict the exhibited work behaviour, consequently influencing the execution of employees' work tasks and, in turn, affecting their performance (Al-Omari & Okasheh, 2017). Al-Omari and Okasheh (2017) researched an engineering company, revealing that situational constraints composed of noise, office furniture, ventilation, and lighting are the primary environmental conditions influencing employee performance. Pradhan (2017) indicated in a study on managers in Indian manufacturing and service organizations that employee performance necessitates the creation and maintenance of a better work environment. Pawirosumarto, Sarjana and Gunawan (2017) researched hotels and resorts in Indonesia, finding that the work environment has a positive impact on employee job performance, although not significantly.

Wei (2018) reviewed the literature on the work environment of American nurses, suggesting that a healthier work environment leads to increased nurse satisfaction, resulting in better job outcomes and higher quality patient care, thereby improving the financial condition of healthcare institutions. Zainudin (2019) discovered in a study on the Malaysian service industry that providing an Islamic work environment is crucial for enhancing employee performance. Farisi (2019) found in a study on long-term employees of the Human Resources Development Agency office in North Sumatra Province that work environment variables have a positive and significant impact on employee performance. Saidi (2019) learned through a survey of leaders in various departments of the Kuching local government that a positive work environment is crucial for ensuring employee efficiency and avoiding unnecessary stress for employees, thus influencing their performance. Tarigan (2022) pointed out that the work environment contributes to determining employees' capabilities related to their job roles and influences their behaviour in the workplace.

Conclusion and Recommendation

With the rapid development of the global economy, Chinese enterprises face significant challenges in the intense market competition. Effectively managing human resources has become a crucial element for the survival and development of businesses. To stand out in the competitive market, companies must rely on high-performance employees. These individuals play a key role in assisting organizations in achieving strategic goals, producing high-quality products, and providing excellent services, thereby solidifying the company's position in the market. Incentive factors have been proven to be crucial in inspiring employee motivation and enthusiasm, necessitating the establishment of a reasonable and viable incentive system. This not only contributes to elevating employee performance levels but also further propels organizational development. Research indicates variations in the definition of performance among different scholars, encompassing employees' overall job levels and long-term work outcomes. This underscores the diversity and complexity of incentive factors.

Future Research Suggestions

However, current research still requires more targeted exploration, especially across different industry sectors in China. Here are several aspects that scholars can focus on and explore (1) Expand research on the impact and potential mechanisms of external motivational factors on employee performance in the Chinese context. Currently, there is a lack of research on how external motivational factors influence employee performance in the Chinese context. Companies face relatively limited incentive strategies to adopt, and they should design and

implement systems that meet employees' incentive needs. This includes not only incentive aspects related to compensation but also consideration of other incentive measures. Additionally, different employees may respond differently to external incentive factors, necessitating personalized incentive plans.

(2) Conduct diversified studies on the impact of motivational factors on employee performance. While current research examines several commonly existing external motivational factors, there is still a need to study the various internal and external motivational factors present in different organizational environments. Employers need to consider both external and internal motivation when formulating incentive strategies. Employers must recognize the balance between employees' external and internal motivation when designing incentive systems to ensure a high level of engagement in their work.

(3) Explore the impact of motivational factors on employee performance in different industries in China. Despite the increasing research on organizational employee performance, studies in other sectors such as manufacturing, hospitality, and education remain limited. Therefore, further research in the unique Chinese context can explore incentive systems for employee performance tailored to different industries. This adaptation of organizational management strategies with Chinese characteristics aims to enhance employee performance and address intense market competition.

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