Career Management and Employee Motivation in Low Skilled, Low Margin Environments.

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Abstract. Career management enhances the level of motivation, resilience, awareness and the direction of employees’ careers goals relative to the existing job opportunities within and outside an organisation. The main aim of this paper is to evaluate how a low-skilled company environment can use career management as a tool for employee motivation. While using Company A (Food company) as its case study organisation, the research utilises an interpretivism philosophy, deductive research approach, case study research strategy, and random sampling method. Primary data is collected by way of interviews and questionnaires and analysed using coding method. The study establishes that Company A has a robust employee career management programme. This programme is based on both short-term and long-term goals and aims to meet both individual employees’ and organisation-wide goals. Specifically, the study establishes that Company A employee career management programme helps employees to make wise career decisions, become aware of available career opportunities, set career goals, execute career goals, explore their careers, and experience career progression. The findings have implications for employee motivation in other low skilled work environments.

1. Introduction

Employee motivation enhances organisational success [1, 2]. Motivation can be defined as the degree to which an individual wants and chooses to engage in certain manner [3]. According to [4], motivation is also the psychological process that gives behaviour purpose and direction. One of the greatest challenges for any organization is to improve its level of efficiency and productivity [2]. However, organisations with motivated and enthusiastic employees that apply new techniques and technologies attain high levels of productivity.

Company A has a sophisticated career management programme that guarantees it a steady supply of employees. This is after realisation that there are limited opportunities for career development and hence there is need to develop it uniformly among employees. The employees own their career development goals with the understanding that there are established career lines available to them. Career management in Company A is more than just a promotion – it is about learning and career enrichment. This proactive career management process has a strong motivating aspect and it has great impact on the attitudes of the
employees. Career management, no doubt enables an organization to attract the best employees, motivates them and to develop and retain the best talent.

Employee retention strategies are also very important to the growth of Company A. Employees often want to be appreciated by the management and they want to be motivated, it is therefore effective to ask the employees what they want the management to do for them. Thus the main aim of this paper is to evaluate the different strategies of employee motivation and career management at Company A (and its two branches) through different motivational theories with a view to improving both aspects, and for lessons to be learnt for other such company (low-skilled, low-margin) environments.

2. Literature Review of Employee Motivation

Employee motivation is a complex process as it has its influence in all areas including organizational development, resource management, internal project and upcoming programs. Motivation is the set of psychological processes that cause the arousal, direction, and persistence of individual’s behaviours toward attaining a goal. As different motivation techniques are applied for different department of the same organization. Choosing which type of motivation for which department plays important role and within the same department, for different task different type of motivation applied [2].

There are two types of motivation namely intrinsic and extrinsic [5]. According to [6] motivation has to do with either internal or external factors that influence a persons’ choice of action. Ryan and Deci [7] describe intrinsic motivation as the conduct of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than a separable consequence. Intrinsic motivation refers to motivation that is induced internally by a person. The reward of this source of motivation comes from conducting the task rather than as a consequence of the task. Intrinsic motivators satisfy an individual’s direct needs and this provides satisfaction and pleasure [5]. People feel motivated when their values are addressed

Nevertheless, not all individuals are motivated by internal factors. According to [7] external factors have an impact on an individual’s level of motivation. Pleasure derived from extrinsic factors comes about from something that a task induces. Examples of extrinsic factors include salary, work benefits, job security, work punishments, work conditions [5]. On a general note, extrinsic motivators such as determinate rewards, for example fixed salary increase at specific periods of the year, may reduce the level of motivation because individuals will quickly lose interest on a particular motivator [6].

Overall, intrinsic motivation is the most important motivation as it develops a person’s social, cognitive and physical abilities [7]. Intrinsic motivation can only originate from within an individual. It is only the individual who can drive himself / herself to perform tasks zealously in an organizational setting. Stimulation to perform well can only stem from an individual and is considered to be a powerful force that emanate from an individual’s inner-self [8]. Examples of intrinsic motivators include challenging tasks at the work place, recognition at work, personal growth and development, quality of work, achievement, and responsibility.

3. Research Methodology

There are several research strategies that a social science project can adopt. According to [9], these include case study, experiment, survey, grounded theory, ethnography, and action study. Each of these strategies has its own strengths and weaknesses. A survey strategy, for example, is broader and its findings can be generalised in a number of scenarios [10].

This research adopted a case study approach. The rationale for adopting a case study strategy was based on the notion that the researcher understands the case study organisation well since he has been working there for some time. To this effect, the researcher was most likely able to decipher hidden meanings of the various responses given by the study participants.
This study sample was made up of both managers and crew members working in the Chelmsford 1 store and Chelmsford 2 store. From these two stores, a total of 10 managers and 30 crew members (40 participants) were sampled. The decision to sample only 40 participants was based on time and monetary constraints. To this end, it was reasoned that 40 participants were sufficiently representative of the staff working at the Chelmsford 1 and Chelmsford 2 Company A outlet.

The study used random non-probability sampling method. This sampling method entails identifying a group of potential participants, seeking their consent to take part in the study and then subjecting them to a random selection process. The researcher used the 40 and 15 consenting potential participants to make two alphabetical lists, one for the managers and the other for the crew members were prepared.

This study utilised both secondary and primary data. The rationale behind the decision to include both primary and secondary was based on the notion that the findings of a credible research study should be based on past studies as well as case-specific data collected from human subjects or from still observations [11].

A large amount of the collected data was qualitative. The reason for collecting qualitative data as opposed to quantitative data was advised by the study topic, study objectives as well as study questions. Moreover, the study adopted an interpretive research philosophy which does not involve testing of hypotheses, it is only concerned in drawing broad patterns and combining them to create broad generalisation pertaining to the influence of career management on employee motivation [10].

4. Research Findings
This study sample was made of 40 participants. This sample comprised of 10 managers and 30 crew members working for Company As’ Chelmsford 1 and Chelmsford 2 stores. Each store contributed 5 managers and 15 crew members for the study sample. The interviews were administered to the managers on a face-to-face basis, while questionnaires were conducted on the crew members. To this end, managers were considered more insightful than the crew members in discerning the influence of Company A’s career management programme on employee motivation.

The use of questionnaires was done in the case of crew members, because of the fear by the subordinates to be reprimanded by their seniors. It was also done because it enhances a level of anonymity. The results of the questionnaires conducted on the crew members, were divided into three sections. The first section was concerned about the length of time that the crew members were working at Company As. The second section was concerned about the career aspirations of the crew members. The third section was concerned about Company A’s career management program.

The only demographic detail collected for this research is the length of service possessed by the respondents. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the respondents according to their year of work.

![Figure 1: Respondents number of working years.](image-url)
Respondents with one (1) year of work were discovered to have the most number of respondents. Respondents with 5 years of experience closely followed with 8. The dominance by employee with the least number of working years can be based on continuous changing of staffs like servers, drivers and others. Also, the respondents might just be working for Company As with most of them having experience in other organisations. The fact that 10 managers were involved might contribute to the high number of respondents with 8 years of working experience.

Findings in Figure 2 showed Chelmsford 1 employees to be more interested in becoming crew trainers. With 9 respondent positively disposed, it was discovered that most of the respondents understand that this post increases the remunerations and further increase their level within the organisation.

Chelmsford 2 respondents disagreed suggesting the prevalence of employees with limited working years. It can be viewed that employees in Chelmsford 2 store are more concerned about part-time opportunities and do not see the crew trainer as very important to their career progression. In essence, the two stores have an employee base that has different perspectives concerning this question. Employees at Chelmsford 2 consist more of students that are interested in increased hourly pay instead of holding a permanent paying jobs such as crew trainer. In Chelmsford 1, more employees desire permanent employment with being crew manager giving them the opportunity to rise within the organisation.

The difference in the perspective of employees in the two stores was exposed in the responses gathered in for this question. Figure 3 showed that crew members at Chelmsford 2 were more confident and believed they can become senior executive at the organisation. However, employees at Chelmsford 1 believed it was nearly impossible to become senior executives. It seems Company A does not apply a similar career management programmes for all its stores. Unlike Store 1, Store 2 engaged employees with more qualification or invested in enhancing their employees’ career skills. In addition, it is arguable that junior employees in Store 2 are in the process of advancing their academic and professional qualifications to occupy executive positions that emerge within the organisation. This argument is based on the conventional notion that senior management positions require higher academic and professional credentials.
Three sets of questions were asked about the Company A’s Career Management Programme (CMP):

(a) CMP is based on short-term targets – between 1 and 2 years:
The distribution in response to the question showed a positive perspective. A total of 15 (see Table 1) respondents indicated that Company A’s CMP is based on short-term goals. It can be deduced that as much as the company wants expansion and great long term improvement sales, current sales and customer satisfaction is an important object of the company’s employee career management.

|                  | Chelmsford 1 | Chelmsford 2 |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Strongly Agree   | 2            | 7            |
| Agree            | 3            | 3            |
| Somewhat Agree   | 5            | 1            |
| Disagree         | 4            | 3            |
| Strongly Disagree| 1            | 1            |

*Table 1: Respondent Perspective on short term targets of Company A’s CMP*

Furthermore, daily sales and performance is the most important aspect of employee career. The store is more concerned about what you do in the nearest future irrespective of their focus on future career improvement. A notable discovery is the presence of 6 respondents that are indifferent across the two stores showing that the direction in the short term of CMP implementation is unclear. Also, 9 respondents in the negative were captured. It can be deduced that the future is more important as this company continues to provide long term and strategic innovations for long term implementation of CMP.

(b) CMP is based on intermediate-term targets – between 3 and 7 years:
Table 2 below showed that the average of respondents were sure of the intermediate targets. This showed the vagueness which the CMP implementation is based in the intermediate sphere in the perspective of employees. Respondents that were not sure are 7 showing that the intermediate targets in the CMP implementation is not clear and employees are finding it difficult to understand.

It can be viewed that the intermediate targets is somehow silent as the most prominent reason for CMP is usually the short term and the long term” Respondents are of the opinion that intermediate term usually become the short term in a couple of years making it to be less important in the reason for CMP implementation

|                  | Chelmsford 1 | Chelmsford 2 |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Strongly Agree   | 3            | 5            |
| Agree            | 4            | 2            |
| Somewhat Agree   | 3            | 4            |
| Disagree         | 2            | 1            |
| Strongly Disagree| 3            | 3            |

*Table 2: Respondent Perspective on intermediate targets of Company A’s CMP*

(c) CMP is based on long-term targets – over 10 years:
Chelmsford 1 respondents were more positive than Chelmsford 2 in this question (Table 3). Employees in Chelmsford 1 see the long-term nature of CMP implementation as a lot of them has been with Company A...
for over 3 years. The employees have experienced CMP implementation and understood the focus better than employees at Chelmsford 1 that are mostly part time.

Chelmsford 2 employees were influenced by their individual educational endeavours and do not plan the career solely on Company As. In this aspect, some of them are not sure the long term nature of the CMP implementation coupled and the fact that they can move to a better employment after completion. For Chelmsford 1 employees, CMP is based on in house career development while Chelmsford 2 employees are more disposed to individual career path development. It can be deduced that Company A’s pursues mixed strategies for different employee cadres. The company seems to follow a long-term career management strategy especially for senior positions and short-term and intermediate strategies for junior and middle level employees.

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------------|----------|------------------|
| Chelmsford 1   | 5     | 5              | 1        | 2                |
| Chelmsford 2   | 3     | 2              | 6        | 3                |

**Table 3: Respondent Perspective on long-term targets of Company A’s CMP**

The major distribution for Chelmsford 2 is the indifferent category with 6 respondents. This deduced that CMP implementation is directed towards improved performance of the company and not necessarily the long term growth. Managing the careers of employees is important for the organisation irrespective of targets.

**d) Company A’s Career Management Programme (CMP) creates new, long-term opportunities for employees.**

Figure 4 shows the distribution as it concerns the long term and new nature of opportunities created by CMP at Company As. Both stores have 10 respondents positively disposed showing a satisfactory distribution in the cumulative. These substantiated by stating that careers in Company As are planned in such a way that employees can maintain their loyalty and contribute to the organisation in a new way that might be needed.

![Figure 4: New and Long-term Opportunities of CMP Distribution Chart](image)

Figure 5 is a display the distribution that is even but still skewed suggesting store opinions that are encouraging. On the cumulative, the two stores have 18 respondents that are agree in some degree that employee motivation enhancement is an aim that CMP implementation at Company As is focused.
However, Chelmsford 2 had the most encouraging distribution positive distribution with 10 respondents agreeing.

![Figure 5: CMP Aim of Employee Motivation boost Distribution Chart](image)

It is worthy of note that Chelmsford 2 does not have any respondent that is strongly disagreeing with the statement. However, Chelmsford 1 have sizeable amount (6) of respondents that are in the middle. This number is disturbing considering that it can swing to either side of the perspective. These perspectives are based on the fact that motivation is wide and CMP cannot be solely responsible for that. This distribution showed that each store has unique perspective within employee base about what motivation implies and if the aim of CMP is enough to effectively impact.

This section has presented and discussed the study findings. It has emerged that Company A’s CMP is based on short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals. The company pursues these three different CMP approaches for different employee cadres and different situations depending on the underlying circumstances. However, it has emerged that Store 2 has a better CMP than Store 1 – comparatively, Store 2 experience low employee turnover (high motivation levels) than Store 1, Store 2 offers its employees a better CMP package that encourage them to desire to ascend through the company’s structures to occupy high positions. In extension, Store 2 seems to experience high employee job engagement than Store 1 – most Store 2 employees believe that a better CMP will enhance their career opportunities in the form of getting promoted to better paying positions within the organisation. Store 2 CMP seems to satisfy industry, legal, and ethical standards, it is more effective in boosting employee job engagement, and job performance.

5. Research Conclusions

The case study analysed the results gathered from the two stores. Although the findings are limited by the case study being in one company (and two separate locations), there are still important lessons to be learnt (also supported by the published literature cited earlier) for these types of environments. What was evident during this study is that the levels of motivation in the two Company A’s stores are high. This was mainly attributed to the career management programme instituted by Company As. These results showed that the career management programme instituted by the two stores had a significant impact on various factors within the Company A’s organizational structure. Many of the respondents agreed that the programme had a significant impact on matters such as motivation, employee turnover, performance and the organizations future aspiration in terms of strategies goals and suitability of the organization.
Findings in the two stores in some areas of the research differs thereby suggesting different perspective that was filtered from the interview. The career aspiration from the two stores differs based on the fact that the employee bases in the stores have differing focus. Chelmsford 1 present its employee base as long term focused with detail towards intra organisational growth. This perspective was reflected in their targets for career development as most of the respondents from the store have long-term targets within the organisation. This psychology influence their career aspiration and CMP implementation. Chelmsford 2 has younger employee base with some taking the job from the store as part time. Their major motivation is to get extra pay and develop personally to occupy top managerial position. Philosophically, the difference in perspective in stores is based on the focus of the employee base in the stores. For example, Chelmsford 2 employees have high agreement to become shift management as it allows them to raise their basic pay in part time basis while Chelmsford 1 employee desired to be business manager which is more of a full time job. Another pattern was displayed as majority of the Chelmsford 2 employees desire to be senior executive.

This research has answered some intricate questions and shed more light in the subject area, which can be concluded as follows:

- Understanding the role of employee motivation and career management programmes are vital even in low-skilled low margin organisations.
- Discovering the best practices for career management and how to derive maximum value from its implementation is crucial.
- To be cognizant of the impact of organisational culture on the implementation of employee motivation.
- To link career management to strategic planning of the organization in order to ensure that the organization identify talent from different managerial levels of the organization.

Future work in this area should focus on choosing a greater number of companies to research the initial findings.

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