



Do awards really motivate employees?

PAT ON THE BACK Work profiles across organisations are not similar, so proper assessment systems should be put in place to reward employees

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After being ignored twice for awards despite putting in a great performance at work, Surpreya Singh (name changed), sales executive in a well-known FMCG company, was so demoralised that she could not deliver her best at work. A few months later, she quit her job, saying she found it "suffocating to work with people who were selected for awards just because they knew how to manipulate certain people in the organisation and tried every trick in the book to be in the good books of their bosses."

Singh is among a number of employees who are growing increasingly sceptical about the annual or monthly awards that most organisations hand out to employees in appreciation of their performance. They feel it's impossible to have a foolproof selection method to fairly assess each employee's achievement in

Rewards which promote individuality may work in some roles. Recognition of individuals in team-based roles does more harm than good. In such a scenario, other members may stop supporting the winner.

NITANT SONI, co-founder, Eccentric Engine

an organisation for a reward. Today, acknowledging the contributions of the workforce through monthly and annual awards are a vital part of employee engagement programmes. "Reward and recognition programmes lend to a sense of belongingness, provided the selection process is transparent and measurable," says Ashesh Mehra, former vice-president and head of Infosys BPO, who is now running his own international BPO company.

Also, though some HR experts relate reward systems with individual efforts, they say it is important to look at the difference in evolution of Eastern and Western cultures to understand the reward and recognition programmes.

"In Western cultures individuals are expected to survive on their own. It's common for children to be independent very early on and this aspect of the socio-cultural background is evident at the workplace too. In Eastern cultures, rewards which promote individualism, singling out one person as a hero may not be the best choice, as it leaves others with a bad taste in their mouths. Rewards which promote team collaborations and are given to groups have a higher significance in Indian culture. We have copied the West for its HR systems, without considering our psychosocial background," says a senior HR head from an



HANDING OUT REWARDS: DO IT RIGHT

■ Don't start a reward programme because everyone's doing it. Take time to decide the core values you want to promote and thereafter reward those core values

■ Make sure that the process is seen as fair and transparent

■ Involve employees while working out ways in which selections are made for rewards and recognition

■ Using rewards and recognition to drive desirable behaviour and efforts makes them more impactful

IT company who does not want to be named.

Nitant Soni, co-founder, Eccentric Engine, feels there aren't many work profiles in which success can be attributed to one individual since most senior level positions require collaboration and support from other team members. "Rewards which promote individuality

may work only in equity trading or individual contributor roles. Recognition of individuals in team-based roles does more harm than good. In such a scenario other team members may stop supporting the winner, because they feel that the individual has been awarded at their cost."

Soni feels that instead of looking towards the West, it would be

good to learn from Japan, which has a culture similar to India.

HR heads believe that irrespective of job roles, reward systems can be implemented everywhere. "I completely agree that if (someone) does not deserve the recognition, other team members will get demotivated and this will prove costly for the organisation. To make sure such things don't

happen, there must be some rules for identifying suitable recipients which starts with identifying the values, goals and behaviour leading to success," says Chandan Chatteraj, president-HR (India and global), Unilever India.

For Chatteraj, it's important that the parameters are well defined. "For instance, in my company, we have different parameters for production, marketing and support functions. This is precisely to avoid overshadowing of the significant contribution made by support function employees," he says. While Chatteraj gives a lot of weightage to approvals by CEOs or business heads for nomination of employees as a key to the selection process, Mehra believes that such selections should be well defined and independent of managers' inputs to avoid a culture of sycophancy and favouritism.

For Gulshan Chib, HR head, Duet India Hotels, good leadership is important for a successful reward and recognition programme. "Work culture, employee engagement and hiring processes — all set expectations. There have been many surveys, stories and newspaper articles on instances of hiring a hero, getting a zero, people leaving because of bad bosses and so on. There could be different reasons too for their relationship with their managers — some employees are hard working, others might know their bosses better than others as they might have worked together in other organisations. Good leaders follow fair practices and don't get carried away while making important decisions. It's better not to run programmes for which you don't have adequate and proper measures to avoid preferential or subjective selection."

'Reward people for professionalism, positive attitude'

Awarding employees for achieving sales targets or getting big contracts or orders for their organisations is one way to motivate them, but professionalism, positive attitude and temperament should also be recognised, say HR experts.

"There could be many departments in an organisation where you find it difficult to decide what an employee has achieved just by assessing how much he/she has delivered in a particular month. For instance, HR executives cannot deliver path-breaking performance month after month as they have routine tasks to perform each month. The same goes for people involved in secretarial practices or data entry etc. Such people are thus excluded from awards systems as they are not able to show sales figures or numbers. So, if good behaviour and professionalism are rewarded suitably, others might not be demotivated," says Aman Attree, head HR, Hindustan Power Projects.

If someone has performed under extreme pressure depending on the nature of the job or she does, if someone has shown great patience during a public dealing, if someone has managed to defuse a crisis situation with a smile on his/her face, these are some personal attributes which should get a standing ovation in the company, Attree adds.

Experts like Chandan Chatteraj, president-HR (India and Global), Unilever India, sug-

REWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Pros	Cons
Motivate employees	Promote individualism
Employee satisfaction guaranteed	Foolproof process a challenge
Enhance organisations' productivity	Demotivate other employees

gest that the most important thing organisations should keep in mind while designing any kind of R&R programme is the pre-assessment of the programme.

"It should for sure inculcate a spirit of positivity and aspiration amongst all employees," he says. Ignoring positive qualities of employees can create a culture which encourages people to race to be ahead of others in achieving targets, which can lead to scant respect for rules or teamwork, say HR experts. Some corporate leaders also believe that an employee should be awarded the moment there is a need to do so. Sometimes monthly and yearly awards don't achieve the desired purpose, they feel. "Business activities and reward programmes need to be synced for success and for improving employee morale," says Gulshan Chib, HR head, Duet India Hotels.

- Jeevan Prakash Sharma

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