

Rewards Strategy and Employee Engagement of Manufacturing Firms in Port Harcourt

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Abstract: *This study examines the nexus between reward strategy and employee engagement of manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. The study adopted descriptive research design with a population component of 35 manufacturing supervisors, line managers and managers, it piloted a census of the managers from 15 manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. After collection and collation of data, the instrument were analyzed using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient with the assistance of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 21.0). The findings exposed that rewards strategy, had a significant and positive correlation with measures of employee engagement; employee vigour and employee dedication. On these rudiment, the findings of the study recommends that managers should initiate and implement impactful rewards strategies that will motivate, attract, retain and improve business performance while recommend reward strategy to their firms. Also there should be frequent review of rewards method, as these will aid firms to be more competitive in intricate business environment whilst meeting their needs and that of the employees. Amid the proposals for further studies comprise the study only engrossed on quantitative approach of analysis, as well as the rareness of the study hence, more studies and other researcher can explore qualitative method to adopt with other statistical tool leveraged to glance the level of correlation between concepts.*

Keywords: Rewards, Reward Strategy, Employee Engagement, Performance, Development.

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Introduction

Over the years several reward strategy has been developed, as firms seek ways to motivate employees and improve their level of engagement. Reward strategy is a distinctive approach that seek to commit and motivate integrated array of workforce towards achieving organizational goals. According to Eric (1994), rewards can be defined as various benefits that are offered to employees in exchange for work or value. In likewise manner, rewards may differ in that they may be intrinsic or extrinsic, direct or indirect, and financial or non-financial (Armstrong, 2006; Mahaney & Lederer, 2006; Mottaz, 1985). As reward system employed by firms will influence

employees' behavior and attitude towards their job if the rewards satisfy their needs and help them to succeed in their personal goals.

Employees receive rewards from their employer in response to their efforts and performance, and they also want to receive them. According to Armstrong (2012), rewards are some things that help people feel appreciated for their contributions. As a result, reward strategy in businesses may refer to a plan designed to show appreciation for high performers and to encourage underperformers to improve. According to Nathaniel et al. (2010), rewards are a way of paying employees based on how well they perform. In other terms, a reward is used to show that a given conduct is valued and comes in the form of monetary or non-monetary incentives following a certain achievement or success.

An excellent compensation scheme will unquestionably help and motivate employees to do more work, stay with a company longer, and draw in fresh talent. According to Bowen (2002), a reward is something that is given or received in exchange for a success or accomplishment. According to Tze et al. (2012), a reward is the money that an employee gets from a company in exchange for the services they provide or as payment for work completed. In their definition of rewards from 2015, Ibrar and Khan included basic pay, incentives, non-salary income, and benefits as well as all other useful outcomes that employees obtain from their employment. According to Pratheepkanth (2011), the more an employee is rewarded, the more driven they will be, and the less they are rewarded, the less motivated they will be.

However, businesses can only remain competitive for as long as they take good care of their most valuable asset, which is their workforce. According to Goldsmith, Veum, and Darity's (2000) theory, businesses can only do this by regularly comparing their extrinsic rewards to those offered by rival businesses. This ensures that workers are more productive, engaged, committed to the business, and less likely to leave. As a result, businesses are better able to conduct their operations and provide the desired outcomes by cultivating an enthusiastic, content staff.

On the other hand, subsequently the current state of affairs in the intricate business environment, firms now strive towards finding fresh and innovative ways to maintain competitive advantage in their respective markets. Any firm that wants to keep its cherished employees will need to focus on increasing employee engagement, which is crucial for the efficient use of the organization's human resources. Studies on the psychological ties that employees have to their workplaces show that, in the twenty-first century, this advantage is the reality of engaged employees because they are able to deal with the instability that the corporate climate brings. In addition, it has been demonstrated that high levels of involvement in domestic and international businesses foster commitment, increase employee vigor, support talent retention, build customer loyalty, and enhance corporate performance and shareholder value (Kumar & Swetha, 2011; Markos & Sridevi, 2010; Wilson, 2009).

Therefore, the finest customer service will be delivered by employees who enjoy their jobs, feel valued and supported by their employers, and are happy and pleased at work. Again, when employees are engaged in their work, they are not only content with their jobs but also translate that contentment into higher productivity and profitability for the company because they have positive working relationships with their coworkers and a better work environment (Larkin, 2009;

Lee, 2012). Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) therefore define employee engagement as a positive, fulfilling state of mind relating to work that is marked by vigor, dedication, and absorption.

Substantiating this, Bakker and Leiter (2010) affirm that employees who are energetic and dedicated to their work can make a true difference for the firms that want to be highly efficient and productive, and Kumar and Swetha (2011) sustain that any organization that understands the conditions which enhance employee engagement would have accomplished something that their competitors will find very difficult to imitate. Slight sensation Shuck and Wollard (2010) opine that employee engagement is the cognitive, emotional and behavioural energy an employee directs toward positive organization outcomes.

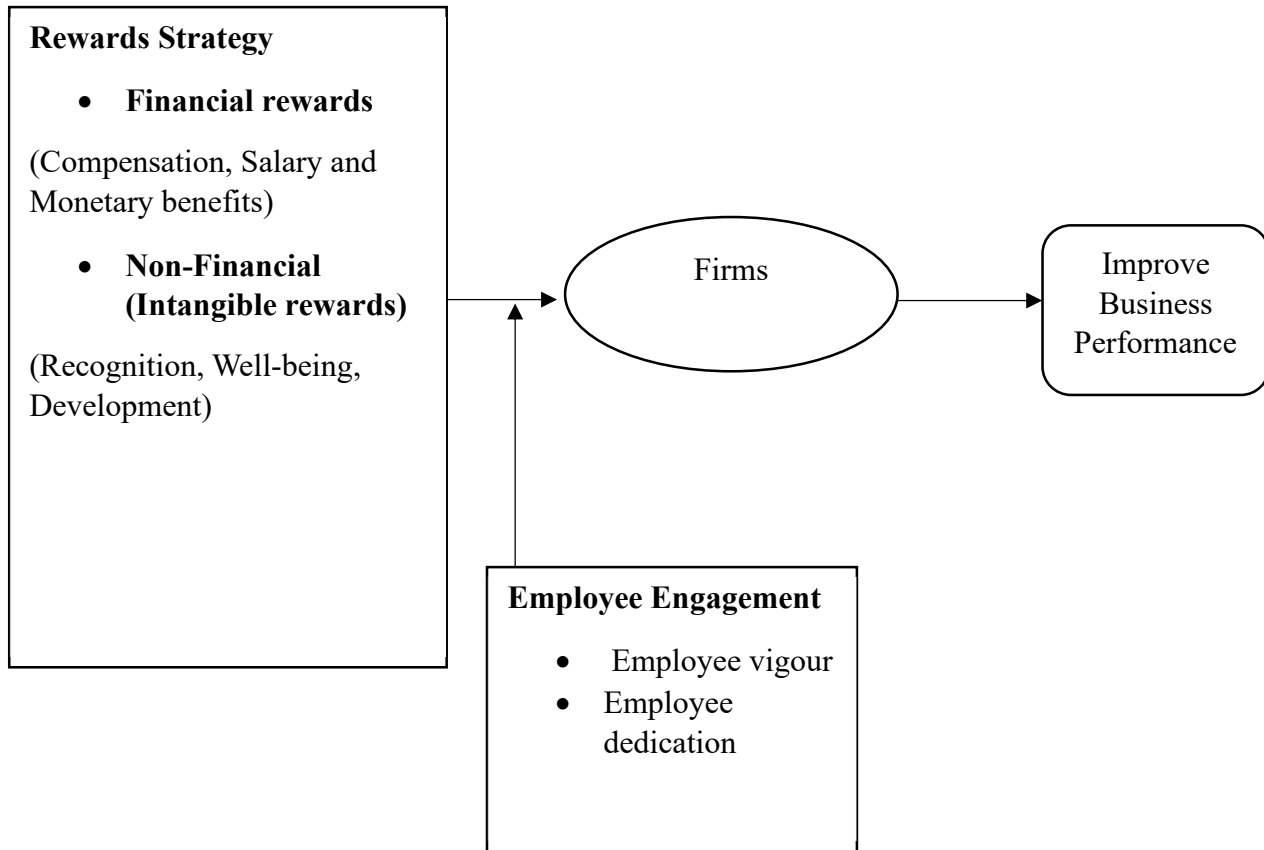
Without employee engagement, a company cannot last for a very long time. According to scholars like Levinson (2007) and Cleland, Mitchinson, and Townend (2008), employee engagement can improve business performance, particularly when responsible, moral, and productive employees are involved. Engaged employees also strengthen an organization's competitive advantage and create a positive business environment (Kang, 2014). Engagement is one of the most crucial and effective strategies to draw in, develop, keep, appreciate, and manage the organization's human resources, according to Neeti and Leekha (2011). Therefore, employee participation, absenteeism, presenteeism, and turnover are all impacted by the level of employee engagement in every organization. As Herzberg (1968) remarked, "if you want someone to do a good job give them a good job to do. This is because intrinsic motivation and increased engagement can be generated by the work itself if it provides interest and opportunities for achievement and self-contentment.

This study with rareness in related research on the subject matter tends to investigate rewards strategy and employee engagement, it becomes pertinent to bridge this identified gap by discoursing the nexus between rewards strategy and engagement of employees in manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

There is rare studies specifically on the relationship between reward strategy and employee engagement, since there is no one best way of reward strategy that is most effective and particularly fit firms setting, thus what type of reward strategy are preferred by employees that leads to improved engagement. The objective of these study is to explore the relationship between reward strategy and employee engagement of manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. As organizations have shifted their attention to reward strategy packages as a means of motivating employees and raising engagement levels (Giancola, 2007; HayGroup, 2015; Nienaber, 2010).

Framework



Source: from researcher (2023)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical review

The perk of reward strategy is to drive overall business strategy to develop a workforce motivated towards improved performance through an effective and rewards package. Engagement is a complex and multidimensional issue that affects various stakeholders and organizational outcomes. This study is underpin by “Self-Determination theory” as a framework to employee motivation, attraction, well-being, recognition, retention and development on reward strategy and engagement employee in manufacturing firms.

Self Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasizes the significance of humans' evolved inner resources for personality development and behavioral self-regulation while utilizing traditional empirical methods and an organismic meta-theory (Ryan, Kuhl, & Deci, 1997). It is an approach to human motivation and personality. That is, as an organismic theory, assumes that individuals are active organisms with developed tendencies toward growth, mastering environmental problems, and

integrating new experiences into a coherent sense of self. The study of people's natural psychological needs and growth inclinations, which form the basis of their self-motivation and personality integration, as well as the environments that support these advantageous processes, is the field of study. Inductively, using the empirical process, we have identified three such needs: the needs for competence (Harter, 1978; White, 1963), relatedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Reis, 1994), and autonomy (de Charms, 1968; Deci, 1975), which appear to be crucial for supporting the best possible functioning of the innate tendencies for growth and integration, as well as positive social development and personal well-being. A significant portion of the SDT-inspired research has also looked at the environments that support or promote poor social functioning, poor self-motivation, and poor personal wellbeing. Although many distinct negative consequences have been studied, the research indicates that these negative effects can be most succinctly stated as undermining the three fundamental psychological requirements. Thus, SDT is concerned not only with the specific nature of positive developmental tendencies, but it also examines social environments that are antagonistic toward these tendencies.

However self-determination theory correspond with reward strategy and employee engagement as its drive the effort of an organization to build a motivated, engaged and satisfied workforce to achieve organizational goals with inclusive rewards package.

Concept of Rewards Strategy

Compensation

This refers to the compensation that employers give to workers in exchange for the talents used, credentials obtained, time contributed, efforts made, and goals attained in attaining task and strategic objectives of a company. Employees are empowered by compensation to take care of their physiological demands, such as obtaining food, clothing, and a place to live. Various forms of compensation, such as basic salary, variable pay, stock options, and cash bonuses, are included in this.

Salary

Is the reward an employee receives for their efforts, which may include learning new skills or earning a degree that will help them further the goals and objectives of their employer. Cash is distributed on a monthly basis and is monetized.

Monetary benefits

Elements that are quantifiable and paid on behalf of the employee to other providers, e.g., medical insurance, housing and other incentives.

Recognition

Some workers lack the motivation to perform at the highest level and to remain devoted to their employer despite receiving enough pay, benefits, and welfare. People desire recognition for their accomplishments. The following are some examples of recognition programs:

- Awards: Performance awards, tenure awards, and spot awards.
- Promotions: The capacity to climb the corporate ladder in order to assume more accountability and get access to leadership.
- A simple thank you or verbal expression of appreciation in front of their peers.
- While not every employee may require this kind of appreciation, every worker deserves respect at work. All workers require respect as a kind of acknowledgment in order to sustain their feeling of dignity and psychological safety at work.

Wellbeing

Employers now place a higher priority on employee wellbeing if they want to recruit and keep talent. People are becoming more and more aware of the need of holistic wellbeing for maintaining happiness, good health, and motivation. Employee welfare is something that company cultures are expected to support, according to employees;

- Employee assistance programs: offer additional support to workers who could be having problems with their relationships, finances, or mental health. These characteristics can be seen in organizational cultures that appreciate and promote employee welfare.
- Employee resource groups are a great place for coworkers with similar backgrounds or hobbies to connect and build networks both personally and professionally.

Development

Employees' self-actualization is a priority for employers who fund training and development initiatives for their staff. Each of us has unique skills and abilities. These skills and abilities enable workers to excel in their positions through education, training, mentorship programs, and appropriate job experience. In order for individuals to reach their full potential, these career development initiatives give them the opportunity to rise within the company.

Needs for Rewards Strategy

There are some obvious reasons why organizations should have a strong rewards strategy. The following are consider below:

- Attracting top talent: A rewards approach that may be able to meet every employee requirement will be attractive to a wide range of potential employees. This speeds up the hiring process and helps a company draw in a diverse candidate pool.
- Employee engagement and happiness: As employees change and move from one period of life to another while still having their needs fulfilled by an effective and efficient rewards program, there is a tremendous possibility for high employee satisfaction. Additionally, it keeps workers interested when they believe they are being adequately compensated.

- Retention of employees: An efficient total rewards plan promotes employee welfare, engagement, and motivation, all of which are essential for doing so.
- Competitiveness: By rewarding excellence in performance, rewards strategies help firms become more competitive within their industry. Additionally, as was already noted, the company may successfully compete for people and establish itself as the employer of choice in its industry.
- Improved business performance: Your company will likely achieve its objectives and outperform its competitors if it can recruit and keep competent personnel. Or, to put it another way, top-performing companies frequently have highly engaged, productive personnel.

Concept of Employee Engagement

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a unique construct that plays a vital role in business performance. According to Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001), engagement is the opposite of burnout. According to them, the opposites of the burnout aspects (exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness) are vitality, involvement, and efficacy. The concurrent "employment and expression of a person's preferred self in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full performances" is what Kahn (1990) defined as employee engagement. Kahn did offer a theoretical perspective on engagement, but it was not operationalized, hence no measure was developed (Schaufeli et al., 2002). According to Shuck and Wollard (2010), employee engagement is defined as the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy that employee focuses toward successful organizational outcomes. According to Robinson (2007), salaries and incentives can only be effective at increasing engagement when a person is happy with their job. However, in other situations, when pressure from outside causes that lead to job unhappiness begins to build, incomes are more likely to cause disengagement. According to Maslach and Leiter (1997), work engagement is characterized by energy, involvement, and agility. Work engagement is described as a positive degree of conditions linked with welfare employment or fulfillment (Bakker et al., 2008). As an independent and distinct construct, Schaufeli (2006) views work engagement as "positive, satisfying, mind-related work that is characterized by enthusiasm, dedication, and energy while working, the willingness to give the best in a job, and perseverance when facing a problem" (Schaufeli, 2017).

Employee vigour

Vigour is a synergy, Shirom (2004) defined employee vigor as the sensation of physical strength, emotional energy, and cognitive liveliness. Both internal and subjective experiences of vitality are related to it. Vigor can be viewed as an attribute as well as a state idea. The vigor of an individual can change during the course of a day (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, Ryan, 2000). For instance, one might typically have high levels of vigor, but after a difficult day at work, these levels sharply decline until they rise again after a good evening with a partner.

Employee Dedication

An enthusiastic employee is one who is invested in their work. Workplace passion stimulates energy, enthusiasm, and productivity. The organization's articulated vision is understood and embraced by committed personnel. This suggests a value alignment that includes the employee's capacity to fully dedicate oneself to and engage in their professional activities. These workers place a high value on their work and hold themselves responsible for doing it properly. They show attention to the organization's output, development, goods, and public image. They are pleased with the output of the organization and seek out methods to improve it. They accept responsibility for all that is under their personal purview as well as for what occurs within their organization.

Dedicated employers have a duty to craft an environ that engenders dedication. Shortcutting quality, limited training, treating customers badly and misusing funds will not fashion a condition that anyone should feel any dedication to (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

Drivers of Engagement

The drivers of engagement are those factors that spur employee to be engaged in their various place of work. Such drivers may include: health and safety, Personal Resources, Manager's Influence etc.

Health and Safety

Another important factor influencing involvement, according to Bakker and Albrecht (2018), is the ability to express oneself and work without worrying about the effects on one's self-image, status, or profession. People are more willing to engage in activities when they feel safe and trusted because they can clearly see the results of their conducts or actions; positive interactions with co-workers and managers also encourage safety; and many group roles that call for participation from other group members should have roles assigned based on skill ability rather than perceived power because this can deter and hinder safe personal engagement.

Manager's Influence

Managers are influential, According to Schaufeli et al. (2008), employee engagement is the gratifying positive mindset associated with work that is characterized by high energy levels and mental spirit while working, readiness to devote effort to work, and perseverance during difficulties; a sense of importance, inspiration, passion, and pride; and full concentration and engrossed by work where time passes quickly and there are difficulties separating from work. That demonstrates vigor, commitment, and immersion. It is understandable why it is occasionally referred to as "passion for work" (Truss, Soane, Edwards, Wisdom, Croll & Burnett, 2006).

Personal Resources

To consistently keep engagement high at work, one needs to employ physical, emotional, and psychological resources (Kahn, 1990). Designing a life-work balance, particularly for the restoration of psychological well-being, allowing time off to attend to personal obligations, and providing individuals with the means to feel energized, motivated, and totally absorbed in their work are important factors in facilitating engagement.

Related Empirical Review

Employee engagement is frequently a vague concept, and its relationship to incentive management is frequently even less clear, according to Brown and Reilly's (2013) research on the topic. This is true despite the enthusiasm for the term and corporate surveys that attempt to measure it. They conduct a thorough investigation into the impact of the challenging global business environment on engagement levels and our current understanding of the relationship between engagement and rewards. They argue that rather than thinking that straightforward universal models can be applied, engagement and its ties with pay and rewards need to be defined and understood in each organizational environment as it is in engaging the diversity of the workforce and satisfying the wide variety of employee demands.

Krishnan and Wesley (2013) investigate the relationship between demographic factors, employee communication, and employee engagement as well as the effect of employee communication on employee engagement levels and its association with employee engagement. Design/methodology/approach. This study used convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling methodology, to choose the sample of 163 employees from different star hotels in Coimbatore. Additionally, information was gathered by questionnaires, and descriptive, correlational, and simple regression analysis were used to examine the data. Results. The results of the correlation study showed a strong association between employee communication and employee engagement. Additionally, a simple regression study with a R square value of 0.709 demonstrated statistically that employee communication had a significant impact on employee engagement levels. The study supports that the employee communication has significant relationship with employee engagement level and it is the predictor of employee engagement level among the star hotel employees in Coimbatore.

In a South African context, Hoole and Hotz (2016) conducted research on the connection between total rewards and job engagement. The study also looked at whether age and gender had a moderating impact on the association between involvement and total rewards. Less than 30% of all working individuals, according to statistics, are optimally engaged in their jobs. Research suggests that employees are no longer content with traditional compensation systems and want to feel valued and appreciated. This is because people spend more than a third of their lives at work, devoting themselves emotionally, physically, and psychologically. 318 questionnaires from financial institutions in Gauteng were collected and analyzed for the study, which used a quantitative, cross-sectional research design and a non-probability convenience and purposive sampling strategy. The opinions of the participants were sought regarding the significance of various reward structures and preferences, as well as their level of workplace engagement. The measurement tools selected were the Nienaber total reward preference model and the 17-item UWES. Results showed a weak statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.25$; $p = 0.000$) between the variables.

From the evaluation of existing literatures and empirical review, it is obvious that rareness of studies on the relationship between reward strategy and employee engagement exist, and it is supposed that strategy for increasing job engagement through the work environment will be generally concerned with developing a culture and framework which inspires positive attitudes to work, promoting interest and enthusiasm in the jobs employees do, and reducing stress as held

by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) that the level of employee engagement is mostly affected by demographic characteristics, the workplace and job demand therefore, it becomes pertinent to bridge this identified gap by exploring the nexus between rewards strategy and engagement of employees in manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Methodology

The methodology for the study, a cross-sectional survey, made it easier to collect data using questionnaires. 35 manufacturing businesses registered in Port Harcourt make up the research target population. The 105 managers who work for the 15 manufacturing companies that may be reached and have registered offices in Port Harcourt make up the study's population. A survey of managers from 15 different industrial companies in Port Harcourt was done by the research. A standardized questionnaire was sent to the chosen manufacturing companies in Port Harcourt, and data was gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The study accepted and used the face and sampling validity, as well as content validity. As a result, the survey tool displays sample validity as well as face validity. The evaluation of the reliability of the survey instrument was conducted using Cronbach's alpha coefficients test, implemented with the assistant of the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Therefore, solely the items that exhibit alpha values of 0.7 or higher are deemed suitable for assessing internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha Test was conducted to determine the results of the variables. Methods of data analysis is Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient technique as it fit the data which expressed the relationship between rewards strategy and employee engagement studied. The reason for using this technique was because it required data on Ordinal Scale.

Results

Correlation

			Rewards Strategy	Employee Vigour
Spearman's Rho	Reward Strategy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.723**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	95	95
	Employee Vigour	Correlation Coefficient	.723**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	95	95

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Data, SPSS Output

Decision: From the SPSS table above, the probability value is 0.000 ($PV < 0.05$) while the correlation value is 0.723 which implies positive relationships between rewards strategy and employee vigour. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between reward strategy and employee vigour of manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.

Correlation

			Reward Strategy	Employee Dedication
Spearman's Rho	Reward Strategy	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.811**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	95	95
	Employee Dedication	Correlation Coefficient	.811**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	95	95

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Decision: From the SPSS table above, the probability value is 0.000 ($PV < 0.05$) while the correlation value is 0.811 which indicates strong significant relationships between reward strategy and employee dedication. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between reward strategy and employee dedication of manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.

Conclusion

Firms should include rewards strategy as part of their engagement model in order to attract and retain talented employees, it is important that manufacturing firms understand the complex nature of reward and engagement nexus and how best to use reward strategy to meet the needs and goals of both the organization and employees while aligning it to firms strategy and top priority. Certain rewards are better predictors of work engagement than others, implying that firms should steer away from administrative hand-out reward strategies and tailor rewards towards employee preference and needs for improved productivity, performance while accomplishing firm goals.

Recommendation

This research has provided useful insights and concepts that can help firms in scheming their rewards strategic models as part of their engagement strategies. The study was conducted during an economical impulsiveness time and inflation flux which could have influenced the results, it is recommended that manufacturing firms should;

- i. Firms should review their compensation philosophy and package as these will enable firms to be focus and prioritize reward strategy and employee engagement with their strategies.
- ii. Firms must align their reward strategy with their business goals and top priority to enable them identify what to focus on, such as building strategies.
- iii. Firms reward strategy should be a reflection of their value, culture and goals while ensuring that their reward strategy is extensively flexible and inclusive.

Furthermore, the results have indicated that it would be beneficial for manufacturing firms to pay attention to reward strategies upon offering their employees, as there are certain preferences which in turn influence their levels of employee engagement such as; constructive and honest feedback, challenging job, growth opportunities, informal recognition, career path planning and mentoring (Bussin & Van Rooy, 2014; Jacobs, Renard & Snelgar, 2014; Masibigiri & Nienaber, 2011; Sortheix, Dietrich, Chow & Salmela-Aro, 2013). Hence, reward strategy enable firms to be more competitive and strength employee's loyalty.

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