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REWARD MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT IN QUICK SERVICE RESTAURANTS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

Gloria Ekemena OKONKWO[1] and Monday Isiramen OJO[2]
[1]Department of Hospitality and Tourism Studies, Dennis Osadebay University,
Asaba, Delta State, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
[2]Department of Management, University of Africa, Toru-Orua (UAT), Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

Employee commitment is important for the success of quick-service restaurants (QSRs). It affects how well they perform, how often workers leave, and how long the business can stay strong. This work evaluated the nexus between reward system and employee commitment at QSRs in Port Harcourt, Nigeria and was operationalized with recognition and career growth. The study was based on Social Exchange Theory as the theoretical underpin (SET). Data was collated from 65 staff members of 10 separate QSR establishments using surveys. The results revealed that when employees feel recognized, they are more committed to their work. In other words, when people feel valued, they stick around longer. The study also points out some challenges in rewarding employees, especially with limited resources and high expectations in Port Harcourt. To improve employee satisfaction and keep workers, QSRs should create clear recognition programs and career paths. By meeting employees' needs, these businesses can build a more dedicated workforce. This, in turn, can lead to better service and smoother operations

Keywords:

Reward management, employee commitment, recognition, career progression, quick-service restaurants, Port Harcourt, Social Exchange Theory.

Introduction

Employee commitment is viewed as bedrock in the performance of any business establishment. Meyer and Allen (1991) defined employee commitment as the psychological connection and devotion that employees demonstrate towards their organization, which enhances and influences their behavior attitude and performance. The scholars opined that committed workers do the extra outside their job requirements, contribute gainfully to the organizational operational culture, and stay with the organization for extended periods. Studies have indicated that increased employee productivity can be traced to employee commitment, lower turnover rates, and improved organizational performance (Meyer & Allen, 1991). This commitment is both beneficial to employees and the organization, as it births a more engaged and motivated workforce.

Reward management involves the strategies, policies, and practices that organizations employ to appreciate their employees for their contributions (Armstrong 2010). Effective reward management systems are designed to align employee performance with organizational goals, thereby enhancing motivation and commitment. According to Armstrong (2010), reward management can be categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Intrinsic rewards include non-monetary incentives such as recognition and personal growth, while extrinsic rewards encompass monetary benefits like salaries, bonuses, and benefits. A balanced approach to reward management can significantly enhance employee satisfaction and commitment.

The relationship between reward management and employee commitment has been the subject of extensive research. Kuvaas (2006), Ng & Burke, (2005), Brun and Dugas (2008) have all highlighted that reward management is a powerful motivator that can significantly impact employee morale and commitment. The concept of reward management and employee commitment has been under researched in the context of quick service restaurant in Port Harcourt. Hence this study intends to fill this gap by empirically investigating the relationship between the reward management operationalized by recognition career progression as the dimensions and employee commitment in QSRs in Port Harcourt.

Problem Statement

Many organizations such as quick service restaurants are faced with the problem of employee commitment. This challenge has been attributed to ineffective design and implementation of reward systems, which is considered not to be in tandem with employee expectations. This challenge is characterized with high employee turnover, low morale, and decreased productivity (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). Operational inefficiencies and low performance are the manifestation of these problems. Frequent staff resignations disrupt workflow and increase recruitment costs, while low employee morale impacts customer service quality and brand reputation (Chinelo et al., 2021). Additionally, employees often display a lack of motivation to exceed basic job expectations, further reducing organizational efficiency. Studies suggest that when employees perceive reward systems as unfair or inadequate, their sense of loyalty diminishes, resulting in reduced organizational commitment (Chinelo et al., 2021). This issue is compounded in an industry characterized by intense competition and a high reliance on consistent service delivery.

If these problems are not addressed, the implications could be detrimental to the long-term sustainability of QSRs in Port Harcourt. Organizations may experience financial losses due to

persistent recruitment and training expenses, coupled with diminished customer retention rates. This study departs from existing research by focusing on the specific dynamics of reward management and employee commitment within QSRs in Port Harcourt, a region characterized by unique socio-economic challenges and workforce expectations. While previous studies have explored general aspects of reward systems in the hospitality industry, limited attention has been given to the localized context of Port Harcourt. This study seeks to bridge this gap by identifying tailored reward strategies that align with the needs and aspirations of employees in this region, ultimately contributing to improved organizational outcomes.

Aim and Objective of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between reward management and employee commitment in quick service restaurants in Port Harcourt. The core objectives are to

    i.   Evaluate the relationship between recognition and employee commitment

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

Social exchange theory (SET), developed by Blau (1964), posits that human relationships are formed through reciprocal exchanges, where benefits provided by one party generate an obligation to reciprocate. The theory emphasizes the role of trust, mutual commitment, and perceived equity in sustaining these exchanges. In organizational settings, SET provides a framework to understand the employer-employee relationship as a dynamic exchange where tangible and intangible rewards are exchanged for employee effort, loyalty, and performance (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This theory is particularly significant in understanding workplace behavior, as it highlights how employees' perceptions of fairness and the quality of exchanges influence their attitudes and behaviors.

In the context of reward management, SET underpins the argument that equitable and strategic distribution of rewards fosters positive employee perceptions, which, in turn, strengthen organizational commitment. When employees perceive that their contributions are reciprocated through fair compensation, recognition, or career advancement, they are more likely to develop trust and engage in pro-social behaviors beneficial to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Conversely, perceived inequity or lack of reciprocity in reward systems can lead to dissatisfaction and reduced commitment. Reward management strategies aligned with SET thus emphasize not just the monetary aspects but also the relational and psychological elements of the employer-employee exchange.

Employee commitment, as supported by SET, is largely influenced by the quality of the social exchanges between employees and their employers. High-quality exchanges characterized by mutual trust, respect, and perceived fairness encourage employees to identify more strongly with their organization, fostering affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Furthermore, the perception of consistent and fair reward practices reinforces employees' belief in the organization's integrity, leading to sustained commitment and reduced turnover intentions. By providing a theoretical lens for understanding the reciprocal

dynamics of reward management, SET underscores the critical role of perceived fairness and trust in building a committed workforce.

Conceptual Review

Reward Management

Reward management is a strategic approach to designing and implementing systems that attract, motivate, and retain employees while aligning their performance with organizational goals. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) define reward management as the development of strategies and practices that ensure fair, equitable, and competitive compensation and recognition for employees. Within quick-service restaurants (QSRs), reward management plays a critical role due to the nature of the industry, which relies on consistent and efficient service delivery. Effective reward management systems in QSRs encompass both financial rewards, such as salaries, bonuses, and allowances, and non-financial incentives, including recognition, career advancement opportunities, and flexible work schedules.

The role of reward management in enhancing employee commitment cannot be overemphasized. Studies reveal that employees who perceive their reward systems as fair and aligned with their efforts exhibit higher levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Chinelo et al., 2021). This is particularly significant in Port Harcourt's QSR sector, where competition for skilled labor is high. Employees are more likely to remain loyal to organizations that recognize their contributions and provide opportunities for growth. However, challenges persist in ensuring that reward systems are tailored to meet employees' diverse needs, which can vary based on demographic and socio-economic factors.

Financial rewards remain a dominant aspect of reward management in QSRs, with many organizations focusing on competitive salaries and performance-based bonuses. However, research highlights the growing importance of non-financial rewards in influencing employee motivation (Dessler, 2020). For example, recognition programs, such as employee of the month awards or public appreciation, can significantly boost morale and productivity. In Port Harcourt, where cost constraints often limit financial rewards, non-financial incentives provide an alternative approach to fostering employee engagement. Nevertheless, balancing these two reward categories remains a critical challenge for QSR management.

The implementation of reward systems in Port Harcourt's QSRs is often influenced by organizational culture and external market conditions. Organizations with strong cultures of recognition and empowerment tend to experience better employee retention and commitment (Agu et al., 2022). However, many QSRs in the region struggle to establish such cultures due to high employee turnover and resource limitations. Furthermore, external factors such as inflation, rising living costs, and labor market competition exacerbate the difficulty of designing effective reward systems. This underscores the need for QSRs to adopt innovative and context-specific reward management practices that address both internal and external challenges. The dimensions of reward management used for this study includes; recognition and employee commitment.

Recognition: Recognition, as a dimension of reward management, refers to the acknowledgment of employees' contributions, efforts, and achievements within an organization. It is a non-financial aspect of reward systems that aims to motivate, retain, and enhance the engagement of employees. Recognition often involves verbal or written praise,

awards, or public acknowledgment for accomplishments, which can significantly influence employee morale and productivity (Armstrong, 2020). It is distinguished from monetary rewards in that its value lies in the psychological and emotional impact it has on the individual, creating a sense of belonging and value in the workplace (Nelson, 2018). In the context of reward management, recognition is strategically used to align employees' behaviors and outcomes with organizational objectives, fostering a culture of appreciation and high performance (Torrington et al., 2017).

The role of recognition in reward management has been extensively explored in organizational behavior literature. Scholars argue that recognition fulfills intrinsic motivational needs, enhancing employee satisfaction and commitment (Herzberg, 1968). When employees feel acknowledged, their engagement and loyalty to the organization improve, reducing turnover and fostering a positive organizational climate (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Moreover, recognition is particularly impactful in team-based settings where collaboration and collective efforts are valued. Studies by Cameron and Pierce (2002) indicate that organizations implementing structured recognition programs report higher levels of employee productivity and innovation. These findings underscore the necessity of integrating recognition into a comprehensive reward management strategy that addresses both intrinsic and extrinsic employee motivations.

Despite its benefits, the implementation of recognition as a reward management tool is not without challenges. The effectiveness of recognition depends on factors such as the organization's culture, leadership practices, and employees' individual preferences (Amabile & Kramer, 2011). Inconsistencies or a lack of sincerity in recognition can lead to skepticism and disengagement among employees. Furthermore, recognition must be timely, specific, and aligned with employees' values to have a meaningful impact. Armstrong (2020) emphasizes the importance of customizing recognition approaches to suit diverse workforce demographics, ensuring inclusivity and relevance. By addressing these nuances, organizations can leverage recognition to create a more engaged and motivated workforce, reinforcing its critical role in reward management.
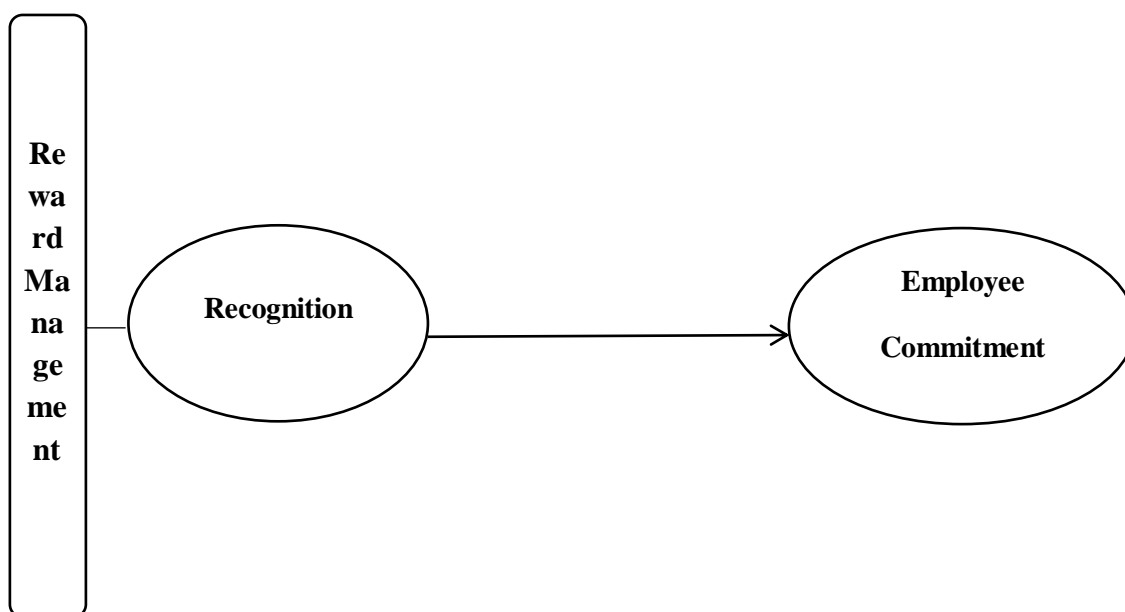
Employee Commitment

Employee commitment refers to the emotional attachment, identification, and involvement that an employee has with their organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). It is a multidimensional construct typically categorized into affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Affective commitment reflects an employee's emotional attachment to the organization, continuance commitment involves awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization, and normative commitment is a sense of obligation to remain (Beck & Wilson, 2000). In the quick-service restaurant (QSR) industry, where job roles are often demanding and turnover rates are high, fostering employee commitment is crucial to maintaining consistent service delivery and operational efficiency.

Studies have shown that employee commitment in the QSR sector is significantly influenced by work environment factors, including management practices, job security, and career development opportunities (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). In Port Harcourt, the unique socio-economic landscape, characterized by a high unemployment rate and limited access to formal career development programs, further amplifies the importance of fostering employee commitment. A well-structured commitment strategy ensures reduced turnover, better service

quality, and increased employee satisfaction, which are critical to sustaining competitiveness in a rapidly growing market.

Reward management plays a pivotal role in shaping employee commitment, particularly in the QSR industry. According to Chinelo et al. (2021), employees who perceive reward systems as fair and motivating tend to exhibit higher levels of organizational commitment. This correlation is especially significant in QSRs, where job roles are often repetitive and require high levels of teamwork. In Port Harcourt, however, inconsistencies in reward practices, including inequitable pay structures and limited recognition programs, have been identified as significant barriers to employee commitment. These challenges highlight the need for tailored reward strategies that address both financial and non-financial motivators.

RMEC Model showing the relationship

Empirical Review

Recognition and Employee Commitment

Brun and Dugas (2008) conducted a study on an analysis of employee recognition: perspectives on human resources practices in Canada. Using a qualitative methodology, including in-depth interviews with HR professionals and employees across various industries, they found that recognition is a critical driver of emotional and normative commitment. Employees who felt acknowledged for their contributions exhibited higher levels of loyalty and alignment with organizational values.

Nelson (2012) examined Impact of recognition on organizational commitment in the United States employed survey methods to gather data from 500 employees in mid-sized companies. The study used statistical tools to analyze the relationship between recognition and commitment dimensions, such as affective, continuance, and normative commitment.

Findings revealed a strong positive correlation between regular, meaningful recognition and affective commitment.

In a cross-cultural study, Meyer et al. (2019) explored the role of employee recognition in enhancing organizational commitment across Asia and Europe. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, they combined surveys and focus group discussions with over 800 participants from diverse industries. Their findings suggested that while recognition positively impacts employee commitment across cultures, the nature and type of recognition valued vary. From the foregoing, a null hypothesis was developed for the study:

H:0_1 there is no significant relationship between recognition and employee commitment of QSRs in Port Harcourt

Methodology

For the current study, quasi-experimental research design was adopted. The selection of a quasi-experimental approach was deemed suitable for this study due to the absence of a researcher monitoring the participants, who are primarily employees (Pawar, 2020). The study included a sample of 65 staff members of three (a total of 10 branches) operational QSRs located in Port Harcourt, which represented the whole population and therefore census was taken as the study sample for the research. The sample size of this study was determined mathematically using the Taro Yamane's formula. Primary data were collated through a well-structured closed ended questionnaire with four point Likert scale. The assessment of data dependability was conducted with the Cronbach Alpha test, with a pre-set threshold of 0.7. The research instrument had essential alterations and modifications due to this facilitation. The reliability of the instruments was assessed using the Cronbach Alpha test, with the support of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, 23.0) with a resultant value of 0.755. This study employed both descriptive and statistical inferential methodologies. Partial least Square Structural Equation Modelling was deployed to examine sole hypothesis of the study.
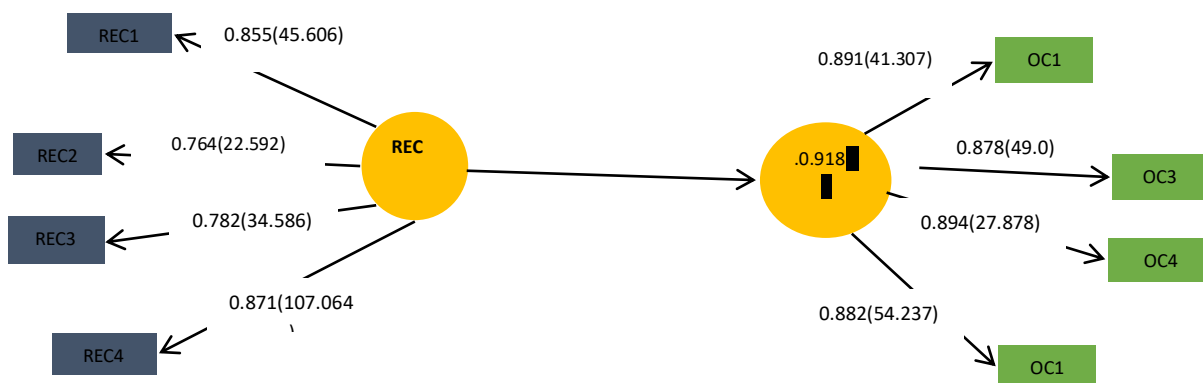
Results and Discussion of Findings

Figure 1: Structural Path Model showing relationship between dimensions of RM and OC.
Source: Smart PLS output, 2025

Table 1: Path Analysis Result of Relationship between dimension of recognition and organizational commitment

S/n	Hypothesized Path	Path Coefficient (β)	P-Value	Standard	T Value	Decisions	f-Squared	Effect size
1.	REC -> OC	0.463	0.004	0.057	2.878	Not Supported	3.491	Large

*P<0.05

The results presented in Table 1 provide compelling evidence for the positive associations between the various dimensions of reward management and organizational commitment. Recognition revealed a statistically significant positive relationship with organizational commitment (= 0.463, p < 0.004, t = 2.878), indicating that employees who feel recognized in the performance of their task tends to get attached/committed to the organization in other to achieve their organizational objectives.

The first structural path showed that there is a positive relationship between recognition and organizational commitment. Thus the null hypothesis was rejected. This result confirms the findings of Brun and Dugas (2008) who submitted that recognition is a critical driver of emotional and normative commitment. Employees who felt acknowledged for their contributions exhibited higher levels of loyalty and alignment with organizational values. Also, it confirms the submission of Meyer et al. (2019) which stated that recognition positively impacts employee commitment across cultures, the nature and type of recognition valued vary.

Conclusion and Implication for Practice

This study appreciates the important influence of reward management, especially recognition on employee commitment in quick-service restaurants (QSRs) in Rivers State. The result demonstrated that workers who feel acknowledged for their contributions displays greater organizational commitment. This reward management system informs a critical role in fostering employee morale, reducing turnover, and enhancing service quality. The results also validate the application of the Social Exchange Theory, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between fair reward systems and employee loyalty.

Implication for Practice

findings suggest that QSR management in Rivers State should prioritize tailored reward strategies that include both financial and non-financial elements. Recognition programmes should be structured to provide timely and sincere acknowledgment of employees' contributions, creating a sense of value and belonging. Additionally, clear pathways for career progression must be established to meet employees' intrinsic and extrinsic motivational needs. By doing so, organizations can foster a committed

workforce, improve operational efficiency, and sustain competitive advantage in the market. Hence the study recommended that organizations should **develop structured recognition programs. The implication being that they should e**stablish regular and specific recognition initiatives, such as "Employee of the Month" awards or public acknowledgment, to enhance employees' morale and emotional attachment to the organization.

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