Tangible and non-tangible rewards- a balancing act

Maslow's hierarchy of Needs [1] lists down the theory of personality that identifies five basic human needs category which are: physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Regarding evaluation and rewards, Maslow noted the following: "*Esteem needs include the need for things that reflect on personal worth, self-respect and social recognition. Individuals need to attain a good reputation in a group or strive to increase their status in the eyes of others are driven by these needs. The organization can help to satisfy employees' esteem needs by showing workers that their work is appreciated and recognized.*" He further iterates that esteem needs are important for personal growth and fulfilment.

This resonates well in the life of a researcher. The life of a researcher is indeed a juggling act. It involves one of experimentation, applying for grants, preparing manuscripts, teaching, student supervision and many others. Often, we find many researchers' asking this question, "What is in it for me?" As a postdoctoral researcher myself, I have been often a victim of lack of reward when it comes to research. Institution are mainstream when it comes to merit systems, often giving credit to achievements that benefit the university rather than the individual. These includes (depending on the institution) number of journals published as the main author, rating/impact factor of journals, number and value of grants obtained and others. Sadly, more and more academics are tailoring their research outcomes and scholarly publications to fit the universities evaluation criteria. No attention is paid for writing a popular article, doing a radio interview, speaking at a "science café" or tweeting about one's research findings. Is not the ultimatum of science; dissemination? For research to make an impact, it must be shared with the public. One such method to do so is to encourage open access publications. Institutions should provide funds based on a merit system for researchers to publish in open access journals. In addition to that, institutions can adopt a varied metric, such as rewarding publications (other than journals) such as newspaper articles and other non-traditional media coverage as media visibility can boost research within the scientific community. Awards that are based on excelling in doing both research and publicly sharing the study to the public should be made more apparent. Trainings like these can be bolstered by having annual prizes that reward scientists who combine and excel both in research and communicating their research after publications.

Recognitions (cash or non-cash) serves as a good measure of reward. While cash-based recognitions are straight forward, non-cash recognitions are a cheaper alternative to institution to help celebrate a researchers' merits. These can include, verbal or written recognition (institution website/newsletter), celebratory meals, shopping vouchers and many others. Research should be rewarded and given its due credit. By doing so it will encourage younger researchers to be motivated and follow through exemplary leads.

Training and developmental programmes are also an important aspect of providing reward to researchers' and I believe that every organizations should find it decisively important to invest in people. Rewards in forms of training should also be incorporated in merit systems for researchers. Training programmes such as these civilize the researcher's self-efficacy, which inevitably pushes their performance levels. It also bridges the gap between employees work practices and their work environment. Institutions that invest in training programs also make employees feel indebted to their organizations. When a researcher gets the vibe that the organization is willing to spend money on their career development, it gives them the confidence in being indispensable, in turn leading to the employee maximizing output at work.

"No one should approach the temple of science with the soul of a money changer." - Thomas Browne

From the early 48 B.C, money changers have been historically labelled to be the cause of increased taxes and even causing corruption in the Roman empire. This quote by Thomas Browne identifies the linking of the concept of science to that of a money changer. Interestingly, he urges us to not have a sense of greed and loath when it comes to science. Being a researcher myself, at times I do feel demotivated and at the verge of giving up. We all need a little motivation at times-just to let us know that the organization/university appreciates us and the work we do. However, the use of payment as an 'incentive' to participate is controversial.

The common currency of rewards for a job is salary. Salaries are the most significant and motivating benefit that is received (in return) for executing a service. Without a doubt, salaries are the most important factor that motivates individuals to go out and seek work. While salaries refer to a tangible reward system, intangible rewards are those of learning, development and work experience. Examples of these include opportunity to develop, recognition from the employer and colleagues and personal achievement. The aim of a total reward system is to maximize the positive impact that a wide range of rewards can have on motivation, job engagement and organizational commitments. Rewards for research and researchers can be both, tangible and non-tangible. Institutions just need to find the appropriate system that works best for the employer and employee. It is all in the balance!

References:

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