

## RESEARCH ON INCENTIVE STRATEGIES FOR SALESPERSONS OF H COMPANY BASED ON PORTER-LAWLER'S THEORY

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the incentive strategies of foreign trade salespersons and attempt to find out a suitable incentive mechanism. Taking H Company as the research object, 27 questionnaires were distributed by the questionnaire survey method, and a total of 26 questionnaires were returned with a recovery rate of 99%, and a questionnaire efficiency of 99%, supplemented by personal interviews using Porter-Lawler's comprehensive incentive theory as the analysis framework from the perspective of pay equity between job effort and job performance, job performance and compensation, compensation and job satisfaction. The study found that the company has problems, including insufficient incentive conditions, single incentive method and poor effect, which in turn lead to low work motivation of salespersons and affect enterprise performance. Finally, the corresponding improvement measures are put forward, hoping to provide some research ideas for optimizing and perfecting the incentive mechanisms of foreign trade salespersons in the future.

**Keywords:** Porter-Lawler theory; Motivation theory; Salespersons Introduction

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, China's foreign trade has grown rapidly, and the total import and export volume of foreign trade has risen from 35.50 billion yuan in 1978 to 391009 billion yuan in 2021 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021), and the total foreign trade volume has grown rapidly. The favorable export environment and policies have generated a large number of small and medium-sized foreign trade enterprises. In the first quarter of 2020, the total number of foreign trade enterprises was about 4.996 million, and there were 142,627 new foreign trade enterprises, of which small and medium-sized foreign trade enterprises accounted for more than 70% (iiMedia Research, 2020). Small and medium-sized foreign trade enterprises have become an indispensable part of a modern market economy (Liu, 2017; Bajaj, & Selvakumar, 2017). However, small and medium-sized foreign trade enterprises are struggling. Every year, a large number of foreign trade enterprises disappear (Keller, Li, & Shiue, 2011; Teng, 2012), at the same time there are many new foreign trade enterprises emerging, indicating that the reason for the failure of enterprises is still their own lack of competitiveness. The enterprises themselves have flaws, once the external environment deteriorates, it is difficult for them to survive (Shafi, Liu, & Ren, 2020). For small and medium-sized foreign trade enterprises, the important factor affecting the competitiveness of enterprises is human resources, specifically foreign trade salespersons. Salespersons need to have high professional knowledge, communication skills, psychological endurance and ability to resist pressure, because salespersons often have to deal with customers, suppliers, manufacturers, and the value created by excellent salespersons and ordinary ones can differ by dozens or hundreds of times (Weinberg, 2010; Lyngdoh, Chefor, Hochstein, Britton, & Amyx, 2021). An excellent salesperson can even determine the fate of the company. Each enterprise has its own set of incentives to improve salespersons' work motivation and job satisfaction (Onyemah, Rouzies, & Iacobucci, 2018; Deng, 2020), but the effect is not satisfactory. How to effectively motivate employees and make them have a strong sense of

belonging has always been a problem that plagues enterprises.

Since its establishment in 2020, H Company has strictly performed inspection for each product and searched for suitable suppliers through multiple channels. So far, it has 3 long-term partners, and the product quality has been guaranteed. At the same time, the company's various management systems are constantly being optimized and slowly getting on the right track. However, due to the influence of internal and external factors, recently the company's salespersons often complained about the difficulty of issuing orders, low work motivation, negligence, and other phenomena. How to establish a more suitable incentive mechanism for H company, improve the salespersons' work enthusiasm has become a problem that the company needs to solve urgently.

To solve the problem of insufficient motivation for the current salespersons of H Company, this paper uses questionnaire surveys and interviews to understand the current situation of salespersons' incentives, analyzes and summarizes the existing problems in salespersons using Porter-Lawler's incentive theory. Finally, it puts forward some improvement suggestions in combination with the actual situation. It is hoped to play a role in improving the company's incentive mechanism and enhancing the motivation of the company's salespersons.

The paper is structured as follows. Besides the introduction in the first section, Section 2 proposes the literature review. Section 3 describes the research process and methodology. Section 4 presents the research results of the present study. Section 5 discusses the problems with the incentive system. Section 6 suggests the strategies to improve the salespersons' motivation. Finally, Section 7 concludes the research paper and presents the limitations and recommendations for future studies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Lee (1997) found a phenomenon through long-term research, when the organization gives positive measures to a certain correct behavior to encourage its development, people develop in the right direction, the organization punishes a certain wrong behavior, and curbs such behavior. The occurrence of it can prevent people from continuing to carry out wrong behavior, thereby improving the negative state, which is conducive to the realization of organizational goals. Reasonable goals must be set for the salespersons. Spiritual motivation plays an important role in the employees' motivation and creativity, so he proposed that enterprises should pay attention to spiritual motivation and create a comfortable and positive cultural atmosphere for employees to stimulate their imagination and creativity and improve work efficiency (Kovic, 2009).

Zingheim and Schuster (2010) categorized the motivation factors of enterprise employees into four aspects, including enterprise development prospects, employees' growth opportunities, the working conditions and environment, and a rich and reasonable compensation system. Zhang (2008) proposed the following incentive measures through the research and analysis of the problems of enterprise talent incentive methods. First, to give salespersons enough confidence to build confidence in the enterprise and the industry. Second, establish a flexible compensation system. Third, pay attention to spiritual encouragement and give the right guidance when the salespersons encounter difficulties to encourage them to move in the right direction. Fourth, improve the internal management mechanism of the enterprise.

Long-term incentives for employees are more effective than short-term incentives (Banker, 2010). The employees of enterprises with long-term incentives have a stronger sense of

belonging and higher work ethic. Therefore, in order to improve the motivation and employees' sense of belonging, enterprises should adopt long-term incentive methods. However, many companies now pay too much attention to the short-term benefits brought by employees, while neglecting long-term investment in employees, not fully understanding the true value that core employees can bring, and not paying enough attention to employees' development. As a result, it is impossible to truly tap more potential of employees, which is conducive to the long-term development of enterprises (Cai, 2015; Li, 2019). The key to improve an enterprise's equity incentive system is to understand the needs of employees and know the right way to attract, retain and motivate employees (Cao, 2014).

This study seeks to investigate the various problems existing in the incentives of enterprise salespersons, such as chaotic management system, unreasonable salary mechanism, lack of fairness, imperfect training system and so on. Enterprises should improve their internal management mechanism based on their own operating conditions and personnel characteristics, build a scientific compensation system, provide equity incentives for core talents, and strengthen the construction of spiritual incentives and training and development incentive mechanisms (Zhang, 2016). Enterprises should attach importance to the personal development of employees, and actively motivate them in various aspects, including salary and benefits, employees training, performance appraisal and personal development, so as to improve employees' motivation, stimulate employees' potential to the greatest extent, and realize the long-term goals of healthy development of enterprises (Yang, 2017). Incentives which can adapt to changes are scientific incentives. Different individuals have different personality characteristics and different ideas. Managers should not be the same when motivating employees, but should know how to adapt to changes, make incentive methods more flexible, and do a good job in motivating employees (Cheng, 2018).

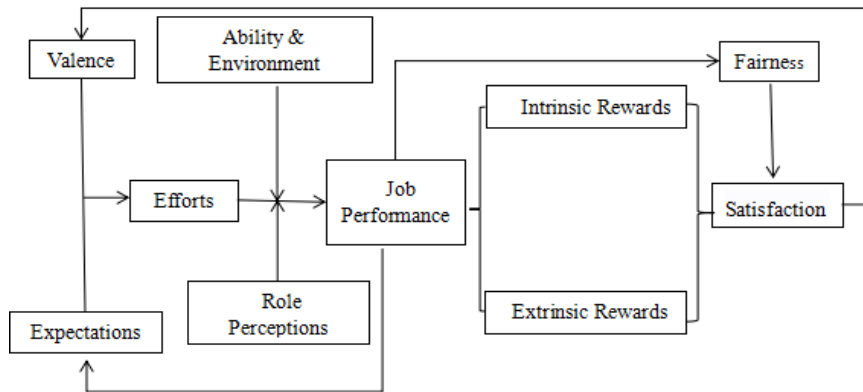
To sum up, the theory of employees' motivation is constantly being improved, and many incentives for employees' motivation have been proposed, such as improving the salary system, setting achievable goals, attaching importance to employees' spiritual motivation, focusing on employees' personal development, and building an excellent corporate culture (Viorel, Aurel, Virgil, & Stefania, 2009). Because the internal and external environments and operating conditions faced by each enterprise are different, the employees of each enterprise have their own characteristics (Supyuenyong, Islam, & Kulkarni, 2009), and those incentives lack relevance; therefore, it is necessary to use the Porter-Lawler's comprehensive motivation theory, combined with the actual situation of H Company to carry out investigation and research to put forward practical solutions.

### **Porter-Lawler's Comprehensive Motivation Theory**

Porter-Lawler (1968) proposed a comprehensive model of motivation as exhibited in **Figure 1**. It is believed that the effective realization of incentives is not achieved by relying only on a certain process but should be investigated comprehensively in three stages: effort and performance, performance and rewards, and rewards and satisfaction. To form a virtuous circle of "effort-performance, performance-rewards, rewards-satisfaction", many factors need to be dealt with (Zhu, 2014). From the model's effort to job performance, a person's work performance is not only affected by personal effort, but also by personal ability, role perception, work environment and other factors. This shows that under the same level of effort, different abilities and qualities, different perceptions of one's role, different working environments, and different safeguards will lead to different work outcomes (Murphy, & Cleveland, 1995; Greenhaus, & Powell, 2006). In the stage from job performance to rewards,

it is divided into extrinsic rewards, including salary, promotion, status, etc., which satisfy lower-level needs, while intrinsic rewards are non-quantitative and satisfy higher-level needs, including the affirmation of the meaning and ability of self-existence and the feeling of making contributions to society.

**Figure 1. Porter-Lawler's Comprehensive Motivational Model**



When the rewards reach the satisfaction stage, they believe that neither the internal nor the external rewards may not be satisfactory and must be adjusted through fair remuneration for understanding when the rewards reach the satisfaction stage. If s/he thinks s/he is being paid, s/he will feel satisfied and will be motivated to work hard, and if s/he thinks s/he is being paid less than s/he is paid for understanding, then s/he'll be dissatisfied, affecting his/her motivation to work.

### Research Subjects

This study selects 27 front-line salespersons of H Company where one of the authors works as the research samples, 10 for the European and American markets, 12 for the Southeast Asian market, and 5 for the African market.

#### Current Status of the Company's Incentives

H Company is located in Zengcheng District, Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province. The company has three cooperative factories, each employing up to 500 employees with a strong production capacity. The main products include garments, cosmetics, skincare products, etc. The products are mainly sold in major European and American markets and are currently actively developing the Southeast Asian market. The company has been established for less than 2 years, and currently employs more than 100 employees. During this period, it has experienced various problems that all new companies will face. As the company's entire management system is not perfect, the company's business personnel have a large flow recently, and their work motivation is low. The salespersons are important members for creating profits. The salesperson's turnover is too large, and the work motivation is low, which will cause inestimable losses to the company. Therefore, solving the problem of the salesperson's work motivation cannot be ignored. The current incentives are mainly divided into material and spiritual incentives (Fang, Qi, Liu, & Wang, 2014; Wang, Cai, & Sun, 2020).

Material incentives include direct compensation and indirect compensation. Direct compensation includes wages, bonuses and allowances (Harrison, Virick, & William, 1996; Osibanjo, Adeniji, Falola, & Heirsmac, 2014; Naidu, & Satyanarayana, 2018). In terms of

salary, H Company's salespersons payroll is base salary plus commission. The base salary is paid monthly, and the commission is accrued according to the sales volume, the accrual point is 4%. It is an accounting unit and is issued monthly. In terms of bonuses, the employees with the highest performance in the month can get a bonus of 1000 yuan, those who reach the sales target will also receive a New Year's Day bonus of 500. At the end of the year, there will be a year-end bonus, which will be distributed according to different positions, the profits of the year and the profits created by each salesperson. In terms of allowances, foreign trade business will have communication subsidies, travel subsidies, and transportation subsidies. Indirect compensation only includes five social insurances (e.g., endowment insurance, medical insurance, unemployment insurance, employment injury insurance and maternity insurance) (Riccardi, 2016; Wu, & Xiao, 2018; Hu, & Yao, 2019; Xuefeng, 2021) and lunch subsidies (Feng, Glinskaya, Chen, Gong, Qiu, Xu, & Yip, 2020; Feng, Wang, & Guo, 2021) Spiritual motivation includes promotion and training (Reave, 2005; Bhatnagar, Sharma, & Ramachandran, 2020). In the context of promotion, the company adopts the system of competition for positions as long as one has the ability, s/he can apply for it. In terms of training, the company does not have a systematic training program. After joining the company, the new employees learn about the job content through videos before work begins. When encountering problems at work, they seek solutions by asking old colleagues, because old colleagues also have their own jobs. There is no way to solve the problems of the new employees in time, resulting in many problems in the work of the new employees, which greatly damages their confidence. Although the company holds a regular meeting once a week, it is mainly about to summarize the work.

## QUESTIONNAIRE METHOD

**The questionnaire design** of this study is based on the Minnesota Job Satisfaction Scale, combined with Wang (2021), Qi (2004) and other job satisfaction questionnaires. The questionnaire design consists of three parts. The first part includes 4 items of the salespersons' gender, age, education, and working hours. The second part is the job satisfaction survey, including 27 items covering work, salary level, benefits, promotion opportunities and fairness, training situation, fairness of rewards and punishments, leadership quality and ability, organizational management, and family support. The third part concerns the source of the current salespersons' distress.

**Pilot testing:** Before starting the formal questionnaire survey, 10 salespersons were selected randomly as the pre-samples for pre-testing. Thus, 10 questionnaires were returned, 10 of which were valid with a usability rate of 100%. The reliability assessment of the pre-test questionnaires was found to be good with a standardized Cronbach alpha coefficient value of 0.968. The questionnaire was modified in accordance with feedback received from the results of the pilot test before being used as the official questionnaire and sole research instrument for studying incentive strategies for salespersons in this paper.

**Questionnaire distribution:** A total of 27 copies was randomly released through the WeChat platform on April 5, 2022, and 27 copies were recovered on April 15, 2022. One was judged as invalid, and 26 were valid questionnaires obtained with a usability rate of 99%.

## RESULTS

### Basic Analysis of Survey Respondents

The data in this study show that 73.1% are women, and more than 88% of employees are under the age of 25, indicating that they are a young group. This age group is full of vigor, active thinking and flamboyant personality, but it is precisely because the group is relatively young, that management difficulties arise, and the employees do not have a strong sense of belonging to the company.

According to the data, the educational level is higher than that of general occupations, with undergraduates accounting for 64.5%, college students accounting for only 19.2%, and high school and below representing 15.4%. It shows that this group has a high level of knowledge, strong learning ability, and relatively high requirements for themselves. They not only pay attention to material incentives, but also have a high pursuit of spiritual incentives.

According to the data of working years, the salespersons who have worked for more than 1-year accounts for more than 1 year. Through the work experience data, the salespersons who have worked for more than 1-year accounts for 19.2%, showing that the company's employees have worked for less than one year, and the new employees need a certain process to integrate into the company. If the company does not give the new employees enough protection and incentive, it may cause the dissatisfaction of the new employees. The basic information of the participants is shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1. Basic Information of Questionnaire Respondents**

Projects	Category	Number of respondents	Proportion (%)
Gender	Male	7	26.9
	Female	19	73.1
Age	25 years old & below	23	88.5
	26-35 years old	3	11.5
Academic qualifications	High School & below	4	15.4
	College	5	19.2
	Undergraduate	17	65.4
Years of work	0-1 year	21	80.8
	1-3 years	3	11.5
	3-5 years	2	7.7
Total		26	100.0

### Analysis of Satisfaction with Incentive System

As shown in **Table 2**, the salespersons are satisfied with their Work Status (WS), Work Autonomy (WA), Challenge (CW), the Recognition of Work results (RW), the Match between Personal and Work (MPW), and the sense of Work Accomplishment (WAC) and the dissatisfaction rate is less than 20%, less than 50% are satisfied with the work environment and Working Conditions (WC), more than 30% are satisfied with the average, and 3.85% are very dissatisfied with the current Working Environment and Conditions (WEC). This indicates that the company needs to improve the working environment and conditions to meet the needs of employees. 11.54% of employees are very dissatisfied with the work intensity, 19.23% are dissatisfied, and less than 50% are satisfied and very satisfied, which means that there are problems with the arrangement of working hours and tasks for salespersons, resulting in employees working under pressure.

**Table 2. Analysis of Job Satisfaction**

Survey Items	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied	
EC	3.85%	19.23%	30.77%	26.92%	19.23%	
WEC	11.54%	19.23%	23.08%	30.77%	15.38%	
WA	0.00%	19.23%	30.77%	30.77%	19.23%	
Work	CW	0.00%	19.23%	38.46%	23.08%	19.23%
	RW	0.00%	19.23%	34.62%	34.62%	11.54%
	MPW	0.00%	26.92%	23.08%	34.62%	15.38%
	WS	0.00%	7.69%	42.31%	30.77%	19.23%
	WAC	3.85%	26.92%	15.38%	42.31%	11.54%

The data in **Table 3** show that the salespersons are relatively dissatisfied with their own wages, the Base Salary Level (BSL) and Performance Linked to the Salary (PLS), the Income and Effort (IE), the Income Compared with Others (ICO), the satisfaction of Income Fairness (IF) and Welfare (Wf) treatment are not more than 45%, which shows that there are certain problems in the compensation system. In addition, more than 34% of employees are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their Income and Workload (RW3), which indicates that the workload of employees may exceed the workload that employees think is reasonable, so it leads to employees' job dissatisfaction.

**Table 3. Analysis of Income Satisfaction**

Survey Items	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfaction	Neutral	Satisfaction	Very satisfied	
BSL	11.54%	23.08%	23.08%	30.77%	11.54%	
PLS	11.54%	23.08%	23.08%	30.77%	11.54%	
IW	7.69%	26.92%	26.92%	26.92%	11.54%	
Wages	IE	3.85%	15.3%	38.46%	30.77%	11.54%
	ICO	3.85%	30.77%	26.92%	26.92%	11.54%
	IF	7.69%	23.08%	26.92%	30.77%	11.54%
	Wf	3.85	19.23%	30.77%	34.62%	11.54%

From the data in **Table 4**, it can be seen that the overall satisfaction of Employees with the Company's Organizational Management (ECOM) is average and the satisfaction of employees in Spiritual Motivation (SM) is higher than other aspects. The dissatisfaction with the Clarity of Rewards and Punishments (CRP) and the Personnel Management System (PMS) exceeds 26% and those who feel neutral account for 30.77%. So, H Company is not doing enough in terms of clarity and implementation of rewards and punishment and personnel management.

**Table 4. Analysis of Satisfaction with Organizational Management**

Survey Items	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied	
SM	3.85%	15.38%	38.46%	34.62%	7.69%	
Organizational Management	CRP	7.69%	19.23%	30.77%	30.77%	11.54%
	ECOM	3.85%	19.23%	34.62%	30.77%	11.54%
PMS	7.69%	19.23%	30.77%	30.77%	11.54%	

The data in **Table 5** shows that 34.62% of the salespersons are satisfied with the company's Promotion Space (PS), because the company is in the initial stage of development and the personnel structure has not yet been fixed. And there are more Promotion Fairness and Opportunities (PFO) and each employee can develop through his/her own efforts. In addition, the satisfaction with training is not high. 7.69% of employees are very dissatisfied with the current Training System (TS) and 34.62% feel that the company's training is of limited help. In fact, the company does not have a more complete training system. The training for new employees is only to understand the basic situation of the company. When encountering problems at work, they always ask old colleagues for advice. However, old colleagues have their own jobs and do not have so much energy to teach new employees. The situation is more difficult, the lower the work efficiency, the poorer the work motivation.

**Table 5. Satisfaction Analysis of Promotion and Development**

Survey Items		Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfaction	Neutral	Satisfaction	Very satisfied
Promotion Development	PS	3.85%	15.38%	38.46%	34.62%	7.69%
	PFO	3.85%	19.23%	34.62%	30.77%	11.54%
	TS	7.69%	11.54%	34.62%	30.77%	15.38%

The data in **Table 6** shows that the satisfaction rate of H Company's salespersons on the Trust and Support (T&S) of the leadership is more than 38%. So, the employees are quite satisfied with the trust of the leadership, but only 26.92% are satisfied with the Ability and Quality (A&Q) of the leadership, and the proportion of the leadership's satisfaction with the Opinions and Suggestions (O&S) is only 23.08%. The leadership should conduct self-examination in a timely manner, improve themselves, learn more about the working conditions of employees and provide appropriate guidance to employees.

**Table 6. Satisfaction Analysis in Terms of Leadership**

Survey Items		Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Leadership	A&Q	3.85%	19.23%	38.46%	26.92%	11.54%
	Q&S	7.69%	15.38%	42.31%	23.08%	11.54%
	T&S	3.85%	15.38%	30.77%	38.46%	11.54%

The data in **Table 7** shows that the satisfaction with the Help of Work to the Family (HWF) is not high, with less than 24% feeling satisfied, and more than 34% feeling average, and the employees' family members are even less satisfied with their attitude towards work (Family's Attitude towards Work; FAW), and they are not satisfied. The satisfaction rate accounts for more than 34%, and the satisfaction rate accounts for less than 20%. This shows that most of the work of salespersons has not been supported and understood by the employees' families. Due to the nature of the salespersons' work, they often return home and continue to reply to customers. The problem is that the salespersons work hard to give their family a better life. If they do not get the understanding and support of their family, this will definitely affect the employees' motivation.

**Table 7. Analysis of Family Satisfaction**

Survey Items		Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Family Support	HWF	7.69%	15.38%	34.62%	23.08%	19.23%
	FAW	19.23%	34.62%	30.77%	19.23%	15.38%

**Employees Need Survey Analysis**

According to the research data as exhibited in Figure 3, 81% of the salespersons think that the heavy workload and the work pressure (C) are the sources of distress, followed by 77% of

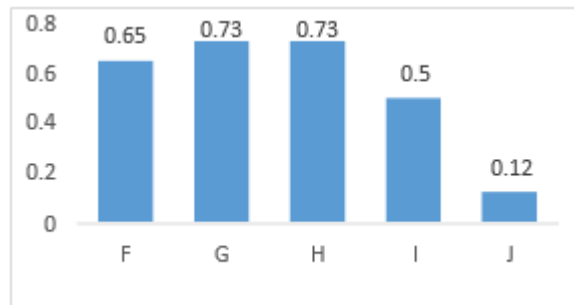


the salespersons who feel that the income and heavy burden of life were the sources of their distress (A). 50% of the salespersons feel that poor working environment and conditions were the sources of their distress (B) and 42% found that promotion is difficult (D) and others represent 15% (E).



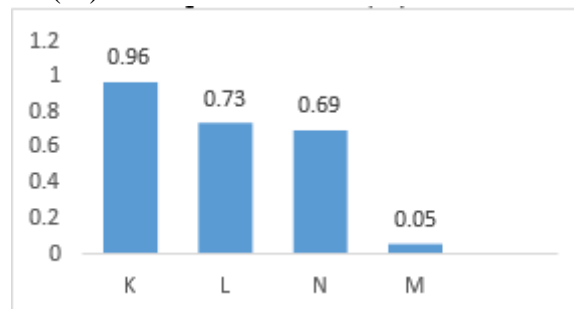
**Figure 3. Comparison of the Average Value of Sources of Distress for Salespersons**

Secondly, according to the survey results of measures to motivate employees as shown in Figure 4, 73% believe that establishing a systematic (G) and effective training system and strengthening the support and concern for leaders to employees (H) can motivate employees. 65% of the salespersons believe that the evaluation system is closely related to promotion (F) because employees feel that the company can motivate employees, followed by 50% of salespersons who think that the coordination of family and work (I) is also a way to motivate employees. Others represent 12% (J).



**Figure 4. Comparison of the Average Value of Company's Incentive Measures**

The results of the research on improving employees' motivation as shown in Figure 5, 96% of employees feel that raising the base salary (K) is an effective way to improve employees' motivation, followed by 73% of salespersons who choose to establish a reasonable fault tolerance mechanism (L) and then 69% of employees approve the promotion of benefits (N). And others represent 0.5% (M).



**Figure 5. Comparison of the Average Value of Employees' Perceived Feasible Incentives**

### **Problems with Incentive System**

Based on the results of questionnaires and interviews and combined with the Porter-Lawler's comprehensive incentive model, the problem of personnel incentives can be classified into the following aspects.

#### **The Relationship between Effort and Performance**

The company does not provide a favorable working environment and conditions for employees. It can be seen from the questionnaire survey that employees are not satisfied with the company's working environment and conditions, and 3.85% of them are very dissatisfied with the current working environment and conditions. The working environment is a bit worse than other companies because it is located on the ground floor, close to the road and the sound insulation effect is poor.

The training system is not systematic and perfect. It can be seen from the basic situation of the company and the questionnaire survey that the company does not have a complete training system. Many employees say that the effect of their training is not good, and it does not greatly help their work.

#### **The Relationship between Performance and Compensation**

**The company's goals for salespersons are too high.** The company sets a huge goal for each salesperson every month. This goal is almost impossible to achieve. If the salesperson does not complete this goal that month, even if s/he has made a lot of efforts, there is no way to get the performance bonus, which affects the work motivation of the salesperson.

**The assessment method is too simplistic.** The company will ask the salesperson to count the total number of tasks completed on a daily basis and once a month the supervisor will evaluate the salesperson according to the number of tasks completed in an average month. Some data may be made by employees in order to cope with the inspection of their superiors. If perfunctory employees get the same assessment scores as those who conscientiously complete their work tasks, it will lead to great psychological imbalance among employees, thus affecting the quality of work.

**No attention is given to the application of test results.** In the survey of salespersons who think the company can motivate employees, 65% of them feel that the appraisal system should be closely linked with the promotion system, which shows that the appraisal system of H Company is not well integrated with the promotion system.

#### **The Relationship between Rewards and Satisfaction**

Porter and Lawler believe that intrinsic rewards and extrinsic rewards cannot determine satisfaction, and the rewards must be regulated by "just rewards as understood" when the rewards reach the satisfaction stage, that is, satisfaction occurs only when the individuals feel that their rewards are reasonable to generate satisfaction. In this regard, H Company has the following problems:

The level of treatment did not meet the expectations of the employees. Most of the salespersons in H Company have high educational level. The company is based in Guangzhou, with high living standards and high salary expectations. According to the survey on the sources of employees' stress, the salary level of salespersons is lower than the local wage level of the industry. When employees compare their own income with others, they feel unbalanced, and salespersons have heavy workload and high work intensity, which seriously affects the employees' satisfaction.

The lack of clarity and implementation of rewards and punishment mechanisms affects the sense of fairness. The survey showed that the dissatisfaction with the clarity of rewards and

punishments and the personnel management system exceeded 26%, and feel Neutral accounts for 30.77%, indicating that they are generally not satisfied. The research data show that the rewards and punishment system of H Company is relatively good, but in the process of implementation, there are many aspects of punishment, and the methods of punishment are relatively simple. So, the rewards and punishment mechanism of the company do not play a positive motivational role.

### **Strategies to Improve the Salespersons' Motivation Enhance the Correlation between Effort and Performance**

Optimize the working environment. The working environment will affect the enthusiasm and motivation of employees (Honore, 2009; Lantara, 2019; Parashakti, Fahlevi, Ekhsan, & Hadinata, 2020). H Company is based on the ground floor, close to the highway traffic noise, which affects the work of employees. The company should take various factors into consideration, strive to provide employees with a more comfortable working environment and improve their work enthusiasm.

Improve the training mechanism and the working ability of salespersons. The following points need to be noted:

- (1) When preparing to carry out training work, it is necessary to first understand the training needs of trainers, so that the organization of training is targeted and practical.
- (2) Conduct a special training for new employees and attach importance to the responsibilities for the pre-job training and skills development.
- (3) For older employees, provide opportunities for further training to enhance the ability of older employees.
- (4) After each training, the salespersons need to provide the training insights to understand the employees' feelings about the training, and the personnel who organize the training should check the effect of the training and report the training situation in a timely manner.

**Clear job responsibilities.** H Company should have a clear definition of each job position and divide the job responsibilities and tasks well. If a certain salesperson must hold a certain position concurrently, the workload of the salesperson should be adjusted so as not to cause the salesperson to be in a state of overload.

**Pay attention to the care of employees' family members.** The company can visit employees' families from time to time to understand the employees' family situation, organize employees' relative activities, and set up year-end employees relative awards, etc., so that employees and their families can feel the company values and care for them in order to obtain the support of employees' families (Lee, 1995; Thomas, Sampson, & Zhao, 2003), thereby motivating them to work hard.

**Improve leadership skills.** First of all, leaders need to set a good example, they should be able to motivate themselves, send positive signals to employees, and have high working ability, leadership and strong appeal (Burgess, 2005; Ashkanasy, & Daus, 2002). Secondly, leaders should understand the employees' abilities, characters, and needs; then formulate strategic goals, which should be phased, specific and feasible. Finally, leaders have strong communication skills and problem-solving skills, understand employees' real thoughts and needs, and help employees solve problems in a targeted manner.

### **Improve the Performance Appraisal System**

First and foremost, clarify the purpose of the assessment:

- (1) The results of the performance appraisal can be used as a standard to measure employees' work attitude, work ability and work performance.
- (2) The results of the assessment can be used as a criterion for judging whether to adjust the employees' salary and career promotion.
- (3) The assessment results can be used to measure the effectiveness of employees training and rediscover training needs and directions. Secondly, in the selection of the assessment method, a 360-degree all-round assessment method should be adopted for employees in order to have an-in depth understanding of the daily work situation of the appraised subjects as well as the publicity and application of the assessment results.

The results of the performance appraisal must first be publicized, so that stakeholders can supervise to ensure the fairness and transparency of assessment results. Secondly, the appraisal results should be discussed with the appraisers, praise their achievements, and let the appraisers discover themselves. Finally, we will discuss the solution to the problem, so that the person being assessed can feel valued by the organization. The results of the assessment should be closely linked with the rewards, punishment, and promotion system: employees who are rated as excellent will naturally be rewarded, and those who fail the assessment will be punished, identify the problem and figure out how to fix it.

### **Reasonable Increase in Compensation**

Reasonably increase in the base salary. According to the survey, the salary level of the salespersons of H Company is lower than the local average level. This will lead to the employees' dissatisfaction when they compare with others. Therefore, managers can appropriately adjust the base salary of employees according to the changes in the average salary level of the market and the company's profitability. Each salary adjustment should be explained in detail. If employees are not satisfied with their salary, give them the opportunity to plead, let them get the salary they think is reasonable, and improve their satisfaction.

Clarify the reward and punishment system, standardize its implementation, and increase positive rewards. Every reward and punishment of the company should have rules to follow, and the rewards and punishment system should be standardized and programmed to reduce employees' dissatisfaction. According to the survey results, H Company has few incentives, so it should increase some incentives, such as full attendance award, outstanding employee award, outstanding contribution award to improve employees' work motivation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on Porter-Lawler (1968)'s comprehensive motivation theory, this paper investigates the problem of salespersons' motivation in H Company. According to the questionnaire survey, the salespersons of H Company were not satisfied with the company as a whole. The main dissatisfaction aspects are the working environment and conditions, base salary, workload, work pressure, training system, leadership ability and quality, and family support, etc.

We also conducted interviews with 6 salespersons to deeply analyze the dissatisfaction factors. On this basis, combined with the Porter-Lawler's comprehensive incentive theory to find out where the problem lies, and put forward some suggestions on the incentive

mechanism of H company:

- (1) Improve the existing environment and conditions and improve the linkage between effort and performance.
- (2) Improve the performance appraisal system and provide the basis for compensation management.
- (3) Reasonably increase compensation to enhance satisfaction.

No piece of study is perfect, and every study has its flaws and limitations. Four limitations have been found in this study. Firstly, the greatest challenge encountered when conducting this study was the time and cost constraints which did not enable the researchers to collect a large amount of data in a limited period. For that purpose, future research should spend more time to gather meaningful data to help better understand the Porter-Lawler's Comprehensive Theory of Motivation and to explain the relationship between job attitudes and job performance. Secondly, another limitation to this study is the methodological approach or technique. This research uses basically interviews to collect and analyze data. Future studies should try different methodologies such as observation methods, thematic analysis, document analysis, experimental method, longitudinal study, and so on to compare the findings. Thirdly, the present research data concern only H Company based in Zengcheng District, Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province. Therefore, the generalizability and transferability of the findings of this study to different contexts in China or abroad should be done with caution. The authors suggest that future studies should focus on the salespersons in other industries or service industries to better understand the differences in terms of incentives to improve salespersons' work motivation and job satisfaction. Our fourth and final limitation to this study is the sample size and representativeness as this study only selects 27 front-line salespersons. Thus, future studies should think of how many salespersons to add to improve the quality of the findings.

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