

Impact of Enhanced Reward Practices on Employee Engagement during COVID-19: A case study on Coral Paints Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted businesses globally leaving a huge challenge for HR practitioners to battle declining employee engagement. Many studies, based in Western countries, proved that an effective total reward system can boost employee engagement. However, there is limited related literature (1) focused on Ghana and (2) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of Ghana. Thus, this research paper sought to understand the impact of enhanced reward practices on employee engagement during the pandemic through a case study analysis of Coral Paints Ghana. A simple mixed-method research design was utilized to determine the levels of employee engagement before and after the implementation of enhanced reward practices; as well as, to identify enhanced extrinsic and intrinsic reward (total rewards) practices implemented from January 2020 to December 2021. The researcher determined the enhanced reward practices through a collection of qualitative data through a pre-survey questionnaire and interviews, as well as, from secondary sources (company HR records and databases). The levels of employee engagement were obtained through quantitative surveys. Thematic data analysis was relied on to understand the data collected in the interviews, whilst a descriptive statistical analysis was used to evaluate the levels of employee engagement before and after the

implementation of enhanced reward practices. Descriptive statistics were performed on the data to determine three data sets: across the company, among different roles, and among different departments. The means and standard deviations were computed for each question in the quantitative survey, across the entire company. In addition, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine the effect of employee roles and departments on Enhanced Reward Difference. The findings revealed that there is a positive correlation between enhanced reward practices and employee engagement. From a total reward approach, the company was able to mitigate challenges to maintain employee engagement levels. The results of this dissertation have significant implications for the academic world, Ghanaian SME businesses, and human resource practitioners. As a result of these findings, recommendations were made to HR practitioners, particularly in Ghana, as well as to other businesses.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, Covid 19 Reward, Employee Performance

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the topic's background and briefly introduces the concepts of employee engagement, total rewards, and their significance during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also provides an overview of Coral Paints Ghana.

Background

Employee engagement has been highly instrumental in organizations as it directly influences overall performance. Studies prove that organizations with engaged workers perform better and exhibit increased productivity, lower employee turnover, and attrition rates, decreased absenteeism, increased loyalty and goodwill toward the firm, and positive word of mouth (Anthony, 2018). In addition, research showed that employee engagement is the opposite of burnout. If engagement is a concept of energy, involvement, and efficacy, its directly opposite burnout would be emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of efficacy (Lacmanović, 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted businesses and their employees and pushed many to adjust to survive rapidly. Since 2020, Human Resource (HR) practices have shifted toward a people-centric workplace to align it to the needs of its workforce (PWC, 2020). Therefore, now more than ever, organizations must put much effort into enhancing employee engagement as they battle the negative impact of COVID-19.

Employment in the manufacturing and service sectors has been significantly impacted, especially with small to medium enterprises (SMEs) (Aduhene & Osei-Assibey, 2021). Ghana, which has the most businesses classified under SMEs, was among the countries that were significantly and negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, many organizations battled many uncertainties such as revenue reductions, downsizing, and organizational restructuring (Korankye, 2020). Coral Paints Ghana is no exception to this trend.

Coral Paints Ghana, registered under the business name M&K Ghana Ltd., is a local paint manufacturing company based in Accra, Ghana, with 147 employees. It is the sole representative of the Dutch multina-

tional company, Akzonobel in Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Togo. At the pandemic's peak, the organization expanded its local production to manufacturing solvent-based products as a necessary business strategy to meet market requirements. In addition, with Coral Paints experiencing internal and external challenges, it perceived the necessity to enhance its intrinsic and extrinsic reward practices as a strategy to maintain and increase employee engagement to achieve positive organizational outcomes. Using an effective reward system is one way to enhance employee engagement (Kimutai & Sakataka, 2015).

Studies have revealed that the quality of its workforce determines the strength of a company. Hence, it is in the best interest of organizations to retain and attract qualified top talent to their team to achieve optimal performance and remain competitive. On the other hand, the absence of motivation and rewards systems reduces employee morale and can lead to higher turnover (Kumari, et al., 2021). Therefore, extrinsic motivators, such as developing appealing incentive/bonus/commission programs, praising workers who finish assignments on time, and recognizing excellent employee performance, must be emphasized during a pandemic like COVID-19 (Nilasari, et al., 2021). In addition, reward systems are considered forerunners of employee motivation (Kuranchie-Mensah & Amponsah-Tawiah, 2016). However, although money or a person's salary remains the most vital and most critical factor that satisfies the employee's primary need, non-financial factors such as job security, internal relationships, and transparency should complement it (Umeozor, 2018).

Recent studies reveal that rewards systems should be from a total rewards perspective; this includes monetary or extrinsic rewards, such as pay and benefits, and non-monetary or intrinsic bonuses, such as learning and growth opportunities, appreciation for work, and employee feedback (Gulyani & Sharma, 2018). This paper intends to utilize this concept to understand the impact of the enhanced reward practices to improve employee engagement implemented by Coral Paints Ghana.

Research Aim

The study aims to critically analyze the impact of enhanced employee reward practices of Coral Paints Ghana on overall employee engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic from January 2020 to December 2021.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the impact of COVID-19 on the level of employee engagement at Coral Paints Ghana before the implementation of enhanced reward practices.
2. To identify enhanced reward practices implemented from January 2020 to December 2021 that addressed employee engagement concerns.
3. To determine the level of employee engagement after implementing enhanced rewards.
4. To contribute any resultant knowledge gained from enhanced reward practices to impact employee engagement in the context of Ghana.

Research Questions

1. What was the impact of COVID-19 on the level of employee engagement at Coral Paints Ghana before the implementation of enhanced reward practices?
2. What were enhanced reward practices used to address employee engagement concerns?

3. What was the level of employee engagement after the implementation of enhanced reward practices?
4. What resultant knowledge can be derived from enhanced reward practices to impact employee engagement in the context of Ghana?

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses how the COVID-19 pandemic affected employees in Ghana. Additionally, it defines the concept of employee engagement and total rewards in the workplace and provides a background on the two variables in the country. Finally, before presenting the conceptual framework for the study, it outlines the literature gap and summary.

Impact of COVID-19 on Employees in Ghana

Between March 2020 and February 2022, the COVID-19 cases recorded in Ghana were 157,992 (156,085 recoveries and 1,429 deaths) (Statista, 2022). As a result, the Ghana government opted to implement a three-week partial lockdown (from March 30th, 2020, to April 20th, 2020) in its major cities. However, while the lockdown of Ghana's urban areas was brief, and labor markets afterward saw a robust but partial recovery, the economic toll continued to fall disproportionately on Ghana's most disadvantaged (Schotte, et al., 2021).

Figure 1. Timeline of COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana 2020 to 2021 (Field research, 2022)

PERIOD	ACTIVITY
March 2020 – April 2020	Temporary lockdown in major cities in Ghana for 21 days. There was a ban on public gatherings of more than 25 people including conferences, workshops, funerals, festivals, political rallies, religious events. All schools at all academic levels and public offices were closed. All borders to neighboring countries were closed and the airport. Social distancing protocols were created. Mandatory use of masks was enforced by businesses and organizations (Owusu, et al., 2022). A total number of COVID-19 cases tallied at 2,074 nationwide; the death toll stood at 17 with 212 patients in recovery (Ansah, 2020).
May 2020	The ban on social gatherings was extended until the end of the month (Graphic Online, 2020). The recorded COVID-19 case count was 8,070 with 36 deaths and 2,947 recoveries (Arhinful, 2020).
June 2020	The Head of the Management Department of UCC Business School encouraged private companies to show care for their employees, stakeholders, and communities (Graphic Online, 2020). Some academic activities resumed nationwide (Crisis 24, 2020).
July 2020	At the end of July, confirmed COVID-19 cases were at 35,501 (3,223 active cases and 182 deaths). There was further easing of restrictions in relation to public transport, churches, and mosques (UNICEF, 2020).
September 2020	Ghana's international airport reopened for travel with COVID-19 protocols, but land and sea borders remained closed (KPMG, 2020). Pubs, nightclubs, and beaches still remained closed (Crisis 24, 2020).
October 2020	COVID-19 recorded cases tallied 48,055. Ghana continued to ease restrictions by removing limitations on the number of participants at workshops and conferences (UNICEF, 2020).
December 2020	Domestic overground transport resumed with hygiene protocols for operators and vehicles. Tourist facilities, attractions, and local open-air drinking spots were permitted to reopen. Beaches, bars, cinemas, and nightclubs remain closed until further notice. Other measures were eased, including restrictions on the number of worshippers at religious venues. Ghana officials placed a limit of up to 100 people on private events such as funerals (Crisis 24, 2020).
January 2021	Schools reopened (GhanaWeb, 2021).
March 2021	Mass vaccination began on 2 March (Amoah, 2021).
May 2021	According to Ghana Statistical Survey, about 770,000 employees had their wages cut off (Ziwu, 2021). COVID-19 Health Recovery Levy Act was passed, imposing 1% on the supply of goods and services, other than exempt goods and services and the import of goods and services (Lartey, 2021).
December 2021	Confirmed COVID-19 cases was 147,203 (13,025 active cases and 1,309 deaths) (Myjoyonline.com, 2022).

A group of researchers from the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER) and the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) conducted a study on the impact of COVID-19 on Ghana's labor market.

With regards to the economic impact, it reported that 84.3% of its respondents had a decline in household income since the start of the pandemic; 41.9% lost their primary source of income, and 34.6% did not have enough money to buy food (Schotte, et al., 2021). In addition, the World Bank reported that 46.1% of business establishments reduced wages for 25.7% of their workforce, and about 4% of their

employees were laid off during the partial lockdown. The pandemic also reduced working hours for close to 770,000 workers (The World Bank, Ghana Statistical Service, UNDP, 2020). According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the researcher assumes an individual's survival and security needs were threatened and affected by the pandemic.

Adonu et al. (2020) studied the general implications of COVID-19 on employees in the Ghanaian context. The following outlines the repercussions:

1. **Staff rationalization and increased job demand:** Fewer workers had to attend to the same work volume. Thus, this led to widespread stress, increased job pressure, and reduced employee productivity (Adonu, et al., 2020).
2. **Remote work:** Ghana's unreliable power supply and slow, unstable internet were not conducive to remote work; this inevitably lowered productivity (Jobberman Ghana , 2021). In addition, many formal-sector employees in the country do not have positions that lend themselves to remote work, nor are many well-versed in utilizing efficient information technology (Adonu, et al., 2020). Managers worked longer hours as meetings were scheduled even after working hours. All this led to frustration, leading to low employee morale.
3. **Absence of social interactions:** Informal chats and discussions were reduced at the workplace due to social distancing protocols, remote work, and different work shifts (Adonu, et al., 2020). Studies have shown that the absence of social connections can lead to anxiety, depression, stress, and complications of work-life balance (Adonu, et al., 2020), decreased job satisfaction and reduced employee commitment (Popa, et al., 2022).
4. **Infection risks in the workplace:** Employees in job roles that do not allow for remote work were at a higher risk of being infected by COVID-19, compromising their physical and mental well-being (Adonu, et al., 2020). This situation also increased their worry for the health of their respective families who live with them. With a poor healthcare infrastructure and overloaded health systems in the country, many feared the health of their families, especially their children (UNICEF Ghana , 2021). Nevertheless, Wolor et al. (2020) pointed out that low-income employees will continue to work despite the health and safety risks involved in meeting their daily needs. Furthermore, the employer has discretion over how leaves are administered without a medical report indicating that the employee is eligible for sick leave (Adonu, et al., 2020).
5. **Adjustments in the workplace:** Wearing a facemask for hours causes discomfort, especially for those who work in labor-intensive roles, affecting an individual's concentration at work (Adonu, et al., 2020).
6. **Challenges with work-life balance:** During the pandemic, many parents experienced difficulties balancing their daily work and personal lives, such as social responsibilities at home, seeking safe and reliable childcare, and coping with financial pressures (Adonu, et al., 2020). Working mothers were usually tardy at work and were less effective and productive; many also faced difficulty accessing social support for their children, which caused a considerable burden (Adonu, et al., 2020). In Ghana, the cultural norm is that childcare falls under the responsibility of biological mothers but has support from extended family (Waterhouse, et al., 2017). However, women were left to seek childcare during work due to the pandemic, which led to additional expenses (Adonu, et al., 2020).
7. **Career shock:** The COVID-19 pandemic is a career shock that impacted many employees globally

with varying experiences (Stoelwinder, 2021). In Ghana, employees in the formal sector experienced job losses, salary cuts, and promotion deferments (Adonu, et al., 2020) which contributed to further stress, worry, and fear of job loss amongst many employees.

8. ***Fear of loss of job:*** The Ghana government did not formally issue a closure of corporate establishments during its partial lockdown; thus, employees who felt unsafe or unwell still reported to work out of the fear that it may affect their salaries or, worse, their job (Adonu, et al., 2020).

The above points present negative impacts on an employee, thus affecting employee engagement. In addition, it has become a substantial human resource concern in today's Ghanaian work environment amid the Covid-19 pandemic (Nilasari, et al., 2021). There is, therefore, a need to understand HR practices that can positively impact employee engagement, and this research will explore reward practices used by Coral Paints Ghana.

Employee Engagement in the Workplace

The term 'employee engagement' was first spoken about by the psychologist William Kahn in 1990; several studies have shown that it plays a massive role in organizational outcomes. Over the years, employee engagement has emerged as a top managerial priority. It is an instrument for retaining, attracting, and motivating a quality workforce to remain competitive in this volatile business environment. Furthermore, employee engagement has a positive relationship with organizational performance, profitability, loyalty, and safety (Simmons, 2018), and it is directly related to product quality and customer satisfaction (Meskelis, 2017). However, there has been a continued decline in employee engagement globally (Shuck, et al., 2011). Scholars have argued that the biggest challenge for executives and HR professionals is the ability to engage a workforce (Choudhury & Mohanty, 2018) (Anusha & Raman, 2017) (Khan, 2013) (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014).

Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as the "harnessing of organization members' selves to the work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (Lacmanović, 2017). Choudhry & Mohanty (2018) stated that, according to Kahn (1990), there are three psychological factors connected with engagement or disengagement: (1) meaningfulness, (2) safety, and (3) availability. Kumar & Pansari (2015) share that engaged employees "are optimistic about the meaningfulness of their job, the safety of their workplace, and the availability of adequate resources to complete tasks." In addition, employee engagement can measure an employee's commitment and involvement in their organization and its organizational goals (Choudhury & Mohanty, 2018).

For simplicity and clarity on the concept of employee engagement, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory can serve as a theoretical bridge between Kahn's (1990) early work on engagement theories, providing a conceptual framework for appreciating the critical nature of meeting basic human needs and providing context for the conceptualization of employee engagement (Shuck, et al., 2011). Maslow arranges the needs of an individual according to the principle of hierarchy.

Figure 2 displays how Maslow's theory applies to employee engagement, with the level of employee engagement increasing as each need is satisfied (Suslova & Holopainen, 2019). This concept is a guide to understanding the levels of engagement at Coral Paints Ghana

Figure 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs applied to Employee Engagement (Suslova & Holopainen, 2019)

Level 1: Survival

This level refers to the physiological needs of an individual, such as food, water, sleep, clothing, and housing (Suslova & Holopainen, 2019). Thus, an organization can meet an individual's needs through fair wages (Stewart, et al., 2018). However, employees will perceive their job only as a means to survive financial responsibilities such as paying for bills or gaining financial independence (Leppänen, 2015). The employee is then considered disengaged.

Level 2: Security

The need for the individual's safety or security is considered at this level. It is essential that the employee feel safe physically, emotionally, and financially (Uysal, et al., 2017). If employees fear losing job security, they will not be engaged or be minimally engaged. Their working environment may be subpar; they may take more sick days than engaged employees; dislike their management, co-workers, or team; or actively seek another job (Leppänen, 2015).

Level 3: Belonging

Once levels one and two are met, the need for belongingness and commitment emerges, and at this stage, the employee is almost engaged. Scholars have proven that humans are social beings (Uysal, et al., 2017). Thus, it is essential that employees feel a sense of belonging to the organization and purpose in their job, which makes them proud to work there. However, there is still a danger that the employee may consider leaving the job for better opportunities (Leppänen, 2015).

Level 4: Importance

This level refers to an individual's esteem needs; which can be categorized into two (1) the desire to be respected and admired by others concerning their reputation, which includes status, acknowledgment, and praise; and (2) the desire for self-esteem and self-appreciation, which includes self-confidence, independence, achievement, and talent (Uysal, et al., 2017). At this stage, the employee is considered engaged.

Level 5: Self-Actualization

The need for self-actualization is the highest level of need an individual can have when highly engaged. These individuals are self-sufficient, creative, and independent (Uysal, et al., 2017). In addition, they are committed, love working for the company, inspire others and contribute significantly to a positive working environment (Leppänen, 2015).

The level of employee engagement greatly influences an organization's effectiveness; hence, it is essential to understand the drivers of employee engagement. One researcher conceptualized a framework

that stated the drivers of employee engagement to be organizational culture (role, achievement, and support culture), leadership (transformational and charismatic leadership), and HR policies (training and development, recruitment and selection, reward, performance management, career growth, working conditions, and socialization) (Kumar, 2019). Khan (2013) mentioned that socialization programs, recognition and praise, good quality line management, two-way open communication, effective cooperation, and fair pay and benefits enhanced employee engagement. Anitha (2014) stated that work environment, leadership, team and co-worker, training and career development, compensation, organizational policies, and workplace well-being were the determinants of employee engagement.

There is an emphasis on the importance of the two-way relationship in employee engagement, defining it as "the positive attitude of employees towards their organization and its values, wherein employees have an awareness of the business context and work to improve job and organizational effectiveness" (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). This idea is due to an unwritten psychological contract between an employee and their employer: their work will allow them to acquire monetary compensation and non-monetary benefits such as job stability (Stewart, et al., 2018).

An organization must explore the right reward system for its workforce to motivate employees to be engaged in the workplace. Reward systems are one of the most significant instrumental factors that can heavily affect how an employee participates in their job (Taufek, et al., 2016).

Total Rewards Approach

When an employee is well-rewarded, they believe that the organization for which they work values them. Likewise, they are inspired to be productive and committed if they know that their organizations care about their well-being and that their career and self-development are refined and cared for (Khan, et al., 2017).

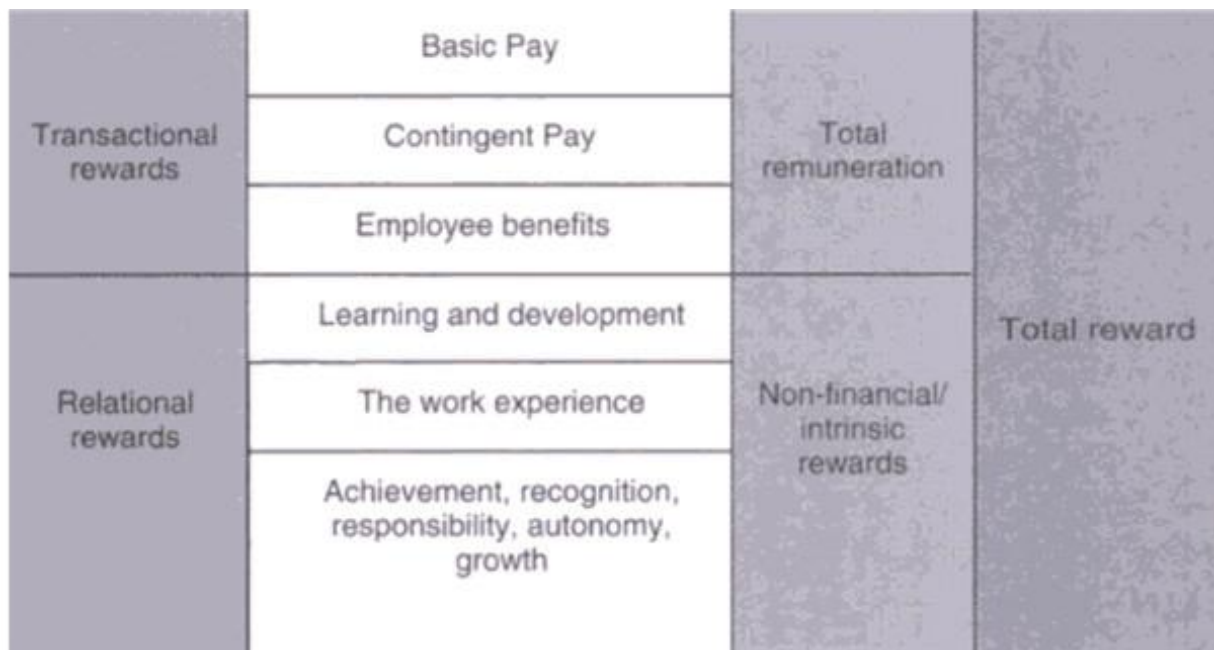
Globally, total reward strategies are fast becoming the objective to prevent the downward spiral of employee engagement levels (Ghose & Mohanty, 2016). Studies have proven that innovative recognition and reward strategies positively affect employee engagement (Lardner, 2015). Furthermore, it reveals that an organization's capacity to align compensation levels with work and performance criteria significantly increases employee engagement in executing daily activities and duties (Samad, et al., 2020).

Today's challenge is for organizations to determine which best practices of rewarding work efficiently to their organization's needs, goals, and current situation (Agbenyegah, 2019). A total rewards strategy has proven to be a decisive action for engaging employees to gain a competitive advantage. It creates a unique set of incentives that differentiate in the recruiting market and may be challenging for competition to reproduce (Anku-Tsede, 2013).

The concept of total reward is the combination of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards (Armstrong & Stephens, 2005) (Figure 3). The objective of real reward is to encompass everything that the employee perceives as valuable in an employment relationship (Anku-Tsede, 2013). Transactional or extrinsic reward refers to financial or tangible rewards such as salary, promotion, interpersonal rewards, bonuses, benefits, and paid leave (Khan, et al., 2017). It directly satisfies the employee's financial needs (Ajmal,

et al., 2015). Relational or intrinsic rewards are intangible or psychological rewards that address an employee's satisfaction, such as feedback, recognition, career development, job responsibilities, and learning opportunities (Khan, et al., 2017). This perspective is rooted in the concept that one or two reward practices do not operate in isolation but rather in various ways individuals accept rewards in the workplace (Armstrong & Stephens, 2005). It is a holistic approach that aligns the business strategy with the HR strategy (Anku-Tsede, 2013).

Figure 3. Components of Total Reward (Armstrong & Stephens, 2005)



Ideally, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards should be gauged depending on an individual's capability, competence, and performance. Huang (2015) found that if a company pays its employees based on how well they work, it helps them do better and allows them to be more effective at their jobs because of its effect on their intrinsic motivation. An individual's personal or inherent motivation significantly impacts their engagement more than extrinsic factors (Umeozor, 2018). Extrinsic motivation factors, such as salary, job security, working conditions, and interpersonal relations, are not necessarily motivators but are needed to prevent job dissatisfaction from affecting employee engagement (Umeozor, 2018). Extrinsic and intrinsic rewards have a more profound and longer-lasting influence on an employee's performance and commitment to long-term organizational success (Anku-Tsede, 2013). Therefore, the total rewards strategy can be relied on.

Researchers have pointed out that all organizations already have an existing reward system, regardless of whether it is written or not (Anku, et al., 2018). It is then up to the organization to explore a suitable reward system that engages their workforce, aligns with their organizational goals, and is conducive to their current circumstances. In addition, studies have discussed that small business leaders lack strategies to impact and enhance employee engagement (Simmons, 2018); the researcher is interested in identifying the effective reward practices of Coral Paints Ghana as a strategy to influence employee engagement, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Total Rewards and Employee Engagement in Ghana

It is essential to acknowledge that most studies focused on circumstances in western countries, and there is still much to learn in the context of Ghana (Frimpong, 2015). For example, Ghanaian HR practitioners have been exploring employee engagement practices over recent years. However, there is still limited research on the relationship between reward systems and employee engagement in Ghana. In addition, most studies have mainly focused on large companies and not on SMEs in the country.

One study on the Ghanaian banking sector established that an individual's salary satisfaction complimented with increased employee recognition positively influences an employee's engagement and thus is an effective strategy for organizations to note (Ewool & Kamil, 2021). Another study focused on a financial institution in Ghana stated that while extrinsic rewards are essential to engage employees to make ends meet and improve their socio-economic standing in Ghana's uncertain economy, intrinsic rewards should not be overlooked (Agbenyegah, 2019). Finally, a case study on a Ghanaian non-banking financial institution conducted by Adjeikwame (2019) emphasized that benefits can increase employee loyalty and must be considered in an employee's compensation plan. He identified them as medical aid contributions, accommodation allowances, education assistance, and vehicle allowances.

Frimpong (2015) explored the impact of compensation and benefits policies on employee engagement, focusing on its influence on turnover intentions at the Electricity Company of Ghana at its central regional office. Through a quantitative study, he ranked the drivers of employee engagement as follows: (1) pay and benefits, (2) training and development, (3) relationship with supervisor, (4) participation in decision-making, (5) job security, (6) positive work environment, and (7) recognition for good performance. He concluded that there is a positive correlation between compensation and benefits policies (extrinsic rewards) and levels of employee engagement, adding that although pay and benefits are the top drivers, non-financial factors (intrinsic rewards) still influence employee engagement. It is recommended that future research consider using a mixed approach to understand the study's variables better.

Acquah-Quarcoo (2016) conducted a study on high-performing organizations in Ghana and identified factors of employee engagement, categorizing them based on Kahn's engagement theory: (1) Physical – compensation, conducive environment, training, teamwork, and job performance; (2) Cognitive – management support, and loyalty; and (3) Emotional – benefits, motivation, and decision-making. In addition, the study explored the importance of understanding the levels of employee engagement between junior and senior staff as the drivers of each employee group vary, stating that there is a difference in perception of a valuable reward depending on whether the employee is a junior or senior staff member. Therefore, creating a reward strategy to improve employee engagement.

Employee engagement directly impacts employee performance and is influenced by employee satisfaction (Supriyanto, et al., 2021). Jobberman Ghana (2021), a popular online career platform in Ghana, surveyed employee satisfaction.

Six hundred thirteen respondents ranked their most valued external traits in a company that keeps them engaged. Figure 4 displays their top five characteristics. Unfortunately, due to an unreliable power

supply and an unstable internet connection, it was reported that remote work was not highly ranked as one would expect during COVID-19 times.

Respondents also ranked their most valued intrinsic traits of the company, referring to innate qualities a workplace should have, such as competitive packages, welfare and benefits, company financial stability, job security, and career growth. Figure 5 displays their top five traits.

Figure 4. Top external traits of a company a Ghanaian employee values (Jobberman Ghana, 2021)



Figure 5. Top intrinsic traits of a company a Ghanaian employee values (Jobberman Ghana, 2021)



Awareness of these traits is essential as it provides a guideline for the researcher to understand whether Coral Paints Ghana aligned its reward strategy based on these perceptions. To engage their employees, organizations must understand the employees' motivation. When an employee is positively engaged, it influences their perceptions about their job commitment and loyalty; there is a higher sense of belongingness and willingness to pursue organizational goals (Acquah-Quarcoo, 2016).

Therefore, organizations must strategize to overcome employees' financial and non-financial challenges to impact employee engagement, even in the Ghanaian context. These challenges are assumed to have heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Total Rewards and Employee Engagement in Ghana

It is vital to modify HR working practices to mitigate the effect on organizations and ensure that products or services can continue during and after the pandemic. These practices should combine current work processes with creative ones, modify operational strategies, redefine employee and customer safety, social distance compliance, workplace COVID-19 infection compensation, and employee productivity criteria that are not required (Adonu, et al., 2020). It was necessary to mitigate these challenges to enhance employee engagement for companies to survive.

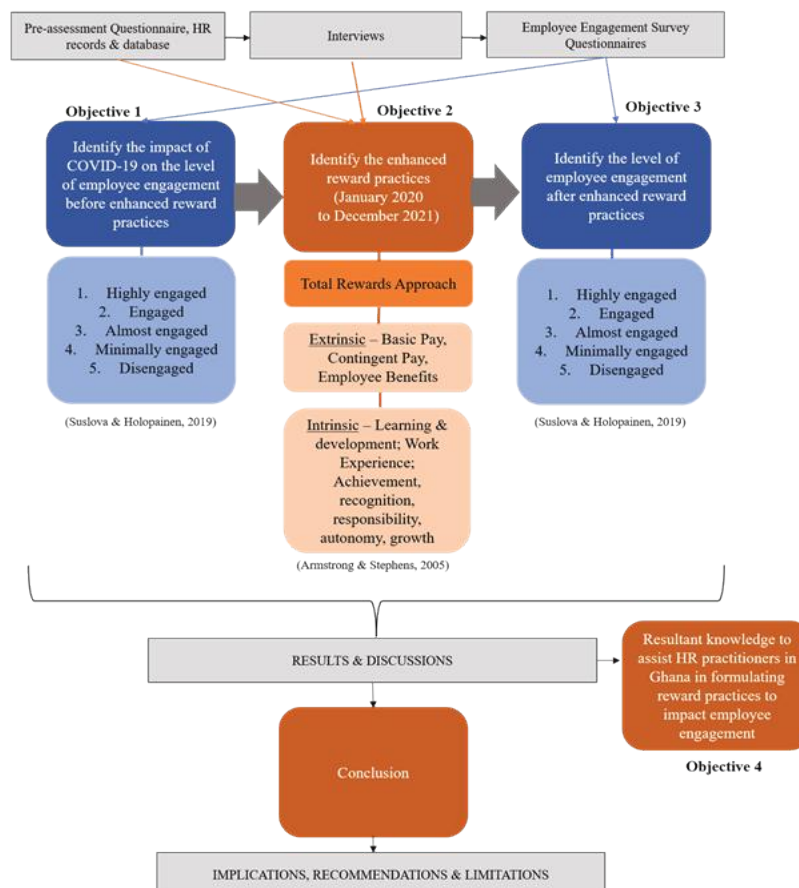
COVID-19 led to high job demands, especially in manufacturing factories such as Coral Paints Ghana, where remote work was a challenge and staff rationalization allowed for a fewer workforce (Adonu, et al., 2020). High job demands lead to heightened stress and anxiety in the workplace, affecting an individual's mental, psychological, and physical health (Kulikowski & Sedlak, 2020). When many organizations experienced heavy financial burdens, Coral Paints Ghana chose to increase its reward practices to combat the potential decrease in employee engagement to achieve positive organizational outcomes.

Studies have proven a positive correlation between total rewards (extrinsic and intrinsic) and employee engagement (Anku-Tsede, 2013). However, although there has been much research on employee engagement and reward systems, most literature was based in Western countries. In addition, there is limited related literature (1) focused on Ghana and (2) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of Ghana. Therefore, the impact of enhanced reward practices on employee engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana is unknown.

Conceptual Framework of the Research

A conceptual framework is critical because it links the concepts discussed and demonstrates how the research will be explored (Adom & Hussein, 2018). Furthermore, it presents how the research questions will be answered.

Figure 6. Conceptual framework of the research (Researcher's work, 2022).



Chapter 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher relied on the 'research onion (Figure 7) (Saunders, et al., 2019) to present the research methodology used to achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions stated in chapter one. The section is vital because it ensures consistency across the tools, processes, and underlying philosophy (Melnikovas, 2018). This chapter also discussed the research's reliability, validity, limitations, and ethical considerations.

Figure 7. The Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2019).

Research Methodology

The methodological choice suitable for this paper was a simple mixed-method research design, specifically the embedded design, that relies on combined quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and analyse data. This is aligned with the pragmatic paradigm as it is under this method, that the researcher has the freedom to choose the suitable approach to produce improved results (Amolo, et al., 2018).

Johnson et al. (2007) define mixed-method research as "the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration." The researcher recognized that this approach enhances the study as it offers a deeper understanding of the research problem than one approach on its own (Reyad, et al., 2020). The rationale of the embedded design is that a single set of data is not enough to answer all the research questions (Youssef, 2018).

The researcher obtained the levels of employee engagement through quantitative surveys and determined the enhanced reward practices through a collection of qualitative data through interviews. Both data types were necessary to answer the research objectives and questions, as the researcher believed this would enrich the study more. In addition, the qualitative data through interviews offered strength to the design of the survey questionnaires, which did not adequately provide much detailed information about the context in which employees offer information (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, the embedded design allowed the researcher to collect the data sequentially (Creswell, 2012). The first set of qualitative data (pre-interview questionnaire) aided the researcher in conducting the quantitative study (interview). The second set of qualitative data (interview) supported the quantitative study (employee engagement survey).

Research Strategy

The researcher utilized a case study strategy to analyse the impact of enhanced reward practices on employee engagement. There was an assumption that the case being studied was atypical as the organization enhanced reward practices during COVID-19 when many organizations were experiencing financial and non-financial challenges. Thus, the researcher believed this single case could provide insight into other events and situations prevalent in a group where the subject is drawn from (Kumar, 2011); hence, the case study strategy was considered.

The researcher also applied survey and archival strategies within the case study research strategy. The survey strategy enabled the researcher to explore the levels of employee engagement before and after the implementation of enhanced rewards. Subsequently, the archival research allowed for a deeper understanding of what reward practices were used to address employee engagement.

Research Time Horizon

This paper is a cross-sectional or short-term study with a specific point of time for data collection. The study period was set between January 2020 and December 2021. The researcher aimed to complete the paper within the time limits of the research project of six months.

Study Population, Size, and Sampling

The total workforce of Coral Paints Ghana is currently 147. To obtain the relevant quantitative data, the researcher relied on non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling. Purposive or judgmental sampling is an intentional selection of informants based on the researcher's knowledge and/or experience with the research topic (Robinson, 2014). This approach enabled the researcher to select the study population with a specific purpose (Dudovskiy, n.d.) and achieve valuable research outcomes. The target study population consisted of permanently employed individuals at Coral Paints Ghana before January 2020, thus, excluding those employed on a contractual and casual basis. Additionally, the researcher excluded all employees hired and who voluntarily or involuntarily left the organization, after January 2020, from the study population. As a result, the study population size totalled 105 employees. In addition, to generalize from a random sample and avoid sampling errors or biases, a random sample needed to be of adequate size (Taherdoost, 2017). The sample size was based on the desired accuracy, 95% confidence level within a 5% margin of error. Thus, the sample size totalled 83.

This study also utilized purposive sampling to gather qualitative data and identify the enhanced reward practices. This allowed the researcher to select information-rich cases that would shed light on answering the research question (van Rijnsoever, 2017). The study followed the criteria that the study sample consisted of managers/leaders of the organization who implemented the reward practices. Previous research pointed out that depending on the resources and time available, sample sizes may or may not be fixed before qualitative data collection (Mack, 2005). Due to limited time and resources, the researcher chose not to select the sample size prior to the interviews. Mack (2005) mentioned that this sampling technique is considered most successful when data review and analysis are done in conjunction with qualitative data collection. Guest et al. (2020) state that data saturation is the conceptual criterion for measuring and judging qualitative sample sizes. This refers to the point in data collection and analysis at which new incoming data generates little or no new information pertinent to the research question (Guest, et al., 2020). The researcher relied on this concept. The total number of participants for the interview was 12.

Data Collection Technique

The study required three sets of primary data to be collected sequentially. The researcher obtained the first set through an emailed pre-survey questionnaire (Appendix A) to the organization's HR, which consisted of mixed closed-ended and open-ended questions. The researcher also utilized secondary sources such as HR records and databases to develop the data collection process further. Subsequently, the research relied on audio-recorded semi-structured interviews, conducted with a deductive approach, to understand the enhanced reward practices in-depth (See Appendix B for interview guide questions). The researcher assumed the interviews allowed the participants to express themselves more. Both pre-survey questionnaires and interviews sought information necessary to aid the collection process of the quantitative data set.

For the last primary set of data, the researcher conducted a self-administered employee engagement survey questionnaire with close-ended questions (Appendix C). This was conducted on Coral Paints premises. The researcher relied on the Likert scale to measure the levels of employee engagement (Figure 8). Participants were asked to provide their level of agreement or disagreement on a symmetric agree-disagree scale for a series of statements relevant to the research questions (Barua, 2013). The questions in the employee engagement survey were designed under three categories: overall employee experience (OE), extrinsic reward practices (ER), and intrinsic reward practices (IR).

Figure 8. Measurement of levels of employee engagement using the Likert Scale (Barua, 2013) (Researcher's work, 2022).

Scale	Weight	Level of Engagement
Strongly agree	5 points	Highly Engaged
Agree	4 points	Engaged
Neither agree nor disagree	3 points	Almost engaged
Disagree	2 points	Minimally engaged
Strongly disagree	1 point	Disengaged

Other secondary data sources are from relevant literature studies and magazines, periodicals, and industry reports related to Ghana.

Data Analysis Technique

The researcher utilized a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative data analysis at different stages of the research. Mixed analysis involves using both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques within the study framework, and it is aligned with the pragmatic paradigm (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011). The researcher's purpose for conducting mixed analysis was for data to be collected sequentially. The findings from qualitative analysis were used to inform quantitative data collected and analysed; this is referred to as 'rationale for development' (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011).

Thematic data analysis identifies themes within the qualitative data that are relevant to answering the research questions (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The researcher relied on Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6-step thematic data analysis framework to understand the qualitative data from the interviews. The steps are as follows: (1) become familiar with the data; (2) generate initial codes; (3) search for the themes; (4) review the themes; (5) define themes; and (6) do the write-up (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The process was not linear, and the researcher moved back and forth when necessary (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This approach was vital in understanding the reasons for specific extrinsic and intrinsic reward practices during COVID-19 at Coral Paints Ghana.

The researcher employed a statistician to conduct a descriptive statistical analysis to evaluate the quantitative data, which aimed to determine (1) the impact of COVID-19 on the level of employee engagement and (2) the level of employee engagement after the enhanced rewards. Descriptive statistics were performed on the data to determine three data sets: across the company, among different roles, and among different departments.

To understand which parts of employee engagement were most and least affected by COVID-19 and after the implementation of enhanced reward practices, the researcher looked at the descriptive measures of the data. The means and standard deviations were computed for each question across the entire company.

An aggregated simplified table was created, and it contained the following measures:

Oe = Overall Experience

Er = Extrinsic rewards

Ir = Intrinsic rewards

$D_{(i,j)} = \sum_{(j=1)}^N (S_{(i,j,k,t=1)}) - \sum_{(j=1)}^N (S_{(i,j,k,t=0)})$ where

i = employee index

j = engagement category

k = question index

t = implementation state

t = 0: before implementation of enhanced rewards

t = 1: after implementation of enhanced rewards

S = score

D = Difference

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the levels of employee engagement on the average scores for individual questions was ranked in order of decreasing average score. The impact of enhanced rewards on the levels of employee engagement on the average scores for individual questions was also ranked. The formulation was as follows:

$$M_j = (\sum_{i=1}^N (S_{(i,j)})) / N$$

Where S = score

i = employee index

j = question index

N = number of employees

M = question mean score

The measure "mean Enhanced Reward Difference" (mERD) was defined as the difference between an employee's scoring of an enhanced reward category before and after implementation.

mERD = enhanced reward difference of

i = employee index

j = engagement category

k = question index

t = implementation state

t = 0: before implementation of enhanced rewards

t = 1: after implementation of enhanced rewards

S = score

D = Difference

t = 0: enhanced rewards not implemented

t = 1: enhanced rewards implemented

N = number of employees within the category (role, department) in question

In addition, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine the effect of employee roles and departments on Enhanced Reward Difference. ANOVA is a statistical procedure concerned with comparing means of several samples, and its purpose is to test for significant differences between class means through the analysis of the variances (Ostertagová & Ostertag, 2013).

Lastly, as a point of interest, to identify which rewards were most valued by the participants during the COVID-19 pandemic, mean ranks were computed to determine the importance of these rewards across the company.

Reliability of the Research

The researcher devoted attention to determining and mitigating any potential personal biases throughout the research process to maintain reliability. Additionally, it ensured internal consistency in measuring employee engagement in the survey and the interview questioning process. It also provided a detailed description of the research process to support transferability to future researchers.

Validity of the Research

The research upheld the internal validity of this study by measuring the levels of employee engagement related to extrinsic and intrinsic reward practices during the retrospective study period. Furthermore, the researcher ensured validity through clear, well-constructed, and relevant interview questions by one interviewer and conducted without judgment.

Limitation of the Research

The research recognized that there were limitations on the degree of accuracy in measuring the actual levels of employee engagement before enhanced reward practices were implemented. Employees were likely to base their perceptions on what they remembered. Thus, the findings of this study may not project the genuine accuracy of the circumstances. However, it was still critical to understand the impact of enhanced reward practices on employee engagement during COVID-19. Gartner Inc., a research and consulting firm in the United States, reported that most organizations added or increased at least one reward to aid employees during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gartner Inc., 2020). The focus of the rewards was on mental well-being, hazard pay, medical benefits, child care support services, and transportation services. Hence, there was an interest in exploring the reward practices implemented at Coral Paints Ghana and their effect on employee engagement.

The research also acknowledged that data collection was dependent on the participants' availability, mood, and willingness; thus, there were some difficulties in administering the survey and interviews. Furthermore, there was limited English language proficiency and literacy within a portion of the study population. Therefore, all questions needed to be clear and concise, and when deemed necessary, questions were explained and translated into the local language by an interpreter.

Despite all the above limitations, the study should not be considered less significant.

Ethical Considerations

The management of Coral Paints Ghana granted the researcher permission to research the organization, communicate with the employees, and access HR records and databases relevant to the study (Appendix D). The researcher mandated written consent for all employee engagement survey questionnaires and verbal consent for the interviews. The participants' time, confidentiality, and privacy were respected and considered throughout the research process. Lastly, all resources used to support this paper were appropriately cited.



Chapter 4: RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

This chapter discusses the findings and analysis of the study for this dissertation. Data was collected via a pre-survey, semi-structured interviews, and self-administered survey questionnaires.

The pre-survey questionnaire and H.R. records were used to identify the enhanced extrinsic reward practices (base pay, contingent pay, and benefits) during the study period. In addition, the interviews revealed intrinsic reward practices (learning and development, work experience, achievement and recognition, responsibility and job autonomy, and professional growth) employed by Coral Paints Ghana. Finally, the survey questionnaires enabled the researcher to determine the difference in the levels of employee engagement before and after enhanced reward practices were implemented.

General implications of COVID-19 on Coral Paints Ghana.

The researcher outlined some activities related to the COVID-19 pandemic experienced by Coral Paints Ghana between January 2020 and December 2021 (Figure 9). In addition, Figure 10 shows the attrition rate for the study period.

Figure 9. Timeline of activities at Coral Paints Ghana from Jan 2020 to Dec 2021 (Field Research, 2022)

PERIOD	ACTIVITY
January 2020 – early March 2020	Business as usual. There was a little concern about COVID-19 and a belief that it would not affect Ghana. Selected members of the sales team were sent to South Africa for sales training with AkzoNobel in February 2020.
20 th March 2020	Dissemination of advisory on COVID-19 which included information on measures, updates, contact numbers of COVID-19 units at designated facilities, as well as, company medical insurance company Special Support numbers at some of the designated facilities.
26 th March 2020	Shift schedules were implemented across the company. In addition, mandatory partial annual leaves were also implemented because the company expected a decline in customer visits.
30 th March 2020 – 19 th April 2020	Ghana government issues partial lockdown. Temporary shut down of Coral Paints Ghana factory, stores, and offices. Management had to conduct online meetings to discuss the work adjustments and COVID-19 protocols. Postponement of all meetings (sales open forum/general meeting) and paint seminars until further notice.
May 2020	Internal and external campaigns to reinforce COVID-19 protocols (face masks, face shields, social distancing, washing of hands). A special risk allowance was given to frontline staff. The company also increased transportation and lunch allowance. A free supply of masks was also given to employees and customers daily until Q3 2021.
June 2020	An internal general staff meeting was held. Quarterly bonuses were given as targets were achieved.
October 2020	All employees were invited to join the annual Painter's Day which was divided into 2 days to accommodate the COVID-19 protocol of social distancing. The event was held outdoors as well.
December 2020	Risk allowance for frontline staff was discontinued. All employees received annual bonuses according to performance.
January 2021	Installation of Air Purifiers- IQ Air with HyperHepa filters in all Coral paint offices and stores. Continuous reinforcement of COVID-19 protocols.
March 2021	The company made arrangements for all employees to have access to the first dose of COVID-19 vaccinations. This service was optional and only those who wanted to get the vaccine, availed of it.
May 2021	Second dose of COVID-19 vaccinations arranged for employees who wanted the vaccine.
July 2021	An internal general staff meeting was held. The company showed a video accompanied by a speech by the management to express gratitude for a job well done during the COVID-19 period. Quarterly bonuses were given as targets were achieved.
August 2021	Selected members of the manufacturing team attended a paint exhibition/conference in Dubai, U.A.E.
October 2021	An internal general staff meeting was held to recap 2021 activities. In addition, Coral opens a new branch location.
December 2021	All employees received annual bonuses according to performance.

Figure 10. Attrition rate for the study period.

Employee count at the end of study period	132
No. of employees who voluntarily or involuntarily left	10
Employee attrition rate	7.58%

During the study period, field research revealed that 3 employees left voluntarily due to better opportunities and retirement. A total of 7 employees left involuntarily because of poor performance and the end of their contract. To keep up with the business expansion, the organization also hired 17 new employees.

Overview of participants

The employee engagement survey had a sample size of 83 participants. The questionnaire aimed to understand the levels of employee engagement before and after implementing the enhanced rewards. All participants were permanently employed before January 1st, 2020, and all consented to participate.

Figure 11. Percentage of participants according to department.

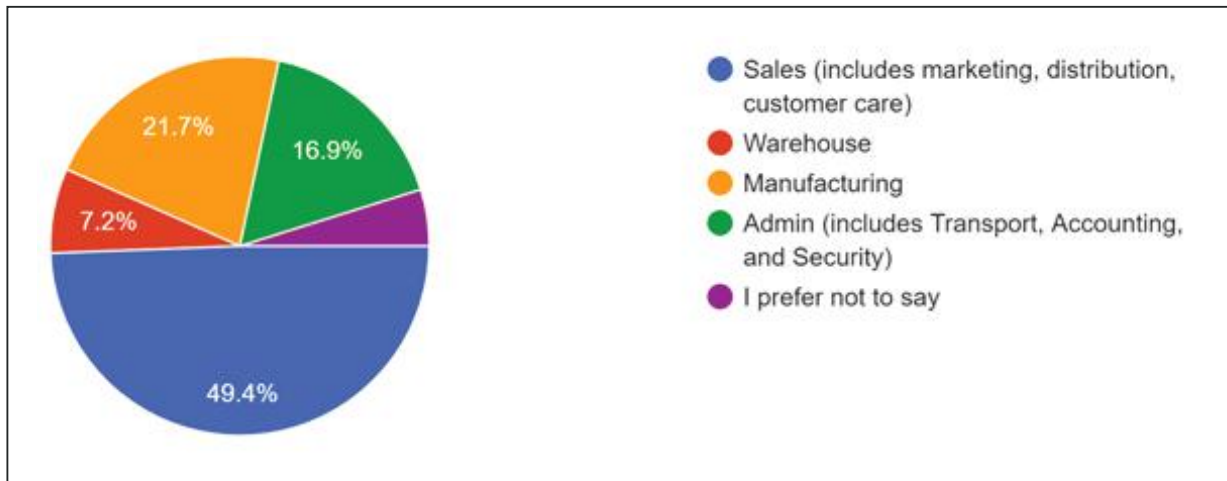
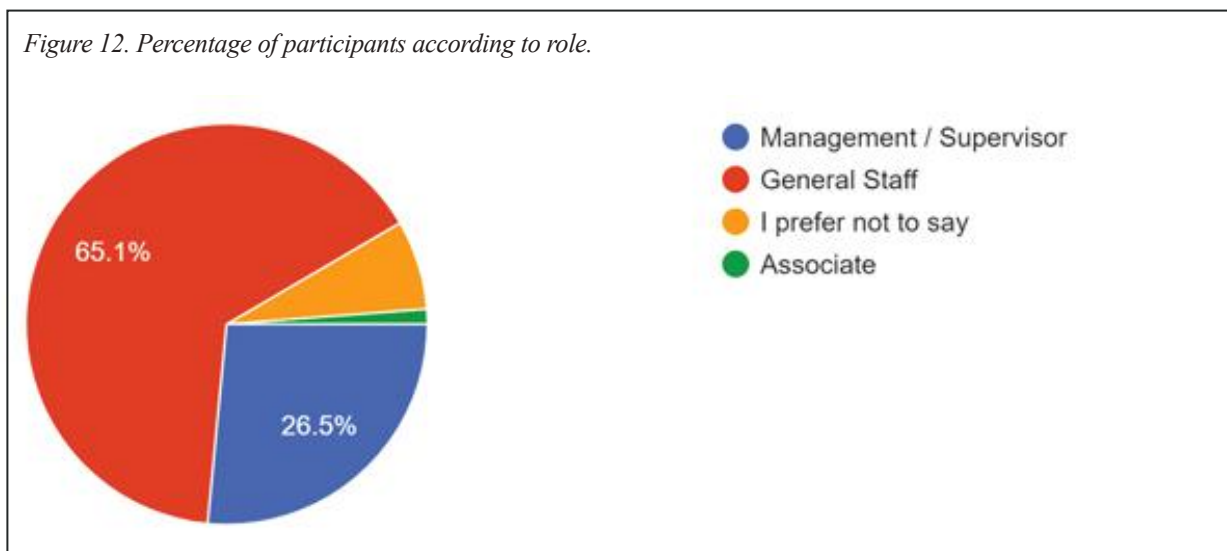


Figure 12. Percentage of participants according to role.



Impact of COVID-19 on the level of employee engagement

This section sought to answer research question 1: What was the impact of COVID-19 on the level of employee engagement at Coral Paints Ghana before the implementation of enhanced reward practices?

The overall mean for the impact of COVID-19 on levels of employee engagement was 4.15. This demonstrated that employees were engaged during COVID-19 before implementing enhanced rewards. Additionally, according to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs theory, the organization satisfied employees' four levels of needs (Suslova & Holopainen, 2019).

Research question 1 was further discretized to gain a deeper understanding of the effect of COVID-19 on employee engagement:

1a. Which parts of employee engagement across the company were most and least affected by COVID-19?

1b. Was there an effect of employee department on employee engagement during COVID-19?

1c. Was there an effect of employee role on employee engagement during COVID-19?

Tables 1 to 4 answers question 1a. Table 1 ranks the categories by decreasing the mean score. The categories of the questions were Overall Experience (O.E.), Extrinsic Reward practices (E.R.), and Intrinsic Reward practices (I.R.). To further understand the impact of COVID-19 on employee engagement, Tables 2, 3, and 4 breakdowns the employee engagement mean scores according to O.E., E.R., and I.R., and their corresponding standard deviations.

Table 1. Ranking of categories according to employee engagement mean scores.

Rank	Category	Question	Mean
1	OE1	I highly recommend Coral Paints Ghana, a great place to work.	4,59
2	ER1	I believe the company really cares about my overall well-being and health.	4,51
3	IR1	At work, I have the opportunity to use my strengths every day.	4,46
4	IR2	I receive the necessary training and information I need to do my job well	4,43
5	OE2	I always want to give my best whenever I am at work.	4,42
6	ER2	I am very satisfied with my medical benefits.	4,41
7	IR3	I am given the appropriate tools and resources to do my job well.	4,41
8	IR4	I see how my work contributes to positive outcomes for our customers.	4,37
9	IR5	I feel that I am growing professionally.	4,36
10	ER3	I am highly satisfied with the incentives (such as transportation, lunch, and other allowances) the company offers me.	4,35
11	OE3	I am proud to work for Coral Paints Ghana.	4,30
12	IR6	My job enables and encourages me to learn and develop new skills.	4,29
13	OE4	I can see myself working at Coral Paints Ghana in five years.	4,28

14	IR7	I feel valued and appreciated by the company.	4,27
15	IR8	I think the company fosters a comfortable, energizing, supportive work environment.	4,20
16	OE5	I believe the company has my best interests in mind when making business decisions.	4,19
17	IR9	The company does a good job communicating the goals and strategies set by management.	4,12
18	IR10	If I do great work, I know that it will be recognized by my manager/supervisor.	4,06
19	IR11	I get enough feedback from my manager/supervisor to understand if I'm doing my job well.	4,04
20	OE6	I am very motivated to come to work.	4,02
21	ER4	I believe my pay is competitive with other places I could work.	3,96
22	ER5	I am rewarded fairly according to my performance and contributions at work.	3,94
23	IR12	I feel physically safe at my workplace.	3,84
24	IR13	People from all backgrounds are treated fairly by Coral Paints Ghana.	3,75
25	ER6	I believe the bonus schemes implemented by the company are fair.	3,73
26	ER7	The processes for determining compensation and benefits in the company seem fair and unbiased.	3,73
27	IR14	The demands of my workload are manageable.	3,67
28	OE7	I rarely think about looking for a job at another company.	3,47

Table 2. Employee Engagement mean scores and standard deviation of Overall Experience.

Rank	Category	Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	OE1	I highly recommend Coral Paints Ghana a great place to work.	4,59	0,64
5	OE2	I always want to give my best whenever I am at work.	4,42	0,77
11	OE3	I am proud to work for Coral Paints Ghana.	4,30	0,85
13	OE4	I can see myself working at Coral Paints Ghana in five years.	4,28	0,79
16	OE5	I believe the company has my best interests in mind when making business decisions.	4,19	0,85
20	OE6	I am very motivated to come to work.	4,02	0,84
28	OE7	I rarely think about looking for a job at another company.	3,47	1,44

The overall average mean score of O.E. was 4.18 (engaged) implying that generally, employees may like the company but may leave the company should they received a better offer (Suslova & Holopainen, 2019) . The result of OE7 proved this (SD:1.44).

Table 3. Employee engagement mean scores and standard deviation according to Extrinsic reward practices.

Rank	Category	Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
2	ER1	I believe the company really cares about my overall well-being and health.	4,51	0,65
6	ER2	I am very satisfied with my medical benefits.	4,41	0,75
10	ER3	I am highly satisfied with the incentives (such as transportation, lunch, and other allowances) the company offers me.	4,35	0,72
21	ER4	I believe my pay is competitive with other places I could work.	3,96	1,03
22	ER5	I am rewarded fairly according to my performance and contributions at work.	3,94	1,13
25	ER6	I believe the bonus schemes implemented by the company are fair.	3,73	1,16
26	ER7	The processes for determining compensation and benefits in the company seem fair and unbiased.	3,73	0,99

The overall mean score of E.R. was 4.09 (engaged), implying that employees are generally satisfied with the extrinsic rewards. The results for ER1 and ER2 displayed that employees were most satisfied with their health and well-being benefits. In addition, ER3's result indicates they were happy with the incentives offered by the company. The researcher observed that the mean scores of ER4, ER5, ER6, and ER7 (related to fairness in compensation and benefits and its processes) are all at 'almost engaged' levels. Furthermore, the standard deviations for ER4, ER5, and ER6 showed varying levels of employee engagement across the company. Table 4.

Employee engagement mean scores and standard deviation according to Intrinsic reward practices.

Rank	Category	Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
3	IR1	At work, I have the opportunity to use my strengths every day.	4,46	0,75
4	IR2	I receive the necessary training and information I need to do my job well	4,43	0,70
7	IR3	I am given the appropriate tools and resources to do my job well.	4,41	0,56
8	IR4	I see how my work contributes to positive outcomes for our customers.	4,37	0,71
9	IR5	I feel that I am growing professionally.	4,36	0,65
12	IR6	My job enables and encourages me to learn and develop new skills.	4,29	0,69
14	IR7	I feel valued and appreciated by the company.	4,27	0,65
15	IR8	I think the company fosters a comfortable, energizing, supportive work environment.	4,20	0,87
17	IR9	The company does a good job communicating the goals and strategies set by management.	4,12	0,82
18	IR10	If I do great work, I know that it will be recognized by my manager/supervisor.	4,06	0,90
19	IR11	I get enough feedback from my manager/supervisor to understand if I'm doing my job well.	4,04	0,98
23	IR12	I feel physically safe at my workplace.	3,84	0,92
24	IR13	People from all backgrounds are treated fairly by Coral Paints Ghana.	3,75	1,27
27	IR14	The demands of my workload are manageable.	3,67	0,83

The overall mean score of I.R. was 4.16 (engaged), demonstrating that employees appreciated intrinsic reward practices slightly more than extrinsic reward practices (2% difference). In addition, the findings show that employees were almost engaged with IR12, IR13, and IR14. However, the standard deviation of IR13 (SD: 1.27) indicates that employees across the company had different opinions on fairness related to how Coral Paints Ghana treats people from all backgrounds.

To answer questions 1b and 1c, ANOVA was applied to the data, and the results were as follows:

By department

Table 5. ANOVA results on employee engagement before enhanced reward practices by the department.

	F-statistic	p-value
OE	3,15	0,02
ER	1,56	0,19
IR	1,96	0,11

The department to which a Coral employee belonged had a statistically significant effect on employees' responses to only Overall Experience. This implied that during COVID-19, employees' overall engagement experiences varied depending on the department they were a member of. The researcher observed that warehouse employees and employees who chose not to disclose their departments (4.8% of participants) were almost engaged. However, a Coral employee's department did not significantly affect employees' responses to extrinsic and intrinsic reward practices. This shows that employees' engagement experiences towards extrinsic and intrinsic reward practices did not vary across the departments.

Table 6. Mean score of departments in Overall Experience Engagement

Department	O.E. Mean Score
Admin (includes Transport, Accounting, and Security)	4.38
Manufacturing	4.13
Sales (includes marketing, distribution, customer care)	4.45
Warehouse	3.95
Undisclosed	3.57

By role:

Table 7. ANOVA results on employee engagement before enhanced reward practices by role.

	F-statistic	p-value
OE	7,95	0,00
ER	10,55	0,00
IR	8,04	0,00

The role to which a Coral employee belonged had a statistically significant effect on employees' responses to all three categories of employee engagement. The largest effect of role can be seen in extrinsic rewards and the smallest effect in the overall experience. This implies that during COVID-19, employees' engagement experiences in each category (O.E., E.R., I.R.) varied depending on their role.

Enhanced Reward Practices

This section seeks to answer research question 2: What enhanced reward practices were used to address employee engagement concerns?

Below outlines and describes the enhanced extrinsic and intrinsic reward practices implemented from January 2020 until December 2021. In addition, the section also presents a ranking of which rewards employees valued the most during this period.

Extrinsic reward practices

1. Basic Pay

Employees received a salary increment in their basic pay in 2020 but not in 2021. This increase was linked to individual performances and employee tenure. In 2020, employees worked fewer hours. The company divided each department into two teams in case an individual was infected with the COVID-19 virus placing the rest of the team at risk. The team of the sick employee would then be asked to isolate and submit a positive PCR test before returning to work. The team without exposure to the sick person would work the hours until the other team was risk-free from COVID-19. In addition, the two teams were created to comply with social distancing regulations in each area of the workspace. Despite the fewer working hours and numerous sick leaves, the entire workforce received their total salaries each month.

The company expressed that it needed to show organizational commitment to its employees during turbulent times. Additionally, they wanted to minimize any apprehension about the company's financial status during COVID-19, thus; establishing solid financial stability

2. Contingent Pay

There are two bonus schemes implemented across the company:

a. Quarterly Sales Bonus – This bonus was provided to all employees when the sales target for the quarter was achieved. Employees were ranked in bonus tiers according to their performances and respective roles. Managers were required to discuss performance appraisals with their team members and agree on the results before submitting them to H.R. According to management; the quarterly sales bonus was vital to enhance organizational morale, performance, and productivity. This proved effective, as the 2021 targets were achieved (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Quarterly Bonus 2020 - 2021.

	2020	2021
Q1	Not achieved.	Achieved.
Q2	Not achieved.	Achieved.
Q3	Not achieved.	Achieved.
Q4	Not achieved.	Not achieved.

b. Annual Bonus

This bonus was determined according to the employee's overall performance. Employees were ranked in bonus tiers according to their performance and respective roles. Managers were again required to discuss performance appraisals with their team members and agree on the results before submitting them to H.R. Annual bonuses were given to all permanent employees for 2020 and 2021. Given the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization's primary aim was to reward the employees for their commitment and recognize the top performers.

3. Employee Benefits

a. Medical Benefits for employees and dependents

Apart from the medical insurance package already provided to all employees and their registered dependents, the workforce received additional medical benefits related to COVID-19 (Figure 14). Managers in their respective departments had discretion over administering sick leaves without a medical report indicating that the employee is eligible for sick leave. The selected employees interviewed shared that there was leniency in administering it, and for this period, H.R. did not track the number of sick leaves an employee took.

The primary goal was for employees to feel safe in the workplace and not fear any negative consequences should they experience symptoms of COVID-19. However, managers observed that employees did not take advantage of the leniency as they understood their role in ensuring the company stayed afloat during the pandemic

Figure 14. Additional Medical Benefits 2020 - 2021.

Medical Benefits	Employee	Employee's dependents (spouse & up to 4 children under 18 years of age)
Unlimited supply of face masks, face shields and hand sanitizers	YES	NO
Vitamin D as advised by doctor	YES	YES
On-call doctor (house visits) to attend to anyone experiencing COVID-19 symptoms (with free PCR test)	YES	NO
Unlimited PCR testing	YES	NO
COVID-19 vaccination	YES	NO

b. Lunch allowance

Lunch was provided to all general staff. The budget was increased in 2020 to allow for a more reliable and trusted supplier. Management and those in senior roles also received an increment in their lunch allowance. However, the researcher observed that the increase was not communicated to some Manufacturing and Warehouse team members.

c. Transportation allowance

Employees who were not assigned a company vehicle received two increases in their transportation allowance - one in 2020 and the other in 2021. As a result, the total increased added to 100%. However, public transportation services, such as local buses called "tro-tro," were required by the Ghanaian government to observe social distancing in the vehicle; hence there was minimal access. In addition, employees feared the risk of infection during the commute. Thus, the company saw it appropriate to increase the transportation allowance so employees could afford Ubers and taxis.

d. Risk Allowance

The company provided a special temporary allowance for COVID-19 precautionary measures from May 2020 until December 2020. This was given to all frontline employees, specifically those with daily direct physical exposure to customers. The allowance was also based on tier depending on the degree of risk of infection in the workplace. Employees who were eligible for this allowance received communication through Whatsapp messages. It was also communicated that if an employee did not receive a message, they could consider themselves exempted.

Intrinsic reward practices

a. Learning & development

The company arranged for training abroad to boost morale and enhance competency. For example, in February 2020, top-performing sales and distribution team members and management attended a week-long sales training in Hermanus, South Africa, hosted by AkzoNobel. In August 2021, top-performing manufacturing team members attended a week-long paint conference/exhibition in Dubai, U.A.E.

In addition, the customer care team received further training to increase reliability and efficiency of service on customer inquiries and orders received via email, phone calls, Whatsapp messages, and social media platforms during COVID-19.

b. The workplace experiences

i. COVID-19 precautionary measures

The company rolled out an internal campaign to increase awareness of COVID-19. A medical doctor was invited to speak to each department to explain and clarify any misconceptions individuals may have. There was a "No mask, No entry" policy in their stores, and they provided free face masks for customers who came without one. Hand-washing stations were placed at the entrance of all stores, and hand-sanitizing stations were located in several work areas. There were also temperature checks at the entrances of stores and offices. Social distancing protocols were also implemented in all workspaces and reinforced by the respective managers. Lastly, the company installed air purifiers in all enclosed spaces.

ii. Support & encouragement

A week after the Ghana government issued a partial lockdown of Accra, the company announced to all employees that all salaries for March would be received in full. It was essential for the company to express its commitment to the workforce through a difficult and uncertain time.

While there was an emphasis on the severity of the COVID-19 infection in the workplace, the company wanted to avoid panic among the employees. It was also necessary to protect the employee from being alienated at the workplace. Thus, there was a strict rule among the managers not to disclose any details of a sick person to anyone apart from the H.R. manager. Although there could have been speculation on the truth, the company felt it was best not to speak about it and instead focus on whoever was at work. The direct manager and/or H.R. would check on the employee directly to ensure the individual received optimal medical care. Furthermore, the owner and managing director of the company were involved in managing the sensitive cases.

iii. Tools & resources to do the job

To support managers who had to work remotely, the company provided all necessary equipment and set up was tasked to the I.T. personnel to ensure its success.

In addition, customer care employees were given the financial and technical resources to cater to online sales solutions.

iv. Work-life Balance

All-female employees with children younger than 15 years were allowed 2 hours each day (either in the morning, during the day, or in the afternoon) to be at home and render the extra needed care during 2020. The time was at their discretion as long as they notified their direct managers/supervisors at any time when they did. These hours were not deducted from their wages.

c. Achievement & recognition

In July 2021, the company held an internal general meeting and recognized the achievements of the entire team, honoring them with a video recapping all the efforts done during the COVID-19 period. The video included managers speaking about the challenges and how the team overcame them. The company needed to express the value and importance of teamwork. The intention was to promote a sense of 'family' and belongingness within the employees.

d. Responsibility & job autonomy

When shift schedules were implemented, there were efforts to enhance the skills of staff members in various departments to ensure the quality of work and boost productivity. There was an urgency to maintain a balance of competencies in a team to maintain performance. For example, the sales team at any given time requires staff for sales, supply, and paint tinting. A sales personnel would require technical paint knowledge and how to conduct a sales transaction. A supply team member must know the store

warehouse setup and how to stack paint buckets to avoid damage. Lastly, a staff member in charge of tinting would require the skill to operate the tinting machine. Should an employee fall sick, there needed to be a replacement from within the team who could take over the job temporarily. Thus, responsibilities for most employees were increased.

Management was also encouraged to train staff to a supervisory level to be on the ground at any given time. One example was the promotion of senior staff in manufacturing to supervisors to alleviate the workload of managers. This proved to be beneficial when a manager fell ill.

Due to the urgency of the circumstances, quick decisions had to be made; thus, it promoted job autonomy in the various departments.

1. Basic Pay

The employee engagement survey revealed that the top rewards most valued by the employees were job security, medical benefits, and fair wages.

Figure 15. Ranking of Rewards Employees valued the most during 2020 - 2021.

RANK	REWARD
1	Job security
2	Medical Benefits
3	Fair wages (salary)
4	Supportive and safe work environment
5	Allowances (transportation & lunch)
6	Incentive Bonuses
7	Learning and development
8	Career growth & Job autonomy
9	Recognition

Level of employee engagement after enhanced rewards

This section sought to answer research question 3: What was the level of employee engagement after the implementation of enhanced reward practices?

After the implementation of enhanced reward practices, the overall mean level of employee engagement was 4.27 (engaged). The organization was able to maintain employee engagement through its implementation of enhanced reward practices. Furthermore, the organization continued to satisfy the hierarchy of needs during the COVID-19 pandemic (Suslova & Holopainen, 2019). There was approximately a 3% increase in engagement after implementing enhanced rewards. We can conclude a positive correlation between enhanced total reward practices and employee engagement based on the findings.

Research question 3 was further discretized to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of enhanced reward practices on employee engagement:

3a. Which parts of employee engagement were most and least affected by the implementation of enhanced rewards?

3b. Was there an effect of employee department on the increment of employee engagement after the implementation of enhanced rewards?

3c. Was there an effect of employee department on the increment of employee engagement after the implementation of enhanced rewards?

Tables 8 to 11 answers question 3a. Table 7 displays the mean scores of employee engagement after enhanced reward practices were implemented and the ranking for each question in decreasing order. It also displays their corresponding standard deviations. To further understand the impact of enhanced reward practices on employee engagement, Tables 9, 10, and 11 breakdowns the mean score differences per category before and after enhanced reward practices were implemented.

Table 8. Ranking of categories according to employee engagement mean scores after enhanced reward practices.

Rank	Category	Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	ER1	I believe the company really cares about my overall well-being and health.	4,59	0,81
2	OE1	I highly recommend Coral Paints Ghana a great place to work.	4,55	0,82
3	OE2	I always want to give my best whenever I am at work.	4,55	0,78
4	ER3	I am highly satisfied with the incentives (such as transportation, lunch, and other allowances) the company offers me.	4,54	0,86
5	ER2	I am very satisfied with my medical benefits.	4,49	1,03
6	IR12	I feel physically safe at my workplace.	4,45	0,90
7	IR1	At work, I have the opportunity to use my strengths every day.	4,45	0,89
8	IR3	I am given the appropriate tools and resources to do my job well.	4,43	0,80
9	OE3	I am proud to work for Coral Paints Ghana.	4,40	1,02
10	IR2	I receive the necessary training and information I need to do my job well	4,40	0,88
11	IR5	I feel that I am growing professionally.	4,39	0,81

12	IR4	I see how my work contributes to positive outcomes for our customers.	4,39	0,76
13	IR8	I think the company fosters a comfortable, energizing, supportive work environment.	4,37	0,97
14	IR7	I feel valued and appreciated by the company.	4,34	0,90
15	IR6	My job enables and encourages me to learn and develop new skills.	4,34	0,89
16	OE6	I am very motivated to come to work.	4,33	0,91
17	IR9	The company does a good job communicating the goals and strategies set by management.	4,30	1,02
18	OE5	I believe the company has my best interests in mind when making business decisions.	4,30	0,84
19	OE4	I can see myself working at Coral Paints Ghana in five years.	4,29	0,92
20	IR11	I get enough feedback from my manager/supervisor to understand if I'm doing my job well.	4,12	1,15
21	ER5	I am rewarded fairly according to my performance and contributions at work.	4,07	1,27
22	IR10	If I do great work, I know that it will be recognized by my manager/supervisor.	4,07	1,01
23	ER4	I believe my pay is competitive with other places I could work.	4,01	1,13
24	OE7	I rarely think about looking for a job at another company.	3,99	1,33
25	IR14	The demands of my workload are manageable.	3,98	0,87
26	ER6	I believe the bonus schemes implemented by the company are fair.	3,81	1,20
27	ER7	The processes for determining compensation and benefits in the company seem fair and unbiased.	3,78	1,10
28	IR13	People from all backgrounds are treated fairly by Coral Paints Ghana.	3,71	1,33

Table 9. Mean score difference of Overall Employee Experience.

Category	Question	Before	After	% diff
OE1	I highly recommend Coral Paints Ghana a great place to work.	4,59	4,55	-0,8%
OE2	I always want to give my best whenever I am at work.	4,42	4,55	3,0%
OE3	I am proud to work for Coral Paints Ghana.	4,30	4,40	2,2%
OE4	I can see myself working at Coral Paints Ghana in five years.	4,28	4,29	0,3%
OE5	I believe the company has my best interests in mind when making business decisions.	4,19	4,30	2,6%
OE6	I am very motivated to come to work.	4,02	4,33	7,5%
OE7	I rarely think about looking for a job at another company.	3,47	3,99	14,9%
	OVERALL	4,18	4,34	3,9%

There was a 3.9% increase in the O.E. engagement experience. This proves that enhanced reward practices positively influence employees' commitment and involvement in their organization (Choudhury & Mohanty, 2018). Earlier research mentioned that employee engagement was an instrument for retaining, attracting, and motivating a quality workforce to remain competitive in this volatile business environment (Simmons, 2018). The researcher observed that the largest effect of the enhanced reward practices was on questions related to an employee's desire to stay at the company (OE7, + 14.9%) and an employee's motivation (OE6, + 7.5% and OE2, + 3%). Furthermore, through the implementation of enhanced reward practices, there was an increase in trust in the organization among employees (OE5, + 2.6%). In addition, the researcher saw a 2.2% engagement level when employees were asked if they were proud to work for the organization (OE3); and a 0.3% increase when asked if employees could see themselves working at the organization for five years. The only decrease in engagement level (- 0.8%) was when employees were asked if they would recommend Coral Paints Ghana as a great place to work.

Table 10. Mean score differences of Extrinsic reward practices.

Category	Question	Before	After	% diff
ER1	I believe the company really cares about my overall well-being and health.	4,51	4,59	1,9%
ER2	I am very satisfied with my medical benefits.	4,41	4,49	1,9%
ER3	I am highly satisfied with the incentives (such as transportation, lunch, and other allowances) the company offers me.	4,35	4,54	4,4%

ER4	I believe my pay is competitive with other places I could work.	3,96	4,01	1,2%
ER5	I am rewarded fairly according to my performance and contributions at work.	3,94	4,07	3,4%
ER6	I believe the bonus schemes implemented by the company are fair.	3,73	3,81	1,9%
ER7	The processes for determining compensation and benefits in the company seem fair and unbiased.	3,73	3,78	1,3%
	OVERALL	4,09	4,19	2,3%

Earlier literature mentioned a positive correlation between extrinsic rewards and levels of employee engagement (Frimpong, 2015). Findings revealed a 2.3% increase in engagement levels regarding the E.R. category of questions. All questions related to extrinsic reward practices experienced an increase in employee engagement. The greatest effect was on ER3, which is related to the satisfaction of incentives resulting in a 4.4% increase, followed by ER5, which pertained to fairness in performance-related pay (+3.4%). ER4 linked to competitive pay saw an increase of 1.2%, which can be assumed as beneficial to the organization as employees ranked fair wages as their third most valued reward (Figure 14). However, the results of ER6 (M: 3.81) and ER7 (M: 3.78) must not be overlooked; these were still below the score of what is considered 'engaged.' These questions refer to fair processes of compensation and benefits.

Table 11. Mean score difference of Intrinsic reward practices.

Category	Question	Before	After	% diff
IR1	At work, I have the opportunity to use my strengths every day.	4,46	4,45	-0,3%
IR2	I receive the necessary training and information I need to do my job well	4,43	4,40	-0,8%
IR3	I am given the appropriate tools and resources to do my job well.	4,41	4,43	0,5%
IR4	I see how my work contributes to positive outcomes for our customers.	4,37	4,39	0,3%
IR5	I feel that I am growing professionally.	4,36	4,39	0,6%
IR6	My job enables and encourages me to learn and develop new skills.	4,29	4,34	1,1%
IR7	I feel valued and appreciated by the company.	4,27	4,34	1,7%
IR8	I think the company fosters a comfortable, energizing, supportive work environment.	4,20	4,37	4,0%

IR9	The company does a good job communicating the goals and strategies set by management.	4,12	4,30	4,4%
IR10	If I do great work, I know that it will be recognized by my manager/supervisor.	4,06	4,07	0,3%
IR11	I get enough feedback from my manager/supervisor to understand if I'm doing my job well.	4,04	4,12	2,1%
IR12	I feel physically safe at my workplace.	3,84	4,45	15,7%
IR13	People from all backgrounds are treated fairly by Coral Paints Ghana.	3,75	3,71	-1,0%
IR14	The demands of my workload are manageable.	3,67	3,98	8,2%
	OVERALL	4,16	4,27	2,5%

The researcher observed a 2.5% overall growth in employee engagement levels for intrinsic reward practices. The largest effect was on IR12 (+15.7%), which is related to physical safety in the workplace and was one of many employees' greatest concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many Coral employees had job roles that did not allow for remote work and thus, were at a higher risk of being infected by COVID-19. Adonu et al. (2020) stated that this situation could compromise their physical and mental well-being, negatively impacting employee engagement.

The second-largest effect was IR14 (+8.2%), which pertained to high workload demands. Although its mean score was still below what is considered 'engaged,' the improvement was essential to the organization considering the concerns around staff rationalization. It was pointed out by Adonu et al. (2020) that staff rationalizations heightened job demand led to widespread stress and increased job pressure. The researcher assumed that the promotions of top-performing staff members to supervisory roles influenced the delegation of responsibilities, reducing work pressure in the workplace.

The researcher observed a 4.4% increase in employees' perception of how the company communicated goals and strategies set by management (IR9). Although there was only a 0.3% increase in IR10 (recognition), there was a 2.1% increase in IR11, which was linked to performance feedback. This implied an improvement in alignment to organization goals and two-way open communication, vital to driving employee engagement. Furthermore, employees ranked recognition as their least valued reward practice (Figure 14)

Efforts done by the organization to enhance work experiences revealed a positive impact on employee engagement, as seen in the results of IR8 (+4%). In addition, there was an increase of 1.7% in how an employee feels valued and appreciated (IR7). This progress contributes to a supportive and conducive work environment, which has proven to be a factor in employee engagement (Acquah-Quarcoo, 2016). Subsequently, employees need to see how their work affects positive outcomes for their customers, and the researcher observed a 0.3% increase in engagement (IR4) after the implementation of enhanced reward practices..

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, the organization continued training and development. The results from IR5 (professional growth) and IR6 (learning and development) displayed an increase of 0.6% and 1.1%, respectively. Additionally, the researcher saw a 0.5% increase in engagement for IR3, linked to the availability of tools and resources. These implied ample management support from the organization. Although there were slight reductions in engagement in IR1 (opportunities to showcase strengths, -0.3%) and IR2 (necessary training and information, -0.8%), both maintained a level of what is considered 'engaged.'

The researcher observed a reduction in engagement in IR13, which was related to the fairness in how the organization treated people from all backgrounds (-1%). The mean score was also at the level of 'almost engaged' (M:3.71).

To answer questions 3b and 3c, ANOVA was applied to the data, and the results were as follows:

By department

Table 12. ANOVA results on employee engagement after enhanced reward practices by department.

	F-statistic	p-value
OE_diff	5,13	0,00
ER_diff	3,68	0,01
IR_diff	2,88	0,03

After the implementation of enhanced reward practices, the researcher observed that the department had a statistically significant effect on employees' responses to all three categories of engagement (O.E., E.R., I.R.). The largest effect of role can be seen in the overall experience, and the smallest effect can be seen in intrinsic rewards. This implied that after enhanced reward practices, all of the employees' engagement experiences varied depending on the department they were a member of.

Table 13. Mean differences between departments after enhanced reward practices.

	Oe_diff	Er_diff	Ir_diff
Admin	3.5 ± 2.245	2.357 ± 1.946	4.643 ± 3.835
Manufacturing	-1.333 ± 6.544	-2.0 ± 7.723	-3.889 ± 16.392
Sales	1.366 ± 2.576	1.317 ± 1.903	2.439 ± 3.384
Warehouse	-1.5 ± 2.811	-1.5 ± 3.564	0.167 ± 2.858
undisclosed	5.5 ± 4.933	3.25 ± 0.957	6.0 ± 5.477

Subsequently, the researcher observed that manufacturing and warehouse employees experienced a reduction in overall experience engagement and extrinsic reward engagement (Table 13). In addition, the manufacturing department also recorded the highest reduction in engagement across the employee reward grouping in the intrinsic reward category.

By role

Table 14. ANOVA results on employee engagement after enhanced reward practices by role.

	F-statistic	p-value
Oe_diff	0,53	0,59
Er_diff	0,02	0,98
Ir_diff	0,13	0,88

Based on Table 14, we concluded that role does not have a statistically significant effect on employees' responses to all three engagement categories. All role-engagement category pairings saw an increase. This implied that employee engagement experiences did not vary according to roles.

Discussions

The main aim of this paper was to critically analyze the impact of enhanced employee reward practices of Coral Paints Ghana on overall employee engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic from January 2020 to December 2021. The first objective of the researcher was to identify the impact of COVID-19 on the level of employee engagement at Coral Paints Ghana before enhanced reward practices. This would serve as a basis to understand if there was an impact on employee engagement after enhanced reward practices. Employee engagement levels were categorized into three experiences: overall experience, extrinsic rewards, and intrinsic rewards. Therefore, the second objective was to identify enhanced reward practices implemented from January 2020 to December 2021 that addressed employee engagement concerns. In order to understand the impact of the reward practices, the third objective was to determine the level of employee engagement after implementing enhanced rewards. Lastly, the researcher desired to contribute any resultant knowledge gained from enhanced reward practices to impact employee engagement in the context of Ghana.

It was essential to the research that the impact of COVID-19 on Coral Paints Ghana was understood prior to answering the research questions. Adonu et al. (2020) stated some of the general implications of COVID-19 on Ghanaian employees, which were aligned to what Coral Paints Ghana experienced: staff rationalizations leading to increased job demand; difficulties in remote work; absence of social interaction, which led to stress and anxiety; heightened fear of infection risks in the workplace; adjustments to COVID-19 protocols in the workplace; challenges with work-life balance; and lastly, fear of loss of job. However, the business environment is volatile; thus, reward systems must evolve with it (Joniaková et al., 2020). Based on findings, the organization was able to do this with their enhanced reward practices during COVID-19.

Overall Engagement levels BEFORE and AFTER enhanced reward practices

The findings revealed that employees were already engaged (overall mean score of 4.15) before the implementation of enhanced reward practices. We assume that employees were committed and involved in their organization and its organizational goals (Choudhury & Mohanty, 2018) despite the impact of the pandemic. Research has pointed out that employee engagement should not be a one-time event but should be ingrained in the company's culture (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020). The researcher speculates that its workforce remained engaged because the organization strived to maintain employee engagement prior to the pandemic. Kumar & Pansari (2015) shared that engaged employees "are optimistic about the meaningfulness of their job, the safety of their workplace, and the availability of adequate resources to complete tasks." Therefore, employees already at an engaged level during the pandemic proved advantageous as the organization could mitigate the challenges and maintain their engagement level at engaged. After implementation of enhanced reward practices, results revealed a **3% growth in employee engagement after enhanced reward practices** (overall mean score of 4.27).

Before the implementation of enhanced reward practices, employees said they would recommend Coral Paints Ghana as a great place to work, resulting in the highest mean score (M:4.59). However, findings also revealed that some employees still considered seeking a job at another company with the lowest mean score overall (M:3.47). After the implementation of enhanced reward practices, the researcher observed a 14.9% increase in engagement linked to whether employees still considered seeking a job with another company (M:3.99). However, there was a slight reduction of 0.8% in engagement levels regarding employees' recommendation of the organization being a great place to work (M:4.55). Nonetheless, there was an increase in motivation to come to work in employees' responses (+7.5%), commitment to giving their best at work (+3%), and trust that Coral Paints Ghana has their best interests when making decisions (+2.6%). There was also an increase in loyalty when employees were asked if they saw themselves working for the organization in five years (+0.3%) and if they were proud to work for the organization (+2.2%). This implied that employees were willing and satisfied enough to stay with the company, but perhaps they experienced an issue once enhanced reward practices were implemented. Therefore, the organization needed to identify the problem early to mitigate it to avoid any decrease in engagement levels related to motivation, commitment, trust, and loyalty.

Impact of Enhanced Extrinsic Reward Practices on Employee Engagement

Frimpong (2015) stated that extrinsic rewards are the top drivers of employee engagement. Despite financial challenges during the pandemic, the organization enhanced its extrinsic reward practices. We observed an overall 2.3% increase in engagement levels regarding the extrinsic reward category of questions. In the survey, employees had ranked job security, medical benefits, and fair wages as their top most valued rewards, indicating them as the top drivers of employee engagement. The organization assured job security and reinforced medical benefits during the study period. However, when it came to the perception of fairness regarding the processes linked to compensation, incentives, and benefits,

employee engagement levels remained almost engaged. Although findings revealed an overall increase in these factors, there was a reduction in the overall experience engagement and extrinsic reward engagement amongst manufacturing and warehouse departments. This could have been caused by the fact that manufacturing and warehouse departments were exempted from the risk allowance.

During the pandemic's peak, essential workers such as healthcare workers, who had high infection-risk jobs, were given hazard pay. Hazard pay is additional pay for performing a hazardous duty or work involving physical hardship (Kinder et al., 2020). At Coral Paints Ghana, the frontline team, those directly exposed to customers, were given a risk allowance. This action can promote appreciation, belongingness, and importance within the employee. However, the allowance was given to employees based on tiers depending on the degree of risk of infection in the workplace. This could give rise to fairness issues because it was difficult to determine or defend the degree of risk of COVID-19 infection. It only takes one person to infect another.

Earlier research pointed out that when creating an effective reward strategy, the company must remember that workplace fairness affects employee engagement (Seifert et al., 2016). Therefore, fair compensation and benefits are not only linked to the competitiveness of the financial rewards but also to its processes. In addition, leadership styles, personality attributes, and employee communication are significantly and positively correlated to employee engagement (Saad et al., 2018). Employees eligible for the risk allowance received communication through Whatsapp messages, and if an employee did not receive a message, they were asked to consider themselves exempted. Thus, effective employee communication was not executed in this situation. Subsequently, we can conclude that these were the causes for the reduction in engagement levels regarding employees' recommendations on whether the organization was a great place to work.

However, it is essential to point out that we saw an increase of 3.4% in employee engagement levels linked to whether employees believed they were fairly rewarded according to their performance and contributions at work. Managers were required to discuss performance appraisals linked to bonuses with their team members individually and agree on the results before submitting them to H.R. The company did not reach its quarterly sales target in 2020 but achieved it in 2021. By linking the bonuses to performance, employees were motivated and engaged to perform better. Achieving sales targets was one of how the organization's efforts were reciprocated by employees' commitment (Einwiller et al., 2021).

Impact of Enhanced Intrinsic Reward Practices on Employee Engagement

Umeozor (2018) stated that an individual's personal or inherent motivation significantly impacts their engagement more than extrinsic factors, emphasizing that extrinsic motivators are essential to prevent job dissatisfaction from affecting employee engagement. Anku-Tsede (2013) remarked that most Ghanaian organizations pay too much attention to financial rewards at the expense of non-financial rewards. This was not the case for Coral Paints Ghana. There was an overall 2.5% increase in employee engagement levels for intrinsic reward practices.

In Ghana, employees in the formal sector experienced job losses, salary cuts, and promotion deferments (Adonu et al., 2020). However, Coral employees did not experience a vast career shock as others in the market. Instead, employees received their salaries in total, and selected top-performing employees from the general staff were promoted to supervisory roles. Research revealed that job promotion provided opportunities for personal growth, more responsibility, and high social status; thus, it positively affected work motivation (Haryono et al., 2020). In addition, Coral employees were assured of job security. In the employee satisfaction survey conducted by Jobberman Ghana (2021), the number one intrinsic trait a Ghanaian employee valued the most in a company was the financial stability of the company. When the organization announced in March 2020 that employees would receive total salaries, despite sick leaves and fewer working hours per employee, it solidified the perception of its financial stability. This action enhanced organizational commitment and trust within its workforce.

The company put much effort into elevating the workplace experience to reduce stress and anxiety during COVID-19. Studies proved that organizations that de-prioritized employees' psychological needs, owing to serve business losses due to lockdown, compromised their employees' engagement and well-being (De-la-Calle-Durán & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021). Thus, it was essential that employees felt physically, psychologically, and emotionally safe in the workplace. Research states that when employees are convinced that their health is being protected, following official rules precisely, and even adopting further steps, their level of engagement rises significantly (De-la-Calle-Durán & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021). The organization found ways to mitigate the fear of infection at the workplace, mainly because most job roles could not be done remotely (Adonu et al., 2020). Thus, it was observed that the most significant effect on employee engagement levels was linked to physical safety in the workplace (+15.7%).

The organization relied on enhanced medical benefits to influence employees' psychological and emotional safety in the workplace. Employees were given an unlimited supply of free face masks, full coverage, and access to PCR tests and COVID-19 vaccinations, vitamins, and an on-call doctor for private medical care. In addition, management was lenient in administering sick leaves and imposed an unwritten rule that there should be no detailed discussions when a team member was absent at work. In 2020, several forms of stigma were reported against confirmed COVID-19 patients, their relatives, and frontline health workers (Adom et al., 2021). Due to the stigma and discrimination toward COVID-19, individuals likely appreciated this subtleness. The company also recognized the challenges experienced during COVID-19 by working mothers (Adonu et al., 2020) and allowed them to take 2 hours at their discretion to sort out childcare. With Ghana's poor healthcare infrastructure (UNICEF Ghana, 2021), it was not a surprise that there was a growth of 1.9% in satisfaction with an employee's medical benefits and trust that the company cares about an employee's overall well-being and health. Additionally, the researcher observed a 4.4% increase in satisfaction with incentives such as transportation and lunch allowances. These factors drove employee engagement levels related to the perception that the company fosters a conducive and supportive work environment to increase (+4%).

Khan (2013) declared that good quality line management, two-way open communication, and effective cooperation were drivers for employee engagement. After enhanced reward practices, there was a growth

of 4.4% in engagement levels related to employees' perception of whether the company does a good job communicating the goals and strategies set by management. Also, engagement levels for performance feedback increased by 2.1%.

Although employees ranked learning and development, career growth and autonomy, and recognition as their least valued rewards during COVID-19, it does not render them insignificant. The researcher saw an increase of 1.7% in engagement levels related to an employee feeling valued and appreciated by the company. An engaged employee should feel a vital part of the business (Suslova & Holopainen, 2019). Providing opportunities for learning and development, career growth, and praise and recognition contributes to the feeling of importance and value. The researcher observed slight increases in engagement levels linked to professional growth (0.6%), learning and development (1.1%), and recognition (0.3%).

One of the factors connected with employee engagement is the availability of adequate resources to complete the task (Kahn, 1990). The researcher saw a 0.5% increase in engagement levels related to providing appropriate tools and resources to complete the job. However, there was a decline of 0.8% when it came to employees receiving the training and information needed for the job. This impacted employees' engagement levels linked to whether they have the opportunity to use their strengths every day (-0.3%). Nevertheless, the researcher acknowledged that all these factors still received mean scores at a level of 'engaged.' Thus, it can be attributed to the negative impact of the turbulent times of COVID-19; they are factors that can be improved as the business environment changes.

Resultant knowledge to contribute to Ghanaian H.R. practitioners.

Gartner Inc. (2020), a technological research and consulting firm in the United States, stated that remote work was a work trend that was expected to be accelerated post-pandemic. However, Jobberman Ghana (2021) reported that productivity decreased due to Ghana's unreliable power supply and poor internet infrastructure, which were not conducive to remote work. Also, Adonu et al. (2020) mentioned that many formal-sector employees in the country do not have positions that lend themselves to remote work, nor were many well-versed in utilizing efficient information technology. These two circumstances were said to have led to frustration, resulting in reduced employee morale. Thus, it was essential for Coral Paints Ghana to create a safe and supportive workplace. The organization placed much effort into assuring employees of their physical safety in the workplace to impact an employee's motivation to come to work. The researcher observed that employees ranked a safe and supportive work environment as their fourth most valuable reward after extrinsic rewards (job security, medical benefits, and fair wages). Frimpong (2015) stated that a positive work environment was key to employee engagement. Therefore, H.R. practitioners and organizations must understand what their employees perceive as 'a positive work environment' to influence employee engagement. In addition, organizations must consider the country's business and technological environment affecting their employees before creating a reward strategy.

Gartner Inc. (2020) also reported that the principal focus of the reward practices in the United States was related to mental well-being. However, this was not discussed by the company, nor was it part of its reward practices. There is an economic (no access to food), psychological (loss of self-esteem), and social (such as family blame, ridicule, and mockery) stigma toward mental health-related issues in Ghana (Tawiah et al., 2015). World Health Organization indicated that individuals might fear being discriminated against if labeled as having a mental health problem (Tawiah et al., 2015). Thus, it would be challenging to identify if employees had concerns about their mental health as they may not be keen on speaking about it.

Nevertheless, the absence of mental health-related practices does not imply that employees did not experience stress or anxiety. There was an increase of 8.2% in engagement levels linked to whether an employee perceived the demands of their workload as manageable. Earlier literature pointed out that staff rationalizations heightened job demand resulting in widespread stress and increased job pressure (Adonu et al., 2020). This implies that stress and job pressure were reduced. In addition, research has shown that low-income workers will risk their health and safety concerns to provide for their families. (Wolor et al., 2020). Thus, a low absenteeism rate considered in isolation does not imply a workforce is engaged.

As part of its enhanced reward practices, the company ensured to address the concern of female workers regarding childcare. The literature mentioned that as part of its cultural norm in Ghana, childcare fell under the responsibility of mothers (Waterhouse et al., 2017). Research states that a successful reward system requires cultural and market compatibility (Joniaková et al., 2020). The research was conducted on cultural influences on reward systems based on Swedish, American, and British companies, revealing that cultural differences affect the creation of reward systems (Flamm & Kihl, 2004). Thus, Ghanaian organizations should consider Ghanaian cultural views when considering an effective reward system.

Chapter 5: CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents the conclusion to findings in Chapter 4 and the implications these may have to the academic world, SME organizations, and human resource practitioners. Recommendations were also made to benefit Coral Paints Ghana and future research. Lastly, limitations of the study were noted.

CONCLUSION

The case study on Coral Paints Ghana sought to understand the impact of enhanced reward practices on employee engagement during COVID-19. Findings revealed a positive correlation between enhanced reward practices and employee engagement. The key findings were as follows:

1.Despite challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Coral employees were already engaged (average mean score of 4.15). Studies indicate that 'engaged' employees may 'like the company, but would leave for a better offer' (Suslova & Holopainen, 2019). The researcher observed this in the data as it revealed that the majority of employees would recommend Coral Paints Ghana as a great place to work (engaged), but some employees still considered seeking a job at another company (almost engaged). We also saw the importance of fairness. Findings revealed that employees were 'almost engaged' when asked questions about fairness related to compensation and benefits, their processes, and how the company treats people from all backgrounds.

2.From a total reward perspective, the company was able to mitigate challenges caused by the pandemic to maintain employee engagement levels. The extrinsic reward practices covered basic pay (ensuring full wages were paid), contingent pay (quarterly sales target bonus linked to targets and annual bonus linked to performance), and benefits (added medical benefits, increase in transportation and lunch allowances, risk allowance). The intrinsic reward practices accounted for continuous learning and development programs, enhanced workplace experiences (COVID-19 precautionary measures, support, and encouragement, required tools and resources to do the job well, and work-life balance), employee recognition of achievements, and increased responsibilities and job autonomy. Findings also revealed that extrinsic rewards (job security, medical benefits, and fair wages) were the top drivers of employee engagement. Another top factor driving employee engagement was a supportive and safe work environment.

3.After the implementation of enhanced reward practices, there was a 3% growth in engagement. Therefore, the researcher concludes a positive correlation between enhanced reward practices and employee engagement. Although the growth was nominal, the researcher considered the immense negative impact of COVID-19 and all the other internal challenges the organization may have encountered; thus, the growth was an important achievement.

- a. The most significant effect of enhanced reward practices was seen on employees feeling physically safe in the workplace (+15.7%), which was a major concern during COVID-19. The second significant effect was that employees rarely thought about seeking a job at another company (+14.9%). Furthermore, the organization had an attrition rate of 7.6% during the study period. This proves that employee engagement practices are essential to retaining, attracting, and motivating talent. The researcher also saw a large effect on employees perceiving workloads as manageable (+8.2%). Subsequently, one question had a slight reduction in employee engagement levels linked to employees' perception of how the organization treated people from all backgrounds (-0.8%), implying a lack of fairness and a communication gap.
- b. We observed that the manufacturing department recorded the highest reduction in engagement in the intrinsic reward category. This proves that extrinsic motivation factors are not necessarily motivators but are needed to prevent job dissatisfaction from affecting employee engagement (Umeozor, 2018).

4. The researcher also sought to add resultant knowledge to assist HR practitioners in Ghana in formulating reward practices to impact employee engagement. Firstly, organizations must consider the country's business and technological environment before implementing the HR strategy. Earlier research stated that remote work did not promote morale and productivity (Adonu et al., 2020) (Jobberman Ghana, 2021). Findings showed that employees ranked a safe and supportive work environment as the fourth most valuable reward. In addition, the researcher observed the most significant effect on engagement level linked to physical safety at work. These findings implied the importance of understanding what employees value as a positive work environment. Secondly, earlier research pointed out that low-income employees will continue to work despite the health and safety risks involved in meeting their daily needs (Wolor et al., 2020). Therefore, organizations should understand the reasons for a low absenteeism rate in low to medium-income countries before relating it to a positive outcome in employee engagement. Thirdly, the reward strategy should consider a country's cultural views. One example was when the company addressed the concern of female workers regarding childcare because it is a cultural norm in Ghana that childcare falls under the responsibility of mothers (Waterhouse et al., 2017). Another example was when the company was discrete in handling employees with COVID-19 cases due to the stigma and discrimination around the virus.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this dissertation have significant implications for the academic world, Ghanaian SME businesses, and human resource practitioners. There is limited related literature (1) focused on Ghana and (2) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of Ghana concerning employee engagement and reward practices. Thus, findings in this research contribute to knowledge that scholars, Ghanaian SME businesses, and HR practitioners can rely on to create and understand further the impact of reward practices on employee engagement in the future, particularly in crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and results of this study, the following recommendations are made. These recommendations are not limited to Coral Paints Ghana but to all organizations in general:

1. Organizations should consider employees' perception of fairness in compensation and benefits schemes. This will help understand employees' experiences better and capture critical divergences that may negatively impact employee engagement (Seifert et al., 2016). For example, Diekmann (2015) revealed that (1) employees may have limited knowledge of how pay works; (2) most employees value transparency around compensation; and (3) the link between pay and performance may be unclear; these three factors affect their perception. Thus, organizations should have clear compensation and benefits policies that must be communicated effectively to employees.

2. HR practitioners should consider an effective communication plan when implementing enhanced reward practices to ensure optimal employee engagement levels are achieved. The following are recommended to help organizations enhance pay communication: (1) recognize the impact of pay secrecy on pay equity perceptions; (2) determine the right level of transparency for the organizational

culture; and (3) transform managers into communication ambassadors for compensation (Diekmann, 2015). Furthermore, through a reward system, an organization can spread the message of what it values and considers valuable (Joniaková et al., 2020). Therefore, the company should use reward systems as an opportunity to communicate what it values to enhance employee engagement and further strengthen its internal brand.

3. It is in every company's best interest to strive for a highly engaged workforce to achieve overall positive organizational outcomes. Research proved that leadership styles and personality attributes are related to employee engagement (Saad et al., 2018). Thus, future studies should explore their influence on enhanced reward practices and employee engagement.

4. A country's cultural views affect employee engagement. Therefore, organizations need to do culture-specific studies to gain a broader understanding of what that culture values concerning engagement and then act on those findings (Munsterteiger, 2019).

5. Employee engagement can facilitate effective crisis management for organizations (Saji, 2014). In a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Coral Paints Ghana was still able to engage its employees. Therefore, organizations should consistently build highly engaged employees to become the building block that can save the company in a future crisis (Saji, 2014).

6. Reward systems should evolve with the current business environment (Joniaková et al., 2020). This research's findings are based on a single case study in the Ghana business environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, organizations and future studies can only rely on the findings to create reward strategies applicable to their present situation.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations of this study include that data was obtained from a single organization in Coral Paints Ghana in Accra, Ghana, which may affect the generalizability of this study. In addition, the researcher limited the analysis of employee engagement levels across the company, roles, and departments due to limited time. It may be beneficial for future research to understand the impact of enhanced reward practices on employee engagement according to gender and employment status (local or expatriate hire). Future research should also explore the role of leadership and employee communication in reward practices to impact employee engagement. Participation bias in the interviews and employee engagement surveys is also a study limitation.



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