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Capítulo 13

PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION AND AWARDS AS INDICATORS OF EXCELLENCE IN COMMERCIAL PERFORMANCE



PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION AND AWARDS AS INDICATORS OF EXCELLENCE IN COMMERCIAL PERFORMANCE

Amanda Cristina Constantino da Costa Silva¹

Abstract: This article explores the intersection between professional recognition, award systems, and the measurement of commercial performance. The main objective is to discuss how the metrics used in award programs not only quantify sales success but also serve as a direct reflection of the management practices and leadership styles predominant in an organization. The adopted methodology consists of a systematic literature review, analyzing motivation theories, such as those by Maslow and Herzberg, and empirical studies on the impact of recognition on employee performance. The analysis demonstrates that while well-structured recognition programs can boost intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, increase talent retention, and foster a high-performance culture, the choice of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for these awards reveals the strategic priorities and values of the leadership. It is concluded that awards, when aligned with a holistic management vision and transformational leadership, transcend the function of a simple reward, becoming strategic tools for competence development, reinforcement of organizational culture, and the pursuit of sustainable commercial excellence. The study offers insights for managers on how to design recognition systems that are fair, motivating, and truly indicative of excellent performance.

Keywords: Professional Recognition, Commercial Performance, Sales Management, Leadership, Performance Metrics, Work Motivation.

Resumo: Este artigo explora a interseção entre reconhecimento profissional, sistemas de premiação e

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a mensuração da performance comercial. O objetivo principal é discutir como as métricas utilizadas em programas de premiação não apenas quantificam o sucesso em vendas, mas também servem como um reflexo direto das práticas de gestão e dos estilos de liderança predominantes em uma organização. A metodologia adotada consiste em uma revisão sistemática da literatura, analisando teorias de motivação, como as de Maslow e Herzberg, e estudos empíricos sobre o impacto do reconhecimento no desempenho dos colaboradores. A análise demonstra que, enquanto programas de reconhecimento bem estruturados podem impulsionar a motivação intrínseca e extrínseca, aumentar a retenção de talentos e fomentar uma cultura de alta performance, a escolha dos indicadores-chave de desempenho (KPIs) para essas premiações revela as prioridades estratégicas e os valores da liderança. Conclui-se que as premiações, quando alinhadas a uma visão de gestão holística e a uma liderança transformacional, transcendem a função de simples recompensa, tornando-se ferramentas estratégicas para o desenvolvimento de competências, o reforço da cultura organizacional e a busca pela excelência comercial sustentável. O estudo oferece insights para gestores sobre como desenhar sistemas de reconhecimento que sejam justos, motivadores e verdadeiramente indicativos de uma performance de excelência.

Palavras-chave: Reconhecimento Profissional, Performance Comercial, Gestão de Vendas, Liderança, Métricas de Desempenho, Motivação no Trabalho.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary corporate environment, characterized by high competitiveness and the relentless pursuit of superior results, the performance of the commercial team assumes a central role for the success and sustainability of any organization. In this context, sales management has evolved from a purely transactional focus to a strategic approach that encompasses the development, motivation, and retention of talent. Among the most used tools to stimulate performance, professional



recognition programs and awards stand out as consolidated practices. However, their effectiveness and meaning transcend the simple granting of bonuses or trophies.

This article starts from the premise that award systems are more than mere incentive instruments; they are, in essence, a mirror of the management practices and leadership values of a company. The way an organization defines, measures, and rewards “excellence” reveals its true strategic priorities and the type of culture it seeks to cultivate. Therefore, the analysis of award metrics offers a two-way street: while serving to evaluate individual and collective performance, it also allows for a diagnosis of the quality of management and leadership (GALLUS; FREY, 2015).

The proposed discussion addresses how the choice of specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) — whether focused on sales volume, profit margin, customer satisfaction, or new account acquisition — directly reflects what leadership values. Management focused exclusively on short-term results tends to create award systems that can, paradoxically, undermine the intrinsic motivation and ethical behavior of the team. In contrast, leadership that values long-term development, collaboration, and the building of solid customer relationships will tend to adopt a more holistic and balanced set of metrics.

The objective of this work is, therefore, to critically analyze the relationship between recognition, awards, and commercial performance, with a particular focus on how evaluation metrics reflect management and leadership philosophies. Through a review of the literature on motivation theories, performance management, and strategic leadership, the aim is to offer a framework for managers and leaders to design and implement recognition programs that not only reward success but also define it in a manner aligned with a vision of sustainable commercial excellence and a positive organizational culture.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the impact of recognition and awards on commercial performance requires a



solid foundation in classic and contemporary theories of work motivation. These theoretical constructs provide the basis for understanding why and how incentive programs work — or fail — and what the role of leadership is in this process.

Classic Theories of Motivation

Two of the most influential motivation theories that inform the practice of professional recognition are Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Frederick Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory. Both, although developed in the mid-20th century, continue to offer valuable insights.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs posits that human beings are motivated by a series of hierarchically organized needs. Once the most basic needs (physiological and safety) are satisfied, higher-level needs emerge as motivators. Recognition and awards fit directly into the fourth layer of this pyramid: the need for esteem. This need encompasses both self-esteem (confidence, competence, achievement) and hetero-esteem (recognition, status, respect from others). Award programs, by conferring status and visibility on high-performing employees, directly address this need, validating their contribution and strengthening their position within the organization’s social group.

Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory distinguishes two sets of factors in the work environment. The Hygiene Factors (or extrinsic), such as salary, company policies, and working conditions, are not capable of generating satisfaction or motivation, but their absence or inadequacy causes dissatisfaction. On the other hand, the Motivational Factors (or intrinsic) are those that effectively promote satisfaction and drive performance. Herzberg identifies recognition as one of the most potent motivational factors, alongside achievement, responsibility, and professional growth. According to this theory, while a financial bonus (hygiene factor) can prevent dissatisfaction, it is the act of recognition for good work that truly engages and motivates the employee to seek excellence.

“Without such an explanation, Herzberg’s theory is not a motivational theory, but simply a theory of job satisfaction.” (LOBOS, 1975)



This distinction is crucial, as it suggests that management should not focus only on monetary rewards, but rather on creating an environment where genuine recognition is a constant practice, aligned with the people management strategy.

Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Motivation

More recent literature on work motivation often focuses on the dichotomy between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, a concept that refines and expands Herzberg's ideas.

Extrinsic Motivation refers to performing an activity to obtain an external result, such as a monetary reward, a physical prize, or public praise. Most traditional award programs operate primarily in this domain.

Intrinsic Motivation involves performing an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction inherent in the task itself. It is driven by internal factors such as a sense of purpose, autonomy, mastery of a skill, and personal growth.

The study by Gallus and Frey (2015) warns about the risks of excessive reliance on extrinsic incentives. Under certain conditions, external rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation, a phenomenon known as the “overjustification effect” or “crowding-out.” When an employee who is already intrinsically motivated begins to receive an external reward for the same task, their perception of why they are performing that work can change: from “I do it because I like it and I’m good at it” to “I do it to get the reward.” This can lead to a drop in engagement and creativity, especially if the reward is perceived as controlling.

The Strategic Role of Awards

Gallus and Frey (2015) propose a strategic view of awards, classifying them into two main



categories that have distinct implications for management:

- **Confirmatory Awards** These are based on explicit and predetermined criteria, such as achieving quantitative goals. The main focus is the validation of expected and measurable performance. From a managerial perspective, these awards reinforce the importance of specific KPIs and create a sense of procedural justice in the organization.
- **Discretionary Awards** These are based on a broad and subjective evaluation of performance, often granted ex post. Their focus is the recognition of exceptional, innovative contributions or those that go beyond what is expected. The managerial implication is that they allow leadership to highlight behaviors and values that are difficult to quantify but essential to the organizational culture.

This distinction is fundamental. While confirmatory awards are essential for aligning the team around clear and objective goals, discretionary awards offer leadership a powerful tool to signal which behaviors and attitudes are truly valued, even if they are not reflected in a sales spreadsheet. The balanced combination of both types of recognition is an indicator of a mature and strategic management practice, capable of rewarding both results (the “what”) and the way they are achieved (the “how”).

PERFORMANCE METRICS AS A REFLECTION OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

The transition from a theoretical understanding of motivation to the practice of sales management occurs in the selection and application of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The choice of metrics to evaluate and reward the commercial team is not a neutral act; it is an explicit declaration of the values, priorities, and philosophy of the leadership. The metrics a company chooses to celebrate



“excellence” define, for the entire organization, what that excellence actually means.

The Choice of Indicators: A Strategic Act

Sales KPIs can be categorized into different domains: financial, efficiency, activity, and individual performance. Management focused solely on short-term financial results may prioritize metrics such as total revenue and sales volume. Although important, these indicators, when isolated, can lead to undesirable behaviors, such as selling at any cost, excessive discounting that erodes profit margin, and neglect of after-sales service.

On the other hand, leadership with a long-term strategic vision tends to adopt a more balanced dashboard of indicators, which includes customer-oriented and business sustainability metrics. Indicators such as Customer Lifetime Value (LTV), Retention Rate, and Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC) reveal a concern not only with closing the next deal but with building a profitable and loyal customer portfolio. The inclusion of these KPIs in award programs signals to the team that the quality of the relationship is as important as the volume of the transaction.

What KPIs Reveal about Leadership

The selection of KPIs for award purposes functions as a diagnosis of the leadership style and organizational culture. Different types of indicators correlate with specific management characteristics:

- Volume and Immediate Result KPIs Examples: Gross Revenue, Number of Units Sold, Number of Contracts Closed. What they reveal: Leadership focused on short-term results, commercial aggressiveness, and a high-pressure culture. They indicate a predominantly transactional management, where the focus is on the volume of transactions and the fulfillment of immediate numerical goals.



- Efficiency and Productivity KPIs Examples: Conversion Rate, Average Sales Cycle, Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC). What they reveal: Process-oriented management, with a constant search for resource optimization and a focus on the operational efficiency of the sales machine. They demonstrate concern for productivity and the intelligent use of available resources.
- Quality and Sustainability KPIs Examples: Customer Lifetime Value (LTV), Retention/Churn Rate, Sales Net Promoter Score (NPS). What they reveal: Leadership with a long-term vision, focus on customer satisfaction and success, and a culture of building lasting relationships. They reflect management that prioritizes quality over quantity and business sustainability.
- Development and Behavior KPIs Examples: Training Completion, Adoption of New Tools, 360° Evaluation, Interdepartmental Collaboration. What they reveal: Transformational leadership focused on the continuous development of people, valuing behavioral competencies, and alignment with organizational culture. They indicate management that invests in human capital as a competitive differential.

Beyond the Numbers: Qualitative Indicators and Transformational Leadership

Excellent management recognizes that not everything that matters can be measured in numbers. This is where discretionary awards, mentioned by Gallus and Frey (2015), gain a strategic role. The leadership's ability to identify and publicly celebrate acts of collaboration, innovation, mentoring, or exceptional customer service — even if they did not generate a direct sale — is a strong indicator of transformational leadership.

This type of leadership inspires and motivates employees to go beyond their contractual goals, contributing to a more positive work environment and the strengthening of organizational culture. By rewarding behaviors, and not just results, leaders reinforce the idea that “how” objectives



are achieved is as important as the “what.” This helps build a more resilient, ethical, and engaged team that does not rely exclusively on financial incentives to perform.

Risks of Poorly Designed Metrics

Award systems based on poorly conceived metrics or those excessively focused on a single aspect of performance can generate significant negative consequences. Exacerbated internal competition, lack of collaboration, employee burnout, and even unethical behavior to achieve goals at any cost are real risks.

A study by Harvard Business School (WHILLANS, 2019) [3] reinforces that satisfaction with rewards is directly linked to well-being and job satisfaction. Award programs perceived as unfair, unattainable, or misaligned with company values can destroy value, leading to disengagement and increased turnover rates. Therefore, the design of award metrics is a critical responsibility of leadership, with a direct impact on organizational health and long-term commercial performance.

CONCLUSION

This article demonstrated that professional recognition and award systems in the commercial sphere are much more than simple incentive tools. They operate as a mirror that reflects with remarkable clarity the management practices, strategic priorities, and, fundamentally, the essence of an organization’s leadership. The analysis of the metrics used to define and reward sales excellence offers a precise diagnosis of whether the company’s culture values immediate results over sustainability, or whether it seeks a balance between performance and purpose.

The literature review, anchored in classic motivation theories such as those by Maslow and Herzberg, and in contemporary concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, confirms that recognition meets deep human needs for esteem and achievement. However, the way this recognition



is structured and communicated by leadership determines whether it will foster sustainable motivation or, paradoxically, undermine intrinsic engagement. The choice of a balanced performance indicator dashboard, which combines result metrics (the “what”) with behavior and development metrics (the “how”), is a sign of mature management and transformational leadership. Such leaders understand that commercial excellence is not just about achieving goals, but about building a capable, ethical team aligned with the organization’s values.

In summary, for recognition and award programs to be true indicators of excellence, they must be designed not as an end in themselves, but as an integral part of a people management strategy that values human development, a culture of collaboration, and the building of long-term customer relationships. The final message for managers is that the most effective awards are those that celebrate not only the sales champions but also the bearers of the culture and the architects of business sustainability. By doing so, leadership transforms recognition from a simple reward into a powerful engine for lasting commercial excellence.

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