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The effects of incentives and rewards in motivating virtual assistants in Naga City, Camarines Sur

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Abstract:

The shift to remote work has reshaped employment practices, highlighting the essential role of virtual assistants (VAs) in supporting businesses globally. This study investigated the effects of incentives and rewards on motivating VAs in Naga City, Camarines Sur. Specifically, it aimed to determine the types of monetary and non-monetary incentives most effective in motivating VAs, examine how these incentives influence work efficiency, productivity, and job satisfaction, and propose an enhancement program to sustain and improve motivation. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study surveyed 100 respondents to gather data on the motivational impact of various rewards. Findings revealed that tailored incentives, such as productivity bonuses and non-monetary recognitions like professional growth opportunities, significantly enhance work performance and satisfaction. Guided by Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and Vroom's Expectancy Theory, an enhancement program was designed to address VAs' needs. This program includes skill development workshops, wellness initiatives, and recognition schemes to foster engagement and collaboration. The study offers valuable insights for employers and stakeholders on optimizing remote workforce management through structured motivational strategies. Implementing these approaches ensures a more productive and satisfied VA workforce, contributing to organizational success in an increasingly competitive digital economy. This research highlights the importance of aligning incentives with employee needs to achieve sustainable workplace motivation, and more engaged, productivity driven work force in delivering organizational success.

Keywords:

Virtual Assistant, Incentives and Rewards, Motivation, Work Productivity, Job Satisfaction.

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Introduction

The rise of remote work has become a defining trend in the global workforce, accelerated by technological advancements and the unprecedented shift to work-from-home arrangements due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual assistants (VAs), who provide administrative, technical, or creative assistance remotely, have emerged as a critical workforce in this new paradigm. Globally, organizations rely on virtual assistants to streamline operations, reduce costs, and maintain flexibility (Upwork, 2023). The International Labour Organization (ILO) highlights that employee motivation, particularly in remote settings, is vital for achieving organizational goals, fostering job satisfaction, and improving productivity (ILO, 2022). Incentives and rewards are commonly utilized to drive motivation; however, the effectiveness of these mechanisms varies based on cultural, economic, and organizational contexts.

In the Philippines, the virtual assistant industry has gained remarkable traction as the country positions itself as a hub for business process outsourcing (BPO) and freelance remote work. A study by Aquino and Cruz (2021) revealed that Filipino VAs are recognized globally for their strong work ethic, English proficiency, and adaptability, making them highly sought after in various industries. Despite these advantages, the motivation of virtual assistants remains a pressing concern, as remote work often leads to challenges such as isolation, lack of engagement, and diminished productivity. Research by De Leon and Santos (2020) found that incentives, whether monetary or non-monetary, significantly impact Filipino remote workers' performance and overall job satisfaction. These findings underscore the importance of identifying the most effective reward mechanisms to sustain the motivation of Filipino virtual assistants.

In Naga City, Camarines Sur, has seen a growing number of virtual assistants, reflecting the broader national trend. As a regional hub for education and commerce in the Bicol Region, Naga City has cultivated a pool of skilled professionals who have transitioned to virtual assistant roles due to the flexibility and opportunities offered by remote work. However, studies specific to this locale remain sparse, highlighting a gap in understanding how incentives and rewards influence the motivation and productivity of virtual assistants in Naga City. Local organizations and employers often rely on anecdotal evidence when designing reward systems, which may not effectively address the unique needs of this workforce. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the types of incentives and rewards that best motivate virtual assistants in the city. It also aims to explore the effects of these motivational mechanisms on work efficiency, productivity, and job satisfaction, ultimately proposing an enhancement program to maintain and elevate motivation levels.

Research Questions

This study examined the effects of incentives and rewards in motivating virtual assistants in Naga City, Camarines Sur. Specifically it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What types of monetary and non-monetary incentives and rewards are most effective in motivating virtual assistants in Naga City, Camarines Sur?
2. How do incentives and rewards affect work efficiency, work productivity, and job satisfaction among virtual assistants in Naga City, Camarines Sur?
3. What enhancement program can be designed to sustain and improve the motivation of virtual assistants in Naga City, Camarines Sur?

Theoretical Framework

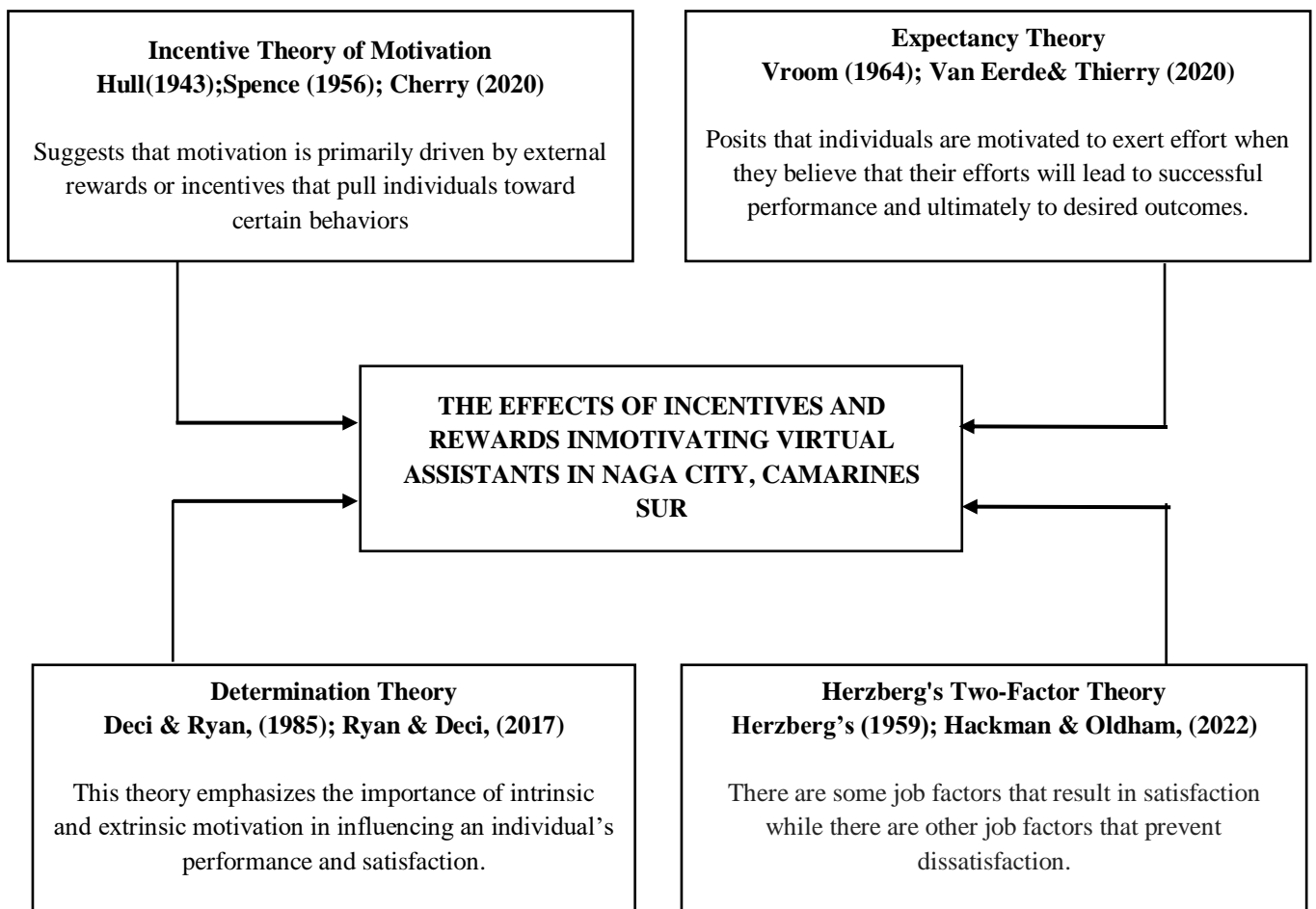


Figure 1. Theoretical Paradigm

Figure 1 illustrated the theoretical framework of the study. The four theories used as anchors for this study provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the role of incentives and rewards in motivating virtual assistants in Naga City, Camarines Sur. The

Incentive Theory of Motivation (Hull, 1943; Spence, 1956; Cherry, 2020) highlights how external rewards, such as monetary benefits and tangible incentives, drive motivation. This aligns well with the study's focus on how different rewards systems impact work behavior. Similarly, Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964; Van Eerde & Thierry, 2020) underscores the importance of the belief that effort leads to performance and rewards, which is particularly relevant in understanding how virtual assistants perceive the relationship between their productivity and the incentives provided to them.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017) further complements the study by emphasizing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, offering insight into how rewards affect both the internal satisfaction and external performance of virtual assistants. Finally, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg, 1959; Hackman & Oldham, 2022) distinguishes between motivators (e.g., recognition, achievement) and hygiene factors (e.g., salary, work conditions), shedding light on the dual impact of incentives on job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Together, these theories create a robust foundation for exploring how incentives and rewards shape motivation, productivity, and job satisfaction in the local context.

Conceptual Framework

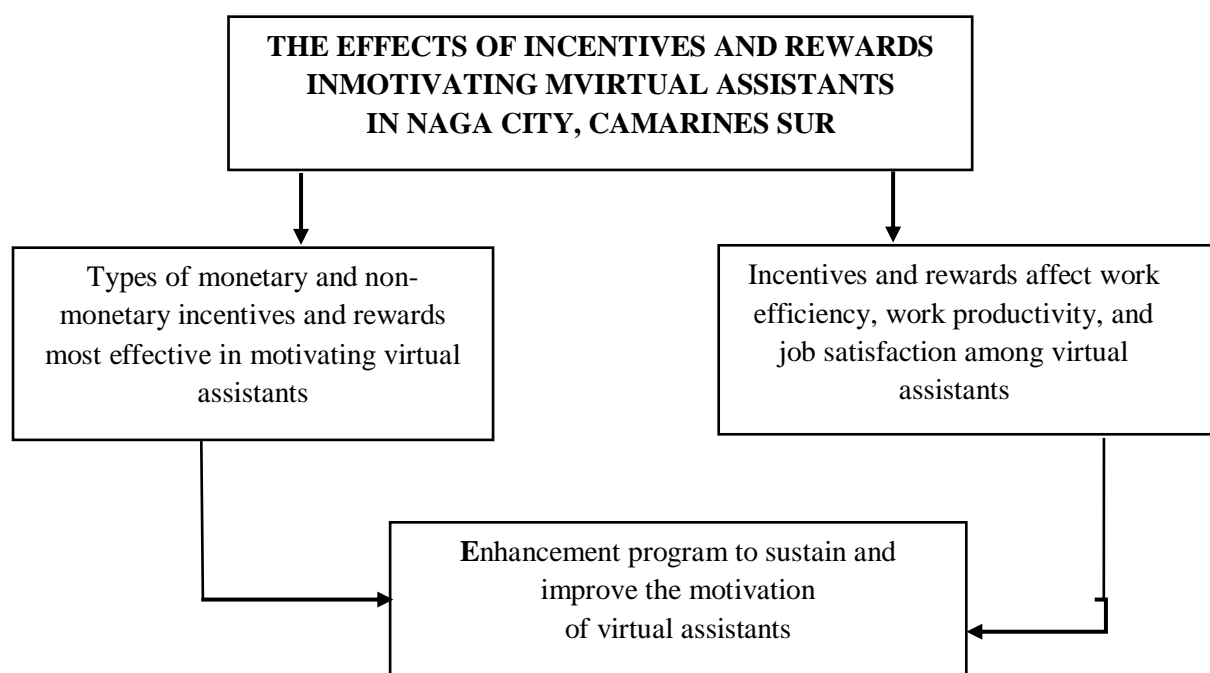


Figure 2. Conceptual Paradigm

Figure 2 illustrated the conceptual paradigm that illustrates the study's focus on examining the role of incentives and rewards in motivating virtual assistants in Naga City, Camarines Sur. It is structured around three key research questions that explore the types of incentives and rewards provided to virtual assistants, how these incentives and rewards

influence work efficiency, productivity, and job satisfaction. Addressing these questions, the study proposed enhancement program to sustain and improve the motivation of virtual assistants.

Research Methods

This study employed a descriptive research design with a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of incentives and rewards in motivating virtual assistants in Naga City, Camarines Sur. The descriptive design was chosen to identify and analyze patterns, trends, and relationships between incentives, motivation, and productivity. The study's primary participants were 100 randomly sampled virtual assistants working remotely across various BPO industries in Naga City. A random sampling method ensured that the sample was representative of the broader population of virtual assistants in the area, minimizing bias and enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

Data collection was conducted using a structured Google Form questionnaire, which included sections on demographic information, the types of incentives (monetary and non-monetary) received, and their perceived effects on work efficiency, work productivity, and job satisfaction. The questionnaire was carefully designed to align with the study's research objectives and validated through expert consultation to ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability. The questionnaire was distributed through email, social media platforms, and virtual assistant networks, ensuring broad reach and accessibility. To maximize response rates, participants were given follow-up reminders during the data collection period. Quantitative data was analyzed using statistical tools, while qualitative responses provided deeper insights into participant experiences.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion on the types of monetary and non-monetary incentives and rewards. How the incentives and rewards affect work efficiency, work productivity, and job satisfaction of virtual assistants, and the proposed enhancement program to sustain and improve the motivation of virtual assistants in Naga City, Camarines Sur.

Table 1

Types of monetary and non-monetary incentives and rewards

Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
A. Monetary		
Effectiveness of salary increases	4.5	HE
Impact of performance-based bonuses	4.2	E

Effectiveness of profit-sharing schemes	3.8	E
Relevance of cash allowances	3.5	ME
Overall Mean	4.0	HE
B. Non-Monetary		
Recognition and awards	4.3	HE
Flexible work hours	4.0	E
Opportunities for skill development	3.7	E
Effectiveness of wellness programs	3.4	ME
Overall Mean	3.85	E
C. Incentives		
Incentives as a driver of productivity	4.6	HE
Contribution to work efficiency	4.4	HE
Effectiveness of incentives in team collaboration	4.1	E
Influence on employee job satisfaction	3.9	E
Overall Mean	4.25	HE
Average Mean of A, B, and C	4.03	E

Note: 4.21-5.00 –Highly Effective (HE); 4.20-3.41-Effective (E); 2.61-3.40 – Moderately Effective (ME); 1.81-2.60 –Slightly Effective (SE); 1.00-1.80 –Not Effective (NE).

Table 1 shows the effectiveness of monetary and non-monetary incentives and rewards, with an overall mean of 4.03, classified as "Effective" (E). Among the categories, incentives achieved the highest overall mean (4.25, Highly Effective), driven by productivity and work efficiency. Monetary rewards followed with a mean of 4.0 (Highly Effective), primarily influenced by salary increases. Non-monetary rewards had the lowest mean (3.85, Effective), with recognition and awards being the highest-rated (4.3) and wellness programs the lowest-rated (3.4).

The analysis reveals that incentives, particularly their role in driving productivity and work efficiency, are perceived as the most effective motivators. Monetary rewards, notably salary increases, are also considered highly impactful. However, non-monetary rewards, while still effective, show variability, with recognition programs being highly valued, whereas wellness programs are less impactful. This indicates a preference for tangible rewards and productivity-driven incentives over well-being-focused initiatives.

The findings infer that while all types of incentives and rewards contribute positively to motivation, the effectiveness varies significantly. Incentives such as those tied to productivity and monetary compensation are prioritized by employees. The lower rating for wellness programs suggests that these may not align as closely with employees' immediate

needs or expectations. Organizations should tailor their approaches based on these preferences to maximize impact.

The results align with expectancy theory, which emphasizes the importance of linking rewards directly to performance outcomes (Vroom, 1964). The higher effectiveness of monetary and performance-based incentives supports studies that highlight financial incentives as strong motivators (Locke & Latham, 2002). However, the relatively lower impact of wellness programs suggests a gap in their perceived relevance, echoing findings from Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory, which stresses the importance of aligning incentives with intrinsic motivators.

Organizations should prioritize incentives and monetary rewards tied to productivity and performance to maintain motivation. Recognition and awards programs should be sustained and enhanced to foster a culture of appreciation. However, wellness programs require re-evaluation and redesign to ensure relevance and alignment with employees' needs. Future studies could investigate how personal or cultural differences affect the perception of non-monetary incentives.

Table 2

Effects of Incentives and Rewards on Work Efficiency, Productivity, and Job Satisfaction

Descriptors	Mean	Interpretation
A. Work Efficiency		
Timeliness in completing tasks	4.3	HA
Accuracy of work output	4.2	Ha
Ability to meet deadline	4.1	A
Improved task prioritization	3.9	A
Overall Mean	4.13	A
B. Work Productivity		
Increased output quality	4.4	HA
Meeting or exceeding targets	4.3	HA
Reduced idle time	4.0	A
Collaboration with teammates	3.8	A
Overall Mean	4.13	A
C. Job satisfaction		
Sense of job security	4.5	HA
Recognition of achievements	4.2	A

Alignment with career goals	4.0	A
Work-life balance improvement	3.9	A
Overall Mean	4.15	A
Average Mean of A, B, and C	4.14	A

Note: 4.21-5.00 –Highly Affecting (HA); 4.20-3.41-Affecting (A); 2.61-3.40 – Moderately Affecting (MA); 1.81-2.60 –Slightly Affecting (SA); 1.00-1.80 –Not Affecting (NA).

The data in table 2 evaluates the effects of incentives and rewards on work efficiency, productivity, and job satisfaction, with an overall mean rating of 4.14, classified as "Affecting" (A). Among the categories, job satisfaction achieved the highest overall mean (4.15), highlighting its strong link to incentives and rewards. Work efficiency and productivity shared a slightly lower overall mean of 4.13. Within the descriptors, "Sense of job security" in job satisfaction received the highest score (4.5), while "Collaboration with teammates" in productivity was the lowest (3.8).

The results indicate that incentives and rewards significantly impact work efficiency, productivity, and job satisfaction, with job satisfaction being the most positively affected. This reflects the importance of intrinsic motivators like job security and recognition. Work efficiency and productivity also benefit, particularly in improving output quality and timeliness. However, team collaboration is comparatively less influenced, suggesting that incentives targeted at individual performance may not sufficiently address teamwork dynamics.

The data infers that while incentives and rewards contribute to higher performance, their impact varies depending on the specific area of focus. Stronger effects on job satisfaction and output quality suggest that these rewards align closely with personal achievement and fulfillment. However, areas like collaboration may require a different approach, such as team-based incentives, to enhance group dynamics and collective performance.

These findings align with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which emphasizes the role of motivators like recognition and job security in enhancing job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1968). Moreover, Vroom's Expectancy Theory supports the idea that linking rewards to performance can effectively drive efficiency and productivity (Vroom, 1964). The lower rating for collaboration echoes research by Deci and Ryan (1985), who highlight the need for intrinsic motivators to complement external incentives for sustained group cohesion.

Organizations should focus on sustaining and enhancing job satisfaction through recognition programs and opportunities for personal growth. To address productivity, performance-based rewards should continue to be prioritized. To improve collaboration, introducing team-based incentives and fostering a culture of teamwork is recommended. Further studies could explore the interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators in enhancing group dynamics and performance.

Enhancement Program to Sustain and Improve the Motivation of Virtual Assistants in Naga City, Camarines Sur

This section proposed an enhancement program designed to sustain and improve the motivation of virtual assistants in Naga City, Camarines Sur. The program addresses challenges such as burnout, skill gaps, and low engagement through targeted activities, including skill development workshops, wellness initiatives, recognition programs, and team-based incentives. Grounded in motivation theories like Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and Vroom's Expectancy Theory, the program aims to enhance job satisfaction, productivity, and overall well-being. The implementation will follow a structured six-month timeline, with continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure its effectiveness.


Program Title: *EmpowerVA: Sustaining Motivation and Excellence for Virtual Assistants*

Program Objective

To develop strategies and interventions that sustain and improve the motivation, performance, and overall well-being of virtual assistants in Naga City, Camarines Sur.

Program Duration

6 months (with bi-monthly activities and continuous monitoring)



	Activity/Event	Objective	Expected Outcome
1	Initial Assessment Survey & Program Orientation	Identify motivational factors and challenges.	Baseline data on motivation factors; informed planning.
2	Workshop: Advanced Productivity Tools	Identify motivational factors and challenges.	Baseline data on motivation factors; informed planning.
3	Virtual Fitness & Meditation + Recognition Awards	Promote mental well-being and morale.	Improved mental health and increased motivation.
4	Mentorship Launch + Team-Building Activity	Foster collaboration and peer support.	Stronger teamwork and sense of community.
5	Upskilling Workshop: Client Communication Strategies	Boost confidence in handling clients.	Better client interaction and satisfaction.
6	Final Evaluation + Presentation of Results and Best Practices	Assess program effectiveness and sustainability.	Sustainable motivation strategies identified.

EmpowerVA: Sustaining Motivation and Excellence for Virtual Assistants



Conclusion

Incentives and rewards play a pivotal role in motivating virtual assistants in Naga City, Camarines Sur. The findings highlighted that both monetary and non-monetary incentives effectively drive productivity, efficiency, and job satisfaction. Tailored rewards addressing individual needs emerged as crucial in sustaining motivation, particularly in a remote work setup where challenges such as burnout and isolation persist. The proposed enhancement program, rooted in established motivational theories, offers actionable solutions through skill-building, wellness, and recognition initiatives, addressing the multifaceted needs of VAs. These findings not only provide practical strategies for employers but also contribute to the broader discourse on optimising remote workforce management. As businesses increasingly rely on virtual assistants, implementing such motivational frameworks can ensure a more engaged, productive, and satisfied workforce, ultimately driving organizational success in a competitive global economy.

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