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Research into R&D employee incentive strategies of Internet enterprises – Taking L Internet Company for example

Mr. Jiwen Sun, Ph.D Candidate in the Business Administration Program,
Chinese Graduate School, Panyapiwat Institute of Management
Xiaoming He, Lecturer in Chinese Graduate School,
Panyapiwat Institute of Management

Abstract

R&D personnel are the most important core resources of Internet enterprises, the creators of putting all kinds of product ideas into practice, and the foundation of whether an Internet enterprise is competitive in the industry. If Internet enterprises want to maintain their own continuous to lead in the industry, they need to retain the core resources of enterprises, develop perfect incentive strategies and implement them, and fully understand their needs from the perspective of R & D personnel in order to arouse the enthusiasm of them.

This paper takes Internet enterprise L as the research object, and studies the current situation of incentive strategies of this enterprise for R & D personnel. On the basis of the expected incentive theory and two-factor theory, combined with the questionnaire survey of enterprise existing R & D personnel on current incentive strategy, the paper try to analyze the problems existing in the L Internet enterprises' employee incentives. The survey shows that the unreasonable ratio of salary performance and lack of training and promotion space are the main reasons why the dimission rate of R & D personnel in L Internet enterprise is higher than other enterprises in the same industry. This paper proposes some corresponding improvements to meet the material and spiritual needs of R & D personnel, so as to optimize the incentive strategy for R & D personnel in L Internet enterprises.

Keywords: Internet enterprises; R&D personnel; incentive strategy; optimize

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Introduction

Research purpose

As the most important resources of Internet enterprises, R&D talents are the linchpin for an Internet enterprise to seeking rapid development, remaining sensitive to the latest industrial trends, and standing out from the increasingly intensified industrial competition. Optimization of R&D employee incentive strategies can help retain core R&D talents for the Internet enterprise. This paper studies the operation status and incentive strategies of L Internet enterprise at an attempt to find out shortages of R&D employee incentive strategies, and provide feasible suggestions and plans for improvement, through which L Internet Company can retain more R&D talents on the path of rapid development of Internet enterprises.

Research significance

R&D employee incentive of Chinese Internet enterprises mainly refers to the R&D employee incentive experience of foreign counterparts. However, the same incentive strategies might work differently under different national conditions. Therefore, it is of vital importance to study issues related to R&D employee incentive strategies and countermeasures arising from the management process of Internet enterprises. Combining relevant theories with current situations of L Internet Company, this paper studies problems existing in L Internet Company's current incentive strategies so as to find out better incentive methods and help L Internet Company address its brain drain, stimulate the working enthusiasm of its R&D employees, improve its operation system, and provide a new thinking for domestic Internet companies on R&D employee incentive employees.

Literature Review

In recent years, enterprise employee incentive has become a general research interest of domestic management experts, and fruitful research findings have been obtained, which provide valuable guidance for academic study. Lu pointed out that the employee salary structure formulated in the human resource management process of Chinese enterprises is mostly unreasonable and subject to the influence of the salary model in the era of planned economy, thus resulting in the partial inconsistency between the salary level and the professional title. Li Qiang held that Chinese enterprise managers are dissatisfied with the salary incentive effect, let alone enterprise employees. Wang thought that, among internal factors affecting employee turnover, if seen from the human resource management status of most Chinese enterprises, one can observe that dissatisfaction with the salary and benefit

level is primary attributable to employees' decision to quit. Employees' dissatisfaction with the salary level is chiefly reflected in the following aspects: (1) employees think the salary paid by their enterprise is lower than the average market level; (2) the salary is different for two employees holding the same position, suggesting a lack of internal fairness; and (3) the existing salary system has not effectively solved existing problems, the incentive measures lack flexibility, and the salary level is lower than employees' minimum expectation. Yu and Yu also argues that, though spiritual incentives are tremendously important, employees, while reporting their needs to the organization, tend to emphasize material incentives rather than spiritual incentive more, thus leading to the inconsistency between subjective opinions and objective needs of enterprise employees about spiritual incentives. Qiu and Liu (2014) mentioned in their co-authored book that technology and talent have been two critical factors deciding whether an enterprise can achieve long-term development in the era of knowledge economy. In the management process, Internet enterprises should not copy management methods of traditional enterprises. This means that there is significant difference between Internet enterprises and traditional enterprises in terms of their management style. However, problems existing in Internet enterprises' employee incentive management cannot be denied: (1) the long-term incentive mechanism of Internet enterprises is incomplete; (2) a complete employee training mechanism is lacking; and (3) Internet enterprises lack corporate culture. In Yuan's research (2013), it is pointed out that, with the popularization of Internet technologies in China, Internet enterprises have been springing up in the market, playing a critical role. As the core of enterprise development, employee management effectiveness of Internet enterprises has been an issue of great concern to human resource managers, and the issue of employee incentive has been the top priority to human resource management. This paper starts with the employee incentive status of Chinese Internet enterprises, including (1) salary incentive status; (2) non-financial incentive status; (3) spiritual incentive status; and (4) long-term incentive status. On that basis, problems existing in the employee incentive management of Internet enterprises are deeply examined; (1) lack of a long-term efficient mechanism; (2) lack of attention to employee training; and (3) lack of employee cultural incentive. Sun (2009) put forth in her research paper that talent and capital are two indispensable factors for corporate operation management, of which talent is the factor that can most effectively generate profits and the most creative and important resource of strategic importance for modern enterprises. Therefore, to seek innovation-drive development, enterprises should adhere to the people-

oriented principle, and make full use of talents, the most important resource to them. Particularly in the modern society witnessing the rapid development of the Internet technology and high technology, innovation is the most important way for enterprises to achieve long-term steady development.

Summary

To sum up, Internet enterprises should attach adequate importance to human resources, and the establishment of favorable incentive strategies is decisive to the realization of enterprises' rapid development. Research has suggested that, according to incentive strategy design principles, to fit Internet enterprises' incentive system to their practical situations and to make enterprises' R&D employees aware of prospects of enterprise development are necessary, which can motivate employees to create more value for enterprises. To the end, a larger platform should be provided for R&D employees to give full play to their talents. In this way, R&D employees excelling in various aspects can obtain a higher pay, a higher evaluation, more honors, and a larger room for promotion. The incentive effect thus incurred can propel all employees to work harder. Hence, before providing incentives for R&D employees, an enterprise should first learn where the needs of R&D employees lie, and create a platform for full play of their talents. Only in this way can employee incentive strategies serve the development of the enterprise.

Research questions

Combining theoretical review and survey data of R&D employees of L Internet Company, this paper mainly focuses on examining the following research question:

- (1) What are expectations of R&D employees for L Internet Company's incentives?
- (2) What are shortages of L Internet Company in R&D employee incentives?
- (3) How can incentives be improved to stimulate the working enthusiasm of R&D employees and satisfy their incentive needs without increasing L Internet Company's operating costs by a large margin so as to achieve the win-win effect?

Design of Research Methods

Case study

This paper adopts R&D employee incentive strategies of L Internet Company as a research object, analyzes the potential problems existing in its incentive strategies through a

survey of its R&D employees' satisfaction with the company's incentive system, and finally puts forward research countermeasures and suggestions.

Questionnaire design

This questionnaire mainly focuses on R&D employees of L Internet Company, and collects the following information, including personal data (work scope, educational background, gender, age, and working hours of the respondents). Meanwhile, the theoretical research is combined with the situations of L Internet Company to find out ten key factors which enterprise employees are concerned about as to incentives. The ten key factors include basic salary, salary incentive, welfare incentive, respect and sense of recognition, sense of fulfilment, working hours, working environment, development prospects of the enterprise, room for promotion and development, and employee relationship. Employees' satisfaction degree with each of the above ten key factors is investigated, with the full mark 10 as "strongly satisfied" and 0 as "strongly dissatisfied". The total scores are used to indicate employees' satisfaction degree with the enterprise's incentive strategies. At last, employees' expectations for L Internet Company's incentives are surveyed, which also revolves around the aforesaid ten factors. In this research 208 questionnaires are delivered to R&D employees, of which 192 valid ones are collected anonymously, registering a valid response rate of 92%.

Reliability and validity test

SPSS 17.0 is used to conduct validity and reliability analysis of the incentive satisfaction scale, and the results are shown in Table 3.1 below:

Table 3.1 General Satisfaction Degree

	General satisfaction degree
Alpha	0. 928

As shown in the table above, the overall reliability of the scale is 0.928, which is higher than 0.70, and coincides with the conclusion of Devellis et al. (1991) holding that the minimum reliability of the scale should be no lower than 0.70. This also provides solid evidence for the favorable internal consistency and reliability of the scale.

The structural validity is mainly verified through factor analysis. Computing results indicate that the KMO value of the questionnaire is 0.947, which is close to 1. The Chi-square value is 7,874.315, the degree of freedom is 1,012, and the significance probability is

smaller than 0.01. All these data pass the Bartlett test, which indicates a good structural validity of the questionnaire. The specific results are shown in Table 3.2 below:

Table 3.2 KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure Of Sampling Adequacy	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		
	Approx. Chi-Square df Sig.		
.947	7874.315	1012	.000

Analysis of R&D employee incentive strategies in L Internet Company

Survey results

Satisfaction survey can help reveal key factors affecting the stay and leave of R&D employees. Effective incentive strategies can be formulated in the process of improving R&D employees' satisfaction to ensure the normal and steady progress of enterprise projects. It can be observed that R&D employees' satisfaction degree with the basic salary is the highest of all, reaching 9.0, which also shows that L Internet Company provides competitive salaries for employees in the current industry, and explains why there are new R&D employees joining L Internet Company in spite of a large number of former R&D employees leaving. Besides, R&D employees are relatively satisfied with the working environment, scoring 8.3. In 2017, L Internet Company purchased the land to build an independent enterprise park. The enterprise park is equipped with complete facilities, and a brand-new office environment. Every R&D employee can work in a spacious working environment. Compared with the R&D office environment offered by most Internet enterprises, the R&D working environment created by L Internet Company has gained R&D employees' recognition.

R&D employees are the most dissatisfied with the working hours (6.7) and room for promotion (6.7), followed by salary incentive (7.0). Results show that R&D employees show the strongest dissatisfaction with the current working hours. However, to work overtime has been a prevailing phenomenon of the current Internet industry, which is common to find in enterprises ranging from BATs to startups with dozens of employees. In Internet enterprises, employees have to work for six days from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. L Internet Company requires its employees to work from 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. for five days a week, and employees need to work overtime frequently, but employees' working overtime is not paid

separately. It has become an imperative for L Internet Company to improve the correlation between working hours and employee incentives so as to retain core R&D employees. Additionally, employees are dissatisfied with salary incentive. Though L Internet Company offers a high basic salary, the follow-up salary incentive strategies are inadequate for R&D employees. Such dissatisfaction with salary incentive will restrict the full play of R&D employees' creativity, dampen R&D employees' activeness to create value, and finally restrict L Internet Company's development. Moreover, employees highly value opportunities for promotion, so enterprise managers should plan the path for promotion of excellent employees, particularly setting up an encouraging and fair promotion channel so that R&D employees can achieve self-actualization. The vision of gaining further development in the enterprise will motivate employees to fully tap their potential and creativity. If R&D employees remain basic R&D employees for years without any opportunity of promotion unless their leaders leave, such a promotion system will be undoubtedly frustrating.

Among the most anticipating incentive methods of employees, salary incentive turns out to be the one with the highest incentive effect, which is followed by a clear room for promotion, more reasonable working hours, etc. There are four incentive methods scoring above eight points, of which one scoring above nine points. This means that R&D employees' needs for incentive are comprehensive. With the price of commodities soaring up, R&D employees have attached great importance to material satisfaction. Economic income can not only reflect personal status, but most importantly ensure the quality of life. Additionally, with the growing stress from life and work, employees urgently need a higher income.

By comparing employees' satisfaction degree with incentive factors and their expectation of incentive factors, one can find salary incentive, working hours and room for promotion are most deviated from the expectation of R&D employees in implementing enterprise management incentive strategies. This suggests that R&D employees are the most dissatisfied with the enterprise's salary incentive strategies, working hours, and room for promotion. Such dissatisfaction will hinder the full play of employees' creativity, dampen employees' creativity, and finally restrict the enterprise's development.

4.2 Problems existing in R&D employee incentive strategies of LInternet Company

(1) The purpose of salary incentive is to evaluate and measure R&D employees' work outcomes through the assessment of key performance indicators on the basis of an effective and objective assessment system, which can not only recognize employees' performance in

the past, but also motivate R&D employees to give full play to their potential and redouble their efforts to contribute to development of themselves and their enterprises.

Salary incentive is the extra salary reward for R&D employees' provision of labor services for their organization in addition to their basic salary. It tells employees in the most direct way which the organization expects most therefrom, which the organization does not want to see, and which the organization is concerned about or not. A well-designed salary incentive system should ensure internal fairness and external competitiveness so that enterprise's salary incentive can remain competitive in the market. To fairly recognize employees' past performance via the distribution of salary incentive can obtain employees a sense of achievement. To enterprises, promise of salary and welfare can fuel employees' enthusiasm to constantly improve their performance. All this is the most direct and vigorous representation form of corporate culture. Salary incentive strategies are formulated by the organization to set standards for salary incentive (either by the overfulfilling of the designated workload or by working hours or by devotion to work). Formulation of the salary incentive system should take the incentive effect, competitiveness, fairness, economy, and legality into consideration. R&D employees of L Internet Company are widely dissatisfied with salary incentive mainly because of the less diversified channels for salary incentive, inadequate quota for employees to apply for salary incentive, and decision of salary incentive by the management's subjective will. Such a salary incentive system is hardly acceptable to employees. With the flourishing of the Internet industry, R&D has been the profession not lacking employment opportunities the most. That employees leave after staying in the enterprise for one year and finding the above problems with the current enterprise's salary incentive salary has become a common phenomenon.

(2) Though L Internet Company has set up the incentive system, the implementation outcomes are far from satisfaction. In spite of great emphasis laid on R&D talents, those with good communication skills can more easily win leaders' recognition. Particularly in small-and medium-sized software enterprises, those having built a favorable relationship with leaders can actually gain a higher remuneration. L Internet Company rewards the team with the excellent project, but how to distribute the rewards within the project team is directly decided by project leaders. As a result, those with a close relationship with project leaders can gain a larger share of the rewards, which is absolutely unfair and implies the necessity of improving the incentive process and introducing a strict incentive system.

(3) Survey shows that R&D employees of L Internet Company attach great importance to career development, particularly career development of young employees. However, the enterprise management is so flat that there are only four major leading positions for an R&D team of more than 200 persons. The other leading positions are all appointed temporarily according to project situations. Moreover, the leaders, having worked for the organization for years, will hardly leave the organization or get transferred, thus making it hard for R&D employees at the basic level to gain any opportunity for promotion, and this can easily arouse the dissatisfaction of R&D employees at the basic level about the room for their promotion and development.

Suggestions and Conclusions

Under an increasingly intensive competition environment of the Internet industry, L Internet Company, if attempting to keep forging ahead, should learn what its R&D employees need most and find out a suitable incentive method to fully stimulate their initiative and give full play to their enthusiasm and creativity. The above survey results show that R&D employees are most concerned about salary incentive, rewards for working overtime and room for personal promotion. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the incentive focuses.

Suggestions for improvement

(1) The current salary incentive system of L Internet Company consists of “Excellent New Employee”, “Excellent Employee”, “Honorary Employee” and “Excellent Project” selected at the end of every year. Different amounts of monthly salaries are offered as a reward to the above honors, respectively. To be specific, winners of “Excellent New Employee”, “Excellent Employee”, “Honorary Employee” and “Excellent Project” take up 20% of the total. Under the prerequisite of increasing corporate expenditure, L Internet Company can considerably set up more awards, such as the “Best Progress Award”, “Best Innovation Award”, “Best Cooperation Award” and “Award for Model Worker”. Meanwhile, the amount of rewards for the existing honors can be lowered properly so that the percentage of R&D employees gaining the annual salary incentive can reach around 50%. This measure can not only satisfy a majority of R&D employees’ eagerness to obtain salary incentive, but also show recognition of R&D employees’ work, which can provide R&D employees with both material and spiritual satisfaction.

(2) Currently, the selection of various rewards and the reward distribution for excellent projects in L Internet Company are directly and finally decided by the management. The

selection process is mainly based on employees' monthly performance assessment, but the annual performance assessment is just one reference, meaning that the final decision is made by the management. Consequently, those getting on good terms with leaders rather than those with scoring higher in performance assessment can obtain salary incentive. Such phenomena are particularly obvious in salary incentive distribution among annual excellent project teams. This means that the principle of fairness, justice and openness should be adhered to in terms of the organization's selection system. In the annual selection, those ranking on the top 80% can be first selected out according to the outcomes of annual personal performance assessment, and then apply to their desired rewards. Finally, all R&D employees will vote by the secret ballot. Assume that there are ten places for "Excellent New Employee", but there are 20 candidates. Then, all R&D employees can vote for ten persons at most, and every person have one vote. This can prevent candidates for salary incentive from being decided by the management alone. Meanwhile, every R&D employee will completely accept the outcome of the open selection.

As to the reward distribution for excellent project teams, the ex-ante calculation model should be adopted. Before the approval of every project, working requires required by every module in detail will be listed so as to calculate the percentage of every module in the project. Then, when the project leader is redistributing the task, the percentage of devotion of every person to the project can be calculated. If the project is rated as the excellent project and obtains corresponding rewards, the reward can be distributed according to the percentage of workload of every project member rather than to the subjective willingness of the project leader. Meanwhile, project members can compete for rewards for every project module. When there are multiple applicants for the same module, the R&D employee using the least hours can be selected. If the candidates fail to meet this standard, their right to share the distribution of the project rewards will be cancelled, thus the cutthroat competition can be avoided. In this way, not only can the principle of justice, fairness and openness be strictly implemented in reward distribution, but also the R&D employees' initiative can be fully stimulated. Under the condition when the project module cannot be delivered in time, R&D employees will take the initiative to work overtime rather than be forced by the organization to do so. This can shorten the R&D period, accelerate the organization's development, and help the company embark on a path of robust development.

(3) Internet companies should keep a close eye on the real-time position management, and improve the position promotion and development mechanism so as to provide more promotion opportunities for the organization's R&D employees, and expand the path for future development. As core talents of L Internet Company, R&D employees are the key to its sustainable development. In order to maintain the stability of core talents, L Internet Company's future development objective should be combined to draw up a reasonable career management plan. To be specific, the career management mainly covers the following aspects:

(1) Establishing the awareness of career development planning for R&D employees. Career planning of employees is directly linked to the future development of an organization. Therefore, L Internet Company should draw up a targeted career plan for every R&D employee. In the process, the overall development strategies for the organization should be clarified first. On that basis, R&D employees will be put in different positions combining their career planning. Meanwhile, employees are encouraged to keep on improving their career management plan according to the organization's future development objective. This can not only promote R&D employees' personal career planning, but also provide a reasonable basis for the establishment of the future human resource management system.

(2) Dividing by career development directions: R&D employees hold different positions, so their career planning also differs. Career planning of employees holding the management positions usually varies from that of employees holding the technical positions. Specifically, the former should plan their career development according to the organization's development objective, while the latter should plan their career for improvement of skills and abilities. Different career development directions of employees holding different positions can maintain the progressiveness of teams in that every type of R&D employees knows which R&D direction they want to pursue. At the same time, different career development directions can avoid some R&D employees' attention to administrative positions but ignoring technical development. For example, programmers should be divided into the basic level, intermediate level and advanced level to avoid that R&D employees holding technical positions focus on administrative development but ignore their personal skill development.

(3) Rationalizing self-planning: L Internet Company should combine their personal characteristics, such as learning background and specialties, in the process of career planning

to draw up their personal development objectives. Meanwhile, the development objective and position characteristics of L Internet Company should be combined to make their personal training more targeted and effective. By objectively evaluating personal abilities, R&D employees can learn more efficiently to keep on improving their personal business skills and knowledge reserve. Finally, employees' personal development and organizational development can be organically linked with each other.

(4) Currently, L Internet Company has built its enterprise park, which has a large office area not in use, and the idle office area can be used to set up the innovation incubation park. Here, two feasible plans are provided for employees' career planning: (1) employees can keep on improving themselves according to the career promotion plan to obtain a higher rank; (2) as to those with the innovational thinking and R&D employees with a perfect mastery of relevant skills, L Internet Company can provide them with the office space free of charge, and assist them in handling administrative formalities. This part of input can be original stock rights of employees' startups. This measure can make full use of the idle resources of L Internet Company, and stimulate those with essential abilities, enterprising spirit but not content with the internal promotion system to work for their own business plans. If their business plans succeed, they will leave the organization and become a cooperator of L Internet Company. If these employees fail in their entrepreneurship plans, L Internet Company will be their top choice. This can effectively prevent brain drain. On the contrary, if these employees succeed with their entrepreneurship plan, L Internet Company can make high profits by holding the original stock rights, with which L Internet Company can boost its diverse development.

Conclusions

(1) Introducing reasonable and fair salary incentive strategies

L Internet Company's current R&D employee salary incentive strategies have their loopholes, including lack of a fair, open and just evaluation process and inadequate motivation for a majority of employees. In order to attract and retain talents, and give full play to employees' working enthusiasm, L Internet Company should introduce fair, open and just salary incentive strategies, including an open and competitive salary incentive system, a complete working hour system, and long-term efficient incentive measures.

(2) Attaching great importance to employees' career planning

R&D employees constitute the core competence of Internet enterprises. Thus, how to improve the career planning for R&D employees in Internet enterprises has become increasingly important. L Internet Company should provide more career options for R&D employees so that they can obtain timely help therefrom to gain further development for not only themselves, but also the organization.

Research prospects

Incentive strategies for R&D employees in Internet enterprises remain a complex issue involving diverse factors. This paper chooses L Internet Company for a case study of R&D employee incentive models in Internet Companies, and obtains some encouraging research findings. Nevertheless, the issue of R&D employee incentive strategies is subject to the influence of different factors. Due to the limitation of the author's research abilities and range of knowledge, this research has a lot to be desired, and should be further deepened in the future. Therefore, the author will examine relevant theoretical knowledge further, and investigate into more cases of Internet companies so as to explore an incentive system suitable for R&D employees working for Internet enterprises.

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