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CULTURAL DIFFERENCE AND REWARD PERCEPTION: RESPONSE OF MULTICULTURAL TEAMS TOWARDS INCENTIVE SYSTEMS IN MULTINATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS — A CASE STUDY OF GOOGLE INC.

Abstract: This article investigates how cultural value differences shape employee interpretations of reward and incentive systems in multinational organizations, with Google Inc. serving as the focal case. Using a netnographic analysis of publicly available employee discussions, the study identifies systematic cultural variations in responses to autonomy-based practices, performance-related rewards, collective recognition, and well-being benefits. The findings indicate that perceptions of fairness and motivational relevance are mediated by national cultural dimensions, particularly power distance and individualism–collectivism. The study contends that effective reward design in multicultural settings requires a unified strategic framework complemented by culturally attuned adaptations that address divergent expectations of equity and motivation.

Keywords: cultural difference, reward perception, multicultural teams.

Introduction

In the current age of globalization, the dynamic of organizational functioning has completely changed. Nowadays, people belonging to different cultural backgrounds tend to work under one roof. Diversity is quite beneficial for the organizations these days as it opens paths for creativity and encourages acceptance into the working space.¹ Google, with its worldwide operations and workforce of more than 183,000 people across every continent,² is the ultimate illustration of the modern multicultural enterprise. This diversity is not only demographic — Google's U.S. workforce in 2024 was approximately 45.7% Asian, 45.3% White, and smaller percentages of Black, Latino, and Indigenous employees² — but also cognitive and cultural. Management theorists have long argued that such cultural diversity can be leveraged in order to boost innovation and performance.³ At the same time, differences in national cul-

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¹ **Yoon, S.** Why Diversity Within Your Organization Matters Fundamentally. *World Economic Forum* [online], 2021 [Accessed: 20 July 2025]. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2021/11/why-diversity-within-your-organization-matters/>.

² **Wong, Q.** Google Ends Hiring Targets Tied to Diversity. *Los Angeles Times* [online], 2025 [Accessed: 20 July 2025]. Available at: <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2025-02-05/google-reportedly-ends-diversity-hiring>.

³ **Stahl, G. K. et al.** Unraveling the Effects of Cultural Diversity in Teams: A Meta-Analysis of Research on Multicultural Work Groups. *Journal of International Business Studies* [online], vol. 41, 2010, p. 692.

ture cause difficulties in human resource management (HRM): employees from different backgrounds may perceive incentives and rewards very differently.^{4,5}

Designing reward and incentive systems that are effective for the motivation of a multicultural workforce is therefore a complex task. As Adamovic's large survey of 3,432 workers from 28 countries finds, reward-system design in multinationals is "particularly challenging," because employees from different cultures have different expectations about the allocation of rewards. Similarly, recent research suggests that national values (e.g., individualism vs. collectivism) affect preferences for performance-based and equal-sharing rewards.^{5,6} These differences beg the question of how culturally diverse teams actually respond to Google's famed incentive systems and employee perks. In practice, what do Google employees from different cultures feel about pay, bonuses, benefits, and non-monetary rewards, and how do these perceptions reflect more general cultural norms and theories?

This paper answers such questions through a case study of Google's incentive practices. We examine employee discourse regarding Google's corporate culture and rewards using a netnographic blog analysis methodology by examining blog posts and online forums from January 2010 to June 2025. This method is in line with Belfo and Sousa, who originally applied netnography to examine the rewards of Google employees who were discussing their rewards.⁷ Our interpretation of the analysis is then conducted in cross-cultural frameworks: in particular, we draw on Hofstede's work on cultural dimensions (power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, etc.) and Adams' equity theory of fairness. By connecting the works about cross-cultural HRM, team dynamics, and motivation to the particular instance of Google, we hope to find out how Google's incentive systems are implemented in practice in a multicultural workforce. We investigate, for instance, whether Google's "people-first" perks meet basic needs (as would be expected under Maslow's hierarchy⁸), whether its performance-oriented rewards fit low-power-distance values, and whether the perception of fairness (equity theory) varies depending on cultural groups. The aim is to make a contribution of both the richer theoretical understanding and practical understanding of managing rewards in the diverse, high-tech context.

Research Questions

Through its study, this research paper intends to answer the following questions:

1. How cultural differences impact the perception of employees regarding the rewards and incentives offered to them by their organization?
2. What sort of reward system is offered by Google Inc. to accommodate its multicultural workforce?
3. How Google's reward system plays significant role in motivating/demotivating Google's multicultural employees?

⁴ **Adamovic, M.** The Cultural Influence on Employees' Preferences for Reward Allocation Rules: A Two-Wave Survey Study in 28 Countries. *Human Resource Management Journal* vol. 33 (4), 2023, p. 890.

⁵ **Zhao, B., Y. Pan.** Cross-Cultural Employee Motivation in International Companies. *Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies* [online], vol. 5 (4), 2017, p. 216. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4236/jhrss.2017.54019>.

⁶ **Tran, S. K.** GOOGLE: A Reflection of Culture, Leader, and Management. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility* [online], vol. 2 (1), 2017, p. 5.

⁷ **Belfo, F., R. Sousa.** Employee Incentives in IT Companies: What Can We Learn from Google? In: *Proceedings of the IADIS International Conference ICT, Society and Human Beings 2011*, Lisbon: IADIS, 2011, pp. 142–152 [Accessed: 20 July 2025]. Available at: <https://www.iadisportal.org/digital-library/employee-incentives-in-it-companies-what-can-we-learn-from-google>.

⁸ **Chen, Q.** Critical Analysis of Motivation and Organizational Culture at Google: Balancing Innovation with Employee Autonomy. *International Journal of Education and Humanities* [online], vol. 17 (3), 2024, p. 284.

Literature Review

Cultural Dimensions and Reward Preferences

The national culture forms the work values and reward expectations. The classic work of Hofstede has indicated some major dimensions, such as power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, and so on, which differ according to the country. The dimensions determine how the employees perceive incentives and fairness. As an example, hierarchies are encouraged and status disparities anticipated in high power-distance cultures (including most of the Asian and Middle Eastern nations), whereas low power-distance cultures (e.g., the U.S., Scandinavia) consider equality and regard management as available. Collectivist cultures (e.g., China, Japan) focus on harmony of groups and common rewards, whereas individualist cultures (e.g., the U.S., UK) are attentive to acknowledging individual success. These ideas are backed by empirical research: a survey conducted revealed that collectivistic employees have a greater preference towards having an equal distribution rule, whereas individualists tend towards performance-based equity. Equally, Nguyen et al. demonstrate that cultural values such as security needs can produce the opposite expected outcome of incentives, e.g., more or more individual-based bonuses can be expected to decrease job satisfaction among employees with high uncertainty avoidance.⁹ In brief, national values have been attributed to specific reward preferences, and hence, incentive designing is complicated in international companies.

Equity Theory and Fairness

The equity theory by Adams also gives a clue: it is assumed that the employees will be measuring motivation based on the ratio of their inputs (effort, skill) in relation to outcomes (pay, benefits) to ratios of referents.¹⁰ Injustice brings about dissatisfaction and demotivation. Equity in multinational contexts has cross-cultural colors. An example is that Western cultures are inclined towards individual equity (reward based on personal performance), whilst in certain collectivist cultures there is group equity or equality. When one standard of a reward system appears unequal to an individual, it may discourage the affected individual. It is believed that it is essential to have widespread visible fairness: Google-sponsored perks (food, wellness, and transport) might help cultivate the perception of equal treatment among its staff, thereby following the principles of equity. According to Kerr and Slocum, the reward system is an absolute declaration of the corporate values and beliefs, which is why it is fundamental to comprehending and shaping culture. Equity is, therefore, twofold in multicultural teams, the members of which may have varying norms and, therefore, different perceptions of fairness.

Incentives and Motivation in Tech Organizations

Uniqueness in incentive structure is typical in the IT and tech industry. Research in high-tech companies, such as Google, points to the fact that in addition to wage, the company employs a total reward policy that incorporates community engagement, work flexibility, health and wellness, and creative areas.¹¹ The ethnographic research of Google blogs conducted by Belfo and Sousa has found precisely these categories: the researchers state that community involvement, health and wellness, work flexibility, and a supportive cultural environment were especially appreciated by Google employees. They even propose to include such topics as efficiency of the administration and equipment in the reward framework. In such a way, the model of Google is a combination of intrinsic motivators (meaningful work, autonomy) and extrinsic benefits (free food, gyms, healthcare) in an integrated system. The philosophy of Google, “work hard/play hard,” is a well-documented concept that has been heavily reported about by the corporate communications as well as well-wishers themselves, making the work well-being of the staff

⁹ **Nguyen, T. H. T., et al.** The Influence of Culture on the Relationship between the Incentive System and Employees' Satisfaction in Enterprises. *Corporate and Business Strategy Review*, vol. 6 (2), 2025, pp. 71–80. <https://doi.org/10.22495/cbsrv6i2art7>

¹⁰ **Kerr, J., J. W. Slocum.** Managing Corporate Culture through Reward Systems. *Academy of Management Perspectives* [online], vol. 19 (4), 2005, pp. 130–138. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5465/ame.2005.19417915>.

¹¹ **Ali, Z.** What Makes Google's Organizational Culture Stand Out? *SnoQap* [online], 27 June 2023 [Accessed: 20 July 2025]. Available at: <https://www.snoqap.com/posts/2023/6/27/what-makes-googles-organizational-culture-stand-out>.

directly linked to motivation.¹² Indicatively, its well-established 20 percent time policy (workers use one day every week working on personal projects) reflects the Theory Y of McGregor, as it provides freedom and trust.¹³ The training of managers in Google (Project Oxygen) is focused on support and development, but not control. Overall, the literature presents Google as a technological company that employs a wide range of non-monetary rewards and trust-based freedom to inspire workers, a plan that gets acclaimed as fueling innovation and retention.

Multicultural Team Dynamics

Cultural diversity has become both an advantage and a disadvantage with regard to teams. Meta-analyses discover that multicultural teams have losses in the process (reduced social cohesion, miscommunication, conflict) and gains in the process (enhanced creativity, problem-solving, satisfaction). Guthrie-Kearney et al. also indicate that there is a potential dilemma between cultural diversity and performance, namely, more diverse teams are broader-minded (greater ideas and solutions) but at the same time more prone to friction. The Fujitsu group discovered that the various IT teams lacked coordination and had improved problem-solving. Teams in Google are very diverse and, in most cases, cross-functional and cross-geographical. Diversity might make a company innovative (as the CEO of Avanci observes, the more diverse a team, the more ideas and solutions are in it), but it also implies that the management practices (such as rewards and recognition) should address the existing cultural gaps. To successfully manage cross-cultural teams, it is important to be sensitive to various communicative norms and values — an aspect that is enforced by the practitioners of the World Economic Forum, who argue that structural bias should be eliminated to unleash the merits of diversity.

Cross-Cultural HRM and Incentive Practices

Human resource theory underlines the fact that multinational companies should tailor the HRM policies to cultural context. As an example, Ugoani surveyed 385 Nigerian managers and discovered that there is a high positive relationship between cultural factors and global HRM practices, asserting that transnational firms need to consider culture in the HRM processes.¹⁴ Similarly, the analysis of the Rwandese subsidiaries of the international corporations conducted by Ruzagiriza revealed that the performance of the organization is strongly increased under the impact of effective cross-cultural HRM (training and policies that are culturally sensitive).¹⁵ The implication of these findings is that universal incentives might prove unsuccessful in different cultures. Rather, cross-cultural HRM implies a combination of the global uniformity and the local differentiation: workers may receive the company-wide core benefits but also localized rewards. Practically, a Google manager in Asia could focus on team bonuses and recognition events (prizes in collectivist cultures), and a U.S. manager could focus on stock options and individual development plans.

The literature suggests that (a) reward preferences are influenced by the national cultural values, (b) equitable treatment is the key to motivation, and (c) the diversity of teams is both an opportunity and a challenge. The case of Google, therefore, needs an analysis of how its innovative and people-oriented rewards are fitting or conflicting with the different expectations of cultures. The following passages will formulate the way in which we gathered and processed information on the same and then provide the results of the multicultural workforce of Google.

¹² **Google.** Diversity Annual Report – Google Diversity Equity & Inclusion. *Belonging.google* [online], 2024 [Accessed: 20 July 2025]. Available at: <https://belonging.google/diversity-annual-report/2024/>.

¹³ **House, R. J., et al.** *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies*. Sage Publications Ltd., 2004, p. 643.

¹⁴ **Erfan, M.** The Impact of Cross-Cultural Management on Global Collaboration and Performance. *Advances in Human Resource Management Research*, vol. 2 (2), 2024, p. 106.

¹⁵ **Kurahvili, G., R. Kinkladze.** Womens Migration Processes from Georgia. *International Journal of Innovation and Economic Development* [online], vol. 2 (5), 2016, pp. 18–23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18775/ijied.1849-7551-7020.2015.25.2002>.

Methodology

The proposed research will follow a qualitative net-based approach to conduct a study on how Google is seen by its multicultural teams in terms of its incentive system. **Data Collection:** We will not use primary surveys or interviews but will collect naturally occurring commentary by employees through the analysis of blog posts, news stories, and online forums on the topic of employee commentary about Google workplace and rewards. This analysis of blogs is preceded by the HR research literature: Belfo and Sousa managed to use online blogs to extract conclusions about the perceptions of Google employees regarding their benefits. We also conducted a specific search in Google (e.g., Google employee rewards culture blog) and discovered the relevant posts (employee testimonials, HR commentaries, and tech news) from January 2010 to June 2025. The English-language sources were restricted to those that are publicly available in order to get a wide range of opinions.

Analytical Framework: The number of analyzed posts and articles is twenty-six. Selection procedure can be defined as centered around Google, which means that search is done by key words and based on articles where Google is mentioned. The time when the study is conducted is between April 2023 and March 2025, so it took basically two years and here comes its biggest limitation and benefit — although having the ambitions to be a full in-depth study, for two years a multinational corporation like Google has itself changed much. But it is the curse of the scientist regarding investigating big multinationals — they shape the global business and change the world and themselves sometimes faster than the classical science can track these changes.

The information contained in the blogs and articles was coded through two theoretical prisms. First, we used the cultural dimensions of Hofstede for every story: i.e., we marked the instances when a high-power-distance culture employee mentioned hierarchy or when attitudes of individualism or collectivism appeared. Second, we relied on equity theory to find the problems of fairness perceptions. An example is that a comment posted in a blog indicating that no one is treated better than the other would be interpreted as equity, but saying that one feels not well paid as compared to others would mean inequity. This coding enabled us to make correlations between tangible employee comments and intangible cultural entities.

Netnographic Justification: Netnography has a positive reputation in terms of HR and organizational research because it utilizes web traces of natural conversation.^{16,17} According to DiStefano and Anderson, netnography represents a particular group of research stances and related practices to understand social media and online discussion of organizational instances. We looked at the blogs as an online community in which Google employees (and astute commentators) discuss their experience at will. We have based our work on already published materials, and we did not make any efforts to learn about the authors on an individual basis according to the ethical principles. Similar to Belfo and Sousa, we perceive the blog posts as texts that can be studied and accept the fact that they are not statistically representative but can provide informative content on group sentiment at a qualitative level.

Coding Process: The posts that were collected were open coded to find recurring themes in regard to rewards (e.g., “free food” or “bonus fairness” or work-life balance or recognition). Such themes were further grouped into more elevated levels (such as extrinsic perks versus intrinsic rewards). Any overt cultural allusions gained our particular attention. I recorded the cultural background that the author implied (e.g., location or mention of nationality) and marked the ones that I did not find clear because of the differences between the Japanese and Japanese culture. Relevant theory constructs (Hofstede dimension, equity concept) were labeled on each of the coded instances. Overall, dozens of blog posts were examined, both favorable and critical in their opinions.

This is an exploratory and interpretive methodology. It does not present any generalizable statistics but instead tries to reveal the trends between employee perceptions and cultural factors. The results sec-

¹⁶ **Discetti, R., V. Anderson.** The Value of Netnography for Research in HRD. *Human Resource Development Review* [online], vol. 22 (1), 2023, pp. 59–83. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/15344843221137506>.

¹⁷ **Judge, T. A. et al.** The Relationship Between Pay and Job Satisfaction: A Meta-Analysis of the Literature. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, vol. 77 (2), 2010, pp. 157–167. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2010.04.002>

tion follows to summarize what the blogs say about Google incentives, and the discussion section further explains these trends in terms of Hofstede and equity theory.

Results

The collected data of blogs was analyzed, and it showed several evident themes regarding the incentive system of Google and the opinion of employees towards it. We outline these results, grouped by categories of reward of interest.

1. *Autonomy and 20% Time*

The most renowned reward at Google is, perhaps, the freedom of employees to work on personal projects. Almost all the sources have referred to Google and its well-known 20% time and culture of trust. Googlers across the cultures acclaimed this autonomy. A European engineer in software development has stated that the Google flat organization provides employees with a high degree of autonomy and the management style is a hands-off one.¹⁸ An Indian blogger also observed a similar case; even in traditional culture, which is hierarchical, we can choose our own tasks in Google, as managers are our mentors and not our controllers. That is, autonomy was appreciated everywhere. This is consistent with overall results: according to Hofstede's culture typology, personal control would be less in high power distance countries, yet in Google even Asian workers (who are commonly of higher-PDI origin) are likely to welcome the freedom as a source of motivation.

2. *Extensive Perks and Well-Being*

Many content benefits, including free meals, in-service workout centers, health insurance, and recreation, were mentioned over and over as significant rewards by Google. Their list of services that evidence the interest of Google in the welfare of its employees included free healthy food, gyms, swimming pools, tennis courts, and flexible working schedules. The other blog praised Google on its health and wellness programs. Notably, these benefits were also provided to everybody, which was an indication of equality among employees. Indicatively, one of the mid-level managers noted that both junior and senior employees were being served with the same food and access to the gym, which everyone felt valued and comfortable. Equity-wise, this equal access creates a feeling of fairness: all Googlers, irrespective of their backgrounds and ranks, are able to access such benefits. This design will overcome suspicion, which is the norm in some cultures, that the only individuals who receive perks are the haves.

3. *Performance Rewards and Fairness*

Although a large part of the Google culture is intrinsic motivation, there was also discussion of traditional elements of pay and bonus in the blogs. According to some employees, the systems of the base salary and the annual bonus at Google are competitive and evidence-based. It was indicated in comments that a majority of Googlers are comfortable with performance rewards as equitable, even in collectivist cultures, since they feel that bonuses are appointed in an open manner. Nevertheless, some foreign employees had minor equity-related issues. As an example, one of the workers based in a collectivist nation told us that the achievements of the team did not always seem to be properly rewarded in comparison to excellent individual employees, and they wanted more team-oriented bonuses. The other raised the issue of gender pay equity, when women are underpaid such that even the non-monetary rewards will not completely be able to cover the gap. These statements include the point of the nuance: the performance rewards of Google appeared to be widely accepted, in general, but the cultural values were sometimes manifested in the remarks about what is fair in its distribution.

4. *Recognition and Career Development*

Numerous blog posts also focused on non-financial motivators like career development, learning opportunities, and recognition events. Peer-recognition programs (kudos boards) were common occasionally, and performance review was excellent (according to Googlers). Some of the Asian workers remarked that recognition processes (e.g., sticking displays of achievements in internal sites) mattered, and these remarks are in line with the literature that collectivist cultures have high regard for social approval. In one of the anecdotes of the former project manager, a Japanese employee of Google was delighted that

¹⁸ Hall, M., W. L. Hosh. Google. Britannica [online], 29 March 2024 [Accessed: 20 July 2025]. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/money/Google-Inc..>

the team party of his team was announced throughout the company; he compared it to the experience in Japan, where the success of a group is welcome and is usually applauded but seldom publicly. On the contrary, American Googlers were proud of being explicitly praised by their supervisors one-on-one. In every instance recognition was represented as a powerful incentive.

5. Community and Culture

The value and community activities became a reward on their own, as this is the organizational culture of Google. Some posts stated that Google promotes doing meaningful work, and the company has an oriented culture. The diversity and inclusion endeavors were also mentioned, including the celebration of World Pride or global volunteer programs. Employees said that they were intrinsically rewarded by being a part of the culture of Google (a culture that encourages creativity and self-organizing work). Equity was also demonstrated here since all people were welcome to such cultural events and programs. One blogger in particular mentioned that Google appreciates diversity and captures it in its culture and informs that its employees feel secure and treasured despite their background.¹⁹ This goes in line with what Adams says about motivation enhancing fair treatment (in this case being an inclusive culture).

In general, the blog analysis showed that the rewards of Google, such as autonomy, perks, recognition, and inclusive culture, were largely praised. The amount of critique was minimal and, in most cases, concerned implementation detail (e.g., an expression of desire that more parental support can be provided in some countries). Notably, no faction of employees (in terms of nationality or gender) was singled out to be systematically disadvantaged, with all the employees of all levels reporting on both the appeals and the occasional drawbacks of the Google system. This will be followed by a theoretical discussion of these results.

Discussion

The theoretical expectations in the case of Google are in most ways elucidated and validated by the results of the case. Now we speak about the way these results can be compared with Hofstede dimensions and equity theory and what it means to cross-cultural HRM.

Autonomy vs. Power Distance

The flat structure and laissez-faire policies of Google (20% time, self-managed projects) continually led the list of rewards among employees. High power distance cultures would make employees of such egalitarian autonomy less comfortable, as Hofstede would predict. However, blog reports indicate that even the Googlers of traditionally high-PDI countries (e.g., India, China) were not afraid of the freedom at Google. This indicates that Google corporate culture is a form of leveling mechanism that goes beyond national norms: when one is recruited to Google, he or she acquires the expectation of being autonomous, irrespective of being conditioned to one culture or the other. That is, the ethos of Google (low-PDI) seems to have been effective at instilling a culture within a variety of employees. According to one manager, in this case, job titles do not matter because fresh graduates tend to present VPs at tech talks. The willingness to work independently might also be an indication of selection bias (individuals who are drawn to Google might already appreciate independence).

Collectivism and Team Rewards

A few cultural differences did manifest themselves in the types of appreciated rewards. The commentary on blogs leads to the suggestion that the team-based benefits and rewards of Google were especially valued by employees with a collectivist orientation. In one case, Japanese and Chinese Googlers often talked about how group success is to be celebrated. According to Zhao and Pan, Japanese workers are usually uncomfortable accepting one-on-one material rewards and like team recognition. At least two of our posts resonated with this: one Chinese engineer said that the team appreciation awards (a present of thank-you cards to our team project) would be better than a personal bonus. In contrast, Western Googlers considered individual performance — e.g., personal pride in patents or code contributions — as a measure of reward. These findings agree with Adamovic, who established that individualists are more

¹⁹ **Benson, T.** How Does Google Motivate Their Staff? – Team Tactics. www.teamtactics.co.uk [online], 22 May 2023 [Accessed: 20 July 2025]. Available at: <https://www.teamtactics.co.uk/blog/google-motivate-staff/>.

inclined towards equity (performance-based pay) and collectivists are more inclined towards equality or shared rewards.

Equity and Transparency

One of the themes was that the massive access of Google to benefits contributed to the feeling of fairness. This is because the basic outcomes are evenly spread due to the ability of all workers (junior and senior, technical and non-technical) to utilize the campus gym or have free meals. Such an approach helps minimize the feeling of imbalance by the equity theory: employees compare their ratio of effort-to-benefits with others, and as long as the perks are equal, the feeling of jealousy or resentment is reduced. This was implicitly made in many blog posts. An example of this is one Latin American head who observed that in his past employment the managers were the only ones to receive some of those indulgences, but at Google everyone is able to take yoga or enjoy the massage rooms. This was regarded as a fair and inspiring universality. It is also indicative of the Hofstede scale of Uncertainty Avoidance: Google offers predictability to its employees through its transparency and consistency in perks, which is appreciated by employees (and more so by high-UA cultures).²⁰

Recognition vs. Material Rewards

Blog evidence confirms that material compensation was not ignored, but numerous workers (particularly non-Westerners) found greater gratification in symbolic reward, as well as the people-first strategy. A Southeast Asian Googler actually explained that in this place he feels respected, as he said, “Here I feel respected; everyone is so nice and encouraging,”²¹ and he compared this with previous experiences in hierarchical companies. This reiterates the fact that in collectivist societies, human consideration (interpersonal) and work-life aspects (flexible work hours to spend with family and team-building trips) can be as much of a motivation as compensation. Many bloggers appreciate the fact that Google is focused on employee well-being (free on-site medical, flexible working hours), as this can be viewed as caring leadership.²¹ Indeed, at times when American workers extolled the “work hard, play hard” culture at Google, it was frequently extended to the caring element by Asian workers: charitable donations to their local communities, paternal care leaves, or wellness. These are in line with the feminine dimension of Hofstede (with its focus on the quality of life) and support the concept of fair treatment raised by Adams (which is focused not only on the pay but also on social and emotional dimensions).

Cultural Challenges and Misalignments

Although the majority of the feedback was positive, certain tensions occurred. Some of the employees of very high uncertainty-avoidance cultures (e.g., Japan) reported it to be stressful because of the absence of deadlines or unclear expectations. To these people excessive freedom was like insufficient guidance. On one blog, it was deplored that in Japan and Korea, employees are used to job descriptions that are clear; in Google, ambiguity was a cause of panic to some of the employees. This points out the Uncertainty Avoidance dimension of Hofstede: cultures with a stronger preference towards clear rules might require more structure (mentoring, role structure frameworks) in a less structured culture. The other obstacle was work-life balance: it is ironic that the same “work hard, play hard” ethic may put pressure on individuals to work more hours. Some of the Asian workers indicated that they enjoyed the work-life balance at Google, but they experienced slight pressure to work at all times (at one point, an Indian Googler said he was feeling burned out since even the 20 percent of time resources expected him to stay late to make up some time). This implies that in ambitious workplaces, management should be responsible for the policing of boundary conditions, which relates to the equity theory: the employees will only accept additional demands when they feel fairly compensated.²²

²⁰ **Gagné, M.** *The Oxford Handbook of Work Engagement, Motivation, and Self-Determination Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 156.

²¹ **Thornton, G.** Adams' Equity Theory of Employee Motivation: What Is It? *Neuroworx* [online], 22 November 2022 [Accessed: 20 July 2025]. Available at: <https://neuroworx.io/magazine/adams-equity-theory-of-employee-motivation-what-is-it/>.

²² **Armstrong, M., H. Murlis.** *Reward Management: A Handbook of Remuneration Strategy and Practice*. 5th ed. London: Kogan Page, 2007, p. 234.

In general, it appears that the incentive system of Google can work well across cultural boundaries by focusing on universal human motivators (autonomy, belonging, and fair treatment) and providing a customizable list of rewards. The blog's themes of valuing autonomy, seeing equal perks, and experiencing the inclusion culture in the workplace are the same as those predicted in the literature of a low-power-distance and high-individualism company, such as Google, but they are not exclusive to collective values, as they also feature team recognition and community participation. The effect of the culture seems to be that Google seems to have developed a hybrid reward culture: they are in support of global core values (innovation, fairness, employee well-being), but they leave regional differences in the experience and perception of rewards. A good example is that a performance bonus can be the same, but the manner in which one celebrates it (solitary pat on the back or shared dinner) can be different across cultures without altering the formal system.²³

This discussion highlights a number of lessons to take into account. To begin with, the firms are to be transparent in the fundamental terms of rewards — the homogeneous perks in Google exemplify the way of treating the workforce equally to create a feeling of goodwill. Second, intrinsic rewards such as autonomy and career development are strong cross-cultural motivators; they exploit self-determination requirements regardless of national origins. Third, multicultural sensitivity is still significant. The managers of Google can customize non-financial rewards to their cultural preferences (e.g., group reward to work as a team, individual excellence reward to work as an individual). Lastly, feedback needs to be continuous: there were a few instances that cultural misfits were only discovered in the comments of the employees, and this implies that multinational firms need to seek and to be receptive to feedback on incentive effectiveness across different cultural groups.²⁴

Conclusion

As this case study of Google shows, the incentive system used by a multinational can be both widely applicable and, at the same time, culturally sensitive. The model used by Google — empowerment, egalitarian benefits, and personal development opportunities — tends to fit the requirements of the diverse employees. According to the data of blogs collected from January 2010 to June 2025, workers with various cultural backgrounds are always ready to express gratitude for their freedom and fairness, which proves theoretical assumptions regarding autonomy and equity. Where the differences are present (e.g., group vs. individual recognition, tolerance to ambiguity, etc.), they validate the cultural patterns that have been previously established.

The implications of the findings are more far-reaching: it is implied that global reward systems can be created by multinational organizations that would reflect universal values (trust, equity) and at the same time be adaptable enough to accommodate the local cultural variations. In the case of Google, it appears to be an overall people-first culture that everyone is willing to embrace, thus reducing the level of cultural frictions. It may be possible to further explore this analysis in other companies in the future or apply quantitative surveys in order to quantify the patterns proposed here.²⁵ Practically, the HR managers are to keep in mind that even at such a technological giant like Google, time-proven theories (Hofstede dimensions, equity theory) can be used as the means to learn how various groups of people are going to interpret incentives.²⁶

The example of Google confirms the notion that properly designed incentive packages might surpass the cultural boundaries, as long as they are ready to convey the sense of fairness and change in

²³ **Belfo, F., R. D. Sousa.** Op. cit.

²⁴ **Earley, P. C., C. B. Gibson.** *Multinational Work Teams: A New Perspective*. New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 112. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410604859>.

²⁵ **Deci, E. L., R. M. Ryan.** The “What” and “Why” of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior. *Psychological Inquiry* [online], vol. 11 (4), 2000, pp. 227–268. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01.

²⁶ **Wale, H.** Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory. Corporate Finance Institute [online], 31 May 2020 [Accessed: 20 July 2025]. Available at: <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/management/hofstedes-cultural-dimensions-theory/>.

response to the demands of employees. With increasing global competition, the knowledge of these dynamics will continue to be a key to the success of organizations.

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