

How can work be designed to be intrinsically rewarding? Qualitative insights from South African non-profit employees



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Dates:

Received: 13 Jan. 2016
Accepted: 30 Mar. 2016
Published: 28 July 2016

How to cite this article:

Renard, M., & Snelgar, R.J. (2016). How can work be designed to be intrinsically rewarding? Qualitative insights from South African non-profit employees. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology/SA Tydskrif vir Bedryfsielkunde*, 42(1), a1346. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v42i1.1346>

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Orientation: Intrinsic rewards are personal, psychological responses to the work that employees perform, which stem from the manner in which their work is designed.

Research purpose: This study sought to discover in what ways non-profit employees are psychologically rewarded by the nature of their work tasks. The use of a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis ensured that in-depth responses from participants were gained.

Motivation for the study: Intrinsic rewards are of particular importance to non-profit employees, who tend to earn below-market salaries. This implies that their motivation originates predominantly from intrinsic as opposed to extrinsic rewards; yet, research into this area of rewards is lacking.

Research approach, design and method: In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted using a sample of 15 extrinsically rewarded non-profit employees working within South Africa. Thematic analysis was utilised in order to generate codes which led to the formation of five intrinsic rewards categories.

Main findings: Intrinsic rewards were classified into five categories, namely (1) Meaningful Work, (2) Flexible Work, (3) Challenging Work, (4) Varied Work and (5) Enjoyable Work. These rewards each comprise of various subcategories, which provide insight into why such work is rewarding to non-profit employees.

Practical/managerial implications: Traditional performance management systems should be re-evaluated in the non-profit sector to shift focus towards intrinsic rewards, as opposed to focusing only on the use of extrinsic rewards such as incentives to motivate employees.

Contribution/value-add: The study provides a qualitative understanding of how extrinsically rewarded non-profit employees perceive their work to be intrinsically rewarding, which bridges the empirical gap pertaining to intrinsic rewards within this sector.

‘There is more to rewarding people than throwing money at them.’ (Armstrong & Brown, 2009, p. 23)

Introduction

In order to improve the strength of an organisation’s value exchange for its employees, organisations should develop reward systems that emphasise both extrinsic *and* intrinsic rewards (Calvert & Stiles, 2010). Extrinsic rewards are tangible, transactional rewards provided to employees for undertaking work within the context of employment (Perkins & White, 2009), such as salaries, bonuses and benefits. On the other hand, intrinsic rewards are personal, internal, psychological responses to one’s work that employees receive from doing work that is meaningful, and performing such work well (Thomas, 2009; Tippet & Kluvers, 2007). They are self-administered rewards that are associated with the job itself (Meyer & Kirsten, 2012; WorldatWork, 2007), as opposed to being provided by an external source such as management. Intrinsic rewards include opportunities to perform varied and diverse activities; to do work that is interesting; to enjoy opportunities to grow personally; to take greater responsibility; to participate in decision-making; and to enjoy freedom and discretion in one’s job (DeCenzo, Robbins & Verhulst, 2010; Swanepoel, Erasmus & Schenk, 2008).

Intrinsic rewards play a role of particular importance to non-profit employees, because employees working for independent non-governmental organisations in South Africa earn, on average, 40.37% less than employees in the private sector in this country, and 22.06% less than those

working for international non-governmental organisations (Ryder, 2008). A similar trend is apparent within the United States of America, with Cohen (2010) highlighting that full-time employees working within non-profit organisations (NPOs) are paid less than their private sector or government counterparts, particularly in higher-level and management jobs, and NPO employees generally receive fewer bonuses and equity than private sector employees. Based on the lower salaries received by NPO employees, it is logical to infer that extrinsic rewards will not necessarily be the primary source of reward for such employees. Taking this into account, Werner (2004) suggests that when individuals are motivated by work that is challenging, meaningful and interesting, then external control mechanisms such as incentives take less prominence. It should be noted that this implies that employees might tolerate lower salaries in relation to the market, should their work be sufficiently stimulating and enjoyable so as to result in motivation. Non-profit employees who earn below-market salaries may thus feel sufficiently rewarded by the nature of their work, causing them to remain motivated to perform to the best of their abilities.

Confirming this, Schepers *et al.* (2005) provide evidence indicating that intrinsic rewards, as opposed to extrinsic rewards such as money, motivate employees working in NPOs. Furthermore, Selden and Sowa (2011) found in their study of 22 human service organisations that none relied on performance-based monetary rewards and incentives, but instead depended on their employees being satisfied with the intrinsic rewards provided by their work. Such intrinsic reward NPO literature is limited, however, implying that further investigation is required in order to understand what factors might intrinsically reward NPO employees.

In addition, there is a lack of empirical studies focusing on intrinsic rewards that have been conducted within South Africa. Nuijoo and Meyer (2012) revealed that the satisfaction derived by employees from their intrinsic job characteristics, such as the extent to which their tasks are appealing, is more important for intrinsic motivation than extrinsic rewards such as monetary benefits, while Jacobs, Renard and Snelgar (2014) showed that the provision of intrinsic rewards to retail employees is positively correlated with levels of work engagement, particularly between meaningfulness (an intrinsic reward) and dedication (a dimension of work engagement).

Research purpose and objectives

The above overview reveals that limited research has been conducted on the relevance of intrinsic rewards within NPOs specifically. Moreover, little research pertaining to this construct exists within South Africa. Thus, the research question for this study is, 'How are employees working within NPOs in South Africa intrinsically rewarded by their work?' This article seeks to uncover by what means non-profit employees can be psychologically rewarded through the nature of their work, as opposed to being only monetarily remunerated through extrinsic rewards. By taking a phenomenological approach to data collection and

interpretation, this article aims to provide qualitative insights into the perceptions of NPO employees regarding intrinsically rewarding work.

Literature review

Intrinsic reward theories

Theory relating to intrinsic rewards is grounded in the work of Herzberg (1966, 1968), Hackman and Oldham (1980) and Ryan and Deci (2000), who all highlight that well designed work content is intrinsically rewarding, and leads to intrinsic motivation and satisfaction. Herzberg's (1966, 1968) Two-Factor Theory states that work-related factors that produce job satisfaction (which he named 'motivators') are distinct from those factors leading to job dissatisfaction and unhappiness at work (which he named 'hygiene factors'). He found that hygiene factors are extrinsic to employees' jobs and are found in the job environment, including the salary paid to employees; however, motivators are intrinsic to employees' jobs and are found within their job content, such as their work itself. According to this theory, paying employees a high salary will not cause them to be intrinsically motivated, but will simply prevent dissatisfaction; yet the work itself that employees perform holds the potential to motivate them.

Herzberg's (1966, 1968) theory, however, does not specify what specific elements of a job are intrinsically rewarding, a gap which is bridged by Hackman and Oldham (1980), and Ryan and Deci (2000). Hackman and Oldham's (1980), Job Characteristics Model (JCM) promotes the enrichment of jobs through designing them in such a way as to create conditions for high levels of work performance. They specify that five core job characteristics (namely, skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and job feedback) lead to three critical psychological states (namely, the experienced meaningfulness of work; experienced responsibility for the work's outcomes; and knowledge of the work's actual results being produced), which in turn will result in positive outcomes for individuals and organisations (including higher levels of job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation). As noted by Hackman and Oldham (1980), motivation at work has more to do with how tasks are designed and managed than with the personal dispositions of those who perform them. Additionally, Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) highlights that intrinsic motivation is enhanced when an employee's three innate psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness are satisfied. The researchers note that this involves employees being given opportunities to master their tasks, operate independently, initiate their own work schedules, be free to make decisions without external approval, and be connected to others at work.

Drawing from the latter two theories, the researchers note that an employee's work should be purposeful (JCM) and autonomous (JCM; SDT), as well as provide opportunities for mastery (SDT) and variety (JCM) in order for it to intrinsically reward employees. The semi-structured questions asked in

the qualitative interviews of this study were aligned to these elements of work, indicating a deductive approach to identifying relevant themes.

Intrinsic versus extrinsic rewards in motivating employees

Individuals are able to experience intrinsic rewards even when they are provided with extrinsic rewards; however, intrinsic rewards motivate individuals' behaviour more powerfully than extrinsic rewards (Csikszentmihalyi, Graef & Gianinno, 1983). According to Deci (1971), extrinsic rewards in the form of money act as a stimulus that causes individuals to cognitively re-evaluate their motivations for performing an activity. When money is introduced as an external form of reinforcement for performing an activity, then an individual's perception changes so that he or she begins performing *for* the money. The extrinsic reward thus becomes the reason for doing the activity. This decreases intrinsic motivation because of the change in perceived locus of causality from internal to external (Deci, 1975). On the other hand, when individuals perform activities that they enjoy (that is, intrinsically rewarding work), then intrinsic motivation remains high (Baron & Byrne, 1991).

The fact that intrinsic as opposed to extrinsic rewards promote greater levels of intrinsic motivation (Nujoo & Meyer, 2012) highlights the need for these rewards being given organisational attention. Moreover, intrinsically rewarding work has been shown to promote psychological well-being and competence (Csikszentmihalyi *et al.*, 1983). Work that is designed to include individual control, skill variety and flexibility has also been found to result in proactive performance, innovation and creativity (Garg & Rastogi, 2006), and work that is purposeful leads to reduced stress, absenteeism, turnover, dissatisfaction, depression and cynicism, in addition to increased happiness, commitment, effort, empowerment, fulfilment and engagement (Beechler, 2013).

Research design

Research approach and strategy

This empirical study was non-experimental in nature because no treatment or unique conditions were assigned to participants (Landy & Conte, 2010), and no planned interventions or random assignment of participants to groups took place (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005). The research was primarily descriptive and contextual in nature, and secondarily explanatory. It aimed to identify and describe phenomena that exist in the NPO work environment as experienced by the sample in their own terms, thus allowing interpretations to be attained regarding the intrinsic rewards provided to participants (descriptive and/or contextual); as well as the influences surrounding the occurrence of social phenomena, such as what underpins participants' attitudes towards their NPO positions (explanatory) (Ritchie & Ormston, 2014).

This research was furthermore phenomenological, aiming both to understand as well as interpret how participants give

meaning to aspects of their working lives (Fouché, 2002). It is positioned within the constructivist paradigm, which focuses on social reality occurring as a result of constructive processes, by which individuals understand their own experiences through their particular contexts (Flick, 2014). This implies that the non-profit context in which this research is positioned is of importance in understanding the results of this study.

Research method

Research setting

Qualitative, in-depth interviews were conducted in South Africa in order to gain in-depth data and verify whether the construct of intrinsic rewards is of particular relevance to extrinsically rewarded NPO employees in this country. NPOs in South Africa are formed 'for the purpose of serving a public or mutual benefit other than the pursuit or accumulation of profits for owners or investors' (Bussin, 2013, p. 9). They include any organisation whose interest is to assist the community, such as churches, schools, sport clubs, learning institutions or theatre groups (Association for Non Profit Organisations SA, 2012).

Entrée and establishing researcher roles

The researchers made contact with potential participants through emailing an interview invitation to NPO employees with whom they are in personal contact. Additionally, an interview invitation was posted on a social media platform to broaden the sample.

The researchers fulfilled a number of roles as this study was conducted. Apart from personally conducting the semi-structured interviews, they also planned the study through making contact with participants, setting up the interview appointments, and developing the list of semi-structured questions to be asked during the interviews. Additionally, the researchers analysed the data through the use of thematic analysis. The researchers did not transcribe the interview data, because this was performed by a student assistant who aided the researchers due to their work constraints.

Research participants and sampling methods

Data was obtained from 15 NPO employees in South Africa. Non-probability sampling in the form of purposive and convenience sampling was used. Purposive sampling entails relying on experience and/or previous research in order to obtain units of analysis in such a manner that the sample obtained was as representative of the population as possible (Welman *et al.*, 2005). Specifically, the basis of the purposive sample was self-selection, with samples of cases presenting themselves to be studied (Horn, 2009) by means of voluntarily choosing to be interviewed. The sample was convenient because in most cases, personal acquaintances of the researchers were contacted.

Table 1 provides the frequency distribution of the sample. It is evident that the sample was comprised primarily of females (73.3%); employees holding some form of tertiary

education (66.7%); and employees working within strategic or managerial positions (60.0%). Participants' total number of years of working experience ranged from less than 1 year through to 40 years of experience. In terms of current organisational tenure, participants' experience ranged from less than 1 year to 17 years of experience. All of the participants met the criteria of being extrinsically rewarded to work within their particular NPO; that is, they were not volunteers. The majority of the NPOs in the sample provide welfare and humanitarian assistance, such as providing support to destitute adults, and two organisations operate in the cultural sphere, including organising arts projects for disadvantaged children. Three organisations provide health care services, such as medical terminal care to cancer patients, while the remaining organisations vary with missions including training the unemployed; looking after the health of animals; and providing religious services.

Data collection methods

'Long' interviews are recommended by Fouché (2002) as an appropriate means of collecting data when using the phenomenological approach to qualitative research that focuses on interpretive enquiry, because they are naturalistic in nature. Prior to the start of each interview, information pertaining to the nature of the study was read to each participant. This included information highlighting the confidentiality of the data and rights of the participants. Thereafter, an interview consent form was willingly signed by every participant. Once consent had been gained, a predetermined list of questions was asked of all participants, to ensure standardisation and comparability of answers. The interviews were, however, semi-structured in nature, comprised of questions that made up an interview schedule.

The interviews were merely guided by such schedules as opposed to being dictated by them (Greeff, 2002). This allowed opportunities to probe further where clarity and further information was required.

A theoretical (deductive) means of identifying data patterns was used in this qualitative study, implying that the questions asked in the interviews aligned with specific theories pertaining to the research area, which enabled the researchers to answer their research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, while the first question asked of participants was general in nature ('Explain how you feel rewarded at work'), this was followed by questions relating to intrinsic rewards stemming from the theories discussed earlier, including 'Do you experience a sense of development and/or mastery and/or growth as you progress in your day-to-day work?'; 'Do you feel that your work has a purpose?'; 'Do you enjoy a level of autonomy (also referred to as freedom and/or choice and/or personal control) in the way that you schedule your activities?'; and 'Describe whether you experience fulfilment from your tasks and duties'.

The interviews ranged in length depending on the depth of answers provided by the participants, as well as the amount of probing on the part of the interviewers. The techniques for effective interviews discussed by Greeff (2002, pp. 293–295) were used when interviewing participants.

Data recording

The interviews were recorded by means of Dictaphones so that they could be accurately transcribed. This ensured that all information was noted for subsequent analysis, so that the correct meanings and subtleties of participants' responses

TABLE 1: Frequency distribution of demographic variables ($n = 15$).

Item	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	4	26.7
	Female	11	73.3
Education	Grade 12 (Matric)	5	33.3
	Diploma or higher education certificate	1	6.7
	Bachelors degree	2	13.3
	Honours or postgraduate degree or diploma	4	26.7
	Masters' degree	1	6.7
	Doctoral degree	2	13.3
Type of position in NPO	Administrative	6	40.0
	Strategic or managerial	9	60.0
Total number of years of working experience	>1 to 10 years' experience	4	26.7
	11 to 20 years' experience	5	33.3
	21 to 30 years' experience	1	6.7
	31 to 40 years' experience	5	33.3
Tenure within current NPO	>1 to 5 years' experience	9	60.0
	6 to 10 years' experience	3	20.0
	11 to 17 years' experience	3	20.0
Non-profit category in which respondents work	Animal welfare	1	6.7
	Conservation and environment	1	6.7
	Cultural activities	2	13.3
	Education and development	1	6.7
	Health care	3	20.0
	Religion, belief and philosophy	1	6.7
	Welfare and humanitarian	6	40.0

were interpreted (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2008). This transcription, performed by a trained student assistant, was crucial in the data analysis process. In total, 408 pages of data were produced as a result of this verbatim transcription process.

Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity

Reliability was confirmed through asking the same predetermined questions to every participant, which ensured standardisation and consistency. Validity was maintained through aligning these interview questions with theoretical frameworks, thus ensuring that the data obtained was relevant to theory related to intrinsic rewards.

To ensure that the research was conducted within an ethical framework (see Webster, Lewis & Brown, 2014; Welman *et al.*, 2005), participation in the research was entirely voluntary and no individuals were forced or coerced to take part. Research participants were informed upfront about the research topic and its aims; that all information would only be used for research purposes; and that they could withdraw their participation at any stage of the interview. Informed consent was gained from all participants, by means of signing an informed consent document. Participants' privacy was maintained throughout the research process, because the data obtained were treated in a strictly confidential manner. The interviews did not require participants to provide their names, and no individuals have been referred to in this article by name. Rather, anonymity has been maintained by referring to participants according to their interview slot. For example, the first participant interviewed is described as Participant A. The interviews were not unnecessarily lengthy or intrusive, and no questions were sensitive or offensive in nature. In addition, the researchers adhered to the ethical standards pertaining to conducting interviews described by Graham, Grewal and Lewis (2007). Ethics approval was granted through the researchers' university to gain permission to conduct the study.

Data analysis

The process of thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the qualitative interviews. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method to identify, analyse and report patterns of meaning (known as *themes*) that occur across a qualitative data set, in order to organise and describe it in 'rich' detail. Thematic analysis served the purpose of reporting the 'experience, meaning and the reality of participants' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). This is in line with the phenomenological qualitative strategy chosen for this phase, as Fouché (2002) states that such a strategy requires data to be systematically identified, followed by meanings and general descriptions of experiences being analysed within a specific context, such as the non-profit context of this study.

There are certain steps that comprise the process of thematic analysis, as discussed by Spencer, Ritchie, O'Connor, Morrell

and Ormston (2014). The first step involved *familiarisation* with the data, which began with transcribing the verbal interview data, followed by reading through a selected number of transcripts in order to record initial ideas and be immersed in the content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the second step of thematic analysis, an *initial thematic framework was constructed* that served as a group of headings under which the experiences and views of participants could be organised (Spencer, Ritchie, Ormston, O'Connor & Barnard, 2014). According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 82), a theme 'captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set'. Six descriptive subthemes were used; however, for the purposes of this article, only the subtheme of 'intrinsic rewards' will be elaborated upon. The deductive questions developed to collect data for this subtheme were aligned with theory stemming from the JCM and SDT.

This thematic framework led into the third step of thematic analysis, which involved *indexing and sorting* the data. In order to *index* the data, each sentence and paragraph was read in detail, after which decisions were made concerning which subthemes from the thematic framework best matched that sentence or paragraph (Spencer, Ritchie, O'Connor, *et al.*, 2014). Summaries of each participant's data according to these subthemes were then recorded, including quotations, in tabular format. This formed the *sorting* component of this thematic analytical step, to enable a view of responses pertaining to similar themes as a whole (Spencer, Ritchie, O'Connor, *et al.*, 2014). At this stage, *initial codes were generated* from the data, which served to identify content that could serve as 'the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89).

The fourth step of thematic analysis entailed *reviewing the coherence of the data extracts* that had been produced, in order to amend labels and reapply them to the data (Spencer, Ritchie, Ormston, *et al.*, 2014). Thereafter, *abstraction and interpretation* involved categorising and classifying the data, including *describing* the data by *developing categories* made up of analytic concepts, according to each theme (Spencer, Ritchie, Ormston, *et al.*, 2014). This comprised reviewing all data extracts and summaries to determine the range of views or experiences that were referred to by participants for each theme.

Results

As noted, a thematic framework was compiled deductively, based on theory described earlier in this article. Patterns of responses emerged from the data collected using these questions, which led to the generation of codes. These codes were then inductively interpreted and re-labelled to form categories. The categories that were found to best group the 'intrinsic rewards' subtheme were Meaningful Work (MW), Flexible Work (FW), Challenging Work (CW), Varied Work (VW) and Enjoyable Work (EW).

Meaningful Work

Nine codes were classified from the 'intrinsic rewards' subtheme under the category of MW. Firstly, nine participants felt that they *play a vital role* within their workplaces, and thus experience their work as meaningful. This meaning stems from participants seeing the end results of their work, which intrinsically rewards them. Participant G acknowledged that her work serves a bigger purpose through the direct impact it has, such as its influence on the 100 000 South Africans who have been placed on anti-retroviral drugs in less than 1 year as a result of her input. This knowledge provides her with internal satisfaction. Participant C, who fundraises for an NPO that provides care to cancer patients, feels that the end result of her work is her greatest reward, because she can see a direct line-of-sight between the money that she raises for the organisation and the way in which this funding is put to use:

...when people say to me 'thank heavens [organisation C] stepped in and relieved his pain, and empowered me to look after him at the end of his life' – that is the greatest reward My greatest satisfaction comes from thinking, 'Gee, I contributed to that'. My part, my little part in this organisation – and remember I'm not in the front line, I'm not a nurse or psychologist – but I've helped raise the funds to get that nurse to that man in Motherwell who was dying a terribly painful death and we could alleviate his suffering. That is the ultimate payoff for me. [Participant C, Female, Fundraising Events Manager]

These examples emphasise the importance of task identity, which in Hackman and Oldham's (1980) JCM is a core job characteristic that leads to meaningfulness in work. Task identity is the degree to which employees can complete a job from beginning to end, with the outcome being visible (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). This ensures that employees see the 'bigger picture' into which their work fits, resulting in them caring more about their work (Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

The code most frequently applied to the data was that of *seeing the difference that one's work makes*, which was mentioned by all 15 participants. Participant F, a residential programme manager for a children's home, highlighted that he feels rewarded by seeing the children excelling and growing, because in those moments he feels that all of his hard work is worthwhile. Along a similar line, Participant K, who cares for 30 children that have been taken away from their homes because of difficult circumstances, noted that she is rewarded by giving these children an education as well as opportunities in life, in this way positively having an impact on their lives:

I think that's a big reward and I think one day when you're old ... it's just to look back and say, 'But what did I do with my time on earth? What purpose did I have on earth?' And I think that for me it is important that I could touch lives ... even if it's just in one person's life. You can make a difference. [Participant K, Female, General Manager]

Moreover, Participant D, who is the public relations officer for an NPO that organises transportation for sick children so that they receive life-saving treatment, stated that she desires to go to work each morning because she knows that it is

guaranteed that she will make a large difference in the lives of others, which motivates her. Seeing one's work assisting others strengthens the significance of one's tasks, which implies that a job substantially impacts the physical or psychological well-being of others inside or outside the organisation (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). This is of particular relevance to the non-profit sector, where employees who possess a higher propensity for caring about softer issues are often attracted to such organisations because they feel aligned to their missions (Forbes, 2013). Such missions tend to be 'engaging and uplifting at a universal and higher-order value level' (Forbes, 2013, p. 33).

The above code is related to the *feel-good factor* that arises from work that is meaningful, which was mentioned by 12 participants as being a rewarding element of their work. Participant B explained how she is made to feel good through her work when she sees how she is changing the lives of children with disabilities, as she practically journeys both with them and their parents. Participant A elaborated on the feelings that arise from doing good work by discussing that her satisfaction stems from seeing learners arrive at her training and development NPO with no jobs and no expertise, and then be filled with joy as they are given the opportunity to learn new skills. Feeling good about one's work in this way also stems from task significance, which according to Grant (2008) causes employees to perceive their jobs as more meaningful because they experience a psychological link between their performance and positive outcomes for others. When the actions of employees have a frequent and long-lasting impact on others, then this increases their perception that their work holds social worth (Grant, 2008). Baron, Branscombe and Byrne (2009) note that having a positive, beneficial effect on the lives of others causes one to feel good about oneself, which they termed 'the empathetic-joy hypothesis'.

Data related to *empowering others* was noted by four participants as a motivating aspect of work. Participant G mentioned that she gains internal satisfaction from empowering others with her expertise within her capacity as a research and technical lead, and Participant L, who works within her local church, poignantly noted that:

...the reward definitely is not financial. Not at all. The reward comes from the hug from a child inside Sunday school; the tears from someone who's come through divorce care; the look of gratitude on someone's face when you visited them at hospital; praying with someone who's in need ... it's priceless ... there's nothing like sitting with someone who you've walked a long road with through divorce care that can say to you 'for the first time in seven years, I've been able to speak to the father of my children because of this course'. You can't put a price on that. [Participant L, Female, Pastoral Care Convenor]

Giving hope to others was discussed five times by participants as a rewarding factor that motivated them. Participant K noted that her personal work goals are to make a change and give hope to destitute children and adults, by providing them with an education. Participant M, working as a trauma

counsellor, described how she experiences her job as meaningful owing to her work holding a purpose in the lives of her psychiatric patients, because she feels that she directly influences their happiness through the counselling she provides. Both of the latter two codes align with individuals helping others as a result of unselfish motives such as knowing that it is the right thing to do (Baron, Byrne & Branscombe, 2006). The act of helping others is therefore rewarding in and of itself.

Thirteen participants made reference to their *tasks being fulfilling*. Participant D described how every work day is fulfilling because she is helping at least one person daily through transporting terminally ill children to receive treatment. Receiving a telephone call saying that a child's operation was successful and seeing the smile on a child or parent's face when they come home, provides her with joy. She highlighted that:

...some of the babies, they spend about six to eight months in Cape Town on chemo – so they grow their teeth there, they start walking in hospital, so when we hear they're coming home, it's excitement for us and it's fulfilling, and it's just knowing they've made it – that's rewarding enough. [Participant D, Female, Public Relations Officer]

Social upliftment was highlighted as being rewarding, such as by Participant J, whose work aims to restore the dignity of the elderly by making them feel loved and appreciated. Participant I, an administrative assistant for an NPO that cares for orphaned children, noted that the children's lives are enriched and the community uplifted when every employee works together and contributes in their individual ways, whether through administration or tasks related to social work.

Sharing knowledge was discussed by three participants as a motivating element at work, such as by Participant H, who stated that teaching children and seeing their excitement is rewarding to him within his role of senior conservation officer. Finally, *working towards a common, vital purpose* was mentioned by Participant D as a work motivator, because her work team collectively aims to achieve a common purpose, with nothing being more important to them than ensuring that children with life-threatening illnesses are provided with the transport they need to receive their healthcare.

Each of these Meaningful Work codes shares a common thread, in that individuals need to be *aware* that their actions have had a positive impact on the lives of those they are helping in order for them to feel rewarded (Baron *et al.*, 2009). This emphasises the importance of line-of-sight in crafting MW, because if individuals do not know *how* their work makes a difference due to a lack of feedback, then they will not deem their work to be purposeful.

Flexible Work

One code emerged from the data that was classified under the category of Flexible Work, namely *autonomy*. All 15

participants agreed that they find this to be an intrinsically rewarding aspect of work. For example, Participant L experiences a level of trust at work when no one questions her actions or recommends different ways of working, and Participant C noted that a lack of micromanagement is rewarding, because it indicates that her boss trusts her and has confidence in her. Participant F feels rewarded when management displays confidence in him and allows him to develop his own objectives and timeframes. He noted that:

...I do have a lot of autonomy in terms of decisions, so if I feel that the programmes need to be radically changed, it can be ready to be changed today. I do not have to go and seek authority from someone else. [Participant F, Male, Residential Programme Manager]

Speaking about her boss, Participant G mentioned that:

He's not a micromanager so long as I deliver the goods, he doesn't mind how I do it. He knows I will do it ethically and I'll do it well, and he gives me a lot of autonomy ... there's nothing that drives me more crazy than somebody micromanaging me and telling me how to do stuff. If you ask me to do something, I'll do it and I'll deliver it and it'll be great, and if you want it done the way that you want it done ... then you should rather do it yourself ... if I need help, I'll ask. [Participant G, Female, Research and Technical Lead]

Such autonomy, a part of SDT, is defined by Deci and Ryan (2008, p. 7) as 'acting with the experience of choice', implying that individuals can be autonomous even while relying on others, because they act independently of others. This data pertaining to the flexible nature of many NPO employees' work is in line with Speckbacher's (2003) argument that NPO employees may need less monitoring than employees outside the NPO context, because they are more committed to their organisations' missions. This implies that allowing NPO employees to manage their own tasks and techniques in an autonomous manner may be an effective strategy for managers to consider within this sector.

Challenging Work

Four codes were classified under the category of Challenging Work. *Opportunities to use their personal skills* was mentioned four times by participants as a motivating factor at work. For example, Participant B makes use of her journalism degree in her work as a public relations officer, and Participant M utilises her Honours qualification in psychology in her role of trauma counsellor. Participant N highlighted how her skills are used effectively to organise orchestral concerts, because she feels rewarded when she is told that concerts would not succeed were it not for her consistent efforts.

Having *opportunities to develop their skills* was mentioned by eight participants as being rewarding. This code aligns with Deci's (1975) proposition that individuals who have a need to be self-determined and competent will seek out situations that provide a reasonable challenge to them. According to Participant B, working at an NPO that empowers disabled

children has developed her both personally and professionally, as she has formalised her writing skills as well as learned patience and how best to take initiative and work independently. Participant F reported that he has improved in his ability to make decisions, take on responsibility, and delegate to others. He has moreover grown in professionalism and maturity, and perceives that he is becoming an expert in his work as he becomes more familiar with the procedures of his NPO. Participant O has experienced a sense of personal and professional growth through developing her interpersonal, fundraising and networking skills. Additionally, Participant M noted that she feels rewarded by the manner in which she has matured through her work, such as improving in the way she handles herself ethically when conducting group therapy sessions at work.

Six participants made reference to being rewarded through *opportunities to gain experience* at work. For example, Participant N finds that gaining greater levels of experience at work is rewarding, and has made her more confident in her abilities, and Participant J was motivated to join his NPO in order to gain experience and build his knowledge base.

Fourteen participants made reference to content that was coded as their *tasks being challenging*. Participant L drew attention to the challenges of working in a people-profession, noting that:

It's very different to working in any other place. The challenges are huge because you're dealing with people all the time. People come before projects. [Participant L, Female, Pastoral Care Convenor]

Participant B referred to the fact that when she began working in her NPO, the challenges were overwhelming because the lives of children depended on her accuracy. However, such challenges helped her to grow, and her tasks have become easier with time. Participant H mentioned that the NPO sector is challenging because skills, technology and direction are radically changing, and his competence has thus needed to evolve accordingly. As a result, he does not feel that he will ever reach a level of mastery within his job.

Participant K summarised the challenging environment of NPOs by stating that this sector requires employees to put all of their efforts into their work, because much planning and effort is required in order for a difference to be made over time. The responses within the latter three codes are in line with what Herzberg (1966) defines as the characteristics of psychological growth, including growing knowledge in relation to other related pieces of information; continuing to know more; being capable of exhibiting creativity; being effective in situations that are ambiguous; growing within oneself; and developing one's individuality especially when faced with group pressure. Moreover, the researchers note that the emotional demands placed on some NPO employees may serve to challenge them not only psychologically, but in a particularly powerful affective manner as well.

Varied Work

Like Flexible Work, the category of VW was comprised of only one code that emerged from the data, namely *tasks being diverse*. This code was applied when participants spoke about feeling rewarded by a lack of routine at work, and being given an assortment of tasks to perform. As discussed by Siu and Jaimovich (2015), non-routine tasks involve greater levels of human interaction, discretion and communication, as well as a greater variety of tasks that are not bound by a fixed set of rules. Thirteen participants mentioned being rewarded by this aspect of work. Participant H highlighted that he was motivated to begin working at an environmental NPO because he was attracted to the diversity of tasks to which he would be exposed. Participant C finds personal satisfaction from the many components that comprise organising events because this allows her to be creative, and Participant M mentioned that her job is exciting owing to its constant stimulation and task involvement. As noted by McClelland (1987), variety acts as a natural incentive that adds interest and excitement to experiences. Moreover, Participant D stated that working within a non-routine job means that she is always learning new things at work:

Every day is a completely different day, so it's not monotonous ... you can go to the same hospital five times, but you are going to meet someone else, there's going to be something new for you to learn there. [Participant D, Female, Public Relations Officer]

Participant F explained that he would get bored with routine work and standardised days, and instead finds fulfilment in having a variety of tasks to do and different challenges to overcome. Along the same line, Participant G noted that she is fulfilled by applying her mind to different daily tasks:

I get such a variety of things to do. There are the mundane day-to-day things which are repetitive, but most days I get something different come across my desk and I find that to be very fulfilling because it's something different to apply my mind to, something different to think about ... try and approach things in a new way, try and be innovative. [Participant G, Female, Research and Technical Lead]

Enjoyable Work

Responses from participants were categorised into the intrinsic reward of Enjoyable Work as a result of two codes. Firstly, *tasks being interesting* was mentioned by seven participants as being rewarding work-wise. As explained by Ryan and Deci (2000), intrinsic motivation can only occur if individuals perform activities that are intrinsically interesting to them. Participant C noted that she enjoys the fact that her job is not static, and that her work is kept interesting because she constantly needs to look for new ways to grow. Aspects of work that Participant B finds interesting include learning how to organise events, speaking on the radio and gaining connections with others. It is crucial that NPO employees find their work to be appealing, because Kohn (1993) declares that extrinsic rewards are a poor substitute for genuine interest in one's job. As noted by Maw (2014), managers of NPOs should ensure that even lower-level employees are given the opportunity to contribute towards work that is interesting.

Secondly, four participants commented that *performing work that they enjoy or love* is motivating to them. Coffman (2002) confirms that employees in the non-profit sector often work there because they gain pleasure from following their interests or convictions. Participant F noted that he simply loves working, and enjoys the work ethic that his position within the welfare and humanitarian field requires. He highlighted that he particularly loves planning and strategising; working with children; leading a team; and always having different people with whom to interact. Owing to the fact that Participant M loves what she does, she performs to the best of her ability and 'gives it her all' at work. She stated that her job tasks make her happy, joyous and satisfied, and that she gains a sense of satisfaction when she is successfully able to assist residents at the psychiatric residency where she works. In fact, she often laughs and dances with the residents. This aligns with Csikszentmihalyi *et al.* (1983) and Kohn (1993), who both highlight that individuals are more likely to engage in tasks and perform them well when they enjoy such activities. Participant M further stated that her job tasks make her happy, joyous and satisfied, and that she often laughs and dances with the residents at the psychiatric residency where she works. When she is able to assist the residents successfully, she gains a sense of satisfaction. Participant G described how her enjoyable tasks motivate her to do even more at work, such as putting in long hours. As a result, she is satisfied by completing her tasks and doing a good job. Positively, Participant L discussed how she is able to find fulfilment even in mundane tasks, and noted how:

...for the first time in my life I feel like a round peg in a round hole... [Participant L, Female, Pastoral Care Convenor]

Discussion

Outline of the results

Table 2 provides a summary of the categories and codes relating to the subtheme of intrinsic rewards stemming from the interviews conducted. It is clear from the above discussion of intrinsic rewards that NPO employees from South Africa are intrinsically rewarded by numerous aspects of the work that they perform. This study's findings draw attention to the fact that rewards need not necessarily stem only from external sources, such as pay or benefits, but rather that NPO employees can be rewarded by the stimulation, delight and joy that stems from the manner in which their job content is designed. It moreover provides evidence that NPO employees find their work to be designed in such a way that they are provided with a sense of purpose in their daily tasks. Employees working within this sector have acknowledged that performing work that they love and which they find interesting, significant, autonomous and diverse will provide them with appropriate levels of motivation to work at their peak. Thus, the answer to this study's research question is that employees are intrinsically rewarded by the nature of their work when they perceive their work to be meaningful, flexible, challenging, varied and enjoyable.

TABLE 2: Summary of categories and codes for the theme 'intrinsic rewards'.

Category	Code
Meaningful Work	Playing a vital role at work
	Seeing the difference that one's work makes
	Feel-good factor arising from one's work
	Empowering others
	Giving hope to others
	Fulfilling tasks
	Social upliftment
	Sharing knowledge with others
Working towards a common, vital purpose	
Flexible Work	Autonomy
Challenging Work	Opportunities to use their personal skills
	Opportunities to develop their skills
	Opportunities to gain experience
	Challenging tasks
Varied Work	Diverse tasks
Enjoyable Work	Interesting tasks
	Performing work that one enjoys or loves

Practical implications

These findings are of importance for the management of NPO employees. Managing the characteristics of NPO jobs lies at the heart of job design (Woods & West, 2010). In order for managers to begin the process of job redesign, subsets of job characteristics such as those highlighted in the present study should be focused on, including introducing greater levels of autonomy into employees' jobs by giving them increased freedom to decide how best to organise their work (Woods & West, 2010). These authors note that this can be tied with effective goal setting so that employees know what they are working towards, which will in turn foster a sense of responsibility. Jobs can also be redesigned through making tasks more complex (Nel *et al.*, 2011), and by ensuring that employees are granted direct, frequent contact with beneficiaries or clients, so that they remain emotionally charged and engaged in their work through gaining exposure to how their performance affects others (Grant, 2007).

Intrinsic rewards should be used as a base form of reward that is offered to every employee at the start of employment and continued for the duration of their tenure, unlike performance-related extrinsic rewards which are provided as a result of effective performance and in fact damage intrinsic motivation (see Deci, 1971, 1972, 1975; Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999a, 1999b). NPO employees are often attracted to such organisations because they feel aligned to their mission and values (Bussin, 2013), and are thus motivated not just for a salary, bonuses and allowances, but rather for the opportunity to contribute to social change as a rewarding factor (Brandt, 2012). The provision of intrinsic rewards therefore has important implications for the design of performance management systems. Instead of relying on traditional extrinsic manners of motivating performance, NPO performance should be driven by managers tapping into the higher-order desires of their employees, which include their desires to improve the human condition and serve others (Forbes, 2013). By empowering NPO employees through ensuring that they know what is expected of them

and understand the vision, mission, goals and operating model of the organisation, as well as by facilitating their self-management, they will be able to adjust their efforts in order to meet the needs of the organisation (Forbes, 2013). Furthermore, managing performance intrinsically, such as by complimenting effective performance immediately upon being noticed as well as involving subordinates in planning and giving them more control within their work (Luecke & Hall, 2006), will psychologically reward them and thus result in more sustained motivation.

Consequently, intrinsic rewards should be built into the culture of an organisation in order to promote above-average work conditions for every employee through effectively designed work. In this sense, intrinsic rewards reward employees simply for being a part of their organisation. They are a means of indicating to employees that they are valued and cared for, not because of their levels of effort or performance, but simply because they have made themselves available to work at the organisation and have offered their talents for the good of the firm and society. Instead of reinforcing positive performance extrinsically, intrinsic rewards reinforce the fact that employees are appreciated, respected and esteemed for who they are and what they bring to the fore to assist the organisation in achieving its mission and objectives. When jobs are designed to be intrinsically rewarding, this sets the scene for a cycle of positivity; a series of progressive consequences that begin with employees *enjoying* the characteristics of their work. Thus, the present researchers believe that 'total rewards' should emphasise not only one's salary, performance-related payments and benefits, but also the provision of intrinsic rewards.

Despite these managerial implications, it should be acknowledged that intrinsic rewards are not the sole method by which employees can be motivated. Although this article has provided evidence that the work of NPO employees is intrinsically rewarding when designed to be meaningful, flexible, challenging, varied and enjoyable, this does not justify paying such employees below-market salaries. Employees should be managed holistically in order for them to be productive, loyal and motivated (Whitaker, 2010). Zingheim and Schuster (2000) agree, explaining that one component of total pay should not be emphasised over another, but rather, all financial and non-financial components should be balanced in order to produce a better workforce arrangement.

Limitations and recommendations

A potential limitation to this study is the fact that recognition, or feedback obtained on one's work, was not included as a type of intrinsic reward. The present researchers classify recognition and feedback as extrinsic, non-financial rewards, because they are generally administered by external sources such as managers or peers, thus not being truly intrinsic in nature. However, it is acknowledged that Hackman and

Oldham's (1980, p. 80) JCM does include feedback as a core job characteristic leading to critical psychological states, being defined as 'the degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job provides the individual with direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance'. It can therefore be argued that recognition and feedback indeed stem from the work that one performs, if built into the work itself. These may be the very manner by which employees realise that their work is meaningful, because this is how they might obtain insight into how their work has made an impact or has been of value to others.

Additionally, it is worth noting that this study has not provided evidence that the management of the NPOs under study have made use of *deliberate* job design to ensure that the work of their employees is perceived as being intrinsically rewarding. That is, the intrinsic rewards that the NPO employees under study experience may be as a result of the nature of the NPO environment in which they work, as opposed to a conscious job design strategy implemented by the management of these organisations. It is therefore recommended that future studies investigate employees from both private organisations and NPOs, to assess whether differences in perceptions of intrinsically rewarding work exist. Moreover, the management of such organisations should be interviewed to determine what efforts are being made with regard to job design.

While this article has highlighted the relevance of NPO work when designed in an intrinsically rewarding manner, it is recommended that future research focus on the causal impact of intrinsic rewards on positive organisational constructs such as NPO employees' levels of organisational citizenship behaviours, psychological capital, emotional intelligence and organisational commitment. Such research requires a quantitative methodological approach, unlike the approach taken to collecting 'rich' detailed data in the present study. The current findings provide a solid foundation for future causal studies that will attempt to broaden the intrinsic rewards empirical base of knowledge.

Conclusion

This study has provided contextual data from non-profit employees working in South Africa, with regard to the psychological rewards they experience from the nature of their work tasks. It was revealed that their work is perceived to be meaningful (purposeful) in nature, as well as flexible (autonomous); challenging (stimulating); varied (non-routine); and enjoyable (interesting). These aspects of work motivate such employees intrinsically, which suggests that traditional performance management systems that rely on extrinsic rewards may not be the most effective means of motivating non-profit employees.

Acknowledgements

This work was partially supported by a bursary from the South African Reward Association.

The researchers wish to thank the Centre for Positive Organisations at the Stephen M. Ross School of Business, University of Michigan, USA, with whom this research was conducted in association.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

M.R. conducted this investigation within the first of three phases of research conducted for her PhD in Commerce (Industrial Psychology). R.J.S. was her supervisor. M.R. was responsible for authoring this manuscript, with editorial assistance from R.J.S.

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