

Employee perceptions of employee recognition programs: Evidence from a case study

Marakat Deng

Monash University

marakat.deng@monash.edu

Christo Karuna

Monash University

christo.karuna@monash.edu

Carly Moulang

Monash University

carly.moulang@monash.edu

Prabanga Thoradeniya

Monash University

prabanga.thoradeniya@monash.edu

February 2025

Employee perceptions of employee recognition programs: Evidence from a case study

Abstract

Purpose: This study examines how employees perceive employee recognition programs.

Design/methodology/approach: The study is based on 15 semi-structured interviews conducted with managers and rank-and-file employees employed at an Australian company that has in place an employee recognition program.

Findings: This study finds that employees perceive the need for both performance- and non-performance-based recognition. However, the interview evidence suggests that, for employee recognition to be effective, it needs to take place within a workplace climate of open communication and trust of management. Employees also feel that team-based recognition is important as much of their work is team-based. We also find that employees perceive that monetary and non-monetary rewards pertaining to employee recognition programs act as complements to each other, which in turn suggests that monetary rewards alone are insufficient in motivating employees.

Practical implications: This study makes a practical contribution as its findings potentially help organisations design better employee recognition programs. The findings suggest a one-size-fits-all employee recognition program is ineffective, instead organisations should actively communicate with its employees to understand their needs and tailor the program accordingly.

Originality: This study contributes to the literature by enhancing our understanding pertaining to employee recognition programs. This study demonstrates that recognition programs are effective not in isolation but as part of a broader system of interpersonal trust and clear communication that conveys sincerity.

Keywords: Employee recognition program; management control systems; social exchange theory

1. Introduction

Prior research has shown that employee recognition programs act as an important control mechanism that encourages employees to engage in actions that are aligned with their employers' goals (Presslee *et al.*, 2013; 2023). However, anecdotal evidence suggests that employees have voiced concerns about receiving too little recognition from their employers. For example, a recent report by SuperFriend (2023) reveals that employees rated employee recognition as the lowest scoring psychosocial factor in the workplace. [1]

It is conceivable that employer underrecognition of their employees may be due to the employer's poor understanding of how to design employee recognition programs that satisfy employee needs (Saunderson, 2016). Compounding this potential concern, the literature is inconclusive on how effective employee recognition programs are. While some studies show that employee recognition programs lead to engaged and motivated employees (e.g., Burke *et al.*, 2016; Kelly *et al.*, 2017; Newman *et al.*, 2024), findings in other studies suggest that there can be negative unintended consequences of such programs (e.g., Dunn *et al.*, 2012; Johnson and Dickinson, 2010; Black *et al.*, 2024). For example, recognizing the best performing employee can result in subsequent lower performance of the unrewarded runners-up due to being demotivated (Johnson and Dickinson, 2010). Furthermore, findings from recent studies collectively indicate that different types of recognition have different effects on employee behavior. [2] For instance, peer-to-peer recognition could result in employees feeling less appreciated (Black *et al.*, 2024), public recognition could influence the subsequent motivation of unrecognized employees (Cheng and Zhou, 2024), and managerial recognition could enhance employees' efforts at work (Montani *et al.*, 2020).

Given the ambiguity surrounding the effectiveness of employee recognition programs, it is important to examine how employees view employee recognition programs and how these views influence their behavior. However, to the best of our knowledge, no study has conducted

such a study. This study attempts to address this gap in the literature by examining the following research question: *how do employees perceive employee recognition programs?*

The study adopts Social Exchange Theory (SET) as its theoretical framework. According to this theory, firms play an important role in inducing a sense of employee obligation and positive work attitudes (Ko and Hur, 2013). Providing favorable treatment, such as recognition, is essential for building a good relationship with employees and ensuring that they reciprocate with the same level of trust, through enhanced performance and engagement (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2015). Prior studies have indicated that recognizing employees for their work contributions and efforts fosters a sense of perceived organizational support, which enables interpersonal trust and mutual respect to be maintained within the firm (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Stajkovic and Luthans, 2003). Therefore, recognition is a vital tool in managing employee behavior and can act as a powerful incentive for enhancing their performance (Petersons and Luthans, 2006; Stajkovic and Luthans, 2001). Thus, SET provides a good context within which to theorize how employees perceive employee recognition programs in their firms.

This study follows a qualitative approach, utilizing a case study to explore employee perceptions of employee recognition programs. We conducted 15 semi-structured interviews of both site managers and rank-and-file employees, between August and September 2024, with employees at Company X. [3] As a company that has in place an employee recognition program, Company X provides a suitable setting for us to conduct research on employee perceptions of such a program. This company is a leader in the heavy vehicle training industry, and operates across six sites in Victoria, Australia. Company X also owns a motorcycle training business. The scope of the research focuses on exploring employee perceptions of (1) the non-performance-based employee well-being initiative and (2) the performance-based employee recognition initiative, both separate components of Company X's employee recognition

program. The non-performance-based employee well-being initiative is based on recognizing employees' birthdays. Employees receive a birthday card signed by the CEO and a \$50 gift voucher as part of this recognition initiative. The performance-based employee recognition initiative aims to recognize the best performing employee of the year via close ballot voting from all employees across the six different sites. The recipient of the "Employee of the Year" award receives a framed certificate of recognition.

The study finds that both rank-and-file employees (hereafter "employees") and managers view employee recognition as necessary, which provides support for the importance of recognition in keeping employees feeling valued and appreciated. Yet, for employee recognition programs to be effective, certain conditions – particularly open communication and mutual trust between employees and employers – must be met. The findings also suggest that individuals' innate traits contribute to employees having varied perceptions regarding their ideal types of recognition. For example, intrinsically motivated employees often derive satisfaction from fulfilling their roles, making external recognition less impactful, while extrinsically motivated employees may benefit more from recognition. This highlights the importance of tailoring employee recognition programs to align with employees' varying motivation levels, which can enhance their effectiveness. Understanding these different employee needs can guide firms to design more effective programs.

While employees regard recognition programs as necessary, they emphasize that recognition needs to be sincere and authentic to have an impact. When perceived as merely tokenistic, recognition fails to enhance employee engagement, which undermines its intended purpose. This study's findings indicate that employees view performance- and non-performance-based recognition as complementary to each other – performance-based recognition provides feedback on work progress and appreciation for employees' efforts, while non-performance-based recognition fulfils short-term employee satisfaction. In addition,

employees claim that prioritizing employee welfare as part of non-performance-based recognition can convey the sincerity of Company X in valuing its workforce. By combining these approaches to recognition, firms can promote a sense of sincerity in recognition efforts, thereby reinforcing trust and positive employee perceptions of recognition programs.

Most recognition programs include rewards, which may be either monetary, such as cash bonuses, or non-monetary, such as awards, certificates, or thank-you notes (Gallus and Frey, 2016). The findings in this study indicate that employees view monetary and non-monetary rewards as complementary to each other in influencing employee perceptions of employee recognition programs. Specifically, while employees value cash bonuses, they also appreciate non-monetary rewards, such as a signed card from the CEO, as these convey a sense of personal acknowledgement and foster a closer connection with Company X.

The study contributes to the literature on employee recognition in several ways. First, the study enhances our understanding of employee recognition programs by offering evidence on the diverse ways in which employees perceive these programs. This insight helps shed some light on the mixed evidence in the existing literature on the effectiveness of such programs (e.g., Burke *et al.*, 2016; Cheng and Zhou, 2024; Dunn *et al.*, 2012). Second, it complements prior studies that examine the effects of employee recognition on employee behavior (Black *et al.*, 2024; Burke, 2022; Presslee *et al.*, 2023; Wang, 2017) by exploring the complementarity between performance-based and non-performance-based recognition. While prior studies have mainly examined the two types of recognition independently (Brun and Dugas, 2008; Lourenco, 2016), [4] presenting mixed evidence on their effectiveness, this study offers new insights into how employees perceive the two types as complementary in how they affect employee behavior. Third, the study contributes to our understanding of employee recognition programs by emphasizing that employees consider employee recognition as necessary and

effective, but only when certain conditions are met in the workplace, such as mutual trust and close communication between employees and employers.

The study also offers practical implications for firms in the design of employee recognition programs. For example, the study provides valuable insights on the potential challenges firms may face when designing and implementing employee recognition programs, such as perceived unfairness. The findings also highlight that effective communication with employees and seeking regular feedback on how they prefer to be recognized may help in designing a more tailored and effective employee recognition program. This practice can also likely boost the employee-employer relationship by signaling that the company values and respects employee inputs. In addition, employees prioritize sincere appreciation from their direct superior over other formal recognition programs. This emphasizes the importance of genuine recognition and suggests that firm leaders and managers should promote more open communication with their employees. Finally, this study's findings also show that firms need to consider individual employee attributes (e.g., intrinsic motivation) for employee recognition to be effective.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents a review of the literature and theoretical framework of the study. Section 3 provides a detailed description of the research method adopted for the study. In Section 4, we present the study's findings. Section 5 discusses the implications of the results. Finally, we conclude the study in Section 6.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1. Overview of employee recognition

Employee recognition is generally defined as the act of acknowledging and appreciating individual employee efforts and work accomplishments (Burke, 2022; Montani *et al.*, 2020; Presslee *et al.*, 2023). The literature identifies different types of employee recognition which

will be explored in the discussion below. This section aims to provide an overview of the types of employee recognition identified in the literature, highlighting gaps in current understanding of how employees perceive the relative value of different forms of recognition.

Recognition can be broadly categorized into performance-based and non-performance-based recognition (Brun and Dugas, 2008; Chiang and Birtch, 2012). Performance-based recognition is generally one where firms provide recognition to employees based on specific performance outcomes (Bareket-Bojmel *et al.*, 2017; Lourenco, 2016). These employee performance criteria are commonly set based on the firm's strategic goals (Chiang and Birtch, 2012). Thus, providing recognition based on employee work performance is congruent with the notion of control systems, which aim to direct employee behavior to align with firm values (Bol and Loftus, 2023; Merchant and Van der Stede, 2017). In contrast, non-performance-based recognition focuses on employees' inherent value, which aims to honor other work-related milestones such as work anniversaries and promotions (Brun and Dugas, 2008; Gallup and Workhuman, 2022). These events serve a dual purpose in that they celebrate employee achievements while conveying the firm's appreciation for their progress and ongoing commitment. Additionally, both performance- and non-performance-based recognition can be formal or informal; while formal recognition is structured as part of a firm-wide program (Neckermann and Frey, 2013), informal recognition is often spontaneous, occurring in less formal environments as a simple "thank-you" for the efforts of a particular employee or team (Brun and Dugas, 2008).

Prior literature has also identified that employee recognition can vary in scope (e.g., Kachelmeier *et al.*, 2023; Presslee *et al.*, 2023), source (e.g., Black *et al.*, 2024; Montani *et al.*, 2020) and visibility (e.g., Burke *et al.*, 2016; Wang, 2017), each serving different purposes. In terms of scope, employee recognition could serve to recognize individual employees for their personal contributions or teams for their collective achievements. Personalized, individual

recognition may serve to enhance an individual employee's satisfaction and engagement (Neckermann *et al.*, 2014; Neckermann and Frey, 2013), whereas providing team recognition can promote a better workplace culture and contribute to a more cohesive workforce (Presslee *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, the source of recognition may vary, coming from either managers or peers. Managerial recognition typically comes from a direct manager or the broader firm (i.e., higher-level executive committee) (Montani *et al.*, 2020), while peer recognition comes from colleagues at similar levels (Black *et al.*, 2024). Finally, recognition visibility also plays a role in how it is perceived and valued. Public recognition is often provided in a formal, open setting, which enhances the recipient's visibility and status within the firm (Frey and Gallus, 2017), whereas private recognition occurs more in an informal, one-on-one context, outside of public or official events (Burke *et al.*, 2016). These dimensions – scope, source, and visibility – are not mutually exclusive but rather serve as elements of the broader type of recognition, specifically, performance-based and non-performance-based.

In their study addressing gaps in the literature and calling for future research on employee recognition, Brun and Dugas (2008) propose a conceptual framework that outlines four approaches to employee recognition. These include the ethical perspective, which focuses on human dignity and social justice, viewing recognition as a moral imperative beyond firm performance; the humanistic and existential perspective, which values individuals for their unique qualities, focusing on their distinctive character and existence; the work psychodynamics perspective, which highlights the subjective experience of employees, underpinning the symbolic recognition of effort and results; and the behavioral perspective, which views employee recognition as a reinforcer of desired outcomes. Brun and Dugas (2008) identify four main forms of recognition practices that align with these conceptual perspectives, including personal recognition, recognition of results, recognition of work practices, and recognition of job dedication. This framework provides an initial conceptual lens to explore

the multidimensional nature of employee recognition in this study, and how employee views of employee recognition may vary across contexts.

Within this framework, it is likely that performance-based, formal, managerial, and public recognition aligns closely with the work psychodynamics and behavioral perspectives, as they emphasize structured acknowledgement of specific outcomes such as delivering results. In contrast, non-performance-based, informal, peer, and private recognition aligns more with the ethical and humanistic and existential perspectives, which recognize employees for their inherent worth beyond measurable achievements. Notably, individual and team recognition can embody all four perspectives. They can align with the ethical and humanistic and existential perspectives by honoring the inherent worth of individuals or teams, or they can focus on recognizing specific achievements, whether individual or collective, which aligns with the work psychodynamics and behavioral perspectives. This flexibility allows for an application across diverse organizational settings and accommodates different personal preferences. Thus, this framework provides a versatile lens through which employee recognition can be analyzed. Yet, the literature remains limited in exploring how employees perceive the value of these different types of recognition. As Brun and Dugas (2008) advocate, understanding these perceptions remains an essential area for future research.

Although prior studies have documented various recognition types, most studies adopt an organizational perspective, which examines the role of recognition to align employee behavior to organizational objectives. For example, Presslee *et al.* (2023) examine the effects of team-based recognition on employee engagement and effort. Montani *et al.* (2020) study the effects of employee recognition on employee behavior. In addition, Wang (2017) examine how employee recognition visibility, via public versus private, affects employee performance and productivity. Few studies, however, explore employees' subjective experiences or preferences for different types of recognition. For instance, Black *et al.* (2024) examine the effect of the

peer-to-peer recognition system on employees' sense of appreciation. This gap suggests that more research is needed to explore how employees perceive these types of recognition.

While employee recognition comes in many forms, such as performance-based or non-performance-based, formal or informal, and can be given individually or collectively, publicly or privately, by manager or peers, most employee recognition programs are accompanied by rewards (Gallus and Frey, 2016). Studies generally categorize rewards into monetary and non-monetary types (e.g., Chiang and Birtch, 2012). These rewards may play different motivating roles (Bareket-Bojmel *et al.*, 2017). Monetary rewards come in the forms of cash, bonuses, commissions, salary increases or other means that have financial value (Alves and Lourenco, 2023; De Cenzo and Robbins, 1996). Non-monetary rewards, on the other hand, include expressions of gratitude, providing assistance, showing kindness, or offering alternative work arrangements among others (Chiang and Birtch, 2012; Grant and Gino, 2010). These rewards are more commonly related to psychological and emotional fulfilment and often carry social value (Alves and Lourenco, 2023; Luthans and Stajkovic, 2017).

A more recent stream of research has begun to explore the concept of tangible rewards, which are non-cash incentives that have non-trivial monetary value, including gift cards, trips, merchandise (e.g., Choi and Presslee, 2023; Kachelmeier *et al.*, 2023; Newman *et al.*, 2024). Tangible rewards are distinct from cash and possess unique attributes. Choi and Presslee (2023) identify four attribute differences: fungibility, hedonic nature, novelty and discrete framing. Unlike cash, tangible rewards have restricted use (fungible), represent “wants” instead of “needs” (hedonic), and feel more novel due to the variety of incentives available (Choi and Presslee, 2023; Mitchell *et al.*, 2022). Lastly, the discrete framing refers to tangible rewards being given separately from salary, recognizing something special or additional that employees have done (Choi and Presslee, 2023).

Overall, the literature suggests that employee recognition takes many forms, and the rewards associated with employee recognition are equally diverse. These various types of employee recognition contribute to a complex understanding of employee recognition. However, the literature presents a gap in how employees perceive employee recognition and their views on the different types of recognition. This section has discussed the different forms of employee recognition in the literature, which could play a role in how employees perceive employee recognition programs, which could in turn influence employee behavior. The next section discusses the behavioral effects of employee recognition programs that have been documented in the literature.

2.2. Behavioral effects of employee recognition

Prior research across various fields, including organizational behavior (e.g., Gubler *et al.*, 2016), psychology (e.g., Deci *et al.*, 2017), human resource management (e.g., Long and Shields, 2010), and economics (e.g., Ashraf *et al.*, 2014; Frey and Gallus, 2017), has examined employee recognition and its effects on firm and employee outcomes. Recently, there is a growing interest in the accounting literature that explores the effects of tangible rewards within employee recognition schemes (e.g., Kelly *et al.*, 2017; Presslee *et al.*, 2013). For example, Presslee *et al.* (2013) find that tangible rewards, relative to cash, lead to higher goal commitment and performance. However, this effect occurs because employees tend to set easier goals when offered tangible rewards (Presslee *et al.*, 2013). Their findings suggest that cash rewards tend to result in better performance outcomes, as employees are more likely to set challenging goals. This in turn suggests that different reward types can have different behavioral implications on employee motivation and performance.

Following Presslee *et al.* (2013), research has increasingly focused on the behavioral effects of non-monetary rewards in the workplace (e.g., Cheng and Zhou, 2024; Kachelmeier *et al.*, 2023; P. W. Black, 2023). These studies document the motivational benefits of non-

monetary rewards in enhancing employee engagement at work (e.g., Bareket-Bojmel *et al.*, 2017; Bradler *et al.*, 2016; Choi and Presslee, 2023). In particular, Bradler *et al.* (2016) conduct a controlled field experiment and found that unannounced public recognition, via a formal thank-you card, significantly improved employee performance, especially when the recognition is solely given to the best performers. Interestingly, the performance increase was driven mainly by those employees who were not recognized.

While experimental studies have been the dominant approach to examine the impact of employee recognition on employee behavior and performance, there has been limited attention focused on employees sharing their experiences and perceptions of employee recognition programs. Some studies, such as those by Long and Shields (2010) and Montani *et al.* (2020), have explored these experiences using survey-based approaches, but more in-depth research in this area is needed to provide richer insights.

Long and Shields (2010) conduct a survey administered to 349 Australian and Canadian firms to examine the relationship between cash and non-cash recognition, and to identify the predictor of the use of non-cash recognition. They found that the use of non-cash recognition is common in both countries but is not a substitute for cash recognition. In contrast, Montani *et al.* (2020) examine the conditions under which employee recognition practices relate to employee behavior at work. While the study by Long and Shields (2010) is more focused on the relationship between cash and non-cash recognition, Montani *et al.* (2020) examine the relationships between employee recognition, meaningfulness and behavioral involvement at work. Montani *et al.* (2020) find that managerial recognition has a direct influence on both in-role and extra-role performance, mediated by employees' sense of meaningfulness at work. When recognition is received from both managers and colleagues, the positive impact on employees' sense of meaningful and behavioral involvement is stronger. These findings then highlight the importance of different types of recognition and how employees perceive their

meaningfulness, which offers an avenue for research to obtain evidence from employees on how they perceive employee recognition programs.

While these studies highlight the increased engagement and performance following employee recognition, another stream of research shows that employee recognition programs can have unintended negative consequences (e.g., Ederer and Pataconi, 2010; Gubler *et al.*, 2016; Lepper and Greene, 2015). For example, employee recognition could lead the unrewarded runners-up to feel demotivated, which could lead them to focus more on activities that garner them recognition, which results in neglect of other important tasks (Ederer and Pataconi, 2010; Johnson and Dickinson, 2010). As a result, employee performance may decrease, which may in turn be harmful to both employees and employers (Gubler *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, employee recognition can harm the interactions among co-workers as social comparison reduces trust (Dunn *et al.*, 2012). These effects suggest that employee recognition can lead to harmful effects on co-workers' interactions among each other.

The review of the literature highlights that employee recognition can result in either positive or negative outcomes. Given this inconclusive evidence on how employee recognition programs affect employee behavior, this study aims to offer empirical evidence on employees' perceptions of such programs. In addition, existing studies have largely focused on performance-based recognition which relates to work-related outcomes and achievements. In contrast, this study aims to offer new insights into how employees perceive employee recognition programs that honor both work-related and personal milestones, exploring both performance-based and non-performance-based recognition.

2.3. Theoretical framework

This study adopts social exchange theory (SET) as its primary theoretical lens to explore how employees view employee recognition programs in a workplace setting. SET posits that individuals engage in a relationship with anticipation of receiving something in

exchange for their contributions (Blau, 1964). These interactions create a sense of obligation between the parties involved (Emerson, 1976). In a workplace organizational setting, the exchange between employees and employers suggests that employees have expectations of favorable treatment by their employer, and this will influence their attitudes and behaviors. Once employees perceive their employers are willing to invest in them or appreciate their contributions, they are more likely to reciprocate with improved performance (Chiang and Birtch, 2012; Ellingsen and Johannesson, 2007). This aspect of social recognition aligns with Brun and Dugas' (2008) ethical and humanistic and existential perspectives, wherein employees desire recognition of their inherent worth and value. Thus, recognition in the workplace can be understood as a reciprocal, two-way process that accounts for "the bidirectional nature of all human relationships" (Brun and Dugas, 2008, p. 724).

The concept of employee recognition as a process of social exchange between employees and the firms they are employed at can be further explained through a sub-branch of the SET, which is known as perceived organizational support (POS). According to Eisenberger *et al.* (1986), POS suggests that employees develop a belief that being valued by their firm evokes a sense of obligation for them to reciprocate this support. Thus, POS provides a basis for understanding employees' emotional commitment to their employers, as they feel a sense of belonging and support from their firm (Ko and Hur, 2013). When the firm recognizes employees for their contribution, it enhances their perception of organizational support (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Such support indicates that employees believe that their firm values their efforts and cares about their well-being, which in turn may lead to greater commitment and positive reciprocation toward the firm (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1997). The norm of reciprocity ensures that benefits are returned; when employees perceive that they are recognized by their firm, they reciprocate this gratitude through their enhanced commitment and loyalty (Gouldner, 1960). Motivated employees are found to be more engaged with their

work, which, as a result, leads to enhanced performance (van der Kolk *et al.*, 2019). Through this reciprocal nature of the employee-employer relationship, a supportive and fair work environment is established to foster positive employee outcomes (Ko and Hur, 2013). Trust is also enhanced between both parties, which is mutually beneficial to both employees and their firm (Aryee *et al.*, 2002). When employees perceive support from their employer, they are likely to exert more trust in their firm (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2019). Thus, central to SET is the notion of POS, reciprocity and trust, which results in mutual benefits to the parties involved in this social exchange process, particularly the employee–employer relationship (Blau, 1964).

While this branch of studies has demonstrated the positive reciprocal effects of the employee-employer relationship, according to SET, there are also associated risks in the exchange process that may result in a negative reciprocation (Blau, 1964; Parzefall and Salin, 2010). According to Parzefall and Salin (2010), in the event of unfavorable work treatment, employees tend to adjust their attitudes negatively. This, in turn, can affect overall firm performance. Therefore, according to SET, employee recognition functions as part of the reciprocal relationship between employees and their employers. Employees’ perception of support and trust is vital in fostering and maintaining this relationship. As a result, firms must carefully consider the potential costs and benefits associated in the social exchange process to avoid negative reciprocation and ensure sustained positive interactions.

3. Research method

This study draws on the case study of Company X. Access to Company X was obtained through personal contacts of one of the researchers in April 2024. Given the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative approach is particularly suited to uncovering the nuance and subjective experiences of participants, as well as their opinions, thereby enabling a better

understanding of their perspectives and experiences with employee recognition programs (Cooper and Morgan, 2008; Flick, 2023).

The primary data is collected via semi-structured interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). Two interview guides were developed, one for employees and one for site managers. An expert's feedback on two interview guides ensured the accuracy and relevance of the questions and provided credibility for the data collection process (Flick, 2023). The potential participants for the employees' group were randomly selected along with all site managers and invited to take part in the study. Company X operates across six sites, one manager manages two sites and one manager declined to participate in the study.

Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted on 11 employees (e.g., administrators; trainers and assessors) and four site managers of Company X from August to September, 2024 (see Table 1). Participant demographics and roles are diverse, reflecting an aim of the study to explore how employees occupying different roles (managerial and operational) perceive employee recognition programs. Anecdotal evidence suggests that managers tend to receive less recognition, as they are typically incentivized through alternative bonus schemes. [5] Therefore, gaining insights on the relative importance of employee recognition from a managerial perspective could offer valuable insights into how these programs should be structured to acknowledge the contributions of all employees, including both managers and employees. Site managers are responsible for making strategic decisions pertaining to operating the sites and managing their teams, enabling them to probe how employee recognition programs in Company X affect them and their team members separately. In turn, employees are able to provide their perceptions of employee recognition programs at an operational level, which could offer interesting insights into whether there are any (or a lack thereof) differences in how employees of different ranks view such programs.

=====

Insert Table 1 about here

=====

Interviews ranged between 21 and 69 minutes in duration, with an average of 34 minutes. The interviews were conducted online through the video conferencing platform, Zoom (Ghio *et al.*, 2023). All interviews were recorded with the consent from participants, except on one occasion. The audio was transcribed through Zoom, and the transcription was reviewed by an interviewer, along with written notes, following each interview, to ensure its accuracy (Roulston, 2010).

Additionally, archival documents of the company's background, strategic plan, and employee demographic details were also collected (Yin, 2018) to gain an understanding of existing employee recognition program and formulate interview guides. All documents, except for the company website, are internal information that were provided by Company X (see Table 2).

=====

Insert Table 2 about here

=====

Data was analyzed using the reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) approach (Braun and Clarke, 2019), which facilitates the identification, analysis and reporting of patterns (themes) within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The flexible and adaptive nature of RTA enables the iterative movement between data and analysis, which aligns with the exploratory nature of this research (Braun and Clarke, 2022). This flexibility, thus, allowed for critical analysis to be

conducted and to capture the complexities and nuances of employees' perceptions of employee recognition programs.

The data was analyzed using the software package, NVivo 14 (Free *et al.*, 2021). Deductive coding, with predefined code based on the research question, provided a starting point for developing codes to reflect the theoretical or conceptual ideas to understand from the dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2022). The initial parent codes include the phrases 'perceptions of employee recognition program', 'effects of employee recognition program', 'preferences for rewards', 'preferences for recognition', 'managerial perspectives', and 'social exchange theory'. Any unexpected or surprising findings were coded into new codes following an inductive coding process (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

4. Findings

4.1. The relevance of employee recognition

Acknowledgement, appreciation and commendation are essential components to recognizing employees (Montani *et al.*, 2020). Employee recognition can be used to reinforce desired behaviors (Long and Shields, 2010). Both site managers and employees agree that employee recognition is necessary to keep them focused and feel valued by the company. SM04 shared, *"I like to be told that I'm doing a good job. Everybody likes to know that [their efforts are] noticed."* Similarly, E08 expressed that, *"[recognition programs] are necessary, because people need to know that they're doing a good job.... it strives them to even accomplish better."* These excerpts suggest that both managers and employees believe recognition to be an important motivator to keep them striving for excellence and to feel satisfied with their work. This finding is consistent with prior studies that found recognition to be an important motivator for employee work engagement (Chiang and Birtch, 2012; Presslee *et al.*, 2023).

Conversely, the lack of recognition may contribute to employees' sense of being unappreciated by their employer. Evidence suggests that in cases where the participants believed that there was an absence of recognition, employees may feel demotivated and questioned their efforts in working for the company. As E08 bluntly expressed, *"If you're trying to do a little bit extra, and you don't [get] recognized for it, you tend to [think], 'well, what's the point?'"*. The participant imparted their views, identifying the lack of recognition as a key demotivating factor, which leads them to question the value of putting in "extra" effort when the company fails to acknowledge or appreciate it. This sense of unappreciation may negatively impact individual performance, which may in turn affect the company's overall performance. The findings also imply that while most employees value recognition for their work, older employees with higher levels of intrinsic motivation may place less emphasis on recognition. As verbalized by E09, *"I'm just happy to come in and do my job. I know I do a good job. I don't need anyone to pat me on the back these days that often as a younger person might starting out in my trade."* Likewise, E08 enthusiastically related that, *"What keeps me going is I enjoy teaching people how to operate a machine or a vehicle. I get satisfaction out of the person accomplishing what they want to do in their life, and show them how to do that correctly."* This suggests that older employees derive their satisfaction from the alignment of their work with their personal values, which seems to reduce their need for validation through the form of formal recognition.

Nonetheless, all employees and site managers interviewed agreed that recognition can play an important role in boosting employees' self-esteem and encouraging better performance, highlighting the relevance of employee recognition in the workplace.

4.2. The role of employee recognition in the social exchange process

Employee recognition provides a mutual benefit to both parties of employment exchange, which corroborates the tenets of SET in employee recognition programs (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). E02 envisioned motivated employees *“to put in more effort in the workplace,”* highlighting the reciprocal effects of receiving recognition results in engaged employees, which ultimately helps toward *“continuous improvement for the business as a whole.”* This suggests that employee recognition may foster organizational support and strengthen trust between employees and their employers. E11, for example, asserted that employee recognition *“gives employees an indication [that they] are actually looked after, not just put into the mask to do the work.”* Hence, employee recognition conveys a message to employees that they are sincerely appreciated and supported, fostering a relationship between them and the company.

However, the findings also reveal that there is a risk in undermining the trust between employees and their employer when employee recognition is not given in a transparent manner. As reflected by E05, *“we’ve got six sites. So, I’m not clear either, are they going to do one monthly at each site or one monthly overall, and then have a yearly one overall.”*

The lack of transparency in employee recognition can create uncertainty, leading employees to perceive such programs as having minimal value. The ambiguity surrounding the process and criteria for receiving recognition leaves employees unsure of how the system operates. When trust in the company’s recognition system is compromised, employees tend to feel dissatisfied and unsupported. As SM04 shared about their reflections on their subordinates, *“I don’t think they think much of the employee of the year, because it really doesn’t hold any weight. I don’t think people expect too much as far as employee recognition for doing their job.”* This perceived lack of organizational support, driven by inadequate recognition, leads to a loss of trust in the system. This distrust, and ensuing downplaying of the *Employee of the*

year award, arises due to perceived injustice arising due to the advantage larger sites enjoy in voting, presumably for their fellow employees.

4.3. Employee perceptions on the different types of employee recognition

Employee recognition can take many forms, such as performance- and non-performance-based recognition, formal and informal recognition, individual and collective recognition, among others (Brun and Dugas, 2008). Employees perceive the two main components of recognition at Company X, the performance-based and non-performance-based recognition, as “*two different things*” (E06), each holding distinct value. An ideal employee recognition program is one that looks at “*individual job performance for each employee,*” and then provides “*them with feedback on how they’re going, delivering key performance indicators, or how they’re performing in their required role.*” (E02). SM01 expressed that recognition should be “*an ongoing recognition of how you’re doing well, or you need to pick up on certain things*” to improve your performance. This suggests that for employees and managers, employee recognition is one where it is based on their performance and efforts.

Performance-based recognition helps provide a testament to employees’ performance and allows them to improve the quality of and engagement towards their work, which hold significant value to the employee. E01 relayed, “*I think performance-based is better than recognizing somebody’s birthday.*” However, some employees felt good about receiving the birthday recognition. E10 stated “*at least they [the company] know who I am, [when] my birthday is and they recognize that which is good.*” However, this recognition is perceived as “*just a little acknowledgement*”; it has no influence on the employee’s work output or efforts, which suggests that employees see little value to non-performance-based recognition as it does not directly link to their performance. Meanwhile, many participants expressed a preference for non-performance-based recognition *in addition to* the performance-based recognition. E09,

for example, professed, *“I’ll always have a preference for my birthday, but [also] some other recognition at some other stage of the year.”* This suggests that while non-performance-based recognition can fulfil employee short-term satisfaction, it is not sufficient, and employees also desire more performance-based recognition from their employer.

At Company X, employees mentioned that non-performance-based recognition should extend beyond simply acknowledging birthdays. Since it is not tied to work-related performance, a well-being recognition initiative that addresses employee welfare indicates that the company values and acknowledges the overall well-being of its employees. As highlighted in the interviews with site managers, maintaining employee happiness is one of their top priorities, and they *“try to keep them [employees] happy all the time”* (SM02). Acknowledging employees’ existence, value, and worth illustrates that the company views an employee not merely as a statistic but as an individual deserving of recognition and care. Thus, non-performance-based recognition is a valuable and symbolic type of recognition that can exert positive influence when tailored genuinely.

In addition, according to the employees, performance-based recognition does not need to be a formal type of recognition whereby the company gives out rewards publicly, but rather could be just an acknowledgement of individual performance. E06 conveyed, *“I don’t think it [recognition] always has to be an award. But I think it should be even verbal, or just to be acknowledged even every six months, and say ... you’re doing okay, you’ve achieved a bit more.”*

While formal employee recognition practices may be rewarded to publicly acknowledge employee contributions and positively reinforce their behaviors to align with organizational values, such recognition practices can have perverse effects such as jealousy, sense of unfairness, unhealthy rivalry and loss of credibility (Brun and Dugas, 2008). Consistent with

the literature (e.g., Dunn *et al.*, 2012; Johnson and Dickinson, 2010), some employees perceive employee performance recognition to cause conflict and tensions within the company as it creates a sense of unfairness among employees. For example, E03 stated, *“the person that got Employee of the Year this year, a lot of people don’t interact with this individual. So, I suppose that lays grounds for, “well, how did s/he get it? when I don’t know this person?” I think it can potentially cause a lot of grievances.”*

While this formal type of recognition may have unintended adverse effects, this is not to suggest that recognition is insignificant or that employees do not seek acknowledgment. Both site managers and employees stressed the significance of recognition that is in nature more informal, which involves frequent continuous recognition, and sincere appreciation of employees’ efforts (Brun and Dugas, 2008). Informal recognition, therefore, highlights the need to acknowledge employees beyond the formal systems of recognition like the Employee of the Year award. As SM01 suggested, *“maybe just encourage more short-term recognition, rather than wait till the end of the year to say someone’s done a good job. It can just be that recognition in a meeting or a recognition in an email.”*

Similarly, participants suggested that recognition should be done on a more regular basis, where it *“recognizes people, their wants and needs”* (E03), and when *“someone’s done a really good job”* (SM03). For example, E08 expressed the importance of showing appreciation for extra effort, *“just show the appreciation when you do the extra work and get a little bit better, ... and recognize when you’re showing the company’s best interest.”* This can be done just through verbal recognition such as *“well done”* (E07, E11, SM04), *“you’ve done well”* (E06), or *“thanks for your efforts”* (E09). This informal recognition is viewed as particularly important by the participants, as they boost morale and convey that the company genuinely cares about them. More importantly, recognition that is both timely and comes directly from their superior

is seen as a powerful motivational tool. As E05 conveyed, *“there’s nothing more powerful if it’s genuine, coming from your peers, and especially your line manager, and above. Positive words of affirmation - nothing’s better and greater than that, as far as building people’s self-esteem and confidence and feeling valued in the workplace.”*

Employee recognition at Company X is also perceived to be valuable when it constitutes team-based recognition. Describing individual recognition as something that is *“like a hot cancer inside the team,”* SM04 remarked that *“I don’t think you can do things individually ... I think anything you do, it has to be a team recognition thing.”* As individual recognition may pose significant challenges within the company, both site managers and employees interviewed shared that team recognition is a better approach to empower employees and promote cohesion. E07 remarked, *“I think the team [recognition] should be done, not just individually. ...because you work as a team.”* As such, employees perceive a noticeable difference between individual and team recognition, desiring more emphasis to be placed on team recognition at Company X. This highlights the perceived importance of team-based recognition, especially in a setting (Company X) where the focus is on promoting a positive collaborative culture rather than competition among team members. This is a gap in the company’s current recognition system.

4.4. Perceived challenges of employee recognition programs

An employee recognition program that is based on a voting system presents drawbacks such as perceived unfairness in recognition. As E03 elaborated, *“we talked about the employee of the year and all this, it’s based on perception, hearsay, word of mouth, things like that.”* E03 referred to this recognition as what they view as ‘social’ perceptions, rather than reflecting the true performance of the best performing employee. At Company X, the nature of the work is that trainers engage in one-on-one training with clients on the vehicles, making it difficult to vote for a candidate that exhibits best performance. As reflected by E02, recognition that lacks

alignment with actual job performance provides limited substantive value: *“the programs that are in place don't really reflect job performance... I think that can very easily turn into a popularity contest rather than looking at actual job performance. I don't really think that adds a lot of value.”*

Most participants expressed that for a recognition program to fulfil its purpose, clear communication from management and selection criteria must be present. While the selection of the employee of the year was said to be based on the employee's performance in a given year, participants stated that they *“don't know how [they] get assessed in that side of it”* (E09) and they have *“never really seen the criteria for it”* (SM01). Therefore, without a clear understanding of how the voting process and selection criteria works, it appears that the Employee Performance Recognition initiative is not viewed favorably. For example, E03 said, *“I think it would be a very successful tool, depend[ing] on how it's measured, how the findings are relayed and how they're put into practice.”* E01 also shared, *“I feel there's not much communication between the staff and the management, because when something changes, then nobody knows about it..., so that's a lack of communication. I think that's where the company needs to improve.”* This evidence highlights the critical role of communication in fostering trust with employees and effectively conveying intended messages. Participants consistently emphasized that clear communication from management would help them feel *“involved and included”* (E02), *“empowered”* (E03), and *“part of the team”* (E03), which in turn would strengthen trust between employees and the organization.

As the company operates across multiple sites with varying sizes and workloads, employees felt that these differences were not adequately accounted for in the selection process. E08 highlighted, *“...larger sites [will] always be going to get the bigger votes over the smaller sites, because a lot of the larger sites don't know who's in the smaller sites.”* Thus, employees

believe the company should consider these factors when determining the best-performing employee and the selection criteria. Likewise, SM02 conveyed, *“it is very hard to decide on the performance because everyone has different roles, and even within the admin, they have a completely different workload. So, it is hard to measure”*. Employees expressed their dissatisfaction with this system, stressing that voting for your peers, *“there will always be a conflict”* (E06), *“you cannot do, because you're not in the truck [with them]”* (E05), and *“we're sort of individuals, we're not collective”* (E10). Consequently, this perceived unfairness in recognition can have detrimental effects on the company, as employees may express their dissatisfaction through decreased performance levels and reduced engagement. As SM01 reflected, *“Well, if they [company] don't think I'm good enough, I'll just do the bare minimum and get through each day and not make any extra effort.”* This suggests that when employees perceive the company as unfair in recognizing their work, they may respond by disengaging, which could diminish the overall performance of the company. This is yet another example of how the underpinnings of social exchange theory is supported by evidence on employee perceptions of employee recognition programs - the lack of recognition on the part of the company is reciprocated with employee disengagement from the workplace. Therefore, as a critical motivator, recognition must be carefully designed to avoid promoting perceptions of unfairness or unhealthy rivalry among employees.

Participants also noted that it is challenging to design an effective employee recognition program due to different employees tending to have different values and thus seeing things differently, making it difficult for companies and leaders to address everyone's needs in a way that feels genuinely sincere and meaningful to all. As echoed by SM04, when a company tries to implement any system change, *“the challenge more so is trying to figure out what's going to make everybody happy. Anyone that deals with staff and manages staff knows that it's a very difficult thing to juggle.”* As employees are individuals with different wants and needs,

satisfying everyone's conditions is almost impossible because "*you can never make them all happy*" (SM04).

Additionally, the nature of work was identified to be one of the challenges of the employee recognition program. Participants shared that their work often involves repetitive tasks, which they feel generates challenges to employee recognition: "*We're just doing the same thing.... I don't even know how often [recognition should be given], but just something to say you're doing really well, keep going. So, I just think it needs to be a bit more intermittent and not just a one off.*" (E06). The findings also reveal other challenges such as difficulty to deliver the intended purpose of recognition. This is reflected in how employees perceive the value of recognition that may seem genuine and symbolic versus one that appears as a tokenistic gesture. For example, E05 expressed being recognized and acknowledged for "*my birthday*" elevates their mood which makes "*a difference to your day.*" This highlights the increase in employee short-term fulfilment that ultimately spreads positivity around the workplace. E03 also expressed that after receiving the birthday card and voucher "*I just went around thanked everybody, cause they'd all signed it.*" The birthday recognition, therefore, induces a sense of belonging, where E01 shared the same view that it helps the employees "*feel like [they] are part of a family.*" For these employees, being acknowledged by the company increases their satisfaction and strengthens their bond with the company, which is central to building trust between employees and their employer. Thus, the intended purpose of this well-being recognition should be properly conveyed to employees and perceived as a symbolic act.

However, while many participants agreed that the birthday recognition provided temporary satisfaction, some employees stated that this is something that is "*personal.*" For example, E07 expressed that, "*you celebrate your birthday with your family and friends. My work, being at work is more important than me celebrating my birthday.*" The emphasis on the importance of

“being at work” and performing their tasks over *“celebrating [their] birthday,”* suggests that for employees who value work performance over personal celebrations, such recognition that is not related to performance may be seen as a tokenistic gesture. While the intended purpose of the employee well-being recognition is to improve employee fulfilment and workplace morale, some employees see the company’s attempt as a minimal gesture. E07 found the birthday recognition as *“meaningful and valuable,”* but at the same time, they saw this as simply a tokenistic form of recognition. Specifically, they said this is *“something that most workplaces do. They celebrate you, and they give you something for your birthday.”* They do not see the real genuine efforts from the company to recognize individuals, as voiced indifferently, *“it’s not like a program that’s been designed. Everyone has it in the workplace.”* This highlights employee perceptions of the challenges that are associated with employee recognition programs, where it appears that close communication and trust between employees and their employer is crucial in conveying the intent of employee recognition. These challenges hinder employees' perceptions of fairness in such programs and diminish the intended symbolic value of recognition.

4.5. Monetary and non-monetary rewards

Often when referring to rewards other than monetary, participants associated rewards with appreciation and recognition of efforts. E08 expressed the complementary relationship between a monetary, cash reward, and a non-monetary reward, in the form of appreciation and recognition. For instance, E08 gladly shared that *“of course, monetary [is] a good one, but sometimes it's not all about money. It's all about just the appreciation as well, and knowing that they recognize that you're doing that [work well].”*

Most participants responded positively to monetary rewards, saying that in the current economy, given the *“high cost of living”* (SM02, E02), everyone *“struggles”* (SM02), so

everyone's "*happy*" (E02, E09) when receiving a monetary reward. Monetary rewards, in that sense, complement non-monetary rewards. While participants mentioned that monetary rewards "*would not go unnoticed or unappreciated*" (SM04) and "*they're always going to think it's nice*" (E08), there are also preferences for other non-monetary rewards. E01 commented that while "*we work for money*," there is something extra that the company can offer to their employees and that "*people want to see more*." Particularly, "*staff training*" to "*upgrade their skills*" are viewed favorably. Other participants also agreed that "*self-development is the biggest section*" (E11), it is "*something that would be really good for staff*" (E02).

The key difference between monetary and non-monetary rewards is that non-monetary rewards do not provide immediate financial benefits to the recipient, unlike monetary rewards that directly offer financial benefits such as salaries or bonuses (Chiang and Birch, 2012). As participants often suggested, other types of meaningful rewards they would want to receive from the company are more training and development opportunities, benefits such as paid gym memberships, access to counsellors, and team-building activities. For example, multiple participants expressed interest in receiving paid "*gym memberships*" (SM01, SM02, E08), with some indicating they would be content if the company covered even 50% of the membership cost, with employees paying the remainder. Holiday packages were also considered as a desirable reward. These examples suggest that, although these benefits incur costs for the company, employees do not view them as direct monetary rewards (even if they have monetary value), as they do not affect their income. Instead, they perceive these benefits as non-monetary rewards, as they provide value by covering expenses they would otherwise incur themselves.

5. Discussion

This study explores employee perceptions of employee recognition programs in the workplace. Collectively, we find that, regardless of ranks, most employees perceive employee recognition programs to be essential for enhancing motivation, but they are challenging to implement effectively. First, the work environment should foster interpersonal trust in the organization's commitments and leadership pertaining to employee recognition. Second, as evidenced by the interviews, strengthening the communication channels between rank-and-file employees, their direct managers, and senior management were shown to be critical. Further transparency in how recognition and rewards are provided are essential, as a lack of transparency leads to perceptions of delegitimization of recognition. Third, employees prioritize authentic and sincere appreciation that acknowledges their efforts on a consistent basis. Fourth, while non-performance-based recognition is valued, employees express a desire for more recognition tied to their performance, especially when they feel underappreciated. Finally, employees identify the need for both monetary and non-monetary rewards. Overall, we find that employee recognition is not perceived as inherently valuable through the eyes of employees unless it aligns with organizational and relational elements.

What is of utmost importance in employee recognition is that it should focus on discerning the conditions under which the recognition is conveyed to the receivers and how it is delivered to them. In particular, establishing trust is important to foster a culture of recognition. It enables employees to feel valued through recognition efforts, which enhances their positive perceptions of such programs. This is consistent with the underpinnings of SET (Blau, 1964; Ko and Hur, 2013), where the quality of the social relationship between employees and their employers influences perceptions of employee recognition programs. Like Presslee *et al.* (2023), we find that team-based recognition, wherein the company acknowledges the collective achievements

of the team, is likely to have a positive influence on employee attitude. Such recognition encourages a strong sense of community, thereby strengthening relationships employees have with both the company and their colleagues. This effect could promote a positive perception of employee recognition programs. Communication with management also plays a pivotal role in how recognition is delivered to employees, which impacts perceptions of recognition programs. For instance, communicating the specific criteria for awards or keeping employees updated about current employee recognition programs ensures staff are aware of all relevant initiatives, thereby reducing ambiguity. This transparency not only fosters more open communication but also strengthens interpersonal trust, thus influencing employee perceptions of recognition programs more positively. From a conceptual standpoint, this transparency in recognition aligns with Brun and Dugas' (2008) *ethical* perspective. This perspective views recognition as taking into account human dignity and social justice, and valuing employees' personal values. This finding adds to existing research, such as Montani *et al.* (2020), which finds that managerial recognition enhances employee motivation as they ascribe more positive meaning to their job. Here, the role of communication is highlighted as essential in enhancing trust in management, which strengthens employees' perceptions of the meaningfulness of recognition. In turn, this underpins the notion of SET by viewing recognition as an exchange that requires mutual respect and valuing employees' contributions. The study found that when there was a lack of transparency this caused frustration among employees and led to a dismissal in the legitimacy of recognition awards. Part of this issue also lies in the challenge of isolating individual performance in the complex work context. The evidence from the study complements prior experimental studies that often examines the effects of employee recognition on employee behavior and performance (e.g., Lourenco, 2016; Wang, 2017). Unlike these studies, which often overlook the subjective experiences of employees with

recognition, this study's findings highlight the significance of trust, communication and transparency in shaping employees' perceptions of recognition programs.

Traditionally, employee recognition was a tool used to align employee behaviors to organizational values (Merchant and Van der Stede, 2017). However, employees now place greater value on recognition that is perceived as sincere and genuine, which aligns with Brun and Dugas' (2008) *work psychodynamics* perspective. According to this perspective, employees have expectations for recognition to be a symbolic acknowledgement of their work contributions (Brun and Dugas, 2008). These perceptions are not perhaps overly surprising given that, in a recent survey of Australian workplaces, most employees rated recognition as the lowest scoring psychosocial hazard and emphasized that they wanted to see improvements in how their employer recognizes their work (SuperFriend, 2023). Organizations, thus, need to adopt a more authentic and personal approach to how they recognize their employees. For example, organizations might consider a more sincere approach, such as informal or private recognition, to convey authenticity and genuine appreciation to employees. These may take the forms of regularly demonstrating appreciation for work such as through informal conversations. Such practices contribute to fostering a culture of meaningful recognition and feelings of appreciation in the workplace.

However, this study raises questions on what constitutes genuine and symbolic recognition that organizations can effectively convey and build mutual trust with their employees. The study's findings indicate that the nuances of the different types of employee recognition make it difficult for organizations to implement an effective program to recognize their employees. Specifically, employee perceptions of and desire for informal recognition represent an employee-centred view of appreciation. This preference aligns with Brun and Dugas' (2008) *humanistic and existential* perspective, which emphasize recognition as a means of valuing

individuals for their unique contributions. This highlights a contrasting view to formal recognition practices, which employees perceive as lacking authenticity. This finding presents a challenge for structured, formal recognition programs, which may risk inducing perceptions of insincerity if they rely too heavily on standardized practices. Prior literature that documents the negative effects of employee recognition (e.g., Dunn *et al.*, 2012; Gubler *et al.*, 2016) often involves formal recognition. This form of recognition raises the recipient's visibility through publicly recognizing employees that can cause negative spillover effects on the motivation and engagement of others (Dunn *et al.*, 2012). Thus, having a greater understanding of how employees perceive the value of recognition appears particularly important to enhance their positive perceptions of such programs and minimize unintended negative consequences.

Interview evidence from this study highlights the importance of understanding each individual's values and aligning recognition practices with how they wish to be valued. Such an approach aligns with Brun and Dugas' (2008) *humanistic and existential* view, which is concerned with recognizing individuals for their distinctive characteristics. The variations in employees' values of recognition poses some challenges for organizations, as they may struggle to balance the symbolic intent of recognition with its perceived value as seen through the employee's eyes. The complementary nature of performance- and non-performance-based recognition as perceived by employees in this study is particularly relevant for companies that prioritize creating a culture of recognition and collaboration. Importantly, it suggests that employee recognition programs are most effective when they are tied to employee performance, but also when they are individualized and context-aware. Tokenistic non-performance recognition, such as recognition of work anniversaries or birthdays, tend to be viewed as a 'nice to have' but workplaces shouldn't rely on these as being sufficient recognition. They help foster a sense of belonging but do not satisfy the desired need for appreciation when it comes to their work role. As the existing literature has not fully explored

the value of non-performance-based recognition, this study contributes to a broader understanding of the role of employee welfare in employee recognition programs.

This study's findings demonstrate that employees who are intrinsically motivated – often experiencing a higher degree of autonomy driven by internal satisfaction with their role (Deci and Ryan, 2000) – tend to view external recognition as less essential. For these employees, recognition may not be viewed as a motivator, but rather be seen as a sign of appreciation. This perception corroborates the notion of organizational support and trust in the SET framework (Aryee *et al.*, 2002; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1997), where recognition is perceived as a symbol of appreciation and support. Additionally, an observation that appears from this study reveals that intrinsic motivation is more prevalent among older employees, who often feel autonomous in their roles and possess a strong sense of competence and self-belief. This study, therefore, helps provide depth to the understanding of how and why employee recognition programs resonate differently with different employees. Perhaps, organizations should consider employee motivational levels when recognizing employees. Tailoring employee recognition programs with an awareness of intrinsic motivation can help preserve employees' internal motivation without diminishing its effects.

Employee recognition programs often include rewards as a component (Frey and Gallus, 2017; Gallus and Frey, 2016). This study explores the role of monetary and non-monetary rewards in employee recognition programs. While Lourenco (2016) found that monetary rewards and public formal employee recognition act as substitutes to each other in how they affect employee perceptions, we find that monetary and non-monetary rewards are viewed as complementary to each other. One potential explanation for this difference is the employees' reference to the current cost of living crisis, whereby employees may not be earning sufficient income, thus increasing their preference for monetary rewards. [6] This suggests that

contextual and environmental factors, such as economic conditions, may drive the need for monetary rewards in addition to non-monetary rewards.

Although rewards such as training and development, paid gym memberships, or movie tickets incur monetary costs for the company, employees in this study consider them as non-monetary rewards thereby ignoring their material value. This distinction highlights that, for employees, non-monetary rewards are those that do not provide direct financial flexibility, unlike cash, and therefore are not considered equivalent. According to Choi and Presslee (2023), rewards can have many features beyond cash that motivate employees, often referred to as tangible rewards. Our findings complement Choi and Presslee (2023) which, taken together, suggest that non-monetary rewards are tangible rewards, distinct from cash. These rewards are often novel and hedonic in nature, making it appear more appealing to employees. This highlights the value of offering both monetary and non-monetary rewards to meet diverse employee needs. Particularly, when offering non-monetary rewards, organizations can consider offering tangible and valued benefits, as these are perceived by employees to hold inherent value.

This study provides insights into the organizational and relational elements that employees perceive as important to ensure that employee recognition is valued. Overall, this study suggests that organizations should reconsider the design of recognition programs to emphasize relational qualities, shifting from standardized events and metrics – which may be perceived as lacking authenticity – to practices that cultivate mutual trust and align with employees' intrinsic values. Such an approach aligns with Brun and Dugas' (2008) *work psychodynamics* perspective, suggesting that employee recognition should not only be seen as a tool to reinforce desired behaviors but also to support employees' well-being and autonomy. This relational approach to employee recognition offers a path forward for organizations seeking to enhance

employee engagement, satisfaction and foster positive workplace culture, while addressing the mixed findings in the literature on the effectiveness of employee recognition programs.

6. Conclusion

This study aims to provide insights into how employees perceive employee recognition programs. By drawing on the theoretical perspective of social exchange theory, evidence pertaining to employee perceptions on employee recognition programs were obtained via semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that employees perceive employee recognition programs to be beneficial when it is characterized by effective communication and interpersonal trust. These conditions collectively ensure that employee recognition programs are positively perceived by employees provided they convey sincerity, meaningfulness and impact. The findings also contribute to the employee recognition literature (e.g., Bradler *et al.*, 2016; Cheng and Zhou, 2024; Montani *et al.*, 2020; Presslee *et al.*, 2023) by implying that organizations that prioritize fostering a culture of recognition are more likely to see sustained influence on employee engagement and satisfaction, potentially having a positive impact on employee performance.

This study offers some practical implications for organizations to consider when designing employee recognition programs. First, effective recognition programs require continuous effort and cannot be viewed as a one-time initiative. Organizations need to take proactive steps to continuously seek employee feedback on their experiences with recognition and identify areas for improvement in both the design and implementation of these programs. Simply introducing an employee recognition program without ongoing evaluation and adaptation is unlikely to achieve sustained employee outcomes. Instead, the design of employee recognition programs should be seen as an iterative process; it must evolve in response to employee feedback to effectively address organizational and employee needs. We demonstrate in our interviews that

when asked, participants believed that there was a lack of recognition in the organization but particularly for teams in the workplace, this provided a previously unidentified opportunity. Talking to staff and asking open-ended questions can reveal important preferences for recognition. Second, creating a culture of recognition in the workplace involves establishing honest communication and building trust with employees. Such efforts show that the organization acknowledges the challenges employees face and values their contributions, thereby demonstrating genuine appreciation for their employees. Without open communication, it is difficult to address their needs effectively. Transparency is also important here, particularly if people or teams are being publicly recognized. Transparency in terms of criteria and evaluations are important to retain the legitimacy of the recognition. Third, the study points to the possibility of intrinsic motivation playing a role in how employees perceive their need for recognition. This provides some insight for organizations to account for motivation levels when determining the type of recognition to be implemented, so as to not dampen employees' intrinsic motivation.

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the research was conducted within the context of a specific company that aims to promote a collaborative and family-like culture, which may limit the applicability of the findings to organizations with different cultural norms. Furthermore, this study is based on one company in a particular industry. Future research can extend this study by exploring how employees from different companies across industries view employee recognition programs. Certain industries may promote different practices, such as prioritizing individual achievements versus collective efforts, potentially leading to variations in employees' preferences for recognition. Second, the study relies heavily on interviewees' perceptions of the employee recognition program and their idealistic view of recognition, which could introduce personal bias. However, given the frank and honest responses obtained from the interviews, these insights represent employees' critical and constructive perceptions

of employee recognition programs. This provides valuable implications for practice and contributes to the literature, which has found mixed evidence on the effectiveness of employee recognition programs. Third, the evidence on employee intrinsic motivation likely influences their perceptions of employee recognition and thus may be subject to some caveats. Contextual factors, such as the nature of the work, age, or job role, likely play a role in shaping these motivational dynamics. Due to the scope of the study, this issue was not explored in depth. Future research could investigate the role of contextual factors in influencing the need for employee recognition, particularly by exploring younger employees' perceptions of recognition. Since the demographic of employees in this study starts from age 40 and above, exploring how younger workers (aged 20 – 29 and 30 – 39) perceive recognition could offer valuable insights. Since they are still in the early stages of their careers, younger employees may be more driven by career progression and goal attainments – constructs closely intertwined with recognition (Cheng and Zhou, 2024). [7]

Notes:

- 1 SuperFriend is an Australian-based not-for-profit organization that conducts and publishes national research with the aim of promoting mental health awareness in the workplace.
- 2 The different types of employee recognition include performance-based and non-performance-based, formal and informal, individual and team, as well as public and private. They are discussed in detail in Section 2.1.
- 3 X is a pseudonym for the participating company in the study.
- 4 One study (Naidoo *et al.*, 2024) examines employee recognition that includes both performance-based and non-performance-based, but their primary focus is on the antecedents of employee recognition. Specifically, they examined how the Covid-19 pandemic affects the amount of recognition given to workers.
- 5 A 2024 survey report by Reward Gateway revealed that while managers are typically responsible for recognizing and rewarding their teams, they also desire to receive similar recognition for their efforts. The full report is available at:

<https://www.rewardgateway.com/au/resource/recognition-rewards-australian-workplace>

- 6 According to Australia Bureau of Statistics (2024), the living cost indexes rose between 3.7% and 6.2% over the 12-month period to June 2024 quarter. Additionally, the annual living costs for all household types report higher increases compared to the March 2024 quarter, except for Employee households.
- 7 While examining the effects of employees' career stages in a recognition, Cheng and Zhou (2024) place more emphasis on employees' rank for its recognition scope and how it affects subsequent motivation of unrecognized employees, rather than exploring age-related factors.

Tables

Table I

Interviewee profile

Participant identifier	Role	Participant background (age range, race)	Duration of interview (mins)
SM01	Site manager	45 - 50, Caucasian	45
SM02	Site manager	40 - 45, Asian	31
SM03	Site manager	50 - 55, Caucasian	29
SM04	Site manager	50 - 55, Caucasian	45
E01	Administrator	45 - 50, Asian	31
E02	Training Coordinator	40 - 45, Caucasian	38
E03	Trainer & Assessor	N/A	44
E04	Trainer & Assessor	55 - 60, Caucasian	24
E05	Trainer & Assessor	55 - 60, African	69
E06	Administrator, Part-time	55 - 60, Caucasian	29
E07	Administrator	40 - 45, Caucasian	23
E08	Trainer & Assessor	50 - 55, Caucasian	24
E09	Trainer & Assessor, Casual	50 - 55, Caucasian	35
E10	Trainer & Assessor, Casual	56 - 60, Caucasian	21
E11	Finance manager	56 - 60, Asian	36

Table II

Archival documents reviewed

Supporting documents
Company website
Employee birthday details
Employee demographic details
Employee survey findings
HR policies and procedures manual
HR strategy presentation
Preliminary HR meeting notes
Survey instrument

References

- Alves, I. and Lourenco, S. M. (2023). An exploratory analysis of incentive packages and managerial performance. *Journal of Management Control*, Vol. 34 No. 3, pp. 377 – 409. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00187-023-00360-3>
- Aryee, S., Budhwar, P. S. and Chen, Z. X. (2002). Trust as a mediator of the relationship between organisational justice and work outcomes: test of a social exchange model. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, Vol. 23, pp. 267 - 285. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.138>
- Ashraf, N., Bandiera, O. and Lee, S. S. (2014). Awards unbundled: evidence from a natural field experiment. *Journal of Economic Behaviour & Organisation*, Vol. 100, pp. 44 - 63. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2014.01.001>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024, June). “Selected Living Cost Indexes, Australia”, ABS, available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/selected-living-cost-indexes-australia/latest-release>.
- Bareket-Bojmel, L., Hochman, G. and Ariely, D. (2017). It’s (not) all about the Jacksons: Testing different types of short-term bonuses in the field. *Journal of Management*, Vol. 43 No. 2, pp. 534 – 554. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206314535441>
- Black, E. (2023, November 30). “Feel overworked and underpaid? You’re not the only one”, The Financial Review, available at: <https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/workplace/feel-overworked-and-underpaid-you-re-not-the-only-one-20231128-p5enfj>
- Black, P. W. (2023). The effect of peer-to-peer recognition systems on helping behaviour: The influence of rewards and group affiliation. *Accounting, Organisations and Society*, Vol. 109, 101454-. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aos.2023.101454>
- Black, P. W., Cecchini, M. S. and Newman, A. H. (2024). When being recognised makes employees feel less appreciated: Evidence regarding when and why peer-to-peer recognition could backfire. *Accounting, Organisations and Society*, Vol. 113, 101565-. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aos.2024.101565>

- Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life* (2nd ed.), Routledge, Oxford.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203792643>
- Bol, J. C. and Loftus, S. (2023). The dual-role framework: A structured approach for analysing management controls. *Journal of Management Accounting Research*, Vol. 35 No. 1, pp. 49 – 68. <https://doi.org/10.2308/JMAR-2021-065>
- Bradler, C., Dur, R., Neckermann, S. and Non, A. (2016). Employee recognition and performance: A field experiment. *Management Science*, Vol. 62 No. 11, pp. 3085–3099. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2015.2291>
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 77 – 101.
<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 589 – 597.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: a practical guide*. SAGE, Croydon, UK.
- Brun, J. and Dugas, N. (2008). An analysis of employee recognition: Perspectives on human resources practices. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 19 No. 4, pp. 716 – 730. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190801953723>
- Burke, J. (2022). The role of social bonds in understanding the pre- and post-recognition effects of recognition visibility. *The Accounting Review*, Vol. 97 No. 5, pp. 119 – 137.
<https://doi.org/10.2308/TAR-2019-0189>
- Burke, J., Hecht, G. and Stern, M. T. (2016). The effects of anticipation and recognition source in employee recognition programs. AAA 2017 Management Accounting Section (MAS) Meeting, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2823837>
- Cheng, T-T. and Zhou, H. F. (2024). Same-rank versus multiple-rank employee recognition: The effect on subsequent motivation of unrecognised employees. *Journal of Management Accounting Research*, pp. 1 – 19. <https://doi.org/10.2308/JMAR-2022-084>

- Chiang, F. F. T. and Birtch, T. A. (2012). The performance implications of financial and non-financial rewards: An Asian Nordic comparison. *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 49 No. 3, pp. 538 – 570. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2011.01018.x>
- Chodyniewska, E., Smet, A. D., Dowling, B. and Mugayar-Baldocchi, M. (2022, March 28). “Money can’t buy your employees’ loyalty”, McKinsey & Company: People & Organisational Performance, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/the-organization-blog/money-cant-buy-your-employees-loyalty>
- Choi, J. and Presslee, A. (2023). When and why tangible rewards can motivate greater effort than cash rewards: An analysis of four attribute differences. *Accounting, Organisations and Society*, Vol. 104, 101389-. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aos.2022.101389>
- Cooper, D. J. and Morgan, W. (2008). Case study research in accounting. *Accounting Horizons*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 159 – 178. <https://doi.org/10.2308/acch.2008.22.2.159>
- Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Management*, Vol. 31 No. 6, pp. 874 – 900. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305279602>
- De Cenzo, D. A. and Robbins, S. P. (1996). *Human resource management* (5th ed.), John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Deci, E. L. and Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behaviour. *Psychological Inquiry*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 227 – 268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
- Deci, E. L., Olafsen, A. H. and Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-determination theory in work organisations: The state of a science. *Annual Review of Organisational Psychology and Organisational Behaviour*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 19 – 43. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113108>
- Dunn, J., Ruedy, N. E. and Schweitzer, M. E. (2012). It hurts both ways: How social comparisons harm affective and cognitive trust. *Organisational Behaviour and*

- Human Decision Processes*, Vol. 117 No. 1, pp. 2 – 14.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2011.08.001>
- Ederer, F. and Pataconi, A. (2010). Interpersonal comparison, status and ambition in organisations. *Journal of Economic Behaviour & Organisation*, Vol. 75 No. 2, pp. 348 – 363. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2010.03.019>
- Eisenberger, R., Cummings, J., Armeli, S. and Lynch, P. (1997). Perceived organisational support, discretionary treatment, and job satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 82 No. 5, pp. 812 – 820. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0021-9010.82.5.812>
- Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchison, S. and Sowa, D. (1986). Perceived organisational support. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 71 No. 3, pp. 500 – 507.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.71.3.500>
- Eisenberger, R., Rockstuhl, T., Shoes, M. K., Wen, X. and Dulebohn, J. (2019). Is the employee–organisation relationship dying or thriving? A temporal meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 104 No. 8, pp. 1036 - 1057.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000390>
- Ellingsen, T. and Johannesson, M. (2007). Paying respect. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 21 No. 4, pp. 135 – 149. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.21.4.135>
- Emerson, R. M. (1976). Social Exchange Theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 335 – 362. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.02.080176.002003>
- Flick, U. (2023). *An introduction to qualitative research* (7th ed.), SAGE, United Kingdom.
- Free, C., Trotman, A., J. and Trotman, K. T. (2021). How audit committee chairs address information-processing barriers. *The Accounting Review*, Vol. 96 No. 1, pp. 147 – 169. <https://doi.org/10.2308/tar-2018-0379>
- Frey, B. S. and Gallus, J. (2017). Towards an economics of awards. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 190 – 200. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joes.12127>
- Gallup and Workhuman. (2022). “Unleashing the human element at work: Transforming workplaces through recognition”, Gallup, Inc, available at:
<https://www.gallup.com/analytics/392540/unleashing-recognition-at-work.aspx>

- Gallus, J. and Frey, B. S. (2016). Awards: A strategic management perspective. *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 37, pp. 1699 – 1714. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2415>
- Ghio, A., Moulang, C. and Gendron, Y. (2023). Always feeling behind: Women auditors' experiences during Covid-19. *Auditing: A Journal of Practice & Theory*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 137 – 154. <https://doi.org/10.2308/AJPT-2021-139>
- Gouldner, A. W. (1960). The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 161 – 178. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2092623>
- Grant, A. M. and Gino, F. (2010). A little thanks goes a long way: Explaining why gratitude expressions motivate prosocial behaviour. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 98 No. 6, pp. 946 – 955. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017935>
- Gubler, T., Larkin, I. and Pierce, L. (2016). Motivational spillovers from awards: crowding out in a multitasking environment. *Organisation Science*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 286 – 303. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2016.1047>
- Johnson, D. A. and Dickinson, A. M. (2010). Employee-of-the-Month Programs: Do They Really Work? *Journal of Organisational Behaviour Management*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 308–324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01608061.2010.520144>
- Kachelmeier, S. J., Williamson, M. G. and Zhang, X. (2023). We're in this together: The motivational effects of tangible rewards in a group setting. *Contemporary Accounting Research*, Vol. 40 No. 2, pp.842 – 867. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1911-3846.12844>
- Kelly, K., Presslee, A. and Webb, R. A. (2017). The effects of tangible rewards versus cash rewards in consecutive sales tournaments: A field experiment. *The Accounting Review*, Vol. 92 No. 6, pp. 165 – 185. <https://doi.org/10.2308/accr-51709>
- Ko, J. and Hur, S. (2013). The impacts of employee benefits, procedural justice, and managerial trustworthiness on work attitudes: Integrated understanding based on social exchange theory. *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 74 No. 2, pp. 176 – 187. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12160>
- Kurtessis, J. N., Eisenberger, R., Ford, M. T., Buffardi, L. C., Stewart, K. A. and Adis, C. S. (2015). Perceived organisational support: A meta-analytic evaluation of

- organisational support theory. *Journal of Management*, Vol. 43 No. 6, pp. 1854 – 1884. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206315575554>
- Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S. (2015). *InterViews: learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (Third edition.), Sage Publications, Los Angeles.
- Lepper, M. R. and Greene, D. (2015). *The hidden costs of reward: New perspectives on the psychology of human motivation* (1st ed.), Psychology Press, United Kingdom. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315666983>
- Long, R. J. and Shields, J. L. (2010). From pay to praise? Non-cash employee recognition in Canadian and Australian firms. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 21 No. 8, pp. 1145 - 1172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2010.483840>
- Lourenco, S. M. (2016). Monetary incentives, feedback, and recognition – complements or substitutes? Evidence from a field experiment in a retail services company. *The Accounting Review*, Vol. 91 No. 1, pp. 279 – 297. <https://doi.org/10.2308/accr-51148>
- Luthans F. and Stajkovic, A. D. (2017). *Provide recognition for performance improvement*. In *The Blackwell Handbook of Principles of Organisational Behaviour* (pp. 173–187). Blackwell Publishing Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405164047.ch12>
- Merchant, K. A. and Van der Stede, W. A. (2017). *Management control systems: performance measurement, evaluation and incentives* (4th ed.), Pearson Education Limited, Harlow, England.
- Mitchell, T., Presslee, A., Schulz, A. K-D. and Webb, R. A. (2022). Needs versus wants: The mental accounting and effort effects of tangible rewards. *Journal of Management Accounting Research*, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp. 187 – 207. <https://doi.org/10.2308/JMAR-2019-505>
- Montani, F., Boudrias, J. and Pigeon, M. (2020). Employee recognition, meaningfulness and behavioural involvement: test of a moderated mediation model. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 356 – 384. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1288153>

- Naidoo, L. J., Scherbaum, C. A. and Saunderson, R. (2024). Employee recognition giving in crisis: A study of healthcare workers during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Personnel Review*, Vol. 53 No. 7, pp. 1787 – 1804. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-11-2022-0784>
- Neckermann, S. and Frey, B. S. (2013). And the winner is...? The motivating power of employee awards. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, Vol. 46, pp. 66–77. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socec.2013.06.006>
- Neckermann, S., Cueni, R. and Frey, B. S. (2014). Awards at work. *Labour Economics*, Vol. 31, pp. 205–217. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2014.04.002>
- Newman, A. H., Tafkov, I. D., Waddoups, N. J. and Xiong, X. G. (2024). The effect of reward frequency on performance under cash rewards and tangible rewards. *Accounting, Organisations and Society*, Vol. 112, 101543-. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aos.2024.101543>
- Parzefall, M.-R. and Salin, D. M. (2010). Perceptions of and reactions to workplace bullying: A social exchange perspective. *Human Relations*, Vol. 63 No. 6, pp. 761 – 780. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726709345043>
- Peterson, S. J. and Luthans, F. (2006). The impact of financial and nonfinancial incentives on business-unit outcomes over time. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 91 No. 1, pp. 156 – 165. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.1.156>
- Presslee, A., Richins, G., Saiy, S. and Webb, A. (2023). Small sample field study: The effects of team-based recognition on employee engagement and effort. *Management Accounting Research*, Vol. 59, 100829-. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mar.2022.100829>
- Presslee, A., Vance, T. W. and Webb, R. A. (2013). The effects of reward type on employee goal setting, goal commitment, and performance. *The Accounting Review*, Vol. 88 No. 5. Pp. 1805 – 1831. <https://doi.org/10.2308/accr-50480>
- Reward Gateway and Edenred. (2024). “Recognition and rewards in the Australian workplace”, available at: <https://www.rewardgateway.com/au/resource/recognition-rewards-australian-workplace>

- Roulston, K. (2010). *Reflective interviewing: A guide to theory and practice* (1st ed.), SAGE Publications, Limited, London. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446288009>
- Saunderson, R. (2016). “Employee recognition: Perspectives from the field”, Grawitch, M. J. and Ballard, D. W, *The Psychologically Healthy Workplace: Building a Win-Win Environment for Organisations and Employees*, American Psychological Association, Washington, DC, pp. 181 - 198. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/14731-009>
- Stajkovic, A. D. and Luthans, F. (2001). Differential effects of incentive motivators on work performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 44 No. 3, pp. 580–590. <https://doi.org/10.5465/3069372>
- Stajkovic, A. D. and Luthans, F. (2003). Behavioural management and task performance in organisations: Conceptual background, meta-analysis, and test of alternative models. *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 56 No. 1, pp. 155–194. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2003.tb00147.x>
- SuperFriend Australia. (2023). “2023 Indicators of a thriving workplace survey”, available at: <https://www.superfriend.com.au/research/workplace-mental-health-statistics>
- van der Kolk, B., van Veen-Dirks, P. M. G. and ter Bogt, H. J. (2019). The Impact of Management Control on Employee Motivation and Performance in the Public Sector. *The European Accounting Review*, Vol. 28 No. 5, pp. 901–928. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638180.2018.1553728>
- Wang, L. W. (2017). Recognising the best: The productive and counterproductive effects of relative performance recognition. *Contemporary Accounting Research*, Vol. 34 No. 2, pp. 966 – 990. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1911-3846.12292>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.