

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Recognition Is a Catalyst for Motivation



In many organizations, the challenge isn't a lack of motivation. It's whether people feel seen, valued, and acknowledged.

People work hard, quietly solve problems, support colleagues, and carry invisible responsibilities yet barely hear anything encouraging until something goes wrong. Over time, that silence sends a message: contribution is expected, but not necessarily valued.

Recognition is often treated as a reward after performance. Its deeper function is to help sustain performance. It is a form of communication that tells people, "Your effort was seen. Your contribution mattered. You belong here." Motivation is shaped not only by targets or compensation, but also by whether people connect their work to meaning and impact.

Research supports this connection. A Gallup and Workhuman longitudinal study tracking 3,447 employees found that well-recognized employees were 45% less likely to have left their organization two years later (Gallup & Workhuman, 2024). In a field experiment involving more than 300 workers, unexpected public recognition significantly increased subsequent performance on a short-term data-entry task (Bradler et al., 2016). Recognition is therefore more than a morale booster. Used strategically, it can contribute to employee engagement, retention, and organizational effectiveness.



The quality of recognition matters. "Good job" may feel pleasant, but it offers little useful information. Intentional recognition is specific, timely, and credible:

Notice the contribution:

What did the person do?

Name the impact:

Who or what benefited?

Connect it to purpose:

Why did it matter to the team or organization?



For example: "You noticed the risk early and brought it to the team before it became a client issue. That helped us respond with clarity."

Recognition should not flow only from managers to employees. Team members often see contributions that leaders miss, especially in hybrid teams. A sincere thank you, an acknowledgment in a meeting, or a private message naming someone's support can strengthen trust and belonging. Research suggests that expressions of gratitude can encourage continued contribution by reinforcing an individual's sense of being valued and appreciated. Offering recognition can also prompt the giver to notice team progress, interdependence, and reconnect with a shared sense of purpose and their own motivation.



For organizations, the task is not another awards program. The goal is to make recognition an integral part of how work happens, woven into check-ins, project debriefs, team meetings, and everyday collaboration. At the same time, recognition must be fair and inclusive. When it consistently favours visibility, proximity to leadership, or headline results, quieter yet equally valuable contributions can easily go unnoticed.

Reflection

Whose dependable contribution have we started taking for granted?

What behaviours are our current recognition habits encouraging?

What can I acknowledge today specifically, sincerely, and without waiting for a formal occasion?



Recognition is not an extra task after the real work. It is one of the ways organizations make good work visible and make people want to keep contributing.

Reference

1. Bradler, C., Dur, R., Neckermann, S., & Non, A. (2016). Employee recognition and performance: A field experiment. *Management Science*, 62(11), 3085–3099. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2015.2291>
2. Gallup & Workhuman. (2024). *The human-centered workplace: Building organizational cultures that thrive*. Gallup.



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