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The Effects of Recognition Rewards on Employee Work Attitudes in Telecommunication Companies in Kabale, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

The telecommunication industry in Uganda, particularly in Kabale, plays a crucial role in regional development. However, challenges related to employee behavior and reward structures hinder sustainable growth and organizational effectiveness. Existing research indicates a disconnect between reward policies and employee expectations, potentially leading to dissatisfaction and high turnover rates. This study therefore examined the effects of recognition rewards on employee work attitudes in telecommunication companies in Kabale, Uganda. The study utilized the descriptive survey design and the census sampling method. The target population comprised of employees in the telecommunications industry in Kabale, Uganda, with a sample size of 63 respondents. The study was guided by Expectancy theory and Social Exchange theory respectively. Data collection was achieved through a structured questionnaire whereas data analysis was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28 through which descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized. In addition, linear regression was used in hypothesis testing. The findings reveal that recognition reward strategies ($\beta = .268, p = .007$) have a significant positive effect on employee attitudes. The study therefore concludes that recognition rewards positively affects employee work attitudes in the telecommunications industry in Kabale, Uganda. The study recommends the implementation of recognition programs such as performance awards, inclusion in high effect projects and implementation of employee of the month initiatives to enhance employee attitudes, boost productivity and organizational effectiveness.

Key words: Telecommunication industry, recognition rewards, employee of the month, performance awards

Introduction

The concept of organizational rewards has evolved significantly from the industrial revolution to the modern era. Early management theorists, such as Taylor (1911), emphasized financial incentives and efficiency-based pay systems, arguing that monetary rewards were the primary drivers of employee motivation. Over time, research began to highlight the importance of non-monetary rewards, including job enrichment, career advancement, and work-life balance, which contribute to employees' intrinsic motivation (Herzberg, 1959; Vroom, 1964). In contemporary organizations, a combination of financial and non-financial rewards is widely recognized as a key strategy for enhancing employee engagement and work attitude (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020).

The relationship between organizational rewards and employee work attitudes has been extensively explored in management and human resource literature. Work attitudes encompass employees' perceptions, feelings, and behavioral inclinations toward their jobs, colleagues, and the organization as a whole (Robbins & Judge, 2019). Historically, employee attitudes have been linked to organizational success, with research indicating that satisfied and motivated employees contribute significantly to work attitude and overall business performance (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). The development of human capital theories emphasized the importance of incentives in shaping work behaviors, as rewards play a crucial role in fostering commitment, engagement, and retention (Becker, 1964).

At a global level, organizations employ various reward systems to shape employee work attitudes. Rewards encompass both financial and non-financial incentives, including salaries, bonuses, promotions, career development opportunities, and work-life balance initiatives (WorldatWork, 2007). Scholars argue that rewards influence employee satisfaction, which in turn affects commitment and performance (Dinc, Zaim, Hassanin, & Alzoubi, 2022). In the United States, the emphasis on performance-based pay has demonstrated positive outcomes in shaping employees' engagement and retention rates (Prasetio, Indiyati, & Madiawati, 2021). European organizations, on the other hand, focus on holistic reward structures that integrate job security, work-life balance, and career growth opportunities as determinants of employee satisfaction (Rehman, Mohamed, & Ayoup, 2019).

In Africa, employee work attitudes are influenced by economic conditions, cultural values, and organizational reward policies. Many organizations face challenges in structuring competitive reward systems due to economic constraints (Koo, Chua, Lee, & Han, 2020). Research by Awino and Kipsang (2020) found that in Kenya, financial incentives such as bonuses and wage increments significantly affect employee motivation, whereas in South Africa,

non-monetary rewards, such as workplace recognition and flexible work arrangements, have been associated with increased job satisfaction and reduced turnover rates (Nurhasanah et al., 2023). In Africa, the telecommunications industry has grown rapidly, driven by economic liberalization, digital transformation, and increased mobile phone penetration. However, managing human capital remains a significant challenge due to high employee turnover, poor reward structures, and job dissatisfaction (Njuguna & Moronge, 2020). Many African countries have attempted to implement comprehensive reward systems, yet issues such as inadequate salaries, limited career growth opportunities, and poor work-life balance persist, affecting employee motivation and overall work attitude (Kigotho & Wainaina, 2022).

In Uganda's telecommunication industry, the role of organizational rewards in shaping employee work attitudes remains critical. The sector, which plays a pivotal role in economic development, has experienced significant challenges related to employee retention and engagement (Kabugo-Musoke & Isabirye, 2018). Studies suggest that reward systems in Uganda are not always aligned with employee expectations, leading to dissatisfaction and high turnover rates (Wanjiku & Karanja, 2019). Moreover, research highlights that when employees perceive fairness in rewards and recognition, they exhibit higher levels of commitment and job satisfaction (Ssekiziyivu & Katamba, 2020).

Objective and Hypothesis of the study

The following were the objective and hypothesis of the study:

O₁: To establish the effects of recognition rewards on employee work attitude in telecommunications companies in Kabale Uganda.

H₀₁: Recognition rewards has no significant effect on employee work attitude in telecommunications companies in Kabale Uganda

Literature review

Organizational rewards are the benefits, compensations, and incentives offered by an organization to employees in recognition of their contributions toward achieving organizational goals. These rewards play a crucial role in attracting, retaining, and motivating employees. According to Cao et al. (2022), rewards are vital for maintaining a motivated workforce and enhancing performance. Similarly, Gupta and Shaw (2020) argue that a well-designed reward system fosters employee satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Organizational rewards refer to the various incentives and benefits that an organization provides to its employees to motivate them, enhance their performance, and foster loyalty. These rewards can be intrinsic or extrinsic and are designed to recognize and reinforce desirable behaviors and outcomes within the workplace (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). The concept of organizational rewards is grounded in motivation theories, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which suggest that rewards can fulfill employees' needs and drive their engagement and work attitude (Robinson & Judge, 2019).

Recognition rewards are non-monetary rewards that acknowledge an employee's contributions and achievements. Recognition can take various forms, such as employee of the month awards, public acknowledgment in meetings, or personalized thank-you notes. Research indicates that recognition can significantly enhance employee morale and motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2019).

Empirical Review

Recognition Rewards and Employee Work Attitude

Hussain, Khaliq, Nisar, Kamboh, and Ali (2019) conducted a study examining the effects of employee recognition, rewards, and job stress on the performance of call center employees in Lahore, Pakistan. This research employed a quantitative design, utilizing a survey method to collect data through questionnaires. A simple random sampling technique was implemented for participants' selection. The statistical analysis was performed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The findings indicated that employee rewards and recognition have a significant positive effect on performance, while job stress negatively affects employee work attitude. Additionally, the results demonstrated that perceived organizational support fully mediates the relationship between employee rewards, recognition, job stress, and performance.

Mugizi et al. (2020) investigated the relationship between motivational rewards for employees and the commitment levels of non-teaching staff at a government-funded higher education institution in Uganda. The research focused on examining how both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations influence job commitment among non-academic personnel. A quantitative research methodology was employed, utilizing a correlational research design to evaluate the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Data was primarily collected through a questionnaire survey. The analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including measures of central tendency and regression analysis. The findings indicated that both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards positively and significantly affected work commitment. Consequently, the study concluded that these rewards are essential for fostering adequate employee commitment.

Ngozi and Ayokunle (2023) explored the effect of recognition and mentorship on the retention of support staff within higher education institutions in Ogun State, Nigeria. Employing a descriptive research design, the study focused on a population of 218 non-academic staff members selected from two universities through random sampling methods. Primary data was gathered using self-administered research instruments. The analysis of the collected

data utilized both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The results of this study revealed a significant correlation between employee recognition and mentorship and the retention of staff members.

Buyondo (2023) investigated the correlation between salary, recognition, organizational climate, and the performance of employees. A comprehensive questionnaire was employed to gather primary data from participants. The study focused on non-teaching staff from both government and privately-owned higher education institutions. Data analysis was conducted using factor analysis and regression analysis techniques. The results indicated that both organizational climate and recognition significantly affected the performance of non-teaching personnel in universities.

Okon, Nsikan, and Orok (2023) aimed to explore the effects of employee wellbeing and recognition on the performance of support staff in selected Federal Universities within the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The research utilized a survey design, collecting data through structured questionnaires. The target population consisted of 19,649 support staff, from which a sample of 392 was derived using Yamane's (1967) formula. Stratified and random sampling methods were employed to select the units of analysis. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics and linear regression. The findings revealed a significant relationship between recognition and employee work attitude.

Theoretical framework

Expectancy Theory

The Expectancy Theory was popularized by Wage Vroom in 1964, proposing that individuals' actions are geared toward maximizing expected satisfaction with intended outcomes. The theory posits that motivation is influenced by two key functions: the relationship between an individual's effort and the expected outcome, referred to as "effort-outcome expectancy," and the attractiveness of the intended outcome, known as "valence." These factors drive individuals to choose efforts that will yield their desired outcomes (Bonner & Sprinkle, 2002).

In the context of organizational rewards, the Expectancy Theory is highly relevant in shaping employee work attitudes. According to Vroom, money plays a crucial role in fulfilling personal desires, as it carries symbolic value associated with status and prestige. This explains why monetary incentives tend to have a greater valence compared to non-contingent incentives (Bonner & Sprinkle, 2002). Employees are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes toward work when they perceive a clear link between their efforts and tangible rewards.

Expectancy Theory suggests that employees' motivation and overall attitude toward work improve when rewards are structured based on effort and expectations. The effect of monetary incentives can be understood in two ways: first, financial rewards serve as a desirable outcome; second, monetary incentives hold higher expectancy than non-monetary incentives because they are strongly linked to employees' expectations of effort leading to valued rewards (Locke & Latham, 1990). When employees believe that their efforts will result in meaningful and desirable rewards, their attitude toward their work shifts positively, fostering greater engagement, job satisfaction, and commitment.

Pay serves as a tool that influences employees' attitudes by reinforcing behaviors associated with reward attainment. Since pay holds strong valence due to its instrumental power in fulfilling various needs—such as social esteem, physiological necessities, and personal aspirations—its presence in organizational reward systems significantly shapes employees' perceptions of fairness, recognition, and satisfaction. As a result, when organizations establish fair and transparent reward structures, employees are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward their work, exhibit higher morale, and feel valued within the workplace.

Managers may apply the principles of Expectancy Theory to influence employees' attitudes by ensuring that wages and other rewards are perceived as equitable and aligned with employees' expectations. When employees trust that their efforts will lead to fair rewards, they are more likely to display enthusiasm, dedication, and a positive outlook toward their work environment (Ertanin & Şafaklı, 2012). This aligns with Vroom's fair awarding systems theory, which states that "if the individual expectations are positively related to rewards, employees will manifest great interest, be committed, diligent, and work with elevated motivation."

In summary, the Expectancy Theory underscores the relationship between organizational rewards and employee work attitudes by highlighting how expectations of fair and meaningful rewards shape employees' perceptions of their work environment. When employees perceive rewards as directly tied to their contributions, they develop a more positive attitude toward their roles, fostering job satisfaction, loyalty, and engagement. The theory is instrumental in explaining how different types of rewards—monetary incentives, recognition rewards, skill-based pay, and empowerment rewards—significantly influence employees' attitudes, reinforcing the importance of structured and fair reward systems in organizations.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) was conceptualized by Peter Blau in 1964. It explains the relationship between employees and organizations, emphasizing that employees' perceptions of the organization's intentions and attitudes toward them are reflected in the policies and procedures imposed by the organization's representatives. Human resource practices serve as a key indicator to employees, either strengthening or weakening their relationship with the organization (Whitener, 2001). According to Gergen (1969), there is a reciprocal exchange of resources where individuals or parties tend to repay deeds of others, whether positive or negative (Gouldner, 1960). As Blau (1964) states, "the exchanges are, however, influenced by the relationship between the actor and agent."

Social Exchange Theory (SET) centers on social behaviors that involve exchanges where individuals are motivated to obtain rewards, even though these exchanges entail some forfeited cost or value. According to the theory, people strive to maximize rewards while minimizing costs, and negative attitudes

or dissatisfaction tend to arise when there is a perceived lack of equity or unfairness in the rewards relative to the effort invested (Redmond, 2015). A key element of this theory is the notion that rewards hold different values for different people; as Homans (1961) explains, employees assess rewards based on their personal significance and perceived fairness. Moreover, social rewards—such as respect, recognition, and acceptance—are derived from workplace interactions and significantly contribute to an individual's sense of belonging, satisfaction, and fulfillment (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The concept of costs involves what is given up in an exchange, including factors like effort, time, or personal convenience (Homans, 1961), while profits refer to the net benefit realized when the rewards received exceed these costs. Lastly, equity and distributive justice are crucial, as Cook and Yamagishi (1983) suggest that relationships remain stable when rewards and costs are perceived as fairly distributed among partners, reinforcing fairness in workplace exchanges.

SET has been widely applied in organizational behavior, particularly in understanding supervisory and organizational support, justice, commitment, and workplace attitudes (Tepper & Taylor, 2003). In a workplace setting, SET conceptualizes the organization (or its representatives, such as supervisors) as the actor who engages in positive or negative exchanges with employees. Positive actions, such as fair compensation, recognition, and empowerment, lead employees to reciprocate with positive work attitudes, such as trust, loyalty, and commitment (Cropanzano & Rupp, 2008). Conversely, negative exchanges, such as unfair treatment, lack of recognition, or inequitable reward distribution, result in negative attitudes such as resentment, dissatisfaction, and disengagement (Gergen, 1969; Gouldner, 1960).

The process of social exchange fosters a relational bond between employees and the organization, reinforcing their commitment, trust, and sense of belonging (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnysky, 2002). When organizations implement fair reward systems—such as monetary incentives, recognition-based rewards, skill-based pay, and empowerment rewards—employees perceive the organization as supportive and fair, thereby strengthening their positive attitude toward work. However, when employees experience inequity in rewards, they may develop negative attitudes characterized by decreased morale, detachment, and dissatisfaction (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

Thus, SET is instrumental in explaining the connection between organizational rewards and employee work attitudes. Employees interpret rewards as signals of their value within the organization, shaping their perception of fairness, trust, and organizational commitment. Positive social exchanges in the form of well-structured reward systems encourage enthusiasm, loyalty, and engagement, whereas negative exchanges undermine these attitudes, leading to dissatisfaction and weakened organizational ties.

Conceptual Framework

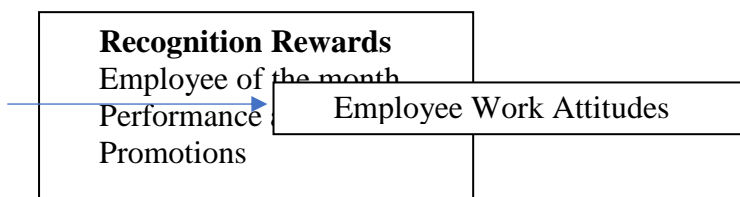


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework

Source: Researchers, 2025

The conceptual framework attempts to explain the relationship between recognition rewards and employee work attitudes. From the literature review, it is evident that recognition reward influence employee work attitudes ultimately affecting their engagement, retention and productivity.

Methodology

The study utilized the descriptive survey design whereas the target population comprised of employees in telecommunication companies in Kabale, Uganda, with a sample size of 63 selected using the census method. Data collection was achieved through a structured questionnaire and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28 was used for data analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the quantitative data and hypothesis testing.

Findings and Discussion

Response Rate

During the data collection phase, research questionnaires were distributed to 63 employees of telecommunication organizations in Kabale, Uganda. Of these, 57 questionnaires were completed, yielding a response rate of 90.48%. Pielsticker and Hiebl (2020) assert that a response rate of 50% is deemed acceptable, 60% is considered good, and a rate of 70% or higher is categorized as very good. Furthermore, Cerar, Nell, and Reiche (2021) suggest that a response rate exceeding 70% is effective, indicating that the study population is sufficiently represented. This high response rate also contributes to the overall precision of the research findings. Consequently, the response rate achieved is viewed as both adequate and satisfactory for drawing conclusions in this study. A summary of the response rate is presented in the table below

Table 1: Showing the response rate

Questionnaires	Frequency	Percentage
Completed	57	90.48
Incomplete	6	9.52
Total	63	100.0

Descriptive analysis

The objective of the study was to establish the effect of recognition rewards on employee work attitude in telecommunications companies in Kabale Uganda. The participants were requested to express their degree of agreement or disagreement regarding certain statements related to recognition rewards and employee work attitude. A Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 was utilized and the responses are displayed in the table below.

Table 2: Showing descriptive statistics recognition rewards

Statements	Mean	Std. Dev
Being recognized as Employee of the Month boosts my morale.	3.52	1.205
Receiving performance awards motivates me to continue performing well.	3.67	0.962
Opportunities for promotions encourage me to strive for career advancement.	3.78	0.922
Public acknowledgment of my achievements enhances my job satisfaction.	3.69	0.861
Career advancement opportunities keep me engaged and motivated.	3.22	0.843
Inclusion in high-effect projects makes me feel valued and respected in the organization.	3.81	0.835
Average mean/Std. Dev	3.62	0.938

The data demonstrates that recognition through performance awards has a significant positive effect on employee motivation, with a mean score of 3.67 (SD = 0.962). This finding suggests that employees generally agreed that receiving performance awards serves as an effective motivator for continued high performance. Opportunities for promotions emerged as a particularly strong motivator, with a mean score of 3.78 (SD = 0.922). This indicates that employees strongly agree that career advancement opportunities encourage them to strive for better performance. Public acknowledgment of achievements shows a strong positive effect on job satisfaction, with a mean score of 3.69 (SD = 0.861). This finding indicates that employees generally agree that public recognition enhances their job satisfaction.

The most significant positive effect was observed with inclusion in high-effect projects, which received the highest mean score of 3.81 (SD = 0.835). This indicates strong agreement that such inclusion makes employees feel valued and respected within the organization. Recognition as Employee of the Month showed a moderate positive effect on morale, with a mean score of 3.52 (SD = 1.205). While this represents the lowest mean score among all statements, it still indicates general agreement about the positive effect on morale. Career advancement opportunities showed the lowest mean score of 3.22 (SD = 0.843), indicating moderate agreement about their role in maintaining engagement and motivation.

The overall average mean of 3.62 across all statements indicates a predominantly positive disposition toward recognition rewards as motivators in the workplace. The findings revealed that recognition rewards have a generally positive effect on employee work attitudes, with particularly strong effects in areas related to project inclusion, career advancement, and public acknowledgment.

The findings agreed with a study by Afolabi et al. (2022) that investigated the effect of recognition and career advancement on employee work attitude at a Nigerian Brewery Plc. The findings revealed a significant and positive relationship between employee recognition and employee work attitude ($r = 0.759$, $p = 0.029$), highlighting the importance of recognition in enhancing employee work attitude. This study's implications underscore the need for organizations to prioritize employee recognition as a means to improve overall performance and work attitude.

Hypotheses Testing

In this study hypothesis testing was done through inferential analysis using a linear regression model to establish the statistical relationship between recognition rewards and employee work attitude. The regression coefficients are shown below.

Table 3: Showing coefficients for recognition rewards

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	4.647	4.69		1.991	0.005
	Recognition rewards	0.295	0.128	0.268	1.782	0.007

a. Dependent Variable: Employee work attitude

The regression coefficients, as shown indicate that the constant value is 4.647. This implies that if recognition rewards and other factors are held constant, employee work attitudes would still exist at a baseline level of 4.647. The Beta coefficient for recognition rewards is 0.295, with a standardized coefficient of 0.268. This means that a unit increase in recognition rewards results in a 26.8% increase in employee work attitude. The p-value for recognition rewards is 0.007, which is below the 0.05 threshold, confirming a significant and positive relationship between recognition rewards and employee work attitude.

Based on these findings, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected, affirming that recognition rewards have a significant effect on employee work attitude. These results align with prior research by Myers & Sadaghiani (2010), who found that recognition rewards affect employee work attitudes impacting their overall job satisfaction and productivity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that recognition rewards significantly affect employee work attitude. Organizations hoping to positively influence their employee attitudes should deploy recognition reward strategies such as performance awards, inclusion of staff in high effect projects and instituting employee of the month initiatives among others. Such strategies will not only impact employee attitudes positively but will also enhance commitment and productivity.

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