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Research Report

Employee Appreciation. The value of valuing people

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COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION

The value of valuing people



ACADEMIC SOCIETY
FOR MANAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION

An initiative of the Günter Thiele Foundation

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EDITORIAL

»It's time to truly recognize and prioritize appreciation as a strategic goal.«

As we navigate the complexities of the post-pandemic landscape, one thing has become abundantly clear: the value of employee appreciation within an organization cannot easily be overstated. Recent years have seen unprecedented challenges arise for organizations in managing their human resources, including the trend to more mobile and flexible work models, high turnover rates in many sectors and an acute shortage of skilled labor. In a world where remote working and digital communication are increasingly prevalent, it is essential to bridge the gap and strengthen relationships between employees and management.

In addition, employees perceive the demands of the working environment as increasingly stress-inducing, which is also reflected in rising sickness rates due to mental illness. In today's competitive labor market, retaining talent is critical to an organization's success. Cultivating an appreciative climate in organizations is therefore not just a 'nice-to-have' – it is a necessity. Employees who feel valued and appreciated are more likely to remain loyal to and engaged in their organization and to stay motivated to continuously develop their skills.

This issue of Communication Insights presents the findings of an extensive research project exploring the multi-faceted issue of employee appreciation from a communication perspective. The issue springboards off our previous research focus on internal communications in increasingly virtual environments (Communication Insights 'Keeping up the spirit', Issue 13), in which the power of appreciation during challenging times was revealed. Employee appreciation, it is



The research team (from left to right): Julia Stranzl, Christopher Ruppel, and Sabine Einwiller

shown, goes beyond simple gestures and token acts of recognition. It is about recognizing the hard work, dedication, and resilience of every individual within the organization. Acknowledging, actively communicating with, and empowering employees are essential. Executives and middle managers have a crucial role to play in creating an appreciative work environment within their organization. Internal communication professionals can amplify appreciation efforts by developing communication strategies that highlight employee contributions and successes, thereby creating a workplace in which every individual feels valued, supported, and empowered to thrive.

As part of the project, my team, led by Julia Stranzl and Christopher Ruppel, conducted three focus group sessions and a survey of employees in a broad variety of organizations, after systematically reviewing the existing literature. We would like to thank everyone who participated in the empirical research for their time and valuable insights. And a big thank you goes out to Karen Berger of the Academic Society for her organizational support for the project, and for preparing this issue of Communication Insights.

Dr Sabine Einwiller

Professor of Public Relations Research
University of Vienna



EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION: KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ **Challenges:** In recent years, organizations have faced unprecedented challenges: a global health crisis paired with the remote working revolution, high turnover and a shortage of skilled labor. At the same time, employees perceive their working conditions and these rapid developments as increasingly demanding and stressful. This puts immense pressure on employers. To meet these challenges, it is crucial for leaders to actively engage with their teams, showing genuine care and appreciation. Fostering trust and a feeling of belonging, irrespective of physical location, can make organizations better able to retain their talent and thrive in today's competitive labor market.
- ▶ **Employee expectations:** Satisfaction with workplace relationships results from the meeting of expectations. Organizations need to address employees' varied expectations regarding appreciation of both their personal characteristics and qualities and their work-related behaviors (pp. 8-11).
- ▶ **Forms of appreciation:** Appreciation should be expressed in varied ways on an ongoing basis—principally by listening to employees' concerns and demonstrating genuine interest in their well-being. We have identified six distinct forms of appreciation that collectively contribute to the overall perception of appreciation in the workplace. Monetary and material forms of recognition, such as pay, are important, but so are intangible forms, like praising employees for their achievements, giving feedback, assigning them meaningful tasks and offering opportunities for career and skills development. The latter become more relevant once an employee's basic needs have been met. Devoting time to communicating accordingly with the organization's employees is key (pp. 12-16).
- ▶ **The downside of appreciation:** Understanding the dynamics of appreciation in the workplace requires knowledge of potentially negative unintended consequences. In our focus group discussions and in the reviewed literature, various challenges and risks associated with appreciation



were identified. These include over-communicating appreciation, withholding appreciation, an unfair selection process, undeserved ‘thank yous’, ‘one-shot’ appreciation, excessive monetary and material incentivizing and leaving appreciation entirely up to co-workers themselves (pp. 16-18).

- ▶ **Positive effects:** Research in various fields has shown that employee appreciation yields positive effects for both individuals and organizations, promoting well-being, stress management, job satisfaction, performance, and loyalty (pp. 19-20).
- ▶ **The role of managers and communicators:** Collaboration and a strategic approach to cultivating an appreciative climate are crucial for organizations to be successful in their efforts to recruit and retain talent. Managers bear primary responsibility for fostering appreciation, but they require support from internal communication professionals as strategic partners in these efforts. Internal communication professionals have

valuable knowledge and resources, function as role models with ideas and guidance, and enable managers through communication-related education and training (pp. 21-24).

- ▶ **Insights into organizations in Germany:** Our survey results demonstrate that feeling appreciated by one’s managers and co-workers is strongly correlated with job satisfaction, organizational identification, and organizational citizenship behavior, underscoring the importance of appreciation from both sources. The study also reveals a notable appreciation deficit frequently experienced by employees versus their expectations (pp. 25-28).

RESEARCH DESIGN

This issue of Communication Insights presents the findings from a sizeable mixed-method research project conducted by Christopher Ruppel, Julia Stranzl, Sabine Einwiller, Jens Hagelstein, and Ingrid Wahl from the Corporate Communication Research Group at the University of Vienna between 2022 and 2023. The overall goal was to gain a deeper understanding of employee appreciation, with a particular focus on German-speaking Europe. The project comprised a systematic literature review, focus group discussions, and an online survey.

Phase 1: Systematic literature review

In the first phase we conducted a systematic review of the literature in order to compile knowledge from existing studies regarding

- 1 the definition of employee appreciation,
- 2 the antecedents contributing to employees' perception of appreciation,
- 3 the effects of employee appreciation for the individual and the organization,
- 4 the role of the internal communications department in employee appreciation, and
- 5 practical examples of employee appreciation.

Our initial search indicated that communication science had not yet focused on the role of corporate communications in creating an appreciative working

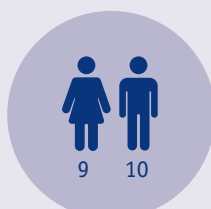
climate. Few studies exist on this topic. Therefore, we broadened our perspective and included research from a broad array of fields, including psychology, human resources, management, sociology, and linguistics. Forty-seven articles were determined to be eligible for extraction and analysis.

Phase 2: Focus group discussions

The second phase involved conducting three focus groups. This method helps reveal deeply held beliefs and perspectives regarding a specific topic by means of a lightly moderated, open discussion (Carey & Asbury, 2016). The focus groups were conducted in January 2023 at the University of Vienna, with six to seven participants each. A total of 19 employees took part, who were employed at least part-time in Austrian organizations with more than 250 employees, and who had no leadership responsibilities. The audio data from discussions were transcribed and qualitatively analyzed, using the MAXQDA20 qualitative analysis software.

The discussion guide was derived from the literature analyzed in phase 1. Following a round of introductions, the focus group participants were asked to reflect on what contributes to their personal well-being at work and discuss the questions: "What should employees be appreciated for?", and "How should such appreciation look like?". We then asked about negative experiences they have had, encouraging critical reflection on the reasons behind these experiences. This was followed by questions about from whom they expect to receive

Focus group participant profiles



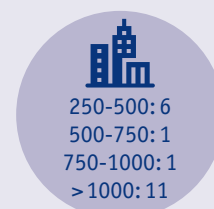
Gender



Age



Work hours/week



Organization size (employees)

Nineteen employees from Austria without leadership responsibility participated in the focus group discussions in 2023.



At the Research Dialogue, communication professionals developed ideas on how internal communication can help to convey appreciation.

appreciation at the workplace. During the discussions participants received material (pictures of various forms of appreciation, such as a gift basket, an email from management, a thank-you note, coupons, etc.) to stimulate a debate about forms of authentic appreciation. To this end, participants were engaged in a broader discussion of the significance of appreciation for them personally.

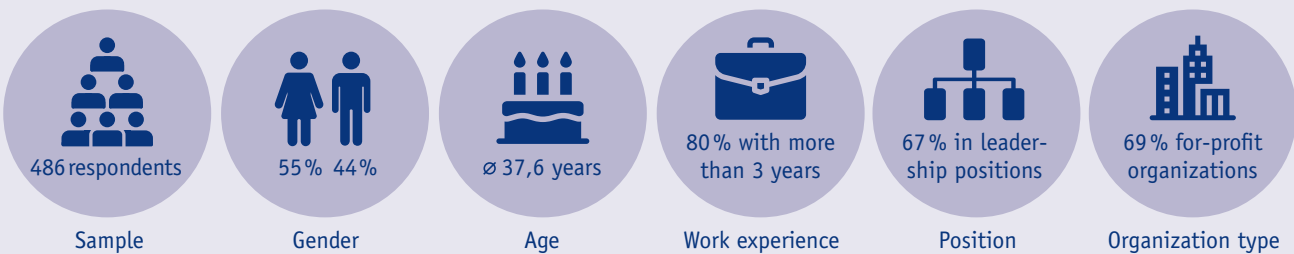
The results of the three focus groups were shared and discussed at a **Research Dialogue**, a one-day conference organized by the Academic Society for Management & Communication, held at the University of Vienna in July 2023. In small groups we reflected on the forms of appreciation with internal communication professionals from large organizations in Germany and Austria and worked out concrete

measures for deploying internal communication for objectives around employee appreciation.

Phase 3: Online survey of 486 employees

In the third phase we conducted an online survey of employees working in Germany for organizations with more than 50 employees in order to test the **effects of perceived appreciation** on job satisfaction, organizational identification, and organizational citizenship behavior. Participants were recruited by the market research firm GapFish, and the data was collected in December 2023. The survey was fully completed by 486 respondents, passing all data quality checks.

Online appreciation survey



486 participants from German organizations with more than 50 employees completed the online survey.



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WHAT EMPLOYEES WANT TO BE APPRECIATED FOR

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND QUALITIES VERSUS WORK-RELATED BEHAVIORS

Employees have specific expectations regarding what they want to be appreciated for at work. Two broad areas of such expectations were identified: appreciation for an employee's personal characteristics and qualities and appreciation for work-related behaviors. These areas cannot be addressed all at once with equal focus, but they provide reference points to start thinking about how to create an appreciative working climate. The following chapter explains the two areas in more detail.

APPRECIATION FOR PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS & QUALITIES

Employees want to be appreciated for their **personal characteristics and qualities**. In the focus group discussions, employees emphasized the significance of being valued for their individual personality, and expressed a desire to be seen as individuals who contribute meaningfully to the organization as a whole:

»In general, everyone deserves appreciation as the person he or she is – for his or her strengths, but also weaknesses.«
Quality management employee

Employees want to be appreciated for their **professional competencies** and prior **work experience** – which are integral aspects of their identity within their job role.

»I want to be valued as a person where I do my part.«
Journalist

It is also essential to not overlook the importance of appreciating employees for their **honesty, punctuality, and reliability**. The participants in our focus groups emphasized that these qualities – which include being forthright about personal feelings at work, managing workload, addressing work-related

issues, and admitting mistakes – are often undervalued and taken for granted. Especially in view of high turnover and the skilled labor shortage, employees desire recognition for their **loyalty** to the organization.

Employees also appreciate acknowledgment of the role they play in fostering a positive work environment through their **social skills, spontaneity, and flexibility** – things which contribute significantly to sustaining an appreciative working climate.

APPRECIATION FOR WORK-RELATED BEHAVIORS

In addition to their personal attributes, employees want to be appreciated for a range of behaviors that contribute to the functioning and success of the organi-

zation. The focus group participants placed greater emphasis on appreciation for work-related behaviors than for personal attributes and provided more detailed comments in this regard.

Employees emphasized that **completing regular work tasks** deserves appreciation, rather than only being appreciated when expectations are exceeded. Focus group participants disagreed with the notion that employees should be valued only for performing above average.

»It is the work one does in general that is fundamentally deserving appreciation.
Without employees,
...

Reasons for employee appreciation



PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS & QUALITIES

- ▶ Individual personality
- ▶ Professional competency, work experiences
- ▶ Honesty, punctuality, reliability
- ▶ Social competency
- ▶ Spontaneity, flexibility
- ▶ Loyalty (commitment)



WORK-RELATED BEHAVIORS

- ▶ Completion of regular work tasks
- ▶ Specific, individual achievements
- ▶ Job-related additional efforts
- ▶ Non-job-related additional efforts
- ▶ Situational extraordinary engagement
- ▶ Team spirit
- ▶ Organizational communication
- ▶ General effort
- ▶ Contributions to organizational development
- ▶ Contributions to organizational success

There are two areas in which employees see potential for or have expectations of being appreciated.

...
the business model just doesn't work.
You can't replace them with machines.«

Croupière

»If you deliver what is asked, then I think that should be appreciated. Not just when you bring in more. After all, you're doing the job you're supposed to do.«

Consultant

However, employees also want to be appreciated for their **specific, individual achievements** at work. These may include completing a task or project, acquiring a needed skill, or publishing a work. Employees often put a lot of effort into the day-to-day tasks that comprise performing their job. These **additional efforts** may be job-related or non-job-related. Non-job-related extra effort may include tasks like regularly arranging servicing of the office coffee machine. Unfortunately, whether job-related or not, such contributions are often taken for granted despite the fact that they contribute significantly to a better working atmosphere for everyone. It is highly important to employees that this extra effort is recognized by their co-workers and managers, and by the organization as a whole.

»I want appreciation
for this invisible work that is done.«

Software developer

In addition, employees can demonstrate **situational extraordinary engagement** within the organization, their team, or in cooperation with co-workers. This may involve for example postponing their vacation during a critical project phase, uncovering significant system errors, or devising concrete strategies to resolve team conflicts. Failing to acknowledge such extraordinary dedication, which often requires significant effort on the part of the individual, can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction for being disregarded. Employees who accordingly feel undervalued in this way are more likely

to actively seek employment elsewhere and leave the organization. One employee shared a situation where 'going the extra mile' was not adequately recognized and honored by the employer:

»A colleague of mine moved to a different place for nine months to work at a construction site.

He saved the company money by living at his parents' house for free.

The company made quite a lot of money from the customer on fees for his deployment.

When his deployment was over and he filed for expense reimbursements, he had to fight for every penny he spent there – the per diem, travel time, everything.

The company ultimately made a few hundred thousand off the guy.

If someone is willing to change their life for nine months to make extra money for the company, there needs to be a more accommodating attitude in general.«

Technical draftsman

Another important factor in order to have a successfully functioning organization is **team spirit**, which among other things requires employees being able to connect and engage with their co-workers. Employees who are reliable team players want to feel valued by their co-workers, and by their managers for demonstrating competency in this regard.

Additionally, employees wish to be appreciated for **communicating transparently** with their co-workers and managers, which includes openly discussing errors, failures, and mistakes. Employees also seek recognition for actively engaging in internal dialogue, providing feedback and communicating respectfully.

And employees play a crucial role in shaping the organization's image by **being an ambassador** in interactions with friends, family, and other members of

the public, on social media and in personal interactions—perhaps at events. Employees feel that their supportive communication behavior is important yet often overlooked, going unacknowledged as a valuable work contribution.

Employees want to be recognized for their **general efforts** at work as well. Not every task yields a measurable success, and projects may fail, entirely or temporarily, and alternative approaches may be required. Such general efforts frequently go unnoticed and are unappreciated because they do not yield measurable results. What matters to employees is the personal cognitive and emotional effort they invest – and this should be acknowledged, irrespective of the outcome.

Employees furthermore emphasize that recognition of their **personal contributions to the overall development and success** of the organization is important to them. In this regard they note the significance of the ideas, creativity, and feedback they contribute and their willingness to engage in personal skills development and training. This kind of recognition is

essential because it indicates how each employee is valued for his or her unique characteristics, qualities, and work-related behaviors. And it shows that the organization appreciates the dedication and loyalty demonstrated by its employees over the long term. The quotes below underscore the importance of this multifaceted consideration:

»I want to be valued for my creativity, which allows me to approach my work in different ways.«

Urban planner

»The company can only succeed when everyone has their eyes and ears open, in order to recognize when things can and should be done a better way.«

Data scientist

»I want appreciation for my ideas, for always trying to think about how to do something better.«

Technical draftsman



TAKE AWAYS

- ▶ Employees expect appreciation for their personal characteristics and qualities as well as their work-related behaviors. These two areas of expectations represent the critical frame of reference for creating an appreciative working climate. Demonstrating appreciation in these areas is crucial in order to foster employee dedication and loyalty and cultivate an appreciative organizational culture.
- ▶ It is essential to get to know employees better to understand what they want to be appreciated for and to implement communication practices accordingly.
- ▶ Key communicators within the organization, such as managers, have various levers at their disposal for communicating appreciation for employees' various work-related behaviors. Recognizing employees for their situational extraordinary dedication is critically important, as appreciation is explicitly expected here. If such appreciation is lacking, it can strain the relationship between employer and employee, and may lead to negative communication behavior.



FORMS OF EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION

APPRECIATION GOES FAR BEYOND MONETARY AND MATERIAL RECOGNITION

That employees perceive appreciation at work, depends on various forms, including salary increase, praise, gratitude expressed through events or listening to and showing interest in employees. In the following chapter we outline six primary forms of expressing employee appreciation. To many employees, the aspect that matters most is that the organization should sincerely try to see what they do and take them seriously. And whether this is perceived as occurring depends heavily on the team or project managers, requiring them to devote time to their people. Other forms of appreciation, such as pay and working conditions, fall more into the area of the overall working settings.

CONTINUOUS APPRECIATION THAN ONE-TIME-GESTURES

Participants of the focus groups discussed how they would like to experience appreciation at work. Above all they emphasized the importance of consistent, ongoing appreciation rather than isolated, sporadic 'one-shot' gestures.

» You can't make your employees feel better after a hard month with just a round of pizza.«

Sound technician

Continuous appreciation can be expressed in various ways. We have identified the following six categorical forms of expression (see graphic on page 13):

- 1 monetary and material recognition;
- 2 thanks, praise and esteem;
- 3 the general work environment;
- 4 seeing and taking employees seriously;
- 5 giving employees a sense of purpose & perspective;
- 6 being human in interactions with employees.

Some of these categories are intuitive, being inherently bound up with appreciation, and have been considered in earlier research (e.g., Beck, 2016; Stocker et al., 2014).



MONETARY AND MATERIAL RECOGNITION

The study participants talked extensively about **pay** as a fundamental element of employee appreciation, but

agreed generally that monetary forms of recognition become less significant after a certain threshold, particularly once employees are able to sustain a comfortable lifestyle. The participants emphasized however that many employees are experiencing lacking appreciation at the workplace due to pay stagnation at unsatisfactory levels.

While **bonuses** are an incentive, other forms of appreciation are seen as more important. Conversely, dissatisfaction with one's pay can undermine other forms of appreciation, such as positive feedback and expressions of gratitude. Thus when an organization demonstrates appreciation by way of a **pay increase, bonus or gift**, effective communication around these monetary benefits is crucial. Participants highlighted the

importance of context with regard to monetary benefits, perceiving these as meaningless or even counter-productive when the proper context is not given, or when the benefit comes with legal strings attached.







»Salary is indeed a fundamental aspect of appreciation – it's where recognition often begins, and it needs to be in line with the employee's contributions.«

Data scientist

»I am somewhat content with the salary, then the other things count much more for me in terms of appreciation.«

HR employee

Forms of employee appreciation

 MONETARY & MATERIAL RECOGNITION	 THANKS, PRAISE & ESTEEM	 GENERAL WORK ENVIRONMENT	 SEEING & TAKING SERIOUSLY	 PURPOSE & PERSPECTIVE	 HUMANITY
Salary	Praise for performance	Additional offers/ services	Interest in tasks	Meaningful tasks	Empathy, compassion
Bonus	Individualized thanks	Workplace equipment	Understanding of employees' situation	Development opportunities	Respectful interaction
Reward	Parties, excursions, events	Work arrangements	Listening	Participation opportunities	Trust
Gifts	Fostering the external image	Flexibility, free space	Taking time for employees		
		Space for exchange	Interest in person		
		Onboarding, integration	Feedback		
		Sanctioning of discrimination & bullying	Employee oriented action		
			Transparency		

Forms of appreciation that contribute to employees' overall perception of being appreciated at work



THANKS, PRAISE & ESTEEM

Expressing thanks, praise, and esteem is common organizational practice, communicated via **thank-you notes, awards, and collective celebrations**, for example. The manner and frequency in which these are communicated are key, as employees should be addressed as individuals who contribute their part, avoiding the use of any generalized, empty phrasing.

»I find that very important:
these little details in speeches. Not:
'Yes, I thank all my managers and their team',
but: 'I thank all the individuals: that one,
that one, that one.'
I think that's much better.«

Urban planner

»I think it's difficult because
usually an award is a one-man show.
One person alone who has done
something great. However, this one person
worked with three or four other people
to achieve the goal. For example,
if the salesperson gets an award
because he has done a great job in selling,
then there are probably
two or three people in the technical
department who supported him
and have worked overtime.«

Technical craftsman

An organization's efforts to bolster its **external image** and that of its industry also impact employees' perception of being appreciated. Participants saw it as appreciative when organizations work on boosting the image of their profession and industry, as this directly contributes to how they personally are appreciated in society (some industries are held in greater esteem than others). They discussed Vienna's municipal waste management company as a case study, with its jaunty, likable, and pride-filled image campaigns.



GENERAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

General work conditions and the organizational environment contribute to employees' perception of appreciation. The focus group participants observed that these are frequently overlooked aspects, which include **tangibles** like good work equipment, having a coffee kitchen, a lounge, an in-house canteen and/or other offerings ranging from complimentary beverages and snacks to sports and health activities. Several focus group participants reported how they felt let-down by their employer in this regard. One participant reported that her employer failed to provide safety equipment for a construction site inspection, while others reported that little gestures like fruit baskets are being increasingly left out.

Appreciation can also be expressed in how **workplace policies and regulations** are communicated to employees and adhered to in practice. Employees value when an organization makes the effort to discuss and explain their employment contract, familiarize them with the code of conduct, and ensure that they understand their rights and obligations. The onboarding process represents a crucial initial experience of appreciation for new employees.

Allowing **free time** for work-related and non-work-related interaction also signals appreciation, affording the opportunity to discuss current concerns, ideas, and private issues. Flexibility in structuring one's daily work routines and break times, is also highly valued as a form of appreciation.

»We have a lot of table tennis tables around
and people don't frown at you
when you go to play. The time
they give you is honest. Because I know
that it costs the employer much more than
a 10-euro voucher if I play for an hour.
So yes, that's great for me.«

Electrical engineer

Last but not least, employees rate as highly important how their organization handles incidents of bullying or discrimination, thus demonstrating an appreciation of employees as **human beings**. They emphasize the importance of having appropriate mechanisms in place for sanctioning such behaviors. An incident of derogatory sexist language experienced by a female urban planner exemplifies this need.: “Das ‘Mausler’ [belittling term for a woman in Austrian language] and similar sayings. I have not been studying for 10 years and then get downgraded because of my age or gender.” Participants felt that the lack of readily enforceable sanctions in such cases represents a missed opportunity for showing appreciation.



SEEING AND TAKING EMPLOYEES SERIOUSLY

The appreciation category of ‘seeing and taking employees seriously’ was given particular attention in employees’ focus group narratives and discussions. The common thread was that appreciation is felt when employees experience that their organization genuinely strives to engage with its employees. **Time devoted to employees** is key in this regard, which was explicitly discussed as a distinct form of appreciation and which represents a limiting factor with regard to many other forms of appreciation such as listening, showing interest, giving feedback, and developing a true understanding of employees’ needs and concerns. Managers at all levels are urged to invest time and pay attention to their employees.

»It’s crucial to look at what the employees have accomplished. What does every single employee do here and there – even if it’s just mopping the floor.
Just really have a look:
What do they do? And what do they need to complete their work every day?
And what would make it easier for them?
Not just sitting in the head office thinking about business, but really visiting

employees in the shops, the plants and offices from time to time – whatever line of work it is – and looking at what they actually do.«

Retail saleswoman

Direct managers play a crucial role in this respect, who should not dismiss institutionalized communication instruments, such as the annual performance reviews, as a mere chore, but rather design these to afford valuable time spent to look at what their employees do and take them seriously.

»My team leader is really good at it. I talk to him once a year during the annual appraisal interview or if something is up with the team. He is an incredibly empathetic person and can listen really well and you feel, when you have this 1.5-hour conversation with him, as if he is fully interested in what you’re saying – although he has to conduct dozens of these conversations in one day. Just this personal touch: That you as a person with what you have to say ... yes, as if your interest is his interest. That’s really cool.«

Quality management employee

Beyond such direct interaction with managers, employees feel appreciated and taken seriously when their organization **communicates transparently** about strategic decisions, salary schemes, and potentially problematic or controversial issues. One negative example reported by an engineer was an incident in which a planned partnership with an arms manufacturer was not openly communicated to employees.



PURPOSE AND PERSPECTIVE

The category ‘purpose and perspective’ is directly linked to the employees’ actual work. Employees want to experience their work as **meaningful**. They expect their managers to reflect on what tasks need to be

completed by whom, and how. This requires time from managers and careful consideration regarding the execution of a given task. Occupational psychology research on so-called ‘**illegitimate tasks**’ (e.g., Pfister et al., 2020; Apostel et al., 2017) supports this importance. Tasks are illegitimate which do not fall within an employee’s job description or that are perceived as unnecessary – the latter, in particular, make employees feel less appreciated.

»If your boss wants something from you, I think the initial appreciation is that he actually thinks about what you should do. So that tasks are thought through and meaningful.«

Data scientist

»With my previous employer, I sometimes analyzed things for a fortnight and then they were thrown away because my boss hadn’t thought about the question he wanted to clarify in detail beforehand.

And I think that’s the worst thing when you invest time, even if I get paid for it – because I want the work I do to be used, because it’s my time.«

Analyst

With regard to providing career prospects, **education** is key. Employees want to learn because it contributes significantly to their feeling valuable as workers. Providing opportunities for **training** and **skills development** therefore further strengthens employees’ perception of appreciation.

»I feel appreciated when the employer pays for training or something similar.

When I started my job, after half a year, my boss approached me and asked me if I would be interested in expanding my knowledge on building physics and whether I wanted to do an advanced training. I think that was a great opportunity and I gratefully accepted it.«

Architect

In addition, employees feel appreciated when they have opportunities to **participate in organizational processes** and actively contribute by sharing their views, problems, and ideas. It is crucial that employees receive responses to their questions and feedback on their ideas. Often employees never hear back on whatever happens with their contributed input.



HUMANITY

The category ‘humanity’ encompasses a range of fundamental forms of appreciation that define the overall **climate of an organization** and interactions between its members. These include **empathy, compassion, respect, and trust**. The significance of fostering an appreciative climate was emphasized through numerous negative examples of interactions that lacked these human elements.

»I told my supervisor:
‘I don’t know how to manage this.’
And her answer was: ‘I can’t help you;
others can do it, too.’«

HR employee

»He always talked very quickly, in a fast pace. He didn’t look you in the eye, but rather over your head. And he never paid attention to your comments or objections.«

Consultant

»They have no empathy because they are simply there for the cash. We saw this very clearly with our last CEO. He was hired, he ran his program and then went to the next company where he probably does the same thing all over again. He gets his bonuses, he ruins structures and leaves the deluge behind him.«

Croupière



CRITICAL ASPECTS TO THINK ABOUT

Sometimes appreciating someone at work can also lead to unintended negative consequences (Beck, 2016). Being aware of and discussing these critical aspects of appreciation is key in the co-creation process of an appreciative working climate. The following risks related to appreciation were mentioned in our focus groups or were discussed by other researchers.

► **Over-communication of appreciation** refers to an excessive or insincere expression of gratitude or recognition in the workplace. This may lead to feelings of annoyance or discomfort in employees as the signals of appreciation lose their meaning, which dilutes its impact. “I hear my manager say several times an hour, ‘Love you guys so much. You’re doing great.’ I can’t stand it.” (Beck, 2016, p. 345).

► **Withholding appreciation** means the failure or reluctance to acknowledge and express gratitude for the efforts, achievements, or contributions of employees. This can be accompanied by the very negative feeling of disrespect. Withholding appreciation potentially demotivates employees and can result in turnover intention.

»I didn’t receive any appreciation for finishing a very large, difficult project under time pressure even though we were completely understaffed, and I pointed out that it wouldn’t work out that way. My extra work and effort were simply not recognized because I delivered the results and it worked anyway. I often feel that maybe I’m not treated appreciatively because things usually just work out, and that extra effort is simply invisible.«

Journalist

► Employees may perceive an **unfair selection process** when recognition or rewards are distri-

buted in a biased or inequitable manner. This elicits negative emotions and challenges the employee-organization relationship. Examples are that someone receives a bonus without explanation and others don’t. Or only one team member is put in the spotlight or gets a salary increase with no reference to the actual performance – especially “when it’s the same few people every time. And those same few people didn’t work nearly as hard.” (Beck, 2016, p. 346)

» For example, if one person receives a public transport ticket and I don’t, and nobody knows why, I perceive it as unfair. But if it’s clear that everyone who lives outside of Vienna gets something, for example, and those in Vienna don’t, then I understand why.«

Biomedical engineer

»It’s unfair that my colleague earns more just because he asked for more money. That’s somehow disrespecting my work. Especially when I feel like I might be working better than him. At that point, it becomes really significant for me personally, especially if I feel like I’m doing more and working better than the one who’s earning more just because he asked.«

Biomedical engineer

► **Undeserved ‘thank you’** is the perception that gratitude or appreciation are expressed for actions or achievements that – in the employee’s eyes – don’t warrant recognition, or when the employee believes that he or she did not contribute or succeed in any meaningful way.

► **‘One shot’ appreciation** refers to one-time gestures in lieu of continuous, ongoing practice (such as one-time pandemic bonus). Employees value consistent and regular appreciation over sporadic or isolated instances of recognition. ‘One shot’ appreciation may fail to have a lasting impact on affective and behavioral reactions.

- ▶ **Incentivizing excessive job engagement:** While several forms of appreciation (such as monetary recognition) can effectively motivate employees, using them as a ‘short-term boost’ in employees’ performance can have unintended consequences, such as excessive job engagement. Intentionally pushing employees far beyond their personal boundaries is very risky in practice, as it can impact their personal health.
- ▶ If responsibility for expressing **appreciation is left solely up to co-workers**, instead of it coming from the organization’s management and people with leadership responsibility, the idea of developing an appreciative work climate is doomed to failure. While receiving appreciation from co-workers is important, it cannot substitute for engagement on the part of the organization’s management and leaders, who serve as role models and visible communicators within the organization. Employees see their direct manager as responsible for appreciation (see Chapter ‘Communication responsibilities’, pp. 21-24).

»If you never get appreciation in your job, there are people who then think, ‘Shoot, I’m not good enough for this job, I have to work even harder,’ then it potentially leads to burnout and so on. I really think you shouldn’t underestimate getting and giving regular appreciation because otherwise it can completely escalate on a psychological level.«

Social worker

»I think the higher the level, the more it can be expected – because it’s their job to make everyone happy. Co-workers should do it too, but it’s the managers’ responsibility.«

Data scientist

TAKE AWAYS

- ▶ Monetary and material forms of recognition, especially pay, are an important driver of appreciation, but only up to the point where employees are materially satisfied. Beyond that point, other forms of appreciation like attention and work conditions become more important.
- ▶ Concerning non-material forms of appreciation, it is most important to devote time to employees, for example by listening to their concerns, showing interest in their situation, and helping to give meaning to their work.
- ▶ Appreciation should be expressed continuously and in many different ways in the day-to-day work context. Noteworthy aspects for discussion include the general ineffectiveness of one-time gestures for fostering the perception of appreciation.
- ▶ Awareness of the critical factors undermining employee appreciation (e.g. withholding appreciation, unfair selection, ‘one-shot appreciation’) promotes an understanding of how fostering an organizational culture of appreciation is a complex undertaking. A nuanced understanding of employees’ expectations is called for, and in-depth discussion of the issue.

EFFECTS OF EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES AND THE ORGANIZATION



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When employees feel appreciated, it positively impacts the individual employee and the organization as a whole, as corroborated by previous research and the findings from our focus group study. Appreciation promotes employee well-being and results in higher commitment. In view of the ongoing skilled labor shortage and high turnover, organizations can take steps to reap the benefits of employees who feel appreciated and are therefore more engaged and less likely to leave the organization.

POSITIVE EFFECTS ON INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEES

Job satisfaction is a salient outcome of employee appreciation, as supported by several empirical studies (Elfering et al., 2017; Garrido Vásquez et al., 2020; Muskat & Reitsamer, 2020; Pfister et al., 2020a; Stocker et al., 2010; Stocker et al., 2019). Employees feel more content with their jobs when they perceive themselves as being appreciated. This is in part because appreciation helps employees experience greater self-efficacy (Stocker et al., 2019) and success at work (Pfister et al., 2020a), which in turn boosts their self-esteem (Semmer et al., 2019). This is in line with what our focus group participants reported.

The focus group study also highlighted **employee well-being** as another important benefit of appreciation. This insight is backed up by detailed scientific studies of how individual well-being is positively impacted by various forms of appreciation. Empirical evidence has been found of increased general contentment, greater serenity, decreased anxiety and lower risk of depressive symptoms (Kranabetter & Niessen, 2019; Pfister, et al., 2020b; Pohrt et al., 2022; Stocker et al., 2014; Stocker et al., 2019).

One study in fact indicated that workplace appreciation has a positive spillover effect on mother-child interaction back home (Gassman-Pines, 2011).

Besides these general effects on employees' overall perception of their job and on their well-being, appreciation influences how employees tackle their job. Empirical evidence suggests that appreciation is correlated with employees' **intrinsic motivation** (Muntz & Dormann, 2020) and **job engagement** (Einwiller et al., 2021; Garrido Vásquez et al., 2020; Gulyani & Sharma, 2018). Focus group participants reported that appreciation motivates them to develop their skills and continuously learn for their work roles.

POSITIVE EFFECTS FOR THE ORGANIZATION

There is no question that the effects at the individual level contribute to organizational success. Empirical studies and our focus group results show that perceived appreciation drives specific indicators on the organizational level:

Positive impact of appreciation

POSITIVE EFFECTS ON THE INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEE

- Job satisfaction ✓
- Employee well-being ✓
- Intrinsic motivation ✓
- Job engagement ✓



POSITIVE EFFECTS ON THE ORGANIZATION

- Affective commitment ✓
- Reduced turnover ✓
- Cohesion ✓
- Trust in the organization and leaders ✓
- Less resentment ✓

When employees feel appreciated, it has a positive impact – on the individual employee and on the organization as a whole.

- ▶ Most importantly, appreciation binds employees more closely to their organization. There is a clear link between appreciation, more substantial **affective commitment** (Einwiller et al., 2021; Elfering et al., 2017) and **reduced turnover intention** (Apostel et al., 2018; Davis et al., 2021).
 - ▶ On the team level, focus group participants reported that appreciation generally promotes **cohesion** and their interest in **supporting other team members** (e.g., by sharing knowledge, training, or equipment).
 - ▶ The focus group study furthermore shows that **trust in the organization and its managers** is a general outcome of feeling appreciated at work
 - ▶ Conversely, appreciated employees are **less likely to feel resentment**, i.e., anger, indignation, and disappointment towards their organization (Pfister et al., 2020a; Stocker et al., 2010).
- Notably, employees in the focus groups concluded that the appreciation they received heightened their own willingness to appreciate other members of the organization. They believe that feeling appreciated is essential in order to appreciate others. This also holds true for managers, as the following quotes illustrate:
- » Your supervisor does not feel appreciated herself and therefore passes this on by not appreciating others herself.«
Social care worker

20



TAKE AWAYS

- ▶ Employee appreciation positively impacts the individual employee and the larger organization.
- ▶ On the individual level, appreciation improves employees' well-being at work, helping them cope with stress and enhancing their job engagement.
- ▶ On the organizational level, appreciation promotes loyalty to the organization, as reflected in higher affective commitment and lower turnover.
- ▶ Most importantly, feeling appreciated increases employees' motivation to appreciate others in the organization.



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COMMUNICATION RESPONSIBILITIES

THE ROLE OF MANAGERS AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS IN EXPRESSING APPRECIATION

Fostering an appreciative working climate requires collective effort on the part of various actors both inside and outside the organization. These include communication by and from the CEO, managers, co-workers, the unit responsible for internal communication, HR, and external parties, such as customers and the general public. The primary responsibility however rests upon the direct managers of organization staff. Our findings afford insights that managers and internal communication professionals can leverage in specific ways.

THE UNIQUE ROLE OF MANAGERS

The focus group participants see managers as having special responsibility, principally their direct manager. Managers have a crucial role to play as a primary source of appreciation in its various forms. This responsibility arises from the nature of their role in direct interaction with employees, which involves the potential for interpersonal connection and a reciprocal relationship. One's direct manager understands the individual employee better than higher-level managers, being better attuned to employees' requirements and emotions, including expressions of frustration and anger. They are knowledgeable about employees' work assignments, tasks, progress, achievements, and specific needs. They are able to engage with the employee on a personal level, communicate informally with

empathy and provide feedback, and they stay attuned to employees' work tasks. Managers are seen primarily as being responsible for assigning meaningful tasks, praising individual achievement, personally expressing gratitude, and engaging in regular dialogue.

»I expect appreciation from my direct supervisor, who sees what I do. That recognition from the top, I don't need it. To be completely honest, we're a big corporation. The board in Hamburg, they don't need to appreciate me.

They have no idea who I am.

It would be ridiculous for them to send me an email saying 'thank you'. But getting something from my manager, that's different.

That's much more important to me.«

HR employee

Managers should have a clear understanding of their communicative impact and responsibilities with regard to meeting employees' expectations of appreciation. The challenge is to understand what employees want to be appreciated for, in order to then provide that appreciation. Our data reveal several problems in this regard, starting with the fact that managers are often unaware of their responsibility to express appreciation to employees, and are deficient in leadership training and social skills (such as finding the right tone, or communicating on eye-level). In addition, remote working creates challenges around regular personal contact and meaningful interactions.

Our findings show there are three levers for effectively communicating appreciation and fostering an appreciative working climate:

- ▶ **Increasing knowledge regarding appreciation:** Managers first need to understand the concept of appreciation and its positive outcomes. Regular dialogue on this topic, with the involvement of external experts, can advance organizational understanding.
- ▶ **Increasing understanding regarding appropriate forms of appreciation:** Managers must know which forms of appreciation are suitable in the work context and understand how to translate these into action. This requires knowledge of best practices and the ability to gauge situations and avoid actions that could have the opposite effect in terms of employee feelings.
- ▶ **Training on leadership communication:** Managers need training on how to go about employee appreciation. This requires knowing which communication channels and styles are appropriate in which situations. Regular training seminars and close liaison with internal communications

and HR are essential to cultivate such knowledge. Managers benefit from being involved in the process of developing the overall strategy for creating an appreciative working climate.

HOW INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS CAN SUPPORT MANAGERS

Internal communication professionals have an important role to play in supporting managers show how the organization values its employees. We have identified three specific roles:

- ▶ Internal communication professionals serve as **strategic partners** of management in the co-creation process of fostering an appreciative working climate. These professionals can drive forward intra-organizational discourse on appreciation to raise awareness of its relevance for the individual and the organization. Their work involves gathering stakeholder perspectives on the topic (what do employees need, want, and desire), prioritizing employee concerns and needs, and providing adequate resources in support of appreciation efforts (e.g., forums, debates, workshops).
- ▶ Internal communication professionals act as **enablers** for all employees, with and without managements roles, to become active senders and receivers of appreciation by providing corresponding training and education. To fulfill this role, a close alliance with their colleagues from HR is crucial.
- ▶ Internal communication professionals act as **role models**, exemplifying employee appreciation, setting the general tone in internal communication, and living appreciation in their daily work. They can regularly communicate expectations and rules regarding appreciation in forums, or documented in a code of conduct.

THINKING ABOUT HOW INTERNAL COMMUNICATION CAN HELP TO VALUE EMPLOYEES

We discussed the six forms of appreciation (see p. 12-18) with several internal communication professionals from leading organizations in Germany as part of a Research Dialogue at the University of Vienna held in July 2023. The idea behind this workshop was to translate the findings into concrete communication measures. The graphic below summarizes the proposed ideas.

- ▶ Internal communication professionals can better manage expectations around **monetary and material recognition** by implementing a bonus monitor that transparently discloses how bonuses are calculated and on what bases they are paid. In Q&A sessions held jointly with HR, managers can become informed about critical issues relating to bonuses and raises. Lastly, communi-

cation professionals can provide a portfolio of monetary and material recognition along with information on accessing these resources.

- ▶ **Thanks, praise and esteem** can be communicated to employees through awards for special achievements and publishing personal bios and success stories of employees and teams on various internal and external media channels.
- ▶ It is essential to understand employees' basic needs regarding the **general work environment** (e.g. space requirements). Regular, close dialogue with HR and employees (through surveys, discussions, work development days, etc.) is necessary to obtain this information. Communication professionals can do their part by transparently communicating about the organization's offers and resources.

Ideas from internal communications professionals



MONETARY AND MATERIAL RECOGNITION

- ▶ Portfolio of appreciation examples
- ▶ Q&A on critical issues
- ▶ Bonus monitor to ensure transparency and fairness



THANKS, PRAISE & ESTEEM

- ▶ Empowerment award
- ▶ Employee bios/team profiles



PURPOSE AND PERSPECTIVE

- ▶ Reflection of internal communication tasks and potential development
- ▶ Communication of new positions and development options
- ▶ Developing guidelines: meaningfulness at work, virtual collaboration, work-life balance
- ▶ Regular dialogue with responsible communicators: reasons to appreciate employees, forms, potential effects
- ▶ Designated days (e.g., Social & Development day)



GENERAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

- ▶ Regular dialogue with other units/responsible communicators
- ▶ Communication of organizational offers and resources



SEEING AND TAKING EMPLOYEES SERIOUSLY

- ▶ Training and education for supervisors/other communicators
- ▶ Listening though regular 'pulse checks'



HUMANITY

- ▶ Removal of taboos through topic-workshops and code of conduct (e.g., invisible jobs, diversity, mental health)

Communication experts developed ideas for how internal communication can contribute to the six forms of appreciation.

- ▶ To further employee **purpose and perspective/prospects** at work, communication professionals need to issue regular communication on internal and external opportunities for continuing education and skills development. They can provide managers support through regular dialogue, helping managers gauge current perceptions of the workplace climate and specific needs and challenges arising. In this dialogue, essential aspects of appreciation (reasons for employee appreciation, appropriate forms, potential effects) can be discussed in relation to the resources available. Internal transparency and reflection on appreciation can be promoted by providing organization members with guidelines regarding work-life balance, virtual work collaboration, and work meaningfulness, and by facilitating internal discussions on appreciation between employee groups. Social and development days or similarly designated events can be held at which employees and managers can learn and reflect on their work in beneficial ways.
- ▶ **Feeling seen and taken seriously** in one's work is a concern of both employees and their managers.

Trainings and education offerings can be instrumental in this regard. Active listening through regular pulse checks, surveys and other feedback channels is important, as is keeping staff informed about what is done with the feedback received. CEO videos directly addressing employee concerns and feedback lunches with executive or middle managers further promote feelings of being seen in one's work and taken seriously.

- ▶ Imbuing the culture with a sense of **humanity** requires effort on the part of all members of the organization. Role models are also important, who can be featured in internal communication. Communication professionals can further help by publishing a code of conduct outlining consequences and sanctions in case of violations. Workshops can be held on critical and taboo issues (e.g. appreciation despite limited financial resources, favoritism, corruption, diversity, inclusion and sexual harassment at work) in support of fostering greater humanity within the organization.



TAKE AWAYS

- ▶ Managers and internal communication professionals play a crucial role in co-creating and maintaining an appreciative working climate and positive organizational environment.
- ▶ Direct managers in particular play a central role in employee appreciation because of their immediate interactions with employees, affording a better understanding of individual employee needs. Managers must be knowledgeable regarding the value of appreciation, appropriate forms of appreciation, and effective communication strategies.
- ▶ Internal communication professionals serve as strategic partners in this process, facilitating intra-organizational discussion, serving as role models and providing resources enabling managers and employees to engage in appreciative communication. Key tasks for internal communication professionals include advising managers, collaborating with HR, gathering feedback, providing training, and modeling appreciation behaviors.
- ▶ A workshop with communication professionals delivered concrete ideas for addressing the different forms of appreciation.



EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION IN GERMAN ORGANIZATIONS

A SURVEY OF 486 EMPLOYEES

A survey was conducted to examine sources, reasons for and outcomes of appreciation. The questionnaire was completed by 486 individuals working for German organizations with more than 50 employees. The results confirmed that appreciation has positive effects for employees and their organizations, though room for improvement was also identified.

THE WORKPLACE APPRECIATION SURVEY

Following the literature review and focus groups, a survey was conducted as a third step within this research project to gain insights into employee perceptions of appreciation. The survey participants worked for organizations in Germany which have more than 50 employees.

Appreciation was assessed across three dimensions (see graphic on p. 26):

- ▶ **Sources** of appreciation refer to the individuals who express it – the people from whom the employee receives appreciation. Sources may either be (a) managers or any other organization members on a higher hierarchical level, or (b) co-workers from one’s own team or other units on the same hierarchical level (Stocker et al., 2014).
- ▶ **Reasons** are the causes for expressing appreciation. These may concern (a) personal characteristics and qualities of the employee, e.g., his or her professional competencies, sincerity, and reliability, or (b) situative work behaviors, e.g., taking on additional tasks, demonstrating extraordinary commitment, and willingness to take responsibility (Stocker et al., 2014).
- ▶ **Outcomes** are the positive effects of appreciation. Appreciation may yield preferable outcomes for (a) employees in the form of greater job satisfaction, and (b) for organizations, through identification and staff behaviors that support organizational functioning, known as “organizational citizenship behavior” (Elfering et al., 2017; Pfister et al., 2020a; Stocker et al., 2010).

A conceptual model of workplace appreciation



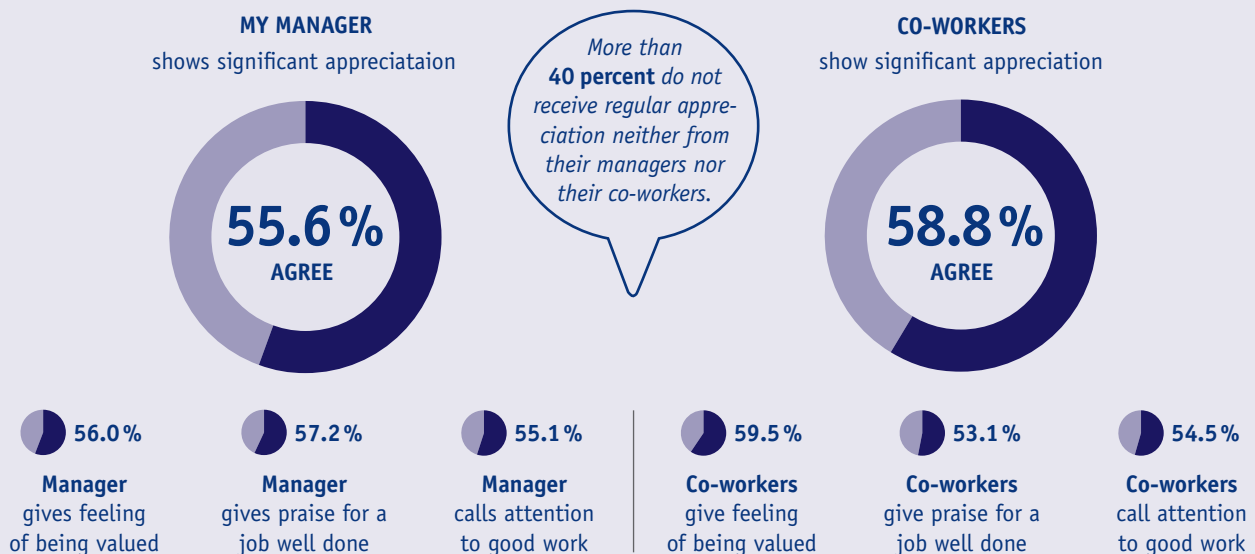
The employee survey measured appreciation across the three dimensions of sources, reasons, and outcomes.

SOURCES OF APPRECIATION: MANAGERS AND CO-WORKERS ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT

The results show that managers and co-workers are equally important as sources of appreciation. Respondents said they receive appreciation from both their managers and from co-workers in nearly the same proportion. Of the total survey respondents, 55.6 per-

cent either agreed or fully agreed that their managers show them significant appreciation while 58.8 percent reported the same with regard to their co-workers (see graphic below). These findings conversely imply however that more than 40 percent do not regularly receive appreciation from their managers or peers – an alarming result.

Managers and co-workers are equally important as sources of appreciation



Managers and co-workers are equally important sources of appreciation. But what's alarming: More than 40 percent don't feel appreciated. (N = 486. % values = scale points 6 and 7 on 7-point Likert scale.)

REASONS FOR APPRECIATION: A GAP BECOMES VISIBLE

The survey revealed remarkable gaps between what employees want to be appreciated for and what they actually receive appreciation for (see graphic below). The employees rated as most important the willingness to take responsibility, a solution-oriented working approach, and reliability. Reliability and solution-

oriented working are also among the top three things that employees actually received appreciation for. Professional competence and loyalty to co-workers are also important reasons for appreciation but are rarely acknowledged. Instead, appreciation often is directed at the employee's contributions to the organization's success. No clear pattern emerged regarding whether personal characteristics or work behaviors are the predominant reasons for appreciation.

Reasons for appreciation: Expectations versus experiences

IMPORTANCE OF VARIOUS REASONS FOR RECEIVING APPRECIATION



REASONS FOR APPRECIATION ACTUALLY GIVEN



What employees want to be appreciated for is not what they actually receive appreciation for. (N = 486. % values = scale points 6 and 7 on 7-point Likert scale.)

OUTCOMES OF APPRECIATION: POSITIVE IMPACT ON EMPLOYEES

Statistical data modeling was applied to reveal associations between appreciation and

- ▶ job satisfaction;
- ▶ organizational identification;
- ▶ organizational citizenship behavior, i. e. behavior supporting organizational functioning that is directed at (a) individual co-workers or (b) the organization as a whole.

Each of these variables was measured in multiple

question items. For example to assess job satisfaction, participants had to rate the degree to which they agree with statements like "I really have fun doing my job" and "I like my job more than the average employee". Associations between the different variables were then tested (see graphic on p. 28).

The results show that **appreciation received from one's manager** is strongly associated with employees' job satisfaction and their citizenship behavior toward the whole organization, and also with their degree of organizational identification.

Positive outcomes of appreciation depend on its source



The survey confirmed the theorized positive outcomes of appreciation. Impact varies however depending on the appreciation source: from managers or co-workers. ($N = 351$, $\chi^2(512) = 1010.852$, $p < .001$, $CFI = .921$, $TLI = .914$, $RMSEA = .063$, $90\% CI [.057; .069]$, $SRMR = .052$.)

Appreciation received from co-workers is positively related to all dependent variables. It is associated strongly with organizational identification and organizational citizenship behavior towards individual co-workers, and a bit weaker to job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior towards the organization.

Interestingly, the different sources of appreciation have varying degrees of association with the respective outcome variables. Manager appreciation is primarily related to job satisfaction and citizenship behavior towards the organization, while appreciation from peers primarily reinforces organizational identification and citizenship behavior towards individual co-workers.



TAKE AWAYS

- ▶ The results of the survey of 486 employees of organizations in Germany indicate that managers and co-workers are equally important sources of appreciation, and that a significant percentage of respondents do not regularly receive appreciation from either source.
- ▶ For employees, the most important reasons for appreciation include willingness to take responsibility, solution-oriented working, and reliability. Gaps exist between expected appreciation versus experienced appreciation.
- ▶ Statistical modeling reveals strong positive associations between appreciation and job satisfaction, organizational identification, and organizational citizenship behavior.
- ▶ Appreciation from managers in particular is associated with job satisfaction and citizenship behavior towards the organization, while appreciation from peers reinforces organizational identification and citizenship behavior towards individual co-workers.

CONCLUSION: THE VALUE OF VALUING PEOPLE

This study shows appreciation to be a multi-faceted topic that clearly needs to be addressed strategically in the organizational context, with the aim of creating value for employees and the organization as a whole. It is an essential issue that needs to be approached judiciously in view of employees' needs and challenges. This requires efforts on the part of all organizational members, from top management over direct managers to co-workers, and internal communication professionals have an important role to play in fostering an appreciative working climate.

- ✓ **Winning talents:** In today's competitive labor market, attracting and retaining talent is critical to an organization's success. Appreciation is a key lever in addressing this challenge, as employees who feel valued and appreciated are more satisfied in their jobs. They are more likely to remain loyal to their organization and show supportive behaviors that help the business thrive.
- ✓ **Everybody counts:** Managers and co-workers are both important potential sources of appreciation, and too often both fail to properly acknowledge team members and peers—as our survey of employees in Germany revealed. Internal communication professionals thus need to generate awareness for employee appreciation, following the idea of a “communicative organization” (Heide & Simonsson, 2018) where every employee becomes an important voice regardless of his or her position. The goal must be to ensure an appreciative organizational climate characterized by openness, trust, collaboration, and mutual support, where responsibilities are directly addressed.

- ✓ **Bridge the gap:** Managers often overlook the reasons why employees want to receive appreciation. Internal communication professionals can support managers by creating an “architecture of listening” (Quin & Men, 2021) so they can more accurately assess employees' needs and expectations around appreciation and share this knowledge with other key communication actors. By closely collaborating with Human Resources, they can ensure that appreciative actions are made visible throughout the organization. This can involve developing communication strategies and initiatives that prioritize employee recognition and appreciation. Measures including employee surveys, team-building activities, and discussion groups can be instrumental in defining the status quo and the desired objectives.

- ✓ **Education and training:** Internal communication professionals can play a crucial role in empowering managers to become effective ‘appreciators’. In training sessions and educational workshops managers can learn how to appropriately value and acknowledge their staff, thereby fostering a climate of appreciation within their teams.

Appreciation should not be approached as a ‘one-shot’ deal, but rather an ongoing mission of publicly highlighting the efforts and the value of employees. Organizations need to change and reliably take care of their responsibility and address appreciation from an employee-perspective. The aim is to create a working environment in which people want to be involved and stay for the long term—moving forward together on today's societal challenges.

» Showing appreciation is the lubricant for a positive working environment in which employees can thrive. Understanding employees' expectations and needs is the key to finding the right blend of this lubricant.«

Prof Sabine Einwiller, University of Vienna

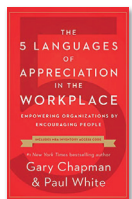
FURTHER READING & REFERENCES



Sven H. Korndorffer (2024):

Die Wertschätzungskette (German only)

Everyone talks about the value chain and forgets about the appreciation chain. Yet employees who feel seen and comfortable are demonstrably more productive, healthier, more loyal and more motivated. Management therefore needs people who are interested in their employees and what is important to them. In this book, Sven Korndorffer shows the costly consequences that a poor corporate culture can have and how appreciation at management level is reflected in employees.



Gary Chapman & Paul White (2019):

The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace: Empowering Organizations by Encouraging People.

This book delves into the profound impact that personalized appreciation can have on employee morale and engagement. Gary Chapman and Paul White reveal the five languages of appreciation, enabling readers to authentically express their gratitude in ways that resonate with co-workers and staff.



Lisa Ryan (2022): Thank You Very Much—Gratitude Strategies to Create a Workplace Culture That ROCKS!

This book provides practical strategies and tips for integrating gratitude into life and work and inspiring case studies of successful leaders who have used gratitude to transform their organizations. It offers valuable insights and tools to support individuals looking to improve their lives, managers seeking to create a positive workplace culture, or organizations seeking to boost productivity and employee engagement.

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