

An analysis of employee recognition: Perspectives on human resources practices

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Employee recognition is as much an organizational management issue as it is one related to the basic needs of individuals. Although it is gaining wider and wider currency in sociology and organizational psychology circles, this complex notion is still fairly vague in the management world. What exactly is employee recognition? What are its limitations and conceptual nuances? What does the act of recognition entail? These are the central questions addressed by this article. The article starts by examining the growing need for recognition expressed by today's workers. It then goes on to provide an overview of the social and organizational context surrounding the issue. Finally, it presents the various approaches and methods used to promote employee recognition, as well as the sources of this recognition within an organization. Four conceptual approaches to recognition are analyzed: the ethical perspective; the humanistic and existential view; the work psychodynamics school; and the behavioural outlook. An analysis of these different theoretical perspectives reveals that recognition takes four main forms: personal recognition; recognition of results; recognition of work practice; and recognition of job dedication. The field of recognition, meanwhile, is characterized by the presence of five types of interactions: organizational; vertical; horizontal; external and social.

Keywords: conceptual paper; employee recognition; human resources practices; meaning of work

Introduction

To date, employee recognition has not been systematically conceptualized nor has it been subject to a satisfactory theoretical integration, which is reflected in the vagueness of the written corpus on the issue. Given employees' urgent need for workplace recognition and the growing organizational challenges in the areas of human resource management, workplace quality of life and worker engagement, all of which share recognition as a contributing factor, it is critical that we achieve a better grasp of this concept. Moreover, when seen as a work organization and HR management tool, recognition represents a viable alternative to control- and subordination-oriented approaches.

The concept as defined here is based on a survey of the scientific literature dealing with employee recognition and related topics. The proposed contextual and theoretical overview therefore seeks to better establish and clarify the concept of employee recognition and, in so doing, lay the groundwork for thoughtful discussion and targeted, meaningful action in the workplace.

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The importance of employee recognition

To respond to the limits of re-engineering work processes and to the requirements of organizational productivity and efficiency, numerous researchers have examined the impact of motivation to work on performance (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman 1959; McGregor 1960; Vroom 1964; Porter and Lawler 1968). These studies quickly highlighted employee recognition as an essential component of motivation. Moreover, Porter and Lawler (1968) put forward an intrinsic and extrinsic motivation model specific to the world of work. These authors stipulate that organizational performance is determined by gaining intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Several studies are in line with this theory, which can be referred to as motivation as a predictor of organizational performance (Deci and Ryan 2000). However, the goals of research on motivation are no longer limited solely to the achievement of work performance but have evolved to respond to new management concerns related to employee commitment (Meyer and Herscovitch 2001), turnover (Richer, Blanchard and Vallerand 2002), mental health in the workplace (Locke 1997) and recognition (Browne 2000; Franco, Bennett, Kanfer and Stubblebine 2004; Saunderson 2004).

Some authors highlight the essential nature of employee recognition as a vector of motivation (Dutton 1998; Appelbaum and Kamal 2000; Saunderson 2004; Grawitch Gottschalk and David 2006), identity (Dejours 1993) and component of meaningful work (Mow 1987; Morin 1996, 2001). Indeed, it acts as a personal development agent as well as a binder and dynamic factor in industrial relations. It also proves to be pivotal to workplace mental health. In fact, Brun and Biron et al. (2003) reveals that a lack of recognition constitutes the second-largest risk factor for psychological distress in the workplace. Among managers, for instance, it would appear to constitute a stress-tolerance factor and a key element in their ability to handle difficult professional situations (Dany and Livian 2002). One of the most important sources of organizational mobilization and engagement (Wills, Labelle, Guérin and Tremblay 1998; Tremblay, Gay and Simard 2000), recognition plays a key role in the success and continuity of organizational change (Atkinson 1994; Fabi, Martin and Valois 1999; Evans 2001). Moreover, it promotes on-the-job learning (Lippit 1997) and is a building block of learning organizations (Griego, Geroy and Wright 2000). Finally, by contributing to employee job satisfaction, it has a positive impact on organizational productivity and performance (Appelbaum and Kamal 2000). Admittedly, most employees express a need to be recognized by their supervisors, co-workers and clients, regardless of their job status or type (Brun 1999, 2000). In the same vein, respondents to a UK survey of construction industry professionals (Bennet, Davidson and Gale 1999) ranked 'recognition of their efforts' as the most important organizational practice or metric among those listed. However, both the qualitative and quantitative data suggest a discrepancy between this need for recognition and HR management practices developed in the workplace. Indeed, these practices are still very much oriented toward the control and domination model of organizational and personal conduct (Linhart and Linhart 1998). This growing need for recognition among workers is partly due to specific social and organizational contexts.

The social context

Modernity is characterized by the hegemony of economic considerations and their pre-eminence over social ones (Chanlat 1998; Meda 1995). It is accompanied by the ascendancy of individualism, the breakdown of social networks and the weakening of community spirit (Thériault 2000). Moreover, in the opinion of Giddens (1991), the modern context, by purging daily life of many of its human dimensions and placing

the individual before a set of dilemmas to resolve, throws up roadblocks to the process of individualization. This prevailing environment of demands and the more ambiguous nature of individual and group references, amplified by the loss of traditions, forces people to identify anchor points and personal meanings to guide their lives. Work is liable to represent one of these seats of existential meaning (Morin 1996). It also fulfils a wide range of individual needs and aspirations. Despite the fact that it ranks second in priority, after family, as a life value and sphere (Bourcier and Palobart 1997), it is still very important to people. It appears to have taken over from former loci of social affiliation and become the focal point for the social bond (Carpentier-Roy 1995, 2000). For many people as well, work has taken on excessive importance in their quest for identity and their need for personal fulfilment (Brun 1999). Consequently, their recognition expectations tend to be much higher in this area of their lives.

That said, the profound changes transforming the world of work are challenging the very premise of the value of individuals and their achievements within the company. Thus, the organizational context brings into play some key factors that need to be considered.

The organizational context

The phenomena of globalization, international competition and technological change have an impact on the organization, pace and nature of work, the definition of professions, as well as the boundaries between previously distinct spheres of life (Gagnon 1996; Lebaube 1997). Companies themselves are also undergoing major changes. Whether in the form of acquisitions, restructuring, process re-engineering, cultural transformation or leadership succession (Fabi et al. 1999), these changes are now part of the organizational landscape. The effects of these transformations, which are often carried out to develop a competitive advantage or enhance corporate profitability, are not always positive. Take, for example, the feeling of uncertainty among many workers, resulting from the unpredictable nature of the transformations and the threat of job cuts (survivor syndrome). A weakened sense of belonging to the organization, a reduced regard for managerial authority, and the questioning of the trust relationship between employer and employee following the violation of the contract that used to bind them, are other negative consequences of the new economic and organizational order (Rondeau 1999).

Moreover, the modern work environment forces managers and employees to respond to unfamiliar and often contradictory demands, which can make it a real challenge to achieve consistency and balance (Forest 2001). The multiple adjustments they have to make, along with the extra effort they put in to perform increasingly complex and burdensome tasks (Collerette, Schneider and Legris 2001), compound their need for true recognition.

Faced with the human costs of these transformations and the challenges posed by current economic conditions, many organizations are working to reforge their ties with employees and stepping up their efforts to devise new HR management models (Rondeau 1999). The declared strategic objective consists of adapting HR practices so that they help facilitate workplace change and contribute to retaining – and engaging – staff. The goal is also to develop employee skills and improve quality of life at work (Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada 2001). In this regard, management practices that promote greater worker involvement in the decision-making process, flexible pay, teamwork, and training incentives, are seen as promising courses of action. Indeed, in some organizations, initiatives like these tend to gradually substitute for more classic control-, domination- and subordination-based approaches to management. They already

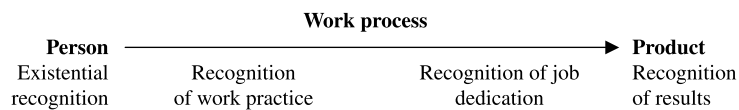


Figure 1. The four employee-recognition practices.

incorporate the concept of employee recognition because the aim is to acknowledge people's contribution to the organization, as well as their training and development needs.

But what exactly is employee recognition? As both a focal and convergence point for multifaceted dimensions, it is a polymorphous, polysemous concept that draws on multiple approaches. Clearly, accounting for its complexity will be no small task.

Approaches to employee recognition

Our analysis of the scientific literature led us to identify four non-exclusive approaches to employee recognition: (1) the ethical perspective; (2) the humanistic and existential view; (3) the work psychodynamics school; and (4) the behavioural outlook. These in turn are expressed through four employee recognition practices (see Figure 1): (a) personal recognition; (b) recognition of work practices; (c) recognition of job dedication; and (d) recognition of results. These four recognition practices fulfil a variety of staff needs: on one hand, to be recognized as full-fledged individuals, and on the other, to be appreciated as workers capable of being committed to their jobs, to invest time and energy in them, to perform their duties competently and to deliver concrete results.

The ethical perspective

HR- and organizational-management ethics are particularly fashionable at the moment. 'This branch of ethics affects each part, each function and each process in the organizational world, and the field of industrial relations is no exception.' (Lapointe 2003, p. 1.)

That is why it comes as no surprise that the ethical perspective provides considerable grist for thinking about employee recognition. The ethical discourse promotes the idea that recognition is a question of human dignity and social justice, and not just an organizational performance or workplace mental health issue (Brun 2000). The concept of human dignity is founded on the belief that the person is an end in itself and, as such, should not be considered as a mere means or instrumental entity for the company (De Konink 1999). Human dignity and respect for the irreducible, inalienable nature of the person go hand in hand. In this perspective, the worker cannot be designated merely as a number, case or file.

The notion of equality among people, to which one is entitled simply by being human, is also associated with employee recognition. The latter becomes a duty of the modern company, especially in the demanding environment to which it subjects its workers (Bourcier and Palobart 1997). All in all, it constitutes a shared collective responsibility that falls to each member of the organization (Brun 2000). Recognition is therefore linked to the notion of concern for others, to the attention paid to outcomes and to the impact of actions taken (Brun 1999).

Finally, given the crisis of meaning or 'crisis of belief' (Lefebvre 2000) facing the modern world, some people favour a management ethic able to fulfil workers' need to have meaning, to fit in and to feel rooted (Pauchant 2000). Moreover, ethical factors are inherent to meaningful work (Morin 2001).

On an ethical level, recognition displays affinities with the concept of organizational justice. In its distributive, procedural and interactional forms (Aquino, Lewis and Bradfield 1999), organizational justice can be infused into an organization through certain practices, such as the following:

- Have senior management clarify organizational standards regarding the distribution of rewards, and treat workers fairly in accordance with these standards and the effective contribution of groups and individuals.
- Have company executives go to bat for their employees when they feel threatened or are affected by difficult decisions.
- Give thought to the human and ethical components of managers' decisions within the organization.
- Acknowledge past mistakes and the negative impact of poor decisions on employees.

In a broader sense, when recognition is viewed in an ethical light, it involves actions aimed at righting wrongs employees have suffered through specific managerial decisions. It also reflects openness to individual and organizational values. The following are a few practical examples obtained from one of our studies on recognition practices (Brun and Dugas 2002):

- Provide dismissed employees with professional services to ease the transition period, and help them find a new position or change careers.
- Establish an organizational culture that respects personal values and promotes their tie-in with organizational ones.
- Assign projects to employees that do not go against their core beliefs and the aspects they value about their work.

The humanistic and existential view

The humanistic and existential view, which is closely related to the ethical approach, is concerned with recognizing people, their being, their unique, distinctive character and their existence. The belief underlying this perspective is a fundamental trust in humanity and the potential of people and communities. Here the notion of justice is not central. The theory states that if you provide people with the proper working conditions – financial and material, of course, but chiefly in the area of relationships, communications, power and independence – it will be easier for them to approach their work positively and align themselves with organizational objectives. They will also work more creatively toward achieving these objectives (Martin, Lenhardt and Jarrosson 1996). According to this perspective, it is important to take the time to 'get to know the people we work with, fully acknowledge their existence and ultimately give meaning to their actions' through recognition (Bourcier and Palobart 1997, p. 21).

In the humanistic and existential view, recognition approaches employees or trade groups as bearers of intelligence, emotions, and expertise (Jacob 2001).

Specifically, it consists of an *a priori* recognition; that is, recognition immediately granted to everyone based on the principle of equality among people by virtue of their common humanity. It is often expressed in everyday interpersonal relations and gestures. In Bourcier and Palobart (1997)'s 'indifference–compensation' continuum, it appears to represent an advanced form of consideration. In our view, it should serve as the foundation of all other recognition practices.

Through existential recognition, individuals are granted the right to voice their opinions about and influence decision-making, as well as the course of their own and the organization's actions. In short, they are authorized to be a witness to and producer of the corporate enterprise. For employees, the indicator of existential recognition is the impression that others acknowledge their existence and take their needs into account. They also have a sense of being respected as a whole person, having unique physical, emotional, psychological and cognitive characteristics.

Although this type of recognition can be expressed through formal practices, it is more often than not informal and non-monetary. Following are examples of existential recognition practices (Brun and Dugas 2002):

- Regularly informing staff of organizational goals and strategies.
- Consulting and involving them in the various design and steering phases of projects.
- Authorizing personalized arrangements and flexible work schedules.
- Giving employees decision-making latitude in their jobs.
- Promoting their development by giving them access to training and upgrading courses.
- Getting managers to be more visible and accessible.
- Encouraging employees to support each other at work.

The work psychodynamics school

Work psychodynamics are concerned with people's subjective experience in the workplace, as well as the individual and group defence strategies they employ to maintain their psychological balance in disconcerting working conditions. The economy of suffering and pleasure in work also falls within its ambit.

According to the work psychodynamics theory, recognition is a reward expected by the subject that is largely symbolic in nature. It involves two central components: it is recognition in the sense of *acknowledgement*, or rather, 'recognition of the reality of the subject's contribution to the organization' (Dejours 1993, p. 225). The reference here is to actual work, rather than the work prescribed by the organization. This type of judgment tends to be frequently resisted by the management chain because it points to deficiencies in work organization. Recognition exists as well in the sense of *gratitude*, to highlight a worker's contribution to the performance of work. This second form of recognition is generally even less forthcoming in the workplace.

Recognition also stems from a judgment made about the work accomplished and its results; it is expressed in two ways. The first type of judgment, called the 'benefit judgment', is primarily issued by supervisory personnel, clients or subordinates, and addresses the social, economic and technical benefits of the employee's work. The recognition of results, which we touched on a bit earlier, is the most direct manifestation of this. The 'beauty judgment', meanwhile, is mainly pronounced by peers, who are in a better position than anyone else to judge the quality of work performed and the effort put in by the person. In passing judgment, this group recognizes that the person performed his/her work according to accepted practices. This sense of being appreciated by one's peers makes employees feel that they belong to a community. By being acknowledged for their particular way of doing things, their style (Clot 1999), and the characteristics that make them stand out from others (originality, elegance, ingenuity, thoroughness), they begin to feel recognized for the unique contribution they bring to their professional life.

Recognition of work performance deals with the manner in which employees carry out their duties, rather than the people themselves or the results they produce. It also deals with their behaviours, skills and professional qualifications.

Recognition of work performance focuses on employees' work process, most notably the creativity, innovation and continuous improvement they bring to their work methods. In the context of the work process, the main indicators for this type of recognition manifest themselves when individuals (or teams) feel recognized for their expertise, skills, ingenuity and professional qualifications in the way they perform their duties and solve problems. Subjects usually come away with a heightened sense of esteem and personal competency. Following are examples of actions for expressing the recognition of work performance (Brun and Dugas 2002):

- Encourage peer feedback on an employee's professional qualifications.
- Have managers recognize the expertise of each team member and give each employee assignments at par with his/her qualifications.
- Consider the work process in team assessments and employee performance evaluations.
- Give out professional practices awards; set up programmes to reward innovation.
- Obtain personalized thank-you letters from clients for the quality of service provided by employees.

It should be added that recognition of work performance focuses more on what employees do than who they are as people. The latter aspect is addressed by a second form of recognition vis-à-vis the work process: recognition of job dedication, by which employees are recognized for how hard they work, how well they apply themselves to their duties, and the consistency of their contribution.

Recognition of job dedication acknowledges the level of participation, commitment and contribution shown by an employee or team in the work process, as regards effort. Employees may sometimes fall short of expected results, despite their best efforts and know-how. It would be proper, nonetheless, to recognize the quality and intensity of the energy brought to the task, which are far too often the least visible aspects of the actual work. Recognition of job dedication is also an opportunity to highlight the contribution of less-productive employees and behind-the-scenes workers, such as those in technical or administrative support. Through their daily commitment, these workers contribute to the organization's effective ongoing operations. Finally, it is about recognizing the risks that employees take to fulfil their duties and the energy they bring under sometimes less-than-ideal conditions.

These different ways of recognizing job dedication all give employees the sense that their efforts are being noticed and appreciated, irrespective of the results of their work. This approaches the concept of 'pure recognition', as defined by Bourcier and Palobart (1997).

In our opinion, this recognition should be expressed in a way that is proportional to the effort the employee puts in or is capable of delivering, since recognition constitutes an act of truth and there is no room for flattery. Conversely, a workplace where major physical and psychological efforts are inadequately compensated can have an adverse effect on employees, according to an extensive study of German workers (De Jonge, Bosma, Siegrist, Peter et al. 2000).

Following are some good examples of this form of recognition:

- Manager thanking an employee for his/her involvement in a project (valuing participation).
- Manager recognizing the value of an employee's ideas, even if they cannot be put to use.

- Leading a round of applause in a meeting to highlight the time and effort invested in a team project.
- Supervisor sending a message to thank an employee for his/her courage and perseverance in difficult working conditions.

If recognition of work performance and job dedication plays a critical role in work psychodynamics, they are by no means the sole contributing factors. In other words, an organization does not necessarily have to avail itself of this approach to recognize the work performance and job dedication of its employees.

The behavioural outlook

The behavioural outlook embodies a viewpoint that differs greatly from the concept just described. Under this fourth approach, human behaviour is controlled by its consequences within an effort-reward model (Siegrist et al. 1990). Recognition thus becomes a method for positively reinforcing observable on-the-job actions and behaviours considered desirable by the company (Nelson 2001). In this way, the recognition of results takes on increased importance in behaviourist management practices. However, positive reinforcement is rarely advocated as the sole method for recognizing employees' work. Spontaneous, interpersonal expressions of recognition are considered just as important, if not the foundation for all practices aimed at reinforcing worker behaviour.

The behavioural approach is closely linked with recognition of results, although this type of recognition is not exclusive to it.

The recognition of results deals primarily with the end product of employees' work and their contribution to achieving corporate objectives. It is therefore a form of recognition that is expressed predominantly *a posteriori*, that is conditional in nature, and that has a direct tie-in with the organization's mission and objectives.

As an expression of judgment, appreciation and gratitude toward an individual or team, recognition of results is concerned primarily with the effectiveness, benefit and value of the work performed. It also involves an evaluation of employees' performance and productivity, as well as their successes and failures. Workers therefore feel they are being recognized for their contribution to delivering results, which has the effect of increasing their sense of usefulness, effort-reward balance (Siegrist 1996), effectiveness, and value to the organization. On the other hand, some studies also show that recognition of results, for example through salary (annual increases, bonuses, incentive bonuses, etc.) has little effect on employee performance in the medium and long terms (Bishop 1987).

Recognition of results is often expressed in a formal manner:

- Performance evaluation meetings.
- Ceremonies to highlight special achievements.
- Incentive bonuses when specific objectives have been achieved.
- Bonuses awarded for outstanding contributions.

But they can also occur more informally:

- Peers spontaneously congratulating an employee who has tackled a major work challenge.
- Manager saluting a job well done at a team meeting.

As it becomes increasingly common in the workplace, recognition of results is likely to have perverse effects, such as jealousy, sense of unfairness, more competitiveness among

employees and loss of credibility. For example, a survey of recognition practices at a parapublic organization revealed that the annual bonuses given to managers created jealousy among those who did not receive them and a sense of unfairness among employees who felt they were every much as deserving of a bonus as their supervisor. In addition, an exclusively results-oriented focus is liable to obscure the reality of the work process, disregarding the effort, emotional investment, risk taking and problem solving that goes on daily. This form of recognition must therefore be applied shrewdly and complemented with other signs of recognition (Appelbaum and Kamal 2000).

In any event, over and above the approaches and practices by which it is expressed, employee recognition is a phenomenon that exists on various levels, as a function of the sources of recognition and workplace dynamics.

The scope of employee recognition

The act of recognition needs to be considered from an interactional perspective that encompasses the notion of reciprocity and thus takes into account the bidirectional nature of all human relationships. Such a perspective highlights the fact that the expression of recognition presumes the establishment of a bipolar relationship between two or more individuals in the workplace and that, consequently, it can be expressed by either of the parties. Recognition may be mutual, one-way or non-existent between the parties, but it nonetheless represents a form of message that each person sends to the other. Whether understated or openly visible at the heart of industrial relations, recognition (or lack thereof) is expressed through various types of interaction.

Recognition-related interaction types

Our analysis reveals the presence of five types of recognition-related interaction, represented by the relationships formed on the organizational, vertical, horizontal, external and social levels.

On the *organizational* level, the concern for employee recognition is expressed through policies and programmes stating the organization's intention to recognize the work performed by its members. We are not referring here to concrete gestures made by managers or employees but rather to the structural elements of recognition (value, policy, mission, goal, etc.). If managers are mandated to develop recognition-related expertise and soft skills, organizations have a duty to enforce their declared guidelines so that words translate into action (Bourcier and Palobart 1997).

Vertical and *hierarchical* interactions are characterized by the recognition relationship that forms between the manager and the employee or team. This recognition can be expressed from the top down or the bottom up, but there is often an imbalance in this exchange. In some workplaces, managers give little recognition to their employees' contributions while, conversely, employees may show signs of recognition toward their manager and may exhibit mutual recognition amongst themselves (Jacob 2001). According to one poll (Crop 1999), 30% of all employees in the Canadian federal public service said they 'somewhat disagreed' or 'totally disagreed' with the statement that '[their] immediate supervisor recognizes their work appropriately'. However, a large-scale US study (Buckingham and Coffman 2001) revealed that the most compelling determiner of an employee's performance was the quality of the relationship with his/her immediate supervisor. Managers' reluctance to afford recognition to their employees may stem from a fear of losing control, apprehensions about others' creative power, resistance to more

egalitarian relationships and a detachment from employees' actual work (Hivon 1996) often caused by new management constraints. Other explanations have also been put forward: signs of recognition show weakness and can be perceived as flattery; they produce unintended effects; they must be handled with care; and they have to be expressed accurately (Hédoin, in Bourcier and Palobart 1996, p. 66). Finally, some authors (Brun and Dugas 2002) point to the fact that managers' failure to apply recognition practices is often due to a lack of time, skill and knowledge in this area.

The *horizontal* component, meanwhile, refers to the recognition that develops between peers and team members. This form of recognition is all the more important since, as was noted earlier, co-workers are the ones who are best placed to make a 'beauty judgment' about the quality of work performed and who foster the employee's sense of team spirit. Colleague recognition appears more trustworthy in their eyes, because it is free of managerial influence (Nelson 2001). Although horizontal recognition is more commonly practised than the vertical variety, it is still influenced by the current workplace situation. The advent of new work organization and corporate management techniques, coupled with job insecurity, can have the effect of intensifying competition among co-workers and, consequently, undermining the impetus for mutual solidarity and recognition (Dejours 2000). Moreover, Brun et al. (2003) show that organizations' performance context, the increase in manager/employee ratios, and the burgeoning of activities parallel to production or service provision are a few of the reasons why the relational conditions conducive to manager-employee or employee-employee recognition have gradually dwindled in modern organizations. Regarding recognition among co-workers, a 1999 Crop survey revealed that 31% of all employees in the Canadian federal public service congratulated other employees on their work only occasionally, rarely or never.

The *external* component is *related to service delivery* and involves not just clients and suppliers, but consultants and partners as well. This type of recognition is important, because when organizations suffer a serious decline in their work environments, employees may come to perceive it as the last remaining source of meaning and motivation for their jobs. The 'relational' or 'client' approach adopted by many organizations can create a context that encourages the expression of this form of recognition.

Lastly, the *social* component is concerned with the relationship that the organization and its employees have with the community, as well as the one that society at large has with the various trades and professions. This recognition may be expressed, for instance, in the community's esteem for an organization and its social value, or in social groups recognizing the role and contribution of specific professions (nurses, firefighters, etc.) to the wider society. Social recognition is also expressed in employees' volunteering spirit, stemming from their own recognition of their community's needs. It may also be perceived by the latter as their way of giving back to the community.

The wider the range of interaction types translated into meaningful recognition practices in the workplace, the greater employee satisfaction will be and, by extension, better corporate performance. Thus, in our view, by providing outlets for recognition on the vertical, horizontal and external levels, organizations will make a considerable first step toward achieving a culture of recognition.

Given the depth and complexity of the concept, we have included a summary table (see Figure 2) to illustrate how the various interaction types work in conjunction with employee recognition practices. The examples provided are not mutually exclusive, and are sometimes applicable to more than one recognition practice. Thus, the goal of this table is primarily to compare and contrast the different employee recognition practices.

Recognition Practices	Existential Recognition (Person/Group)	Recognition of Work Practice (Work Process)	Recognition of Job Dedication (Work Process)	Recognition of Results (Product, Result)
Interaction Levels				
Horizontal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social gatherings (create ties) Consultation among peers Support in addressing personal needs Information on topics of interest Recognition ceremony among co-workers when someone leaves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer feedback on professional skills Problem-solving groups Highlighting contributions, innovative thinking, and creativity at team meetings Mutual congratulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Praise for effort (person, team) Personalized letters acknowledging a co-worker's courage and perseverance Encouragement from peers to keep up effort and collective engagement Support among units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Party among peers to celebrate a success Giving someone a gift to mark a major career milestone Informal congratulations between two employees when goals have been achieved
Vertical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management accessibility and visibility Management accountability Participation in development Access to professional development Going to bat for employees Giving greater latitude in decision making Authorizing flexible schedules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assignments to special projects Authorizing employees to attend conferences Career support Employees' positive support for supervisor Valuing project leaders Congratulating an employee in front of peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking into account the quantity and difficulty of work when evaluating results Organizing leisure activities after a hectic period Employee thanking a manager for spending time with him/her 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance evaluation meetings Saluting a job well done in meetings Personalized letter to an employee who secured a contract for the company Posting team successes on departmental bulletin board Awarding plaques Manager publicly congratulating/thanking employees for their role in a project's success Establishing an honour roll
Organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personalized letters for life event (birthdays, etc.) Orientation meetings for new employees Access to less tedious jobs Employee suggestion programme Informing and consulting with staff Clarifying compensation standards Incorporating human issues into management decision-making Offering professional services to laid-off employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional practices awards Coaching and mentoring programmes Mobility programmes Innovation support and recognition programmes Teamwork recognition ceremonies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizing overtime Recognizing years of service Finding time for office social activities Allowing people time off to relax 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incentive bonuses Notes to staff or newsletters highlighting successes Awards of excellence, teamwork awards Discretionary recognition budget per unit or department Personalized congratulation messages for noteworthy achievements Recognition weeks
External (services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weighing the opinions of clients/consultants Personalized contact Providing consultants with information Greeting suppliers warmly Remembering clients' personal details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Verbal thanks from clients for the quality of service Meetings to evaluate consultant's work Offering consultants major contracts at par with their professional qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letters of recommendation for consultants, praising their energy and enthusiasm Giving suppliers positive feedback Client congratulating an employee for doing a good job in difficult circumstances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing satisfaction with consultant's work Awarding subsequent contract at a higher rate Gift from client (bottle of wine)
Social (community)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer work Respecting the culture and identity of specific groups in the community Community esteem for employee or company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Company publicly thanking a community organization for its work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizing work of seniors and pensioners Letter of recognition from the community commending a group of employees for their engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarding grants to organizations based on merit Recognition ceremonies Media coverage of positive results of company-community co-operation

PRACTICES

Figure 2. Interaction levels and recognition practices.

Practical implications of the proposed model

Employee recognition is being increasingly acknowledged as a management practice having a wide-ranging impact on people and organizations (Bishop 1987). Even though its criticality has been clearly identified, many organizations are still looking for ways to approach the concept in a strategic, orderly manner. The model we propose allows organizations to more clearly pinpoint the various possible expressions of recognition (existential, work practice, job dedication and results), and to systematically take stock of what recognition practices exist or are lacking in the workplace. For example, as part of the knowledge transfer activities conducted pursuant to this research project, we coached several organizations that had mapped out the recognition practices employed by their managers and workers. This mapping provides an overview of how recognition is implemented within the organization, showing what has been done and suggesting practices introduced in some work units but not in others. It also helps to identify what practices have been used less frequently and to guide the organization in rolling out its recognition efforts.

In fact, the model proposed in this article shows to what extent employee recognition can draw on various practices. We wanted to name these practices to provide managers and employees with concepts, terms and language that they can apply to their management practices and daily work routines.

Conclusion

This article highlights the fact that the current social and organizational context has made employee recognition a priority issue for organizations and the wider community alike. The majority of studies support the idea that the need for recognition is felt by a substantial portion of the workforce, regardless of the status or profession of workers (Saunderson 2004). Employee recognition is key to preserving and building the identity of individuals, giving their work meaning, promoting their development and contributing to their health and well-being (Grawitch et al. 2006). It also represents a constructive alternative to control- and monitoring-oriented management styles (Dandeker 1990). Finally, it fosters the growth, transformation and performance of organizations.

In light of its importance and the paucity of theoretical and practical material on the subject, acquiring a clearer understanding of the concept of recognition was imperative. We would therefore like to conclude this reflection by proposing the following definition for employee recognition:

Recognition is first and foremost a constructive response; it is also a judgment made about a person's contribution, reflecting not just work performance but also personal dedication and engagement. Lastly, recognition is engaged in on a regular or ad hoc basis, and expressed formally or informally, individually or collectively, privately or publicly, and monetarily or non-monetarily.

To better elaborate on our definition of employee recognition, we have broken it down into five components:

1. It constitutes a constructive, authentic response, preferably one that is personalized, specific, consistent, and short-term; and that is expressed through human relationships, against the backdrop of various types of work- and company-related interaction.
2. It is based on recognition of the person as a dignified, equal, free, and unique being who has needs, and also as an individual who is a bearer and generator of meaning and experience (ethical and existential nature of recognition).

3. It represents an act of judgment on workers' professional endeavours (recognition of work performance) as well as their personal commitment and collective engagement (recognition of job dedication). It also consists of an evaluation and celebration of results produced by employees and valued by the organization (recognition of results).
4. It is furthermore a regular daily or ad hoc exercise expressed through a set of practices that are formal or informal, individual or collective, private or public, and monetary or non-monetary in nature.
5. Finally, for its beneficiary, recognition represents a reward experienced primarily at the symbolic level, but may also take on emotional, practical or financial value.

Some of the points covered in this article already suggest future avenues of research, for example, the impact that recognition or lack thereof has on workers and organizations, as well as the obstacles to providing it, deserves further study. It would appear that, to be well founded, recognition practices must be incorporated into employees' and managers' daily work habits, into routine HR management practices, and into the current organization model. Consequently, there is a need to explore in greater depth the main conditions and dynamics to implementing relevant, wellness-promoting employee recognition strategies.

Furthermore, if, according to the ethical perspective, recognition must be given to all employees, must it take the same form for everyone? How do you develop recognition practices that are sufficiently universal but also meaningful for each individual? These are just a few of the questions that will need to be addressed in future research.

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