EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION (ER): A MOTIVATOR OR A MISTAKE IN ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS

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Abstract: *The workplace and the society at large, is the totality of people from different sphere of life and with varying ideologies and skills put together for existence. These people, at one time or another, want to be recognized for their actions, contributions as well as achievements. Yet, often times most of us do not give or receive enough of the recognition expected of us or due us as the case may be. There is therefore need to explore what employee recognition is all about and if it stands as a stimulating factor or a mistake in organizational success. The study focuses on the need to recognize employee in the workplace. It also highlights certain traits (negative) in some employees when they are being recognized. The paper further identifies ways of carrying out employee recognition in the workplace and how they in turn, help enhance organizational success. The paper employs an exploratory and narrative methodology where a critical review of existing puny literature was carried out. The issue of employee recognition should therefore be of serious concern to everyone. The study finds that employees value recognition and consider it as very important amongst other things. They want to be appreciated, applauded and recognized for their contributions. It further reveals reasons why some leaders avoid recognizing their employees. Based on the findings, the paper recommends among others, the need for adoption of an evaluating guide to help identify areas an employee needs to be recognized; and taking the job of recognition seriously and promptly. A simple "thank you" or "smile" may just be the encouragement someone needs to do better.*

Keywords: *Employee recognition, motivation, organizational success, evaluation guide.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations have goals which can only be achieved by pressing the right button and stimulating the employees to get the desired result. Employee recognition (ER) is one of the many possible ways of realizing this. Receiving recognition is a key driver for motivating staff and ultimately achieving business success. With the increasing catalog of literature promoting ways of improving productivity, many organizations are realizing the need to establish an equitable balance between an employee's contribution in the organization and the organization's contribution to that employee. Pratheepkanth (2011) believes that the key focus of recognition is to make employees feel appreciated and valued.

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Despite the array of studies carried out occasionally on the subject matter, many leaders and owners of businesses still exist who consider the idea of employee recognition as a fallacy that needs not be taken seriously. Therefore, there is still need for expanse knowledge to be impacted. Series of studies undertaken so far, show that most of the employees who get recognized tend to have higher self-esteem, more confidence, more willingness to take on new challenges and more eagerness to be innovative. In as much as some managers have not come to terms with the fact that managing people well yields productivity, Anyim, Chidi and Badejo (2012) strongly assert that the management of people at work is an integral part of the management process. It is an obvious fact that tangible assets such as salary, medical and dental coverage and sometimes vacation time are all important incentives that help to keep employee satisfied. However, understanding how to reward employees by ensuring that they feel appreciated and acknowledged can help to make the process easier. There is therefore need for managers to be well abreast.

This paper focuses on the need to recognize employee in the workplace. The main objective is to analyze and explore the spectrum of employee recognition and to deduce if it should be encouraged or put aside. Consequently, the paper goes further to determine when and how to carry out employee recognition; to examine some of the reasons behind employers' negligence to adopt employee recognition; and also, to ascertain better ways of applying ER programmes successfully.

The paper is divided into seven sections. The introductory section is followed by the literature review which extensively explores employee recognition as a concept and also as an inseparable and cogent part of motivation. Section three gives insight on the methodology employed. Findings and discussions are presented in section four. This is followed by the limitation of the study and the direction for further research and after which, we have the recommendations in section six and conclusion presented in the last section.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE RELATED CONCEPTS

2.1. Employee Recognition

Employees are the key to the productive outputs in an organization and ought to be effectively and adequately recognized for projects well implemented. Ude and Coker (2012) see employees as occupying very strategic role and position in the organization. They are responsible for converting inputs to productive output. The focus of attention is the employees. How well a manager selects and maintains its employees, goes a long a way to make the difference between high productivity and low industrial output. Inyang (2004) therefore proposes that for any organization to encourage higher productivity, it is essential that a system of reward

be designed to equate hard work and rewards. Kim (2005) asserts that there are two aspects of employee recognition, first, one gets to see, identify or realize an opportunity to praise someone, while the other is of course, the physical act of doing something to acknowledge and praise the people for work well done.

Recognition for work well done sends extremely positive signals to the recipients and others who are aware of the act of recognition. It is therefore a communication technique to be encouraged and used as a performance enhancer in the organization. It is a communication between management and employees which reward them for reaching specific goals or producing high quality results in the workplace. Heathfield (n.d.) sees employee recognition as a communication tool that reinforces and rewards the most important outcomes people create for your business. When you recognize people effectively, you reinforce, with their chosen means of recognition, the actions and behaviours you most want to see people repeat.

Kim (2005) presents employee recognition as the timely formal or informal acknowledgement of a person's or team's behavior, effort, or business result that supports the organization's goals and values and which has clearly presented itself been beyond normal expectations. Appreciation is a fundamental human need. Employees respond to appreciation expressed through recognition of their good work because it confirms their work is valued.

Jolton (2009) on the other hand, critically emphasizes the need to value an employee rather than mere recognition. He asserts that organizations are especially weak in creating an environment where employees truly feel valued. Recognizing an individual means successfully completing a project, while valuing someone is letting him or her know that you are glad he or she is on the team and that things would not be as good without them. He believes that valuing employees appears to be a driver of engagement more than recognizing their efforts.

It is pertinent to note that while Jolton (2009) tries to create a distinction between value and recognition, Kim (2005) sees them as working paripassu as one factor. When employees and their works are recognized and valued, their satisfaction and productivity rises and they are motivated to maintain and improve their good work.

2.2. Organizational Success

Every organization wishes to achieve success in its life time and never to go bankrupt. What then qualifies an organization as being successful? According to Pfeffer and Veiga (1999) for organizational success to be efficient, managers today, must begin to take seriously the often heard, yet frequently ignored, adage that "people are our most important asset"? Organizational success is a state where a business makes profit in its market share. It can also be defined as a state where

the company penetrates through the market and commands almost everything therein. For this to be evident, it requires proper people management.

An organization is said to emerge as successful when these seven dimensions are evidently inherent: employment security; selective hiring; sell-managed team and decentralization as basic elements of organizational design; comparatively high compensation contingent on organization compensation performance; extensive staff training; reduction of status differences; and lastly sharing of information. Maltz, Shenhar and Reilly (2003) in assessing organizational success in commercial firms, streamlined the dimensions of success in organization into five factors: financial, market, process, people and the future.

Successful organizations breed future focused leaders who know the essence of true employee recognition. Future focused leaders have a natural ability to identify individual and groups that play a critical role for the success of the organization and they work tirelessly to develop key relationships with them, while acknowledging their role and contribution to the organizations' visions. Kalleberg and Leicht (1991) base their measure for organizational success on a company's gross earnings. In line with these perspectives one can deduce that it takes the human factor to achieve efficient organizational success and as such needs to be well-managed. Through this process, credibility would be built and employees would be inspired to higher performance along with a strong sense of commitment and motivation. Supportively, Louis (2012) agrees that recognizing an employee is a key to realizing organizational success.
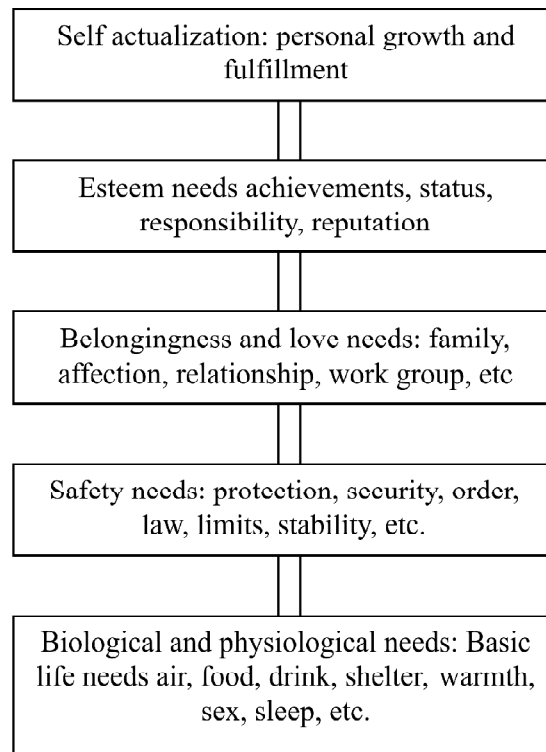
2.3. Motivation theories and Employee Recognition

Motivation happens to be the broad system which encompasses all there is to improve on the management and satisfaction of the human factor in an organization to yield better organizational success. It can be defined as the forces that cause people to behave in certain ways. Recognition of employee is one very important aspect of motivation. According to Onah (2003) motivation gets employees to work hard, to be at work regularly and to make positive contribution to the organization's mission. Inyang and Akpama (2002) see motivation as the will to act. As well, motivation is defined as the psychological forces that determine the direction of a person's behavior in an organization, a person's level of effort and a person's level of persistence (Jones and George, 2010). Motivating an employee can be a manager's biggest challenge. Several theories of motivation have over time being propounded to help give insight to what can really motivate people efficiently.

The theories of motivation emphasize the need for employee recognition. Some of the most famous content and process theories are the Maslow Need hierarchy, Herzberg's two factor theory; McClelland's three factors drive theory, Skinner's reinforcement theory; and Adam's equity theory. For the purpose of this paper,

we shall focus on that of Maslow, McClelland, Vroom; and lastly Lawrence and Norhia to be able to identify the emphasis on employee recognition.

(i) Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory:

Self actualization: personal growth and fulfillment

Esteem needs achievements, status, responsibility, reputation

Belongingness and love needs: family, affection, relationship, work group, etc

Safety needs: protection, security, order, law, limits, stability, etc.

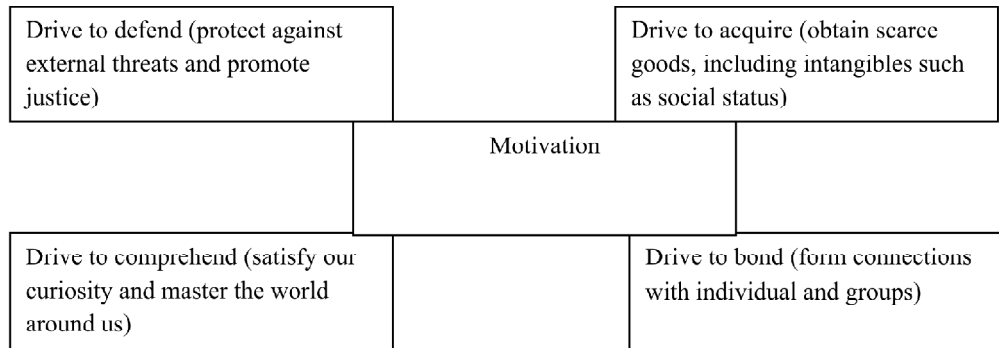| Biological and physiological needs: Basic life needs air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sex, sleep, etc. |
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Maslow (1943/54) develops a hierarchy of needs to describe how people seek to satisfy their needs. This theory organizes dozen of different needs into five basic categories arrange in this hierarchy. It should be noted that in this hierarchy, it is assumed that as a need gratifies, other level of needs arises. In as much as several researchers believe this theory to be a false assumption, our concern is to identify where recognition exists. From the third level, we can see that recognizing an employee creates a hug sense of belonging to that very organization, thereby encouraging them to have the drive to give their best in achieving immense productivity. To be really effective in your job, one needs to understand the psychology of praising others for their good works, and to apply the principles of employee recognition.

(ii) **McClelland learned needs theory:** David McClelland, a psychologist who tried to expand on Maslow's idea, paid more attention on three learned needs: achievement, power and affiliation (McClelland, 1961). This theory repeats the

point that a person's need can be strengthened or weakened. Managers, employers and even owners of business can strengthen or weaken employee need for achievement, power and affiliation by supporting an achievement-oriented culture, rewarding those who demonstrate achievement-orientation (employee recognition and living workers with such qualities).

(iii) **Vroom expectancy theory:** The expectancy theory of motivation also known as valence instrumentality, expectancy theory was developed by Victor H. Vroom. Vroom (1964) approaches motivation quite differently from the other two. It explains why an individual chooses to act out a specific behavior or oppose to another. Emphasis is placed on the need to reflect employee's recognition in the goals sought by an organization. The theory assumes that if a worker sees high productivity as a path leading to the attainment of one or more of his personal goals, he will tend to be a high performer. Conversely, if he tends to perceive low productivity as a path to the achievement of his goals he will tend to be a low producer. This explains why when productivity made by an employee is appreciated, he or she feels very fulfilled and seeks to perform more.

(iv) **Four Drive Theory**

Drive to defend (protect against external threats and promote justice)		Drive to acquire (obtain scarce goods, including intangibles such as social status)
	Motivation	
Drive to comprehend (satisfy our curiosity and master the world around us)		Drive to bond (form connections with individual and groups)

From Lawrence and Norhia's (2002) point of view, these drives underline everything we do. Intention to quit (employee turnover) may occur when their drives are lacking. Fulfilling the drive to bond has the greatest effect on employee recognition. This in turn sets the drive to protect the organization from loss and external eventualities. There is a direct impact of employees feeling rewarded and recognized as their motivation to do more productive task. These rewards do not necessarily have to be monetary; the feeling of accomplishment alone is a huge motivation.

3.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper employs an exploratory and narrative methodology where a critical review of existing puny literature was carried out. The issue of employee

recognition is of serious concern to researchers, employees and organizations at large and as such has attracted a surfeit of relevant contributions.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Importance of Employee Recognition

An organization is considered as less at risks when it has people that are loyal, committed, trained and qualified working at different levels, departments, offices, etc. (Bolton, 2013). Give everyone an annual raise, make sure the working environment and conditions are suitable, resignation will stop or reduce to a minimal and retention of staff achieved. For organizations to be efficiently and effectively productive, it must go beyond retention of staff. Retention of staff would only ensure that they show up every morning and stay to the close of the day and get paid at the end of month, but taking initiative, meeting schedules and deadlines, operating with a seriousness of purpose and drive, require relationship building and employee recognition programmes that are effective and well implemented.

According to Hart (2011) recognition of employee is another way of demonstrating respect for your employees. A meaningful and thoughtful employee appreciation programme is about valuing employees' efforts and having respect for who they are and what they do. Employee recognition is important in the following ways:

– It keeps organization from capsizing, thereby increasing productivity and raise revenues, the ability to effectively thank, reveal, and coach with recognition can make a sustained difference to an employee's career and a company's future.

– Holistic ER programmess are aimed at building relationships and improving the performance across organization. It can influence the overall success of any organization programmes. When people inside your company (employees) feel a sense of belonging and appreciation, they will extend that same attitude and commitment, through communications, to the people outside your company (customers and possible future applicants).

4.2. Why Leaders do Not Engage in ER

Reactions from colleagues: Most often employee recognition results in other employees complaining, jealousy and dissatisfaction. When this is the case, performance is low thereby affecting the productivity of the organization.

Lack of expertise: Being abreast with the need to adopt employee recognition programme is one thing yet knowing how well and what to do in implementing it is another. Not knowing how to provide ER programme effectively can mar the whole process thereby leading to bad experience or outcome.

Prideful display: When employees get recognized, it is unexpected that they react to it in like manner. It may improve or stall your performance. Employees sometimes assume an "oversize fits all" attitude when they are recognized, which is not at the advantage of the organization.

4.3. Employee Recognition and Organizational Success

Organizations, whether they are educational, business, industrial, government, military, service, healthcare, or entertainment focused, are made up of people – women and men (Warigon, n.d.). Some organizations do not appreciate the fact that it is the people (employees) that ensure the day-to-day functioning of the system. Such organizations are more apt on embracing the business system rather than motivating the employees to achieve significant improvements in business performance. Employees are an organization's greatest asset (Dhonnchadha, 2012). If an indicator of a successful organization is one that manages it assets and experiences effectively, then people-management should be at the forefront of an organization's business strategy.

Recognition of employee goes a long way to affect the flow of work and productivity in an organization and as such should be treated with seriousness. This is so because satisfaction of the basic needs of life such as food, shelter, etc., are taken for granted by a large majority of employees, hence emphasis has shifted to interesting work, achievement, recognition, challenge and self actualization (Remi, Abdul-Azeez and Toyosi (2011). They categorize recognition as the extrinsic aspect of rewards desired by employees. They opine that extrinsic rewards can come in different ways as paychecks, performance, bonuses, praise, etc., and this aid in the pursuit of strategic and operational goals of an organization. With the large range of business running in millions, vying for customers, an organization must be able to motivate and properly compensate employees or risk falling behind competitors or worse still has employees that do not have the drive to tackle challenging roles.

Organization achieves immediate as well as long term benefits when their recognition programmes are effectively implemented. This is why Drucker (1974) insists that the work of management is make people productive so as to achieve superior performance and gain competitive edge in the globalized arena through effective compensation packages. Knowledge retention in the organization is also heightened. When the workforce is well recognized and motivated for their efforts, retention is impacted positively because employees with critical organizational knowledge and experience are less likely to leave; rather, they stay and pass that knowledge and experience on to other employees and future entrants.

4.4. Some of the Disadvantages of Employee Recognition

Well intended recognition can also miss the mark and cause disasters for the organization. To the organization, it was meant to appreciate and recognize staff

for work well done and boost further positive contributions. However, these perks can turn out to be the stimulant to several negative traits displayed by employees in the work place. Lewis (2014) emphasizes that in as much as employees at all levels and strata love to receive praise at one time or another, their approach to it differs. The main idea behind recognition is to confirm an employee is doing well and working in line with the organization's expectations.

Despite the numerous positive credits attached to recognition, it still has series of identified flaws as well as disadvantages among which are listed thus:

– **Ego building**: Employees who are naturally prone to getting a "big head" after receiving too much verbal praise may begin to exhibit destructive behavior in the workplace. Those with egocentric outlook may assume they are the only ones being praised and may believe they are the most favourite or top employees.

– **Selective praise:** When an employee is constantly being praised, it tends to create a divide between workers if it is given selectively to just one or two persons. Even when those employees actually deserve the praise for doing their jobs better, it could create friction resulting to jealousy, and in some cases affect performance of others who conclude that they can never do well.

– **Efficiency**: often time, when an employee is being recognized, he or she may decide to feel relaxed and disengaged from further learning. Lewis (2014) opines that an employee who is told he/she is doing an exceptional job all the time might be prone to thinking there is no need for improvement. This may eventually affect the performance of such employee towards tackling situational changes aimed at achieving success in that organization. There is also the tendency of such employee not to key into the reverse mentoring factor from other colleagues when the need arises.

– **Unnecessary incites**: employers sometimes do this to encourage employee to continue working and as a way of managing them well. This is the praise given to employee even when they have not actually carried out any specific outstanding project. The disadvantage of doing this is that an employee who knows that he has not really being up to his best in carrying out his duty and gets such praise may assume he is being fooled and decide to seek employment elsewhere where he would be praised or reprimanded where necessary.

4.5. Causes of failure of ER programmes

In the quest for measures to step up their relationship with employees, managers often times, take up different employee recognition strategies and

programmes. The essence of this is to reap the benefits in morale and greater productivity resulting from programmes that is clearly defined and in which the employees feel they can earn recognition for exceptional work. Only a well designed employee recognition programme would be able to alleviate some of these impacts and boost morale significantly. However some ER programmes rebound and result in low morale and no increase, or even a decrease in productivity. When this happens, the employer, manager and even business owners perceive it as a mistake to have adopted ER programme.

Adopting ER programme is not necessarily the problem, rather there are several factors militating against it, thereby causing it to appear as a mistake. Some of such reasons are arrayed as:

- Design of the programme: The nomination form for candidates to be recognized may appear too cumbersome for other employees to fill. The form should be structured in simple and clear terms to ease documentation required for the consideration of the nominated employee.

- Unknown criteria for recognition: In some organizations, their ER programmes are not based on definable and measurable criteria. The criteria used for an employee to be recognized should be well understood by them. This would help employees to be up and doing. When the criteria for recognition are not very familiar to certain employees, they begin to feel that those getting the recognition are just the bosses' favourites and pets. Certain factors like personality and perception of an employee should play little or no essence in the recognition programmes. Also, employees may quibble and begin to shun other employees recognized when such poor programmes are adopted.

- Unavailability of recognition strata: This is one of the typical problems experienced with some ER programmes. Once an employee achieves recognition award, he may feel fulfilled, satisfied and too relaxed to push further in order to achieve more. There should be different levels of recognition awards encouraging employee to work harder in the organization. When an employee achieves a recognition award, it is recommended that another award to work toward be there to serve as continuous motivator. By creating strata of recognition, an employee should be pushed positively to avoid slipping into lower performance level after being recognized.

- Unfair review team: During nominations of employee to receive and be awarded recognition, it is necessary and most important for the screening team to be fair and just. Having a nomination review team that is not dedicated to ensuring the right employees receive the recognition is another mistake made in development of ER programmes in organization.

4.6. Strategies for Successful and Effective ER Programmes

– Align ER programmes to organization vision. The overall corporate strategies of the organization should be at heart when considering employees for recognition. This would serve as an investment to the organization rather than an expense. There should be a connection between the needs and expectations of the workforce and the organization's goals and strategies. When this is done, employees would know what area of the organization's objective they have contributed to when being recognized. If this is not so, employees would be left wondering why the recognition was offered and as such not give it any meaningful payback on its investment.

– Total commitment: There should be room for unbiased team of peers or management or a blend of both levels of employees to consider and reconsider nomination, manager must commit credible and sufficient resources to any incentive programme (Daniel and Metcalf, 2005).

– The design of the ER programme: To enjoy the benefits of an ER programmes one must ensure that the design is effective. Avoid a programme backfire causing dissention and strife, lower productivity and lower morale. Removing the name of the nominees and having only the facts available for consideration would go a long way to ensure impartiality of the process.

– Authenticity: Saying thank you in a way that is honest, genuine and treating them as a person and not as a body. This would produce a level of commitment and positive momentum that no amount of money can buy. Employees should be enlightened to understand what to do to gain recognition (Daniel and Metalf, 2005).

– Sustained evaluating system: An effective ER programme is that which is continuously followed up, evaluated and revised to keep them relevant and current. The evaluation process should be completed at the conclusion of each recognition award cycle. This is to aid for adjustment in order to improve and update the system. When you start an employee reward programme, do not suddenly stop it. Make sure the programme you design is one you plan on following through year after year. (Sheid, 2010).

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

It is evident that the general knowledge of the literature is that a well mapped out and implemented ER programme impacts on organizational success. However, the obvious major limitation of this study is that it did not empirically take up survey of organizations that have adopted and used ER programmes in the past to be able to ascertain how well it played out.

The direction for further study therefore, should be to employ good survey and sampling techniques where questionnaires would be administered to derive answers for better result. Undertaking empirical studies would offer more insight about employee recognition.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Remember, recognition can be a good recruitment tool. An organization's recognition programme can factor into a candidate's decision to join an organization. We shall therefore adopt the SSMART way of Daniel and Metacalf (2005) in carrying out better ER programme

1. Support organizational goal and values: Any recognition award will be most successful when they are congruent with organization's stated mission, vision, values and goals.

2. Sincere and simple award culture.

3. Meaningful: The award must be meaningful to the receiver. This would require the manager to have enough information about his subordinates to be able to ascertain what motivates them.

4. Adaptable: Presenting an array of adaptable incentives and recognition opportunities.

5. Relevant: Try to apply a more specific and relevant award.

6. Timely: The recognition should be timely and as possible close to the desired behavior.

It is worthy to note therefore that when considering ER strategy, nothing is more desirous than a sincere "thank you", "a smile", "a pat on the back", "thumb up" or even "gestured nod". This may just be the only acknowledgement as well as encouragement one needs to perform better.

7. CONCLUSION

Employees exist to work towards achieving organizational goals and objectives. It is based on this premise, that recognizing them for their contributory efforts is not to be underestimated. What an employee gives as output is highly depended on what he takes in as input. Meaningful words can be much more powerful than the proverbial gold watch. Real recognition does not need to cost a lot; it just needs to be specific, sincere and timely.

Our research indicates that a little recognition as long as it is the right type can go a long way. The important key there is to make sure you remain aware of the rewards employee values most. By so doing, a more satisfied and productive employee can produce positive result in the organization.

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