



Enhancing Employee Performance in the Civil Service: Does Positive Recognition Matter?

Ntshalintshali Thabisile Tekhaya & Kule Julius Warren

Department of Business Administration

Faculty of Commerce

University of Eswatini

ORCID – <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3029-7899>

Email: ntshalintshali.zekhaya.2016@gmail.com/jwkule@uneswa.ac.sz

Abstract: *This study investigated the impact of positive recognition on employee performance within the Ministry of Finance in the Hhohho Region of Eswatini. The research focused on identifying the effect of positive recognition on employee performance. A quantitative approach was employed, with data collected through structured questionnaires from a sample of 252 civil servants. The study utilised inferential statistical analysis to examine the relationship between positive recognition and employee performance, particularly in areas such as engagement in decision-making and appreciation from superiors. The results revealed that positive recognition significantly enhances employee performance ($F\text{-value} = 43.738, p < 0.001$). Aspects such as managers involving staff in decision making, and managers seeking employees' opinion in meetings were identified as key positive elements of recognition. The findings highlight the importance of fostering a supportive work environment through effective recognition practices to improve overall employee performance. The study concludes that workers' engagement in decision-making and appreciation from management should be implemented to improve recognition in the Eswatini Public Sector in order to enhance motivation and productivity of their workforce.*

Keywords: Appraisal, Appreciation, Employee, Performance, Recognition

How to cite this work (APA):

Thabisile, T. & Kule, J. W. (2025). Enhancing employee performance in the civil service: Does positive recognition matter? *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 9(2), 180 – 187. <https://doi.org/10.59765/pvyb2949>.

1. Introduction

Positive recognition is an organisational practice aimed at acknowledging and appreciating employees for their contributions, efforts, and achievements. It is generally perceived as a motivator that fosters a sense of value and belonging in employees, thereby enhancing their commitment to the organization (Prakasha, 2015). Recognition can range from informal verbal praise to formal awards or public acknowledgment of

accomplishments (Culbertson, 2019). In the workplace, positive recognition not only helps in validating employees' efforts but also plays a critical role in enhancing job satisfaction and overall performance (Bosire et al., 2021).

According to Jo and Shin (2025), positive recognition refers to any act that conveys appreciation for an employee's work and encourages repeat behaviors. Recognition acts as a significant intrinsic motivator, with

employees feeling more appreciated when their achievements are publicly acknowledged or rewarded (Yang & Xia, 2023). Therefore, positive recognition encompasses both formal (e.g., bonuses, promotions) and informal (e.g., compliments, thank-you notes) methods of acknowledging employees (Owoeye et al., 2020). These forms of recognition have been shown to affect not only individual motivation but also team dynamics and overall organisational success (Meena et al., 2019).

Positive recognition, as a form of feedback and acknowledgment for employees' achievements and contributions, has been shown to have a significant impact on job satisfaction, motivation, and overall performance in various organisational settings (Bosire et al., 2021). However, there is a lack of specific research focusing on the role of positive recognition in enhancing the performance of civil servants in Eswatini. Understanding how positive recognition influences employee performance within the context of performance appraisal can provide valuable insights for policymakers and human resource (HR) professionals in the public sector. A study by Robert and Jenny (2025, p.1) revealed that "practices of promoting employee recognition and inclusion exhibit the strongest effects on entrepreneurial attitudes of public servants, via person-job and person-organisation fit respectively." However, the same study revealed that there is limited knowledge on unlocking public sector employee's full potential. This study aims to address this gap by examining the relationship between positive recognition and employee performance in this specific setting. The lack of context-specific research on recognition practices in Eswatini's public sector represents a significant gap in literature. While general principles of employee recognition have been established in global research, the unique cultural, organisational, and economic factors that influence the effectiveness of recognition remain underexplored (Strongman, 2016). Brun & Dugas (2008, p. 717) state that, "in fact that a lack of recognition constitutes the second-largest risk factor for psychological distress in the workplace." This study is justified by the need to develop contextually relevant recognition strategies that can effectively enhance employee performance in this specific environment.

In Eswatini, civil servants play a pivotal role in governance and public service delivery. Establishing effective recognition practices could enhance employee morale and productivity, thereby improving overall governance and service delivery in the country. The culture of recognition in the public sector has often been overlooked, with limited formal structures for recognising employee performance (Amarullah & Wismono, 2019). Recent studies have suggested that civil servants value acknowledgment for their work but often report a lack of

structured recognition mechanisms (Romzek, 1985). Research by Marrengane (2021) highlighted that civil servants in Eswatini are motivated by positive recognition, but the formal processes for recognising their contributions are often not well-established.

As a result, employee morale and productivity may suffer due to this lack of knowledge. The same study found that civil servants who felt recognised and valued showed greater engagement in their work and were more likely to provide quality public service. Furthermore, government policies tend to prioritise financial rewards rather than non-monetary forms of recognition, which could result in missed opportunities to motivate employees (Romzek, 1985). In a study conducted by Victor and Hoole (2021), employees expressed a preference for recognition that includes both tangible rewards (such as monetary bonuses) and intangible recognition (such as praise from superiors). These employees noted that informal recognition through appreciation emails and verbal praise led to improved morale and engagement, although such methods were not consistently implemented across Ministries (Alahiane et al., 2023).

This study addresses the question: How does positive recognition relate to employee performance in the Civil Service in the Hhohho Region, Eswatini? By identifying key recognition practices, the research seeks to offer valuable insights for improving employee performance through tailored recognition strategies.

2. Literature Review

Recent studies underscore the importance of customised recognition practices aligned with individual employee preferences (Ghimire et al., 2021). For instance, Maheshwari (2019) found that when recognition resonates with employees' personal values, it significantly boosts job satisfaction and performance. This underscores the need for a tailored approach to recognition, particularly in public sector organisations. Recognition plays a critical role in performance appraisal systems and is directly linked to employee motivation and satisfaction. (Bosire et al., 2021) posits that effective performance appraisals that incorporate recognition practices are likely to yield better employee outcomes. Positive recognition instills a sense of value and belonging, which is crucial for improving employee performance (Dangol, 2021). Research further indicates that forms of recognition, such as verbal praise, awards, and public acknowledgment, motivate employees and enhance organisational commitment (Ghimire et al., 2021; Yang & Xia, 2023). A study conducted by Owoeye et al., (2020) delved into the correlation between recognition and employee motivation within public sector

organisations. The results revealed that employees who received consistent recognition exhibited heightened levels of intrinsic motivation and engagement. This suggests that recognition not only elevates morale but also bolsters the dedication of civil servants to their respective roles. In an extensive analysis, Nnamdi (2023) scrutinised diverse recognition programs implemented in civil service departments across various nations. Their study concluded that structured recognition initiatives notably enhanced job satisfaction among employees, resulting in reduced turnover rates and increased productivity levels.

Tayyab and Saira, (2021) conducted a study focusing on the cultural aspects of employee recognition within the civil service sector. Their research highlighted the significant impact of cultural values on how recognition is perceived and embraced by employees. In cultures that prioritise collectivism, recognition emphasising team accomplishments proved more effective than individual acknowledgment. Recent research by Bosire et al., (2021) delved into the direct relationship between recognition practices and performance outcomes in civil service organisations. Their findings indicated that entities implementing regular recognition programs witnessed a substantial improvement in employee performance metrics, encompassing efficiency and work quality. Looking towards the future, a meta-analysis by Kumar, (2024) underscored the necessity for further exploration into innovative recognition strategies aligning with the evolving dynamics of the workforce, particularly in the realm of remote work and digital communication. They advocate for adapting recognition practices to suit contemporary work environments as imperative for sustaining employee engagement.

2.1 Types of Positive Recognition

There are various types of positive recognition that organisations can use to acknowledge employees' contributions. These types can be broadly categorised into intrinsic and extrinsic forms of recognition (Harrison, 2024). Extrinsic recognition includes monetary rewards, such as bonuses, salary increases, and promotions, as well as non-monetary awards like certificates, trophies, or formal public acknowledgment (Phillips et al., 2017). Intrinsic recognition, on the other hand, includes recognition that caters to emotional and psychological well-being, such as verbal praise, thank-you notes, and career development opportunities (Romzek, 1985). The following are types of positive recognition.

Verbal and Written Praise: This is one of the most common forms of informal recognition. It involves supervisors or peers acknowledging an employee's contribution through appreciative words or written messages, such as emails or

notes. This form of recognition has been found to have a significant positive impact on employee motivation and job satisfaction (Kumari, 2020). **Awards and Incentives:** Awards in the form of bonuses, gifts, or public recognition during formal events are extrinsic forms of recognition. Studies have shown that employees who receive tangible rewards for good performance feel valued and are more likely to repeat such behaviors (Ayandele & Etim, 2020). These rewards can range from gift cards to recognition during annual award ceremonies or celebrations (Wei & Yazdanifard, 2014). Recognising employees by providing them with career development opportunities, such as training or promotions, is another key form of positive recognition. This type of recognition aligns with employees' career goals and demonstrates an investment in their future (Alrefaei, 2020). Research by Dash and Sandhyavani (2019) found that career development recognition is linked to higher job satisfaction and reduced turnover intentions among employees.

Peer Recognition: Peer-to-peer recognition is an informal yet powerful form of acknowledgment where colleagues recognise each other's contributions. Peer recognition has been linked to improved team dynamics, better communication, and increased overall team productivity (Ho & Nguyen, 2021). Employees often perceive peer recognition as more authentic and meaningful.

2.2 Positive Recognition and Performance

Although studies have consistently shown that there is a relationship between recognition and employee performance (Yang & Xia, 2023), results remain mixed. Some research indicates that while recognition can enhance motivation and job satisfaction, its impact on overall performance may vary depending on individual and organisational factors (Bosire et al., 2021). For instance, a study by Bosire et al., (2021) found that recognition programs significantly improved performance in high-performing teams, while other studies suggested that the effectiveness of recognition diminishes in environments lacking supportive leadership (Dhanpat, 2014). Positive recognition serves as a catalyst for employee performance in several ways. First, recognition contributes to increased employee motivation by making individuals feel valued for their efforts, which in turn enhances their engagement and commitment to the organisation (Yang & Xia, 2023). Recognition practices foster a work environment in which employees are more likely to go above and beyond their job responsibilities, striving for excellence and innovation (White, 2014).

A study by Jo and Shin, (2025) is of the view that employees who receive recognition regularly report higher job satisfaction levels, which results in increased productivity and a better quality of service.

It is stated that employees feel recognised and valued, they are less likely to seek employment elsewhere or disengage from their responsibilities (Nkomazana et al., 2015). This is particularly relevant in the public sector, where employee turnover can disrupt operations and service delivery(Lee & Jimenez, 2010). KHAN et al., (2023) also suggests that positive recognition helps to establish a sense of trust and loyalty between employees and management, thus improving organisational culture and reducing internal conflicts. Where trust in leadership is critical, recognition serves to strengthen the relationship between employees and managers, ultimately improving the effectiveness of public service delivery (Thusi et al., 2022).

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research methodology to examine the relationship between positive recognition and employee performance. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to employees across three sub-sections of the Ministry of Finance in Eswatini: Treasury, Internal Audit, and Headquarters. The questionnaire included items related to employee recognition and performance, with a total of 252 respondents participating in the study. The items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The reliability of the research instruments was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha,

with all dimensions achieving excellent reliability scores ranging from 0.891 to 0.948, well above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7. Notably, the recognition factors dimension achieved a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.943, indicating high internal consistency. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics followed by inferential statistical analysis (ANOVA). This approach was chosen because ANOVA allows for the comparison of means across multiple groups, enabling the identification of significant differences in the data that may not be apparent through descriptive statistics alone. This methodology enhances the robustness of the findings and supports the validity of the conclusions drawn from the study (Kim, 2014).

4. Results and Discussion

A total of 252 questionnaires were distributed, with 161 responses received, representing a 64% response rate. This robust response rate ensured the representativeness of the sample and provided a strong foundation for statistical analysis.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The study generated descriptive statistics to summarize and characterize the key features of the data collected, providing a clear overview of the sample's demographics and primary variables. This was later used to inform the analysis of inferential results. Table 1 below shows descriptive results from respondents who participated in the study.

Table 1: Respondent’s perspectives on Positive Recognition in the Ministry of Finance

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Our superiors always engage us before taking decisions.	161	3.77	0.8
My superiors usually request for our opinions during work meetings.	161	3.31	1.324
My superiors always appreciate my work	161	3.48	1.124
I feel valued in my job.	161	2.98	1.282
Average		3.385	1.1325

From Table 1 above, the highest mean score (3.77) for "Our superiors always engage us before taking decisions," indicates a strong perception of involvement in decision-making processes, suggesting that participative management is relatively well-established within the Ministry. The lower standard deviation (0.800) indicates a consensus among respondents regarding their engagement in decision-making. "My superiors always appreciate my work" received a moderate mean score of 3.48, suggesting that while appreciation exists, it may not be consistently practiced across all departments or by all supervisors. The higher standard deviation (1.124) indicates variability in experiences among employees. "I feel valued in my job" received the lowest mean score (2.98), suggesting that despite specific recognition practices, employees may not consistently experience an overall sense of being valued. This highlights a potential gap between recognition actions and their impact on employees' perceptions of value. The

average mean score across the four statements was 3.385, which indicates a generally positive perception of recognition and engagement, as it is above the midpoint of a typical 5-point Likert scale. Overall, while the average mean score reflects a generally positive perception, the individual statements reveal specific areas for improvement, particularly in enhancing how valued employees feel in their roles.

4.2 Inferential Statistics

The study sought to assess the effect of positive recognition on employee performance in the Ministry of Finance, Eswatini. Table 2 below shows correlation co-efficients between positive recognition and performance in the Ministry of Finance, Eswatini.

Table 2: Relationship between positive recognition and performance

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	42.79	4	10.697	43.738	.000 ^b
	Residual	38.154	156	0.245		
	Total	80.944	160			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Positive Recognition

Table 2 presents a regression sum of squares of 42.790, while the residual sum of squares was 38.154. The total sum of squares is 80.944, which is the sum of the regression and residual sums of squares. The F-value of 43.738 indicates that the model is statistically significant. This high value suggests that at least one of the predictors is significantly related to the dependent variable. The p-value of 0.000 indicates that the results are statistically significant at any conventional alpha level (e.g., 0.05). This means there is strong evidence to reject the view that positive recognition does not affect employee performance. In fact positive recognition has a significant effect on performance. Inferential statistics demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between positive recognition and employee performance (F-value = 43.738, $p < 0.001$). This finding is supported by the results of the study conducted by Stajković and Luthans (2003), which

revealed that positive recognition enhances employee performance.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that positive recognition is a critical factor in enhancing employee performance. These findings are supported by existing literature, including the works of Bosire et al., (2021), which emphasize the importance of recognition in the workplace. Future research should further investigate the nuances of how different forms of recognition impact employee perceptions and performance outcomes. The study highlights that many existing recognition models may not fully account for individual employee preferences. Traditional recognition frameworks often fail to consider the nuances of motivation in diverse work environments. Therefore, there is a need for more

adaptable models that incorporate employee feedback and preferences to optimise recognition strategies.

The study further established that positive recognition serves as a powerful catalyst for improving employee performance by fostering a culture of appreciation and support. This study's findings suggest that effective recognition strategies not only motivate employees but also strengthen their commitment to organisational goals. Employees who feel valued are more likely to contribute meaningfully to their teams and the broader organisational objectives. In support of the above, (Prakash, 2015) argues that recognition not only enhances individual performance but also cultivates a sense of belonging and loyalty among employees, ultimately leading to higher levels of productivity and job satisfaction.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, positive recognition plays a pivotal role in enhancing employee performance in the Ministry of Finance, Hhohho Region, Eswatini. This study on positive recognition and employee performance highlighted several key aspects, including the engagement of subordinates in decision-making processes, the solicitation of employee opinions during work meetings, the appreciation of individual contributions, and the overall feeling of being valued in one's job. These factors were found to have significant correlations with employee performance, indicating that when employees feel recognised and valued, their motivation and productivity increase. The study revealed a positive relationship between positive recognition and performance, suggesting that organisations can enhance employee engagement and effectiveness by fostering a culture of appreciation and open communication. This underscores the importance of supportive leadership in creating an environment where employees feel empowered, ultimately driving organizational success and improving overall performance in the workplace. To further enhance the effectiveness of recognition practices, the following recommendations are proposed:

5.2 Recommendations

To further enhance the effectiveness of recognition practices, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Develop Structured Recognition Programs that Acknowledge Both Individual and Team Contributions: It is essential to create formalised

recognition programs that celebrate achievements at both the individual and team levels. This could include awards, public acknowledgments during meetings, or a dedicated recognition platform. By implementing structured programs, the Ministry can ensure that all employees feel valued for their unique contributions, fostering a sense of belonging and motivation to excel.

2. Foster a Culture of Appreciation through Regular Feedback and Communication: Establishing a culture where appreciation is a norm requires consistent and open communication. Regular feedback sessions, both formal and informal, should be encouraged to provide employees with insights into their performance and areas for improvement. Additionally, leaders should model appreciation by recognizing efforts and successes in real-time, which can significantly enhance employee satisfaction and loyalty.

3. Tailor Recognition Practices to Align with Individual Employee Preferences and Values to Ensure Greater Effectiveness: Understanding that each employee is unique, it is crucial to customize recognition efforts to align with individual preferences and values. This could involve conducting surveys to gather insights into what forms of recognition employees value most, whether it be verbal praise, monetary rewards, or opportunities for professional development. By personalizing recognition, the Ministry can ensure that employees feel genuinely appreciated, leading to increased motivation and commitment to their roles.

5.3 Limitations of the Article

The study's limitations include its focus on a single ministry within Eswatini, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other public sector organisations. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data could introduce bias, as employees may report more favourable perceptions of recognition than they experience.

5.4 Managerial Implications

Managers in the Ministry of Finance can leverage the study's findings by prioritising recognition practices that promote employee motivation and engagement. By fostering a culture of appreciation and aligning recognition with employee preferences, managers can improve performance outcomes, leading to enhanced service delivery in the public sector.

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