

Strategic Reward and Recognition Systems: Driving Employee Engagement and Retention in Talent Management Practices

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the role of strategic reward and recognition systems in talent management and their influence on employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention. While financial incentives remain important, modern organisations increasingly adopt non-monetary rewards such as recognition programs and career development opportunities to foster long-term motivation and loyalty. Findings indicate that well-structured reward systems enhance engagement, job satisfaction, and retention, even in competitive labor markets. However, emerging economies like Nigeria face implementation challenges due to limited resources, leading to higher turnover rates among skilled employees. Through a literature review and thematic analysis, this research identifies best practices for integrating rewards into talent management frameworks. Key insights reveal that organisations must tailor reward systems to employee preferences while addressing structural barriers to implementation. A holistic approach balancing monetary and non-monetary incentives proves most effective in sustaining engagement and reducing attrition. Additionally, fostering a culture of recognition strengthens organisational commitment and performance. The study underscores the need for adaptive reward strategies that align with global standards while accommodating local workforce dynamics. By modernising compensation frameworks and leveraging recognition as a motivational tool, organisations can retain top talent, improve productivity, and gain a competitive edge. Recommendations include adopting personalised reward structures, investing in leadership training for effective recognition practices, and utilising technology to enhance transparency in hybrid work environments. These measures ensure reward systems remain relevant, equitable, and impactful in diverse organisational contexts.

KEYWORDS: Strategic reward, Recognition systems, Employee engagement, Talent retention, Talent management practices

INTRODUCTION

Background

Reward and recognition systems constitute a critical pillar of strategic human resource management, serving as powerful levers for enhancing workforce motivation, engagement, and organisational commitment. Historically, these systems were predominantly transactional, anchored in financial compensation such as salaries, bonuses, and profit-sharing schemes. However, the evolution of talent management paradigms has precipitated a shift toward more holistic, value-driven approaches that integrate both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards (Hassanein & Özgüt, 2022). Contemporary frameworks now emphasise non-monetary incentives including public recognition, career development opportunities, and work-life balance initiatives as essential components of a comprehensive total rewards strategy. This paradigm shift reflects a nuanced understanding of human motivation, acknowledging that while financial remuneration addresses basic hygiene factors (Herzberg, 1959), sustained employee engagement requires fulfilling higher-order psychological needs for appreciation, growth, and purpose (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The strategic integration of reward and recognition systems has been empirically linked to measurable improvements in job satisfaction, productivity, and retention. For instance, robust recognition programs foster affective commitment by validating employees' contributions, thereby reinforcing their emotional connection to the organisation (Ahmić & Čizmić, 2021). Aburub (2020) further substantiates this, demonstrating that organisations with structured reward systems exhibit 23% lower turnover rates compared to those relying solely on monetary incentives. In hyper-competitive labor markets, where talent mobility is exacerbated by globalisation, such systems serve as a critical differentiator. However, the efficacy of these frameworks is contingent

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upon their alignment with organisational culture and employee expectations. Disconnects in this alignment particularly in emerging economies often precipitate disengagement and attrition, underscoring the imperative for context-sensitive reward architectures (Tetik & Zaim, 2021).

The African context presents unique challenges in this regard. Despite growing recognition of the strategic value of reward systems, many organisations grapple with systemic barriers such as fiscal constraints, infrastructural deficits, and bureaucratic inertia (Mabaso et al., 2021). For example, Ismail et al.'s (2021) comparative analysis of Malaysian and African SMEs revealed that while recognition programs increased retention by 18% in Malaysia, similar initiatives in Africa faltered due to inconsistent implementation and resource scarcity. This disparity highlights a critical gap in translating talent management theory into practice within resource-constrained environments. Moreover, the absence of scalable, technology-enabled recognition platforms in many African organisations exacerbates inequities in reward distribution, particularly for remote or hybrid workers a challenge amplified by the post-pandemic shift toward flexible work arrangements (Voon & Cheong, 2021).

Nigeria epitomises these systemic challenges. The nation's volatile macroeconomic climate—characterised by inflationary pressures, currency instability, and unemployment rates exceeding 33% (NBS, 2023) has rendered traditional reward systems increasingly untenable. Nigerian employees, particularly high-potential talent, exhibit diminishing tolerance for organisations that fail to align compensation with global standards while addressing localised needs such as job security and skill development (Igweh & Kifordu, 2022). Mabaso et al. (2021) identify a "recognition deficit" in Nigerian firms, where 62% of surveyed employees reported feeling undervalued due to ad-hoc, non-transparent reward practices. This dissonance between employee expectations and organisational capabilities has catalysed a brain drain, with skilled professionals migrating to multinational corporations or overseas markets offering more robust talent value propositions.

The interplay between reward systems and talent retention is further mediated by cultural and behavioural factors unique to the Nigerian workforce. Studies indicate that Nigerian employees place premium value on hierarchical recognition such as direct commendation from leadership and community-centric rewards like team-based incentives (Oladimeji et al., 2023). However, many local firms persist with Western-designed reward templates that neglect these sociocultural nuances, resulting in suboptimal engagement outcomes. This misalignment underscores the necessity for glocalised (global + localized) reward strategies that harmonise international best practices such as pay transparency and peer-to-peer recognition platforms with indigenous motivational drivers (Alsakarneh et al., 2023).

From a strategic perspective, effective reward systems must transcend transactional exchanges to embody a culture of recognition. This entails embedding rewards into the organisational DNA through daily managerial practices, performance feedback loops, and leadership modelling (Chopra et al., 2023). The Nigerian case illustrates that technology can serve as both an enabler and a disruptor in this process. While digital tools like HRIS platforms facilitate real-time recognition and data-driven reward personalisation, their efficacy is often undermined by poor change management and digital literacy gaps (Hassanein & Özgüt, 2022). Consequently, organisations must invest in change readiness assessments and leadership training to ensure technological adoption complements—rather than replaces human-centric recognition practices.

The imperative for strategic reward systems is unequivocal. As organisations vie for competitive advantage in an era of talent scarcity, those that master the symbiosis between monetary and non-monetary rewards will disproportionately succeed in securing employee loyalty and driving performance. For Nigerian and broader African enterprises, this demands a dual focus: (1) modernising reward infrastructures to meet global benchmarks, and (2) cultivating organisational cultures where recognition is pervasive, equitable, and deeply tied to employee well-being and growth. Failure to address these imperatives risks perpetuating cyclical talent attrition, ultimately compromising organisational resilience and macroeconomic progress.

Aim and Objectives

To investigate the effectiveness of reward and recognition systems within various talent management frameworks and their impact on employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention. This shall be achieved by attaining the following specific objectives, which are to:

- i. analyze how different talent management frameworks influence the effectiveness of reward and recognition systems in enhancing employee engagement.
- ii. identify best practices for designing reward systems that effectively cater to diverse employee motivations and preferences.
- iii. examine the relationship between employee recognition programs and overall job satisfaction, assessing how these programs contribute to a positive work environment.

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- iv. explore the challenges organisations face when implementing technology-driven recognition programs in remote or hybrid work environments, and how these challenges affect employee engagement and retention.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on examining the strategic implementation of reward and recognition systems within organisational talent management frameworks, with particular emphasis on their impact on employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention. The scope encompasses both monetary and non-monetary reward mechanisms, analysing their evolution from traditional compensation-based models to contemporary holistic approaches that incorporate career development opportunities, public recognition, and psychological fulfillments (Hassanein & Özgüt, 2022). By evaluating these systems across diverse organisational contexts, the research highlights their role in fostering a culture of appreciation and commitment, which is critical for sustaining workforce motivation and productivity (Aburub, 2020).

Geographically, the study prioritises emerging economies, with Nigeria serving as a primary case study due to its unique socio-economic challenges, including resource constraints and high talent mobility (Mabaso et al., 2021). The Nigerian context provides valuable insights into the barriers faced by organisations in developing robust reward systems, such as limited fiscal capacity, infrastructural deficits, and cultural nuances that influence employee expectations (Igweh & Kifordu, 2022). By contrasting these challenges with best practices from more developed markets such as Malaysia's success with transparent reward systems (Ismail et al., 2021) the study identifies adaptable strategies for improving recognition programs in resource-limited settings.

The research also explores the intersection of technology and reward systems, particularly in hybrid and remote work environments. Digital platforms for real-time recognition, performance analytics, and personalised rewards are assessed for their efficacy in maintaining engagement across dispersed teams (Voon & Cheong, 2021). However, the study critically examines potential pitfalls, such as the depersonalisation of recognition or inequities in technology access, which may undermine these systems' effectiveness (Tetik & Zaim, 2021).

Theoretical frameworks underpinning this study include Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which distinguishes between motivators (e.g., recognition, growth) and hygiene factors (e.g., salary, job security), and Self-Determination Theory, which emphasises autonomy, competence, and relatedness as drivers of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These theories provide a lens to evaluate how reward systems can be tailored to meet both psychological and economic employee needs.

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative thematic analysis of secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, industry reports, and case studies published between 2020–2024. This approach ensures a comprehensive synthesis of global trends while allowing for nuanced exploration of regional disparities in reward system implementation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contemporary Concept of Talent Management

Contemporary talent management has evolved into a strategic organisational function focused on attracting, developing, and retaining high-potential employees. Modern frameworks like the Talent Management Lifecycle emphasise continuous workforce development through clearly defined stages from recruitment to succession planning (Hassanein & Özgüt, 2022). The Integrated Talent Management Model further demonstrates how aligning individual competencies with organisational objectives creates mutual value (Ahmić & Čizmić, 2021). However, implementation challenges persist in developing economies, where a significant majority of organisations lack the infrastructure for comprehensive talent programs (Mabaso et al., 2021). This gap particularly impacts employee engagement, as professionals in these markets often perceive limited growth opportunities. Effective solutions require adapting global best practices to local contexts while integrating robust recognition systems that validate employee contributions (Voon & Cheong, 2021).

Best Practices in Reward Systems

Modern reward systems have transitioned from purely transactional compensation models to holistic approaches that address both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Research indicates that while financial incentives improve short-term performance, their impact diminishes without complementary non-monetary recognition (Aburub, 2020). Leading organisations now implement differentiated strategies including peer-to-peer recognition platforms, skill-based career pathways, and personalised development plans (Ahmić & Čizmić, 2021). Ismail et al. (2021) found that companies combining monetary rewards with meaningful recognition experience substantially higher retention rates. However, success depends on maintaining rigorous transparency in reward criteria

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and equitable access to opportunities, as perceived favouritism can significantly reduce engagement (Tetik & Zaim, 2021). These findings underscore the need for regularly audited, data-driven reward architectures.

Impact of Recognition Programs on Employee Satisfaction

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate recognition programs' multidimensional benefits. Organisations with structured recognition systems report markedly higher job satisfaction scores, as employees feel valued for their contributions (Hassanein & Özgüt, 2022). Performance metrics improve considerably, with recognised teams achieving greater productivity through enhanced collaboration (Ahmić & Čizmić, 2021). Retention effects are particularly notable in competitive sectors, where comprehensive recognition programs lead to lower turnover rates (Mabaso et al., 2021). However, program effectiveness depends on authentic implementation employees are significantly more likely to trust recognition systems when they observe consistent, merit-based application across all organisational levels (Tetik & Zaim, 2021). This highlights the critical role of leadership modelling and transparent communication in maximising program impact.

Technology in Talent Management

Digital transformation has revolutionised talent management practices, particularly in recognition systems. Cloud-based platforms now enable real-time recognition across geographically dispersed teams, with numerous organisations reporting improved engagement after implementation (Aburub, 2020). Advanced analytics allow personalized reward experiences by tracking individual preferences and performance patterns (Ahmić & Čizmić, 2021). However, technological solutions present unique challenges - many remote employees report feeling disconnected from automated recognition systems (Ismail et al., 2021). Successful implementations balance efficiency with human connection, using technology to enhance rather than replace interpersonal recognition (Mabaso et al., 2021). The most effective systems integrate AI-driven insights with manager-led recognition moments, creating a hybrid model that respects both scalability and emotional authenticity (Voon & Cheong, 2021).

Theoretical Framework: Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Motivation-Hygiene Theory)

Herzberg's (1959) Motivation-Hygiene Theory provides a foundational framework for understanding employee motivation and job satisfaction. The theory posits that workplace satisfaction and dissatisfaction stem from two distinct sets of factors rather than existing as opposite ends of a single continuum. Motivators such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, and the work itself create genuine job satisfaction, while hygiene factors including salary, job security, company policies, and working conditions primarily prevent dissatisfaction when adequately maintained (Hassanein & Özgüt, 2022; Aburub, 2020). This critical distinction reveals that eliminating workplace dissatisfaction does not automatically create positive motivation organisations must actively cultivate both dimensions.

The theory's impact has extended across various industries, including healthcare and education, due to its clear differentiation between factors that motivate employees and those that merely maintain baseline satisfaction (Robbins & Judge, 2013). By distinguishing these elements, the framework enables managers to develop more effective strategies for boosting employee engagement and productivity (Ahmić & Čizmić, 2021). However, several limitations have emerged in contemporary applications of the theory. Critics argue that the model may oversimplify human motivation by creating rigid categories that don't account for individual differences in what workers find motivating (Tetik & Zaim, 2021). Additionally, the theory's focus on internal workplace factors neglects broader economic and competitive influences that significantly impact employee satisfaction (Voon & Cheong, 2021).

Despite these limitations, Herzberg's theory remains relevant in modern work environments. Organisations continue to apply its principles when designing recognition and reward systems, particularly in adapting to remote and hybrid work arrangements (Mabaso et al., 2021). The framework emphasises that while maintaining proper hygiene factors like fair compensation and safe working conditions is essential for basic employee satisfaction, true engagement requires meaningful motivators such as professional development opportunities and genuine recognition (Ismail et al., 2021). This two-pronged approach aligns well with contemporary organisational practices that increasingly value employee experience and engagement as drivers of performance.

Gaps in Literature

While existing research has extensively explored reward and recognition systems, significant gaps remain in understanding their application across different cultural contexts (Mabaso et al., 2021). Most studies have focused on traditional workplace settings, with limited examination of how recognition practices function in partially or fully remote environments. Furthermore, while Herzberg's theory has been widely applied, there is insufficient understanding of how its motivational factors interact with technology-driven reward programs to influence employee engagement (Hassanein & Özgüt, 2022).

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This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the effectiveness of reward and recognition systems in Nigerian organisations, a context that has received limited attention in previous research. The research will explore how these systems can be adapted to accommodate the specific cultural and economic challenges faced by Nigerian workers. Additionally, the study will examine the role of technology in recognition programs, providing contemporary insights into how digital tools can foster a culture of appreciation across diverse work settings (Ismail et al., 2021). By bridging these research gaps, the study will contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical applications of motivation theory in developing economies.

RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY AND METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study investigates how strategic reward and recognition systems influence employee engagement, retention, and performance within Nigerian organisations. The research employs thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2024) to systematically examine secondary data from peer-reviewed journal articles, industry reports, and organisational case studies published between 2019-2024. Comprehensive searches were conducted across academic databases including Scopus, ScienceDirect, and African Journals Online using keywords such as "strategic reward systems," "employee recognition," and "talent management in Nigeria." The analytical process followed Braun and Clarke's (2024) six-phase framework: (1) extensive familiarisation with literature on global and local reward practices, (2) systematic coding of motivational factors and implementation barriers, (3) iterative theme development through constant comparison, (4) critical review against Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, (5) precise definition of emerging patterns, and (6) synthesis of findings into actionable insights. Key themes identified include: cultural influences on reward preferences, technology's role in modern recognition systems, and the tension between global best practices and local economic constraints.

Ontologically, the study approaches reward systems as socially constructed phenomena whose effectiveness is shaped by organisational culture and national context (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Epistemologically, it adopts an interpretivist paradigm (Ejnavarzala, 2019), recognising that the meaning and impact of recognition practices emerge through employees' subjective experiences and organisational narratives. This approach deliberately contrasts with positivist methodologies (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020) to better capture the nuanced relationship between reward systems and workplace motivation in Nigeria's unique socio-economic environment.

The methodology provides several advantages for this investigation: (1) it facilitates cross-cultural comparison of reward system effectiveness, (2) reveals implementation challenges specific to resource-constrained environments, and (3) identifies culturally-appropriate adaptations of global HR practices. Following Finlay's (2021) quality criteria, the study ensures rigour through transparent documentation of the analytical process, reflexive consideration of researcher positioning, and triangulation of findings across diverse data sources. While limited by its reliance on existing literature, the systematic approach enables development of contextually-grounded recommendations for Nigerian organisations seeking to optimise their reward strategies amidst workforce challenges and economic pressures.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Theme 1: Talent Management Practices as Engagement Drivers

Contemporary research demonstrates that strategic talent management systems significantly influence employee engagement levels. Abdullahi et al. (2022) reveal that integrated approaches combining recruitment, training, and development initiatives yield measurable performance improvements. These findings align with Akter et al.'s (2022) telecommunications sector study, establishing a positive correlation between targeted hiring practices and workforce engagement. The literature suggests organisations implementing comprehensive talent frameworks achieve superior engagement outcomes compared to those with fragmented approaches (Alsakarneh et al., 2023). Recognition emerges as a critical component, with Aburub (2020) demonstrating its substantial impact on sustained engagement in knowledge-intensive roles.

Theme 2: Engagement as Reward System Mediator

Employee engagement serves as the crucial link between recognition programs and organisational outcomes. Abdullahi et al. (2022) identify engagement as the mechanism through which development investments translate into performance gains, particularly when reinforced by structured recognition. This mediating role proves especially significant in SMEs, where Ismail et al. (2021) found engaged employees demonstrate markedly lower turnover intentions. The reciprocal relationship between engagement and recognition manifests clearly in employer branding contexts, with top-performing organisations achieving greater returns from their reward systems (Chopra et al., 2023).

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Theme 3: Recognition and Career Growth as Motivators

Non-monetary recognition systems demonstrate particular effectiveness in sustaining employee motivation. Aburub's (2020) analysis reveals meaningful recognition correlates more strongly with job satisfaction than financial incentives alone. This effect intensifies among younger demographics when career development opportunities accompany recognition initiatives (Ahmić & Čizmić, 2021). The research underscores the importance of personalised approaches, with recognition systems tailored to individual growth aspirations yielding superior motivational impact (Alsakarneh et al., 2023; Amushila & Bussin, 2023).

Theme 4: Compensation and Recognition Synergy

While financial compensation remains foundational, its interaction with recognition determines retention outcomes. Alsakarneh et al. (2023) establish that competitive pay explains only partial retention variance, rising significantly when combined with recognition practices. This synergy appears particularly pronounced in high-turnover industries, where balanced reward systems correlate with extended employee tenure (Amushila & Bussin, 2023). The evidence consistently highlights recognition's disproportionate contribution to organisational commitment metrics.

Theme 5: Recognition Programs and Job Satisfaction

Structured recognition initiatives demonstrate robust associations with job satisfaction. Chopra et al.'s (2021) research found employees in organisations with mature recognition systems report substantially higher satisfaction scores. The quality of recognition proves equally important as frequency, with values-aligned recognition generating greater impact than transactional approaches (Srimulyani, 2023). These effects cascade into performance outcomes, with recognised teams showing measurable productivity improvements.

Theme 6: Technological Implementation Challenges

Digital recognition platforms present both opportunities and barriers. Voon and Cheong (2022) identify a "personalisation paradox" where technology enables scalable recognition but risks diluting emotional resonance. Accessibility issues compound these challenges, particularly for frontline workers (Hassanein & Özgüt, 2022). The most effective implementations blend digital efficiency with human touchpoints, achieving superior participation rates (Tetik & Zaim, 2022).

Theme 7: Sustaining Engagement Through Recognition

Proactive strategies can optimise recognition in hybrid environments. Oladimeji et al. (2023) demonstrate that training in recognition techniques improves perceived authenticity. Structural solutions prove equally valuable, with organisations implementing regular recognition audits achieving greater program satisfaction (Tetik & Zaim, 2022). The research emphasises multi-channel approaches combining digital, scheduled, and peer-to-peer recognition for optimal impact.

Summarization of Key Themes

Theme	Key Insights	Related Authors
Talent Management Practices as Drivers of Engagement	Talent management frameworks significantly influence employee engagement by integrating recognition and reward systems. A holistic approach fosters commitment and reduces turnover.	Hassanein & Özgüt (2022), Aburub (2020)
Role of Employee Engagement in Reward Systems	Employee engagement is a critical component of reward systems, enhancing overall job satisfaction. Recognition and appreciation contribute to higher engagement levels, thus improving retention.	Ahmić & Čizmić (2021), Voon & Cheong (2021)

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Recognition and Career Development as Motivational Tools	Non-monetary rewards, including recognition and career development opportunities, play a vital role in motivating employees. Tailoring systems to diverse preferences increases effectiveness.	Aburub (2020), Chopra et al. (2023)
Compensation and Retention	Financial rewards are essential for employee retention, but must be balanced with non-monetary recognition to foster long-term commitment. Both elements are crucial for a comprehensive reward system.	Alsakarneh et al. (2022), Amushila & Bussin (2021)
Recognition Programs and Job Satisfaction	Effective recognition programs are strongly linked to job satisfaction. Implementing such programs fosters a positive work environment, enhancing retention and employee performance.	Chopra et al. (2023), Srimulyani (2020)
Technological Challenges in Recognition Programs	Challenges in remote and hybrid environments include communication gaps and maintaining engagement. Implementing technology-driven recognition systems requires overcoming these barriers.	Voon & Cheong (2021), Hassanein & Özgüt (2022)
Overcoming Challenges to Sustain Engagement	Strategies such as regular feedback and inclusive practices can mitigate challenges in recognition programs, ensuring ongoing employee engagement and retention in remote settings.	Oladimeji et al. (2022), Tetik & Zaim (2022)

Source: Author's Computation (2025)

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides compelling evidence that strategic recognition systems serve as powerful drivers of employee engagement and retention in modern organisations. The research demonstrates that well-designed reward & recognition system significantly enhance job satisfaction, with employees in organisations that implement structured recognition systems reporting substantially higher engagement levels. The findings reveal recognition operates most effectively when integrated with career development opportunities, creating a multiplier effect on motivation and performance. Our analysis confirms that while competitive compensation remains necessary, it is the combination of fair pay with meaningful recognition that produces optimal retention outcomes, particularly in high-turnover industries.

The Nigerian organisational context presents unique challenges for implementing effective recognition systems. Resource constraints often limit the scope of reward programs, while cultural factors influence how recognition is valued and perceived. The study identifies several critical gaps in current practices, including over-reliance on informal, manager-dependent recognition rather than institutionalised systems. These findings carry particular significance given Nigeria's competitive talent market, where recognition deficits frequently contribute to skilled employee turnover. The research also highlights the growing importance of adapting recognition strategies for hybrid and remote work environments, where maintaining personal connection and emotional resonance requires deliberate design.

Strategic Recommendations for Implementation

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Organisations should prioritise the development of comprehensive recognition frameworks that operate across multiple levels. At the foundational level, day-to-day recognition should be facilitated through user-friendly digital platforms that enable peer-to-peer acknowledgment of contributions. These systems work best when integrated into existing communication channels and workflow processes. For milestone achievements, standardised protocols should be established to celebrate project completions, work anniversaries, and significant skill development. The most prestigious recognition should be reserved for exceptional achievements, with criteria clearly tied to organisational values and strategic objectives.

Personalisation emerges as a critical success factor for recognition programs. Organisations should invest in understanding employee preferences through regular surveys and feedback mechanisms. HR analytics can be leveraged to tailor recognition approaches to individual motivations and career aspirations. The most effective systems balance consistency with customisation, ensuring all employees receive recognition while maintaining the special significance of each acknowledgment. This requires training managers to deliver recognition that feels authentic and meaningful to each recipient.

The digital transformation of workplaces necessitates careful attention to how technology mediates recognition experiences. While digital platforms enable scalable and timely acknowledgment, they risk losing emotional impact if overused. Best practices include combining digital efficiency with human touch points, such as following up automated recognition with personal notes or conversations. Virtual recognition events should be designed with cultural relevance, incorporating elements that resonate with Nigerian traditions of communal celebration. Organisations must also be mindful of technology access disparities and ensure recognition systems are inclusive of all employee groups.

Cultural Integration and Measurement

For recognition to have lasting impact, it must become embedded in organisational culture rather than existing as a standalone program. This requires visible leadership commitment, with executives modelling recognition behaviours and incorporating recognition metrics into performance reviews. Middle managers play a particularly crucial role and should receive specialised training in recognition best practices. Organisations can create recognition ambassador roles to sustain momentum and ensure consistent application across departments.

Measurement and continuous improvement should be built into recognition systems from the outset. Key performance indicators might include recognition frequency, participation rates, and correlations with engagement survey scores. Regular program audits can identify participation gaps or inconsistencies in application. The most advanced organisations integrate recognition data with other HR systems to analyse relationships with retention, productivity, and other business outcomes.

Implementation Roadmap and Future Research

A phased implementation approach typically yields the best results. The first six months should focus on assessment and pilot testing, including employee feedback collection and small-scale trials of different recognition methods. The subsequent year can be dedicated to scaling successful pilots and integrating recognition with other talent processes. Full maturity typically requires two to three years, by which point recognition should be fully embedded in organisational culture and operations.

Future research should explore cultural variations in recognition preferences across different Nigerian industries and regions. Longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into the lasting impacts of recognition programs on career trajectories. There is also need for more investigation into how recognition systems can be optimised for frontline workers and other employee groups with limited technology access. Finally, research should examine how recognition strategies might evolve to meet the expectations of emerging generations in the workforce.

This study underscores that strategic recognition is not merely a nice-to-have benefit, but a critical component of effective talent management. Organisations that implement the recommendations outlined here can expect to see measurable improvements in engagement, retention, and overall organisational performance. The time is ripe for Nigerian organisations to embrace recognition as a strategic priority and competitive advantage in the war for talent.

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