

Fostering Employee Job Engagement through Organizational Gratitude: A Study of Outdoor Event Management Firms in South-South, Nigeria

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Abstract: Organizational gratitude is increasingly recognized as a pivotal factor in shaping employee job engagement, particularly within the context of outdoor event management firms in the South-South region of Nigeria. This study explores the dynamics of organizational gratitude and its influence on employee job engagement, drawing upon theoretical frameworks such as Social Exchange Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory. Through a comprehensive literature review, this research elucidates the conceptualization and dimensions of organizational gratitude, including episodic, persistent, and collective forms, as well as the multifaceted nature of employee job engagement encompassing vigor, dedication, and absorption. The empirical review synthesizes existing research findings, highlighting the positive relationship between organizational gratitude and employee job engagement, mediated by factors such as organizational culture, leadership practices, and employee perceptions. By adopting a mixed-methods approach, this study examines the experiences and perceptions of employees within outdoor event management firms, providing valuable insights into the mechanisms through which organizational gratitude influences job engagement outcomes.

Keywords: Organizational gratitude, Employee job engagement, Outdoor event management, South-South Nigeria, Social Exchange Theory, Conservation of Resources Theory.

INTRODUCTION

Organizational gratitude, characterized by expressions of appreciation and acknowledgment towards employees, has garnered increasing attention in organizational psychology literature due to its potential impact on employee job engagement and overall organizational performance (Yam et al., 2020; Grant et al., 2011). In the context of outdoor event management firms in the South-South region of Nigeria, where dynamic and high-pressure work environments are common, understanding the role of organizational gratitude becomes particularly salient. With recent studies suggesting a positive association between gratitude and employee job engagement (Mwangi, 2017), exploring this relationship within the specific context of event management firms provides valuable insights

for enhancing workplace practices and fostering a culture of appreciation.

Gratitude within organizations can manifest in various forms, including episodic, persistent, and collective expressions (Yam et al., 2020). Episodic gratitude refers to intermittent acts of recognition or appreciation by supervisors or colleagues, while persistent gratitude involves sustained efforts to acknowledge employee contributions over time (Okwemba, 2019). Additionally, collective gratitude encompasses expressions of appreciation at the organizational level, fostering a culture of recognition and gratitude among all employees (Demerouti & Xanthopoulou, 2012). Understanding the nuances of these different forms of gratitude is essential for delineating their impact on employee job engagement within outdoor event management firms.

Employee job engagement, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's work, is crucial for organizational success and employee well-being (Kahn, 1990; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Vigor represents high levels of energy and resilience in approaching work tasks, dedication reflects a strong sense of significance and enthusiasm towards one's job, and absorption denotes deep immersion and concentration in work activities (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). The relationship between organizational gratitude and employee job engagement is complex, influenced by various factors such as organizational culture, leadership practices, and individual differences (Grant et al., 2011). By examining this relationship within the context of outdoor event management firms in the South-South region of Nigeria, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on workplace gratitude and employee engagement while providing practical implications for organizational management and leadership.

As organizations seek to enhance employee job engagement and foster a positive work environment, understanding the mechanisms through which organizational gratitude influences employee attitudes and behaviors becomes imperative (Yam et al., 2020). By elucidating the pathways through which different forms of gratitude impact employee job engagement, this study seeks to inform organizational practices and interventions aimed at promoting a culture of appreciation and recognition within outdoor event management firms in the South-South region of Nigeria. Through empirical investigation and analysis, this research endeavors to provide actionable insights for organizational leaders and managers seeking to optimize employee engagement and organizational performance in dynamic and challenging work environments.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study examines the relationship between organizational gratitude and employee job engagement within outdoor event management firms in South-South Nigeria. Organizational gratitude, operationalized

through episodic, persistent, and collective gratitude, serves as the independent variable influencing employee job engagement, which is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Yam et al., 2020; Okwemba, 2019). The framework posits that different forms of gratitude can enhance various dimensions of job engagement: episodic gratitude fosters vigor, persistent gratitude enhances dedication, and collective gratitude promotes absorption (Demerouti & Xanthopoulou, 2012). By delineating these relationships, the framework provides a structured approach to understanding how expressions of gratitude within organizations can impact employee engagement levels.

The model also incorporates the organization incentive system as a critical factor that moderates the relationship between organizational gratitude and employee job engagement. Incentive systems, encompassing monetary rewards, recognition programs, and career development opportunities, can amplify the positive effects of gratitude on employee engagement by reinforcing appreciative behaviors and promoting a culture of acknowledgment (Mwangi, 2017). This moderation effect suggests that the presence of robust incentive systems can enhance the impact of gratitude practices on employees' vigor, dedication, and absorption, thereby fostering a more engaged and motivated workforce.

Figure 1 illustrates this conceptual framework, showing the pathways through which different forms of gratitude (episodic, persistent, collective) influence various dimensions of job engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption) within the context of outdoor event management firms. The framework underscores the importance of a supportive organizational climate, where both gratitude and incentives are leveraged to optimize employee engagement. By integrating insights from social and organizational psychology, this model provides a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which gratitude can enhance job engagement, offering practical implications for organizational leaders and HR practitioners (Okwemba, 2019).

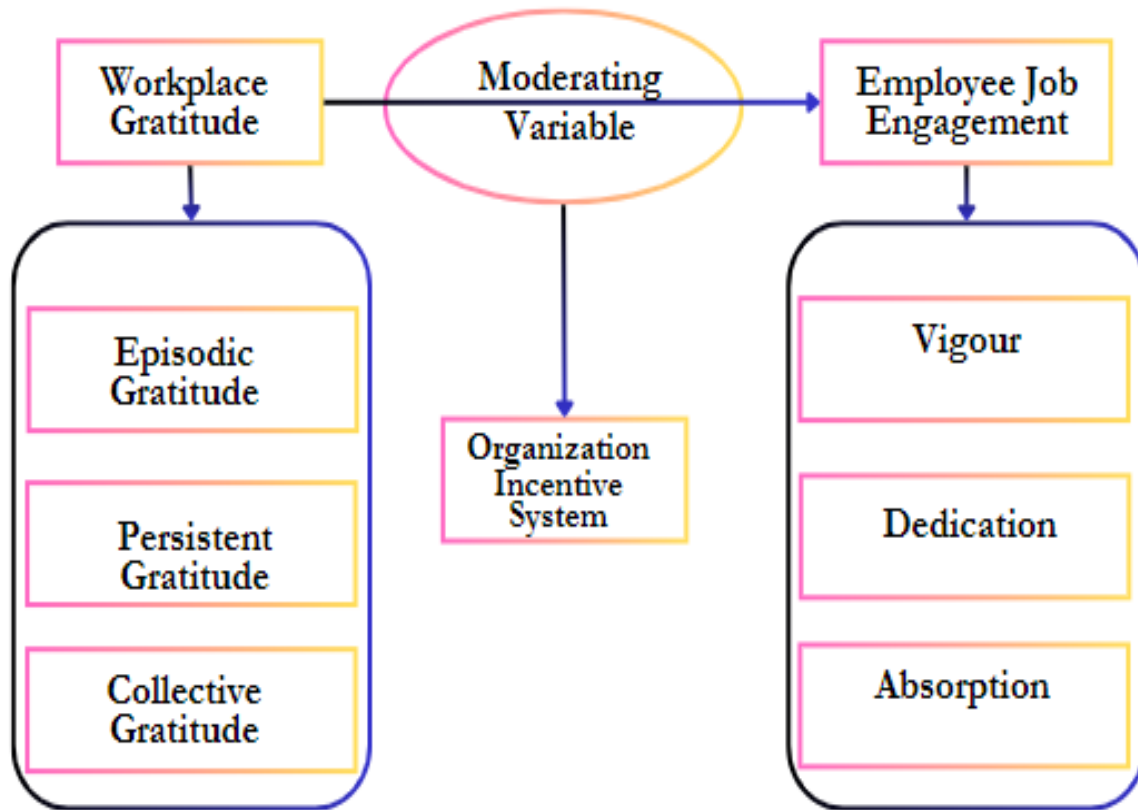


Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework of Organizational Gratitude and Employee Job Engagement of Outdoor Event Management Firms in South-South, Nigeria*

Source: Mwangi (2017), Kahn (1990), Okwemba (2019) Demerouti & Xanthopoulou, (2012).

The study at hand, drawing upon desk research conducted in 2024, seeks to delve into the intricate relationship between organizational gratitude and employee job engagement. This endeavor is guided by a comprehensive framework, with the predictor and its dimensions sourced from Mwangi (2017), Kahn (1990), Okwemba (2019), and Demerouti & Xanthopoulou (2012). The research aims to elucidate how different forms of gratitude within the workplace can enhance various aspects of job engagement, and how organizational incentive systems can further moderate this relationship.

At its core, the study aims to accomplish several objectives through its literature review:

1. To scrutinize the association between episodic gratitude and employee vigor.
2. To analyze the nexus between persistent gratitude and employee dedication.

3. To explore the correlation between collective gratitude and employee absorption.
4. To ascertain the potential moderating role of organizational incentive systems on the relationship between organizational gratitude and employee job engagement.

To effectively address these objectives, the study delineates specific research questions:

1. What is the nature of the relationship between episodic gratitude and employee vigor?
2. How does persistent gratitude influence employee dedication within organizational contexts?
3. What impact does collective gratitude exert on employee absorption metrics?

4. To what extent do organizational incentive systems shape the dynamics between organizational gratitude and employee job engagement?

In essence, this study represents a concerted effort to deepen our understanding of the interplay between organizational gratitude, incentive systems, and employee job engagement. By elucidating the complex relationships at play, it endeavors to inform strategic decision-making and facilitate the design of targeted interventions aimed at maximizing workforce potential and fostering sustainable organizational success.

Ultimately, this research seeks to provide actionable insights for organizational leaders and managers in the outdoor event management sector in South-South Nigeria. By integrating theoretical perspectives with empirical findings, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on workplace gratitude and employee engagement, offering evidence-based recommendations for enhancing organizational practices and promoting a culture of appreciation and high performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this study is anchored in two primary theories: the Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model. These theories provide a robust framework for understanding the relationship between organizational gratitude and employee job engagement within the context of outdoor event management firms in South-South Nigeria.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory, as proposed by Blau (1964), posits that social behavior is the result of an exchange process aimed at maximizing benefits and minimizing costs. In the workplace, this theory suggests that when employees perceive positive actions from their organization, such as expressions of gratitude and recognition, they are likely to reciprocate with higher levels of engagement, commitment, and performance (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET emphasizes the importance of trust, mutual commitment, and the perception of fairness in fostering a positive exchange relationship between employees and employers. This reciprocal relationship underscores the potential impact of organizational gratitude on enhancing employee job engagement.

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

The JD-R Model, developed by Demerouti et al. (2001), provides a comprehensive framework for

understanding how job demands and resources influence employee well-being and performance. According to this model, job resources (e.g., organizational support, recognition, and appreciation) play a crucial role in motivating employees and fostering job engagement, particularly in high-demand environments like event management. The JD-R Model suggests that the availability of job resources can buffer the negative effects of job demands, leading to improved employee outcomes such as vigor, dedication, and absorption (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Within this framework, organizational gratitude can be seen as a valuable job resource that enhances employee engagement by providing emotional support and fostering a positive work environment.

Implications for Organizational Practice

The integration of SET and the JD-R Model into the study of organizational gratitude and employee job engagement has significant implications for organizational practice. By recognizing and appreciating employees' contributions, organizations can foster a positive exchange relationship, leading to increased job satisfaction and engagement (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Moreover, the JD-R Model highlights the importance of providing adequate job resources, such as gratitude and recognition, to mitigate the adverse effects of job demands and promote employee well-being (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). These theoretical insights underscore the necessity for outdoor event management firms to cultivate a culture of gratitude and implement robust incentive systems to enhance employee engagement and organizational performance.

Concepts and Dimensions of Organizational Gratitude and Employee Job Engagement

Organizational gratitude, encompassing episodic, persistent, and collective gratitude, plays a crucial role in shaping employee job engagement. Episodic gratitude refers to spontaneous acknowledgments of employees' efforts, such as thank-you notes or public recognition, which can significantly boost employees' vigor, defined as high levels of energy and mental resilience at work (Waters, 2012; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Persistent gratitude involves consistent, ongoing expressions of appreciation, creating a workplace culture that recognizes and values employees' contributions over time. This form of gratitude fosters dedication, characterized by employees' strong involvement and sense of pride in their work (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Bakker et al., 2008). Studies have demonstrated that employees who experience continuous recognition are more likely to show higher levels of

commitment and dedication to their organization (Fehr et al., 2017).

Collective gratitude, which is the shared appreciation among team members, enhances a supportive and cohesive work environment. This collective sense of gratitude promotes absorption, where employees are fully concentrated and engrossed in their work tasks (Fredrickson, 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Research indicates that a culture of collective gratitude can strengthen interpersonal relationships, reduce workplace stress, and foster deep engagement with work activities (Hu & Kaplan, 2015). By understanding and leveraging these dimensions of organizational gratitude, firms can create strategies that enhance overall employee job engagement, leading to improved organizational performance and employee well-being.

Episodic Gratitude and Vigor

Episodic gratitude refers to the spontaneous expression of appreciation in response to specific events or actions (Algoe, 2012). In the workplace, episodic gratitude can be manifested through verbal acknowledgments, thank-you notes, or public recognition of an employee's efforts. Such expressions of gratitude can significantly boost employees' vigor, defined as high levels of energy and mental resilience while working (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Research indicates that employees who experience episodic gratitude are more likely to feel energized and motivated, leading to enhanced job performance and engagement (Waters, 2012).

Persistent Gratitude and Dedication

Persistent gratitude involves ongoing, consistent expressions of appreciation that become embedded in the organizational culture (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). This form of gratitude goes beyond occasional acknowledgments and reflects a sustained recognition of employees' contributions over time. Persistent gratitude can foster a sense of dedication among employees, characterized by a strong involvement in one's work and a sense of significance and pride (Bakker et al., 2008). Studies have shown that employees who perceive a continuous culture of gratitude are more likely to exhibit higher levels of commitment and dedication to their organization (Fehr et al., 2017).

Collective Gratitude and Absorption

Collective gratitude refers to the shared sense of appreciation within a team or organization, where gratitude is expressed and felt collectively among members (Fredrickson,

2004). This collective form of gratitude can create a supportive and cohesive work environment, enhancing employees' absorption, which is the state of being fully concentrated and engrossed in one's work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Research suggests that collective gratitude can foster positive interpersonal relationships, reduce workplace stress, and promote a deep engagement with work tasks (Hu & Kaplan, 2015).

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Relationship between Organizational Gratitude and Employee Engagement

Research has consistently shown a positive relationship between organizational gratitude and employee engagement. Gratitude practices in the workplace, such as recognizing employee efforts and celebrating successes, significantly enhance employees' emotional well-being and job satisfaction (Waters, 2012). For example, a study by Emmons and McCullough (2003) revealed that employees who regularly receive expressions of gratitude are more likely to feel valued and appreciated, which boosts their engagement levels. Moreover, gratitude fosters a positive organizational climate that encourages employees to invest more effort into their tasks (Fehr et al., 2017).

Episodic Gratitude and Employee Vigour

Episodic gratitude, characterized by spontaneous and specific acknowledgments of employees' contributions, has been shown to significantly impact employee vigor. Vigor, defined as high levels of energy and mental resilience at work, is crucial for maintaining productivity and motivation (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Research by Waters (2012) indicates that episodic gratitude, such as thank-you notes or verbal praise, can rejuvenate employees' spirits, making them feel more energetic and willing to take on challenges. This form of recognition provides immediate reinforcement that helps sustain high performance and enthusiasm.

Persistent Gratitude and Employee Dedication

Persistent gratitude involves regular and ongoing expressions of appreciation, contributing to a supportive organizational culture. This continuous recognition fosters a sense of dedication among employees, which is reflected in their strong involvement and commitment to their work (Bakker et al., 2008). A longitudinal study by Hu and Kaplan (2015) found that workplaces with persistent gratitude practices experienced lower turnover rates and higher levels of employee dedication. Employees who feel consistently valued are more

likely to develop a deep emotional connection to their organization, enhancing their motivation and productivity.

Collective Gratitude and Employee Absorption

Collective gratitude refers to the shared appreciation among team members, creating a cohesive and supportive work environment. This form of gratitude enhances absorption, where employees are fully concentrated and engrossed in their work tasks (Fredrickson, 2004). According to a study by Schaufeli et al. (2002), employees in organizations that promote collective gratitude exhibit higher levels of absorption, leading to improved focus and job performance. The sense of community and mutual respect fostered by collective gratitude can significantly reduce workplace stress and enhance overall job satisfaction.

Organizational Incentive Systems and Gratitude

Organizational incentive systems play a pivotal role in reinforcing gratitude practices within the workplace. Incentives such as bonuses, awards, and career advancement opportunities can serve as formal acknowledgments of employees' hard work, reinforcing the culture of gratitude (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). A study by Grant and Wrzesniewski (2010) found that organizations with well-structured incentive systems that include gratitude practices experience higher levels of employee engagement and performance. These incentives not only reward individual achievements but also promote a culture of appreciation and mutual respect.

Moderating Role of Organizational Climate

The effectiveness of gratitude practices on employee engagement is significantly influenced by the organizational climate. A supportive climate that encourages open communication and recognition amplifies the positive effects of gratitude on employee engagement (Ozge & Erkut, 2016). Research by Dawson et al. (2013) suggests that employees are more responsive to gratitude practices in environments where they feel safe, valued, and supported. Such climates facilitate the implementation of gratitude initiatives and ensure that they are perceived as genuine and meaningful by employees.

Gratitude and Work-Life Balance

The impact of gratitude practices extends beyond the workplace, influencing employees' work-life balance. Organizations that promote gratitude tend to have employees who experience better work-life balance, as they feel more satisfied and less stressed (Allen et al., 2000). A study by Lambert (2000) found that employees who feel appreciated at work are more likely to have positive experiences at home,

leading to overall life satisfaction. This interplay between work and personal life highlights the broader benefits of gratitude practices.

Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Gratitude

Gratitude practices can vary significantly across different cultural contexts. Understanding these variations is crucial for multinational organizations aiming to implement effective gratitude strategies (Hofstede, 2001). Research by Eisenberger et al. (2001) indicates that cultural differences can influence how gratitude is expressed and received in the workplace. For instance, in collectivist cultures, collective gratitude practices may be more effective, while in individualist cultures, episodic gratitude may be more appreciated. Adapting gratitude practices to fit cultural norms can enhance their impact on employee engagement.

Technological Tools for Promoting Gratitude

The advent of technology has introduced new avenues for promoting gratitude in the workplace. Digital platforms and social media can facilitate the expression and dissemination of gratitude, reaching a wider audience and reinforcing positive behaviors (Leimeister, 2010). A study by Zhang and Venkatesh (2013) found that organizations using technology to promote gratitude, such as internal social networks and recognition apps, experienced higher levels of employee engagement and satisfaction. These tools can provide immediate feedback and public recognition, enhancing the visibility and impact of gratitude practices.

Challenges in Implementing Gratitude Practices

Despite the evident benefits, implementing gratitude practices in the workplace can pose several challenges. These include overcoming skepticism among employees, ensuring consistency in recognition efforts, and aligning gratitude practices with organizational goals (Grant & Gino, 2010). Research by Luthans and Youssef (2007) suggests that organizations need to address these challenges by fostering a genuine culture of appreciation, providing training for managers, and integrating gratitude into the organizational fabric. Overcoming these obstacles is essential for maximizing the benefits of gratitude practices.

Measuring the Impact of Gratitude

Assessing the impact of gratitude practices on employee engagement requires robust measurement tools and methodologies. Surveys, feedback forms, and performance metrics can provide valuable insights into how gratitude influences employee behavior and outcomes (Bakker &

Demerouti, 2008). A study by Schaufeli et al. (2006) emphasizes the importance of using validated instruments to measure variables such as job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and organizational commitment. Accurate measurement is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of gratitude initiatives and making informed adjustments.

Case Studies on Organizational Gratitude

Case studies of successful organizations provide practical examples of how gratitude practices can enhance employee engagement. For instance, Google's recognition programs and Zappos' culture of appreciation have been widely studied for their positive impact on employee morale and performance (Hsieh, 2010). These case studies illustrate how tailored gratitude initiatives can create a positive organizational climate, foster innovation, and drive business success. They also offer valuable lessons for other organizations looking to implement similar practices.

Future Research Directions

Future research on organizational gratitude should explore its long-term effects on employee engagement and organizational outcomes. Longitudinal studies can provide insights into how sustained gratitude practices influence employee behavior and performance over time (Seligman, 2011). Additionally, research should investigate the interplay between gratitude and other organizational variables, such as leadership styles, corporate social responsibility, and employee well-being. Understanding these relationships can help organizations develop comprehensive strategies for enhancing employee engagement.

Practical Implications for Management

The findings from empirical studies on organizational gratitude have significant practical implications for management. Managers can enhance employee engagement by integrating gratitude practices into their leadership style and organizational policies (Cameron, 2012). Training programs focused on emotional intelligence and appreciative leadership can equip managers with the skills needed to effectively express

gratitude (Goleman, 2006). By fostering a culture of gratitude, managers can create a positive work environment that motivates employees and enhances organizational performance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the empirical review highlights the significant impact of organizational gratitude on employee engagement, underscoring its role in fostering a positive work environment and enhancing organizational outcomes. By acknowledging and appreciating employees' contributions through episodic, persistent, and collective gratitude practices, organizations can cultivate a workforce that is more energized, committed, and absorbed in their work tasks. Embracing gratitude as a core value and integrating it into organizational policies and leadership practices holds immense potential for driving employee satisfaction and performance. Moving forward, organizations should prioritize the implementation of gratitude initiatives and foster a culture of appreciation to maximize employee engagement and foster a thriving workplace environment.

Recommendations:

1. **Develop formalized gratitude programs:** Organizations should establish structured programs that facilitate regular expressions of gratitude, including recognition ceremonies, appreciation awards, and peer-to-peer recognition platforms.
2. **Provide training on gratitude practices:** Managers and leaders should receive training on the importance of gratitude in the workplace and effective ways to express appreciation to employees. Training programs can enhance managers' emotional intelligence and leadership skills, enabling them to create a culture of appreciation within their teams.

By implementing these recommendations, organizations can create a workplace culture where employees feel valued, supported, and motivated to contribute their best efforts toward organizational success.

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