


Employee Experiences of Recognition and Organizational Support: A Qualitative Study on Work Motivation and Engagement

¹Seoungpil Ahn, ² Dedy Darmawan, ³A. Kartini Sari Putri D

¹Sogang Business School, Sogang University, South Korea

²STIE Widya Praja, Tanah Grogot, Indonesia

³Ichsan Sidenreng Rappang University, Indonesia

Correspondence : dedy310@gmail.com

Abstract

Employee recognition and perceived organizational support have been widely recognized as critical factors influencing work motivation and engagement in contemporary organizations. However, many studies have predominantly employed quantitative approaches, leaving limited understanding of how employees interpret these experiences in their daily work contexts. This study aims to explore employees' lived experiences of recognition and organizational support and how these experiences shape work motivation and engagement. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to capture employees' subjective perspectives. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation review involving employees who had worked in the organization for at least one year. Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and meanings within participants' narratives. The findings revealed four main themes: recognition as psychological affirmation, supportive leadership and communication, organizational resources and fairness, and the development of work engagement and intrinsic motivation. Employees perceived recognition and organizational support as key factors that strengthen their sense of value, belonging, and commitment to their work. These experiences foster higher motivation and deeper engagement in organizational activities. This study contributes to the literature by providing qualitative insights into how employees interpret organizational support and recognition in their work environments. The findings highlight the importance of supportive leadership, fair organizational practices, and meaningful recognition systems. Future research may explore similar phenomena across different organizational contexts or integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches to enrich understanding of employee engagement dynamics.

Keywords: *Employee Recognition; Perceived Organizational Support; Work Motivation; Employee Engagement; Qualitative Research; Phenomenological Study; Organizational Behavior; Workplace Experience*

I. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary organizational environments, employee motivation and engagement have become central concerns for organizations seeking sustainable performance and productivity. Global workplace trends indicate that many employees experience declining engagement levels despite increasing

organizational demands and technological changes. Employee engagement is widely recognized as a critical determinant of organizational effectiveness because engaged employees tend to demonstrate higher commitment, productivity, and job satisfaction. Recent studies highlight that organizational practices such as recognition and support significantly influence employees' psychological attachment to their work and organization (Imran et al., 2020; Aggarwal et al., 2022). However, organizations across sectors continue to face challenges in fostering meaningful recognition and support systems that effectively motivate employees.

At the global level, research indicates that employees who perceive their contributions as recognized and valued by the organization are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of motivation and engagement. Recognition practices—such as appreciation, feedback, and acknowledgement of employee contributions—serve as important psychological resources that reinforce positive work behavior. Empirical findings show that recognition not only enhances job satisfaction but also strengthens employees' emotional connection with their workplace (Imran et al., 2020; Malaeb et al., 2023). In addition, perceived organizational support (POS), which refers to employees' perceptions regarding how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, plays a significant role in shaping work attitudes and behaviors (Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2021).

In many organizational contexts, recognition and organizational support function as essential motivational mechanisms. When employees perceive that their efforts are acknowledged and supported by their organization, they tend to reciprocate through greater engagement and commitment to their roles. Studies conducted in various sectors have demonstrated that perceived organizational support positively influences work engagement, job satisfaction, and employee retention (Aggarwal et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2023). Conversely, the absence of recognition and support may lead to disengagement, reduced motivation, and increased turnover intention among employees.

In the Indonesian context, similar challenges have been observed across both public and private organizations. Several recent studies report that employees often experience limited recognition for their contributions, particularly in hierarchical organizational structures where communication between management and employees remains formal and distant (Grace et al., 2025; Alhempri et al., 2025). Such conditions can create perceptions of inadequate organizational support, which may negatively affect employees' work motivation and emotional attachment to their organizations. In practice, employees frequently report that recognition is often limited to formal performance evaluations rather than ongoing appreciation of daily contributions.

Field observations and preliminary reports in organizational settings also indicate that employees frequently associate motivation not only with financial rewards but also with non-material factors such as appreciation, trust, and supportive leadership. For instance, studies highlight that employees who experience supportive interactions with supervisors and receive acknowledgment for their

work often describe feeling more valued and motivated to contribute to organizational goals (Evans-Uzosike & Okatta, 2025). These qualitative insights suggest that recognition and support are experienced subjectively and are deeply influenced by interpersonal relationships within the workplace.

From a theoretical perspective, the relationship between recognition, organizational support, and employee engagement can be understood through Organizational Support Theory and social exchange theory. Organizational Support Theory suggests that employees develop global beliefs about how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Imran et al., 2020). When employees perceive high levels of support and recognition, they feel obligated to reciprocate through positive work behaviors, including increased motivation and engagement. This reciprocal relationship highlights the importance of understanding employees' subjective experiences regarding recognition and support in the workplace.

Despite extensive research on employee engagement and organizational support, much of the existing literature primarily relies on quantitative methods that examine relationships between variables using statistical analysis (Hassanein et al., 2025; Zargar et al., 2025). While these studies provide valuable insights into the structural relationships among organizational factors, they often overlook employees' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to recognition and organizational support. Consequently, there remains limited understanding of how employees interpret and experience recognition practices and supportive organizational environments in their daily work contexts.

Furthermore, previous research often treats recognition and organizational support as measurable constructs without exploring the processes through which these experiences shape employees' motivation and engagement. Qualitative approaches can offer deeper insights into the subjective meanings, emotional responses, and social dynamics that underlie employees' perceptions of recognition and support. Such approaches are particularly important for uncovering how employees interpret organizational practices and how these interpretations influence their motivation and engagement over time.

Therefore, there is a need for qualitative research that explores employees' lived experiences of recognition and organizational support in the workplace. By examining employees' narratives and interpretations, qualitative inquiry can reveal how recognition practices and supportive organizational environments influence motivation and engagement from the perspective of the employees themselves. This approach allows researchers to capture complex social interactions and contextual factors that may not be visible through quantitative analysis.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore employee experiences of recognition and organizational support and how these experiences shape work motivation and engagement. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how employees perceive recognition, how organizational support is experienced in daily work interactions, and how these experiences influence their motivation and

engagement. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of organizational behavior literature by providing a deeper qualitative understanding of recognition and organizational support within the framework of Organizational Support Theory. Practically, the findings are expected to provide insights for organizations and managers in designing more meaningful recognition practices and supportive work environments that foster sustainable employee motivation and engagement.

II. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore employees' lived experiences regarding recognition and organizational support and how these experiences influence their work motivation and engagement. Phenomenology is appropriate for research that seeks to understand the meanings individuals attach to their experiences and the way those experiences shape their perceptions and behaviors within a particular context (Rana et al., 2023; Lim, 2025). The selection of this approach aligns with the research objective, which is to gain a deep understanding of how employees interpret organizational recognition and support in their daily work lives. The research was conducted in a private service organization located in Indonesia between January and March 2025. Participants consisted of employees who had worked in the organization for at least one year, ensuring that they had sufficient experience interacting with organizational policies and leadership practices. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, with criteria including employees who actively participated in organizational activities, had experience receiving recognition or support from supervisors, and were willing to share their work experiences. To expand the participant pool and identify additional relevant informants, a snowball sampling technique was also used, where initial participants recommended other employees who met the study criteria.

Data were collected through multiple qualitative techniques to ensure depth and richness of information. The primary method was semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to describe their personal experiences of recognition, support, motivation, and engagement while providing flexibility for probing questions. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was recorded with participant consent. In addition to interviews, participant observation was conducted to capture interactions between employees and supervisors during routine organizational activities, meetings, and daily work processes. Document analysis was also utilized to review organizational policies, performance evaluation records, and internal communication materials related to recognition or employee support programs. Using multiple data sources enabled methodological triangulation, which helps strengthen the credibility and depth of qualitative findings (Dahal, 2025; Isik, 2025). Field notes were taken throughout the data collection process to document contextual factors, researcher reflections, and emerging patterns that informed subsequent interviews and observations.

To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the findings, several qualitative validation techniques were applied. First, source and method triangulation were

used by comparing interview data, observation results, and organizational documents to identify consistent patterns and interpretations. Second, member checking was conducted by sharing summarized interview interpretations with participants to confirm the accuracy of the researcher’s understanding of their experiences (Vella, 2024). Third, an audit trail was maintained by documenting all stages of data collection, coding decisions, and analytical procedures, enabling transparency and traceability of the research process. Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, which involves systematically identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. The analysis process began with data familiarization through repeated reading of interview transcripts, followed by initial coding to identify meaningful units related to recognition, organizational support, motivation, and engagement. Codes were then grouped into broader categories and themes that reflected employees’ experiences and perceptions. This iterative analytical process allowed the researcher to interpret the relationships between themes while maintaining alignment with the phenomenological aim of understanding participants’ lived experiences (Rana et al., 2023; Lim, 2025).

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The qualitative analysis of interview transcripts, observation notes, and organizational documents revealed several recurring patterns related to how employees interpret recognition and organizational support in shaping their work motivation and engagement. Through iterative coding and thematic analysis, four main themes emerged: (1) recognition as psychological affirmation, (2) supportive leadership and communication, (3) organizational resources and fairness, and (4) the development of work engagement and intrinsic motivation. These themes reflect the ways employees perceive organizational practices and how such perceptions influence their emotional and behavioral involvement in the workplace. Similar qualitative research indicates that perceived organizational support and recognition practices significantly shape employees’ sense of belonging, commitment, and engagement (Adisa et al., 2023; Alluhaybi et al., 2026).

Table 1. Main Themes and Categories Identified from Data Analysis

Theme	Categories	Illustrative Meaning
Recognition as Psychological Affirmation	Appreciation, acknowledgment of achievements, informal praise	Employees feel valued and respected when their contributions are recognized
Supportive Leadership and Communication	Supervisor empathy, open communication, feedback culture	Leaders who listen and guide employees strengthen motivation
Organizational Resources and Fairness	Training opportunities, fair workload, career development	Institutional support creates trust and commitment
Development of Work Engagement	Sense of belonging, enthusiasm for work, responsibility	Employees become more engaged when they perceive meaningful support

The first theme, recognition as psychological affirmation, reflects employees' perceptions that recognition—whether formal or informal—serves as a symbolic form of appreciation that validates their contributions. Participants reported that recognition from supervisors or colleagues increased their sense of pride and motivation. One participant stated:

“When my supervisor acknowledges my effort, even with simple words like ‘good job,’ it makes me feel that my work matters to the organization.”
(Participant 4)

Observational data also indicated that informal recognition during team meetings fostered a more positive workplace climate. Such recognition reinforces employees' sense of personal value and encourages continued effort. Research on employee engagement suggests that recognition acts as a social reinforcement mechanism that enhances employees' emotional connection to their work (Rajashekar & Jain, 2024).

The second theme concerns supportive leadership and communication. Participants frequently described how leaders' attitudes and communication styles influenced their motivation. Employees reported feeling more engaged when supervisors were approachable, provided constructive feedback, and showed empathy toward employees' challenges. As one interviewee explained:

“A supportive leader is someone who listens to our problems and guides us. When that happens, we feel motivated to contribute more.”
(Participant 7)

This finding aligns with observations that leadership behavior significantly shapes employees' perception of organizational support and engagement levels (Nguyen & Petchsawang, 2026). In addition, observational data showed that teams with more collaborative leadership styles demonstrated higher levels of participation and initiative during meetings.

The third theme relates to organizational resources and fairness. Employees emphasized the importance of access to training opportunities, fair workload distribution, and transparent evaluation systems. Participants perceived these practices as indicators that the organization genuinely cared about employee well-being and professional growth. One participant stated:

“When the company provides training or development opportunities, it shows they invest in us. That motivates us to improve our performance.”
(Participant 2)

Document analysis also revealed organizational policies supporting professional development programs, which employees interpreted as a form of institutional recognition. Previous qualitative studies highlight that fair organizational practices and resource availability strengthen perceptions of organizational support and encourage engagement (Gadolin et al., 2021).

The final theme, the development of work engagement and intrinsic motivation, illustrates how recognition and support ultimately shape employees' psychological involvement in their work. Employees reported experiencing greater enthusiasm, dedication, and responsibility when they perceived strong organizational support. As one participant explained:

"When I feel supported by my team and supervisors, I become more enthusiastic about my work and want to give my best." (Participant 9)

These experiences demonstrate how organizational practices contribute to employees' sense of belonging and commitment. The relationship between support and engagement has been widely documented in organizational research, where supportive environments promote higher motivation and proactive behavior among employees (Nguyen et al., 2024).

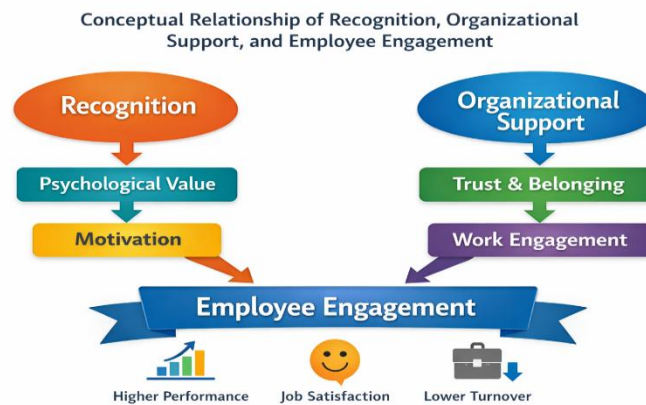


Figure 1. Conceptual Relationship of Recognition, Organizational Support, and Employee Engagement

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between recognition, organizational support, and employee engagement. Recognition plays an important role in influencing employees' psychological perceptions. When employees receive recognition for their contributions and achievements, they develop a sense of psychological value, meaning they feel appreciated and valued by the organization. This positive feeling enhances their motivation, encouraging them to perform better and become more committed to their work. As motivation increases, employees are more likely to develop stronger employee engagement, characterized by enthusiasm, dedication, and active involvement in their tasks.

At the same time, organizational support also contributes significantly to employee engagement. When employees perceive that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, they tend to develop trust in the organization and a strong sense of belonging. These feelings foster work engagement, where employees become more energetic, dedicated, and absorbed in their work responsibilities. As work engagement grows, it strengthens overall employee engagement within the organization.

Ultimately, the framework suggests that both recognition and organizational support indirectly influence employee engagement through psychological and emotional mechanisms. By providing recognition and demonstrating support for employees, organizations can enhance motivation, trust, and work engagement, which lead to positive outcomes such as higher performance, greater job satisfaction, and lower employee turnover.

This conceptual pattern illustrates how recognition and organizational support act as catalysts that foster motivation and engagement among employees.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the central role of recognition and organizational support in shaping employees' motivation and engagement. The first theme recognition as psychological affirmation demonstrates that employees interpret recognition not merely as a reward but as a symbolic confirmation of their value within the organization. This aligns with social exchange theory, which suggests that employees reciprocate positive organizational treatment with greater commitment and engagement (Adisa et al., 2023). The findings are consistent with previous research showing that recognition contributes to stronger emotional attachment to the organization and increased motivation to perform (Rajashekar & Jain, 2024).

The second theme emphasizes the importance of supportive leadership and communication. Participants reported that empathetic leadership and open dialogue enhance employees' sense of belonging and trust. This result corresponds with prior qualitative studies that highlight the role of leadership behavior in shaping perceptions of organizational support and employee engagement (Nguyen & Petchsawang, 2026). However, this study adds a new perspective by illustrating how everyday interpersonal interactions such as listening to employee concerns or providing constructive feedback can have a profound motivational impact.

The third theme concerning organizational resources and fairness further reinforces the significance of institutional support in shaping employee experiences. Employees interpreted training opportunities, fair workloads, and transparent policies as tangible expressions of organizational commitment to their development. These findings are consistent with research indicating that access to organizational resources increases employees' perceptions of fairness and encourages proactive engagement (Gadolin et al., 2021). Nevertheless, this study extends previous research by emphasizing how employees interpret these policies through a subjective and experiential lens rather than purely structural organizational frameworks.

The final theme highlights the development of work engagement and intrinsic motivation as outcomes of recognition and support. Employees who felt appreciated and supported reported greater enthusiasm and responsibility toward their work. These results align with studies demonstrating that perceived

organizational support fosters higher levels of engagement and psychological involvement in work activities (Nguyen et al., 2024). From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to the growing body of literature that integrates organizational support theory with qualitative insights into employee experiences.

Practically, these findings suggest that organizations should cultivate recognition practices and supportive leadership cultures to enhance employee engagement. Simple gestures such as verbal appreciation, transparent communication, and opportunities for professional growth can significantly influence employee motivation. Organizational leaders should therefore prioritize inclusive and supportive workplace environments that acknowledge employee contributions.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that open avenues for further research. Future studies could explore the relationship between recognition and engagement across different organizational sectors or cultural contexts. Additionally, integrating qualitative insights with quantitative approaches may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how organizational support influences employee behavior. Expanding research in this area will help organizations design more effective strategies to foster motivation, engagement, and long-term organizational commitment.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study explored employees' lived experiences regarding recognition and organizational support and how these experiences influence work motivation and engagement within the organizational context. The findings revealed four central themes: recognition as psychological affirmation, supportive leadership and communication, organizational resources and fairness, and the development of work engagement and intrinsic motivation. These themes demonstrate that employees interpret recognition and support not merely as formal organizational practices but as meaningful experiences that shape their sense of value, belonging, and commitment to their work. The study highlights that when employees perceive genuine appreciation, transparent communication, and equitable organizational policies, they are more likely to develop stronger motivation and deeper engagement in their work activities. These findings support existing research emphasizing that perceived organizational support plays a critical role in enhancing employee engagement and positive work attitudes (Imran et al., 2020; Mascarenhas et al., 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the literature on organizational support theory and employee engagement by providing qualitative insights into how employees subjectively interpret recognition and support in their everyday work experiences. While many previous studies have relied primarily on quantitative approaches, this study enriches the existing literature by highlighting the experiential and contextual dimensions of organizational support. The findings illustrate that recognition and supportive leadership act as social

exchange mechanisms that strengthen employees' emotional attachment to the organization and foster greater engagement. This qualitative perspective helps deepen understanding of the psychological processes through which organizational support influences employee motivation and behavior.

Practically, the results suggest that organizations should prioritize workplace cultures that emphasize appreciation, open communication, and fair organizational practices. Leaders play a crucial role in shaping employees' perceptions of support through everyday interactions, feedback, and encouragement. Implementing consistent recognition systems, providing opportunities for professional development, and maintaining transparent policies can strengthen employees' sense of value and motivation. From a policy perspective, organizations and human resource managers should design employee engagement strategies that integrate both formal recognition programs and supportive leadership practices to cultivate sustainable work environments and improve organizational performance.

Despite its contributions, this study also has several limitations that provide opportunities for future research. The findings are based on experiences within a specific organizational context, which may limit their generalizability to other industries or cultural settings. Future studies could examine similar phenomena across diverse organizational sectors, cultural contexts, or employment structures to broaden understanding of how recognition and organizational support influence employee engagement. In addition, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches may provide a more comprehensive perspective on the relationship between organizational support, motivation, and engagement. Such research could further strengthen theoretical development and provide more robust guidance for organizational practice.

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