

Appreciation in the Workplace

The feeling of being appreciated yields an increase in satisfaction at work, strengthens the attachment to the organisation, increases performance and supports the coping of stress.

This article highlights the effect of appreciation in the workplace.

How is Appreciation Manifested?

The most obvious form of appreciation is praise but appreciation can also go beyond praise. For example, appreciation can be expressed through showing interest in the employee or through actions such as the omission of barriers (the omission of poor lighting for example). These are only two examples of many.

Appreciation through Fairness

Appreciation is often expressed through fairness: distributive fairness (Do I get the salary I deserve?), procedural fairness (Why were certain decisions made?) and interactional fairness (Am I being taken seriously?). Interactional fairness also includes respectful interactions i.e. one signals that the other person is taken seriously. This also means that when a decision is made, especially an unpleasant one, the reasoning behind the decision should be explained comprehensively to the people involved.

An example: Two subsidiaries of an US-American enterprise lost an important contract which led to financial difficulties. Both subsidiaries decided to decrease the salaries by 15 % for a period of 10 weeks. In the first subsidiary the decision was announced at a short meeting without any further explanations. In the second subsidiary, the decision to cut the salaries short was well explained during a longer meeting. In the first subsidiary, 1/4 of the employees resigned within 10 weeks. In the second subsidiary, this number was less than 2 %. In addition, the employee theft increased from 3 % to approximately 8 % in the first subsidiary. In the second subsidiary the employee theft increased from 3 % to about 5 %. After the 10 week period, the employee thefts dropped to their original levels in both subsidiaries.

Appreciation and Job Safety

A solid safety culture necessitates that one speaks openly about errors and learns from them. But these factors depend on a culture that displays appreciation and where one does not feel inhibited to speak about problems. In such environments it is easier to communicate about security. Appreciation also reduces the experience of stress and supports the coping of strains. Hence, appreciation leads to a safer work environment.

An American study showed that the perceived support through the organisation and a good relationship with the management leads to a better communication about safety, which in turn leads to a decrease in accidents.

Important Sources and Triggers of Appreciation

Previous research at the University of Berne concerning appreciation mainly focused on identifying the sources of appreciation as well as its triggers. The results showed that supervisors and colleagues as well as clients are an important source of experienced appreciation. The main reason for receiving appreciation is one's own performance and it is mainly communicated through praise (Jacobshagen & Semmer, 2009).

Appreciation and Consequences on Well-Being

Appreciation or the lack of appreciation also affects the employees. The concept of the “gratification crisis” emphasizes the balance between effort and reward. Effort is being valued through the rewards; salary, work place safety and appreciation.

Studies showed that an unbalance between effort and reward can increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases, especially for men, and the risk of depression for both gender groups. An example is the study of a Finnish production firm. Before the study, none of the employees had cardiovascular problems. The results of this study showed that the risk of dying from cardiovascular problems is twice as high for individuals with a high imbalance between effort and reward.

The effect of appreciation and Well-Being was examined in a further study where we evaluated the effect of perceived appreciation in the Swiss military. 228 professional officers were questioned with an online questionnaire. The results revealed that appreciation through management and colleagues leads to higher job satisfaction and less negative emotions. The study also showed that long work days lead to lower job satisfaction, but only when accompanied by low appreciation and not by high appreciation (Stocker, Jacobshagen, Semmer, & Annen, 2010).

In our current research, which is in cooperation with the Swiss National Fond, we focus on appreciation and its effect on well-being. We believe that appreciation can predict well-being over time and that some sources of appreciation are more important than others. Leaning on our previous results, we believe this source to be the supervisors. Furthermore, we are examining if high appreciation can attenuate the feeling of stress. We will also examine fluctuations of the effect of appreciation within individuals; what are the immediate reactions and how does it influence well-being at the end of the work day? Could it be that appreciation can compensate negative events or even lead to a better well-being at the end of the work-day?

Implementation in Workaday life: Opportunities and Obstacles

In conclusion, the implementation of appreciation leads to many positive outcomes. But it is not easy and there is no perfect way to do it. However, the power of small gestures such as nodding during a conversation, solving a problem rapidly or giving an explanation if the problem cannot be solved within a short timeframe, should not be underestimated. With our current study we hope to shed some new light on how appreciation influences our everyday life and how we can use it as an opportunity.

Literature:

Jacobshagen, N., & Semmer, N. K. (2009). Wer schätzt eigentlich wen? Kunden als Quelle der Wertschätzung am Arbeitsplatz. [Who appreciates whom? Clients as a source of appreciation at work]. *Wirtschaftspsychologie*, 11, 11-19.

Translation „Wertschätzung am Arbeitsplatz“
17.01.2012

Stocker, D., Jacobshagen, N., Semmer, N. K., & Annen, H. (2010). Appreciation at work in the Swiss Armed Forces. *Swiss Journal of Psychology*, 69, 117-124.