

**Gordon Institute
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**How cultural differences affect recognition and retention in multinational
organisations**

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Abstract

Employee recognition matters to business outcomes; ensuring employees know and feel that they are valued can result in lower voluntary turnover. The purpose of this qualitative research was to investigate how cultural differences affect employee recognition and its link to retention within the context of a telecommunications multinational operating in 18 African markets. By exploring the nuances of recognition across various cultural contexts, the research aimed to determine the relevance of macro-cultural models such as Hofstede's in guiding modern employee recognition strategies affecting employee loyalty with the aim of identifying best practice.

The study used a descriptive-exploratory design, analysing 16 semi-structured interviews with employees and HR professionals across multiple African regions. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in preference, perception and impact using Atlas.ti. The principal finding is that national culture is a weak predictor of recognition preferences. Instead, individual demographic factors and socio-economic pragmatism were found to be stronger moderators. The findings also challenge the direct link between recognition and retention and highlight that recognition is more of an amplifier than a driver of retention.

The study proposes a Structured Personalisation model in place of a "one-size-fits-all" approach. It recommends that MNCs provide personalisation in recognition and make managers more accountable for driving it.

Keywords

Recognition

Retention

Hofstede's Cultural Theory

Cross-cultural management

Talent management

Plagiarism Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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List of Acronyms:

AJG	Academic Journal Guide
EVP	Employee Value Proposition
HRM	Human Resource Management
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MNC	Multinational Corporation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	South and East Africa
WECA	West and Central Africa

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research Problem

1.1 Introduction

This research tells the story of managing talent across cultures. It aims to understand if and how the powerful employee engagement tool, employee recognition, can equally be applied in different contexts to retain talent. Employee engagement speaks to the connection, enthusiasm and commitment that an employee has to their work and has consistently been directly linked to positive business outcomes (Gallup, 2025). However, employee engagement is currently facing a global crisis, with over 40% of employees worldwide reporting that they are not engaged in their work (Deloitte, 2025) and Manager engagement falling from 30% to 27% (Gallup, 2025), a concerning sign for organisations already struggling with productivity and meeting business outcomes. Multinational companies in particular, face unique challenges in managing a culturally diverse workforce across a multitude of geographies (Caliguiri et al., 2024; Schuler & Rogovsky, 1998). The effectiveness of their recognition programmes varies widely across the different contexts in which the business operates potentially causing a failure to engage and retain high-performing employees in some of its operations if a blanket approach is taken.

The ability of business to retain top key talent remains crucial for achieving stakeholder outcomes (Bonneton et al., 2022; Brun & Dugas, 2008). Talent management practices in general have been found to have a positive effect on the intention to stay with an organisation (Bonneton et al., 2022) giving organisations that can retain talent critical talent a competitive advantage. More specifically to this study, the link between retention and recognition as a talent management practice, in particular, has also been studied extensively and confirmed (Mngomezulu et al., 2015, Ndiago et al, 2024). Longitudinal data from a 2022-2024 study found that well-recognised employees are 45% less likely to leave the organisation (Yi, 2024), highlighting the business imperative for getting recognition right in order to retain good talent. This shows that when employees feel valued and appreciated for their efforts, they are motivated to stay in the long term.

This research problem highlights the need to understand the impact that cultural differences have on recognition, engagement and retention of employees, especially in

a culture-rich context such as the African continent. Tailoring recognition practices to account for cultural nuances, even within a single organisation, can boost morale and foster a sense of loyalty, belonging, and commitment, ultimately affecting employee retention and driving positive business outcomes across the Group or multinational organisation.

1.2 Why Was This Problem Selected?

In today's increasingly competitive and globalised environment, many companies operate across diverse cultural landscapes and must navigate a complex web of cultural expectations. While this diversity in employee composition brings innovation and broader perspectives (Vaara et al., 2021), it also presents challenges in managing human capital effectively. One such challenge is ensuring that recognition and retention strategies are culturally appropriate and effective across different regions (Froese, Shen & Davies, 2020). This research problem was selected because misalignment between recognition practices and cultural expectations can lead to employee disengagement and high turnover, which is costly and disruptive for any business (Stahl et al., 2010). The 'war for talent' or competition to attract and retain critical talent is getting fiercer and businesses can benefit from any advantage that makes employees want to perform better and stay with the business (Tarique & Schuler, 2010). Understanding the intricacies of what it takes for a business to pull on the recognition lever is important for employee engagement and, consequently, retention.

On a larger scale, employee engagement and retention are strongly linked to Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth), as ensuring employees are engaged leads to full and productive employment which in turn drives initiatives that support economic growth (UN, 2025). Companies with engaged employees report high productivity and wellbeing, directly supporting this SDG (Gallup, 2025). Recently, post-COVID, employee engagement has decreased dramatically, with elements like 'quiet quitting' becoming more prevalent (Corbin et al., 2024), making research on this topic both relevant and urgent.

1.3 What Evidence Verifies the Identification of The Problem?

The case for recognition in the workplace is both clear and persuasive. Recognition is one of the core drivers behind an inspired and motivated workforce (Luthans, 2011, O’Flaherty et al., 2021) and structured, consistent, meaningful recognition is foundational to successful cultures (Robins, 2019). This involves both frequent, lower-quality recognition such as peer-to-peer recognition as well as infrequent, high-quality recognition such as loyalty programmes (Kgarimetsa & Naidoo, 2024). Equally important in ensuring productivity and business success is employee retention. That is, ensuring that the business is able to keep key talent in order to achieve shareholder and stakeholder outcomes (Romy, 2024; Brun & Dugas, 2008).

1.4 What is The Relevance of This Topic?

A core objective of leadership is enhancing employee engagement and recognition serves as a vital workplace resource contributing significantly to this outcome (Jo & Shin, 2025). Recognition is crucial because it reinforces an employee’s sense of achievement and their perceived value within the organisation (Martela ET AL., 2021).

While it has been confirmed that when employees are recognised for their efforts at work, they are less likely to quit, a key area not yet fully explored is how recognition practices and expectations vary across different cultures and the subsequent effect this might have on employee motivation and ultimately retention in the context of a multinational company (MNC). Further, existing research on recognition in the workplace has not explicitly considered this angle, specifically examining it in the context of a multinational operating within the African context, which is rich and diverse culturally, and linking it to the positive business outcome of employee retention. For instance, what is considered a meaningful reward in one culture may be perceived as inadequate or even inappropriate in another. Understanding these intricacies can equip leaders with the correct and necessary tools to engage and retain top talent. This research explores the mechanisms through which recognition can explain retention in a multinational business operating in the African environment.

1.5 What is Unique About The Proposed Research Setting?

The objectives of the research are to understand if culture plays a moderating role on employee recognition and retention and the uniqueness of this research lies in its focus

on real-world practices within multicultural organisations operating in culturally diverse regions such as the African continent. Comparing the views of employees in different contexts across the same business will enable an understanding of how the same recognition framework is perceived across different territories.

By examining both headquarters that set the tone and the regional offices which implement and experience employee recognition, the research will qualitatively explore the tension between designing centralised recognition programmes and the perception of the programmes in diverse contexts. This will allow for an in-depth understanding of how cultural differences influence recognition and by extension, retention as well as provide an understanding of how global frameworks are adapted or fail to adapt to local cultural contexts in an under-researched African backdrop (Michailova, 2011). Additionally, research into these dual contexts will highlight the role that leaders and HR professionals have in acting as intermediaries that bridge the cultural divide between global policies and local expectations.

1.6 Conclusion and Report Structure

This research aims to thoroughly examine a practical and theoretical problem from a unique viewpoint, grounding lived experience in cultural theory (Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions). Each Chapter helps to establish detailed knowledge on how cultural differences affect recognition and retention in African multinational organisations. This Chapter has presented the contextual framework for the research, including the academic and business importance.

Chapter 2 investigates the conceptual frameworks underpinning the study. This includes Hofstede's Cultural Theory Framework as well as a review of the current literature on the topic to identify existing gaps in knowledge. Chapter 3 presents the research questions whilst Chapter 4 discusses and defends the research methodology. Chapter 5 presents the results of the research, which are then critically discussed in Chapter 6. The Final Chapter, Chapter 7, summarises the study including the practical consequences, academic contribution and the implications for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 outlined the purpose of the study and its significance as well as the academic and business problem addressed by this research. This chapter turns to the theory which explains the research problem and what previous research has said about the research questions. It also highlights the related literature themes that lead to the research propositions.

Globalised Business & The War For Talent

The competition to attract and retain critical talent is getting fiercer and employee retention is one of the crucial elements that leaders constantly monitor. The globalisation of business characterised by multinational organisations that operate across diverse political, economic and social landscapes and remote work have intensified this competition for talent, making employee retention a strategic imperative and forcing all organisations irrespective of size and location to balance the efficiencies of standardised operation with the nuances of cultural adaptation (Liu, et al., 2021). For an organisation to be effective in an international setting, there needs to be a deliberate consideration of cultural sensitives. Given the high costs associated with employee turnover (Mngomezulu et al., 2015), developing talent management strategies that are effective in engaging and retaining employees is an important competitive advantage.

Standardisation of Talent Management Practices

The effectiveness of recognition practices is not universal; it is shaped by cultural contexts in which organisations operate (Vaara et al., 2021; Schuler & Rogovsky, 1998). Existing literature has, for the most part, reached consensus that the standardisation of global talent management needs to be both standardised and localised (Caligiuri, Collings, De Cieri & Lazarova, 2024). Existing research on recognition in the workplace has not explicitly considered the angle looking specifically at the context of a multinational operating within the African context which is rich and diverse culturally and linking it to the positive business outcome of employee retention. What constitutes fair acknowledgement in one culture may be perceived as unjust or offensive in another. For example, a highly standardised recognition system based on individualistic philosophies risks clashing with cultural norms in societies that prioritise equality and collective

contributions irrespective of the intrinsic value. An example is the Ubuntu philosophy which provides a cultural framework rooted in community and relationship building (Tayali, 2025).

This literature review therefore critically examines the moderating role of national culture, drawing on Hofstede's dimensions and explores the benefits, types, timing and cultural intersection of employee recognition in multi-national organisations (MNOs), with a focus on the effect this has on talent retention. The review first defines the foundational principles, concepts and constructs before analysing how Hofstede's dimensions apply.

2.2 Definition and Benefits of Recognition

Employee recognition is widely defined in academic literature as the formal or informal acknowledgement of an individual or team's contributions, achievements or behaviours that support organisational goals (Brun & Douglas, 2008). Recognition can take numerous forms, be it monetary or non-monetary, private or public, and may be delivered by leaders, managers, peers or the organisation as a whole to individuals or collective teams. Recognising employee contributions and achievements has been established as a critical and important vehicle for motivation, positive feedback and commitment. It is therefore a critical lever for increasing engagement and reducing turnover (Brun & Dugas, 2008).

The case for employee recognition is as clear as it is persuasive. Recognition is linked to a wide range of positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, performance, culture & engagement and retention (Mngomezulu et al., 2015). Recognition also functions as a critical resource supporting employee engagement by improving psychological and emotional well-being (O'Flaherty et al., 2021). Jo & Shin, 2025 posit that recognised employees report higher job satisfaction and overall well-being whilst Bradler et al., 2016 found similarly positive outcomes when it comes to recognition enhancing engagement, in turn leading to increased productivity and innovation. They found that recognition increases performance substantially, this is regardless of whether the recognition has been done publicly or not (Bradler et al., 2016). Similarly, Laaser & Bolton (2021) discuss "respectful recognition" as a core dimension of meaningful work. They posit that whether done through formal or informal recognition programmes, respectful recognition

enhances employees employee morale and also creates a sense of self-worth where employees can derive dignity from their contributions. The importance of working with meaning cannot be underscored given its link to various positive outcomes (Martela et al., 2021). Recognition has also been known to strengthen organisational culture by reinforcing core values and desired behaviours (Kudos Inc., 2025).

The correlation between employee recognition and positive psychological functioning and well-being is also well established. At a neurobiological level, recognition has measurable positive effects on human physiology and psychological health, it triggers the release of dopamine, the "reward" chemical, and oxytocin, the "trust" hormone, which enhance feelings of appreciation and connection within the team (AwardCo, 2025). Expanding on this perspective, Tursunbayeva et al. (2025) also investigated the neuroscience of recognition and argue that there are cognitive benefits as recognition 'lights up' the brain, releasing feel-good hormones such as dopamine. Consistent and sincere appreciation also serves as an effective countermeasure to workplace stress, reducing cortisol levels (the stress hormone) by 23% (AwardCo, 2025). This creates a more secure environment where individuals feel safe to contribute and collaborate. Beyond the individual, there are 'knock-on' effects to other team members and to the business where acknowledging an employee's contributions improves the motivation and performance of their team members thereby providing a dual benefit and creating an aspirational standard for collective performance (Romy, 2024).

However, not all scholars agree on its efficacy. Hancock (2022) critiques it as symbolic and potentially manipulative, arguing that recognition programmes may serve managerial interests more than they serve the interests of the ordinary employee and suggesting that they need to be replaced with tangible praise, such as compensation. Similarly, Hassan, 2023, states that poorly executed recognition can be worse than no recognition at all and call for recognition to be authentic and meaningful or risk undermining the very trust and engagement that it aims to cultivate. While there are scholars that challenge the positive research on employee recognition, when considered collectively the literature overwhelmingly supports employee recognition as critical for both business and the employee and organisations that overlook it risk creating a systemic retention crisis.

2.3 Types of Recognition

A good employee recognition strategy takes into account the different types of recognition, namely formal / informal, public / private and conditional / unconditional. These dichotomies enable organisations to customise their strategies and optimise motivational effects across varied employee demographics and organisational contexts. This research used these three types of recognition in order to understand if there are any patterns in the type of recognition that link to national culture.

Formal vs. Informal Recognition

Formal recognition refers to structured, standardised programmes with set criteria such as annual loyalty or service awards, big events or ceremonies, or performance-linked incentives bonuses. These programmes are institutionalised and usually follow a set of rules that have been decided ahead of time, and designed by a central 'Group' team. Formal systems are meant to show and spread the idea of distributive justice (Bradler et al., 2016). By identifying the organization's "good soldiers" according to standardised criteria, they send a clear signal on which values and vital behaviours are valued by the business. The hardest part of putting formal programmes into action is making sure that everyone follows the rules of procedural fairness. The program can hurt trust in the organisation if the criteria seem random, unfair, or unclear, no matter how big the reward is. Formal systems that are carefully set up give other employees clear examples to follow and learn from. This could make them feel like the workplace is fairer and improve their health.

Informal recognition on the hand includes spontaneous, unplanned ways of showing appreciation such as verbal praise, instant digital kudos, or handwritten thank-you notes (Neckermann & Yang, 2017) These methods are often not about money, but they are very important for quickly reinforcing good behaviours and building good emotional connections at work. Informal recognition is very important for building strong interactional justice, which means that daily interactions between managers and coworkers should be based on respect and honesty. The capacity to provide spontaneous and prompt commendation directly enhances positive emotions and relational contentment. Informal recognition's high frequency and immediacy make sure that positive actions are recognised quickly, which helps keep employee engagement levels high (Bradler et al., 2016). The two types are not distinct, but rather complimentary

as effective systems typically use the formal programmes to ensure that the informal recognitions happens consistently across teams.

Public vs. Private Recognition

The visibility of recognition is also a key consideration. Public recognition involves praising an employee's work in view of other people such as in meetings, company updates or events and has also been found to a valuable and effective recognition type which appeals to social wellness (Bradler, Neckermann & Non, 2016). In contrast, private recognition involves acknowledging an employee's contributions only to them and can be just as powerful as because it is more intimate (Bradler et al., 2016) The decision to recognise someone privately or in public does presents a challenge in terms of the personalisation and often perceived authenticity of the recognition. It has been referred to as the dual-axis approach because it takes into account both internal personality traits and external cultural contexts (Neckermann et al., 2017). The preferred recognition type often comes down to personality and the personality axis (introvert/ extrovert divide) where individual psychological preferences dictate the best way to recognise someone. People who are introverted usually generally prefer discretion and privacy and may feel uncomfortable or overwhelmed by large, public displays of praise. This group responds best to recognition when it is given in private, personalised ways, like one-on-one conversations with a manager, personalised emails, or handwritten notes. Introverts often appreciate indirect recognition that comes from having more freedom or chances to learn, which fits with their preference for quiet, focused work. Extroverts on the other hand usually do well when they get social validation and public praise, they are motivated by praise from others, big social events, and rewards that are easy to see (Bradler et al., 2016).

Conditional vs Unconditional Recognition

Conditional recognition as the name suggests refers to tangible, transactional or expected recognition which is tied to a pre-established condition, an example of this is long-service or loyalty awards which recognise employees at specific tenure milestones in their career or on the anniversary of them joining the business. These function primarily as extrinsic motivation. In contract, unconditional recognition refers to intangible, often

unexpected employee recognition (Luthans, 2000). This is typically more intrinsic and serves to reinforce and recognise personal effort, performance or commitment.

2.4 Timing and Delivery of Recognition

The timing and delivery of recognition are also important variables to be considered. Best practice suggests that timely, specific and sincere recognition is most effective as it links directly to the achievement, driving a sense of belonging and closing the feedback loop (Rizzo, 2019; Zak, 2017; Harrison, n.d.). Frequency is also strongly correlated with engagement where high-performers in particular can feel invisible or unappreciated without regular feedback (Wang, 2017). Automated platforms which some organisations have adopted help ensure consistency, immediacy and reach across digital channels. On the flip side, delayed or generic recognition can be demotivating or even resented (Corbin et al., 2024). Moreover, the administrative burden of maintaining recognition programmes can lead to inconsistency and disengagement (Hancock, 2022). This highlights that beyond the content or 'what' of recognition, the tactical delivery or 'how' is equally important.

2.5 Recognition and Talent Retention

Employee retention is a critical aspect of organisational success. High turnover rates lead to increased costs, loss of institutional knowledge, and decreased morale among remaining staff (Hassan, 2023). Understanding and addressing why employees leave is essential for developing effective retention strategies. Employee recognition has a mitigating effect on turnover.

Numerous studies confirm a positive correlation between recognition and retention (Mngomezulu et al., 2015; Ndiango et al., 2024; Jo & Shin, 2025). Recognition fosters a sense of belonging, value, and purpose, which are key drivers of retention. However, the impact of recognition on retention is not uniform. For example, Ndiango et al. (2024) found that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between recognition and retention, and that the effect varies by age group with recognition having a stronger direct effect on retention for younger employees than for middle-aged employees. This shows that while recognition is generally beneficial, its impact on retention is moderated by other factors such as generational cohort, culture and the authenticity of the recognition process.

Overly standardized or symbolic programmes therefore may fail to deliver the intended benefits and can even erode trust and engagement.

While previous studies have looked into the many elements of recognition and tested it against motivation and job satisfaction (Brun & Dugas., 2008; Martela et al., 2021), little emphasis has been placed on the connection between recognition and retention using Hofstede's cultural dimensions as a lens within the African context.

2.6 The Intersection of Culture and Recognition

Existing literature highlights that cultural values might shape recognition preferences. Collectivist cultures value group recognition; individualist cultures prefer personal achievements whilst high power distance cultures value recognition from leaders and low power cultures value peer recognition (Laaser and Bolton, 2021; Kgarimetsa & Naidoo, 2024). Whilst some research such as confirms that recognition programmes are more effective when adapted to local cultural norms (Mngomezulu et al., 2015) , some studies on the other hand suggest that generational shifts and preferences may actually play a stronger role in moderating traditional cultural preferences, with younger employees across the different cultures valuing flexibility, peer recognition and autonomy in spite of cultural context (Kgarimetsa & Naidoo, 2024).

Contrary Views

While employee recognition has largely been seen as a positive construct, there are critical and opposing views which recognition been used as symbolic instead of substantive and viewing recognition as a double edged sword. Hancock (2024) and Laaser & Bolton (2022) argue that many recognition programmes are symbolic, focusing on individual exceptionalism and failing to address deeper needs for autonomy, dignity, and collective meaning. They warn that such programmes can reinforce managerial control and even contribute to employee alienation resulting in disengagement or even attrition. In some contexts, employees may view recognition as a form of manipulation or compelled identification with organisational values, rather than genuine appreciation. Recognition can sometimes backfire, especially if perceived as inauthentic, unfair, or tied to unattainable standards (Brun & Dugas, 2008; Hancock, 2022).

2.7 Theoretical Overview: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede's (1980, 2011) cultural dimensions theory is foundational for understanding cross-national difference in workplace behaviour. Developed in the late 1970s, the model analyses 6 dimensions to understand how cultural differences impact international business interactions (Hancock, 2022). Some critics argue it is based on a narrow definition of culture that oversimplifies complexities down to general trends and risks essentializing cultures and ignoring intra-country diversity, with authors such as Jo & Shin (2025) suggesting that digital transformation and globalisation may be eroding traditional cultural boundaries, thus complicating the application of Hofstede's dimensions. Nonetheless, Hofstede's framework remains influential. Though the model might be outdated, it remains highly relevant for a baseline understanding of the modern global workplace from a macro perspective, and its easy applicability makes it suitable for research of this nature.

The framework provides a critical tool for understanding how different societies approach hierarchy, individualism, risk, gender roles, time orientation and life outlook, enabling MNCs to create a predictable matrix for recognition policy adaptation particularly during international expansions or takeovers as well as in this digital era where remote work has become normalised. The 6 dimensions detailed below are relevant and provide a lens through which to analyse how recognition is perceived and valued across cultures and are what the study was grounded in.

2.7.1 – *power distance index*: this dimension evaluates the extent to which a country's social structure displays inequality dynamics as well as the extent to which less powerful members of organisations accept and expect unequal power relationships (Bing, 2004). High power distance cultures value authority and hierarchies whilst low power distance cultures prefer equal relationships and participative decision making (Hofstede, 1980). In high power distance cultures such as China, recognition from senior leaders is highly valued, while in low power distance cultures such as the United States, peer recognition can be equally impactful (Schular & Rogovsky, 1998). The implications for this research are that recognition originating from a high-status manager can be perceived to have far greater value, credibility and legitimacy and peer-to-peer recognition systems may be

undervalued or dismissed because the source lacks the necessary organisational authority.

2.7.2 – individualism vs collectivism: this dimension measures the degree to which people are integrated into homogenous groups within the social structure (Bing, 2004). Individualistic cultures emphasize personal autonomy, individual achievements and self-reliance while collectivism cultures are the inverse, they prioritise the greater good, group harmony, loyalty and shared responsibilities (Hofstede, 2011). The individualist cultures would favour personal achievement recognition whilst collectivist cultures prefer team-based or group recognition (Bing, 2004). Highly individualistic cultures such as the United States for example, emphasize individual achievement and therefore recognition would be most effective when it specifically acknowledges the individuals contribution publicly whereas in a collectivist culture singling out an employee for personal praise might cause discomfort or be perceived negatively therefore private recognition of recognising the whole team would be more appropriate and motivating.

2.7.3 – masculinity vs femininity: This dimension evaluates societal tendencies regarding gender roles, gender equality and traditional gender values (Hofstede, 2011). High masculinity cultures are goal oriented and value competitiveness, achievement, assertiveness and material success making performance-based recognition important whilst feminine cultures on the other hand value care and quality of life favouring recognition for collaboration and supportive behaviours allowing males and females to interchange their contributions to social and economic systems more fluidly (Hofstede, 2011).

2.7.4 – uncertainty avoidance: This dimension essentially reflects general levels of risk tolerance (Bing, 2004). It measures a society's tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, where high uncertainty avoidance cultures prefer structured environments with clear rules and formal procedures to mitigate the potential influence of the unknown and unexpected, whilst low uncertainty avoidance cultures are more comfortable with flexibility and risk-taking (Hofstede, 2011). Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, that show a clear preference from clear rules, stability and structure such as Germany, therefore, may prefer formal, structured recognition programmes, while those with low

uncertainty avoidance are comfortable with flexibility and improvisation may accept informal, spontaneous recognition (Laaser & Bolton, 2021). Clearly structured recognition programmes with clear criteria would therefore provide psychological safety to high uncertainty avoidance contexts while spontaneous and highly informal recognition might be thought to be unfair and mistrusted.

2.7.5 – Long-term orientation:

Long-term oriented cultures value perseverance and future rewards whilst short-term oriented cultures focus on traditions, social obligations and immediate results (Hofstede, 2011). Cultures with a long-term orientation may therefore value recognition which is tied to sustained contributions such as loyalty awards as they display a willingness to forego instant results for the greater long-term good while short term oriented cultures on the opposite end may focus on immediate 'on-the-spot' recognition as they value strategies that generate fast results and instant gratification (Bing, 2004).

2.7.6 – Indulgent vs restraint: Indulgent cultures value enjoyment and allow relatively free gratification of basic human desires related to having fun and showy displays of socioeconomic status whilst restrained cultures suppress gratification and regulate it through social norms (Hofstede, 2011). Indulgent cultures may therefore encourage frequent and visible recognition whilst restrained cultures may view public recognition as inappropriate as they emphasise modesty, suppression and self-control (Bing, 2004).

2.8 Beyond Hofstede: Competing Factors in Recognition

While Hofstede's model provides a foundational lens for national culture, recent academic literature argues that it may be an outdated, based on a narrow definition of culture that oversimplifies complexities down to global trends (Liu et al., 2021). The findings from their research which focused on cross-cultural mergers and acquisitions, questions the ready applicability of Hofstede's theory and calling for living lenses which allow for a deeper understanding pre, post and during the merger.

Similarly, other scholars now point to other powerful variables such as generational and demographic cohorts as well as socioeconomic context, that may dilute or even override the influence of national culture in today's globalised workforce. Recent studies

(Kgarimetsa & Naidoo, 2024) argue that generational identity (e.g., Gen Z) creates a global "micro-culture" with shared preferences for flexibility and recognition that can be stronger than their national identity. Likewise, the lived experience of different genders in the workplace may fundamentally shape needs for validation and respect, a factor not explicitly captured in Hofstede's model. Similarly, Macro-cultural models often fail to account for the immediate socioeconomic reality of employees. In contexts with high inflation or economic precarity, the preference for tangible, monetary-based recognition may not be a 'cultural' trait but a 'pragmatic' one. These other variables complicate Hofstede's minimalistic theory, positioning it as a simplistic tool that is no longer relevant or overly basic.

2.9 Literature Review Conclusion and Research Gaps

The literature demonstrates that employee recognition is a powerful tool for engagement and retention, but its effectiveness is highly context-dependent. Personality differences, culture, generational differences, timing, source and the authenticity of recognition practices all moderate the outcomes, highlighting that there is a need for study into the more nuanced approaches to better understand the recognition – retention connection.

The research also highlights a clear need for deeper contextual focus on underexplored regions. More empirical studies are needed on the balance between global consistency and local adaptation of cultural frameworks in African, Latin American and Middle Eastern contexts to validate or challenge the applicability of Western-centric cultural models such as Hofstede's. Local concepts such as Ubuntu (in Southern Africa) or familismo (in Latin cultures) may have an influence on recognition preferences and retention outcomes which is yet to be investigated.

MNOs must balance the drive for global consistency with the necessity of local adaptation to address the unique cultural and generational preferences of their diverse workforces. Talent retention is achieved when recognition validates the individual's contribution within the framework of their culturally determined values.

Therefore, this study enters a live debate: in the context of an African MNC, is national culture (per Hofstede) the primary driver of recognition preferences? Or is its influence being overshadowed by more immediate factors, such as demographics, gender, and socioeconomic context? The next chapters of this paper will engage directly with these elements using the findings from the research as a basis.

Chapter 3: Research Questions & Propositions

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the objectives of the study and highlights the research questions and propositions supported by the existing literature. The study aims to investigate how cultural differences affect recognition and retention in multinational organisations. The objectives of the study are to understand employee recognition in the African context and the key elements that influence, affect and impact it given its perceived link to retention. The research was directed by 3 main research questions, which informed the identification of critical themes and theoretical frameworks that underpin the key arguments.

3.2 Research Questions

The main research question has been broken down into 3 sub-parts, there are therefore three sub-questions that this research explores in order to respond to the main question:

Research Question 1

How do employee perceptions of recognition practices differ across cultures within multinational corporations?

The first research question will aim to identify the main thoughts that employees have on recognition in the workplace. This research question is instrumental in terms of bringing to light the perceptions around recognition, the varied definitions, the value placed on recognition, what makes it effective or ineffective as well as the preferred shape of recognition across the different markets. More importantly, it aims to understand if national culture has a moderating effect on employee recognition and to what extent. There is a notable lack of research investigating how other factors such as culture, economic circumstances, technology influence the perceptions of recognition in multinational corporations.

Research Question 2

How large of a role does recognition play in an employee's decision to leave an organisation?

The second research question endeavors to ascertain the link between recognition and retention. Numerous studies have found recognition to play a large role in retaining employees (Ndiango et al., 2024) yet this has not been tested in the African context.

Research Question 3

How can multinational corporations tailor their recognition programmes to accommodate diverse cultural preferences of recognition in the workplace and enhance employee retention?

The third and final question looks squarely into the cultural dynamics at play when it comes to talent management practices like recognition in multinational corporations. There exists a notable lack in understanding the nuances around recognition in the workplace aside from the general views on how effective it is. The intricacies that come with context and social conditioning might play a role in how recognition is perceived and received.

3.3 Summary

By providing in-depth answers and different perspectives on the questions, the study aims to contribute to the growing body of research which relates to how the powerful tool of recognition can be used effectively to retain employees in competitive and multi-cultural work environments such as the telecommunications industry. The propositions for this study are that cultural contexts do have an impact on recognition and multinational corporations should take context-specific nuances into account when developing talent development, engagement and retention strategies such as recognition.

Empirical studies confirm that national culture can moderate the relationship between recognition and retention (Schuler & Rogovsky, 1998). In African contexts where collectivism and high-power distance are prevalent, recognition that aligns with community values and is delivered by respected leaders is more effective (Mngomezulu et al., 2015).

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines and justifies the research design, philosophy and strategy, how the method was used as well as how the method links to the research question allowing us to understand how cultural differences affect recognition and retention in multinational organizations. It also takes care of elements around the study's limitations and quality control mechanisms employed.

4.2 Choice and Purpose of Research Design

This research adopted a descripto-exploratory qualitative research approach to identify and analyse how recognition in the workplace is perceived across the different territories which one multinational organisation in the telecommunications industry operates in. A qualitative study focuses on understanding subjective perspectives to uncover “inner meanings and new insights” (Quinlan et al., 2019, p127). This inductive design was appropriate for gaining insights into complex issues where existing knowledge could be limited or changes according to the time or context (Quinlan et al., 2019) such as across different cultural settings. This approach was key in responding to the research questions as it enabled detailed and intricate insights and emotions to come to the surface in a way that quantitative research could not.

4.3 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy was interpretivism. This is because it aims to understand “the differences between humans in their role as social actors” (Saunders & Lewis, 2018) by speaking to employees of a multinational that operate in different contexts, in this instance being different locations of the same multinational organisation.

4.4 Approach Selected

The research approach selected was inductive and theory building in nature. It aimed to observe and understand patterns in thoughts around recognition. This type of method was chosen as it is flexible and allows for understanding of different contexts through coding and theming interview data. The phenomenology approach was used as it is a research strategy that “explores participants subjective experiences and perceptions of

a specific phenomenon to gather insights into the way they understand and interpret their realities” (Quinlan et al., 2019).

4.5 Methodological Choices

The study took on a mono methodological choice with data being collected through semi-structured and open-ended interviews, to gather rich, detailed data on the lived experiences of employees when it comes to the role and effect that recognition has in the workplace.

The mono method refers to using one method either qualitative or quantitative and not mixed methods (Wohlin & Runeson, 2021). The study exclusively used qualitative methods for the collection and analysis of data, the limited time frame for the duration of the study coupled with its nature made the mono-method approach a logical choice.

The first phase of the research involved secondary data collection through desktop research. This phase utilised various sources, including academic journals, industry reports and also company employee recognition data and exit trends and turnover reasons. The objective was to gather existing information to get a broader understanding of the issue at a macro level as well as a deeper understanding at the organisational level. The second phase of the research involved semi-structured and in-depth interviews.

4.6 Strategy

Given that this was a phenomenology qualitative research, semi-structured interviews were a strategic choice for this research because they are flexible, allowing for the participant to share candidly whilst also being guided. The structured questions were helpful in guiding the employees to focus on facts whilst there was also an allowance for discovery of information that is deemed to be key to the participants or in need of further exploration through elaboration. Whilst this strategy of study had its limitations such as not being quantifiable or that objectivity might have been difficult to maintain, the benefits far outweigh them. It is suited to understanding attitudes and behaviours in their natural setting and capable of capturing nuance. This method also allowed for probing and gaining clarity by the researcher to better understand the issues and aid in theory building. The study had two phases with the first phase focused on the experiences of employees of different countries. This choice of research strategy was guided by the time

available to conduct this research as well as the availability of and access to participants from different territories who work for the same multinational.

4.7 Time Horizon

This study was cross-sectional in nature given that it aimed to study perceptions of recognition from different contexts but at a particular point in time (Suanders & Lewis, 2018).

4.8 Population

The population for this research was permanent employees of a multinational organisation in the telecommunications industry who all have the same standardised, group-led recognition programmes in place as well as the Human Resource professionals who are responsible for the design and implementation of these Group-wide recognition programmes.

4.9 Unit and Level of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this research was the individual which allowed for deeper exploration of how recognition affects retention decisions and how culture mediates this relationship. The data was collected from employees at the head office and across four different geographies that the multinational operates in as well as from the HR professionals that are directly involved in the design and implementation of employee recognition programmes. Employees offered perspectives on how recognition is received, perceived and valued whilst the HR professionals provided insights into the recognition programme design and delivery to confirm that it is indeed a consistent approach across the Group as well as highlight what if any considerations are made to localise the programmes and make them context specific. One sample was from the Ugandan operation in East Africa, another from Eswatini in Southern Africa and the final samples were purposively selected from employees in Benin and Ghana in West Africa. Ensuring that there was a wide and diverse spread of employees from distinct African cultures enabled the research questions to be answered as it provided cross-case, cross-cultural perspectives and the identification of both shared and culturally specific themes. By focusing on individuals, rather than departments, the study captured the nuanced

subjective experiences which are essential for understanding the cultural dynamics at play.

The level of analysis as informed by the research question was at an organisational level. This enabled the research to look at the differences within one organisation as a whole system, holding other external factors constant in order to understand the interconnected cultural nuances.

4.10 Sampling Method and Size

A mixed-purposive sampling method was employed. This involved ensuring that the sample fits into the research design and study design through selecting employees that are wide ranging in terms of tenure, age and job level across the different business units but also based on convenience and accessibility. Using the readily available internal Human Resource information on the staff directory, permanent employees in the business across different markets in South, East and West Africa were selected using non-probability purposive sampling. Further, the purposive element ensured that within those, there was equal representation of age, tenure or length of service as well as level within the organisation. This deliberate quota sampling enabled the research to get information across a range of different types of participants who represent different perspectives, backgrounds, demographics and experiences related to the research questions. The breadth of viewpoints aimed to increase the potential for external validity (Franke & Richey, 2010).

Some of the ethical concerns relating to the sampling include informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, minimisation of harm and respect for diversity and cultural sensitivity. Ethical clearance was obtained from GIBS (Appendix A) prior to commencing with the collection of data to ensure adherence to the guidelines and minimisation of harm. Informed consent was obtained from all research participants, ensuring that they fully understood, the purpose, procedures and any risks associated with participating in the study and agreed to partake without coercion. The privacy and confidentiality was reiterated when getting the informed consent. An additional ethical consideration entailed anonymising the participant data as well as ensuring that it is accurate, managed responsibly and stored safely (Sinkevics et al., 2008). Finally, because this research took

place across multiple geographies, with people of diverse backgrounds, respect for the beliefs, values and cultural norms of participants was paramount. This included avoiding discrimination, based on race, gender, ethnicity or any other characteristics (Bansal & Corley, 2012) as well as presenting data that does not disclose identities when reporting the findings.

4.11 Measurement Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the participant data. The consistent use of interview guides maintained reliability and ensured uniformity in collection and analysis of the data (Sinkevics et al., 2008). The questionnaire was developed taking account the research questions as well as the literature review. A pilot interview was conducted to test the feasibility of the study by checking if the questions land well, are sequenced correctly in a logical manner that flows as well as if the , yield the desired outcomes as well as the length of the interviews. Following the pilot, no changes were made to the interview protocol given that there were no identified weaknesses, confusing questions or need to rework the approach.

4.12 Data Gathering Process

Data was collected through virtual (MS Teams) one one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the participants. There were a total of 16 interviews across the different geographies, which far exceeded the minimum of 12 participants which the researcher sought to include.

14 of the participants were employees of the business spread across various operations and the semi-structured interviews aimed to gain insights into their perceptions and preferences of employee recognition with the view of understanding how that links to employee retention.

The remaining two participants were Human Resource Specialists responsible for the design of the employee recognition systems adopted across the Group whose interviews were more in-depth. Such interviews are generally used when significant depth is required or when a different perspective of a known subject is required (Gill et al., 2008). This allowed for a deeper connection with the respondents allowing them to disclose

fundamental information they might otherwise withhold. In the collection of the data, techniques like member checking and triangulation helped to increase internal validity (Bansal & Corley, 2012).

4.13 Analysis Approach

The first step in analysing the qualitative data was transcribing the interviews conducted into written text (Sharma & Bansal, 2020). Whilst this was done digitally using MS Teams, the researcher still needed to ensure that the transcription was accurate considering the tone and accents, particularly because this research included participants across different African geographies.

Thematic analysis was then used to summarise and categorise the data gathered. This process allowed for condensing the large volumes of data and also summarising the meaning through forming relationships and patterns between groups of words (Machailova, 2011). The grounded theory approach was used to inductively and thematically code the data. In order to ensure academic rigour and that there was a strong and convincing connection between the data collected, the analysis conducted, and the interpretations made, the study made use of thematic analysis software called Atlas TI. Leveraging on this technology assisted to code, categorise and interpret the findings, ensuring that they accurately represented the experiences, perspectives and meanings shared by the participants (Bansal & Corley, 2020).

Finally, communicating transparently the reasoning behind interpretations made allowed for easy readability, coherence and consistency so that the conclusions drawn were clear and logical.

4.14 Quality Controls

Validation techniques were employed in order to ensure the quality of the data collected. This included having the participants check the transcripts of the data that had been gathered in order to confirm the accuracy of interpretations and that their voices had been well represented. Further, there was triangulation of the data to enhance the reliability of the findings. Using other sources such as exit interview data for employee turnover rationale, allowed for cross-validation of the findings and strengthened the

external validity by providing converging evidence from different perspectives or sources (Cuervo-Cazura et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2021).

A secondary quality control included the use of reflexivity. The awareness of the researchers own biases, values and assumptions might have had a direct influence on the interpretation of the data (Aguinis et al., 2022). Transparency regarding the researchers positionality combined with the other control elements highlighted above enhanced internal validity.

Saturation occurs at the point of data collection where no new information or themes emerge from the data (Ellis & Levy, 2008). Saturation can also be a quality control mechanism as achieving saturation enhanced the credibility and internal validity of the qualitative information. The third quality control was having a stopping criterion based on pragmatic considerations and iterative coding and analysis, this enabled the identification of the saturation point where no new codes were being generated after 13 interviews for the HR professionals, this quality control was not applied as their sampling was purely purposive.

Finally, the process peer review and audit trail was the last quality control mechanism (Welch & Piekari, 2017). That is seeking external feedback and scrutiny from the research supervisor as well as maintaining an audit trail and documenting any decisions made during the research process to help establish credibility.

4.15 Limitations

Whilst all care was taken to ensure that the study aligns with the requirements of academic rigour, some limitations were anticipated. Being proactive in identifying and addressing any methodological challenges is key in ensuring academic rigour (Aguinis et al., 2022). Firstly, the sample consisted primarily of educated employees who work for the same organisation. This might limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations such as those that are uneducated or in other countries not included in the study however, external validity was ensured through transferability, sampling and diversity, contextualisation as well as reflexivity and transparency.

The findings of this study can be trusted because there was a focus on internal validity. This refers to the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, interpretations and conclusions within the context of the study (Aguinis et al., 2022). In order to ensure that there was a strong and convincing connection between the data collected, the analysis conducted and the interpretations made, the study made use of thematic analysis software ATLAS.ti. Leveraging on this technology helped ensure that the findings accurately and faithfully represent the experiences, perspectives and meanings shared by the participants.

The use of transferability or ensuring that the findings can be applied to similar contexts and populations was ensured using thick and detailed descriptions of the research context, processes and participants to enable the readers to fully understand the findings in this setting (Cuervo-Cazura et al., 2016). Providing sufficient information enables readers to evaluate the similarities and differences between their own contexts and the research contexts for applicability and judge the transferability of the findings (Ellis & Levy, 2008).

The final anticipated limitation relates to any potential conflicts of interest that may compromise the objectivity of the research coming from the researcher. This includes any professional or financial conflicts that may influence the research design, analysis and reporting. Similarly, acknowledging the researchers role as an HR professional and potential biases and influence on the research process and findings ensured transparency and reflexivity.

4.16 Methodology Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and justified the research methodology employed to explore how cultural differences influence recognition and retention in a multinational context. The chosen descripto-exploratory qualitative design, grounded in interpretivism and phenomenology, was well-suited to capturing the nuanced, subjective experiences of employees across diverse African cultures.

The use of semi-structured interviews, supported by purposive sampling and thematic analysis, enabled rich, context-specific insights aligned with the research objectives. Ethical considerations, quality controls such as triangulation and member checking, and the use of analysis software ensured the credibility and rigour of the findings.

While limitations such as generalisability and potential researcher bias were acknowledged, they were mitigated through transparency, reflexivity, and methodological coherence. Overall, the research strategy was thoughtfully constructed to provide a robust foundation for understanding the cultural dynamics of recognition and their impact on employee retention.

Chapter 5: Findings and Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings, organised around the key themes identified through data collection as they relate to the research questions. It is divided according to the 2 participant types: the diverse sample of 14 employees working for the same telecommunications organisation who experience a standard employee recognition programme, and 2 of the HR professionals responsible for the design of group-wide recognition programmes. The interviews explored how cultural differences affect recognition and retention in multinational organisations, with questions guided by an interview protocol (Appendix B). The consistency framework presented in Appendix F ensured alignment between the literature, research questions and the interview guide.

Inductive analysis of the categorical data was conducted using ATLAS.ti software. The process involved clustering related codes into categories to reveal key themes that describe the observed phenomena, grouping these key themes, and iterating the process until no new key themes emerged. The findings expose these emergent themes, offering insights into how employee perceptions of recognition practices differ across cultures within multinational corporations, the role played by recognition in retention as well as how multinational corporations can tailor their recognition programmes to accommodate diverse cultural preferences of recognition in the workplace.

5.2 Description of the Sample

Table 1 and 2 below show the data on the sixteen participants who participated in semi-structured interviews for the study. The data has been anonymised to protect their identities by assigning each participant a unique number from 1 to 16. The participants were purposively selected to be representative of the diversity on the culture-rich African continent, and included employees from East Africa, Southern Africa and West Africa in an effort to cover the most distinct cultural viewpoints. An attempt was also made to have diversity in the participant ages as well as different departments and seniority in the business. A final consideration in the sampling was influenced by the recognition platform participation data (Appendix G), where the aim was to have a mix of participants from

markets that are performing well in terms of participation and uptake of the current recognition platform and those that are not, in order to capture both perspectives. According to the 2025 platform data, Benin (2.8%) and Côte d'Ivoire (29%) were identified for low participation, while Eswatini (95.3%) and Ghana (83.6%) had the highest participation rates. The countries with average participation were South Africa (43.7%) and Uganda (63.1%).

Table 1: Information on Employee Participants and Their Backgrounds

Participant	Gender	Country of Origin	Age	Race	Seniority in the Business*
1	Male	South Africa	25 – 30	Black / African	Level 3
2	Female	Cote D'Ivoire	25 – 30	Black / African	Level 1
3	Female	Benin	45 – 50	Black / African	Level 4
4	Male	South Africa	40 – 45	Mixed Race / Coloured	Level 4
5	Male	Benin	35 – 40	Black / African	Level 3
6	Female	Uganda	50 – 55	Black / African	Level 4
7	Female	South Africa	35 – 40	Black / African	Level 3
8	Male	Ghana	35 – 40	Black / African	Level 5
9	Male	Nigeria	30 – 35	Black / African	Level 4
10	Female	Eswatini	45 – 50	Black / African	Level 4
11	Female	Eswatini	55 – 60	Black / African	Level 2
12	Female	South Africa	30 – 35	Black / African	Level 2
13	Male	Benin	30 – 35	Black / African	Level 3
14	Female	South Africa	35 – 40	White / Caucasian	Level 3

*The different levels refer to seniority in the business where Level 1 is the most Junior and Level 6 is the most Senior. Manager level roles are Level 3, with Senior Management at Level 4 and General Managers at Level 5 and Executives at Level 6.

Table 2: Information on The HR Expert Professionals Interviewed

Participant	Gender	Job Title	Race	Seniority in the Business
15	Female	Consultant: Global Recognition	Black / African	Level 3
16	Female	Senior Manager: Global Rewards and Recognition Design	Indian	Level 4

5.3 Findings From Employee Participants Across The Business

Employee recognition was found to generally be a strategic pillar of organisational culture and employee engagement and to an extent, retention. The participants also shared key insights on how a multinational organisation can make recognition work optimally across different contexts. The following section outlines the key themes that emerged, as they relate to the research questions.

5.3.1 General Findings Around the Topic

Research Question 1 – How do perceptions of recognition differ across cultures?

Definition, Importance and Value of Recognition

An overwhelming majority of the participants (12 out of 14) found employee recognition practices to be a good thing. They viewed it as demonstration of caring and belonging, making employees feel valued, useful and appreciated by the organisation. Even small acknowledgements, like thank-you messages, were found to be meaningful. Whilst this shows that recognition serves as a powerful validation tool that impacts emotional, neurological, and career well-being, the research also highlighted that it carries a significant risk of demotivation and disengagement if handled poorly.

Themes

Motivation

A very expected theme that came up was motivation. According to the literature, recognition undoubtedly plays an important role in driving motivation, and the research findings somewhat validate this. This section examines interview insights and key themes related to recognition as a source of positive motivation. While many employees find recognition to be a powerful motivator that enhances their sense of value and engagement, others think it fails to deliver meaningful outcomes. The combined insights suggest that the impact of recognition on employee motivation/drive is complex and varies across individuals and contexts. While most participants confirmed that they view recognition as a powerful motivator that enhances engagement, 2 participants held different views, stating that they do not rely on external validation at all.

The effectiveness of recognition as a motivator, however, is fragile and can be negated, or even reversed, by poor execution or inconsistency. Inauthentic recognition was said that have a demotivating effect, and *"recognition given out of obligation"* (Participant 7), when *"perceived as insincere or forced"* (Participant 8), or used manipulatively (e.g., *"to assign extra work"* Participant 14) does not have a positive motivational effect and can instead even lead to discomfort and demotivation. Participant 6 cited a negative impact from *"poorly handled recognition, such as public blame followed by a compliment and generic gesture."*

Similarly, superficial or ineffective programmes, such as one cited with *"minimal tangible benefits,"* result in disengagement because employees *"do not see real value in being recognized"* (Participant 1). He went on to cite that non-monetary recognition, such as career growth, well-being, work life balance and psychological safety was considered highly more motivating and meaningful than financial rewards for some who linked it to purpose and meaning at work. Participant 1 stated that *"anything that allows me to work on things that are aligned to the purpose of the organisation and my personal purpose"* gives them motivation.

Intrinsic Motivation vs. External Validation

Another emergent theme was around the superiority of intrinsic motivation and purpose over external rewards. Participant 1 argued that as long as their work is *"aligned to my purpose and the organization's purpose"*, they will stay, stating, *"remuneration and recognition is not a top priority."* This is reinforced by Participant 3's focus on the organisation's mission and contribution to society as well as Participant 4's view that personal fulfilment from the work itself was the primary driver. These participants see recognition as a *"welcome factor"* (Participant 3) or an *"additional benefit"* (Participant 4) rather than the core reason for retention. Conversely, Participants 13 and 12 demonstrate that for others, external validation is a critical part of feeling motivated and valued, directly influencing their longevity with the company.

Belonging

The most immediate and common effect of recognition is its ability to affirm an employee's intrinsic value and foster a sense of belonging. Participants reported that

being acknowledged fosters a sense of belonging and makes them feel valued which positively impacts motivation. Participant 2 for example shared that *“receiving recognition, even a simple thank you makes them feel valued, useful, and appreciated which is motivating on a personal level.”* This feeling of worth is not merely emotional; it has a confirmed neurological basis. Participant 4 corroborated that recognition triggers the release of positive brain chemicals like dopamine and oxytocin, making people feel connected and appreciated, which in turn, *“boosts motivation.”* This psychological/biological response transforms recognition from a gesture into a deep motivational reinforcement.

Authenticity / Genuineness of Recognition

A recurring theme across interviews was the importance of authenticity in recognition. Whilst recognition was valued by most, its impact depends on authenticity and balance. Overuse or insincere recognition can diminish its value. Both small gestures (like a thank you coffee) and larger acknowledgements (for going above and beyond) were deemed important, but participants said should be given thoughtfully and not excessively. Participants emphasized that recognition must be personal, intentional, and specific to be meaningful. Participant 14 noted that authentic recognition feels *‘real’* when it includes a personal touch rather than being a *“tick box exercise”*. Similarly, Participant 7 highlighted that *“recognition is most powerful when it is genuine, specific, and makes people feel truly seen for their individual contributions”*.

Other authenticity concerns centred around company-run incentivised recognition programmes (like Kudos with points rewards), which can sometimes lead to less genuine acknowledgements. Several participants expressed scepticism towards formalised or obligatory recognition systems, as people may give points to maximise incentives rather than for true appreciation. Participant 13 pointed out that recognition feels less authentic or scripted when it is required stating *“why are you lying? You don’t need to lie to me, my friend, you know.”* Participant 10 echoed this sentiment, suggesting that *“things that come naturally, like saying thank you, should not be formalised”* as this diminishes their sincerity. Additionally, Participant 12, mentioned that recognition should be *“authentic and impactful if it is to drive a real culture shift among employees.”* Cultural context also featured in the conversations around authenticity as illustrated by Participant 1 who

stated that what is considered authentic varies across cultures, and recognition should align with values like Ubuntu which reinforce the principle of community and shared success. Participant 2 and Participant 4 also spoke about how incentive-based systems, such as point-based rewards, can lead to transactional rather than heartfelt appreciation. Participant 4 warned that *“people can always tell the difference between a real and a fake thank you”* whilst participant 2 stated, *“Because of the incentive, I made a list of people and gave small points to each, even though I usually prefer to give more points to those who truly helped me”*.

The effectiveness of recognition initiatives clearly hinges significantly on authenticity. The participants highlighted diverse perspectives on what constitutes authentic recognition and the impact of genuine appreciation in the workplace. They highlighted that despite good intentions, recognition in the workplace can sometimes feel inauthentic. If companies are to get it right, recognition should not be transactional; it should be genuine and truly reflect the honest beliefs of the giver of the recognition.

5.3.2 Forms of Recognition

In terms of preference of recognition type, the research highlighted balanced views on the effectiveness of monetary versus non-monetary recognition, demonstrating that both forms are valued but for different reasons and circumstances. While non-monetary recognition is frequently cited as more meaningful, personal, and impactful for day-to-day motivation, monetary recognition was equally important, often preferred, tangible acknowledgement of value.

The Superiority of Non-Monetary and Intrinsic Recognition

A strong consensus exists among participants, particularly Participant 1, Participant 4, Participant 13 and Participant 9, that non-monetary recognition is often more important and meaningful than purely financial rewards. This preference stems from the personalisation and intrinsic value associated with these gestures.

Personalisation and Belonging

Non-monetary recognition is valued for making employees feel "seen" and that they "belong." Participant 4 expressed a strong preference for personalised gestures like handwritten cards and notes, stating they *"mean more than money because it shows someone took the time to notice and appreciate you for who you are and what you did."* He added that he still has a handwritten thank you card signed by the Group CEO from the first GLG (Global Leadership Gathering) that he worked on in 2002. Similarly, Participant 1 emphasized that for him, non-monetary factors like *"career growth, well-being, work-life balance, and belonging are the most important"* because recognition fundamentally *"means caring, making someone feel they belong."*

Theme 6: Growth and Opportunity as Recognition

Many participants view development and opportunity as the most profound forms of non-monetary recognition. Participant 5 and Participant 9 both highlighted growth opportunities such as secondments, training, certifications and upskilling as highly valued. Participant 9 stated that the *"best way to recognize people is to make their achievements known and help them grow through development opportunities."* Similarly, Participant 3 preferred rewards like *"training or education or immersion into another environment"* or contribution to high-stakes projects that allow for exploration and impact, rather than money alone.

Theme 7: The Power of Informal Acknowledgment

Simple and authentic verbal and informal recognition was frequently cited as effective and impactful. Participant 10 noted that even *"a high five or a quick thank you is enough"* for day-to-day achievements, while Participant 7 valued timely, specific, and sometimes public verbal acknowledgment stating; *"For me, it's just to acknowledge and to say it, and sometimes say it publicly"*. Participant 13 echoed these sentiments, valuing simple words of appreciation and symbolic gestures like a team message.

5.3.3 The Importance of Monetary and Tangible Rewards

Despite the strong preference for personalised and non-monetary recognition, the research confirms that monetary recognition remains a key factor, particularly because it provides a tangible, measurable acknowledgement of value.

Monetary Rewards as a Necessity

For some, the tangible value is paramount. Participant 8 was the most explicit on this question, preferring a salary increase or a bonus, adding that most people would trade certificates and trophies for tangible financial rewards any day. He mentioned that his view is rooted in a cultural context where recognition is expected to be accompanied by something tangible and more public, *"In Ghana, if someone does something that you appreciate, you publicly say it, exactly what they did, you don't beat around the bush. You need to then reciprocate and give something small to say thank you back. I am a bit of an outlier, but in general that is the culture, it is a big deal"* .

The Need for Tangible Outcomes

Linked to this, a recurring point is that recognition must go beyond the 'thank you' and translate into meaningful outcomes to be effective for retention. Participant 14 strongly articulated this, stating, *"If a person feels they are delivering and it's not recognized in bonuses, career opportunities, or promotions, they will leave."* They cautioned that simple informal recognition (*"thank you or giving certificates"*) is not enough if it does not lead to real rewards or career progression.

Participant 7 and Participant 10 linked recognition directly to performance rewards, such as bonuses and shares, noting that a lack of these forms of acknowledgement can lead employees to seek better-rewarding companies. The risk of demotivation from meaningless or ineffective programmes was also highlighted by Participant 1, who noted, *"If recognition is just a title with no real difference, people won't fight for it or stay for it."* Participant 6 shared an example anecdote where a colleague left the business after their significant innovations were not recognised, further illustrating the retention risk when contributions go unacknowledged by tangible rewards or career advancement.

Blended Reward and Practical Value

Many recognition platforms, such as the Kudos system in use at the organisation and described by Participants 14, 11 and 7, bridge the gap by offering redeemable points that translate into vouchers, petrol cards, or groceries. Participant 7 noted that these vouchers are *"meaningful,"* especially for non-executive staff as *"you can use the voucher to get things for December or electricity; it means a lot"*. Participant 14

acknowledged that while monetary options are valued, she has a preference for time off as a non-monetary reward, linking it to wellness and work-life balance, but acknowledged that not everyone values this equally. She however ultimately noted the difficulty in finding truly 'free' non-monetary rewards, stating that "*at the end of the day, everything is money. Even time off or exposure to opportunities have a cost so its hard to find something that is truly free.*"

Monetary Recognition in the Context of Performance

Monetary recognition whether in the form of shares, bonuses, (Participant 7, Participant 1), or small gifts (Participant 12) is seen as effective when linked to performance or as a gesture of appreciation. While some respondents don't expect a voucher for every good job, they acknowledge that structured monetary rewards like annual increases are part of the larger organizational recognition system.

Remote vs In-Person Recognition

In person recognition was found to be more impactful due to the personal connection (Participant 4) but virtual recognition can also be effective and more motivating "*if there is already a strong rapport, building relationships virtually is more challenging*".

Conclusion

The research does not point to an optimal recognition strategy but instead emphasises programmes that leverages the strengths of all types of recognition. Non-monetary recognition excels at fostering culture, boosting morale, and driving intrinsic motivation through personalization, growth opportunities, and sincere acknowledgment. It is the preferred method for frequent, day-to-day appreciation. However, monetary recognition, including financial incentives and redeemable vouchers, was said to be essential for confirming an employee's contribution in a tangible, quantifiable way, especially for high-stakes performance or when providing a meaningful, practical benefit. This suggested that effective recognition programmes must therefore integrate high-value non-monetary rewards like time off and development opportunities with a structured system of monetary and redeemable rewards that provide both emotional and financial confirmation of an employee's worth.

5.3.4 Collective vs Individual Recognition

The question of whether individual or collective (team) recognition is the more effective recognition tool reveals a split among employees, with strong arguments presented for each approach based on differing motivational needs, cultural values, and thoughts on the principles of organisational justice. Again, the findings argue for a contextual application of both, rather than one over the other.

5.3.5 Main Arguments for Individual Preference

Preference for Individual Recognition: Fostering Meritocracy

A slight majority of participants (8 out of 14 Participants) articulated a clear preference for individual recognition, citing its greater motivational impact and its role in maintaining a system of meritocracy. This view is centred around the need for acknowledging personal effort in order to drive and sustain high performance.

Sustaining High Performance and Preventing Mediocrity

The most compelling and prevalent argument is that individual acknowledgement prevents the dilution of effort. Participants 14 and 7 stated that focusing solely on team recognition risks demotivating high performers who carry the team's weight. Participant 14 warned that if an employee "*go[es] above and beyond but the team doesn't meet its goals, you share the consequences, which can be demotivating.*" Participant 7 further explained that failure to acknowledge specific contributions "*kills the spirit*" and removes the incentive to "*go the extra mile.*"

Accountability and Fairness

Participant 9 framed the issue in terms of organisational justice, arguing that recognition should mirror accountability: "*When someone performs better than others, they should be recognized individually, just as consequences are managed individually.*"

Personal Impact

Participant 12 emphasized that personal acknowledgment "*digs deeper into your self-improvement*" and feels "*more meaningful*" than generic praise. This speaks to the individual's need for authentic validation of their unique contribution, as supported by Participant 2.

5.3.6 Main Arguments for Collective Preference

Interdependence

The counter group (6 out of 14) advocated for collective recognition, grounding their arguments in cultural imperatives, personal discomfort with public scrutiny and the reality of interdependence.

Cultural and Communal Alignment

Participant 1 provided a compelling cultural argument, stating a preference for team-based recognition that aligns with the South African Ubuntu philosophy of shared success, moving away from a Western focus on "*individual glory*."

Contextual Necessity

Participant 10 and Participant 13 highlighted that in highly collaborative roles, team recognition is more meaningful because achievements are often the result of collective effort, not an individual effort. Participant 10 noted, "*in my current role, I can't achieve anything on my own so team recognition means more.*"

Dual Validation and Comfort

Participant 5 viewed collective recognition as offering "*two recognitions in one*," simultaneously validating personal effort and the crucial ability to work as a team. Separately, Participant 8 expressed discomfort with being singled out in public, preferring that the team is recognised instead because "*no man is an island*."

Strategic Application

Participant 6 articulated the need for using both types thoughtfully when she mentioned that collective recognition is required for team efforts to preserve unity and on tasks that are collaborative (e.g developing an app), but individual recognition is essential for unique contributions to confirm and reward specific merit.

Accountability

The key to making the collective model viable is the accountability clause. Participant 1 emphasised that team recognition is preferred only "*as long as individuals who are not performing are held accountable*." Without this, the system validates subpar performance

and creates the demotivation feared by the individual-preference group. This same view came out strongly in the interviews with Participants 7 and 14 as well.

Authenticity, Timeliness and Specificity

Regardless of whether it is monetary or non-monetary, recognition must be specific and authentic (Participant 4). Generic praise, even when directed at the team, dilutes meaning, making it feel insincere and ineffective for both individual high performers as well as the group as a whole. The timing in which recognition is delivered was also highlighted as a factor affecting retention. Participant 5 shared an experience where a delayed or absent recognition after significant effort led to disappointment and demotivation. This shows that lack of acknowledgement can cause discomfort and uncertainty about performance, which could eventually influence a decision to leave, as noted by Participant 10, who mentioned that she was *“currently considering leaving the organisation due to not feeling recognised or validated”*. Furthermore, Participant 7 and Participant 9 both cautioned against insincere, non-genuine, or *“tick-box”* recognition, as this can dilute its value and become demotivating.

Conclusion

The findings from the participants highlights a need for a hybrid model. This was also articulated by Participants 4, 6 and 2 who all emphasized that the type of recognition used should be strategically chosen depending on factors that are context specific such as the environment and the achievement itself. In summary, team recognition is important, but individuals also want their specific contributions acknowledged. Robust recognition strategies and programmes must therefore be fluid and diagnostic, leveraging individual acknowledgement to confirm merit and drive high-level performance, while also leveraging collective praise to reinforce collaboration and cultural cohesion. Also, a key theme that emerged centred on authenticity which was found that both collective and individual recognition have a stronger motivational impact when it directly acknowledges specific actions and contributions, generic praise can feel meaningless if it not specific. A second, important takeaway was culture-related, as the concept of Ubuntu and principles of collective success were emphasised as key. Lastly, the findings also indicate that organisations can avoid the mediocrity trap by ensuring

that team recognition is never used as a substitute for or in place of direct accountability and praise.

5.3.7 Linking Recognition to Retention – Research Question 2

Research Question 2 – How large of a role does recognition play in an employee's decision to leave the organisation?

Introduction and General Views

A large portion of this research centred around testing the theory that recognition leads to reduced turnover. The findings indicate that recognition alone is unlikely to be the sole reason for staying or leaving the organisation, but rather that it contributes to overall job satisfaction and sense of value. Other elements such as work atmosphere, management and salary are ranked higher. Recognition is still a significant motivator but not decisive alone, this is in line with the secondary data collected (Appendix H) where the insights suggest that across levels and regions, employees leave the business for a multitude of reasons, some linked to talent management and most of them not. The research also highlights a crucial distinction in the types of recognition that influence retention, with a clear preference for those that carry tangible, meaningful weight or are integrated into the culture of the organization.

The Role and Importance of Recognition in Retaining Employees

Participants offered a diverse set of views on where recognition ranks among factors that influence their decision to stay or leave an organization, demonstrating a clear divide between its essential nature and its perceived adequacy. While most participants said it was important, other factors took precedence.

Recognition as a Decisive Factor

For a small number of participants, recognition is more than a superficial benefit; it is fundamentally tied to their sense of value and respect. Participant 5 noted that recognition *"makes me feel that my work matters, motivates me to do more, and is even more important than salary,"* while Participant 9 equated proper recognition with respect stating that *"recognition, if done properly, is respect, and respect is one of the most important things in life"*. Participant 10 stated that recognition has played a *"significant*

role" in their long tenure, and even mentioned currently considering leaving due to a lack of feeling recognized and validated since moving to a different operation within the business and working under a leadership that does not provide feedback or recognition. Similarly, Participant 14 placed it in the top three reasons why they would leave an organisation, stating that it's about one's *"worth as a person."* These views highlight how recognition acts as a powerful affirmation of an employee's contribution and personal worth and can largely influence the decision to leave an organisation.

Recognition as a Contributing but Not Sole Factor

However, the majority view holds that recognition is an important but insufficient factor in retention. Participant 4 stated that recognition *"is rarely the only thing that makes someone leave; it's usually a mix of factors,"* noting that for the internally motivated, lack of recognition alone wouldn't prompt an exit. This sentiment was echoed by Participant 6, who mentioned recognition ranks *"in the middle"* among other push factors like growth opportunities and salary. Participant 2 was explicit in ranking it as the fourth most important factor after work atmosphere, salary, and growth, stating, *"Recognition is important, but it is not the main reason I would stay at a company."*

Moreover, some participants downplayed its impact altogether, stating they would stay in an organisation even if employee recognition did not exist, as long as they were not treated poorly. Participant 3 and 4 were clear that recognition was *"not a factor"* in their decision to stay or leave, citing the organization's mission, value-creation, and potential to change lives (Participant 3) or simply a lack of poor treatment (Participant 4: *"Just don't treat me badly and I'll stay. Recognition is not something I seek or miss"*) as more important. This illustrates that for some, job satisfaction and working conditions completely eclipse the need for formal acknowledgement.

Conclusion

The views on the role of employee recognition in retention are best understood as a spectrum of influence rather than a binary factor. At one end, some people like Participants 3 and 8 see recognition as a non-factor, emphasizing intrinsic motivation, mission alignment, or simply being treated decently. At the other end, Participant 13 and

12 see it as a top-tier, integral reason for staying or leaving, connecting it directly to their personal sense of value and commitment.

In summary, recognition functions as a critical enabler of retention, but rarely as the primary driver. It acts as a powerful reinforcer of an employee's decision to stay, as it provides “*proof of respect*” (Participant 9) and assurance of being “*on the right track*” (Participant 10). Its absence, however, is a clear attrition risk, as it can contribute to a toxic mix of factors that eventually prompt an exit (Participants 4 and 6).

In order for recognition to have an impact and be effective as a retention tool, three components came out strongly. Firstly, it must be meaningful and tangible, linking to career growth, bonuses, or promotions and cannot be limited to only informal praise (Participant 14, Participant 7). Secondly, it must be cultural and holistic, meaning that it must be part of a broader, warm, and welcoming culture that respects the employee's values and provides a sense of belonging, meaning and well-being (Participant 1, Participant 7). Finally, it needs to be authentic and timely as insincere or delayed recognition is ineffective and can have a negative effect (Participants 5 and 9).

Ultimately, while the foundation for retention is built on many elements such as leadership, purpose, work atmosphere, and core compensation, employee recognition does serve as the vital layer of validation that transforms a satisfactory job into a fulfilling, long-term career commitment or makes someone question the value that they bring if absent. The anecdotal evidence that some employees missed the recognition platform after leaving the business and joining organisations without a structured recognition programme (Participant 11) also supports this finding.

5.3.8 Cultural Sensitivity in Recognition Programmes – Research Question 3

Research Question 3 – How can MNCs tailor their recognition programmes to accommodate diverse cultural preferences of recognition and enhance employee retention?

5.3.8.1 Negative Recognition Experiences / Potential Downsides

Introduction

While employee recognition is widely viewed as a crucial morale booster, the research also revealed a significant "*dark side*," characterized by negative perceptions and uncomfortable interactions with recognition programmes. The participants' experiences point to a critical gap between the intent of recognition and its execution, often leading to feelings of inauthenticity, manipulation, and demotivation. These negative perceptions stem primarily from forced participation, a lack of transparency, and the use of recognition without tangible or ethical backing. A more severe set of negative perceptions centres on the use of recognition in ways that make it a burden and can feel unethical or manipulative, when it leads to a disproportionate increase in workload or uncomfortable peer dynamics.

The Problem of Inauthenticity and Forced Participation

The most prominent negative sentiment across the interviews was the perception of inauthenticity and recognition as a "tick-box" exercise (Participant 9: "*Recognition often feels like something people do just to comply*"). This feeling of coercion is particularly associated with formal platforms which often allocated points that employees are mandated to deplete and designated appreciation periods.

Recognition on Demand

Recognition can become transactional or gamified (e.g. people seeking points or expecting kudos), which undermines authenticity. Participants felt discomfort when recognition was expected or mandated, such as during "Global Appreciation Week" or when employees were told by HR to use the recognition platform (Participant 13, Participant 10). This "*recognition on demand*" diminishes the sincerity of the gesture. Participant 7 also noted that when recognition is not genuine, especially during obligatory periods, it is not appreciated and can be demotivating (Participant 7: "*When someone is not genuine with recognition, I just get bored. Can you just keep it?*").

Incentivised and Transactional Recognition

The use of incentives to drive platform use was also cited as undermining authenticity. Participant 4 highlighted the discomfort when recognition becomes transactional or when people "*game the system*" just to receive a return. Participant 2 and Participant 3 observed that some colleagues may give out kudos (recognition points) simply to meet incentive requirements or distribute points, thereby blurring the line between genuine appreciation and a coerced activity (Participant 3: "*I don't think it adds real value because of the incentives. It[s] should be spontaneous and authentic*").

Lack of Specificity and Cultural Barriers

Inauthenticity is compounded by a lack of specificity, with Participant 9 noting that many people receive generic thank you messages for excellent or expected behaviour, which diminishes the value of actual praise. Furthermore, cultural differences can make the public or digital expression of recognition feel forced or uncomfortable. Both Participant 11 and Participant 10 pointed out that some cultures are more reserved in expressing appreciation, making platforms that require constant, visible kudos feel unnatural or forced, requiring ongoing "*schooling*" or encouragement to participate (Participant 11: "*It's challenging to get adults to pause and appreciate their colleagues; for some, it's not natural*").

Peer Dynamics and Comparison

Being singled out for recognition can also lead to uncomfortable social dynamics and peer scepticism. Participant 12 shared that receiving an award, such as a 'unique contributor' T-shirt, led to peers questioning if they deserved it, causing discomfort and making them reluctant to display the recognition. Participant 12 described these moments as "*double-edged*," where the positive impact is diminished by comparison among colleagues (Participant 12: "*There are times when being recognised puts you on a pedestal, it can feel uncomfortable when others question if you deserve it*"). Participant 8 similarly expressed discomfort with public recognition, preferring team-based acknowledgment or private recognition over being singled out.

The 'Dark Side' of Recognition

Additional Responsibilities

Participant 14 described a "dark side" where recognition is used to justify giving someone more work or responsibilities without proper compensation or support - *"Sometimes recognition is used as a way to say, 'You're so good at this, so here's more work,' which can feel manipulative and not truly appreciative"*. This can result in employees being assigned tasks outside their scope or being expected to cover for others' lack of performance, making the recognition feel more like a burden rather than an honour.

Mishandled or Delayed Recognition

Mishandling recognition, particularly when coupled with criticism, can be deeply demotivating. Participant 6 described a jarring experience where they were publicly singled out as the cause of some of the reasons why the company could not meet targeted revenues during a CEOs roadshow due to a technology deployment project that was running behind schedule, only to be asked to participate in a celebration immediately afterward for a separate achievement (Participant 6: *"It wasn't a good experience to be displayed as the problem in front of the company and then asked to join a celebration"*). Furthermore, the lack of timely recognition after significant effort, leads to disappointment and demotivation that can take some time to recover from (*"When recognition is missing or delayed after hard work, it can be demotivating and difficult to digest"* –Participant 5).

Loss of Value and Lack of Transparency

A final set of themes relates to recognition programmes losing their meaning and impact due to poor design, lack of tangible value, or issues with communication.

Recognition Lacking Tangible Impact

The theme around monetary rewards was applicable even here, as several participants noted that formal recognition programmes can be ineffective when they offer little tangible benefit. Participant 1 criticised a programme run by the business for identifying people who are high performers, going over and above and contributing uniquely that provided only a small salary increase or a simple "cap/t-shirt," noting that employees no longer valued or strived for it (Participant 1: *"Being a UC is just a title with no real difference; people don't fight for it anymore because it doesn't mean anything"*). Participant 8 expressed a preference for private, tangible rewards (like salary increases

or bonuses) over public "trophies or certificates," feeling that purely ceremonial recognition without substantial value is not meaningful.

Perceived Inequity and Lack of Transparency

Concerns were raised about equity, fairness and lack of transparency in recognition programmes, perceiving that some benefits were not widely known or accessible, thus creating the impression they were reserved for a "niche group." This lack of clarity about criteria and accessibility can lead to quiet dissatisfaction and a sense of inequity among employees (*"Some recognition programmes seem to benefit only a niche group, and many employees don't even know about them"* –Participant 1).

Dilution of Meaning

Finally, recognition can lose its value simply by being overdone or too frequent. Participant 4 cautioned that if recognition is given too frequently or for trivial reasons, it becomes empty, citing the example of saying *"well done"* for everything. This dilution of meaning contributes to the overall perception that the recognition programme is not sincere, making employees hesitant to participate or not value the acknowledgment they receive (Participant 4: *"If recognition is just about getting something in return or is expected, it loses authenticity and becomes uncomfortable"*).

The collective experience of the participants underscores that ineffective recognition can be worse than no recognition at all, creating a source of friction and discomfort in the workplace instead of fostering appreciation. It highlights the importance of organisations getting it right.

5.3.8.2 Source of Recognition

Introduction

The findings suggest that the source of recognition, whether from a leader, peer, or direct report, significantly influences its perceived value, with organizational culture, national background, and individual role context playing a role. While peer recognition was cited as meaningful, the research reveals a strong, culturally-driven preference for Leader Recognition, which is rarer and deemed to carry formal weight. While participants

expressed an appreciation for the relevance, importance and authenticity of Peer Recognition which is more common, it was not given the same value as recognition coming from a leader.

Leader Recognition and Hierarchical Culture

A strong majority of participants (10 out of 14) placed the highest value on recognition originating from senior leaders or supervisors over recognition from their peers or team members that report to them. This preference was connected to organizational hierarchy, culture of respect and the perceived impact of leadership endorsement on one's career.

Table 3: Preferred Source of Recognition

Participant (s)	Preferred Source	Rationale
14, 12, 7, 10, 13, 2, 3	Direct Line Manager or any Business Leader	Hierarchical Weight & Career Impact: The acknowledgment is valued because it comes from the ultimate evaluator of performance and perceived gatekeeper of career progression. Participant 3 noted that in a <i>"francophone organization, we are very hierarchical,"</i> meaning recognition <i>"carries more weight when it's the boss."</i> Participant 7 similarly explained that leader recognition <i>"counts more because it talks to your career and assures you that you are progressing,"</i> which is critical, especially when the <i>"absence of managerial recognition can cause employees to start second guessing themselves."</i> Participant 2 relatedly valued this source because it <i>"gives assurance and clarity about performance, confirming that they're 'on the right track'."</i>
9, 5	Peer	Relevance and Authenticity: Peers share the same daily challenges, making their appreciation deeply relevant. Participant 5 valued peers most because <i>"they understand the challenges."</i> Whilst Participant 9 viewed peer recognition as more genuine than the boss's, since it's <i>"based on real impact and specific behaviours"</i> going beyond standard performance metrics
6	Direct reports	Leadership Validation: Participant 6 uniquely preferred recognition from direct reports because it provides crucial feedback on their

		effectiveness as a leader. As Participant 6 explained, it helps them understand " <i>what I do well and where I can improve</i> " from the perspective of those they are meant to support.
8, 4	Equal Value	Holistic Validation: Participant 8 placed all sources "on the same level," valuing leader recognition for its high-level acknowledgment and peer recognition for reflecting " <i>respect and impact across departments.</i> " Similarly, Participant 4 thought that all sources matter as they fulfil different needs, stating that " <i>recognition from the top holds more gravitas, but appreciation from peers is equally valued for making people feel seen.</i> "
1	No effect	Participant 1 mentioned that recognition from their leader was more ideal and meaningful early in their career but at this stage, they no longer seek affirmation from leaders or peers and are instead motivated by purpose rather than external validation stating " <i>I don't do things for a thank you; I do them because I understand the bigger purpose</i> "

These findings indicate that leader recognition is important to most as it functions as organisational assurance and a formal validation that one's contribution is visible and strategically valued at the highest strategic levels. Recognition from senior leaders, such as the CEO (as mentioned by Participant 11), is particularly impactful because it makes employees feel noticed "*in that little corner where I do my things,*" confirming their relevance and impact within the company.

The Unique Value of Peer and Direct-Report Recognition

While formal, top-down recognition holds institutional power as highlighted above, recognition from colleagues and subordinates was seen to offer a more authentic, context-specific form of appreciation. This is because it validates the employee at the point where the work is actually done. Participant 8 summarised this well: "Recognition from a leader is special and makes you feel like you truly exist in the organisation, *but recognition from peers is also valuable because it shows your everyday efforts are noticed.*"

Cultural Background as a Determinant

Cultural background was explicitly mentioned as a factor influencing the comfort and preference for the source of recognition.

Francophone/Hierarchical Culture: Participant 3 pointed out that in Francophone cultures, which tend to be very hierarchical in nature, the higher-up the source, the greater the weight that recognition carries.

Communal vs. Individual Expression: Participant 11 noted the impact of cultural background on *how* recognition is given, stating that some cultures, such as Swazi culture, are "*toned down*" or more reserved in expressing appreciation compared to others, which affects both individual and collective praise coming from colleagues. This influences how frequently and openly peers recognise each other.

Conclusion

The research confirms that employee preferences are varied, an optimal strategy cannot therefore rely on a single source. Leader Recognition was highly valued by the majority, highlighting that it is a necessary validation of professional trajectory and organisational worth, especially in hierarchical cultures like the African context. However, Peer and Direct-Report Recognition is an essential measure of daily impact, authenticity, and leadership effectiveness. This set of findings highlights that an effective recognition framework must be designed to promote and value acknowledgment from all directions (upward, downward, and lateral), ensuring that both the formal hierarchical endorsement and the genuine, grassroots appreciation are prioritized in the workplace.

5.3.8.3 National Culture and Upbringing

This section of the report brings the essence of the research into focus. It considers the participants' perception and preferences of recognition from a cultural perspective, providing key insights for MNC's operating across diverse environments. The findings suggest that the effectiveness of employee recognition in a multicultural setting is shaped by the interplay of national culture, gender personal upbringing, and regional identity.

Differences in Expression and Expectation

The greatest challenges for MNCs stems from the vast differences in how gratitude is expressed, valued, and received across national and linguistic boundaries. The

participants' direct comparisons of cultural styles illustrate the drawbacks of a "one-size-fits-all" approach, given the varied comments even from people from the same country.

Cultural Foundations and Competing Values

The participants' reflections reveal a tension between the universal psychological need for appreciation and the vastly different cultural scripts used to express and receive that appreciation. African participants often frame this tension as a conflict between communal values and standardised corporate practices.

Ubuntu vs. Individualism: The African Context

Several participants, notably Participant 1 and Participant 4, highlighted the deep influence of African communal philosophy, Ubuntu, on workplace expectations. They stated: *"Ubuntu means community. Shared success, and human dignity are central, not individual glory."* He added that the company's progressive shift away from individual to collective recognition is positive and *"aligns with African values,"* positioning this cultural alignment as a source of organizational strength. Participant 4 reinforced the collectivist logic, linking everyday courtesies to communal roots: *"In African cultures, greeting, thanking and acknowledging others is rooted in community values like Ubuntu, while in more individualistic cultures, such gestures are less common."* This highlights the main challenge for MNCs; what constitutes *"recognition"* in an Ubuntu-infused culture may be seen as basic manners, while the same gesture in an individualistic culture might be seen as a significant act of appreciation.

Upbringing

Upbringing emerged as a powerful determinant of an employee's recognition style and how they expect recognition. Participants 7, 10 and 11 all agreed that the habit of giving and receiving recognition is internalised from a young age.

Participant 7 stated *"if you already have recognition as part of your culture, it's easy to recognize someone at work."* She, however noted a challenge within *"the black culture"* where *"the more you do, the more you are expected to perform, and recognition is not always given,"* drawing a parallel between parental expectations and the corporate tendency to reward high performers with more work after recognising their contribution. This critique reveals that cultural upbringing is not always a source of positive recognition

habits but can, instead instil a tolerance of unacknowledged high performance. Similarly, Participant 11 stated, "*how you were raised influences how you give recognition; you give what you have experienced,*" underscoring the need to teach recognition etiquette to those whose upbringing may not have prioritised explicit appreciation if there is a standard expected recognition philosophy or practise in place.

The Tangible vs. Symbolic Divide

Participant 8 and 14 provided crucial insights into the expectation of tangible rewards, particularly from West African contexts, challenging the efficacy of purely symbolic recognition.

Participant 8, in reference to Ghanaian culture stated that "*just saying thank you is not enough. If you come with empty hands, people will notice and feel the recognition is incomplete.*" This critiques recognition systems that prioritise tokens or certificates over material acknowledgement, demonstrating that in some contexts, a token is not an option but a requirement for the act of recognition to be psychologically complete.

He further critically observed that stretch opportunities like training and development which are often given to top performers as form of recognition are actually a basic requirement and condition of employment, "*something the company should provide to everyone... not as a special form of recognition*", narrowing the range of effective, non-monetary rewards that are applicable from his perspective.

The Francophone vs. Anglophone Divide

Participant 13 and 3 highlighted a key difference in linguistic and cultural expression that affects the frequency and ease of giving recognition. Participant 13 observed that in their "*francophone culture, recognition does not come as naturally or frequently as in anglophone cultures.*" He noted that "*Anglophone people express appreciation more easily,*" while Francophone colleagues may view work simply as fulfilling mandatory contractual obligations and therefore do not expect to be recognised for additional discretionary effort. He mentioned that when he first joined the business, he initially found the frequent thanks "*surprising*" but came to appreciate it, highlighting a need for adjustment to an organisation's culture. He argued that because of this adjustment, "*recognition should be standardized as part of the company's core values*" to foster a

unified global culture, a critical and fair point that directly challenges the viewpoint for complete localization of recognition practices.

Communal Amplification of Gratitude

Participant 2 introduced the concept of communal amplification from Ivorian culture, where recognition transcends a simple bilateral exchange. She stated that "*in my culture, recognition is not just between two people, it involves the community, and we ask others to thank someone on our behalf, making it a shared experience.*" This contrasts sharply with typical recognition, which is often a one-on-one exchange, arguing that for the appreciation to have its full cultural weight, it must be socially broadcasted and reinforced by multiple parties.

Theme Tensions

The findings reveal points of tension and inconsistency which all MNCs must navigate when designing global policy. The following section of the findings unpacks these tensions in detail, as applicable to international businesses.

Tension 1: Universality vs. Customization

The debate on whether to standardize or localize something as personal as recognition is central. Participant 2, 10, 14 and 9 advocated for customization, while Participant 13 and 1 favoured standardisation. Participant 14 stated that while recognition is a "*basic human psychological need*", its expression and perception "*differs across cultures,*" supporting the view that programmes should be customised to fit the specific cultural context. This was supported by Participant 9 who noted that recognition practices vary and suggested that platforms should allow for cultural customization. The counter argument for standardisation was that recognition is tied to values which should be shared and standard, so complete localisation could undermine the creation of a single, cohesive corporate culture, making global performance management inconsistent.

Tension 2: Upbringing

The concept of upbringing was used by the participants to both explain reluctance to recognize (Participants 11 and 7) and to explain or justify the expectation of recognition

(Participant 12, Participant 6). Participant 11 noted that some employees *"need to be taught workplace etiquette around recognition"* suggesting that upbringing deficiencies could and should be corrected through organizational training. Similarly, Participant 7 implied that those who lack the habit of appreciation were not properly *"instilled"* with it. This places the burden of cultural adjustment squarely on the employee instead of the organisation adapting to individual preferences. On the opposite end, Participant 6 shared that *"in our culture, we say thank you a lot,"* but also critically added that, *"everyone should know their own value and not depend only on recognition from others."* This perspective shifts the focus from external cultural practice to internal self-worth, providing a valuable counter-critique or viewpoint to the reliance on external validation from an employer.

The Current Approach

Participants 1 and 5 shared positive reviews of the MNC's efforts to understand and cater to cultural nuances, yet their comments still highlight the underlying difficulty. Participant 5 praised the company's efforts to accommodate different cultures, noting that the business adjusts *"meeting times for time zone and religious differences,"* which makes collaboration easier. This shows that operational accommodation is a recognised form of cultural respect. Similarly, Participant 1 appreciated that the business *"allows people to remain true to their local culture and identity,"* acknowledging that this allowance for local identity must be balanced with the universal corporate requirements.

Conclusion and Insights for Multinational Corporations (MNCs)

The research provides convincing evidence that recognition is moderated by cultural differences, making a "one-size-fits-all" global policy ineffective and potentially demotivating.

How Cultural Differences Affect Recognition:

Tangibility

Culture determines whether appreciation is psychologically complete with or without a tangible reward. In some contexts (e.g., Ghana/ Participant 8), a verbal "thank you" is only the first step, and the absence of a token (monetary or gift) invalidates the entire

act. In others (e.g., the Francophone region/Participant 13), the verbal act itself is a more significant occurrence because it is less frequent.

Direction and Amplification

Culture also dictates the preferred flow of recognition. African communal cultures (Participant 1, Participant 2 and Participant 4) mentioned collective recognition and involving the community to amplify the recognition while Participant 3 said her culture demands that recognition flow top-down to be credible and relevant to your career.

Upbringing

As expected, the findings suggest that cultural upbringing establishes the default or base level. In cultures where gratitude is highly ingrained, for example, Participants 4 and 12 both mentioned that basic courtesies are expected in their culture, requiring recognition programmes to surpass simple manners like a 'thank you' if they are to achieve real and motivational impact. In cultures where explicit appreciation is less common, such as those of Participants 13 and 11, even simple acknowledgement can be highly impactful; however, employees may need training to learn how to become givers of recognition.

Strategic Insights for MNCs:

The findings suggest that adopting a globally consistent framework of standardising the value and meaning of recognition, such as recognition of high performers or collaborative team players, but localising the manner in which it is delivered to be locally relevant. Put differently, this means establishing a common understanding of what is seen as worthy or recognition but leaving the how to each market to decide. This would mean allowing the operating subsidiary companies or the different markets to customise the reward catalogue as well as the social mechanism on how it is delivered. Even still, given the variations in responses from people with the same national backgrounds, perhaps a more individualised and flexible approach should be taken in place of a rigid one for any element of the process that can be localised.

Secondly, investing in cultural intelligence training would be advisable for both leaders and followers in the business. The responsibility to adapt should not fall only on the receiver. Leaders and peers, particularly those operating across cultural clusters (e.g.,

Anglophone, Francophone, West Africa or Southern Africa etc), must be trained on local expressions of gratitude to ensure their recognition is perceived as sincere and complete in order to have the intended motivational benefit and not offend.

Thirdly, integrating accountability into collective recognition is a strong takeaway. In line with the Ubuntu cultural background, organisations should take seriously the preference for collective recognition in a setting where individual recognition is not the forefront thought, while pairing these team rewards with transparent, individual accountability metrics in order to avoid the mediocrity trap mentioned by several participants. Still, collective praise should not replace specific, documented acknowledgement of the high performers who drove the success.

Lastly, MNCs need to operationalise cultural respect. This topic was passionately introduced by many participants and is a key theme centred around simple operational adjustments, such as accommodating time zone differences for religious observance or adjusting meeting schedules to a time that is not outside of the regular work day for all, which send powerful, non-monetary forms of recognition that demonstrate genuine respect for an employee's background, make them feel seen and improving cross-cultural collaboration.

5.4 Findings from the HR Professionals

Following the interviews with employees, the in-depth interviews with expert HR professionals explored their perspectives on how cultural differences affect employee recognition and retention in multinational companies from an expert perspective.

Alignment with Global Recognition Trends

A key finding from the interviews was around the evolution of the recognition strategy in the business but also globally; how it is becoming inculcated into the business operations and culture, shifting from driving simple '*thank yous*' to deeper appreciation linked to purpose and legacy. This speaks to intentionally creating a culture where leaders authentically appreciate employees in every interaction, shifting from activity-focused to impact-focused recognition and reflects business keeping up with the global movement towards wellbeing, respect, care, and authenticity in the workplace in general.

Localisation vs Standardisation

The distinction between rigid policies of the past, when the recognition programme first started, towards the recent, more flexible frameworks which allow for localisation was also highlighted. Localising group-wide recognition programmes to fit cultural contexts of different regions affirms the general viewpoint of this research, emphasising flexibility for local markets to adapt programmes based on their unique needs. Similarly, understanding generational differences in recognition preferences, such as public vs. private recognition and adapting recognition based on employee personas came up showing that whilst there are many universal practices that each operation is expected to align to, there is still room for local markets to adapt some elements of the employee recognition programme based on their unique needs. The role of national culture in shaping recognition practices was a central theme, with examples of how different markets such as Ghana, Rwanda and South Africa engage with recognition differently, with the main customisation element being whether recognition is incentivised or not.

Challenges to Global Implementation

Challenges in standardising recognition programmes across diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts were discussed, with the need for local adaptation emphasised. A key challenge mentioned was around the tedious process of getting group-level frameworks approved which involves multiple revisions, committee reviews and approval layers, reflecting the complexity of cross-market implementation of a uniform approach. The digital 'Kudos' platform was discussed as the main peer-to-peer recognition tool, with varying levels of incentive availability across markets. The catalogue of rewards on the platform is localised at a country level to suit local tastes, budgets and preferences. Some markets which lack rewards on the platform had lower usage such as Benin which demonstrates that not having an incentive demotivates usage, however this was not a hard and fast rule as another market with low usage percentages, Cote D'Ivoire did have a wide variety of incentives on the platform (Appendix G: Recognition Platform Participation Data), the lack of a consistent approach was highlighted as one of the challenges affecting implementation. The introduction of tiered performance incentives (bronze, silver, gold, platinum) was mentioned as a way to drive the uptake of the platform and ensure that all operations fully adopt the employee recognition systems.

Recognition for Business Growth

In terms of culture, there was an understanding that recognition plays an instrumental role but a sharp differentiation was made between recognition for appreciation (interpersonal skills, belonging) and recognition tied to performance (meeting KPIs, incentives with caution on using recognition to drive performance at the expense of making employees feel seen and heard).

Leadership Role

They emphasized the critical role that leaders play. Authentic and sustained leadership buy-in was identified as a key challenge for building a recognition culture, with discussions about possibly making recognition a KPI for leaders in order to ensure that they make time to participate actively in recognition activities despite their busy schedules.

Employee Feedback

Surveys are used to assess employee perceptions of recognition, with findings showing similar desires across markets (authentic recognition, incentives, belonging), but also highlighting specific needs like housing and food support in some regions where socioeconomic conditions are deteriorating. The business is working to integrate employee well-being with recognition, aiming for a holistic approach that includes mental, financial, and physical health support.

Link to Retention

While the HR professionals are advocates of recognition, both participants stated that there was no clear data around recognition being a key driver of retention. Exit interviews and survey data are currently used to understand why employees leave the business and whilst recognition is not in the top 5 reasons why employees leave the business, they believe that it is an influential factor for employees who have left or considered leaving the business.

5.5 Findings Conclusion

The research findings highlight that a balanced approach to recognition can foster a motivated, engaged and loyal workforce. The impact of recognition on retention is

complex, difficult to measure and varies across individuals and contexts. While many employees find recognition to be a powerful motivator that enhances their sense of value and engagement, others found little value in external validation and others still caution against its overuse, lack of authenticity, and failure to deliver meaningful outcomes. The interviews with both employees and HR Professionals revealed that authenticity is a crucial requirement for effective employee recognition. While formal systems can provide structure, they must be implemented thoughtfully to avoid perceptions of insincerity. Personalised, timely, and specific recognition, especially when aligned with organisational values and delivered by respected leaders or peers, has the most profound impact. The findings call for organisations to foster a culture where appreciation is both genuine and culturally sensitive, ensuring that recognition efforts truly resonate with employees in order for them to actually contribute to a positive workplace environment. Further, the findings indicate that organisations must implement recognition practices that are timely, specific, and aligned with employee values, while being mindful of cultural and generational differences.

Chapter 6: Results Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 5. It combines Hofstede's 6-Dimensional Cultural Theory and other existing literature with the aim of corroborating or highlighting any inconsistencies between the literature and the research findings. It therefore serves as the analytical core of the dissertation, moving beyond a summary of results to interpret their meaning, bringing in and comparing the key literature from Chapter 2, to derive new insights. The chapter's primary goal is therefore, to answer the 'So what?' of this study. The discussion is structured as follows: First, the discussion will address Research Question 1, critically examining how perceptions of recognition differ across cultures and arguing that individual and demographic factors may actually be stronger predictors than national culture. Second, the chapter will discuss Research Question 2, analysing the role of recognition in retention and reframing its function as an 'amplifier' rather than a primary 'driver' by using the participant insights and the company's own exit interview data (Appendix H). Third, the chapter will discuss Research Question 3, by proposing a practical model for MNCs. It will argue against a simplistic, Hofstede-based approach in favour of a framework for 'structured personalisation'. Finally, a chapter summary synthesises the key arguments, providing a bridge to the final conclusions and recommendations in Chapter 7.

6.2 Research Question 1

How do employee perceptions of recognition practices differ across cultures within multinational corporations?

The literature review had established Hofstede's dimensions as the primary framework for anticipating these differences. 'Power Distance' would predict the hierarchical preferences found in the Francophone contexts. Similarly, the 'Masculinity' dimension (Hofstede, 2011), which values material success, aligns with the expectation of tangible rewards. The literature also highlighted the communal 'Ubuntu' philosophy as a key feature of the African context (Hofstede, 2011).

A comparison of the findings to the literature reveals both confirmation and, more importantly, a significant contradiction. The data confirms that Hofstede's Power Distance dimension remains a relevant lens. However, the study's most significant insight is the limitation of these macro-cultural models.

The findings for RQ1 revealed a complex landscape of recognition preferences. A clear preference for hierarchical, leader-led recognition was voiced in Francophone contexts, with Participant 3 noting it “*carries more weight when it's the boss*”. This contrasts with the emphasis on tangible rewards in West Africa, where Participant 8 (Ghana) stated that without a 'small gift', a 'thank you' is 'incomplete'. However, the most significant finding was a cross-cutting theme: an employee's gender and individual personality (e.g., public vs. private praise) often appeared to be more influential than their national origin. Female participants, for instance, consistently linked recognition to their personal 'worth' (Participant 14).

This also points to different understandings of recognition and appreciation, terms which are often used interchangeably to mean the same thing but are different. Recent literature points out the importance of the difference between recognition (often performance-based, reward-driven) and appreciation (valuing someone for who they are or their day-to-day efforts) (Romy, 2024). Mike Robbins (2019) argues employees need both recognition for results and appreciation for their intrinsic worth. The findings around the Masculinity vs. Femininity Hofstede dimension tie into this. In more “masculine” cultures (which value achievement, heroism, material success), employees like Participant 8 wanted something tangible; essentially, they equated recognition with a concrete reward or status symbol (a bonus, a trophy, a promotion). This aligns with a recognition-as-reward concept. For these contexts or individuals, if the company wants to motivate and retain them, it should ensure that exceptional performance is met or paired with tangible recognition (monetary awards, pay raises, formal titles, etc.), not just a pat on the back. On the other hand, more “feminine” cultures (which value cooperation, modesty, quality of life) or simply employees with that orientation (like Participant 12, who emphasised a family-like work environment and well-being) find appreciation more motivating, wanting to feel cared for and noticed beyond just their output. For them appreciation such as, a heartfelt thank you, a supportive team atmosphere, or work-life

considerate gestures (like extra leave or flexibility as a form of appreciation) are more meaningful.

Distinguishing and balancing both recognition and appreciation becomes key and an effective recognition program must therefore incorporate both elements and clarify their purpose. A recommendation is to explicitly design two tracks, one being a performance recognition track (with clear criteria for bonuses, awards tied to concrete outcomes) and the second being an appreciation culture track (encouraging everyday positive feedback, gratitude, and perhaps smaller rewards like vouchers or public recognition for living the company values). By doing so, the company addresses the spectrum of needs, those who say “show me the money (or equivalent tangible reward)” and those who say “acknowledge my effort and make me feel like family.” Recent literature supports this approach, distinguishing recognition (rewarding what people do) from appreciation (honoring who people are) leads to more holistic engagement. Romy (2024) found that monetary incentives had significant impact on performance in an Indonesian manufacturing context, underscoring that for driving results, one should not shy away from financial or tangible components in recognition. At the same time, a study by Hancock (2024) warns that focusing only on performative reward systems can backfire if employees don't feel genuinely valued highlighting that balance is crucial.

The power distance dimension of Hofstede's framework looks at the degree of inequality that exists and is accepted between people with and without power or authority (Hofstede, 2011). It suggests that in some cultures, on the opposite side of the spectrum, it is normal for bosses to have a lot of power and for everyone else to follow orders whilst in other cultures, that gap is narrower. In an extreme situation, people accept a hierarchical order without much question, whereas in the inverse, low power, people prefer equality and challenge authority more readily. Again, the research debunked those hard and fast generalisations. While some participants from higher PD contexts placed greater importance on recognition coming from managers or leaders, those from lower-PD contexts were comfortable with, and even enthusiastic about, peer-to-peer recognition. The inverse was also true for a minority of the participants. The research didn't clearly show power distance dynamics as a main factor at play in recognition, the

majority of participants were more in favour of recognition from the leader than any other source.

Participant 3 brought this to life vividly when sharing about the expectations in the Francophone setting (Higher PD), where power distance is real and recognition received from superiors carries higher weight than that from peers in contrast to Anglophone countries. This shows that recognition was inherently tied to the organizational hierarchy and a formal award or thanks from the boss served as a validation of status and achievement in a way that peer recognition did not for her, however, this was not the case for all participants. This anecdote aligns with the broader pattern from the other participants from lower PD settings, in sub-Saharan Africa, indicating that people generally “accept a hierarchical order” and find recognition from leaders more meaningful as a whole, but not that this is culture specific (Vaara et al., 2021).

Socioeconomics vs. Culture

The finding from Participant 8 (Ghana) is likely not an expression of Hofstede's 'Masculinity' but rather one of 'socioeconomic pragmatism.' In a context of high inflation and economic pressure, intangible praise can be perceived as 'empty' or 'manipulative'. This suggests the immediate economic environment is a more powerful driver than a static cultural dimension.

Gender vs. Nationality

The most powerful theme was the one that transcended national boundaries: gender. The finding that female employees (e.g Participants 10, 14 12) across different countries (Eswatini, South Africa) felt recognition was a top-tier factor for retention and personal worth is a crucial insight. This suggests that in the 'third culture' of a modern MNC, demographic identity and lived experience can be a stronger predictor of recognition needs than an employee's nationality.

Collectivism vs Individualism: Limited 'Ubuntu' Finding

This dimension speaks to the strength of social ties and the emphasis on individual achievements versus group loyalty (Hofstede, 2011). It's about whether people think doing things independently or collective identity is more important. In individualistic

cultures, the expectation is that there is a lot of focus on personal success, self-interest, and growth. In these settings, public recognition that focuses on individuals (for example naming a "Top Performer" or "employee of the month") works very well because it boosts personal status and competitive success. On the other hand, collectivistic cultures emphasise collectivism and group-based benefits, organisational stability and harmony above all else. In such settings, giving someone high-profile public praise can be counterproductive because it could make them feel embarrassed or break up the group's sense of unity and cohesion as one individual is singled out (Hancock, 2024). The preferred approach in this context should shift from private acknowledgement of individual contributions to public recognition focused on the team's collective achievement.

The research expectedly surfaced the concept of Ubuntu, a key consideration for the African context. Ubuntu, the concept of *'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu or I am because you are'* emphasizes collectively and mutual care (Tayali, 2025). Interestingly, the Ubuntu philosophy which is frequently cited as the foundational African leadership paradigm (Tayali, 2025) was only explicitly raised by the South African subset of participants and did not emerge as a pervasive, pan-African theme in recognition preference. This suggests that while it is a powerful regional philosophy, it cannot be applied as a pan-African 'collectivist' stereotype to guide policy in, for example, West or East Africa. The findings indicate that the strategic positioning of recognition within a national or organisational culture does not profoundly influence its effectiveness, especially regarding Hofstede's dimension of individualism versus collectivism. While there were some standout takeaways such of Individualism and focus on own goals, as evidenced by the Ghanaian Participant (Participant 1), and expressed collectivism, such as Eswatini (Participant 11) who highlighted that group or family goals are a lot more important, on the balance, one cannot simply conclude that highly individualised societies prioritise individual goals and rights whilst collectivist societies emphasise group cohesion, loyalty and collective well-being.

This analysis extends the literature by proposing that MNCs must de-emphasise static cultural models in favour of a more dynamic, "culture-aware" HRM approach. The emerging insight is that managers need 'cultural intelligence' (as supported by

recent academic literature) rather than a checklist. This also reveals a key limitation of this study: it was designed to find national differences but instead found gender-and socioeconomic-based ones. Therefore, a critical area for future research is to explicitly test the hypothesis that gender is a stronger moderator than nationality in the recognition-retention link.

6.3 Research Question 2

How large of a role does recognition play in an employee's decision to leave an organisation?

This research question probed the connection between employee recognition and retention, essentially whether feeling recognised (or not) influences if employees remain with their employer. The findings for Research Question 2 were conclusively mixed. They highlight a complex picture; while recognition was appreciated for the most part and linked to higher motivation and engagement, its direct impact on the decision to stay or leave was moderate and seemed to be mediated by other factors. The majority of participants stated that recognition was a 'contributing but not sole factor' and ranked it *below* salary, growth, and work atmosphere. Participant 4 noted it 'is rarely the only thing that makes someone leave'. However, this was contradicted by a vocal minority (e.g., Participants 10, 14), for whom a lack of recognition was a decisive factor in considering an exit. This group, notably, was comprised of female employees, reinforcing the finding from Research Question 1. This highlights that whilst recognition does matter and is valued, it is more a supportive than central factor when it comes to recognition.

Gender Link

However, building on the previous discussion, female participants in the sample indicated a stronger link between recognition and their likelihood of staying. Several women expressed that consistent lack of recognition would drive them to consider opportunities elsewhere, as it signals a lack of respect or growth. This contrasts with some male participants who, while discontented by poor recognition, did not see it as deal-breaking if other job aspects were satisfactory. This gender difference suggests that for certain groups, recognition hits closer to fundamental needs of feeling respected and seen in the workplace. One female interviewee (Participant 6) implied that recognition for her

was tied to dignity, it validated that her efforts are not being overlooked because of gender biases, for example. Laaser & Bolton (2021) discuss 'respectful recognition' as a component of dignity at work, particularly relevant in contexts where individuals from historically marginalized groups (such as women in male-dominated environments) may crave that validation as proof of their equal status. Therefore, in the research, it appears recognition can be a more decisive retention factor for women, perhaps because its absence might compound other challenges they face, prompting them to seek a more appreciative environment. This finding diverges from much mainstream literature that rarely differentiates retention drivers by gender; it suggests an area for further research and is a signal to HR practitioners to ensure their recognition practices are inclusive and mindful of diverse employee experiences.

The academic literature, by contrast, often draws a very direct and positive correlation between recognition and retention. Studies reviewed in Chapter 2, including recent publications, link recognition to job satisfaction, which in turn mediates retention (Bonneton et al., 2022; Hancock, 2022; Kgarimetsa et al., 2024). This literature formed the proposition that a strong link would be found however, Participants stated that a lack of recognition on its own was not enough or did not play a big enough role in them wanting to leave the business and offered two explanations. Firstly, this was due to intrinsic motivation factors or personal resilience, where employees who are self-driven and derive satisfaction from the work itself or the personal achievement might tolerate a low recognition environment better than others, which makes them less inclined to seek external validation. Secondly and more pragmatic reason could be the job market reality; in the African context, where unemployment is high, employees will rather stay in environments that do not meet their psychological needs but meet their immediate physical needs, than leave. In the absence of alternative employment opportunities, people would be willing to stay in an organisation, feeling unrecognised and be disengaged or "quiet-quit" rather than exit (Corbin et al., 2024).

Although their perspectives differ, it can still be concluded that employee recognition has a mitigating effect on turnover as most of the interviewed employees mentioned that they were of the view that recognition or the lack of it does affect their decision to leave or stay with the organisation. This was specifically important for those motivated by intrinsic

elements, pointing to a need to link theories on motivation closer to those of recognition (Ndiango et al., 2024). This suggests that while a lack of recognition can cause dissatisfaction, it may not be a tipping point until unless other points of dissatisfactions also exist.

This does not mean recognition is irrelevant or unimportant. Instead, the findings reframe the role of recognition not as a primary driver, but rather as an amplifier. When a primary driver like remuneration is not met, a lack of recognition amplifies the negative, validating an employee's feeling of being undervalued and accelerating their decision to leave. Conversely, when a primary driver such as career development is met recognition amplifies the positive effect, creating strong employee loyalty. It's only when lack of recognition is combined with other factors (such as pay, development opportunities or outside offers, or dissatisfaction with pay and growth) that it could directly cause turnover. This 'Amplifier' model explains why Participant 4 sees it as 'contributing' to his reasons to stay, while Participant 10, already feeling undervalued, sees its absence as a final straw for her.

This study's finding that the link is 'not very tight' initially appears to contradict the established literature. However, the organisation's own Exit Interview Data (Appendix H) provides a powerful explanation that synthesises both the literature and the participant data. According to Appendix H, the top two reasons for employees leaving are 'Career Development' (e.g., 40% in WECA, 42% in SEA) and 'Remuneration' (e.g., 23% in WECA, 34% in SEA). Recognition is not even listed in the top 6. Recognition likely acts as a 'hygiene factor' or an accelerant of a retention decision already driven by pay and promotion. When an employee feels underpaid and unrecognised, the lack of recognition validates their decision to leave. This study thus argues that recognition alone cannot fix retention; it can only amplify the positive effects of a fair and growth-oriented work environment.

The implications of the mixed nature of these findings present a challenge to the conventional understanding "recognition is always good for retention." It is, but not unconditionally, it is possible for an organization to have a strong recognition culture and yet suffer turnover if, say, compensation is below market or career prospects are

stagnant. Conversely, some organizations with weaker recognition practices may retain staff through other means (though possibly not sustain their engagement). The literature also points out potential boundary conditions. For example, an immanent critique by Hancock (2022) argues that many formal recognition programs can be perceived as hollow or manipulative, failing to have the intended impact. If employees view recognition initiatives as insincere “symbolic solutions” (e.g. a corporate program that feels like a checkbox exercise rather than genuine appreciation), then those programs might not improve retention and could even breed cynicism. Brun & Dugas (2008) similarly caution that the *quality* of recognition (personalized and fair versus generic and favouritist) determines whether it boosts morale or not. From the interviews, many participants indeed complained about insincere or unfair recognition, such as only certain employees being recognised, which made others feel alienated. In such cases, recognition as experienced by employees might not mitigate turnover risk; it could exacerbate it by introducing perceptions of injustice. This highlights that simply having a recognition program is not enough; it must be authentic and culturally attuned (a theme expanded on in RQ3) and also defensible with the criteria well-articulated and understood.

These mixed findings on the correlation between recognition and retention presents a critical challenge to the conventional wisdom in talent management literature (Tarique & Schuler, 2010). While recognition is clearly a powerful leadership tool (Luthans, 2000; Award.co, 2025) and linked to job satisfaction (Ndiango et al., 2024), a substantial number of participants indicated other factors primarily drove their decision to stay. This finding suggests that in the context of African MNCs, recognition may function more as a necessary component of the Employee Value Proposition (EVP) rather than a guaranteed retention driver (Hassan, 2023). Retention is dependent on "getting recognition right" (Yi, 2024), but this ambiguity suggests that a lack of recognition may lead to dissatisfaction or "quiet quitting" (Corbin & Flenady, 2024) but may not be the *sole* cause of turnover when other factors like compensation and career growth are present. The results highlight the need for a holistic view of the EVP. The emerging insight is that recognition cannot be used as a 'fix' for a broken retention model. An MNC cannot solve its attrition problem with a 'Kudos' platform if its employees are leaving for (as Appendix H shows) pay and promotions. The recommendation is that recognition

must be integrated into the career development and performance management process, not treated as a separate, 'soft' HR initiative.

Research Question 3

How can multinational corporations tailor their recognition programmes to accommodate diverse cultural preferences of recognition in the workplace and enhance employee retention?

Summary of Findings

The analysis, combined with insights from HR practitioners and recent literature, suggests that successful recognition programs in MNCs must be culturally nuanced, integrated with broader talent management strategies, and attentive to demographic nuances such as gender as well as socioeconomic factors. By testing Hofstede's dimensions framework (Hofstede, 2011) against a modern multicultural context, a nuanced, non-linear effect on retention was revealed. The study therefore offers an empirically grounded critique of the universal applicability of Western-developed HRM models (Vaara et al., 2021). Building on the insights from RQ1 and RQ2, this question seeks to translate understanding into action. Given that cultural differences were not found to strongly affect recognition preferences and that many other factors take precedence over recognition in retention, how should a multinational corporation (MNC) design or adapt its employee recognition programs for a culturally diverse workforce?

When asked how to tailor programmes, the findings were clear: employees want authenticity and personalisation. Participants 9, 13 and 14 passionately described the 'dark side' of recognition, citing inauthentic 'tick-box' exercises and 'manipulative' recognition used to assign more work. The findings also showed that how recognition is delivered (public vs. private) and by whom (manager vs. peer) is as important as the recognition itself. Finally, the HR Experts (Participants 15, 16) confirmed the MNC's move toward flexible, localised frameworks, aligning with the study's findings.

Connection to Literature

The literature on tailoring is often framed as a 'global vs. local' debate, pushing MNCs to adapt standardised programmes to local norms. This often results in the exact kind of

'checklist' approach based on Hofstede that this study has critiqued. Recent academic literature, however, calls for 'respectful recognition' and 'meaningful work' that addresses employee dignity, aligning with the participants' calls for authenticity.

The table below attempts to provide a practical visual matrix or framework which multinationals operating within the African context would employ to keep employees engaged based on the simplistic insights from Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions model only:

Table 4: Hofstede Dimensions vs Current Recognition Strategies Practical Framework

Hofstede Dimension	Recognition Strategies
Power Distance (PDI)	High (e.g Nigeria): Formal recognition from senior leaders, public award ceremonies Low: Peer-to-peer, informal Kudos
Individualism vs Collectivism (IDV)	Individualistic: Personal awards, spotlight programs e.g celebrating employee or 'hero' of the month Collectivist (e.g Eswatini): Team-based recognition, group celebrations such as team lunches for collective targets met or exceeded
Masculinity vs Femininity (MAS)	Masculine (e.g Ghana): competitive, performance-based rewards where the criteria is clearly articulated upfront, tangible recognition linked to monetary value Feminine (e.g Cote D'Ivoire): emphasis on wellbeing, collaboration and work-life balance perks such as flexible work or working from home days
Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)	High (e.g Uganda): Structured, rule-based recognition programmes Low: Spontaneous, informal appreciation
Long-Term Avoidance Orientation (LTO)	High (e.g Benin): Recognition tied to career development, loyalty programs, mentorship opportunities Low Once off, on the spot, more frequent recognition based on displaying/living the company values or customer service
Indulgent vs. Restraint (IVR)	Indulgent (e.g South Africa): Celebratory events, social media shout-outs spotlighting the employee on the company page Restrained: Private, personal recognition

The above table shows that the simplistic nature of Hostede's framework and its easy applicability would not serve the purpose of recognising the individual employee who has nuanced and varied experiences, as shared by the participants. While one is able to place some of the participants in the model based on their responses, there are some outliers and national cultures that contradict each other. Additionally, the model, as applied, is static and does not allow for growth of the individual or the evolving nature of culture (Froese et al., 2020). A key recommendation of this study is for MNCs to move beyond simplistic cultural mapping (as tempting as a framework like Table 4 might be). The data shows this approach will fail. Instead, the organisation must adopt a framework of structured personalisation which goes beyond the generalised and simplistic nature and is also a 'live' model which changes and grows together with the each employee.

This model has two components:

1. A "Menu" of Options: The company provides a global "menu" of recognition options (e.g., redeemable points, public "Kudos," private email from a leader, extra leave day, a team lunch voucher, a small tangible gift etc).
2. Mandatory Manager Training: Managers are trained (and held accountable via KPIs, as the HR experts suggested) to have explicit and frequent, one-on-one conversations with each team member about how they personally prefer to be recognised. The manager's job is to then deliver recognition from that "menu" in the way that is most meaningful to that individual at that particular stage of their career and life, not their nationality.

Discussion and Analysis

This study's findings challenge the very premise of the research question. The data suggests that tailoring by national culture is the wrong approach and will lead to the inauthentic, 'tick-box' outcomes that do not resonate with employees. A simplistic framework like the one originally proposed at the onset of the study and modelled in Table 4, 'Hofstede Dimensions vs Recognition Strategies', would be a strategic failure because it ignores the study's findings. Participant 4 (South Africa) and Participant 1 (South Africa) are from the same "Indulgent" culture, yet one values private, personal notes and the other focuses on collective 'Ubuntu' principles. They would require different recognition practices despite sharing a national culture.

The true tailoring must happen at the individual level. The 'dark side' of recognition is not a failure of the reward; it is a failure of the manager. Authenticity is not a feature of a platform but rather, is the result of a manager truly seeing and understanding the employee for who they are.

Emerging Insights

The main insight that the process of recognition must be authentic, timely, and personal, is far more important than the recognition itself. This is, the only way to tailor recognition to be effective across diverse cultures, genders, and personalities. This leads to the study's primary recommendation. MNCs must abandon simplistic cultural framework tools and checklists and instead implement a framework of 'Structured Personalisation' to understand and resonate with the team they aim to recognise. This proposed model has two parts: A Global 'Menu' where the organisation provides a global, flexible framework and a 'menu' of recognition tools (e.g., points, vouchers, extra leave, training opportunities, public vs. private 'Kudos') complimented by Mandatory Managerial Accountability where the execution is 100% localised to the line manager and employee. Managers must be trained and held accountable (as suggested by Participant 16) for having explicit conversations with each team member, these can include specifically and directly asking each individual how they prefer to be recognised for good work.

6.5 Results Discussion Conclusion and Chapter Summary

The significant and unexpected finding of this study is the challenge it presents to the importance of national culture. While Hofstede's dimensions were partially validated (e.g., hierarchical preferences in Francophone contexts), the interview data repeatedly showed that an employee's gender and age (generational cohort) were stronger predictors of their recognition preferences in line with recent literature (Kgarimetsa & Naidoo, 2024). For example, female participants (e.g., Participant 10, 14) linked recognition directly to their sense of 'worth as a person' and retention, a finding that cut across national cultures. This suggests that in the context of a modern MNC, a 'third culture', therefore comprising corporate and professional identities may dilute the influence of national culture. This aligns with recent academic literature that calls for more 'culture-aware HRM' rather than rigid, stereotype-based models (Lui et al., 2021).

The practical implications for MNCs operating in the African context are aligned to the findings shared by the HR Professionals which call for a shift from standardized, top-down recognition programs to decentralized, culturally nuanced frameworks. This requires cultural alignment, investing in in-depth cultural research to align the types and delivery of recognition with local cultural dimensions, and contextualization, integrating recognition with other EVP elements to address the multi-faceted nature of retention (Quinlan et al., 2019,) as recognition on its own does not have a strong effect. Finally, developing gender specific or gender-aware recognition channels, recognizing the unique retention risks associated with under-recognizing female talent (Kgarimetsa & Naidoo, 2024; Mngomezulu et al., 2015).

This chapter has provided a critical analysis of the study's findings, using the literature review to develop new insights. It began by arguing that while Hofstede's model is a useful starting point, it is not sufficient as a predictor of recognition preferences. The discussion proposed that individual (gender, personality) and socioeconomic factors are more powerful moderators in this context. Next, the chapter tackled the recognition-retention link. By synthesising participant interviews with the MNC's own exit data (Appendix H), it reframed recognition's role from a primary 'driver' to a critical 'amplifier' that validates or accelerates an employee's decision to stay or leave. Finally, the discussion argued that tailoring recognition by national culture is a flawed strategy. It rejected a checklist approach and instead proposed a model of 'Structured Personalisation' that empowers managers to deliver authentic recognition based on individual, not national, preferences (Lui et al., 2021). The following chapter will now provide the final conclusions and recommendations based on this synthesised analysis.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Brief Review of The Study's Main Objectives and Approach

Recognising the importance of the employee recognition on motivation, retention, productivity, business outcomes and decent work, this research sought to explore the role that culture plays in the relationship. In understanding this, the research looked at the current perceptions of a diverse group of employees on the different elements of recognition namely preferred type, timing and who delivers it with the view of understanding if there are any marked differences according to the geography.

The goal of the research was to provide a framework or method for culturally diverse organisations to better understand their team's differences and areas of convergence when it comes to the topic of employee recognition and its link to retention. The research on cultural theories was therefore an important lens through which to discuss and analyse the results. The literature review established Hofstede's dimensions as the primary framework for anticipating these differences. 'Power Distance' would predict the hierarchical preferences found in the Francophone contexts. Similarly, the 'Masculinity' dimension, which values material success, aligns with the expectation of tangible rewards. The literature also highlighted the communal 'Ubuntu' philosophy as a key feature of the African cultural context.

Whilst this research began by asking how cultural differences affect recognition and retention in a multinational African context, the answer found was that while culture plays a role, a far more powerful set of factors, gender, personality, and socioeconomic pragmatism, drives employee preferences when it comes to recognition. The research found that recognition's link to retention is not direct, but rather that of an 'amplifier.'

The findings show that the most significant challenge for any MNC is not navigating national cultures, but rather closing the "authenticity gap" often associated with static talent management programmes. A thank you is not the same everywhere or to everyone. This study's main contribution is the recommendation to move away from cultural checklists and toward a "Structured Personalisation" model. By providing a

flexible global "menu" but mandating that managers deliver recognition personally, an MNC can turn recognition into a powerful tool for engagement and, ultimately, retention.

7.2 Conclusion Introduction

The principal finding of this study aligns with more recent literature on the topic which suggests that while national culture (per Hofstede) provides a useful baseline for understanding recognition, it is an insufficient and often inaccurate predictor of employee preferences within a diverse African MNC.

The research highlights that employee recognition is not a superficial perk or another 'nice to have' initiative driven by HR, but an essential component of modern employee engagement and retention strategies across the African continent. Its motivational impact stems from a psychological validation that makes employees feel valued, seen, and motivates them to continue contributing positively. The evidence strongly advocates for a system that aligns with organisational values and culture whilst also prioritising authentic, timely, and specific acknowledgment, focusing on non-monetary elements like growth and psychological safety as equally as tangible financial rewards. While individual motivation is critical and recognition varies by person and generation consistent, genuine recognition, particularly from direct leaders and senior management, strengthens the employee's connection to the organization and reduces their inclination to leave. The risk of demotivation is high if recognition is generic, insincere, or exclusionary.

Ultimately, recognition is considered a factor in retention, sometimes ranking in the top reasons for staying with or leaving a company, provided it is executed with sincerity and focus. Whilst it did not come out clearly as a standalone reason, by nature, it is interlinked and intertwined with the other reasons that employees mentioned, such as pay, learning and development.

7.3 Principal Findings and Their Significance per Research Question

Research Question 1

Main Findings: Recognition is important but personal factors dominate. Recognition is also separate from appreciation and the definitions are not clearly understood.

An employee's gender, age, and individual personality (e.g., introvert vs. extrovert) are *stronger* moderators of recognition preference than their nationality. The research clearly highlighted that a general understanding of culture on the surface level is no longer relevant for today's modern workforce. It showed that even within each country, there are marked differences in preferences to recognition. Instead, the factors that came out more clearly were the personal factors such as gender and personality.

The perceptions on recognition were generally positive; however, there were some blurred lines in the understanding of the distinction between recognition and appreciation. The two are very much linked, but recent thought leadership calls for the distinct separation between recognition and appreciation, which is in line with the views of the participants of the study, who highlighted that recognition must firstly be authentic and secondly come with something tangible, as opposed to appreciation, which is a simple show of gratitude.

Secondly, the interviews indicate that employees take a holistic view of recognition, they mention recognition in the same breath as growth, environment, and leadership. Therefore, an MNC should ensure its recognition program is contextualized within the overall retention strategy. For example, if work-life balance is valued in a country or region, incorporating that into recognition (reward teams that find ways to improve balance or openly appreciate individuals who support colleagues' well-being) or if career progression is a big concern, include developmental recognitions (like an internal "Rising Star" program that not only applauds the person but also gives them added mentorship or a stretch opportunity as a reward, blending recognition with development) could be a solution.

Finally, socioeconomic pragmatism is key. In many operating contexts, the socioeconomic environment dictates a need for tangible, practical recognition (e.g. vouchers, small gifts) over purely symbolic praise. This highlights that the socioeconomic reality of the environment that the business operates in dominates over personal factors, where employees are naturally more concerned about basic physiological needs over higher order esteem needs.

Research Question 2

Main Finding: Recognition is an Amplifier, Not a Driver of Retention

The findings indicate that the link to retention is indirect. The conversations with employees, HR professionals, as well as the secondary company highlight that employees leave for a myriad of different reasons, and recognition is not a standalone construct but rather cuts across most of the top reasons, as it influences and impacts the decision, but other factors often take precedence. Recognition therefore acts as a powerful amplifier; it either reinforces the positive effects of fair pay and career growth, or it accelerates an employee's exit when those primary needs are not met.

Research Question 3

Main Finding: Personality, Gender and Generational Preferences More Important Than Culture

The Individualism or Collectivism question shows that people's views are rarely ever fixed according to cultural dimensions (although some were) but rather point to a need to use different approaches in different settings for different outcomes. Positioning recognition within a national or organisational culture profoundly influences its effectiveness, in terms of Hofstede's dimension of individualism versus collectivism. In individualistic cultures, there was expected to be a lot of focus on personal success, self-interest, and growth. In these settings, public recognition that focuses on individuals (for example naming a "Top Performer" or "employee of the month") works very well because it boosts personal status and competitive success. On the other hand, collectivistic cultures are cultures that stress collectivism and group-based benefits, organisational stability and harmony above all else. In such settings, giving someone high-profile public praise can be counterproductive because it could make them feel embarrassed or break up the group's sense of unity and cohesion as one individual is singled out (Marterl et al., 2021). The preferred approach in this context should shift from private acknowledgement of individual contributions to public recognition focused on the team's collective achievement. Whilst this framework proved to hold true for the most part, the few outliers reiterate the need for personalisation. Factors such as personality, for example where one participant acknowledged the general cultural disposition but was clear that he is an outlier in that culture indicate that culture is good as a first level general understanding which then needs to be validated on a personal level.

7.4 Theoretical and Practical Contributions of the Study

This study makes 2 significant theoretical contributions. Firstly, it contextualises and critiques Hofstede's cultural dimensions model. The research challenges the over-reliance on macro-cultural models in a modern, globalised context. By applying the existing framework in an African MNC, it provides empirical evidence that in a "third culture" (MNC + professional identity), demographic and individual factors can overtake national cultural dimensions as key moderators. It shows that macro-cultural models such as Hofstede's are still worth defending but demotes their importance to a general base level and not the primary tool.

Secondly, the research identifies gender as a critical, under-studied variable. The study reveals a significant and consistent finding; female employees across different national cultures reported a stronger link between recognition and their sense of personal worth, and thus, retention. It suggests that gender may be a more powerful variable than national culture in the recognition-retention link, a factor largely under-explored in cross-cultural HRM literature.

The study therefore updates existing research on employee engagement and retention by offering a different, more contemporary and contextualised view on the topic of recognition from employees of diverse African backgrounds, which can be leveraged to re-engage and retain talent.

7.5 Limitations of the Research

Introduction and Primary Limitation

While there are both theoretical and practical contributions of the study as mentioned above, the primary limitation of this study stems from its original design in relation to its emergent findings. The purposive sampling strategy was deliberately constructed to explore differences across national cultures by sampling employees from South, East, and West Africa. However, the study's most significant finding was not about national culture, but about the powerful moderating role of gender in recognition preferences and retention.

While the final sample had a reasonable gender split (10 females, six males across participants and experts), the methodology was not designed to systematically test this

variable. The insights on gender are therefore emergent and exploratory. The study cannot definitively conclude that gender is a stronger predictor than culture, only that the qualitative data points strongly in this direction.

There were other factors that limited this research study, which include the sample size, qualitative nature of the study, as well as its duration and potential participant censorship. These are highlighted below; however, they are secondary to the main limitation highlighted above.

Sample Size and Composition

Because of time constraints and due to the level of the research being at a Masters level, the scope was restricted to less than 20 employees in one multinational organization. This means that the sample was relatively small, possibly impacting the generalisability of the findings. Future research on employee recognition could consider improving and replicating this study with a larger sample size and also comparing one or two other MNCs as opposed to focusing on one and over a longer period of time. Looking into more participants, would increase the generalisability of the findings, making it representative of the full breath of African cultures and also considering more than one organisation as the setting in order to confirm the applicability of the findings to other industries outside of Telecommunications.

Researcher Experience and Familiarity

Secondly, despite having been reassured of anonymity and confidentiality, the Participants of the research reported their views to a member of the same organisation that they work for, which might have made them cautious and not fully candid in their responses, knowing that the researcher is a colleague. This self-censorship could have resulted in them not fully expressing how they feel, especially on elements that are critical or negative. Similarly, the researcher's inexperience could have compromised the quality of the data collected. In order to mitigate this limitation, the research questions were vetted by the Research Supervisor as part of the ethical clearance submission and a pilot interview was conducted to understand which elements of the questions need to be tweaked as well as for the researcher to practise and gain confidence.

Cross-Sectional Nature and Opportunities Presented by Limitations

Finally, this study was cross-sectional in nature which could mean that temporal views on employee recognition were captured. A longitudinal study on the other hand would have allowed for the Researcher to capture the evolving perceptions of employee recognition over time. In order to counter this, the Researcher asked most questions twice, in a different way to make sure that the responses are reliable and consistent.

While the above limitations have been provided to give clarity on the extent to which the results can be interpreted and applied, they also provide opportunities for this research to be improved and built on in the future.

7.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Main Recommendation

Based on this key limitation, the most critical area for future research is to directly investigate the role of gender in recognition. A future quantitative study should be designed to test the hypothesis this study has generated: "In an African MNC, gender is a stronger moderator of the recognition-retention link than national culture." This would provide a powerful, generalisable insight for all MNCs operating on the continent.

Gamified Recognition Systems

Gamification represents a significant and growing global trend in employee recognition systems. This meant to increase adoption and engagement, however its success hinges on the correct design. Building on this research, future studies could explore how gamification mechanisms, such as leaderboards, points, and badges, are perceived, especially in environments that are low in individualism and high in uncertainty avoidance, and therefore have a risk aversion to public failure.

Inter-Generational and Demographic

This research has corroborated that different demographics and generational cohorts have varying requirements for talent management in general and recognition in particular. This area requires further research to determine just how different demographic and generational factors influence perceptions of recognition and

appreciation in the workplace so that organisations can exploit these differences to their benefit and get maximum value from each team member regardless of age or location.

Theoretical Gap

While this study applied Hofstede's cultural dimensions at a high level, there is a gap in terms of direct empirical research that systematically tests how cultural contexts influence how employees perceive and value recognition, moving beyond the theoretical prediction to quantitative validation and assigning each of the size analysis points a relative score from zero to one hundred. This will ensure that organisations do not rely on theoretical frameworks without sufficient proof of efficacy.

Sample Mix

The main findings of the study called for customisation and not treating everyone with a blanket approach, another consideration for future research therefore might be focusing on employees at different stages of their tenure with the business in order to understand the effect of having been with the company. It could well be that an employee comes into the business with set perceptions and culture which are then shaped and changed by the values and priorities of the business. Focusing squarely on whether length of service affects these perceptions could allow MNCs to tailor their approach according to how new the employee is to the business. Linked to this, the research calls for a reconsideration of static principles. Further research could therefore be longitudinal and look at if there is really a change in what people find to be meaningful recognition or are there more personality factors than generational.

7.7 Recommendations for MNCs: A Framework for Structured Personalisation

One of the principal aims of the research was to provide tangible recommendations on how MNCs to go about creating and rolling out employee recognition programmes that speak to all employees in a manner that serves the desires, motivation, and retention purposes. This study points to the difficulties of doing this, owing to numerous factors, such as demographics, culture, and upbringing, that are at play at both the contextual and individual levels. While the research did not support the propositions fully, it proves them correct; cultural contexts do have an impact on recognition, and multinational corporations should take context-specific nuances into account when developing talent

management, engagement and retention strategies, as evidenced by the case of employee recognition. It also goes a step further to discover more nuances which most literature had taken for granted. Contexts and individuals vary to a very large extent, and therefore, a one-size approach may fail to meet the intended objectives. Blending monetary and non-monetary forms of recognition is an example of how recognition frameworks can be localised but still maintain a global structure.

Based on the findings, this study’s main recommendation is for MNCs to abandon the rigid, culture-based frameworks. They do not allow for the authenticity and tailoring that employees from all the regions called for. Whilst the framework proposed in Table 4 is convenient, it is based on the false premise that ‘all employees in Ghana’ or ‘all employees in South Africa’ want the same thing. The study from this research shows that they do not. Instead, organisations should adopt a “Structured Personalisation” model. This model would resolve the tension surfaced by the research by providing a globally consistent governance framework (the structure) while also empowering managers to deliver the authentic and individualised acknowledgement that employees crave (personalisation). The model revises Table 4 to remove national culture completely and is detailed below:

Table 5: The Structured Personalisation Model for Recognition

Component	Owner	Key Actions
The Structure	MNC / HR	<p>Provide a Diverse “Menu for Recognition” that is globally approved and in line with the organisations EVP but locally sourced. This must include options that appeal to the findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tangible: vouchers for petrol or groceries (for socioeconomic needs) - Intangible: a wellness day - Public: a ‘kudos’ on the company platform, a team celebration - Private: a personal, specific email from a senior leader - Career based: Nomination for a secondment, mentoring or place on a high-level cross-functional project.

		Provide the Technology: A single, easy to use recognition platform where employees can share recognition and where line managers can deploy items from the menu from.
		Provide the training: Make cultural intelligence and empathy training mandatory for all managers. This is not just about informing them about stereotypes, but also about providing them with the tools to ask the right questions and listen empathetically for a deeper understanding.
The Personalisation	Line Manager	Conduct a Recognition 1-on-1: To help line managers be better leaders and ensure that their recognition styles align to what employees want, as part of onboarding and at quarterly check-ins, the manager must infuse recognition alongside the performance conversation and ask each direct report questions around the timing, type and delivery of recognition such as “how do you personally prefer to be recognised for great work? Does public praise motivate you, or do you prefer private?”
		Listen for personal drivers: Listen for what truly matters to that individual (this could be career growth, work-life balance, their family time etc) and intentionally link this back to how they are recognised by the business.
		Deliver authentically: Use the “menu” to deliver recognition that is specific, timely and aligned with the employee’s stated preference. This act closes the authenticity gap highlighted by the Participants.
		Ensure Accountability: Recognition delivery (as suggested by Participant 16) should be a KPI for managers. Having them be directly responsible for making employees feel seen and valued for their contributions is a function of management and should be a KPI for managers.

While not as prescriptive and ready to use as the original Hofstede framework, adopting this model directly addresses the study’s key findings. It solves for gender and personality, by defaulting individual preference, not cultural grouping, as the basis. It also

takes into account the socioeconomic needs which are more prevalent in the African context by including tangible items on the menu and solves the authenticity problem by making recognition a personal one-on-one conversation, not an automated tick-box exercise. Finally, it integrates with the items that were identified as retention drivers by adding career-based options, directly linking recognition to the top reasons that employees have cited for leaving the business.

The proposed model has limitations in that it might be costly to implement. Having managers spend a lot of time with employees, truly discovering who they are and what is meaningful to them, requires time and an interest that needs to be cultivated. The cost of the career-based options may also be outside of the budget or cost appetite for many MNCs; however, if they truly want to solve the recognition problem, the findings clearly state that it needs reworking. The findings suggest that employees want to be thoughtfully considered for who they are as individuals and the challenge is therefore on Managers to really make them feel seen. This is not to say that a framework like Hofstede's should be thrown out completely, but rather that it serves as a wide-ranging precursor, pointing to rough and general characteristics which need to then be validated per person.

Leader Recommendations: Inclusivity and Training

Personalising recognition came out strongly as a must, in spite of the size of the business, leaders must avoid generic templates. This can be done in a manner that is cost effective, translating messages into the local language and using imagery associated with the people of that region can assist to be more relatable and inclusive. Providing workshops on Hofstede's dimensions and their impact on recognition would also help ensure cultural competence. This could be very practical and include role-play scenarios for giving culturally appropriate praise in cultures or for individuals where recognition does not come naturally.

Recognition Platforms and Tracking

Platforms for recognition and internal peer-to-peer systems can help bridge the personality gap. These systems often let people choose whether or not to show their recognition, which means that extroverted coworkers can get the public praise they want

without putting introverted coworkers in uncomfortable situations. Also, employees who are purpose-focused and are driven by intrinsic rewards often prefer private recognition because they connect intrinsic satisfaction with discreet validation. This can be an included feature on the platform where the sender selects public or private recognition or the receiver can also be able to hide the post should they want it to only be visible to them. Leveraging technology for systematic, intentional recognition is critical to ensuring high frequency, particularly in remote settings or cross-national collaboration projects. However, the platform should allow for granular customisation such as visibility setting and reward types to avoid cultural misalignment.

The use of digital platforms also allows for easy tracking where dashboard can be used to monitor and gain insights on recognition in the different countries allowing for data driven decision making on customisation. HR can then periodically audit how recognition intersects with other metrics, for example, does increased recognition correlate with higher engagement survey scores, lower turnover in teams, better performance? If not, maybe recognition is isolated and needs to be re-configured to fit what employees actually value. Quinlan et al. (2019) note in their business research methods that multi-faceted approaches yield better results , the application to the HR space would be a multi-faceted retention strategy ensuring a compelling Employee Value Proposition.

Therefore, in order for global or multicultural recognition systems to work well, they need to be personalised on two levels: they need to change the way they work based on the psychological profile of the person receiving the recognition and the overarching cultural context. Simply having a recognition programme is not sufficient, the system must operate in a manner that is culturally congruent with local definitions.

7.8 Conclusion

The competition to attract and retain talent is at an all-time high, making it necessary for organisations to rethink their talent management strategies. Recognition has been well established in literature as well as in this research as a key factor impacting employee engagement. When applied correctly, it substantially increases the likelihood of long-term retention, although indirectly. The research demonstrates that a thank you is not the same everywhere but when recognition is culturally and personally appropriate, it resonates deeply, turning a simple “thank you” into a powerful tool for engagement and

retention. Conversely, mismatched recognition can be a missed opportunity or even a source of discontent.

In line with the literature, the findings reveal that recognition is a powerful motivator, affecting employee engagement. When leaders share gratitude openly, they validate the employee and their sense of achievement which strengthens trust, connection, and overall productivity. The effectiveness of recognition in converting high engagement into committed retention, however, is moderated by its cultural and personal appropriateness as well as possibly gender. If recognition is delivered via a mechanism that is perceived as inauthentic or unjust, for example, public recognition in a culture or for a person that values modesty, the short-term boost in motivation might fail to translate to sustained committed loyalty as it does not resonate. Culturally adaptive recognition and leadership awareness of their teams members preferences is therefore essential for ensuring the robustness of the recognition-engagement-retention connection.

Another contribution of this research is highlighting how Western-derived HR models (like generic recognition and reward programs) need adaptation in non-Western contexts. The findings largely validate Hofstede's dimensions as a useful lens for broad generalisations or basic guiding assumptions which need to be validated, for example, some differences observed align with classic cultural distinctions (power distance, individualism, etc.), reinforcing the relevance of Hofstede's framework even decades after its inception. In the same vein, there are places where the findings contradicted Hofstede's model completely, pointing to the need for a more personal model. The nuanced effect of recognition on retention was found to offer a critique of simplistic assumptions. Western HRM literature often promotes employee recognition programs as unequivocally positive for morale and retention; however, the context-rich data reveal a more conditional effectiveness. This resonates with calls in international business research to contextualize theories and avoid one-size-fits-all assumptions (Michailova, 2011). It also echoes Vaara et al. (2021)'s critical view that what works in one cultural or national identity context may not directly transplant to another without considering identity dynamics and local values. By examining recognition in multiple African cultural settings, the study broadens the empirical base beyond the often American or Euro-centric research on the topic. In doing so, it provides evidence that while the core human

need for recognition is universal, the expression and impact of recognition are mediated by culturally and other variables such as gender.

This highlights how something often seen as 'soft' can actually play a key and strategic role in business. The findings also highlight that there is much more to the topic, and it is under-researched. Tailoring recognition programs is both an art and a science; it requires listening to employees (the art of empathy and cultural insight) and applying evidence (the science of what drives engagement and retention). On the whole, recognition is only one factor in talent management; it must be implemented alongside numerous other complementary strategies, such as reward and performance management, by organisations wanting to win in the global arena.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Ethical Clearance Approval

Ethical Clearance Approved External Inbox x Print Share

 **Masters Research** <MastersResearch@gibs.co.za> Fri 5 Sept, 10:51 Star Reply More
to me, Masters ▾



**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

**Ethical Clearance
Approved**

Dear

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.
You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.
We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS [Research](#) Admin team.

Appendix B – Questionnaire / Interview Protocol

Group 1 – Employees

Section A: Background

1. Please describe your current role and responsibilities at MTN.
2. How does your work intersect with MTN's employee recognition program?
3. Please tell me about the last / most recent time when you received recognition at work?

Section B: Employee Recognition and Retention Specific Questions

4. Can you describe what recognition means to you in a work context?
5. How would you describe MTN's overall approach to employee recognition?
What are the common ways in which employees are recognized in this business?
6. How do you feel when you receive recognition in this way? Is it motivating, why or why not? How does it make you feel? Do you think that this approach is culturally sensitive or appropriate?
7. What in your view would be a meaningful non-monetary reward or recognition for doing your job well?
8. What about when you have gone above and beyond and exceeded expectations?
9. Do you think our recognition philosophy and practices are aligned with your cultural expectations?
10. Is there anything about employee recognition that makes you uncomfortable or hesitant to participate? Or less meaningful or even demotivating?
11. Does it matter more if your boss has given you recognition or a peer and why?
12. Is giving and receiving recognition something natural which occurs frequently in your culture?
13. Do you think that HR practices such as recognition programmes need to be culturally diverse or can they be standard across the board?
14. Does it matter more if you receive recognition as a collective / team or when it is for you specifically as an individual and why?

15. Do you believe your cultural background is respected and understood by the business?
16. Do you think recognition plays a factor in your decision to stay with or join an organization?
17. Thinking about the various factors that influence your decision to stay or leave an organization, where does "recognition" rank for you? (e.g. compared to salary, growth, work-life balance, management).
18. Can you recall a time when lack of recognition or ineffective recognition contributed to you feeling demotivated or considering leaving a job?
19. On the opposite end, has recognition ever made you feel more committed to a role / company and less likely to leave?
20. Do you believe that the recognition practices at MTN significantly impact more and intention to stay with the business. Please explain why or why not?

Section C: General and Concluding Questions

21. Outside of the work environment, where else do you receive recognition or praise?
22. When do you feel most appreciated?
23. Who does it matter the most for recognition to come from?

Section C – Closing

Thank participant for their time and insights and ask if they have any questions.

Group 2 – HR Professionals

Section A – Introduction

Briefly explain the purpose of the study, assure confidentiality and ask for permission to record.

Section A: Background

1. Please describe your current role and responsibilities at MTN.
2. How does your work intersect with MTN's employee recognition program?
3. Please tell me about the last / most recent time when you received recognition at work?

Section B – Semi-structured interview Questions mapped to the research questions

1. How do you define "recognition" within MTN's global HR framework?
2. What are the key recognition programmes or practices currently in place globally within MTN?
3. To what extent are these global recognition programmes standardized versus localized?
4. What are some of the challenges you've encountered in implementing a consistent recognition strategy across different cultural contexts?
5. Have you conducted any assessments or gathered feedback on how recognition is perceived by employees in different regions? What were the key findings?
6. In your view, how do cultural factors (e.g., individualism vs. collectivism, power distance) influence employee expectations and preferences regarding recognition?
7. Can you provide examples of how perceptions of recognition differ across specific regions or cultural groups you manage? What resources do you use to understand the cultural nuances related to employee recognition?
8. Describe the process that the company follows when adapting a global recognition strategy for a specific setting? What stakeholders are involved in the adaptation process?
9. How do you measure success of employee recognition strategies in terms of both cultural fit and retention impact?
10. Based on your data and experience (exit interviews, employee surveys etc) what role does recognition or lack thereof play in employee turnover at MTN?
11. Have you observed any trends or key insights about employee recognition and its link to turnover?
12. How do you measure the effectiveness of recognition platforms?
13. What are the main challenges you face in implementing the group wide recognition programme?
14. In your opinion, what are the key factors that enable MNC's to successfully implement culturally diverse recognition programmes that enhance recognition?

15. Can you provide examples of initiatives that the business has tailored to suit the local context that you are familiar with? What made them successful or not successful?
16. In your opinion, what role does recognition play in enhancing retention?

Section C – Closing

Thank participant for their time and insights and ask if they have any questions.

Appendix C – Research Instrument

Group 1 – Semi-Structured Interviews with Employees

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ 1: How do perceptions of employee recognition differ across cultures?	Question 4 Question 5 Question 6 Question 7 Question 8 Question 21 Question 22 Question 23
RQ 2: How large of a role does recognition play in an employees decision to leave?	Question 16 Question 17 Question 18 Question 19 Question 20
RQ 3: How can MNCs tailor their recognition programmes to accommodate diverse cultural preferences of recognition and enhance employee retention?	Question 9 Question 10 Question 11 Question 12 Question 13 Question 14 Question 15

Group 2 – Semi-Structured / Open Ended Interviews with HR Professionals

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ 1: How do perceptions of employee recognition differ across cultures?	Question 1 Question 2 Question 6

	Question 7
RQ 2: How large of a role does recognition play in an employees decision to leave?	Question 9 Question 10 Question 11 Question 16
RQ 3: How can MNCs tailor their recognition programmes to accommodate diverse cultural preferences of recognition and enhance employee retention?	Question 3 Question 4 Question 5 Question 8 Question 12 Question 13 Question 14 Question 15

Appendix D – Sample Consent and Confidentiality Form

Researcher Name: Nokwanda Dlamini
Researcher Email: 23032767@mygibs.co.za
Phone: +268 7606 0507

Research Supervisor Name: Dr Adetunji Adegbesan
Research Supervisor Email: AdegbesanA@gibs.co.za

Confidentiality & Consent Agreement for Research Participants

Thank you for participating in my qualitative MBA research study. I am conducting research on *how cultural differences affect recognition and retention in multinational organisations*. The interview is expected to last between 45 minutes to an hour, and your participation is completely voluntary.

Please read and agree to the following terms:

1. **Confidentiality and Privacy of Information**

- All information collected from you during this interview will be kept strictly confidential.
- Your responses will be anonymized, and no personally identifiable information will be associated with the data.

2. **Storage and Security**

- The data will be stored securely in password-protected files.
- Access to the raw data will be limited to myself (the researcher) and the academic institution (Gordon Institute of Business Science)

3. **Use of Data**

- The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Verbatim quotations from the interview may be used in the final report however, these will not be identifiable to you.
- The findings of this research will be reported in an anonymized form, with no way to identify individual respondents.
- Data will be used solely for research purposes and will not be shared with unauthorized third parties.
- The final research paper may be disseminated by GIBS in its bid to make research available as broadly as possible

4. **Withdrawal**

- You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or explanation.

5. **Contact**

- If you have any questions about how your data is being used or your confidentiality, please contact me on 23032767@mygibs.co.za

By participating in this study, you acknowledge that you understand and agree / consent to these confidentiality terms.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

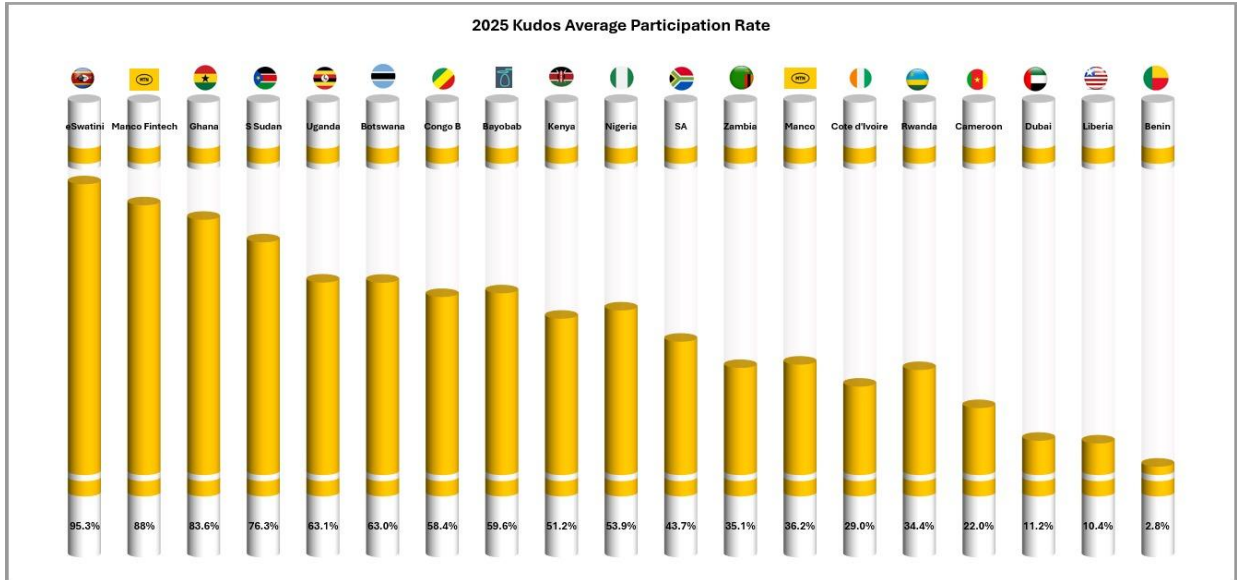
Appendix E – Consistency Matrix

Research Question	Literature Review	Data Collection Tool	Data Analysis
RQ 1: How do perceptions of employee recognition differ across cultures?	Employee recognition is an important ingredient in talent management and recognition preferences vary (Bradler et al., 2016; Jo and Shin, 2025; Lasser and Bolton, 2021)	Semi-structured interviews with a diverse cross-section of employees of an MNC	Thematic analysis of interview transcripts in order to identify key factors, perceptions and preferences on employee recognition.
RQ 2: How large of a role does recognition play in an employees decision to leave?	Employee recognition is strongly linked to employee retention but moderated by other factors (Hancock, 2022; Hassan; 2023; Martela et al., 2021; Mngomezulu et al., 2015)	Semi-structured interviews with a diverse cross-section of employees of an MNC	Thematic analysis of interview transcripts in order to identify the themes related to the role of recognition in retention.
RQ 3: How can MNCs tailor their recognition programmes to accommodate diverse cultural preferences of recognition and enhance employee retention?	Organisations need to cater for fundamental differences in culture to ensure positive talent management and retention outcomes in the workplace (Bonneton et al., 2022; Hofstede, 2011; Vaara et al., 2021)	Semi-structured interviews with a diverse cross-section of employees of an MNC as well as semi-structured interviews with the HR Professionals responsible for the design of employee recognition programmes across the Group.	Thematic analysis of interview transcripts in order to uncover the ideal strategies and thoughts around the current approach to employee recognition as it pertains to culture. Narrative Analysis was used on the HR Professionals Interview Data

Appendix F – Atlas Coding: Informing Thematic Analysis

Motivation	38	Excessive	8
Tangible	24	Monetary	33
Private	23	Flexibility	25
Language	11	Rewards	17
Customisation	32	Relationships	26
Language	9	Practical	9
Symbolic	29	Incentive	17
Upbringing / Background	18	Blended	8
Inequity	21	Fairness	27
Bonus	12	Individual	22
Negative	13	Belonging	19
Transactional	25	Cultural	31
Meaning	22	Interdependent	14
Timeliness	17	Value	19
Accountability	23	Mediocrity	8
Context	32	Remuneration	17
Validation	26	Intrinsic Motivation	26
Comfort	9	Non-Monetary	19
Salary Increase	16	Authenticity	23
Development	23	Appreciation	31
Ubuntu	9	Dopamine	4
Training	6	External Validation	15
'Seen'	11	Reciprocal	2
Balance	23	Extrinsic Motivation	14
Formalised	19	Development	22
Tick-Box	12	Collective / Communal	27

Appendix G – Recogniton Platform Participation Data per Operating Company (OpCo)



Opco	202501	202502	202503	202504	202505	202506	202507	202508	202509	Total
eSwatini	94.5%	95.6%	96.7%	97.2%	92.5%	95.8%	93.0%	97.3%	95.2%	95.3%
Manco Fintech									88.4%	88.4%
S Sudan	24.1%	84.0%	88.5%	96.2%	95.6%	96.7%	98.9%	98.9%	97.4%	86.7%
Ghana	80.2%	81.6%	79.0%	86.0%	81.6%	84.2%	88.6%	87.0%	88.3%	84.1%
Botswana	62.1%	63.3%	71.0%	71.0%	67.7%	58.1%	62.5%	63.6%	58.8%	64.2%
Uganda	63.2%	63.2%	62.0%	58.8%	59.4%	60.2%	64.1%	59.2%	72.0%	62.5%
Bayobab	55.9%	63.4%	58.4%	52.1%	52.0%	64.0%	64.4%	54.4%	64.7%	58.8%
Congo B	61.8%	62.9%	59.4%	62.0%	58.4%	54.2%	57.5%	48.9%	56.7%	58.0%
Nigeria	49.2%	46.7%	53.2%	46.7%	52.1%	51.5%	64.7%	55.2%	68.7%	54.2%
Kenya	53.0%	59.0%	49.4%	43.2%	40.5%					49.0%
SA	41.1%	42.7%	43.1%	41.6%	38.7%	41.2%	45.2%	47.0%	51.0%	43.5%
Manco	29.7%	35.3%	33.0%	33.7%	32.2%	29.2%	30.8%	41.4%	63.8%	36.6%
Rwanda	8.8%	9.5%	8.7%	9.5%	32.5%	68.0%	57.5%	42.9%	91.5%	36.5%
Zambia	32.7%	38.4%	18.4%	32.6%	34.5%	31.9%	38.8%	19.1%	66.1%	34.7%
Cote d'Ivoire	25.9%	20.6%	21.8%	10.5%	12.7%	24.0%	36.6%	25.3%	65.1%	26.9%
Cameroon	18.8%	14.3%	15.7%	15.2%	12.9%	19.3%	22.5%	33.2%	39.6%	21.3%
Dubai	11.5%	7.0%	12.8%	9.3%	14.0%	12.8%	7.0%	5.8%	23.3%	11.5%
Liberia	5.2%	6.2%	5.2%	8.2%	11.2%	11.8%	10.8%	9.2%	31.6%	11.0%
Benin	3.9%	2.7%	2.4%	3.4%	1.9%	1.7%	2.4%	1.9%	2.6%	2.5%
Total	40.1%	44.2%	43.3%	43.2%	43.9%	47.3%	49.7%	46.5%	62.5%	46.7%

Appendix H – Exit Interview / Turnover Data

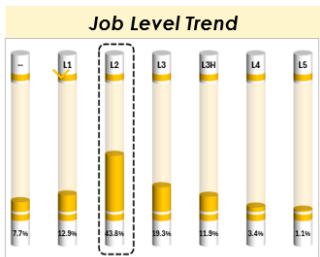


Exits Interview Reports: Keys Insights

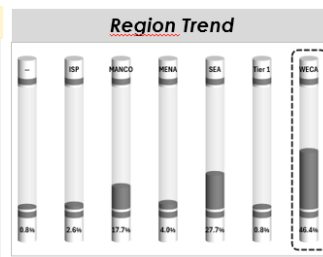
Key Demographics Summary

The data in this report is from 2022 – March 2025

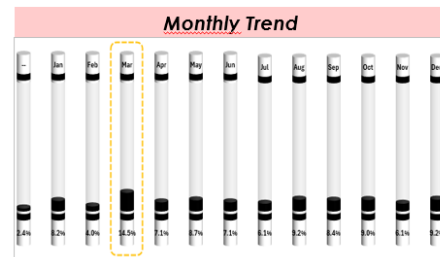
379 219 | 58% 155 | 41%



- The highest exit percentage is at L2 (43.8%) and L3 (19.3%), mid-level employees are leaving at a higher rate.
- The lowest exit percentages are in L5 (1.1%) and L4 (3.4%), higher retention at senior levels.

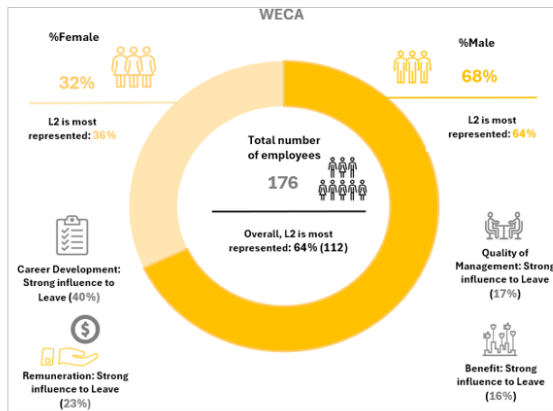


- The highest exit percentage is from WECA (46.4%), followed by MENA (40.0%), indicating significant attrition in these regions.
- Other regions have relatively lower exit rates, with the lowest in Tier 1 (0.8%) and ISP (2.6%).



- March has the highest exits (14.5%), followed by Feb (8.2%) and May (8.7%).
- Exit rates are relatively steady for other months, mostly ranging between 6%-9%.

— West and Central Africa (WECA) Region Analysis



- A Total 176 employees completed the survey i.e., 46%
- Gender distribution: Male: 68% and Female: 32%
- L2 employees: 64% (112 individuals) the most represented group in both exits and overall workforce.

Key Reasons for Leaving

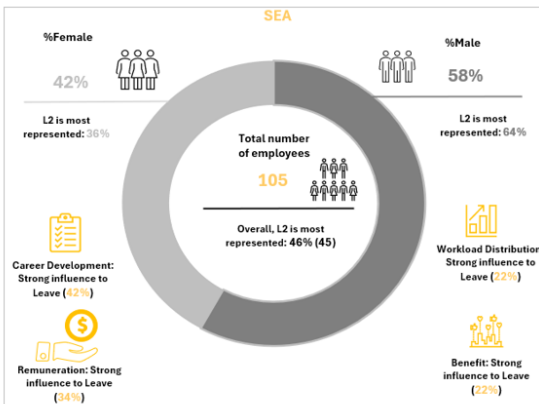
- Career Development (40%) – Lack of career growth
- Remuneration (23%)
- Quality of Management (17%) – Leadership and managerial practices are contributing factors.
- Benefits (16%) – Employee dissatisfaction with benefits

Recommendations

- Enhance career development opportunities – Introduce structured mentorship programs, leadership pathways, and upskilling initiatives.
- Benchmark salaries and benefits against industry standards to remain competitive.
- Provide leadership training and increase manager accountability.
- Consider flexible benefits tailored to employee needs.

3

— South and East Africa (SEA) Region Analysis



- A Total 105 employees completed the survey i.e., 28%
- Gender distribution: Male: 58% and Female: 42%
- L2 employees: 46% (45 individuals) the most represented group in exits.
- L2 employees are the most affected group, which may suggest mid-career stagnation.

Key Reasons for Leaving

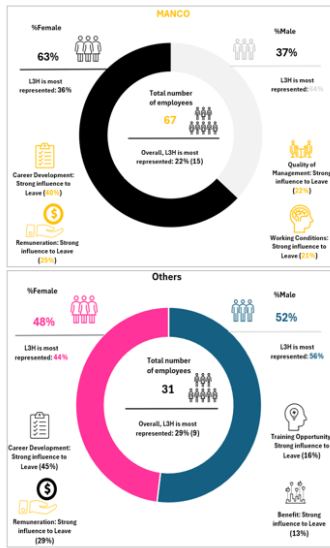
- Career Development (42%) – The biggest driver of attrition, indicating a lack of growth opportunities.
- Remuneration (34%) – A major factor in employees leaving.
- Workload Distribution (22%) – Indicates potential issues with work balance and job design. Different to the WECA region, Quality Management.
- Benefits (22%).

Recommendations

- Strengthen career growth programs
- Conduct salary benchmarking to remain competitive.
- Reassess task distribution and workload balancing across teams.
- Consider flexible benefits to meet employee needs better.

4

MANCO Analysis



- A Total 67% of employees from MANCO completed the survey i.e., 17%
- Gender distribution: Male: 37% and Female: 63%. Female employees are the majority (63%), which is unique compared to other regions.
- Most Represented Level is L3H employees (22%, 15 individuals). Suggesting mid-to-senior level dissatisfaction.

Key Reasons for Leaving

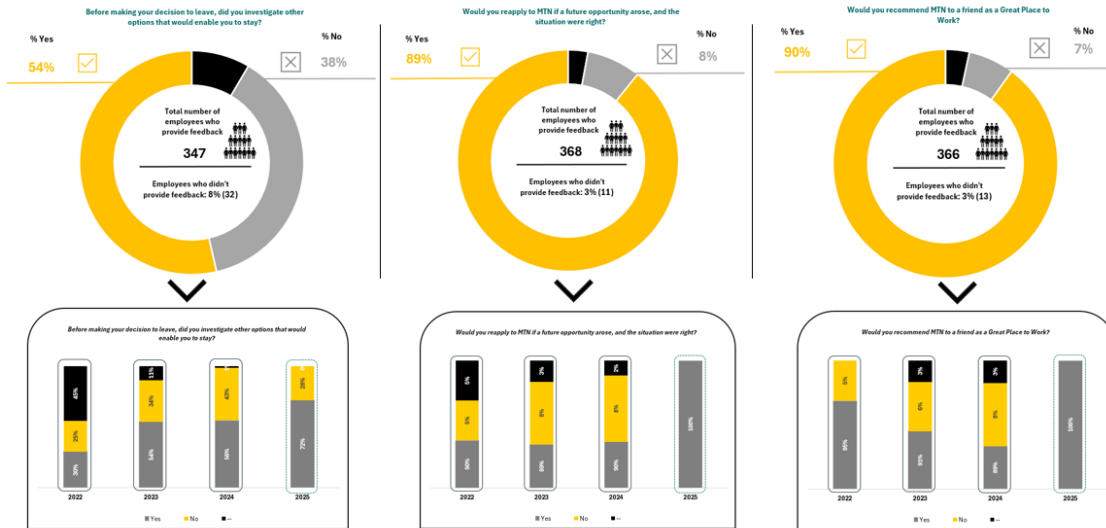
- Career Development (40%). A significant factor influencing attrition, indicating dissatisfaction with growth opportunities requiring strategic interventions.
- Remuneration (25%). Compensation concerns remain a key challenge.
- Quality of Management (22%). Leadership and managerial effectiveness impact retention.
- Working Conditions (21%). Work environment and operational conditions affect employee decisions to leave.

Recommendations

- Invest in Career Development Programs. Career stagnation as the leading cause of attrition. Implement structured mentorship, promotions, and skill development initiatives.
- Review Remuneration and Benefits. Conduct salary benchmarking and consider performance-based incentives.
- Enhance Management & Work Environment.
- Leadership training and workplace improvements can reduce dissatisfaction.

5

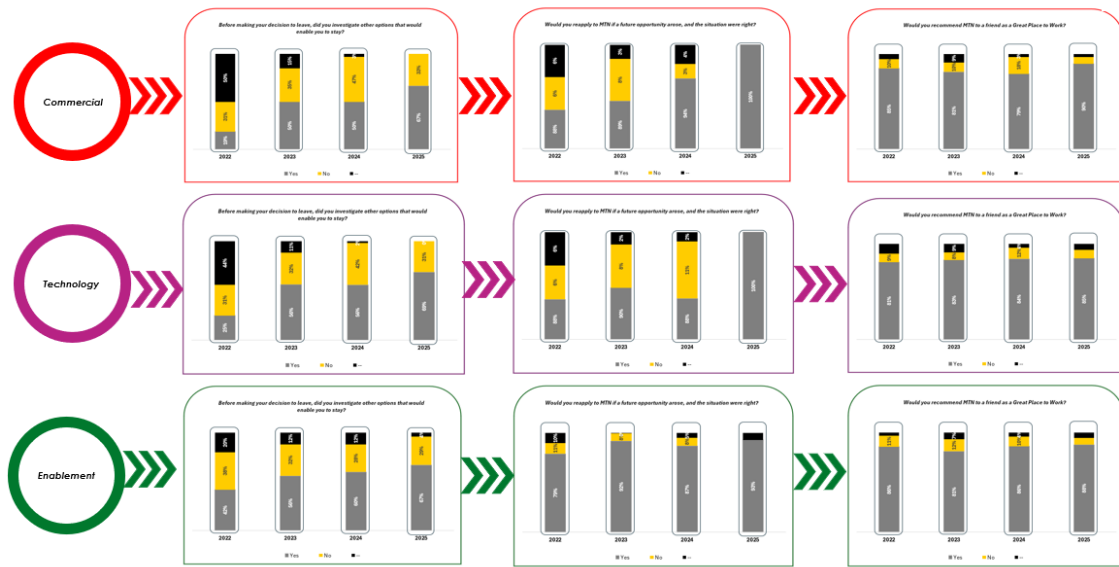
Keys Considerations



6

- -- : employees who fill the Exit Interview questionnaire did not provide information on that field.
- This report is based on employees who left the organization and fill the questionnaires. Some are leaving but do not fill the Exit Interview form.
- The data in this report are from 2022 till 2025 Year to date.

Year on Year Trend by Functional Stream



7

Top 6 Reasons for Employees Leaving



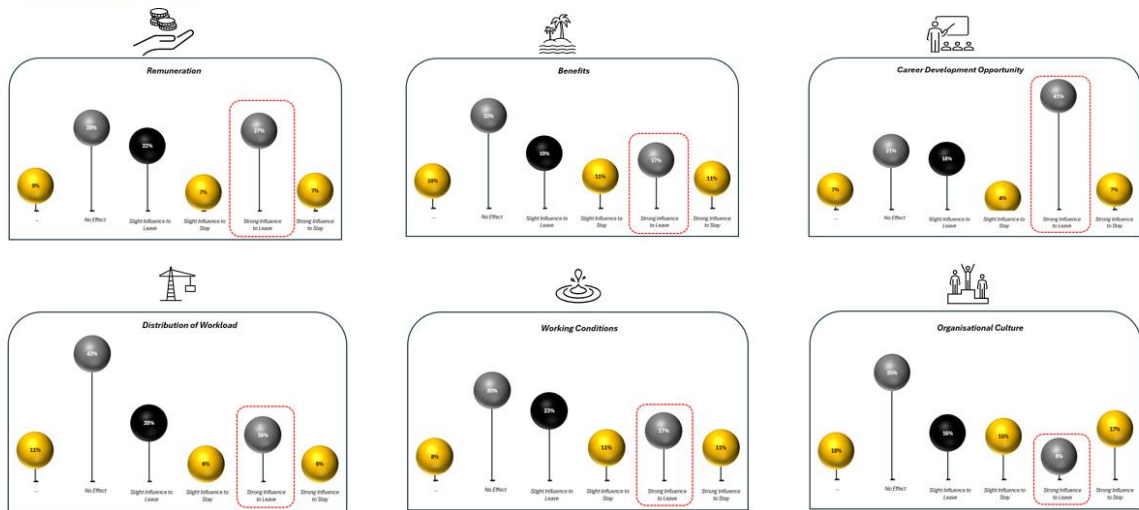
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— Recommendations

- Ensure that your salaries and benefits are competitive within your industry. This includes health insurance, retirement plans, bonuses, and other perks that can make employees feel valued and secure.
- Provide opportunities for professional growth through training, mentorship programs, and clear career paths. Employees are more likely to stay if they see a future with the company and opportunities to advance.
- Promote a healthy work-life balance by offering flexible working hours, remote work options, and encouraging employees to take their full vacation time. This helps prevent burnout and increases job satisfaction.
- Invest in leadership training for managers to ensure they are supportive, communicative, and effective. Good management can significantly impact employee satisfaction and retention.

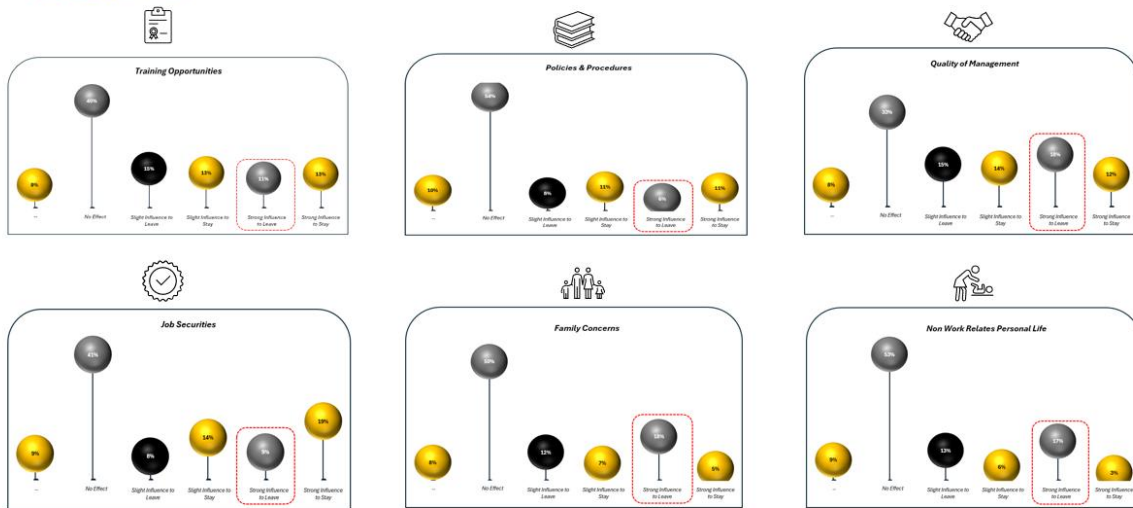
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— Annexures



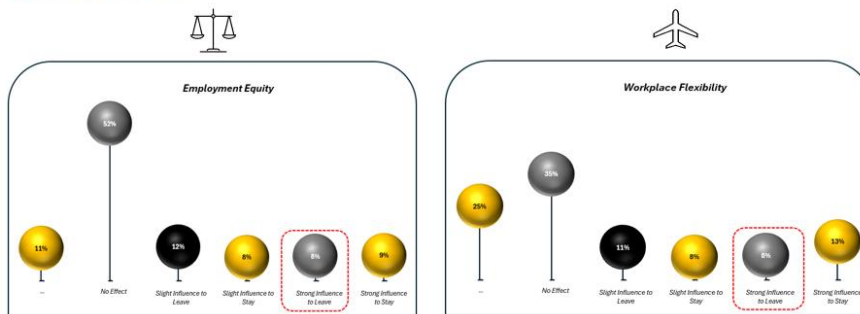
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— Annexures



11

— Annexures



12