

From Praise to Trust: Exploring the Relationship Between Recognition and Interpersonal Trust in the Workplace

Author: Marc Janik
University of Twente
P.O. Box 217, 7500AE Enschede
The Netherlands

ABSTRACT,

This paper looks at how recognition influences the development of interpersonal trust in the workplace. While recognition has long been associated with employee motivation and engagement, there is no real consensus on its role in shaping interpersonal trust relationships. By conducting semi-structured interviews and using thematic analysis, a link between recognition as a practice and the development of interpersonal trust was established, leading to an understanding of what factors need to be in place to favour interpersonal trust, combating the demise of trust in the workplace in the 21st century. The paper indicates a difference between recognition as a practice and recognition as a tool – a difference crucial to how the recognition is perceived by the recipient and one that can lead to either trust building or trust breaking.

Graduation Committee members:

Dr. Simon Schafheitle
Marijn Knieriem

Keywords

Recognition, Interpersonal Trust, Workplace Relationships, Trust Development, Workplace, Organisational Behaviour

During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT in order to GENERATE IDEAS, DEEPL in order to TRANSLATE TRANSCRIPTS AFTER ANONYMISING, and GRAMMARLY in order to CORRECT SPELLING AND GRAMMAR. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the work.

1. INTRODUCTION

Building, as well as maintaining, interpersonal trust is seen as an important component for employees to improve factors like collaboration, positive attitudes, productivity, and performance in the workplace (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Mayer et al., 1995). *Interpersonal trust* is defined by Mayer et al. (1995) as the willingness to show vulnerability to another party based on the positive expectations of their intentions or behaviour, and creates the foundation for effective relationships in the workplace, as well as contributing to a cohesive organisational climate. Hungerford and Cleary (2020) support this view by saying that 1) trust is obligatory for a functioning human society, but also mention that 2) trust has declined in organisations or groups that have been serving vital functions for society so far in the 21st century, and 3) this issue has trickled down into the workplace, whilst workplaces can be classified into “*high-trust*” and “*low-trust*” environments. This decline often appears in the form of employee scepticism and disengagement and shows the importance of coming up with mechanisms that are able to rebuild trust and positive organisational cultures (McLain & Pendell, 2023).

To understand how trust forms, Lewicki and Bunker (1995) have developed a three-stage model, comprising ‘calculus-based trust’, ‘knowledge-based trust’, and ‘identification-based trust’. In the beginning, trust initially depends on the predictability and consistency of action, with people employing external incentives and threats to ensure reliability, forming the stage of *calculus-based trust* (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995). Once the trust relationship develops, it goes into the second stage of *knowledge-based trust*, which is built on information acquired, experiences shared, and the ability to predict the actions of others (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995). The third and final stage, *identification-based trust*, is a deeper connection in which people internalise the values of others, intuitively sense intentions, and come together over common goals or identities (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995). Through this, Lewicki and Bunker (1995) argue that trust relationships are not static but dynamic and can be influenced by outside factors relevant to the formation of trust.

In the scope of organisations and their workplaces, the concept of recognition came up as a crucial factor in building trust among employees. The practice of recognition in the workplace refers to the acknowledgement and appreciation of the efforts, achievements, or contributions of an individual through both formal and informal means (Brun & Dugas, 2008). This notion of recognition goes past mere monetary recognition and includes a deeper moral and relational dimension to affirm an employee’s social identity and worth (Honneth, 1997). According to Honneth (1997), recognition is a vital human need, and lays the foundation for the development of aspects like self-esteem or social integration. Between the three forms of recognition established by Honneth (1997), namely ‘*love*’, ‘*respect*’, and ‘*social esteem*’, social esteem can be seen as the most relevant form of recognition in the workplace, as it focuses on the appreciation of individual contributions within a collective context (Van Leeuwen, 2007).

Recognition, as well as the concept of social esteem, is important for the well-being and motivation of a person, but has different levels of influence when it comes to building interpersonal trust. According to Maslow (1943) and Honneth (1997), social esteem encompasses the respect and sense of belonging a person feels from others, which in turn has an impact on the sense of self-worth and the perceived social standing. On the other hand, recognition refers to the active and relational dynamic process of the explicit recognition of contribution and effort (Brun & Dugas, 2008). This not only makes the employee feel valued but

also respected, resulting in a feeling of belonging and psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). Understanding how recognition and social esteem are different from each other is important, as social esteem alone may not be able to create the tangible and mutual interactions required in order for interpersonal trust to form. Trust forms through active, tangible, and reciprocal interactions, which includes forms like giving and receiving feedback, acknowledgement of contributions, and expressing appreciation (Rousseau et al., 1998), and whilst recognition is able to provide these interactions, social esteem in itself may just be a general feeling or reputation perceived by a person that does not create the two-way process needed to develop trust.

Recently, there has been more focus on the connection between recognition and trust. Brennan (2021) developed a new framework in regards to recognition called ‘*Recognition Trust*’, which explains how trust emerges when an individual feels morally acknowledged and respected by others. The work of Brennan (2021) aligns with the observation by Honneth (1997), which stated that if a person is denied recognition, it can result in moral injury, feelings of alienation, and a decrease in overall well-being. This leads to the assumption that recognition has the ability to enable trust by valuing people not only for their performance, but also for their personal value to the workplace. Despite this, recognition and trust are mostly treated independently in organisational research, and the possible ways in which recognition practices can directly contribute to the development of interpersonal trust are not being looked at. Rather, recognition is perceived as a tool to increase employee performance and to shape the desired behaviour of the employee.

As mentioned by Hungerford and Cleary (2020), trust in the workplace is diminishing, and this research tries to investigate this problem by analysing the relationship between recognition and interpersonal trust. Research shows that a large number of employees report having feelings of mistrust towards their organisations and leaders (PwC, 2024), stemming from perceived injustices toward recognition practices, unclear communication, and opaque management. The COVID-19 pandemic and the move toward hybrid teams and remote working resulting from the pandemic have worsened the problems mentioned so far, further complicating the development of trust through missing face-to-face interactions (Badrinarayanan, 2024).

This thesis tries to answer the question: “*How does recognition in the workplace contribute to the development of interpersonal trust among employees?*”. It will investigate the conceptualisation of recognition and esteem and how they differ in creating interpersonal trust. Through this, the study tries to find out how recognition has the potential to stem the erosion of trust in modern workplaces. The study is built on Honneth’s (1997) theoretical framework of recognition, Rousseau et al.’s (1998) framework of trust, and the notion of ‘recognition trust’ developed by Brennan (2021). This means that this study is situated at the intersection of organisational psychology, sociology, and management research.

To reverse the 21st-century decline in organisational trust (Hungerford & Cleary, 2020), one requires comprehension of the relational and interpersonal processes of building trust. The goal of this research is to provide both theoretical insights as well as practical recommendations through observation of the connection between recognition and trust. Through this, new ideas will be presented related to how the challenge of eroding trust can be tackled, and how to implement the new insights into the workplace.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Recognition theory in the workplace

According to Honneth (1997), recognition is needed for the creation of self-identity and integration with others, as well as an inherent need for human beings. Workplace recognition establishes the acknowledgement of someone's worth to the organisation and can be used as a practice to create and reinforce organisational values and norms (Brun & Dugas, 2008). If recognition is used regularly to award wanted behaviours and to praise achievements, an organisation is able to create a workplace culture that fosters excellence and mutual respect between employees and supervisors, which will eventually contribute to an increased commitment and engagement from the employee (Kuvaas, 2006).

2.2 Distinction between recognition and social esteem

Even though recognition and social esteem are interrelated, both concepts have unique features and implications which impact working life and the workplace. According to Maslow (1943), the concept of social esteem explains the general respect and admiration that one receives from other people, which in turn leads to an increase in one's self-esteem and social position. Usually, it is used to explain the perception of an individual's status or achievements. The act of recognition is an active practice where work or achievements are appreciated using verbal or written acknowledgement (Honneth, 1997). Recognition, therefore, is a mutual, interactional practice that can be used to express feelings like appreciation or contentment, leading to the strengthening of social bonds between employees in the workplace (Brun & Dugas, 2008). While acknowledgement can serve to increase social esteem, not every indication of esteem involves the symmetric, dialogical interaction required by recognition. This distinction is crucial in the context of interpersonal trust, as trust is not only shaped by perceived status or generalised respect, but also by the affective experience of being recognised through specific, contextual engagements. The relevance of recognition for trust development, therefore, stems from the interactional nature, opposed to the mere symbolic elevation. As the process of recognition is of an active and specific nature, the employee is made to understand that their inputs are appreciated and valued, leading to increased feelings of belonging and safety for the employee (Edmondson, 1999). Recognition is, therefore, able to generate trust and positive working relationships.

2.3 Interpersonal trust in organisations

Mayer et al. (1995) define interpersonal trust as the willingness of a person to open themselves up to possible risks emanating from the behaviour of others, based on the hope that such behaviour will eventually turn out to be beneficial or, at least, not harmful to them. If trust is present in the workplace, this can lead to outcomes such as better organisational functioning, increased collaboration between employees, increased communication, and improved productivity (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). Rousseau et al. (1998) state that trust develops over time by interacting repeatedly with the other party. In the workplace, trust can lead to increased cooperation between employees and allow them to work to their best capabilities without the fear of being exploited or harmed (Edmondson, 1999). If a high level of trust is present in the workplace, Dirks and Ferrin (2001) state that one can expect to find higher employee engagement, job satisfaction, and commitment.

Gustafsson et al. (2020) advance the notion of trust in the workplace by stating that it is not a fixed resource, but rather should be seen as an everyday accomplishment placed at the

centre of everyday interaction, referred to as 'active trust'. Gustafsson et al. (2020) argue that trust is actively sustained by mindful practice that confirms stability, expresses empathy, and reasserts collective ownership. The practices to preserve trust, namely 'cognitive bridging', 'emotional embodying', and 'inclusive enacting', sustain the relational link of trust in the face of uncertainty or disruption (Gustafsson et al., 2020). This trust perspective by Gustafsson et al. (2020) argues that trust is sustained and performed through concrete, everyday action, and rather than relying on past consistency, trust gives need to constantly produce and negotiate trust in the context in which it is given. The enabling mechanisms of "mobilisation of established trust foundations" and 'understanding of role during disruption' not only directly contribute to the three trust preserving practices, but also have a direct impact on the preservation of organisational trust in general (Gustafsson et al., 2020). All of these factors not only lead to the development of trust in the organisation, but, more importantly, also to the preservation of trust (Gustafsson et al., 2020). Understanding the notion of active trust can therefore lead to navigating a trust crisis during an uncertain time and managing the fragile concept of trust in organisations.

2.4 Recognition as a mechanism for building trust

By valuing and appreciating the work of employees, recognition as a practice is able to send a message of respect and value to the employees, representing an important factor in building interpersonal trust in organisations, and elements essential to trust (Edmondson, 1999; Brun & Dugas, 2008). Recognition is able to promote a workplace culture of psychological safety, where employees feel comfortable expressing themselves freely and are willing to engage in activities that might require risk without needing to fear negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). Furthermore, the notion of recognition and trust has seen a scholarly addition by Brennan's (2021) introduction of the term "Recognition Trust". Brennan (2021) defines recognition trust as a form of trust that emerges from morally and relationally acknowledging individuals. This means that, according to Brennan (2021), the practice of recognition, more exactly the recognition of the contributions and the worth of an individual, aids in building trust between individuals. Through this, Brennan's (2021) work aligns with the work by Honneth (1997), and proves that the practice of recognition is not just a motivational and relational practice, but can actively help, and might be fundamental, in establishing (inter-)personal trust. Additionally, the act of recognition can help to alleviate the feeling and fear of power discrepancies as well as hierarchy by validating the inputs of employees and promoting a culture of mutual respect, as they will feel more integrated in the hierarchy of the organisation (Eisenberger et al., 2002). This leads to employees feeling a sense of appreciation from others for their work, and will in turn respond with increased loyalty and trust in the organisation (Brun & Dugas, 2008; Eisenberger et al., 2002). This, in turn, helps to build a workplace where positive behaviours are reinforced and relationships between employees are strengthened, which leads to a workplace where employees are committed and find themselves in a cohesive environment (Brun & Dugas, 2008).

2.5 Social identity and collective self-esteem

According to Islam (2014), the social identity theory explains that the social group one finds oneself in has a direct impact on the self-perception and self-esteem of a person. In the context of the workplace, it can be argued that recognition serves as a practice to increase the feeling of social identity of the employees through the acknowledgement of their worth and role, increasing

the self-esteem of the group and ultimately strengthening group cohesion (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The feeling of usefulness, loyalty, belonging, and an increase in job satisfaction and productivity can be achieved for the employees if the recognition practice is well-designed and is in line with the expectations of the employees (Immanuel Arunraj et al., 2024). The recognition helps with developing a team culture and promotes interdependence by focusing on individual achievements useful for the success of the group. If recognition is used in this collective way, then this will lead to increased feelings of social identity and trust in the organisation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

2.6 Integrating recognition and trust: theoretical implications

Combining recognition and trust leads to an integrated explanation of the ways in which recognition is able to shape interpersonal trust in the context of the workplace. Recognition is the means for communicating respect, appreciation, and value, and these three aspects are all key in order to develop trust (Rousseau et al., 1998). By underlining the work of the employee, organisations have the ability to develop a culture of trust, contributing to greater collaboration, work engagement, and job performance (Eisenberger et al., 2002). The work by Brennan (2021) has shown that the practice of recognition is not just a practice, but might be important in the foundation of trust itself, highlighting the theoretical bridge between recognition and trust, and bringing these two disciplines together. Additionally, the distinction between recognition and esteem explains the specific behaviours and interactions leading to the establishment of trust. Whereas esteem relates to the overall respect for a person, recognition refers to the active and explicit recognition of inputs and the work achieved, thus creating trust through concrete and mutual exchanges (Honneth, 1997). Through this, the need to put in place recognition mechanisms that are sound and provide the building blocks for interpersonal trust to develop becomes clear and is being emphasised.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

For this study, a qualitative research approach was chosen, as it allows for understanding social phenomena and offers the best chance of answering the research question in a rich and complete way (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). It was also chosen, as a qualitative approach is usually selected when research is needed in a relatively new research area, and since the research tries to answer the “how” of the research question (Basias & Pollalis, 2018).

3.2 Data collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. This style of interview was chosen as participants are able to share personal stories and are not confined to a fixed guide, allowing the participant, as well as the interviewer, to go beyond the initial interview guide, ask follow-up questions, explore hidden meanings behind gestures and expressions, and in the end produce rich insights that help in answering the research question (Kakilla, 2021). The interviews helped to understand the relationship between recognition and the development of interpersonal trust in the workplace setting. The interview questions were created on the basis of existing literature, whilst also going beyond to understand the reason as to how or why the act of being recognised leads to the development of interpersonal trust (see Appendix). In the end, 6 interviews were conducted. These interviews varied in length from 28 minutes to 57 minutes, with a mean of 43.5 minutes. The interviews were conducted online through Microsoft Teams and WhatsApp Messenger. The interviewees were asked if they wanted to share information that

was not asked during the initial interview to ensure that every important aspect was covered.

The interviewees were selected based on four criteria: 1) They must be 18 years or older, 2) They must currently hold a white-collar position, 3) They must work in a setting where collaboration with colleagues and/or their supervisor(s) is part of their role, and 4) They must have at least six months of experience in their current workplace to make sure they were familiar with the recognition practices present in the workplace, and to allow some trust to be built between employees, as time is one of the key components of building trust (Honneth, 1997). All participants were from the same company, located in Germany.

To make sure that the research was conducted in an ethical way, a consent letter was issued to the participant if they had stated interest in the research. The participant had to read and agree to the consent letter, which noted the requirements, but also their rights, like being able to withdraw from the research at any point without any penalty. Before the interview started, the participants were again asked to confirm that they had no issue with the consent letter. No participant has withdrawn from the study.

To ensure that data was not only recorded in a way that would be useful for the analysis, but was also saved should there be any technical difficulties, the interviews were recorded in a ‘.mkv’ format, which allows for recording both screen and audio, and saves the file from corrupting in case of a technical issue, so as to not render the interview void.

3.3 Data analysis

Once all six interviews were conducted, the interviews were transcribed using the local desktop version of OpenAI’s Whisper automatic speech recognition (ASR) model, with the help of the “ggml-large-v2.bin” multilingual model. This way of transcribing was used, as it did not require an internet connection, and the interviews, through the local multilingual model located on the PC, could be transcribed without the need to upload any data to a server or cloud, ensuring full encryption of the data and adhering to the ethical requirements stated in the consent form. Other modes of transcription were considered, like Microsoft Word’s ‘transcribe’ feature, but were not chosen due to the sensitive nature of the data and, in the case of Microsoft’s ‘transcribe’ feature, the requirement of the data to be uploaded to the servers of Microsoft before they could be transcribed.

Once transcribed, and all sensitive data was anonymised, the data was analysed with the help of the ‘ATLAS.ti’ software. ‘ATLAS.ti’ is a qualitative research tool that allows the user to go through the transcribed interview, mark relevant sections, develop codes and investigate emerging themes and patterns. The AI features of ‘ATLAS.ti’ were not used during the analysis of the data. The data was analysed using thematic analysis according to the framework by Braun and Clarke (2006). This type of analysis was chosen as it helps with identifying and analysing patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Through this, data can be organised to an extent that provides insights in order to answer the research question, and also helps to highlight any relevant relationships between recognition, social esteem, and trust.

As outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis was done in six steps by 1) getting familiar with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) looking for emerging themes, 4) analysing and reviewing the emerging themes, 5) defining and naming the themes, and 6) producing the report.

From the six interviews, 165 relevant quotes were identified, with each quote receiving a sub-theme to aid with analysing and understanding the connection between the quote, the sub-code, and the code group.

4. FINDINGS

Relevant findings from the data collected with the help of the interviews will be presented in this section. In total, the four code groups 'recognition', 'missing recognition', 'trust', and 'recognition trust relationship' were identified from a total of sixteen sub-codes. The relationship between the sub-codes and the code groups can be found in the appendix.

4.1 Recognition of work performance

One of the best ways employees felt recognised in their workplace was when their work itself was being recognised. For example, participant 1 stated:

"I thought, okay, what I've done so far seems to have been good. Now I'm getting my chance here. And that was the crucial point where you felt very valued."

(Participant 1)

In this instance, the chance participant one is talking about is about him being allowed to tackle and build up the system for a new project that was introduced in the department, as previous performances have been impressing the supervisor to an extent that they felt the participant could be trusted with his own project. This led participant one to feel recognised and valued for their work. Furthermore, when asked where they would see their feeling of recognition on a scale from one to ten, they said ten, claiming that:

"The knowledge that you're doing a good job, that you're being recognised, promoted, above all, that's of course also part of it, recognition and then appropriate promotion[.] I think I'm definitely recognised in my current position with the tasks and I would say for myself that it's definitely a 10, it's not an 8 or a 9, the way it is now is actually perfect."

(Participant 1)

What one can derive from this is that they are feeling a deep connection with the role they are currently in, but also with the workplace and the company itself. To claim a perfect score of ten, it can be argued that every aspect of their work needs to be fully appreciated and communicated in a way that is tangible for the employee. Participant three mentioned that a lot of recognition of the work is tied to quotas, and that recognition is gauged from that. Whilst many participants mentioned a lot of ways recognition can be given to the employee, like 'annual dialogue meetings', 'performance reviews' or 'personal development plans', participant three mentioned quotas in particular, how they need to be fulfilled, and that recognition is especially given if these quotas are met. In the case of participant three, they reached the quota ahead of schedule, and this achievement was especially recognised, appreciated and praised by their supervisor and their manager. They also went on to say that for them, giving praise or recognition in particular is a vital part of a positive and pleasant working environment, underlining the importance of recognition in the workplace. One thing to note, especially, was that a few participants mentioned that because they met their quota ahead of schedule, they were invited to a dinner by their supervisor and manager, which they felt was a great show of recognition.

"We actually recently received an invitation to a meal because we had achieved our annual targets, from our line manager and

also his line manager. [...] We also took our free time and deliberately went there, but so did they. And it was also a great sign of appreciation that we were genuinely invited outside of working hours."

(Participant 5)

All of these factors lead to a sense of satisfaction and belongingness. They influence how the employees feel about themselves, their work, and how they are part of the team. As participant one put it:

"I'm valued, my work is important to you. I'm not just doing anything, I'm also contributing to a goal. And we're working towards something. And of course that makes you proud or satisfied somewhere."

(Participant 1)

They also stated that it makes you realise that you are not just one of many, with participant three supporting that claim by saying that they have the feeling that other colleagues actively recognise the work they are doing in the team.

4.2 The importance of recognition for trust development

All six participants have claimed that recognition is a key factor in being able to build up interpersonal trust with their colleagues. Participant three, for example, claimed that if the component of recognition is completely missing, they would find it very difficult to build up trust with another colleague. The other participants also claimed that the feeling of recognition and being recognised positively affected their ability to build up interpersonal trust. During the interviews, a lot of participants claimed that the trust they have in another colleague is directly tied to the work performance of others, i.e. recognition. Participant six claimed that:

"In a work context, as I said, at the end of the day it's the work that counts. This means that if I can work well with a person, the relationship of trust builds up much faster than the other way round."

(Participant 6)

They also claimed that for them, action speaks louder than words, and that the easiest way to gain their trust is to simply do a good job. This is supported by participant three, who said when asked what interpersonal trust in the workplace meant for them, that it comes down to the work performance again, and that if there are any urgent matters arising, they can rely on their colleagues to support them. They advanced this narrative by saying:

"In my case, and I think in most cases, recognition often goes hand in hand with good work. So you would somehow see that and store it for yourself, even if you don't necessarily say it, but there is still a certain kind of recognition."

(Participant 3)

This statement ties back to the notion that trust develops through the recognition of the work of others, making it easier for them to trust someone in the workplace. If this recognition is not given, then employees will also have less trust in other colleagues, as participant three explained, if the work performance was not

good enough, they would be less willing to hand things over and trust other people less in some matters. To them, feeling recognised by another colleague makes it easier for them to build up interpersonal trust, as through the recognition of their work and views, the trust builds through the feeling of shared views, being on the same page, leading to an increased trust in the judgement of the colleague. Supporting this, participant three mentioned that if they saw someone working very badly, they would be less willing to trust them with support tasks that impact their work directly. As a good summary of this, participant three said:

"I mean, at the end of the day, it's tasks that I might end up supervising again or that fall back on me. And then, of course, I would tend to give it to someone whose work I think I might recognise more than someone else's work. And accordingly, I probably have more confidence in that person, more trust, and would tend to give them the perhaps more complex or difficult tasks because I think they would do them better."

(Participant 3)

They also noted that whilst social interactions are very important in order to build up trust, especially in the workplace, they find it equally important to be able to rely on the person, and that trust develops if they have helped them multiple times by doing good work, tying back to the notion of recognition.

When asked whether recognition had a direct impact on being able to develop interpersonal trust, participant two answered:

"Yes, well, because when you show appreciation, it's something very personal. [...] And so I think that, yes, that also has an influence on it"

(Participant 2)

They also noted that the interpersonal trust relationship is very important to them and that without either recognition or trust, the workplace would be a lot less enjoyable. Interestingly, participant two stated that social esteem might be able to compensate for missing recognition and vice versa, but also stated that the missing recognition would still hurt their trust in others.

"So if I now have the impression, okay, this person [...] sees me as an equal, to put it bluntly, you go through thick and thin together, you support each other, that kind of thing naturally promotes trust."

(Participant 4)

The notion of recognition being paramount for interpersonal trust was also underlined by participant four. Whilst they were not someone who was striving for massive amounts of recognition to be promoted or go up on the career ladder, and rather prefer to be able to work in peace, they still agreed that being recognised, especially by other colleagues, plays an important role in building interpersonal trust, saying that:

"If I don't feel recognised by someone, it naturally has a negative effect on my trust in that person."

(Participant 4)

When participant four was directly asked if being recognised helps to build trust with their colleagues and/or supervisor(s), they affirmed this. When asked for the reason as to why, they said that the feeling of being needed creates a sense of belonging, making it easier for them to trust others because they feel like they are worth something and are directly contributing to the workplace. Supporting the view of participant three, participant four also ties the recognition of work to trust, saying that if they recognise someone is doing a good job, they trust that person, allowing them to value their input or at least take it at face value.

Participant five shared the view of the other participants, albeit with a bit more cautious approach. When asked if being recognised helps to build trust with their colleagues and/or supervisor(s), they too replied that this is the case, and that recognition can function as a relational practice if it is applied consistently. They again confirmed the link and correlation between recognition and trust when asked if they think that there is a connection between recognition and trust, meaning that as the feeling of recognition goes down, the feeling of trust goes down with it, and if the feeling of recognition goes up, the feeling of trust follows suit. However, they made the claim that trust can only develop if the actions of a person match recognition. This means that for them, through recognition, the subsequent trust can only develop if the actions that follow the recognition are in line with what was being said or what is expected from the form of recognition.

"This means that if a line manager pats me on the back and says, hey, what you're doing is great, you'll get very far with it, but six months later I realise, okay, I'm not being developed here at all and those were just empty words, then I've received praise, then I have received recognition, but the lack of reaction or action, which I then lack, where I then get the feeling, okay, these are just empty words, that can of course destroy trust very quickly, I say, or ensure that it is not built up in the first place."

(Participant 5)

For participant one, the connection between recognition and trust was the greatest, saying that if one receives the appropriate appreciation in a way that is tangible that this leads to trust, and also stated that they cannot come up with a scenario where recognition does not lead to trust being built up.

"At the moment, I wouldn't say there's any example where I would say that would apply, that recognition doesn't lead to trust being built up."

(Participant 1)

4.3 Challenges and ambiguities in recognition practices

While all participants, except participant one, who had conflicting statements, agreed that recognition was an important factor for building trust, participants also indicated that there were challenges and uncertainties regarding the perceived recognition in their workplace, which appeared to hinder building and maintaining trust.

A recurring problem was the infrequent nature of recognition practices. Participants two and three, for example, stated that recognition practices in the form of feedback were not done regularly and actively avoided, with supervisors only using recognition for special performances.

Participant two talked about a situation where they were working on a project, only for the outcome to be claimed by the supervisor, who made it seem like it was their work. Whilst this was later rectified in a separate meeting with the participant and the supervisor, this still undermined their trust in the intentions of the supervisor, making them believe that their work did not get the necessary attention. Whilst participant two stated that this was a one-off occurrence, they also stated that if such a situation were to happen again, it would definitely hurt their interpersonal trust in the supervisor. Additionally, participant two also stated that the perceived trust in their team is high, but that they are unsure if that is the case in other teams or departments. As restructuring and outsourcing projects are taking place in their workplace, they mentioned that they can see trust being hurt by the insecurity among employees.

"I think we once had a situation where we worked on something ourselves for free. And afterwards it was presented as something that the line manager had worked out."

(Participant 2)

Participant three mentioned a situation in which they took on a lot of responsibilities and showed high commitment, but did not receive the appropriate recognition for their work in their eyes. They explained that they invested a lot into setting up a new area of a department, building it from the ground up, without any guidance, but in the end did not receive the recognition they hoped for. They felt frustrated that other people did not appreciate how much work they put into setting up the department and that this was not always recognised. When asked whether this had impacted their interpersonal trust in other colleagues or supervisor(s), they hesitated at the start as they were unsure, but later confirmed it did have an impact on their interpersonal trust in other colleagues or supervisor(s):

"Okay. Mhm. Yes. Erm ... I would also like to think about that for a moment, to be honest. Erm ... Yes, is that my trust now? Yes, probably a little bit [...] it would probably be a lie if I said that it had no impact at all."

(Participant 3)

Participant six mentioned an inconsistency between managerial and self-ratings. During a performance review, the participant assessed themselves significantly better than their supervisor. They needed to persuade their supervisor, pointing out the extra work they had done in comparison to their job description, stating it as an extraordinary commitment. Even though the situation was eventually sorted out, and the participant got the points for the performance review, the initial incident created tension and a sense that their extra work was not being recognised. Whilst there was no major breach of trust in this case, the participant still called it 'a shame' and was unsatisfied with the recognition from the supervisor. Nevertheless, participant six mentioned another situation where a lack of recognition damaged his interpersonal trust. The participant stated that they had invested a significant amount of time in a task and made their interest in further pursuing this task clear to the supervisor, but the supervisor reassigned the final task in the end, citing risk concerns and departmental boundaries. Whilst the participant felt like the supervisor had trust in their abilities, they also mentioned that the prioritisation of risk management over individual effort from the supervisor undermined the interpersonal trust they had.

"Yes, as I said, that would actually fall into this category, interpersonal trust. I would say that he would have trusted me to do it, but for [them] there was this risk factor, saying that it was better for the department responsible. In other words, if a mistake occurs, he doesn't have to take the blame. Yes, I think that's a relatively apt example."

(Participant 6)

Participant five also specified how they were missing recognition in some instances. For example, they described how undervalued they felt when they switched departments and were given the same payment as new employees despite having more experience and background knowledge, as they were working in a department very similar to the new one before, acquiring most of the skills needed in that old department. They did not perceive the work they were doing to be recognised in a tangible manner and felt that this undermined their contribution. Regarding that old department, participant five named the reason for their switch to the new department as they reached the upper limit of performance for that department, and no recognition was given anymore, introducing a feeling of stagnation and demotivation.

4.4 Summary of findings

Recognition was not seen as a single or monolithic experience, but rather as a range of practices in a constant and consistent manner. Across all interviews, participants stated that recognition is a socially embedded practice which is being shaped by factors like context, intention, and reciprocity. In particular, factors like feedback from the supervisor, the acknowledgement of work performance, informal praise, formal mechanisms, and peer-to-peer appreciation were the most important recognition practices. Participants connected the practice of recognition to building and maintaining interpersonal trust, provided that it was perceived as genuine, relational, and fair. However, where recognition was absent, inconsistent, or perceived as not genuine, it destroyed or, at the very least, undermined the interpersonal trust in the workplace. The perceived quality of recognition could also be moderated by past experiences of recognition, by cultural factors (both country and organisation specific), and by the perceived job security.

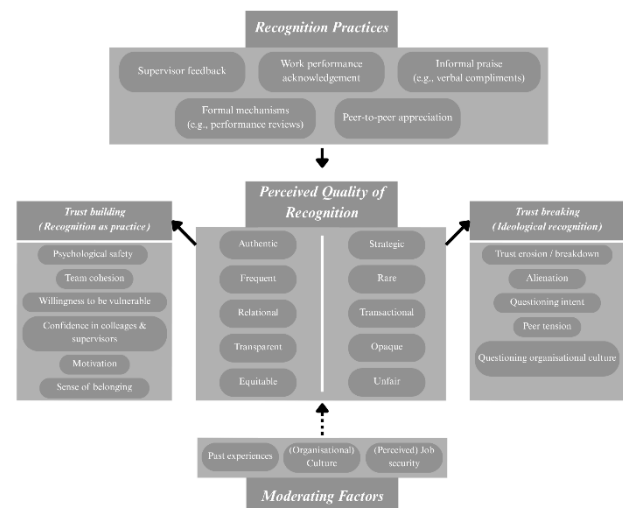


Figure 1. How Recognition practices influence trust

5. DISCUSSION

Through the findings of the research, two main topics arise that are vital to recognition building interpersonal trust in the workplace. The research question *“How does recognition in the workplace contribute to the development of interpersonal trust among employees?”* is answered as ***“Recognition is able to contribute to the development of interpersonal trust among employees when it is perceived as authentic, reciprocal, and contextually appropriate, yet is also able to undermine trust when the recognition is used as a tool and perceived as insincere, inconsistent, or strategic”***.

5.1 Recognition as a building block for interpersonal trust

Throughout this study, all participants have demonstrated and made clear that recognition is a key building block in developing interpersonal trust in other employees and supervisors, highlighting the impact of recognition on the workplace. All participants stated that recognition is not just a relational practice to appreciate performance but rather to see recognition as a meaningful exchange, affirming not only their identity but also their efforts and contributions in the workplace. This aligns with the research done by Honneth (1997) and his theory of recognition, which posits that recognition is a vital desire by humans which lets us develop self-identity and serves the purpose of social integration, and that in order to develop a positive view of oneself, social affirmation is needed. As seen through the interviews, participants receive this form of affirmation in the form of recognition by having their contributions appreciated and their role in the team validated.

Participants reveal that when supervisors and colleagues frequently and meaningfully, in line with what is expected, show recognition, this experienced recognition builds a sense of belonging as well as psychological safety in the workplace. This led them to be more open to share ideas, voice opinions and concerns, and allowed them to be themselves. For example, participant five found it very important to be able to mention shortcomings without any repercussions, that they are able to admit areas they are not comfortable with, and that these areas are then worked on together jointly without the fear of being ridiculed or being made fun of, leading to an increased sense of trust in the workplace. This reinforces the concept of psychological safety by Edmondson (1999), where in the workplace one feels safe enough to take the risk of being vulnerable without threatening negative consequences and is linked to the foundation of trust building. Recognition in the form of appreciation and acknowledgement builds this sense of safety and lays the foundation for interpersonal trust building.

The concept of *recognition trust* by Brennan (2021) provides the explanation of how recognition and interpersonal trust relate by stating that trust is established once individuals are ethically and respectfully seen and supported by others, leading to the conclusion that recognition is not just transactional, but rather relational in nature through the affirmation of contributions and worth. The answers from the participants second this, as through the authentic recognition from the supervisor or other colleagues, they felt respected and built a sense of belonging. Becoming more open to share work and trusting others to do a good job are just two aspects of what genuine recognition leads to.

The answers of the participants are also in line with the trust theory of Rousseau et al. (1998), which explains that people are willing to be vulnerable under the condition of positive expectations of the other party's behaviour or intentions. Participants reported that the aspect of recognition led them to build interpersonal trust in other colleagues, allowing them to

share work and trusting that the other colleagues would act in the manner they hoped for, raising the overall trust in one another and elevating the trust climate within the team.

Recognition needed to be frequent and honest in order to develop interpersonal trust. Participants stated that recognition was only of real use when they felt the recognition being issued was genuine and ‘action followed words’, but also wished the recognition was issued more often, instead of for extraordinary commitments or performances only. The notion of trust building in this case aligned with the work by Rousseau et al. (1998), where trust would be established through frequent, repeated interactions that reinforce positive expectations. Participants said that if the recognition was insincere or only provided on occasion, they would question the motive behind the recognition, leading to the erosion of trust. Two participants have claimed that the infrequent recognition might be down to the stigma present in Germany that if everything is going well, people tend not to say anything, and only issue feedback when things are going badly, or mistakes are made. Whilst these participants agreed that this lack of feedback can be seen as recognition, they themselves also claimed that this is not a tangible form of recognition and does not lead to the development of trust, wishing for more recognition that is based on exchange.

Tying into this, the recognition received from the supervisor was key to being able to establish interpersonal trust. Participants claimed that once they felt recognition from the supervisor, this led them to feel respected and valued. Consistent with this is the research done by Eisenberger et al. (2002), who show the role supervisors have, as by showing recognition to the employees, this has a direct impact on the trust employees have in the workplace, as this leads to the feeling that the company values their contribution and the supervisor being favourably inclined towards them, fostering the sense of belonging. It can be argued that once employees feel valued and a sense of belonging, and if this comes from the supervisor, then they are more likely to trust other colleagues, ultimately tying recognition to the development of trust.

Additionally, the findings indicate that appreciation extends past the hierarchical also encompasses intra-peer interactions. Participants claimed that when other colleagues appreciate their work, and if they appreciate the work of others, this leads to the development of trust and helps to build a supportive workplace. This indicates how recognition builds trust relationships among employees, besides the recognition from the supervisor. The findings generally indicate how recognition builds interpersonal trust between colleagues by valuing the effort of others, holding optimistic beliefs regarding others, and establishing safe spaces where people can freely communicate their ideas and raise their concerns, leading to a workplace of psychological safety. Recognition, therefore, can be seen as a relational and moral practice that is able to build trust, enable cooperation, and lead to a more productive workplace.

The findings show that there is an observable link between recognition and interpersonal trust, meaning that recognition serves as a foundation for building interpersonal trust. This is especially relevant since, as of now, only the notion of ‘recognition trust’ by Brennan (2021) exists in academic literature, but the link between recognition and trust is still unexplored and not clear. Recognition has a direct impact on the interpersonal trust between employees, which extends to the supervisor, too. Especially recognition received from the supervisor and the recognition of work performance by colleagues are important factors for building trust.

5.2 Challenges in recognition practices and their impact on trust

Interpersonal trust was especially impacted by recognition if the recognition received was not consistent or transparent. During the interviews, participants stated that recognition and feedback, especially, were not a common occurrence and felt like it was even discouraged by the company. This led participants to wonder whether the recognition they have received was actually genuine or stemmed from the need to do so through annual reviews, supervisors not being able to overlook achievements, etc. Participants, therefore, were unsure whether the recognition they have received could be taken at face value, with one participant stating that they perceive recognition as genuine only if the recognition is followed up by some sort of action, arising from past negative experiences where recognition led to no further action. Additionally, employees will change departments or will go as far as considering changing the employer altogether if they are in a position where they have reached the 'ceiling of recognition' and do not receive recognition for the work they are doing anymore. This can be tied to the 'alienation' aspect of Honneth's (1997) work, where the absence of recognition will lead to a feeling of alienation for the person, causing personal harm. As this undermines their work and contribution, according to Honneth (1997), one would then expect the sense of belonging and respect to be damaged, leading to moral injury. As mentioned by the participants, one would then expect the trust in the organisation, as well as the ability to develop interpersonal trust in others, to be damaged too. Furthermore, these findings relate to Honneth's (2007) concept of 'ideological recognition', which explains a form of recognition that appears affirming on the surface level, and the recognition is accepted as such in the beginning from a subjective point of view, but is later viewed unjustified from an objective point of view. According to Honneth (2007), recognition in cases like these is not rooted in mutual respect or moral affirmation, but rather deployed strategically to elicit performance, compliance, or loyalty. This concept links to the experiences of participants who felt a lack of recognition for their work, in instances where the supervisor took credit for their work, or where the supervisor practised recognition in a way that was perceived as superficial and not genuine. In these instances, recognition is not a practice, but becomes a powerful tool in the hands of supervisors and/or employees that is used for manipulation. Through this, the practice of recognition loses its relational and moral dimensions, undermining interpersonal trust. Honneth's (2007) concept of ideological recognition, therefore, helps to understand how and why participants had their interpersonal trust decreased when receiving recognition, as recognition was used as a tool rather than a relational practice.

Participants also claimed that interpersonal trust is hurt if recognition is completely absent or attributed to the wrong person. One participant in particular stated that he felt demotivated and questioned the motives of the supervisor when the supervisor claimed the work the participant had done for themselves. This ultimately led to questions about the authenticity of recognition within the workplace. Furthermore, missing recognition in the form of prioritising risk aversion over trust by allocating tasks away from participants when they were keen on taking on the challenge broke the interpersonal trust between the participant and the supervisor, as they felt even though the supervisor trusted them to handle the task, they still preferred to play it safe. Whilst trust was being shown to the participant, the lack of recognition in the abilities of the participant ultimately damaged that interpersonal trust from the side of the participant, as they felt the supervisor did not have enough faith in the abilities of the participant to carry out the task

and preferred risk minimisation. According to Brennan (2021), recognition trust can only develop if the acknowledgement is morally grounded and validates the efforts of an individual. Here, it can be argued that the recognition given by the supervisor was self-serving or insincere, as the recognition was given albeit not fully by handing the final task to the participant and only issuing the recognition for the performance, but preserving the consequences, undermining the moral basis upon which trust is built.

Issues of fairness and equity also emerged from the interviews, especially in the form of monetary recognition. Whilst one participant mentioned that the current employer was the first one who fully recognised his work monetary wise, which led them to feel a sense of security and trust in the workplace, another participant complained about her monetary recognition, where they felt they were not recognised enough monetary wise, as they had built up background knowledge, but earned the same as a new employee would. This led them to feel like they were being treated unfairly, damaging their trust in the workplace.

The findings indicate that job uncertainty and the subsequent missing recognition were also factors for damaging trust, as the fear of the job being outsourced also came up during the interviews. Whilst the participants were not on the receiving end of the organisational restructuring and cost-saving measures, they expressed concerns that these measures may affect them in the future. It can be argued that those measures undermine the recognition of the workers and subsequently hurt the trust of the employees, as for trust to arise, people need to accept a certain amount of vulnerability based upon positive expectations (Rousseau et al., 1998). The layoffs lead to employees losing their sense of belonging, resulting in moral injury (Honneth, 1997), and as the positive expectations are not met, the trust relationship will be damaged (Rousseau et al., 1998). Therefore, one might conclude that when recognition is overshadowed by the organisational priorities, the development of interpersonal trust will be disrupted, as trust is built through repeated interactions that reinforce positive expectations (Rousseau et al., 1998), and those positive expectations ultimately stem from the recognition of work (Honneth, 1997).

Whilst recognition is able to be a founding block for interpersonal trust, this is only the case if the recognition experienced is of a consistent, genuine, and fair nature. This poses the threat that if recognition is not genuine or perceived as such, or if recognition is not evenly distributed, this can actively hurt any existing trust relationship between colleagues or employees and the supervisor, as per Honneth's (2007) notion of ideological recognition. If recognition is absent, this leads to a feeling of alienation, mirroring the findings of Honneth (1997), but also undermines the trust in the workplace. Recognition and interpersonal trust correlate, and recognition should be used in a way that elevates this relationship. Whether the recognition is perceived as a practice or as ideological recognition, as per Honneth's (2007), is also influenced by moderating factors like past experiences, where a bad past experience can lead to mistrust in all recognition practices. This means that the recipient of the recognition will be more careful and cautious with the intent of the practice. Furthermore, organisational culture can be a moderating factor. If the recipient is part of a culture where recognition is only given rarely, the onset of recognition might feel off, and the recipient then might question the true intent of the practice. Lastly, the perceived job security of the recipient also plays a role, as receiving recognition when in a vulnerable state might come across as damage limitation or a distraction to keep the recipient happy and boost productivity short-term and discourage phenomena like "quiet quitting".

5.3 Contribution to existing literature

While recognition had already been theorised in the literature as a trust variable, the current study offers a more nuanced explanation of the manner in which recognition practices help to build interpersonal relationships in the workplace. It was shown that recognition not just reinforces trust, but is the relational medium through which trust is initially formed and actively maintained. This contributes to and extends existing frameworks that represent trust as the product of abstractions like perceived fairness, and relocates trust into the perceived experience of being acknowledged by others. The study also shows how the practice of recognition can not only build interpersonal trust but also erode interpersonal trust. While recognition as a practice is usually perceived as a uniformly positive force, the findings show that the impact is mediated by perceived authenticity, reciprocity, and purpose. As soon as recognition is used as a tool, rather than a practice, the presence of recognition equals, or is even worse than, the absence of recognition. The findings thus mirror Honneth's (2007) distinction between relational and ideological recognition and provide a tangible demonstration of how skewed recognition practices destroy trust rather than establish it. Recognition is to be seen as a dynamic, morality-filled practice within the social processes in which trust is constantly negotiated and maintained.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

As this study was conducted with white-collar employees, it is viable to explore whether this relational link between recognition and interpersonal trust also exists in blue-collar occupations. Additionally, all participants were from the same country, so future research should focus on different countries to see if cultural differences play a role in the relationship between recognition and interpersonal trust, or if this relationship can be universally found. Given the relational nature of recognition and interpersonal trust, future research should employ quantitative research to test the qualitative insights of this study and to check for reproducibility. By doing this, insight would be gained on the causal relationship and the relative impact of recognition on interpersonal trust. As more organisations start to integrate artificial intelligence, one possible field of research could be how digital recognition systems influence the relationship between recognition and interpersonal trust. Furthermore, as hybrid and remote work environments become more popular, research should investigate how this has an impact on recognition and interpersonal trust, especially considering how recognition is communicated and perceived in these environments. Understanding this further will provide valuable insights into how workplaces should be shaped to allow for this relationship of recognition and trust to thrive. As this study mainly focused on the overall link between recognition and trust, research should focus on how different personalities might interact with this relationship. Factors like personality traits or overall mistrust in others might moderate the relationship.

5.5 Recommendations for practice

This paper shows that the still-overlooked connection between recognition and interpersonal trust is an important factor in the workplace. To be able to build interpersonal trust from recognition, supervisors need to develop and implement recognition practices that are consistent, authentic, and aligned with the contributions and efforts of their employees. If supervisors are unable or unsure how to implement the correct recognition practices, training in this regard should be given to ensure supervisors are able to give recognition to their employees that is meaningful, consistent, and perceived as just by their workforce. To ensure that recognition will be perceived as meaningful and just, supervisors should develop a set of criteria

that are clear-cut and allow for transparency and tracing of their practices. Furthermore, recognition should be seen as a relational practice that involves active participation with the recipient, rather than a transactional praise for performances or extraordinary commitment. To strengthen the relationship between recognition and interpersonal trust between colleagues, the development of a peer check might prove useful, so employees know how other colleagues see them and are able to improve their relationship with other peers. Lastly, recognition practices should be in line with the values and goals of the organisation to ensure that a culture of trust can be created and that recognition practices are seen as genuine.

6. LIMITATIONS

The research faced some limitations which might have impacted the results and the overall validity. Firstly, the data was collected from a relatively small sample of six participants who were all from the same company and from the same country. Whilst this was done due to time and scope constraints, and still produced rich and insightful data, full validity can only be given for that exact workplace, and future research must prove that this phenomenon is translatable to other workplaces, countries, and cultures. Even though participants and their workplace were anonymised, they still might have held back their opinions, especially in regard to negative experiences with their supervisor or the company. Whilst this does not impact the results on the relationship between recognition and interpersonal trust, it might have influenced the understanding of how the absence of recognition may obstruct the growth of trust or damage trust altogether.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper tried to investigate whether there is a meaningful connection between recognition and trust in the setting of workplace setting. Therefore, the central research question of this study was:

"How does recognition in the workplace contribute to the development of interpersonal trust among employees?"

This question was answered through conducting six semi-structured interviews with six participants holding white-collar jobs. Through these interviews, it became clear that recognition had a direct impact on the ability to build interpersonal trust with both other colleagues and supervisors. Participants saw recognition as a building block for interpersonal trust, and building interpersonal trust was inhibited when recognition was absent. Furthermore, the implications of the absence of recognition and their impact on the ability to build interpersonal trust were explored. Therefore, the research question was answered as *"Recognition is able to contribute to the development of interpersonal trust among employees when it is perceived as authentic, reciprocal, and contextually appropriate, yet is also able to undermine trust when the recognition is used as a tool and perceived as insincere, inconsistent, or strategic"*. Lastly, the paper suggested ways in which recognition can be implemented in a meaningful way that allows for the connection between recognition and trust to thrive.

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10. APPENDIX

Table 1: Interview guide (translated into English)

Theme	Interview questions
Recognition	<p>Was there a situation where you felt that your work was recognised or that you were truly valued?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What exactly happened? - Who was involved? <hr/> <p>What did that trigger in you? How did you feel afterwards?</p> <hr/> <p>Was there a situation in which you felt you were overlooked or not taken seriously?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did that make you feel?
Trust	<p>Does the feeling of recognition, or a lack thereof, influence whether you can trust someone?</p> <hr/> <p>Is there anything that helps you build trust in someone?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you have an example of this? - Does hierarchy play a role here?
Recognition Trust Relationship	<p>Do you think that recognition of you and your work helps to build trust with your colleagues or your manager?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why/why not? <hr/> <p>For you personally, what does trust in the workplace mean?</p>

Table 2: Coding Scheme

Code group	Code(s)	Example Sub-Theme	Example Quote
Missing recognition	Recognition Absence	Recognition builds trust relationship; Recognition and trust relationship correlate	You know that, for example, let's say your line manager no longer praises you or criticises you a lot, that as an employee I personally think to myself, okay, if that's how they see it, maybe my colleagues see it that way too. I can just imagine, depending on how strongly they criticise you, that it would have an impact on me. And I would think to myself, yes, can I still confide in my colleagues or not? Erm ... It just depends a bit on how strong it is in each case. But I think that also has an influence, yes
Recognition	<p>Experienced Recognition</p> <hr/> <p>Recognition Result</p> <hr/> <p>Social Esteem > Recognition</p> <hr/> <p>Recognition Practices</p> <hr/> <p>Organisational Culture</p>	Recognition from supervisor	Yes, we actually recently received an invitation to a meal because we had achieved our annual targets, our core team, I would say, from our line manager and also his line manager.
Recognition Trust Relationship	<p>Recognition builds trust</p> <hr/> <p>Recognition over trust</p> <hr/> <p>Recognition equals trust</p>	Recognition builds trust relationship, no scenario where this doesn't apply	No, at the moment I wouldn't say there's any example where I would say that would apply, that recognition doesn't lead to trust being built up

Trust	Trust before recognition	Recognition builds trust relationship; Only if recognition is genuine and backed up with actions, otherwise break of trust relationship	I think it depends on the form the recognition takes and whether it is serious. I believe that recognition can very easily destroy trust if you have the feeling that it is not meant seriously
	Trust building		
	Trust breakdown		
	Perceived Trust		
	Trust over recognition		
	Trust and Hierarchy		