

Communicating appreciation in the workplace: importance and perception of appreciation from managers and co-workers and its effects on organisational citizenship behaviour

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Abstract

Purpose – To strengthen relationships with their employees, organisations should encourage the appreciation of work performance and personal characteristics/qualities among managers and co-workers. Thus, this study analyses how much appreciation employees receive from managers and co-workers, how important various reasons for appreciation are to employees, and how often they perceive appreciation for these reasons. Furthermore, the effects of receiving appreciation from managers and co-workers on different forms of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) are examined.

Design/methodology/approach – Employees working in Germany ($N = 486$) responded to an online survey gauging (1) appreciation received from managers and co-workers, (2) importance and perception of appreciation for different reasons and (3) OCB on the individual and organisational level.

Findings – Both managers and co-workers convey a high level of appreciation, with co-workers communicating slightly more appreciation. Reliability, willingness to take responsibility and solution-oriented working are seen as the most important reasons for appreciation, while employees receive appreciation for their reliability, individual performance and solution-oriented working. Differences between the importance and perception of appreciation indicate that employees feel under-appreciated. Appreciation from managers increases OCB on the organisational level only, while appreciation from co-workers increases OCB on both the individual and the organisational level.

Originality/value – The study demonstrates how receiving appreciation encourages employees to volunteer for both their co-workers and their organisation. Furthermore, the results indicate that internal communication professionals should ensure that the appreciation expressed is aligned with employees' needs.

Keywords Appreciation, Organisational citizenship behaviour, Internal communication, Leadership, Working climate, Survey

Paper type Research article

Introduction

Demographic change, skills shortage and high turnover rates challenge the survival and success of organisations and require additional efforts to attract and, more importantly, retain talent (Stieglitz *et al.*, 2024). Communication efforts of various internal stakeholders (e.g. co-



workers, managers, CEO) can contribute to maintain strong bonds between organisations and their employees, which is a necessity for overcoming these challenges (Men, 2021). Communication scholars particularly point to the value of addressing employees on a relational level to meet their needs and demands (e.g. Einwiller et al., 2021; Ruppel et al., 2022). Accordingly, it was demonstrated that *appreciating* employees increases employees' engagement and support for the organisation (Einwiller et al., 2021). Appreciation is a prototypical socioemotional resource in the work context (Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025) that is essential for strengthening employees on both a personal level and in fulfilling their professional role (e.g. Stocker et al., 2010, 2014). From a communication perspective, appreciation is defined as "communicating that one values someone else" (Stocker et al., 2019, p. 333). Following the literature on respect (Grover, 2014; van Quaquebeke and Eckloff, 2010), this can be further specified either as praise for a persons' performance and behaviour or as unconditional recognition of a person. In this understanding, appreciation is a broader concept than *recognition* which focuses on performance-related aspects only (Robbins, 2019). This definition implies that someone (i.e. a communicator) expresses appreciation and includes that appreciation can be conveyed on both the higher hierarchical level (i.e. managers) as well as the same hierarchical level (i.e. co-workers). Accordingly, scholars highlight the communicative responsibility of managers (Beck, 2016; Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025) as well as co-workers (Stocker et al., 2014). As communicating appreciation is part of their job role (Stocker et al., 2014), managers in particular need to consider employees' expectations (i.e. what employees want to be appreciated for) and preferences for appreciation (i.e. which forms of appreciation they prefer; Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025). Qualitative research outlines that employees want specific appreciation for both their *work-related behaviours* (e.g. specific achievements, job-related extra tasks, communication behaviour) and their *personal characteristics and qualities* (e.g. reliability, punctuality; Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025). The questions that remain unanswered are whether work-related behaviours or personal characteristics and qualities are more important for employees' perceptions of appreciation, from whom employees want to receive appreciation and whether there is a gap between employees' expectations and the actual occurrence of appreciation.

Strong internal relationships through appreciation foster employees' job engagement (Einwiller et al., 2021). Especially in the light of current sociopolitical challenges and future crises, an organisation depends not only on employees' regular job engagement, but also on their voluntary contributions. We propose to capture these "extra miles" with the concept of *organisational citizenship behaviour* (OCB; Organ et al., 2005). Defined as discretionary action, OCB is a work behaviour that goes beyond the requirements of the workplace and is chosen voluntarily by the employees themselves. OCB can address both the *individual level* (contributing benefits to individual employees, e.g. welcoming and supporting new co-workers) as well as the *organisational level* (contributing benefits to the organisation, e.g. standing up and defending the organisation in public; Podsakoff et al., 2000; Williams and Anderson, 1991). In the context of appreciation, it was shown that employees' perceptions of being appreciated at work yields beneficial outcomes for *individual employees*, e.g. through increasing their well-being, work happiness and job satisfaction. However, benefits for *employers* were also found, for example through fostering job engagement and reducing turnover intentions (e.g. Davis et al., 2021; Elfering et al., 2017; Garrido-Vásquez et al., 2020; Gulyani and Sharma, 2018; Kranabetter and Niessen, 2019; Muskat and Reitsamer, 2019; Pfister et al., 2020a, b; Pohrt et al., 2022; Stocker et al., 2010, 2014, 2019). Following this line of argument, we propose that *employees' perception of appreciation from managers or co-workers enhances their OCB at both the individual and organisational level.*

Overall, this study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on internal communication and relationship building (Men, 2021) by focusing on employee appreciation (Beck, 2016; Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025) and OCB (Organ et al., 2005) in three ways: First, we examine the role of managers and co-workers in communicating appreciation; second, we demonstrate which reasons for appreciation are important to employees, how often they perceive that they

are actually appreciated for these reasons, and where differences between importance and occurrence are identified; and third, we analyse the effects of appreciation of both managers and co-workers on individual and organisational level OCB. From the perspective of communication practice, our findings should encourage internal communication professionals to establish a positive working climate by emphasising the value of appreciation within their organisations.

Literature review and theoretical background

Communicators of and reasons for employee appreciation

The concept of employee appreciation is mainly rooted in occupational psychology (e.g. Semmer *et al.*, 2019; Stocker *et al.*, 2010, 2014, 2019), but is slowly gaining traction in communication research (e.g. Beck, 2016; Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025). Based on *social exchange theory* (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Homans, 1958), Stranzl and Ruppel (2025) conceptualise appreciation as a socioemotional resource in the working context that contributes to satisfying employees' needs and expectations. Appreciation is a communicative construct that stimulates internal relationships in the sense that it fosters reciprocity between senders and receivers of appreciation. This is reflected in the *leader-member exchange theory* (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995), which suggests that leaders form a relation with each of their employees, for example by providing feedback, handing out rewards or acknowledging efforts. Similarly, *transformational leadership* (Bass, 1990) with its core dimension of individualised consideration suggests treating employees according to their needs and granting them personal attention.

There is a general agreement that *managers* are first and foremost attributed with the responsibility to engage in employee appreciation (Elfering *et al.*, 2017; Kranabetter and Niessen, 2019; Pohrt *et al.*, 2022; Stocker *et al.*, 2014; Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025; van Quaquebeke and Eckloff, 2010). Due to their regular and personal connection, they are key points of contact and know about employees' tasks, challenges, wishes and needs. In addition, managers are representatives of the organisation, which assigns them a key role in contributing to the working climate (Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025). Stocker *et al.* (2019) concluded that there is an "importance of contextual factors like appreciative leader behaviour for handling difficult situations such as work interruptions and thus confirm the potential of feeling appreciated at work as a protective resource in stressful work situations" (p. 331). Furthermore, employees also believe that managers are responsible for conveying appreciation (Beck, 2016; Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025). A qualitative study conducted in the United States showed that employees valued managers' verbal and personal expressions of appreciation for specific achievements (Beck, 2016). For the European context, another qualitative study highlighted various ways in which managers could show their appreciation (e.g. taking time to listen to employees, giving feedback, showing support, thanking employees; Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025). Researchers from communications and occupational psychology claim that managers need training and education to promote a positive working climate in which appreciation prevails (Elfering *et al.*, 2017; Fagley and Adler, 2012; Kranabetter and Niessen, 2019; Pfister *et al.*, 2020a; Pohrt *et al.*, 2022; Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025). For such trainings to truly address employees' needs and evoke their perception of being appreciated, insights into the effects of communicating appreciation, best practice examples and knowledge about employees' preferences regarding appreciation could be helpful (Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025). Although managers might be aware of the importance of appreciation, it remains unclear whether they convey it accordingly in their daily communication with employees (Stocker *et al.*, 2010). Managers should therefore be aware of the specific reasons why employees expect appreciation from them and ensure that they express this appreciation in a manner that aligns with those expectations.

Additionally, scholars mention the important role of *co-workers* in contributing to a positive working climate (Pfister *et al.*, 2020a, b; Stocker *et al.*, 2014; Weiss and Zacher, 2022). For example, Stocker *et al.* (2014) reported that employees experienced appreciation in the

forms of praise and receiving “thank you” messages from co-workers and customers; thus, “co-workers and customers are relevant sources of appreciation as well. Strengthening a culture of appreciation can therefore relieve some pressure from leaders” (Stocker *et al.*, 2014, p. 90). To foster a more nuanced debate about responsibilities and education in communicating appreciation (Fagley and Adler, 2012; Kranabetter and Niessen, 2019; Pohrt *et al.*, 2022; Stocker *et al.*, 2014; Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025), we compare how much appreciation employees receive from their managers and co-workers:

RQ1. Do employees receive more appreciation from their managers or their co-workers?

To communicate appreciation adequately, it is not only the communicators who are important but also, in the light of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the employees’ expectations (Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025). Qualitative research from an employee perspective captured the reasons to appreciate someone. It demonstrated that employees wish appreciation particularly for their *work-related behaviour* (e.g. personal achievements, extraordinary commitment) as well as their *personal characteristics and qualities* (e.g. punctuality, reliability, flexibility; Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025). Although there is a strong emphasis in organisational practice on employees’ work-related behaviour (Gallup, 2016; PwC, 2023), employees might also find it very important to be appreciated for their personal characteristics and qualities. Pohrt *et al.* (2022), for example, argued that managers need to “think beyond traditional reward systems and recognize the value of a person regardless of their achievements” (p. 384). Qualitative studies provided information about the desired content of appreciation; however, there is a lack of information about how important employees consider the different reasons for appreciation (Stocker *et al.*, 2014; Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025). In addition, there is no evidence yet on employees’ expectations in relation to their actual experiences of appreciation. Differences between the desired appreciation and the received appreciation could indicate whether employees receive an appropriate amount of appreciation (i.e. they seek as much appreciation as they receive), or whether they experience over-appreciation (i.e. they seek less appreciation than they receive) or under-appreciation (i.e. they seek more appreciation than they receive; cf. Davis *et al.*, 2021). Hence, this study poses the following research questions:

- RQ2. Which reasons for appreciation do employees rate as more important, (a) their work-related behaviours or (b) their personal characteristics and qualities?
- RQ3. For which reasons are employees more often appreciated, (a) their work-related behaviours or (b) their personal characteristics and qualities?
- RQ4. For which reasons do the importance and the perception of appreciation differ?

Appreciation and OCB

Appreciation in the workplace is beneficial on the individual level and has additional positive outcomes on the organisational level. For example, perceptions of appreciation increased job satisfaction and had a positive impact on employee well-being (Garrido-Vásquez *et al.*, 2020; Muskat and Reitsamer, 2019; Pfister *et al.*, 2020a, b; Stocker *et al.*, 2010, 2014, 2019), work happiness (Gulyani and Sharma, 2018) and health (Kranabetter and Niessen, 2019; Pfister *et al.*, 2020b; Pohrt *et al.*, 2022; Stocker *et al.*, 2014, 2019). In addition, perceiving appreciation fostered employees’ job engagement (e.g. Einwiller *et al.*, 2021; Gulyani and Sharma, 2018) and reduced their intention to leave the organisation (Apostel *et al.*, 2018; Davis *et al.*, 2021). Specifically, during crises (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic), where continuous employee support is required, the perception of appreciation strengthened employees’ affective organisational commitment (Einwiller *et al.*, 2021).

OCB captures employee behaviour that is beyond their regular job role (Organ *et al.*, 2005). While several conceptual distinctions have been proposed (see Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000 for an overview), we follow Williams and Anderson’s (1991) idea of distinguishing between OCB at

the individual level (*OCB-I*) and OCB at the organisational level (*OCB-O*). Examples of individual-level OCB include experienced employees supporting the onboarding of a new co-worker or employees from the communications department helping their sales colleagues in responding to a customer complaint. On an organisational level, OCB occurs when employees make suggestions to improve the efficiency of work processes or defend their organisation on social media. In general, both levels of OCB are beneficial for organisational success and performance. Even though single occurrences of OCB are detached from organisational profitability, their aggregate ensures the functioning of an organisation (Organ *et al.*, 2005).

From the perspective of internal communication, organisations should engage regularly and transparently with their internal stakeholders (i.e. employees) to activate support for ongoing transformations (Einwiller *et al.*, 2021; Gehrau *et al.*, 2024; Men and Yue, 2019; Li *et al.*, 2021; Yue, 2022). This recognises employees as active communicators with the ability to stimulate internal or external debates and influence or shape organisational processes; thus, their communicative actions have a strong impact on organisational success, reputation and legitimacy (Andersson, 2019; Frandsen and Johansen, 2011; Heide and Simonsson, 2011, 2021). Linking internal communication and OCB, strategic internal relationship building is considered a necessary precondition of employees' engagement in voluntary efforts (Chan and Lai, 2017; Men and Yue, 2019; Walden and Kingsley Westerman, 2018). In particular, corporate symmetrical communication and communication satisfaction contribute to OCB (Chan and Lai, 2017; Kandlousi *et al.*, 2010; Men and Yue, 2019), and especially in uncertain times, organisational communication is crucial to foster employees' willingness for additional efforts (Yue, 2022, p. 164). OCB should therefore be examined more closely in strategic management and internal communication research.

Certain leadership styles promote employees' OCB (Chan and Lai, 2017; Men and Yue, 2019; Tian *et al.*, 2020). Nohe and Hertel's (2017) synthesis of meta-analyses demonstrates that transformational leadership is positively related to OCB, with the quality of leader-member exchange being the strongest mediator in a multi-mediator model. Likewise, personal recognition – a subdimension of transformational leadership – is positively related to OCB (Hassi, 2019). Research on the association of appreciation with OCB, however, is missing so far (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000). Addressing this research gap and in line with prior findings, we assume that appreciation from both managers and co-workers will encourage employees to engage in individual and organisational OCB. Thus, we hypothesise:

- H1. Appreciation in the workplace by managers is positively related to OCB on the (a) individual and (b) organisational level.
- H2. Appreciation in the workplace by co-workers is positively related to OCB on the (a) individual and (b) organisational level.

In addition, we ask whether the effects of appreciation by managers and co-workers differ:

- RQ5. Do the effects hypothesised in H1 and H2 vary depending on the source of appreciation?

Research design

Building on qualitative research that has highlighted the importance of appreciation from managers and co-workers and its positive impact on employee behaviour, this study adopted a quantitative approach to test the resulting hypotheses. An online survey was set up in the Qualtrics tool and distributed by the panel provider GapFish among 486 German employees in December 2023. Participants (54.7% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 37.6$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.0$) worked in organisations with more than 50 employees. This criterion was applied as organisations of this size or larger have most probably established structures for internal communication (Einwiller and Boenigk, 2012). Most of the participants were employed in for-profit companies (68.9%).

The majority had worked there for at least three years (80.4%), and two-thirds held managerial positions (67.1%).

Receiving appreciation by managers and co-workers was gauged using two scales, each with four similar items, one of which was directed at managers ($\alpha = 0.92$) and one at co-workers ($\alpha = 0.88$). The items were developed by consulting previous studies (see [Tables 1 and 3](#), cf. [Jacobshagen et al., 2008](#); [Rafferty and Griffin, 2004](#); [Sirgy et al., 2001](#); [Weiss and Zacher, 2022](#); [White and Bragg, 2012](#)). The importance and perception of appreciation for different reasons were derived from [Stranzl and Ruppel \(2025\)](#) and [Stocker et al. \(2014\)](#) with 24 items each. These reasons for appreciation covered both work-related behaviours as well as personal characteristics and qualities (see [Table 2](#)). OCB was assessed on the individual level ($\alpha = 0.87$) and on the organisational level ($\alpha = 0.90$) with eight items each (see [Table 3](#), cf. [Lee and Allen, 2002](#)). All instruments used seven-point scales. The research project was approved by the institutional review board prior to data collection (approval ID-code: 20231128_059). A qualitative pretest of the survey was conducted to ensure that it was understandable and worked properly.

Findings

Data were analysed in R ([R Core Team, 2023](#)). In an initial data cleaning procedure, participants who were not part of the target population or rushed through the survey too quickly (in less than half of the median answering time; [Leiner, 2019](#)) were omitted. Mean values were compared in paired samples Wilcoxon tests to answer the research questions. [RQ1](#) asked whether employees receive more appreciation from their managers or their co-workers. Results show that both managers and employees communicate a high level of appreciation (i.e. all means ≥ 5.29 on the seven-point answering format). Employees tend to receive slightly more appreciation from their co-workers than from their managers (see [Table 1](#)). However, although significant in some cases, the mean value differences are overall rather marginal and below 0.20 for each item; thus, managers and co-workers can be considered to communicate equal amounts of appreciation.

Replying to [RQ2](#), which asked about the importance of different reasons for appreciation, *reliability* ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 1.21$) as a personal characteristic and quality was rated as the most important reason. It was followed by *willingness to take responsibility* ($M = 5.93$, $SD = 1.17$) and *solution-oriented working* ($M = 5.91$, $SD = 1.08$). For [RQ3](#), which focused on the actual perception of appreciation, *reliability* ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 1.45$) was also the main reason for which appreciation occurred, followed by *individual performance* ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 1.49$) and *solution-oriented working* ($M = 5.46$, $SD = 1.51$). Concerning [RQ4](#), which referred to the differences between importance and perception of appreciation, the largest gaps were observed for *willingness to take responsibility* ($M_{diff} = -0.52$, $p < 0.001$), *extraordinary commitment* ($M_{diff} = -0.48$, $p < 0.001$), and *daily work effort* ($M_{diff} = -0.47$, $p < 0.001$). There is a difference between the importance ratings and the perception of actual appreciation for all reasons; importance is rated higher in all cases, indicating an overall under-appreciation. [Table 2](#)

Table 1. Receiving appreciation in the workplace from managers and co-workers

	Managers		Co-workers		Δ M_{diff}
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
I have the feeling that my ... appreciate(s) me	5.39	1.54	5.58	1.26	0.19**
My ... praise(s) me when I do my work well	5.38	1.57	5.34	1.42	-0.04
My ... emphasize(s) when I have done a good job	5.29	1.62	5.39	1.52	0.09
My ... show(s) me noticeable appreciation	5.36	1.53	5.51	1.40	0.15*

Note(s): *Italic* indicates the higher mean value for each item. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 2. Importance and perception of different reasons for appreciation in the workplace

	Importance		Perception		Δ
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M_{diff}</i>
<i>Personal characteristics and qualities</i>					
Professional competence	5.90	1.24	5.45	1.49	-0.45***
Professional experience	5.72	1.22	5.36	1.57	-0.36***
Sincerity	5.80	1.28	5.42	1.52	-0.38***
Punctuality	5.66	1.43	5.36	1.61	-0.30***
Reliability	5.96	1.21	5.63	1.45	-0.33***
Personality	5.63	1.32	5.32	1.56	-0.31***
Social competence	5.56	1.41	5.25	1.59	-0.32***
Flexibility	5.69	1.31	5.44	1.52	-0.25**
Loyalty to co-workers	5.87	1.24	5.44	1.51	-0.43***
Good mood	5.54	1.53	5.33	1.60	-0.21**
Friendly ear	5.59	1.38	5.43	1.55	-0.16
Individual performance	5.87	1.23	5.47	1.49	-0.40***
<i>Work-related behaviours</i>					
Taking over additional professional tasks	5.65	1.38	5.20	1.71	-0.44***
Taking over additional non-professional tasks	4.99	1.72	4.73	1.88	-0.25**
Extraordinary commitment	5.49	1.50	5.01	1.72	-0.48***
Daily work effort	5.80	1.20	5.33	1.55	-0.47***
Willingness to take responsibility	5.93	1.17	5.41	1.55	-0.52***
Solution-oriented working	5.91	1.08	5.46	1.51	-0.44***
Feedback	5.63	1.34	5.33	1.59	-0.30***
Team spirit	5.75	1.30	5.37	1.54	-0.38***
Loyalty to organisation	5.78	1.25	5.35	1.59	-0.43***
Contributions to organisational development	5.72	1.22	5.31	1.63	-0.41***
Contributions to organisational success	5.76	1.27	5.41	1.57	-0.35***
Willingness to learn from mistakes	5.80	1.20	5.38	1.55	-0.42***

Note(s): Italic indicates the three highest mean values for each measure. Negative values for M_{diff} indicate perceived under-appreciation. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$

Source(s): Authors' own work

shows the mean values for the importance and perception of each reason and the differences between them.

Structural equation modelling using the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012) was applied to test H1 and H2 on the associations between appreciation and OCB and to answer RQ5. The measurement model indicated sufficient standardised factor loadings of 0.60 or above for all items of an assessed construct. Reliability and convergent validity were adequate with Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.87$ and composite reliabilities ≥ 0.89 , while the average variance extracted (AVE) was above or very close to 0.50 (see Table 3). The square roots of the AVE were higher than the correlations between the constructs and the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was ≤ 0.88 , demonstrating discriminant validity (see Table 4). We used Hair et al.'s (2019) recommendations for critical values (i.e. composite reliability > 0.70 ; AVE > 0.50).

To assess model fit, Hu and Bentler's (1999) thresholds for an acceptable model fit were used (i.e. CFI > 0.90 ; TLI > 0.90 ; SRMR < 0.08 ; RMSEA < 0.06). The structural model yielded an acceptable fit ($\chi^2(246) = 501.941$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.933, TLI = 0.925, RMSEA = 0.067, 90% CI [0.058; 0.075], SRMR = 0.049) [1]. In support of H1b, appreciation from managers has a strong positive association with organisational OCB ($\beta = 0.453$, $p < 0.01$); however, managers' appreciation is not associated with individual OCB ($\beta = -0.176$, $p = 0.078$, n. s.), rejecting H1a. In line with H2a and H2b, appreciation from co-workers is positively related to both dependent variables, with a strong association regarding individual OCB ($\beta = 0.879$,

Table 3. Statistical information on the measurement model

Construct/Indicators	SL	α	CR	AVE
<i>Appreciation received from managers</i>		0.92	0.93	0.77
I have the feeling that my manager appreciates me	0.85			
My manager praises me when I do my work well	0.86			
My manager emphasizes when I have done a good job	0.89			
My manager shows me noticeable appreciation	0.91			
<i>Appreciation received from co-workers</i>		0.88	0.90	0.69
I have the feeling that my co-workers appreciate me	0.77			
My co-workers praise me when I do my work well	0.84			
My co-workers emphasize when I have done a good job	0.84			
My manager shows me noticeable appreciation	0.86			
<i>Individual level OCB</i>		0.87	0.89	0.49
I help my co-workers after they have been away from work for a while	0.72			
If co-workers have work-related problems, I am happy to take the time to help them	0.69			
I organise my time according to the wishes of my co-workers if they need more free time	0.72			
I do my best to make new co-workers feel welcome at work	0.71			
I show sincere interest in my co-workers, even in the most difficult situations	0.76			
I take time to help others who have problems at work or outside of work	0.60			
I support my co-workers in their tasks	0.74			
I share what is mine with my co-workers to make their work easier	0.69			
<i>Organisational level OCB</i>		0.90	0.91	0.57
I take part in events that are not relevant to me personally, but which serve the organisation's image	0.69			
I keep up to date with developments in my organisation	0.75			
I defend my organisation when other employees criticise it	0.82			
I am proud when I represent my organisation in public	0.83			
I suggest ideas for improving the work processes in my organisation	0.75			
I am loyal to my organisation	0.70			
I would do something to protect my organisation from problems	0.79			
I care about the image of my organisation	0.68			

Note(s): SL = standardised loadings, α = Cronbach's Alpha, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted; all standardised loadings are significant on a level of $p < 0.001$

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 4. Statistical information on the measurement model's discriminant validity

	Appreciation received from managers	Appreciation received from co-workers	Individual level OCB	Organisational level OCB
Appreciation received from managers	0.88	0.82	0.57	0.72
Appreciation received from co-workers	0.80***	0.83	0.76	0.69
Individual level OCB	0.53***	0.74***	0.70	0.74
Organisational level OCB	0.70***	0.68***	0.71***	0.76

Note(s): Values below the diagonal are the correlations between the constructs, values in the diagonal represent the square root of AVE (average variance expected), and values above the diagonal are the HTMT values (heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations). *** $p < 0.001$

Source(s): Authors' own work

$p < 0.001$) and a medium-sized association with organisational OCB ($\beta = 0.313, p < 0.05$). Replying to **RQ5**, while managers' appreciation is related to organisational OCB only, appreciation from co-workers facilitates both individual and organisational level OCB (see **Figure 1**).

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to examine employees' perception of appreciation in the workplace. Results of our online survey show that both managers and co-workers convey high levels of appreciation, with co-workers appreciating their colleagues slightly more. The most important reasons for appreciation are work-related behaviours (i.e. willingness to take responsibility, solution-oriented working) and personal characteristics and qualities (i.e. reliability). Furthermore, employees receive appreciation for similar work-related behaviours (i.e. solution-oriented working, individual performance) and personal characteristics and qualities (i.e. reliability). As the indicated importance for the reasons of appreciation exceeds the received appreciation for these reasons, under-appreciation prevails. Managerial appreciation fosters OCB on the organisational level only, while co-workers' appreciation enhances OCB on both the individual and the organisational level. These results inform communication professionals that employees' need for appreciation and the amount of appreciation received should be aligned.

Our study shows that both groups of organisational members – managers and co-workers – communicate appreciation to their subordinates and peers, respectively. This extends the scope of prior studies, which mainly focused on leaders as communicators of appreciation (Beck, 2016; Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025). As the definition of appreciation (Stocker *et al.*, 2019) and the literature on respect (Grover, 2014; van Quaquebeke and Eckloff, 2010) suggest, employees found appreciation important for both their work-related behaviours and their personal characteristics and qualities. The reasons rated as most important for appreciation were *reliability*, *willingness to take responsibility* and *solution-oriented working*; the reasons for which employees receive the most appreciation were *reliability*, *individual performance* and *solution-oriented working*. Thus, our study reveals that, in most cases, the reasons why employees wish to be appreciated are the same as the reasons why they actually receive appreciation. This adds quantitative support to previous qualitative findings (Stocker *et al.*, 2014; Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025).

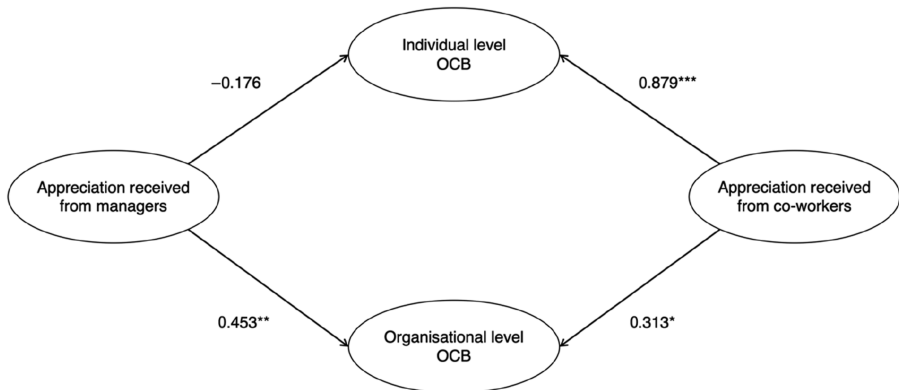


Figure 1. Standardised regression coefficients of the structural model testing the associations of receiving appreciation from managers and co-workers with individual and organisational level OCB. Note. $N = 351, \chi^2(246) = 501.941, p < 0.001, CFI = 0.933, TLI = 0.925, RMSEA = 0.067, 90\% CI [0.058; 0.075], SRMR = 0.049. ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05$. Source: Authors' own work

Furthermore, differences between the importance and the actual perception of appreciation were demonstrated. As importance ratings exceed perception ratings, under-appreciation is indicated. The most notable differences were found for the work-related behaviours *willingness to take responsibility*, *extraordinary commitment* and *daily work effort*. Such differences may potentially dampen employees' motivation to engage in voluntary efforts and put in extra work effort. In the long run, this could pose serious threats to the success and survival of an organisation. Hence, respecting employees' expectations regarding appreciation is crucial for maintaining reciprocal relationships (Blau, 1964). Despite these differences, it is worth noting that both levels of importance and perception of appreciation were considerably high, with mean values for all items not smaller than $M = 4.99$ (importance) and $M = 4.73$ (perception), respectively. This observation may be due to the composition of our sample: The vast majority of study participants have worked at their current employer for three years or longer, indicating that they are essentially satisfied with the working climate and level of appreciation there.

Our results demonstrate that appreciation from both managers and co-workers increases voluntary work behaviours. The strength of associations, however, varies; while for appreciation from managers, the correlation with OCB occurs only on the organisational level, appreciation from co-workers is related to OCB on both the organisational and the individual level. Considering that individual OCB mainly targets co-workers on the same hierarchical level (e.g. new colleagues in the team), this finding is rather unsurprising. The association between appreciation received from managers and employees' willingness to engage in additional efforts for the benefit of the entire organisation can be explained because managers are perceived as representatives of the organisation. In general, these results resonate with the motivation and engagement function attributed to internal communication in organisations (Men, 2021). In line with theoretical considerations on employees as active communicators (Andersson, 2019; Heide and Simonsson, 2011, 2021), they particularly stress the important communicative role of organisational members on all hierarchical levels. Overall, findings strengthen the idea of appreciation as a prototypical resource to strengthen internal relationships (Stranzl and Ruppel, 2025) with positive outcomes for both individuals and organisations.

This study also implies important directives for internal communication practice. Our findings are crucial for internal communication professionals to understand their responsibility and opportunities in co-creating an overall positive working climate. Such a positive climate could be established through appreciation by managers and co-workers and encourage employees to commit to voluntary efforts regarding their co-workers and their organisation. Internal communication professionals can help organisations to strategically employ appreciation, either through their own communication measures or by advising and enabling other members of their organisation. Following, we derive some important conclusions for internal communication management: (1) Both managers and co-workers are communicating appreciation and are therefore important communicators of appreciation. Thus, internal communication professionals need to address all organisational members when they aim to create a positive climate by emphasising the value of appreciation. This follows the idea of a *communicative organisation* (Heide et al., 2019) where every employee is an important voice, regardless of their position; (2) the reasons for which employees think appreciation is important and for which they receive appreciation are mostly aligned. However, employees want more appreciation than they receive, indicating under-appreciation. Accordingly, communication professionals have to work on establishing an *architecture of listening* (Macnamara, 2016, 2024) within their organisation to accurately assess employees' needs and expectations and to identify appropriate opportunities to communicate appreciation and (3) appreciation from managers and appreciation from co-workers are linked to different outcomes. Communication professionals need to consider these influences; depending on the goals and objectives, they may either produce messages that enable managers to express appreciation to their subordinates, promote appreciative communication among employees on

the same hierarchical level or set up communication training programmes for both of these internal stakeholder groups.

Our study demonstrates that employees want and perceive appreciation for various distinct reasons, which are mainly unrelated, as additionally conducted exploratory factor analyses failed to indicate a coherent pattern of loadings across both scales. Available scales measuring appreciation (e.g. [Einwiller et al., 2021](#); [Jacobshagen et al., 2008](#); [Kranabetter and Niessen, 2019](#); [Rafferty and Griffin, 2004](#)) miss to capture and incorporate these specific reasons, treating appreciation as a reflective concept instead. Thus, to better gauge the concept of appreciation, formative scales should be developed (cf. [Bollen and Lennox, 1991](#)). As our sample only addressed employees from Germany, future research may take a comparative perspective and examine cultural influences on the communication of appreciation. Furthermore, appreciation and work efforts form a cycle with employees working hard, receiving appreciation for this work, continuing or even increasing their work efforts and consequently receiving further appreciation from both managers and co-workers. However, it remains unclear how different patterns of appreciation and work effort affect future efforts, such as (1) continuous appreciation for similar efforts, (2) decreasing appreciation for similar efforts, (3) continuous appreciation for increased efforts and (4) increasing appreciation for increased efforts. In this context, it may also be worthwhile to focus on appreciation communicated in the reverse direction, i.e. from employees to their managers. From a methodological standpoint, cross-sectional survey studies like ours may suffer from retrospection bias and cannot identify causal relationships between appreciation and its potential antecedents and consequences. Thus, further research on appreciation in the workplace could utilise longitudinal and/or experimental designs.

Overall, although the surveyed sample is not representative and limited to the German context, our work offers important contributions to strategic communication theory and practice. By identifying that importance and perception of appreciation differ, we show that, at least in our sample, under-appreciation prevails in the workplace. Moreover, we demonstrate varying effects on employee behaviour depending on whether appreciation is communicated by managers or co-workers. Building on these findings, we eventually provide guidance for internal communication professionals.

Note

1. Model fit indices of structural model and measurement model were identical, indicating that the arrows in the structural model could be reversed, i.e. OCB predicting appreciation (and not the other way around, as shown here).

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