

Transforming Episodic Individual and Collective Employee Gratitude into Persistent Gratitude: Challenges and Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Gratitude is a universally experienced cognitive-affective phenomenon, which is considered to have significant mental and physical health benefits at the workplace. Episodic gratitude is a momentary and transient feeling that people experience in response to kindness, favor, or benefit. Employees can experience episodic gratitude at individual and collective (group) levels in response to various organizational policies and practices. Scholars suggest that if such episodic gratitude is experienced persistently by the employees, it can become part of the organizational essence or character at the institutional level. The present paper suggests while the experience of episodic gratitude may be commonplace at the individual level and possibly more difficult at the collective level, transforming such transient gratitude into a persistent experience which becomes embedded in the organizational character can be quite challenging. The article focuses on policies and practices that arise episodic individual and collective employee gratitude; the barriers and challenges are discussed a). hinder attempts to engender employee gratitude at episodic levels, and b). thwart efforts to transform episodic (individual and collective) gratitude into a persistent experience which becomes embedded in the organizational character. The paper also discusses strategies to deal with such challenges. A model of such issues is also presented which can inform future research and practice.



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INTRODUCTION

The future of work is employee well-being (Meister, 2021), which is a timely proclamation as well-being at work requires special attention. A global well-being report suggests that burnout levels are rising; 56% of the employees are struggling at work, 9% are actively suffering, and only 24% believe that their organization actually cares about their well-being (Gallup, 2024). The newest work cohort (GenZ), appears to have more mental health concerns than prior generations. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), 91% of GenZ reported experiencing physical and psychological symptoms due to stress, 70% say their mental health needs the most attention or improvement right now (Bethune, 2019), 68% are stressed at work (O'Boyle, 2021), 72% are thinking of quitting their job (Smith, 2023). Majority of Gen Z and millennials want their employer to take an active role in helping improve employee well-being. It is not just from the employee standpoint that well-being needs attention. Employee well-being related problems cost organizations hundreds of billions of dollars every year in sick leaves, medical costs and lost productivity (Gallup, 2024a). Main contributors to deterioration in employee well-being are toxic emotions, stress and burnout.

Scholarly literature suggests various personal (employee-level) and institutional strategies and interventions to bolster employee well-being. The present paper focuses on policies and

practices which invoke employee gratitude, as it is a valuable psychological, emotional and social coping resource to deal to improve worker well-being. Gratitude can simply be defined as being conscious of and thankful for the good things in life (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). Gratitude is also linked with a variety of psychological, emotional and physical well-being indicators (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Froh et al., 2014; Froh et al., 2011). Different theories are deployed to explain the positive effect of gratitude on well-being including coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and broaden and build theory of emotions (Fredrickson, 2001). Gratitude helps people develop healthy and positive coping styles to deal with issues, leads to positive thoughts and emotions, builds enduring psychological resources, reduces negative emotions, and creates positive upwards spirals (Fredrickson, 2004; Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998).

Emmons (2003) suggest that gratitude can improve employee wellbeing and lower toxic emotions in the workplace. In their seminal article, Fehr, Fulmer, Awtrey, and Miller (2017) introduced a multilevel framework for gratitude in organizations. The authors impressed upon the need to build a grateful organization at various levels of analysis, to cultivate and improve employee gratitude at an episodic level, persistent and collective level; “By making gratitude a fundamental part of the experience, leaders and managers can leverage the benefits of gratitude for employees and the organization as a whole” (p. 376). Di Fabio, Palazzeschi, and Bucci (2017) also recommend that gratitude should be cultivated at the individual, relational and organizational levels as it can enhance employee well-being, individual and organizational performance, build positive relationships, and create healthy organizations.

People are grateful when they feel that they have received a valuable gift/favor/blessing/goodness and the provider (or benefactor) of favor or good is someone or something else (Emmons, 2016). People can feel grateful to a person, a supernatural being, nature (grateful for trees, a gentle breeze), for abstract concepts like good fortune, kindness, the good intention of the benefactor, etc., In employment contexts, when employers are seen as kind, caring, and compassionate, it can raise gratitude among employees. For instance, Fehr et al. (2017) suggest employee appreciation programs and developmental feedback can give rise to employee gratitude; However, these events in organizational life may create episodic (and transient) rather than persistent gratitude. The question is, how can episodic gratitude be converted into generalized persistent gratitude and be sustained in a collective manner, which permeates the organization and becomes embedded in the institutional character.

TRANSFORMING EPISODIC INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE GRATITUDE INTO PERSISTENT EMPLOYEE GRATITUDE: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

Table 1: Gratitude in Organizations based on Fehr et al. (2017)

Type of gratitude experienced by employees	Explanation
Episodic gratitude	A momentary feeling (emotional state) of gratitude which is experienced by an employee.
Collective gratitude	Gratitude experienced collectively by members of the organization
Persistent gratitude	Durable and long-term feelings of gratitude, experienced more frequently and intensely by an employee
Institutional gratitude	Gratitude becomes embedded in institutional essence and character.

Fehr et al. (2017) suggest that organizational policies and practices can arouse episodic gratitude (a momentary, transient feeling) among individual employees and at the collective (group, team) level. They further argue that employee appreciation programs and developmental feedback can give rise to employee gratitude; However, these events may create an episodic (and transient) rather than persistent gratitude. When episodic gratitude becomes a frequent experience for employees, it can transform into persistent gratitude. Collective persistent gratitude can be embedded within the durable institutional character and essence. This paper argues that while it is relatively easy and possibly commonplace to engender episodic gratitude among employees at the individual level, it is slightly more complex to transform individual episodic gratitude into collective gratitude. Moreover, converting episodic gratitude into persistent gratitude at both levels (individual and collective) is even more challenging. Finally, embedding gratitude at an institutional level, so that it becomes a stable and permanent character of the organization is possibly most challenging. The following sections focus on how episodic gratitude can be transformed into persistent gratitude. The challenges which may hinder the arousal of episodic, collective and persistent gratitude are mentioned. The present paper also discusses some strategies to deal with such challenges as well. A framework of these issues presented along with recommendations for future research.

Policies and practice that arouse employee gratitude

Gratitude can be aroused in employees by the nature of work, gratitude interventions (GIs), leadership, culture and the Institution itself. The paper presents the gratitude antecedents with a discussion on how employee gratitude at the individual level be transformed into persistent gratitude within the collective and institutional context.

The nature of work

Gratitude can be experienced for doing something which is intrinsically rewarding and meaningful, without expectation of an extrinsic reward from someone else (Carr, Morgan, & Gulliford, 2015). The job characteristics model (JCM) (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) suggests that certain inherent features of the job are instrumental in contributing to employee satisfaction. Job characteristics e.g., an employees' task identity, skill variety and significance, and level of autonomy have an impact on the meaningfulness of the work. Such meaningful work can be a primary antecedent of employee gratitude (Cain et al., 2019; Youssef-Morgan, van Zyl, & Ahrens, 2022).

Collective and Institutional context: challenges and strategies for persistent gratitude

The experience of meaningful work is a highly subjective and personalized phenomenon, but it can also be experienced at collective levels (although possibly not as persistently). If the meaningful work involves working in teams and groups then it can also be experienced as a shared and collective emotion (Fehr et al., 2017). Prosocial acts from others such as sharing, helping, comforting and supporting behaviors arouse gratitude (Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2019). Gratitude is a gift that keeps on giving, and such grateful people create more gratitude by exhibiting more prosocial behaviors towards other people e.g., kindness, care, generosity, empathy, support and helpfulness, and social support (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2020; Grant & Gino, 2010; Ma, Tunney, & Ferguson, 2017; Sawyer et al., 2022). When employees work in teams and exhibit supportive, kind, caring, empathic and generous behaviors towards each other, gratitude can emerge as a shared and collective emotion. If employees are provided with organizational support to perform meaningful work on a persistent basis, they can also feel grateful to the institution. If the employees perceive that the organization has provided them with meaningful work, the organization can become the target of such employee gratitude

(Guzzo, Wang, & Abbott, 2020; Madrigal, 2020).

The work itself is quite robust in invoking persistent gratitude among employees. However, in the long term, work may become repetitive and tedious, causing the meaning attached to it to dissipate. People can become disillusioned with their work, which they once found meaningful, and must be constantly challenged to keep them in a state of flow (Chickzenthmihalyi, 1990). Employees must be consulted by managers regularly to discuss their work content and find ways to enrich their jobs to sustain the sense of meaning in their work. Sustaining work-related collective gratitude is possible through effective collaboration, communication, and teamwork. Appreciation programs based on collective rather than individual effort, can encourage supportive and helping behaviors among groups.

Gratitude Interventions

Gratitude interventions (GIs) include simple activities such as writing gratitude journals/lists, gratitude letters, and verbal expressions. GIs stimulate a state of gratitude among people by asking them to focus on blessings and positive aspects of life (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). These blessings are simple things to be grateful for in life that are often taken for granted. While GI studies in the workplace are scarce, some researchers have successfully deployed GIs to arouse employee gratitude (Komase et al., 2021; Locklear et al., 2021).

Collective and Institutional context: challenges and strategies for persistent gratitude

GIs typically occur for a few weeks and thus usually create short-term and episodic feelings of gratitude in individuals. Long-term gratitude may become tedious and lead to gratitude fatigue, akin to overdosing in medicine. Gratitude fatigue can render gratitude-eliciting stimuli a neutral or negative experience (Dickens, 2019). To address this issue, GIs can be made a regular feature of the organization to instil persistent gratitude by employing various methods such as intermittent gratitude interventions (2 to 3 times a year) and using different methods to arouse gratitude, such as gratitude mobile applications, trainings, and recreational trips with yoga and meditation (Ivtzan & Papantoniou, 2014).

Gratitude interventions, such as gratitude journaling and diaries, are very subjective and personal in nature and thus invoke gratitude in individuals. However, there are certain GIs that can increase collective gratitude among members of the organization. These include expressing appreciation to people (simple thank-you) and writing letters of appreciation and gratitude. Employees' helping and supportive behaviors toward each other, along with expressions of gratitude at work, can make people feel socially valued and increase prosocial behaviors, thereby creating more gratitude (Grant & Gino, 2010). This can make the experience of gratitude a more durable and persistent phenomenon.

Another issue with GIs is that some people exhibit high levels of certain personality traits, such as narcissism, cynicism, materialism (Solom et al., 2017), and entitlement (McCullough et al., 2001), which make them comparatively more cynical and less grateful. Cynicism is a negative appraisal of people's nature and the conviction that most human actions are motivated by self-interest (Stavrova & Ehlebracht, 2019). Narcissism is defined as self-centeredness, a sense of entitlement, and lack of empathy, and tendency to demand special privileges and treatment (McAleer, 2012). These issues can be addressed with intermittent trainings on mindfulness, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence (Ivtzan & Papantoniou, 2014). Employees can also be trained in humility as "humility may be the rich soil in which gratitude can grow" (Solom, Watkins, McCurrach, & Scheibe, 2017, p. 7).

Leadership and gratitude

Research has shown that supervisors, managers, and leaders are valuable antecedents to individual and collective employee gratitude. In particular, family-supportive supervisor behavior (Qing et al., 2021), benevolent leadership (Huang, 2022), paternalistic leadership, servant leadership (Sun et al., 2019), and expressions of gratitude by supervisors/leaders, as well as informal managerial recognition (Beck, 2016), are linked with the rise of gratitude among employees. The psychological mechanisms that arise gratitude among employees are the perceived kindness, support, benevolence, and selflessness of the authority figure.

Collective and Institutional context: challenges and strategies for persistent gratitude

Managers and leaders not only influence individuals but can also engender gratitude among teams, departments, and entire organizations through their personality and policies. The first challenge for the arousal of persistent gratitude is that managers/supervisors may be replaced by others who adopt a more authoritarian leadership style. Also, since a leader's influence is partly based on their personality, a new leader may not have the same influence on people. Managers who are authoritarian, withhold information, and are seen by employees as unfair, lacking personal relationships, insincere, or rewarding undeserving employees, can lower employee gratitude.

Supervisors must be trained to manage employees in a fair, impartial, and personalized manner. Managers who provide sincere, specific, and timely developmental feedback and guidance, personalized care and attention, arouse higher levels of employee gratitude. Drawing on the social distance theory of power, Anicich, Lee, and Liu (2021) showed that high-power people express less gratitude because they feel more entitled to benefits and favors. Managers must become role models for behaviors they wish to instill in employees and express regular appreciation and gratitude to their employees. 65% of employees do not receive even informal recognition, such as a simple thank-you or good job, from their managers during an entire year (Gallup, 2022). Leaders should build an optimized, recognition-rich environment where employees are simply appreciated by their managers or colleagues every 7-10 days (Gallup, 2024a). A simple "thank you" and informal appreciation can easily invoke gratitude among employees (Grant & Gino, 2010), which can encourage them to also express recognition and gratitude to each other on a consistent basis.

Culture and gratitude

If gratitude becomes a stable feature of the organizational culture, it can be permanently embedded at the collective and institutional levels. Culture is the collection of underlying shared beliefs, values and ways of interacting and behaving that formulate the unique psychological and social environment of the organization (Marker, 2009). Schein (1983) presented a seminal model of organizational culture, divided into Artifacts, Espoused Values and Basis Assumptions (see figure 1). Artifacts are the visible manifestations of the organization's visual culture, including buildings, offices, parking spaces, logos, company reports and newsletters, language and jargon, technology, products, dress code, behavioral displays, rites, and ceremonies, and stories circulating within the organization. Values are the "guiding principles" of the organization that most modern organizations encourage their employees to adhere to. They are publicly displayed on organizational walls, reports, and websites, and considerable investment goes into embedding them within the organization. Organizational policies and investment to make "gratitude" part of the organizational values can be very useful toward this goal. Basic assumptions are the deeply held, non-confrontable, non-negotiable, taken-for-granted, time-honored, and tested values and beliefs of a culture (More on this in the next section under institutional gratitude).

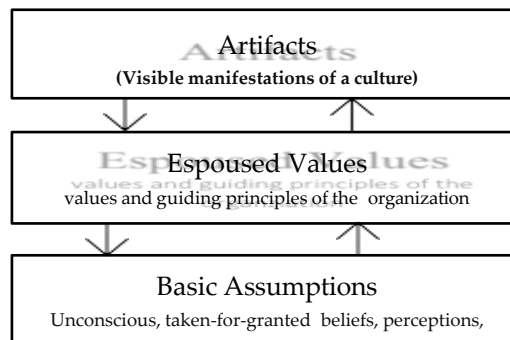


Figure 1: Schein's (1983) model of Culture

Collective and Institutional context: challenges and strategies for persistent gratitude

A gratitude culture can engender individual employee gratitude, and help invoke and sustain collective and persistent gratitude in the organization. Since Positive emotions can have social origins and are contagious (Fredrickson, 2004; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993), gratitude can spread in and become part of the cultural fabric of the organization. Also, there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between collective and individual gratitude.

The first challenge is the gap between espoused values (what organizations claim to be their cherished values) and values that are actually practiced throughout the organization. A recent report in the MIT Sloan Management Review showed that corporate values do not matter to employees. In 562 top American corporations, no correlation was found between an organization's officially stated/espoused values and the culture of the organization (Sull et al., 2020). The existence of informal groups, alliances, malicious exchanges among co-workers, and influential employees can spread cynicism, a sense of entitlement, and dissatisfaction (Chiaburu, Peng, Oh, Banks, & Lomeli, 2013). This can foil the organizational attempts to cultivate gratitude at a collective level and make it a part of the organizational values. When employees see themselves as in-group and the organization as the outgroup, they can resist displaying deviant, resistant, and recalcitrant behaviors to oppose organizational policies.

In most organizations, values are ornamental, proudly displayed on the website, in company communications, and on the office walls. Organizations can deploy a consistent and concerted effort to make gratitude a non-negotiable value. Values should be actionable, distinctive, linked to results, and made part of the performance appraisal to be embedded into the culture (Sull et al., 2020). The value-congruence theory suggests that employees are more likely to respond positively to organizational ideals if they believe their own values are congruent with the ones suggested by the company (Amos & Weatherington, 2008). The Japanese management philosophy Kaizen or continuous improvement is mostly seen as employees working in groups to improve product quality and lower costs. However, Kaizen as a "management philosophy" also formulates the foundations underlying the values and culture of organizations (Suárez- Barraza, Ramis-Pujol, & Kerbache, 2011). Value-Kaizen teams can meet once every quarter to examine the state of employee value-congruence, the barriers to value-congruence, and what can be done to embed gratitude at the collective level. The culture of supporting colleagues, expressing gratitude through deeds and actions, and mindful gratitude can be reinforced through regular trainings, group discussions, and various rituals and ceremonies.

Leaders must act as role models to instill any value, and gratitude is no different. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) suggests that people will imitate the behaviors of their more powerful role models. Ethical and moral leadership is linked with a myriad of positive employee values and behaviors (Bao & Li, 2019; Guo, 2022). Recently, Jeff Bezos paid up to \$5000 to his employees to quit the organization if they were dissatisfied with

their career at the company. Dubbed the "pay to quit" program, Bezos wanted a more "dedicated and enthusiastic workforce," instead of people who were unhappy, resentful, or possibly ungrateful with their employment. If gratitude is to become part of the organizational culture, character, and climate, then leaders must display the attitudes and behaviors they wish their employees to emulate.

Institutional context and gratitude

If gratitude becomes embedded in the character of the organization, people can be grateful without needing frequent acts of benevolence to engender gratitude. Sull et al. (2020) argue that in order for organizational values to be institutionally embedded, they should capture its unique identity and its enduring essence. Schein (1983) calls such enduring and distinctive essence of the organization its basic assumptions or unconscious beliefs. Basic assumptions ultimately guide conscious values and behaviors. Can gratitude be embedded in the organizational essence to the point that employees become grateful for having an opportunity just to be a part of it?

The institutional context: challenges and strategies for persistent gratitude

There are fundamental challenges that must be addressed in order to make gratitude a part of the institutional character. People experience gratitude as a four-step process: a) A person receives a valuable gift, blessing, or favor from someone else. b) The favor is seen as effort-intensive and costly. c) The effort is based on a genuine intention to benefit the person. d) The effort is seen as altruistically intended, not based on a transactional, quid-pro-quo relationship, and has no ulterior motives that benefit the benefactor (McCullough et al., 2001). Can employees think of their organizations as kind benefactors who intend to benefit them? It is possible because employees can perceive their organizations as living entities, having a motive, purpose, and intent; "People project upon organizations human qualities and then relate to them as if the organizations did in fact have human qualities" (Levinson, 1965, p. 377). Thus, organizations can be perceived by their employees as ruthless, manipulative, generous, kind, or benevolent, etc. (Ashforth, Schinoff, & Brickson, 2018).

Some research suggests that HRM practices can be seen as a manifestation of the organization's manipulative or benevolent intent towards the employee (Nishii et al., 2008). When the organization initiates certain HRM practices, employees try to interpret the organizational intention behind enacting such HR practices. If employees feel that HRM practices were enacted by the organization to care for them, support their performance, and improve their well-being, such interpretations are called Benevolent HRM attributions. Research has shown that Benevolent HRM attributions can engender improved levels of consistent gratitude among employees (Hameed, Khwaja, & Zaman, 2023).

Gratitude Engendering Phenomena	The Experiential Context of Gratitude		Barriers and Challenges to Persistent Gratitude	Strategies to Transform Episodic Gratitude into Persistent Gratitude
	Individual	Collective		
The Nature of work	Yes	Yes, if teams and groups support each other in performing meaningful work.	People can become illusioned with work overtime, work may become tedious and repetitive.	The content of employee work must be enriched overtime to sustain meaning.
Gratitude Trainings and Intervention	Yes	Yes, if gratitude interventions involve sharing, supporting encouraging each other.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GIs are designed to generate episodic gratitude. - Individual personality traits e.g., trait entitlement, cynicism can act as barriers to episodic and collective gratitude and consequently, persistent gratitude 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intermittent gratitude interventions (2 to 3 times a year), using different methods to arouse gratitude e.g., gratitude mobile applications, trainings, recreational trips with yoga and meditation. - Training people in humility and self-awareness can reduce cynicism and entitlement.
Leadership/Supervision Style	Yes	Yes, if leaders generate a positive collective buzz and are a source for collective performance, bonding and positive team spirit.	Supervisors/managers may be replaced with people who have authoritarian styles, managers who withhold information and are seen by employees as unfair, lacking personal relationships and insincere.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training managers to become ethical and moral leaders who empower and value employees and build an optimized employee appreciation and recognition-rich environment. - Training managers to provide consistent, developmental and encouraging feedback to employees.
Culture	Yes	Yes, by building a gratitude culture and making gratitude a core organizational value.	Employee culture and values are usually ornamental without being actually practiced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building a culture and value system that is value congruent, actionable, distinctive, linked to results. - Making gratitude a part of employee appraisal and performance management

Institution (organizational promise to provide employment that contributes meaningfully to the society, a promise of organizational care and generosity)	Yes, If the above gratitude engendering phenomena is consistently experienced	Yes, If the above gratitude engendering phenomena is consistently experienced	Boundary Condition For Gratitude: Psychological Contract Employees may feel “entitled” to the organization’s kindness and benevolence, which can deteriorate gratitude.	Optimizing employer-employee psychological contracts.
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Challenge: Psychological Contract and transactional nature of employer-employee relationship

The nature of the employer-employee relationship is quite transactional in nature, where employees offer their services to the organization in exchange for pay and rewards. Psychological contract theory provides the boundary conditions within which employee gratitude can arise, as it explains how employer and employee relationship operate at the psychological level. The psychological contract is different from the legal employment contract, as it explains the mutual expectations that arise between employers and employees (Rousseau, 1995). Rousseau (1995) suggests that the psychological contract between the employer and employee can be transactional or relational. When employers and employees view their relationship as transactional, it is based on an economic exchange. However, a relational employer-employee contract involves both economic and socioemotional aspects of the employment relationship. In relational contracts, the organization provides security, development, good treatment, and respect to the employee, whereas the employee responds with commitment, loyalty, organizational citizenship behaviors, and possibly gratitude. Thus, a relational psychological contract which makes employees believe that their employers are kind and caring can make them grateful to the organization.

However, even relational employment contracts are problematic because the rise of gratitude among employees (according to gratitude theory) requires employees to perceive that the employer’s efforts towards them are altruistically intended, not based on a transactional relationship, and bearing no ulterior motives that benefit the employer. Organizational efforts to engender persistent gratitude among employees may be thwarted when the employee continues to view the relationship as transactional. Employees innately know that organizational praise, rewards, and kindness are temporary and conditional to their performance. Employees also understand that employers treat them well because it is beneficial for the bottom line and growth of the company. Persistent gratitude can only arise when the kind treatment of employers is seen as unconditional, without employees thinking that the employer also benefits from the kindness bestowed upon them.

Convincing employees that the employer is a kind benefactor, and fostering persistent employee gratitude, is especially challenging in a shrinking economy. The current wave of layoffs in tech companies, particularly at "Google," underscores this challenge. Since 2009, Google has consistently been recognized with numerous "best company to work for" awards in the United States¹. Google’s unparalleled workplace perks, such as free gyms, onsite doctors, laundry facilities, complimentary restaurants and coffee shops, sleeping pods, and sports facilities, along with its quirky organizational design and values promoting creativity, excellence, and inclusivity, have often been lauded. Once heralded

as the premier employer in the US and an archetype of a benevolent and caring organizational culture, Google recently terminated 12,000 employees via email in a single day². When such examples become commonplace, it is easy for employees to perceive that the employer views their relationship as relational only as long as it is convenient.

Optimizing the psychological contract and nature of employer-employee expectations

Convincing employees that their employer genuinely wants to bestow them with favors and kindness without expecting anything in return is challenging. Employers often make extravagant promises to employees about their identity, values, and the meaning of employment, portraying the organization as more altruistic and benevolent than it truly is. When employers fail to fulfil these obligations and promises adequately, the psychological contract between employee and employer is breached (Rousseau, 1995). Instead of feeling grateful, employees may experience disappointment when their expectations are not met, as explained by the expectancy disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980). To foster persistent gratitude among employees, the nature of employer-employee expectations and responsibilities must be carefully optimized.

Google's issues began before downsizing and stem from the lofty expectations it instilled in its employees. In 2020, a Financial Times article highlighted Google's struggle with widespread unrest, including employees spying on one another, rebelling against organizational policies, engaging in trolling and name-calling, and sabotaging plans (Waters, 2020). The article noted, "The freedom given to workers has turned into a liability as tension between management and staff has grown." The dissatisfaction, rebellion, and unrest at what was once considered the most rewarding and generous organization in the world shows that in matters of gratitude, promising people more does not necessarily yield better results. Wealthier and more privileged societies are not inherently more grateful than impoverished ones (Tong et al., 2021). At the heart of gratitude lies the notion of undeserved merit, where individuals receive something for which they did nothing to warrant (Emmons, 2003). Grateful individuals acknowledge that they did nothing special to deserve a gift or benefit (Bertocci & Millard, 1963).

Simply being associated with an organization that offers more privileges and perks does not necessarily invoke gratitude among employees. Instead, employees may come to view these privileges as rights or entitlements, which do not elicit feelings of gratitude. While gratitude arises from the recognition of undeserved benefits, entitlement emerges from the belief that one is owed special privileges and treatment, which diminishes gratitude (Solom et al., 2017). Peterson and Seligman (2004) suggest that when employers fulfill their obligations, it does not engender gratitude; instead, employees may feel grateful when they are praised, receive unexpected benefits and feel valued. How often can regular benefits and perks be considered "unexpected" before employees start taking them for granted.

This paper does not suggest that organizations should roll back employee freedom, empowerment or perks. The empowerment/perks contemporary organizations offer are commendable and more desirable than the authoritarian and despotic management styles based on classical school principles. Weiner (1985) suggests that for gratitude to arise, the beneficial act needs to be seen by the beneficiary as solely benefiting them, instead of being used as a device to enhance the reputation of the benefactor. Even concepts like sustainability, green HRM, and corporate social responsibility drives are known to enhance the reputation of organizations. The current societal zeitgeist requires organizations, either by law or social pressures (especially online reviews), to adhere to such practices. However, to ensure persistent gratitude that becomes embedded on an institutional level, future scholarly research must address the following questions regarding the psychological contract between employer and employee:

1. What is the nature of expectations employees have from their employers and to what

extent can employers persistently meet and exceed those expectations?

2. How can an optimal mix of employee-employer expectations be achieved to sustain persistent and institutional gratitude in the organization? How can employee feelings of entitlement be reduced and feelings of organizational benevolence and kindness be instilled?

3. What kind of organizations have more grateful employees: organizations that promise less and deliver more, or organizations that promise more and try to deliver more?

4. What makes employees in generous organizations ungrateful?

CONCLUSION

Gratitude can be experienced by employees as an episodic (individual and collective transient feeling of gratitude), or persistent (a durable phenomena). This paper delves into the transformation of gratitude from a transient experience into a persistent phenomenon embedded in the organization's essence. The framework outlines various challenges and strategies associated with fostering persistent gratitude among employees. It acknowledges the importance of individual interventions, such as gratitude trainings, as well as collective efforts, such as creating a gratitude culture and effective leadership practices. Additionally, it addresses the role of the organizational context, including the psychological contract between employers and employees, in shaping gratitude experiences.

The paper emphasizes the need to optimize the nature of employee expectations and employer policies to sustain persistent gratitude. It warns against the pitfalls of overpromising and entitlement, suggesting that genuine acts of kindness and benevolence are essential for cultivating gratitude. Furthermore, it calls for future research to explore the complexities of the employer-employee relationship and its impact on gratitude in organizations. In conclusion, the framework presented in the paper offers valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of gratitude within organizational settings. By addressing the challenges and nuances associated with fostering persistent gratitude, organizations can create environments that promote employee well-being, engagement, and success.

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