

# **The role of gratitude in the workplace and its relationship with job satisfaction**

*How do written, spoken and no gratitude differ in their effect on job satisfaction among employees and which communicative form would influence job satisfaction most?*



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## **Abstract**

This experimental study investigated the relationship between spoken, written, and no gratitude and employee job satisfaction. By means of an online experiment, the researchers created three participant groups of people with working experience in the Netherlands. All participants had to perform a task where they were asked to match a flag of a country or continent to its belonging country or continent. After the task, the three groups received different forms of gratitude for their effort: one group received spoken gratitude (thank you for your participation), the other group received written gratitude (thank you for your participation), and the control group did not receive a thank you message. Finally, all groups had to answer one question in a questionnaire in Qualtrics about the enjoyability of the task. The idea was to check whether the different forms of gratitude caused differences in the degree of task/job satisfaction experienced by the participants. The results indicated that the group that received spoken gratitude reported significantly higher task enjoyment than the group that received written gratitude. However, no significant difference was found between whether a group received gratitude for their work (either spoken or written gratitude) or no gratitude. The results of this study could lend some tentative support for the idea that spoken gratitude might be preferred in the workplace over written gratitude. HR managers could use these finding wisely when creating new gratitude interventions in institutional settings.

*Key words: spoken gratitude, written gratitude, no gratitude, employee job satisfaction, politeness theory, markedness, well-being.*

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## **\Theoretical background**

In contrast with other mammals and different animal species, humans have a very complex culture, cooperation, and communication system. We are complicated social animals and we need to cooperate with each other for our survival: to distribute goods, to assist each other with everyday tasks and for psychological well-being (Johnson & Norem-Hebeisen, 1977). A study by Boyd and Richerson (2009) explained that a few million years back in time humans used to be like other social beings like some sorts of animals. However, human's cooperation scale has evolved dramatically over time compared to other primates. Namely, humans created a shared moral system of what is right and wrong that is regulated by strict laws and penalties. Furthermore, they argued that human psychology has changed over time and became the basis for bigger and more cooperative societies that define modern humans nowadays. This implies that people are interdependent from each other which means that good communication is necessary to reach for mutual understanding of how things are organized, both in social life as in organizational settings (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 297).

Thus, it can be inferred that human cooperation is paramount for our psychological well-being. Therefore, to reach for cooperativeness, people need to build social relationships for which social rules of conduct help us to also maintain these relationships. Politeness strategies are a good example of social rules of how to behave with the aim to cooperate. In the book "Politeness, Some Universals in Language Use" by Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness is given the following description on what it is for: "positive politeness is redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants (or the actions/acquisitions/values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable". The book described the notion of face as the wants and desires of people that can be both protecting the positive or the negative face.

A study by Ryabova (2015) investigated different politeness strategies in everyday communication. One of these types is positive politeness that is concerned with the need for people to feel included and with social approval. Being polite will also lessen the probability that we will offend others, which in turn, is in our favor due to the need for social acceptance.

A very important politeness strategy is expressing gratitude and can either be expressed explicitly or implicitly. Gratitude can occur explicitly, for instance when someone either verbally, in a written or spoken form, or non-verbally such as smiling, nodding head, or using a hand gesture identifies and thus acknowledges the kindness of someone else. In some cases,

explicit gratitude occurs when someone's contribution is not necessarily expected or seen as a responsibility (Floyd, Rossi, Baranova, Blythe, Dingemanse, Kendrick, Zinken & Enfield; 2018). On the other hand, implicit gratitude is most common and occurs when someone is expected to do something that is seen as a reciprocal fulfillment of certain rights and duties in society. In this case, no explicit acknowledgement of gratitude is expected as the global norm tells us that reciprocal fulfillment belongs to someone's responsibilities. The simple act of saying 'thank you' to someone to recognize a certain favor that one received and evaluated as something kind or putting the word 'please' at the end of a request to demonstrate politeness are omnipresent phrases in everyday communication. Furthermore, Floyd et al. (2018) indicate that "social reciprocity in everyday life relies on tacit understandings of rights and duties surrounding mutual assistance and collaboration".

Adler and Fagley (2005, p.81) have defined gratitude as "acknowledging the value and meaning of something—an event, a person, a behavior, an object—and feeling a positive emotional connection to it". Given that this study focuses on the explicit function of gratitude that people use to verbally communicate their gratefulness to each other, the simple definition 'thank you' is sufficient here.

As was said that gratitude relates to people's well-being, it is important to get into more detail on how these variables are related to each other. Several studies have been focusing on this relationship and tried to define how gratitude can favor one's state of well-being. Emmons & McCullough (2003) posited that gratitude is an emotion that can positively relate to well-being and Algoe, Haidt and Gable (2008) concluded that gratitude can promote and maintain relationships, which, as mentioned earlier, are necessary for human survival and thus an important contributor to well-being. Wood, Froh & Geraghty (2010) explained how gratitude could contribute towards one's well-being in life. In general, Wood et al. (2010) viewed gratitude as a higher order life orientation that could decrease depression. They paid attention to the interpersonal facet of gratitude that applies the idea of experienced gratefulness being dependent on someone else's actions that could even be at the expense of well-being. They concluded that if someone receives gratitude for something, he or she has done for someone else, makes the person in question feel better. Hereby, they resolved an inconsistency in the literature on how gratitude and well-being are related to each other.

Until now, most research on gratitude has focused on its functions in a casual or non-institutional setting in which the role of gratitude is personal and informal. However, even though limited consideration has been given to the role of gratitude in organizations and its influence on job satisfaction, there is an increase in interest towards gratitude expressions in institutional settings. The links between gratitude at work and positive emotions are further explained in the paragraph below.

To elaborate, it could well be that institutional interventions of gratitude also positively effect well-being among employees. According to Kašpárkováa, Vaculíka, Procházkaa and Chaufeli (2018), job satisfaction, together with employee engagement, is a part of work-related well-being and in their study, they aimed to investigate how employee well-being was related to employee performance. Kašpárkováa et al. (2018) used the following definition of job satisfaction: “an evaluative description of job conditions or characteristics” (Christian, Garza & Slaughter, 2011, p. 97). A study by Di Fabio, Palazzeschi & Bucci (2017) also concluded that institutional gratitude positively contributes to workers’ well-being by increasing it. As a result, for our study, by knowing that job satisfaction is a dimension of institutional well-being and thus already found to be related to gratitude, an interesting research example of gratitude in the workplace by Waters (2012) was found. That study focused on how gratitude could contribute as a predictor of job satisfaction. This research by Waters (2012) focused on gratitude expressions. It was explained that gratitude could occur in different forms such as an inclination to be grateful in general. Most importantly, she explained that institutionalized gratitude or formal gratitude could impact employee job satisfaction directly. Another study by Cameron (2012) described institutional gratitude as “gratitude that is culturally embedded within the organization, through its people, policies and practices, such that thankfulness and appreciation are customary features of daily work life”. Cameron (2012) concluded that workplaces that provide opportunities through which its people can express and receive virtuous behaviors such as gratitude that are generally seen as honorable, are more likely to cherish but also further stimulate employee well-being.

Employee well-being is not merely beneficial for the employees’ state of mind and their feelings, but also contributes to the decrease in lost productivity caused by depressions and insurance claims (Keyes, Hysom & Lupo, 2000). Moreover, employee well-being fosters the process of making companies more effective producers of profit as research by Cameron (2012) suggested.

A grateful culture at work might have a positive influence on employees' experienced job satisfaction, even though an employee might not actually experience direct gratitude communicated by a colleague themselves (Cameron, 2012). Cameron (2012) explained that a company culture where any gratitude intervention is included as policy can already be experienced as positive, as it allows employees to feel that their work is valued upon. Waters (2012) showed in her article that state and institutional gratitude unambiguously predict job satisfaction but what remains unknown is what made these gratitude messages influence job satisfaction. Still, when institutional gratitude is looked closer at, it is unidentified whether spoken institutional gratitude has a different impact on an individual's experienced job satisfaction compared to written institutional gratitude. This is a first indication of a gap in the literature on what form, spoken or written, gratitude takes can account for a difference in how the person to whom the gratitude message is communicated experiences this form of kindness differently. Also, these studies seem to indicate that written gratitude is widely used in institutional settings, for instance gratitude interventions such as 'thank you' emails can be part of a company's policy (Cameron, 2012). It seems that the focus on spoken gratitude is lacking.

An existing knowledge gap on how the effects of spoken and written gratitude when communicated from one party to another can differ on perceived job satisfaction among employees remains unfilled. The question about how gratitude can be communicated most efficiently to maximize employee's level of job satisfaction remains. Therefore, the researchers conducted exploratory interviews with five employees to get a better image about their perceptions on gratitude in the workplace. These interview results were prudently taken into consideration as to compensate the scarce literature on the effect of spoken gratitude in institutional settings. All interviewees mentioned that spoken gratitude was more common than written gratitude and most of them would prefer spoken gratitude as well. One interviewee indicated that showing gratitude is important if it is 'loaded' with a deep meaning rather than a default 'thank you' that would be forgotten in 10 seconds. *(See Appendix for full interviews)*

If explicit institutional gratitude is expressed to employees, it might be more likely that this is done in a written way as it more tangible and could be remembered better than if communicated orally. Especially for big organizations that often allow tasks to be submitted digitally, it might be handier to also express gratitude through via channels such as email. Maybe not only for its practicalities, but also for its efficiency is gratitude, if communicated at

all, communicated more often in a written form rather than in a spoken form. Furthermore, the interview results indicated that most institutional gratitude takes place in spoken form and most of the times this was also preferred as it felt more personal than written gratitude.

With this research, we aim to contribute towards a better understanding about optimal ways of expressing gratitude in the workplace which might be helpful for any kind of institution that is interested in optimizing the well-being of its employees and in increasing employee productivity that can eventually cause bigger financial gains. Leaders, HR staff or any other managerial functions might want to know how to communicate their gratitude to the workforce in the best way possible. The question therefore rises whether management should adopt spoken or written channels to explicitly express their gratitude and thankfulness towards the employees. No research has yet been carried out aiming to investigate whether spoken or written or even no gratitude would differ in their effects on perceived job satisfaction by employees. Gratitude as saying ‘thank you’ that was based on the literature review where gratitude is defined as: “acknowledging the value and meaning of something—an event, a person, a behavior, an object—and feeling a positive emotional connection to it” (Adler and Fagley, 2005, p.81) and where job satisfaction is defined as: “an evaluative description of job conditions or characteristics” (Christian, Garza & Slaughter, 2011, p. 97) and the interview results, created the following research question and hypotheses.

- Research Question: What is the influence of explicit institutional gratitude on employee job satisfaction?
- Hypothesis 1: spoken gratitude effects job satisfaction more positively than written gratitude.
- Hypothesis 2: both written and spoken gratitude effect job satisfaction more positively than no gratitude.



## **Method**

### *Materials*

In order to obtain the data, answer the research question and to investigate whether the hypotheses can be accepted or rejected, an experiment was conducted to find out the effects of different gratitude expressions on perceived job satisfaction among employees. The manner of expressing gratitude is the independent variable for which the nominal measurement level was used. As mentioned in the theoretical background, the following definition for gratitude was used: “acknowledging the value and meaning of something—an event, a person, a behavior, an object— and feeling a positive emotional connection to it” (Adler and Fagley, 2005, p.81). However, to increase clarity, we adopted the practical definition of gratitude: ‘thank you’. The independent variable consisted of three levels that were measured: written gratitude, spoken gratitude and no gratitude. For the stimulus material, the three levels of gratitude were used and tested upon independently to investigate whether they accounted for differences on the effects of perceived job satisfaction. Gratitude was operationalized as saying ‘thank you for your participation’ through two different channels: ‘thank you for your participation’ written down, ‘thank you for your participation’ spoken and ultimately a version where no gratitude message was provided at all. Written and spoken gratitude were the experimental conditions of this study and they both expressed the same content in either written text or via a recording and the conditions with no gratitude serves as a control group. Furthermore, the participants were asked to fill out the regular descriptive variables as they could impact someone’s expectations with regards to how gratitude should be received and how explicit or implicit that should be.

### *Participants*

For the experiment there were three independent participant groups to test whether spoken, written or no gratitude messages differed in impact on employee job satisfaction. People currently working in the Netherlands or those who had work experience in the Netherlands who were 18+ belonged to the population of our study and a sample of 103 participants was retrieved from this group through random convenient sampling. 7 participants were excluded from the analysis as they were outliers. Therefore, 96 participants remained in the analysis. 31 participants were assigned to the condition of spoken gratitude (32.3%), 34 to the condition of written gratitude (35.4%) and 31 to the condition of no gratitude (32.3%). An online randomization tool made sure that the participants were assigned randomly to one of the three

conditions. 40 participants were male and 56 were female (respectively, 41.7% and 58.3%). Regarding the participants' educational background we found the following: 49 participants had a bachelor's degree (51%), 22 had a master's degree (22.9%), 18 had a high-school degree (18.8%), 4 had an associate degree (4.2%), and 3 had a doctoral degree (3.1%). The average participants' age was 26 ( $M = 25.91$ ,  $SD = 8.02$ ) with a range of 37 (minimum age was 19 and highest age was 56). Finally, 53 participants were Dutch (55.2%), 11 were German (11.5%), and the remaining 32 participants had other nationalities (33.3%). Both gender and educational level were equally distributed across the participant groups: chi square tests showed no significant difference for gender ( $\chi^2(2) = 0.32$ ,  $p = .852$ ), neither for level of education ( $\chi^2(8) = 10.03$ ,  $p = .264$ ). A one-way ANOVA showed no significant difference for the distribution of age across the three groups: ( $F(2,93) < 1$ ). Finally, the analysis showed that it took the participants 5 minutes and 56 seconds on average to do the experiment ( $M = 5.56$ ;  $SD = 8.92$ ).

### *Design*

A 1 x 3 between-subjects design was used for this study. Each participants group, consisting of 35 participants, was exposed to one of the three levels of the independent variable gratitude. One group of 35 participants served as the control group as this group did not receive a 'thank you' message at all.

### *Instruments*

Both the cognitive task of matching the right flag with the right country and the questionnaire occurred in Qualtrics. The 'thank you' message that was communicated to the two groups of participants, the group with written gratitude and the group with spoken gratitude, was as follows: "Thank you very much for your participation!". The last group was not thanked for their participation. When the gratitude was communicated to two of the three groups, all groups continued the experiment by filling out a questionnaire (*see Appendix*). The aim of the questionnaire was to measure the effect of the expression of gratitude on the degree of satisfaction. Before the participants were shown with the questions, their confirmation was needed that they had read the information letter. Furthermore, some independent variables regarding information about the participant such as their nationality, age, and educational level were asked to obtain data that could relate significantly to gratitude as the main independent variable. To accurately measure the participants' satisfaction, the questionnaire question was created by using the job satisfaction scale of Macdonald and MacIntyre (1997).

The participants could indicate on a 7-point Likert scales to which extent they agreed or disagreed with this question: “In my opinion, the experiment was...”, respectively: Very unenjoyable, Unenjoyable, Somewhat unenjoyable, Neutral, Somewhat enjoyable, Enjoyable, Very enjoyable.

### *Procedure*

The participants were approached via social media channels where an online experiment was sent to them. All 5 researchers approached 21 participants of which 7 people per condition (spoken, written or no gratitude) and invited them to participate to the study. In the online experiment the researchers started by briefly introducing themselves and mentioning the purpose of this study that belongs to the final thesis of their bachelor’s program. In order not to bias the participants with the exact goal of the study, they were told through an information letter that the aim of the research was to study cognitive mechanisms of perception in an organizational setting. Then, they were informed that they could leave or quit the study at any time without consequences. In case they wanted to cease their participation, they would receive a thank you letter from the researcher. Subsequently, the participants were invited to do a mix and match task where they had to match a country with its national flag. The researchers discussed that the task could not be too easy and boring, neither too difficult nor exhausting. Nor could the task be too pleasant to avoid participant bias or early dropouts or fake answers due to the difficulty.

When the task was done, which was the same for every group, the different manners of expressing the researcher’s gratitude to the participants occurred. In order to investigate whether written or spoken gratitude has a different impact on the perceived satisfaction of the task, the content of the message was exactly the same as to avoid the possible risk of participants preferring certain words over other words. The only difference was that one group read the message that was written down and the other group listened to the same message that was spoken. To minimize the risk that a strong accent in the audio message may had on perception of gratitude, the spoken gratitude message was recorded by someone with an almost native British.

Only when the participants finished the experiment, they were more precisely informed about the aim of the experiment. All groups were thanked again for their participation which could have been most important for the control group that had not received any gratitude at all.

Under no circumstances the researchers wanted the participants to end the experiment with a bad feeling due to no acknowledgement of their participating.

#### *Statistical Treatment and Analytical Model*

All data were analyzed and tested by means of SPSS. To answer the research question and to test the hypotheses, a one-way ANOVA was carried out, given that the experiment contained one independent variable with 3 nominal levels and one dependent variable that was measured at the interval level. Figure 1 with the analytical model below shows how the independent variable with its nominal measurement levels relates to the dependent variable that consists of interval levels.

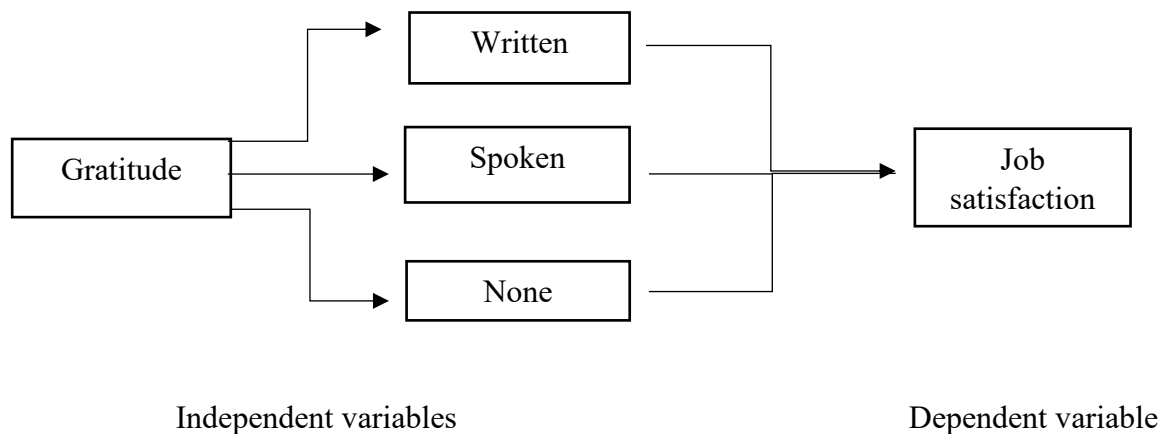


Figure 1. Analytical model: gratitude and job satisfaction

## Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether different forms of gratitude (spoken, written, and no gratitude) would impact job satisfaction among employees differently. An online experiment was conducted to answer the research question: What is the influence of explicit institutional gratitude on employee job satisfaction?

A Welch ANOVA showed that the effect of spoken gratitude differed significantly compared to the effect of written gratitude on the task satisfaction (job satisfaction) of the participants. This main effect was ( $F(2, 57.908) = 4.43, p = .016, \omega^2 = .063$ ). The group of participants that was exposed to spoken gratitude ( $M = 5.87; SD = 0.72$ ) enjoyed the task more than the group that was exposed to written gratitude ( $p = 0.21$ , Games-Howell procedure;  $M = 4.97; SD = 1.73$ ).

However, no differences were found between spoken gratitude and no gratitude ( $p = .208$ , Games-Howell procedure) and between written gratitude and no gratitude ( $p = .314$ , Games-Howell procedure).

## **Discussion and conclusion**

### *Conclusion*

The research question of this study was the following: What is the influence of explicit institutional gratitude on employee job satisfaction? And the following two hypotheses were posited:

Hypothesis 1: spoken gratitude effects job satisfaction more positively than written gratitude.

Hypothesis 2: both written and spoken gratitude effect job satisfaction more positively than no gratitude.

As can be derived from the results, the first hypothesis is confirmed since there was a significant difference between the experience in task enjoyability between participants who were exposed to spoken gratitude and those who were exposed to written gratitude. The second hypothesis cannot be confirmed as the results showed that it did not matter whether gratitude, be it spoken or written gratitude, was communicated. Thus, important to mention here that gratitude only had a significant effect on task satisfaction if it was expressed in the spoken form, compared to written gratitude. Trying to answer the research question, the data allow us to come up with a tentative answer that spoken gratitude has a significantly higher effect on task satisfaction than written gratitude. This would mean that, if the results are applied to a real institutional setting, employees who are acknowledged for their work or effort via spoken gratitude such as literally receiving the word ‘thank you’ from the person for whom they did something, are more satisfied with their job than employees who received the word ‘thank you’ in a written message such as in an email for the same work or effort.

### *Discussion*

Based on the relevant literature, this study might have contributed positively to the knowledge about differences between spoken and written gratitude in institutional settings and its relationship with job satisfaction. The most plausible explanation for the main result could relate to the research by Cameron (2012) where it was stated that written gratitude is widely used in institutional settings and that it can even be formally embedded in the organization’s culture through policies. Since the literature has shown that gratitude seems to be widely communicated in institutional settings (Waters, 2012), however most studies do not even mention spoken gratitude. Therefore, written gratitude might be more expected in organizations than spoken gratitude which might mean that written gratitude is ‘unmarked’ and therefore unnoticed, as explained by the ‘markedness’ vs. ‘unmarkedness’ model as

discussed in an article by Myers-Scotton (1998). Based on this theory, it could be that spoken gratitude is experienced as 'marked' or 'unexpected' and therefore noticed as more positive than written gratitude.

However, no existing literature provides direct support for the main finding in this study.

Therefore, the finding of this study cannot be interpreted as a fact. Thus, this study contributes to the existing literature on gratitude in the workplace by discussing that spoken gratitude might work better than written gratitude when employee job satisfaction is measured.

If the theory about 'markedness' by Myers-Scotton (1998) applies to this study, it would be interesting to conduct further research on differences between spoken and written gratitude and to take the literature that states that written gratitude is widely used (Cameron, 2012) into consideration. These further studies could investigate whether spoken gratitude is really preferred over written gratitude by employees, or that spoken gratitude was just preferred over written gratitude by chance since it was unexpected and therefore valued higher, compared to written gratitude that is more expected and therefore noticed less.

Even though current literature does not make hard claims about differences between spoken and written gratitude and the effect on job satisfaction, the results of the exploratory interviews conducted in this study tended to favor spoken gratitude over written gratitude.

Furthermore, one interviewee also mentioned that he preferred the company's gratefulness towards him by giving him the freedom to use his competence, be autonomous to a certain extent, relate himself to important issues and to work on something that is meaningful. This indicates that neither spoken nor written gratitude does not matter by itself, but that gratefulness and job satisfaction is accomplished through by other things than merely hearing the word 'thank you'

Obviously, this study had its limitations. First, rather than measuring 'job satisfaction', this study measured 'task satisfaction' with the assumption that this was narrowly linked with job satisfaction. (Wanous, Reichers, Hudy; 1997). Secondly, maybe the country and flag task has been too pleasant to carry out which might have resulted in no significant differences between whether gratitude was communicated or not. Maybe the manipulation of using different forms of gratitude did not work because participants focused too much on the task itself. If the task was too enjoyable, the sensitivity towards the gratitude messages could have been deteriorated. Another limitation might be the fact that the whole experiment has been carried out online and therefore less face threatening than if it had been carried out in an offline more personal setting. This could have an impact on how much gratitude is being valued, and the

politeness theory by Brown et al. (1987) might back up this idea: maybe face does not have to be protected as much online compared to an offline setting.

Further research should focus on a real life setting where actual employees are asked to perform a task for their boss. Again, different groups will be exposed with different gratitude messages to check whether spoken gratitude differs significantly from written gratitude on job satisfaction.

It can be concluded that this research has add a new dimension about how specific gratitude messages, spoken or written messages, can actually cause differences in how job satisfaction is being experienced. Therefore, the study can be regarded as a first step into more research about the relationship between different forms of gratitude and employee job satisfaction. In turn, these results might eventually contribute to the creation of specific gratitude interventions by HR managers in different organizations.



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## Appendix

### *Online experiment: task and questionnaire in Qualtrics*



Dear participant,

You are invited to participate in a research project about cognitive mechanisms of perception in a working environment for which you are asked to complete a cognitive task and follow-up questionnaire. This research project only requires participants working or that have worked in the Netherlands and is being conducted by International Business Communication students from Radboud University. Completing this questionnaire should take approximately 10 minutes.

The data collected during this study is anonymous and cannot be traced back to you. Such data will be used as part of datasets, articles and presentations exclusively for the purposes of this research.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You can withdraw your participation and consent at any time without giving a reason, and all of the collected data from you will be permanently deleted.

Should you want more information about this research, or in case you have any questions / complaints, please send an email to [l.bottcher@student.ru.nl](mailto:l.bottcher@student.ru.nl).

Note: If you do not meet the following criteria, we kindly ask to quit the survey.



I am at least 18 years old.

Yes

No



I am currently working or have worked in the Netherlands.

Yes

No



I have read the information text and give consent to participate.

Yes

No



In the following part, you will complete a task, in which you will be asked to match countries with their corresponding flags. You will be presented with a country / continent name and 4 possible answer options. Please indicate which flag fits the country / continent.



Brazil



Antarctica



South Africa



Spain



China



USA



New Zealand





Kenya



Qatar



Turkey



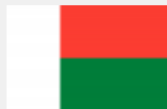
Thailand



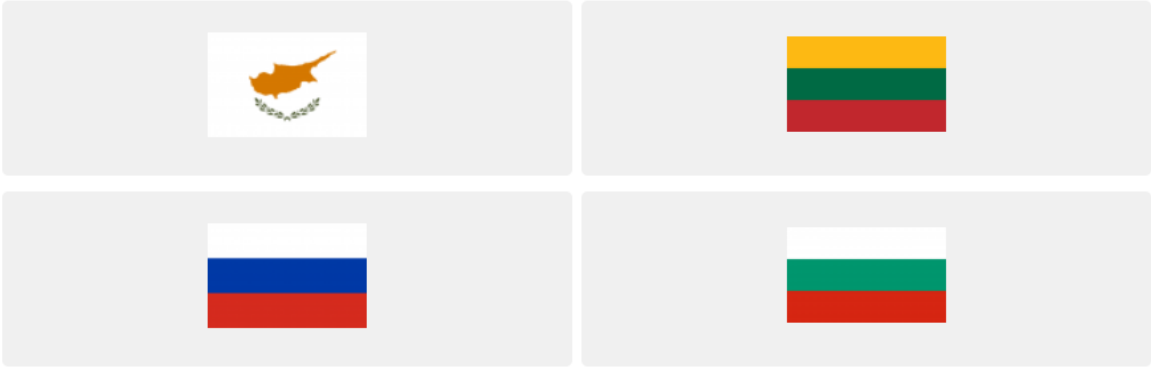
Romania



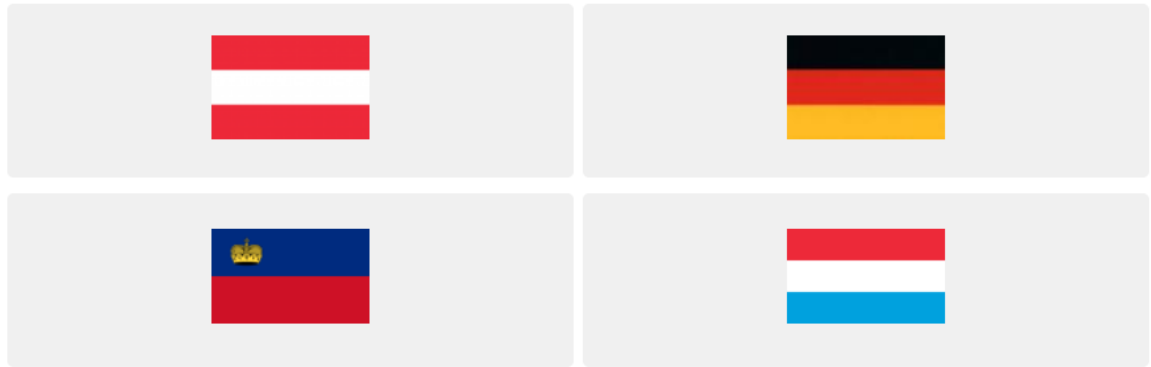
Tanzania



Bulgaria



Germany

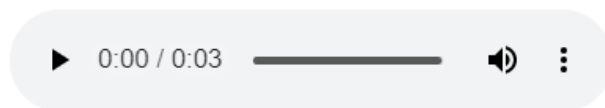


## Spoken gratitude

**Radboud University**



Please make sure your audio is ON to hear the following recording.



*Please now continue with the follow-up questionnaire.*

Were you able to hear the message?

Yes

No



## Written gratitude

Radboud University



Thank you very much for your participation!

Please now continue with the follow-up questionnaire.



Radboud University



In my opinion, the experiment was...

Very unenjoyable	Unenjoyable	Somewhat unenjoyable	Neutral	Somewhat enjoyable	Enjoyable	Very enjoyable
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My gender is:

Male

Female

Other



My age is:



My nationality is:





My highest education degree is:

Less than high school degree

High school degree

Associate degree (2-year)

Bachelor's degree HBO & WO (3- or 4-year)

Master's degree HBO & WO

Doctoral degree



How religious do you consider yourself to be?

Not religious

Neutral

Religious



## *Interview results*

### Interview questions:

1. What's your personal experience with gratitude in your environment?
2. Do you know what gratitude means? / How would you define gratitude?
3. How should gratitude be expressed to you as / how do you express gratitude to others?
4. Do you feel valued at work?
5. How often do you receive compliments/ appreciation from your superiors?
6. What do you think is the best way to create satisfaction in terms of gratitude?
7. When was the last time your manager expressed their gratitude towards you?
8. What is more frequent; verbal or non-verbal forms of gratitude in your work environment?
9. Does your manager let you know when you are doing a good job at work?
10. Would you like to hear 'thank you' more frequently?

### *Interview 1*

I: Thank you for participating in our tiny research. Just to repeat maybe two of the the most important features of this interview: You can leave this at any given point and also it is going to be about gratitude in your work environment. So maybe if you could possibly start with a short introduction of yourself...

R: I'm a teacher at a local secondary school, 53 years old, my subjects are music and English. I've been teaching at this very school for 22 years now and yeah the question of gratitude is interesting. Usually you get a good feeling if especially the principal; so the head teacher, gives you some rewards. Some kinds of gratification for excellent work that could be a lesson off or something like that.

I: Are those monetary rewards or is it-

R: Not really.

I: Could you describe what kind of reward?

R: Well there is monetary reward but this would be in form of extra work and the school board pays you a little extra if you do a certain amount of extra work. That's not the only thing, no; we're talking about the appreciation of what you do. But of course, that doesn't depend on the head teacher only. I think it's feedback you get from colleagues, from pupils you teach... Sometimes they just say "wow I like your lessons" or something like that.

I: Okay. Do you feel grateful the same way if you compare monetary rewards or appreciation as you say and let's verbal or non-verbal let's say it could be anything from 'thank you' to an email stating that "Dear M, we're very grateful to have you here. Good job."

R: These kinds of emails rarely happen but well I must say it doesn't depend on the money, no. It's not that. That doesn't give much gratification at all I would say. It's just the money you get and yeah you work for it and I think you somehow deserve a payment of course but no it's more the gratification coming from the interaction with colleagues and pupils and other members. So it's more the verbal thing like "Good job yesterday!" or concert or yeah as I said feedback from pupils and so on.

I: I feel if you think about those social interactions at your workplace – how, in your opinion, should gratitude be expressed to you? What's – for you – the best way; how would you appreciate it the most?

R: Well I appreciate it the most face-to-face; not in front of a big audience and everyone clapping because this is very often, to me at least, it's an artificial situation and not the honest way: straight from the heart as it-

I: Okay so it should be as you were saying- just to translate it into my world of communication it should be credible and direct(?)

R: Yes.

I: Okay. Thank you. And-

R: And if I may interrupt: You do feel if it's meant from the heart or not. So there's also empty gratification because if you focus on and repeat and if you actually say "I want to show gratitude for what you have done and great achievements" it's somehow the reverse: it's somehow the opposite what is reached by that.

I: So too much is..is-

R: Is bad-

I: -negative. Okay, okay. How do you by yourself express gratitude to others? That's also maybe interesting.

R: Well, basically the same way. I would give a brace to for example the pupil well if I catch them in the hallway saying "Good job today, you've really improved far better than usual" etc. etc. So this would be the smallest step of course. Or pupils I have worked with for over 5 or 6 years who I have known for a long time in other words; well I express gratitude for the chance to play music with them and to build our music community etc.

I: And you do this the same way you would say? Also direct and, well, as you said coming from the heart?

R: Yes, if it is verbally person-to-person, yeah.

I: Okay. How does it change in a written context?

R: Yeah it's kind of more humorous; with a light humour. For example, if I have a chat in which pupils are involved and I want to point out that A did a good job in working for the group, whatsoever, I think pupils have learnt to understand my humour: The lighter it gets, the more serious the effect is because I have realised that the persons actually like this better than if I just formally say "That was very good, pupil X!"

I: So with your pupils you express gratitude in an informal and humorous way, kind of.

R: Yes. Yes. Yes.

I: And how does it then change if your superiors express gratitude to you in a written context? Could you elaborate on that-

R: You mean what has changed or-

I: No, kind of how do they communicate gratitude towards you. If they do, I don't know.

R: In a written context?

I: Exactly, yeah. For sure, if I may, sometimes for example before Christmas when... Do you know where I'm getting?

R: I see yeah yeah. Now I understand. Yeah well this is exactly the formal way "I would really like to thank you for a year full of work for the school" etc. etc. etc. And actually I don't need it and I don't really like it because it's just a collection of hollow phrases; stock phrases expressing this for my superiors. It's quite different from mails I get by colleagues.

This is entirely different because they would rather say, straight from the heart, “Good job mate” or something like that.

I: Okay, okay good. Well moving on to the next question: Do you feel valued at work?

R: So if my work is appreciated or if I as a person am?

I: Oh God that’s another topic. I guess both but-

R: Yeah you can’t separate it-

I: Yeah but through the eyes of well obviously yourself but yeah, go on.

R: So it’s... Oh yeah that’s really a good question; the feeling....

I: Or what makes you feel valued at work?

R: Okay, well that’s very simple: If I get the same respect that I also pay to everyone. This is actually the basis. And that’s where any kind of value starts. I- well as you say here in Germany it’s called “*dutzen*”, we say you in the informal way: I’ve got only 2 colleagues out of almost 100 which I find arrogant and have never come to terms with and all the others are on eye level: they can be 30 years old or 65; it’s not a question of experience or age no, we’re all the same.

I: And with the colleagues that you don’t get along so super well do you use like the formal terms? Like “*Sie*”?

R: Yeah. Exactly. Just to keep a distance because I’m not really...

I: Language can be used for so many things; also as you said for social positioning. So yeah that’s not far off at all. This is also really interesting: How often do you get compliments or appreciation for your work?

I: Well at school this is rather seldom in a way because your position as a teacher you have to make the pupils work and achieve something and you also give marks and you see it’s another kind of gratification they get, the pupils, but not all are content with their achievements and sometimes they blame it on to you, the bad mark but well thinking about it: appreciation can be attention. Sometimes, when you really have the feeling that this is really interesting for the pupils and that they are engaged in conversation and contribute something: This actually happens. Not with all of the pupils all of the time that would be far too optimistic and even

naïve but you know you do your job well when you see that they are here; I really opened up the pupils minds and yeah..

I: Of course yeah. Would you like to hear thank you from superiors as in forms of appreciation more?

R: More often? It depends for what. Well a simple thank you is something I would like to or everyone likes to hear – so do I. It just depends for what would I get a thank you. What do you mean? I mean it could be a very simple everyday situation or is it related to your job?

I: It's more related to yeah I guess to the job then. When... It can also I think... I personally think it also depends what type of let's call it job act, job action you've just performed and how gratitude is expressed to you because well I think if you receive.. Superogity it's called I think ; it's like highly explicit super overloadedly expressed gratitude for a simple task then I think it also becomes less credible.

R: That's right.

I: So the question – I think – also is to some extent how do you balance gratitude in an organisation no? In order to motivate employees-

R: Yeah..

I: Which actually leads me to the question: Would you feel more motivated or satisfied with your job if you received gratitude but let's call it "matched gratitude" more frequently? If it matches the task you performed.

R: If it matched the task I've performed yes. Otherwise it's... It easily gets well they easily develop some kind of inflation of praise. This is exactly what nobody needs and which is even as I said before adding to the contrary: Not so much creating a good feeling.

I: Okay but you would say in general, it does contribute to your job satisfaction?

R: It would, if it's meant seriously and if also – and this is perhaps strange but if it's also connected to critical feedback. So if there's a culture in an organisation or company or here in my school – if we talked more openly about what's really good and praising or giving gratitude to individuals and ALSO not closing our eyes to what's not going down so well that would be even better. So it's not only gratitude that helps it's also kind of openness that goes along with that. I mean openness to self-criticism.

I: Yeah yeah, I think I understand what you're on about. So actually, when was the last time gratitude was expressed to you? Let's start with your superiors ..

R: Okay well after I performed a week of rehearsing with a lot of pupils I was asked how it was and I everything went fine. And then I was very satisfied so great and thanks... That was the last one. So that's about 3 weeks ago or something.

I: 3 weeks ago? Okay. Does your superior actually let you know when you did a good job?

R: Yes. And...it's a she so she absolutely wants to but there's sometimes an embarrassing situation because I ... I-

I: What's going wrong when she tries to express gratitude?

R: I sense she comes to me and approaches me and Do(es) know I've done something great like performed a concert or whatever and it's... yeah well the atmosphere is... she wants to say something nice and say thank you and give gratification in that form but she overdoes it. So it's like like not inflation in words but in intensity so this doesn't get very believable.

I: Okay. Okay yeah.

R: Or convincing or...even not natural in a way. See; you can really do something really wrong by doing something like this.

I: Yes, yes of course. Yes, absolutely. Yeah..

R: But I wanted - if I may add something the last time I was praised was just 2 hours ago by a pupil who said "Wow you look good in your carnival costume" and so on or "You're my favourite teacher" that's what the little ones usually say if they don't know what else to say. I think this is really nice and I really appreciate it very much.

I: So actually gratitude occurs more between colleagues or let's say downstream gratitude and upstream from your students that sense; so your superiors do not express gratitude adequately.

R: No. Sometimes they repeat over and over again that this was really great so it's too much and sometimes I feel a bit... Not ignored but-

I: Not taken seriously?

R: Taken seriously rather than that. So it's not the frequency of thank yous but more.. yeah indeed.

I: Okay. What is the best way to create job satisfaction at work? And this is the last question.

R: Okay. Well as a superior in my opinion you should not only create the feeling that everyone is taken care of but you should actually take care of your employees. So in other words: You should focus on a healthy and clean work environment and also...

I: What does that mean?

R: Well it starts with rooms: temperature, equipment so that you feel physically well yes and also that you as an employer or as a superior take care about the mental health of your colleagues so having a good eye on who seems to be strained and overstressed or stressed out and take measures accordingly. So to both prevent further deterioration and also to enhance the identification and therefore the happiness at work or the contentment.

I: So there should be a personal relationship between the superior and the teachers in this case?

R: Yes. Yes is of course of tremendous add. The other side would be a head teacher who sits in his office all day long and lets the teachers do their business, their work but never gets in touch. So this would be not suitable at all, no.

I: And I think I cut you off when we were talking about job satisfaction right?

R: Yeah...

I: Sorry for the intervention-

R: Yeah no can we... We have somehow been spinning off this thing: What was the question exactly?

I: Yeah: What is the best way to create job satisfaction at work? And you started with physical needs and for your superior let's call it observe the staff...

R: Yeah well observe....Take care of the needs

I: Be there-

R: Yeah be present but, and this is the second part actually, that you create the feeling of trust, so that you trust in their employees that they will do their job fine and that you as an employee; teacher in this case; have the feeling that I can do my work alone; I'm capable of and this is also seen by my superior. I don't need any control or guidance really. Help yes but too much control and guidance is actually not productive.



I: Acknowledgement of your skills-

R: Yes. Yes-

I: In that sense.

R: Right.

I: Okay. Okay. Well then if you think about it, a lot of things are on the table now; if you think more in a written context; how could you improve job satisfaction?

R: Written context means anything I get...?

I: Anything any... In this case it's not corporate but any institutional email leaving the head office. For example.

R: The head office or rather that would be a superior board maybe yeah-

I: Do you think there's a need for more employee communication like... Would your workplace be enriched if there was a sort of communication specialist in the head office that can actually design those as I said institutional messages in a way that employees feel more valued feel more happy or-

R: I'm not too sure. I would rather say no because it's different. We have to sit through so many letters or emails each day that we rather not be actually overly thankful if we're emailed with something positive because it gets lost in the vast amount of other texts but well if I think about gratitude at work it's about being noticed. And once you've got a complaint for the higher board if you write to them, since I'm the speaker of my colleagues, I wrote a letter and never got response. A constructive letter about some critical issues it doesn't matter here but so it's also about non-gratification if nobody cares what you write or think about. So this is the thing: if your noticed in both your needs and wants but you don't get any response that would be bad. But okay that's not what my actual superior does but in general, as you asked.

I: Okay. Okay so yeah also it's a question of frequency and intensity absolutely.

R: So too much is definitely harmful but not at all is not good either.

I: Okay well thank you very much for this interview, we're done already: 25 minutes more or less.

R: I hope I could give some input at all...

I: Yes.

R: Of course, a business is a different organisation than a school but interaction works either way so..-

I: Exactly and it actually serves our research purposes...

R: So then I have not lived in vain.

I: Thank you very much. Good bye.

R: You're welcome. Bye.

### *Interview 2*

I: What's your personal experience with gratitude in your environment?

R: In the family environment, gratitude plays a horrendous role. This is in contrast to the attitude towards gratitude in the work environment.

I: Do you know what gratitude means? / How would you define gratitude?

R: To appreciate someone's work to be able to say/show how thankful you are.

I: How should gratitude be expressed to you as / how do you express gratitude to others?

R: For me it would definitely be enough to know that my colleagues and bosses are happy with my work. Every now and then it is needed to simply mention, that someone does good work.

I: Do you feel valued at work?

R: It depends on the persons. In general, I do.

I: How often do you receive compliments/ appreciation from your superiors?

R: Once every half a year during a periodical meeting. Additionally, in case she presents my results, she mentions my name, which is a kind of appreciation from her.

I: What do you think is the best way to create satisfaction in terms of gratitude?

R: As mentioned in 3. While discussing different topics/results of work, mention (although the results are not convincing) that someone does great work.

I: When was the last time your manager expressed their gratitude towards you?

R: December 2019

I: What is more frequent; verbal or non-verbal forms of gratitude in your work environment?

R: Verbal

I: Does your manager let you know when you are doing a good job at work?

R: Sometimes.

I: Would you like to hear 'thank you' more frequently?

R: Yes, I would love to.

### *Interview 3*

- **Question 1:**

If you put gratitude in the small version, it is not so much of importance I would say, but once you put it in a bigger perspective, in a holistic perspective, then it is a major important instrument but I would like to come back on that later.

- **Question 2:**

As I said already in question number one, of course I know what it means and it depends on how you look at it. Do you look at it on the small version or do you look at it with a holistic perspective? Because that makes the difference in defining the word. The word is nice but how do you load the word, that is the most important thing.

- **Question 3:**

Again, you need if you are using instruments as a leader or if you get it as an employee, you should always be able to load it, to load the term. I mean, uh, you say thank you to an employee, which, well, it is nice but it works for maybe 10 seconds you know if a boss says thank you to his employee. But to load it, that has a much more impact. This is what you want as a leader, you want to have impact on your employees. Uhm, so, yeah that is my answer.

- **Question 4:** (question modified to the respondent's circumstances: did you feel valued at work, when you were still working?)

Yeah, but mainly by my employees. I have been a very independent leader in the past, that means that sometimes it is very easy, but it means, practically it meant that if I

had any confrontations it was usually with MY boss or with the shareholders or with the board of directors where I also was part of, uhm, so when it comes to do you feel valued at work then I would say I got it more from my employees: the interaction between employees and myself. And, then again, I have the privilege to feel very independent so I didn't really care if I got compliments from my bosses because it was nice and it was there but it didn't have to. But what is important: employees! Because they make or break you. They are the most important!

- **Question 5:**

Not often, but I was also not asking for it and it was not in our culture so much on that level, it was not a common thing to give or receive compliments.

- **Question 6:**

Yeah, yeah, and now we get a little bit to the holistic area, right? I would say that the word gratitude, uh, I would take the word gratitude in a wider perspective. If you as a leader can offer a pack of instruments which can influence the vitality of employees and psychological basic needs of employees, being: competence, autonomy, relatedness, and meaning, and I will come back on those 4 elements, if you can offer them, then I know, and this is scientifically proved by my dear friend professor W. who by the way has been awarded one of the top 1 professors in the world, then, then you can have a REAL impact on employees and THEN you can use gratitude, again, if you see the in-depth perspective of these 5 elements (again: vitality, competence, autonomy, relatedness and meaning) if you can really LOAD those terms, then you get somewhere! Then you are getting REALLY somewhere with gratitude.

- **Question 7:**

Haha, today my manager is my wife! (laughs). No just kidding haha, but the last time gratitude was expressed I don't recall.

- **Question 8:** (question + additional explanation: 'so, what did you experience more, was it in the form of verbal communication like people saying 'thank you' or was it more non-verbal like you could read of their faces that they were very happy with you as an employee or as a boss or a leader. I mean, how did you experience that?)
- Well, actually I experienced it in the numbers: the increasing revenue numbers and the increasing profit numbers and increasing happiness and the increasing mental energy of my employees. We measured that every year by Aon Hewitt at that time, Aon

Hewitt was measuring the mental energy of employees in companies across Europe. Here we talk about the employee engagement level, the mental energy level, that is sort of the school report for the CEO, because THAT says 'Hey boss, I am happy to work for you and I will make sure I am never sick, I make sure I give you the revenues and the profits' (sick as in ill so that the employee can't go to work).

I: Would you link that skill to employee motivation as well?

DEFINITELY!

- **Question 9:**

Well, I as a manager let my people know that they were doing a fantastic job, YES! Every month, I had the figures: the increasing numbers of revenues and increasing numbers of profit and cashflows. I learned my people how to read the balance sheet, I learned my people how to read the profit and loss account, so that they could follow, with me, the development of our company and by THAT I am coming back to the relatedness thing of the 4 items that I used before. People loved it! And then, at the same time, I told my employees that these results were their efforts. This is what we did together! So, yes, this is the way how I did it every month.

- **Question 10:**

Only if it is loaded! Else it is just a useless thing! If I did something good, really something outstanding, then yes, of course, I want to have my credits. But a good employee comes to his boss and says 'hey, I want your compliments now because I have done something f\*cking good!'.  
I: well, thank you for your time, we are now done with the ten questions!

#### *Interview 4*

I: What's your personal experience with gratitude in your environment?

R: Well, besides people saying thank you for your help and your advice, sometimes people give me a card of something else to express their gratitude for my help to them.

I: So you sometimes receive a card? How does that make you feel?

R: Yes, it is very nice when people do something extra to make you feel happy. I also receive messages from people expressing their thanks.

I: Do you receive those often?

R: No not very often, they are more like an exception than a rule. And they mostly come from clients.

I: Okay. Do you also receive gratitude from your supervisor sometimes?

R: Yes, I do and those expressions are the nicest. Sometimes in a verbal form and sometimes in the form of a present.

I. Do you know what gratitude means?/ How would you define gratitude?

R: When people express their sincere feelings they have, because you helped them with something or in a particular situation. It can be an expression with words, a small present or by just giving them a hug.

I: What do you think is most common

R: Just saying thank you very much, so using words. The most important thing about showing your gratitude is taking an effort for someone, which I appreciate.

I. How should gratitude be expressed to you as / how do you express gratitude to others?

R: It depends why I want to express my gratitude and to whom

I: On what does it depend?

R: It depends on the relationship. If you give someone flowers or just a hug or a more expensive present.

I: Okay. And to whom would you give a hug and to whom flowers?

R: When you have a more friendly or family kind of relationship you would give a hug sooner. In a business relationship you would express your gratitude in terms of a cart, flowers or just by saying thank you.

I. Do you feel valued at work?

R: Yes, I do.

I: Okay. How is that expressed to you?

R: It is expressed by words, by reflecting on what went well in a group and by saying that you did a good job and that your work is appreciated.

I: Okay. And do you get that mostly from your supervisor or from you colleagues?

R: More supervisor than colleagues, but I receive gratitude from both.

I. How often do you receive compliments/ appreciation from your superiors?

R: Normally about once a month.

I: do you think that is enough

R: Yes I think that is enough. I do not want a compliment every day, because I think it would not be realistic any more then.

I: What would be not realistic anymore?

R: That your effort is appreciated.

I: So you think someone needs to express their gratitude at some point, but not every time you do something good?

I: I think showing gratitude is very important but is must not be something to be done easily, because uhm...

R: Because it will become common?

I: Yes. You should not forget it, but it should not be too common in order to be realistic.

I. What do you think is the best way to create satisfaction in terms of gratitude?

R: Well, I think that when you are working on a project and sometimes you have an evaluation with your team and then it is good to realize okay what are we doing, what did we achieve and how did we do it. Then it is good to say what went well and what went wrong and to express your gratitude about it in order to motivate everyone to finish their job. So it is a positive thing to mention everyone's achievements when you want to have a feeling of satisfaction.

I. When was the last time your manager expressed their gratitude towards you?

R: During Christmas

I: Okay. And what did you receive?

R: I could pick a Christmas present a liked.

I: And do you find that valuable?

R: Yes.

I. What is more frequent; verbal or non-verbal forms of gratitude in your work environment?

R: Verbal

I: Like?

R: You did a great job. Thank you. We finished this project very well.

I. Does your manager let you know when you are doing a good job at work?

R: Not on a daily or weekly base, but now and then, yes.

I: And that is mostly verbal?

R: Yes.

I: Do you ever get something tangible when perfectly finishing a project?

R: Sometimes.

I: And why do you get that?

R: Because then you went for the extra mile and you did something extra, which is being appreciated. For finishing normal projects, you usually do not receive some form of non-verbal gratitude.

I: Would you like to hear 'thank you' more frequently?

R: That is a difficult one. Not particularly, but if I would not receive it anymore, I would miss it.

I: Okay, so you are satisfied with how things are going in the workplace regarding gratitude?

R: Yes, all things considered, I am satisfied.

I: Okay, thank you for your time and information.



*Statement of own work*

**Statement of Own Work**

Student name: Stan Eshuis

Student number: S1005985

Course code and name: LET-CIWB351, BA thesis

Lecturer: Dr. J. Baranova

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Signed: Stan Eshuis

Date: 15-06-2020