



THE IMPACT OF EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION APPROACHES ON JOB SATISFACTION: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS OF SRI LANKA TO ENHANCE HUMAN PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the dynamics of job satisfaction among Air Traffic Controllers (ATCs) is imperative for ensuring the human performance, productivity, efficiency and safety of aviation operations. This study investigates the impact of various employee appreciation methods on the job satisfaction levels to enhance the performance of ATCs in Sri Lanka. Drawing upon existing literature and analysis of the data collected from the current employees, the research is aimed at filling a critical knowledge gap regarding the relationship between employee appreciation and job satisfaction within the ATC sector. The research problem centres on the need to comprehend how different forms of appreciation, ranging from verbal acknowledgements to tangible rewards, influence ATCs' job satisfaction. Through a structured survey utilizing a Likert scale, the study measured the effects of seven appreciation methods on job satisfaction, namely verbal expressions in one-on-one and public settings, electronic notes, written communications, tangible items, monetary bonuses, and the absence of gratitude. Key research questions addressed the specific impacts of each appreciation method on the job satisfaction of ATCs'. By analysing responses from ATCs in Sri Lanka, the study aimed to provide insights for supervisors and managers to tailor appreciation strategies effectively. The findings hold significance in enhancing the work environment, retaining talent, and promoting organisational productivity within the aviation industry. Acknowledging potential limitations such as participant biases and organisational policies, the research adopts measures to ensure data integrity and confidentiality. By leveraging a comprehensive approach to data collection and analysis, it enhanced the reliability and credibility of the findings of the study.

KEYWORDS: Air Traffic Controllers, Employee Appreciation, Human Performance, Job Satisfaction

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1. INTRODUCTION

Employee performance and job satisfaction are critical in today's competitive environment in order for firms to achieve their goals. Previously, material items were regarded as more valuable than any other in the eyes of an organization. However, presently, organizations have realized that human resources are more valuable than other assets. They now focus on human resources to improve performance due to high global competition and the dynamic business environment. Organizations can attain social sustainability with a positive working relationship with employees. A competent and motivated worker is a resource that is extremely scarce and not readily available in the market. Because of this, modern businesses seek to use sustainable human resources to gain competitive advantages. Examining job satisfaction is a method of measuring how well an organisation creates a positive work environment for its employees (Che Nawi et al., 2016). Companies that aim to foster job satisfaction can boost productivity by keeping their workforce engaged (Che Nawi et al., 2016). The behaviour of managers within the organisation plays a role in establishing an atmosphere, which in turn leads to higher levels of job satisfaction among employees (Fabio et al., 2017). Locke (1969) provides the definition of job satisfaction describing it as an emotional state influenced by an individual's values regarding their work and resulting in feelings of delight or dissatisfaction. Assessing job satisfaction often focuses on the factors that determine an individual's inclination or aversion toward their job. These factors are dependent on socio elements like age, work experience, job characteristics, supervision, support, communication, fairness, career growth opportunities, and the overall work atmosphere (Chen et al., 2019; Spector, 1997). Competent employees are assets to an organisation as they have the motivation to complete their tasks and align with the organisation's objectives. This alignment directly affects intentions to leave the job, absenteeism rates, work culture, and overall work productivity (Miller et al., 2009).

Air Traffic Controllers (ATCs), who include aerodrome controllers, area controllers and approach

controllers working in control towers, have roles within a work environment that involve limited human interaction. The dynamics of this environment depend on the type and volume of air traffic at the airport. Due to a shortage of well-trained ATCs (E & Zhang 2017), a high rate of turnover can result in negative consequences such as reduced air traffic flow, increased passenger delays, and added workload on the remaining ATCs. Job dissatisfaction is a predictor of employees leaving their organisations (Jou et al., 2013). Therefore, it becomes crucial to understand the range of factors that contribute to this situation in order to enhance safety in the aviation industry.

ATCs play a major role in securing aviation safety in Sri Lanka, and currently Airport and Aviation Services Sri Lanka (Private) Limited ('AASL') and Sri Lanka Air Force ('SLAF') are the sole organisations in Sri Lanka which recruit and train civil and military ATCs. There are approximately 800 civil and military ATCs currently working in the industry, but a significant reduction in the workforce can be noted in the industry due to premature resignations by the controllers. This is mainly due to the inadequacy of current monetary and non-monetary benefits received by the ATCs coupled with the rising cost of living caused by the severe economic crisis faced by Sri Lanka in the year 2022. This caused many ATCs to prefer to seek foreign employment for better benefits and better living standards. This has created a shortage in the industry causing a possible standstill of air traffic control services offered by Sri Lanka. Thus, it is important to retain the existing ATCs and also attract new talent into the sector by ensuring the job satisfaction of the staff involved in the ATC industry.

To ensure that employees in an organisation are satisfied with their jobs, it is essential for employers to understand the relationship between forms of showing appreciation to employees and how it affects their job satisfaction, allowing employers to tailor their strategies accordingly. By analyzing existing literature, Naim and Lenka (2018) discovered that the way appreciation is shown impacts how employees perceive their job satisfaction. Other factors such as work location, employee generation and leadership style also play a role. Furthermore, research conducted

by Fabio et al. (2017) further supports the notion that employer gratitude towards employees in forms has implications for job satisfaction and employee morale. The researchers emphasize that gratitude fosters relationships between employees and employers, creating an environment that benefits both parties within the organisational and societal context. This study conducted an analysis to measure the importance of methods used by employers to motivate support staff and how these methods directly impact their job satisfaction. Gevrek et al. (2017) also conducted a study examining the effects of employee appreciation and gratitude on employee morale and job satisfaction where it was found that monetary factors contribute to job satisfaction while other variables such as job rank and title also play a role. In light of the above findings, it is viable for the ATC sector to explore on the impact of various employee appreciation methods on the job satisfaction levels and also implement such methods systematically to retain and attract more ATCs to the industry to fill the shortage of staff facing currently.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee job satisfaction plays a major role, in determining the success or failure of an organisation and also provides the foundation for an organization's accomplishments. (Stankovska et al., 2017, Mahajan & Kumar 2018). Creating a conducive work environment is essential for attracting talent and retaining highly productive employees, which should be a priority for employers (Jalilianhasanpour et al., 2021). Employees who receive motivation from their employers and satisfaction demonstrate a deep commitment to driving the organisation's success (Varma, 2017). The growth and expansion of an organisation are closely tied to recognising the significance of employee job satisfaction (Sittisom, 2020). When employees feel valued in their workplace, their motivation and their enthusiasm for work increase (Hamrick & White 2020).

Building a relationship and ensuring job satisfaction can be achieved through supportive approaches such as providing constructive feedback and guidance, recognising and appreciating contributions, and maintaining effective communication where

expressing gratitude, and acknowledging employees' efforts not only boosts performance but also prevents demoralisation and thoughts of leaving (Mahadi et al., 2020).

Employee perspectives towards work are inevitably shaped by job stress which impacts experiences such as engagement. Consequently, it influences both job satisfaction and intentions to leave the job (Allisey et al., 2014; Bowling et al., 2015; Kazemi et al., 2015; Yoon et al., 2021). Job satisfaction plays a role in influencing employee performance while aiding in achieving organisational goals. It also enhances group effectiveness by reducing employees' inclination, towards aversive behaviours (Chen, 2018).

The intention of employees to leave their organisation, known as turnover intention, is closely connected to how satisfied employees are, with their jobs. When job satisfaction decreases it often leads to an increase in turnover intention, which acts as a mediator for employee turnover (Chung et al., 2017; Mobley, 1977; Steel & Ovalle 1984).

While many studies delve into general workforce job satisfaction, limited attention has been given to the job satisfaction of Air Traffic Controllers. This quantitative study aims to examine how seven specific methods of employee appreciation affect the job satisfaction of ATCs in Sri Lanka given the unique nature of the job carried out by the ATCs.

Methods of employee appreciation

Within the domain, there are many ways to show appreciation, to both groups and individuals. Employers are faced with the task of understanding and appreciating the sources of motivation for individual employees in order to foster positive job satisfaction (Noor & Zainordin 2018). De Gieter and Hofmans (2015) suggest that while financial incentives play a major role in motivating employees, there is a growing trend towards embracing financial rewards as a form of appreciation.

Achmad et al. (2020) explore the realm of employee motivation, highlighting that it arises from factors including employers' gestures, such as showing appreciation, which plays a role in shaping job

satisfaction. A complex relationship emerges, connecting how employers value their employees with increased engagement, higher retention rates, and enhanced job satisfaction compared to those who feel undervalued (White, 2016).

In their research, Hamrick and White (2020) provide an analysis of the ten methods of employee appreciation that have the most positive impact. These methods align with what they call the five languages of appreciation, which include affirmations, acts of service, tangible tokens, and physical touch (Hamrick & White 2020). By conducting a survey, they found that affirmation stands out as a preferred method of appreciating employees.

Similarly, Stankovska et al. (2017) conducted two types of surveys to explore appreciation methods. The Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS), originally developed by Paul Spector in 1985 included 36 questions covering nine aspects of job satisfaction. The Job Motivation Questionnaire (JMQ) helped them gain insight into the factors that influence job satisfaction, among educators (Stankovska et al., 2017).

The study conducted by Norman (2005) sought participants' perspectives on methods of appreciation used in the medical field, which revealed that methods such as acknowledgement, recognition, and thoughtful gestures lead to positive outcomes.

In the field of education, it is important to show appreciation financially. These financial methods involve providing opportunities for career growth, supporting education and training during work hours, recognizing job performance and promoting and encouraging communication (Haider et al., 2015). According to Jensen et al. (2005), as cited in Haider et al. (2015) organisations that incorporate rewards tend to have engaged employees and establish themselves as top employers who value their workforce (Haider et al., 2015).

Scholars have extensively studied job satisfaction over the years using Locke's influential definition which he presented in 1969 as a reference point. Within this framework, job satisfaction is seen as a combination of emotions where individuals experience either delight or discontent based on their values related to

their jobs. This complex landscape is measured through factors that individuals use to assess their liking or disliking towards their roles. Throughout the evaluation process various socio-demographic factors such as age, work experience, job characteristics, supervision dynamics, support systems, communication effectiveness, fairness considerations, career trajectory and the overall work environment all play a role (Chen et al., 2019; Spector, 1997).

The employee motivation aligns with the goals of the organisation and impacts factors like turnover intention, absenteeism rates, work culture and overall productivity (Miller et al., 2009). This interaction not only fosters a positive relationship that leads to employee satisfaction but also shapes long-term outcomes. The responsibility lies with the organisation to create a healthy work environment which is essential for job satisfaction.

In the landscape of attitudes and work conditions, job stress emerges as a factor that impacts employee engagement and emotional experiences. It casts its influence on job satisfaction and turnover intention (Allisey et al., 2014; Bowling et al., 2015; Kazemi et al., 2015; Yoon et al., 2021).

Air Traffic Controllers

There are three types of ATCs namely Aerodrome, Area, and Approach controllers. Each with their role coordinates their tasks within an environment where human interaction is minimal. The coordination required for this role is like a ballet performance that adapts to the type and amount of air traffic flowing through the airport (E & Zhang, 2017). The increased turnover of ATCs leads to the lack of experienced and skilled ATCs in the aviation industry and this leads to negative consequences such as disrupted air traffic flow, passenger delays, and heavier workloads for existing controllers. At the heart of this equation lies job dissatisfaction as a factor that predicts one's inclination to sever ties with the organisation (Jou et al., 2013). As the importance of employee job satisfaction intertwines with safety in the aviation sector, there is a need to explore and comprehend factors affecting job satisfaction. It is not just

necessary but crucial to strengthen the industry's resilience and ensure its continued growth.

Despite the research on employee job satisfaction, there is a lack of in-depth literature reviews specifically focusing on the job satisfaction of ATCs. This absence highlights the need for an exploration that can bridge the understanding of this profession. The lack of inquiry presents a chance to delve into the complexities of ATCs's job satisfaction and how it is impacted by appreciation approaches of the management in order to provide valuable insights for a wide range of stakeholders.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is influenced by employees' internal perceptions and the external motivators they encounter (Parlalis, 2011). Employee satisfaction is a combination of opinions, emotions, and experiences related to their job and the employer (Vorina et al., 2017). In essence, job satisfaction can be measured based on an employee's sense of achievement and recognition received from their employers (Parlalis, 2011). As aptly stated by More & Padmanabhan (2017), "A positive attitude towards the job leads to levels of job satisfaction while negative attitudes indicate dissatisfaction." Satisfied employees exude inspiration, innovation, and optimism in contrast to their counterparts (Rast & Tourani, 2012; Windon, 2019). Job satisfaction is a response that individuals have towards their job conditions, and it encompasses ideas and perspectives formed within their work environment (Stankovska et al., 2017).

By expressing appreciation towards their workforce employers create a work environment where employees feel valued. This sense of value enhances productivity and loyalty among employees (Jalilianhasanpour et al., 2021). On the other hand, employers who underestimate the importance of employee job satisfaction risk productivity and decreased morale among their workforce (Sittisom, 2020). The absence of satisfaction is evident through disinterest and detachment from the goals of the organisation. Thus, it is worth noting that employer actions or lack thereof have an impact on job satisfaction (Noor & Zainordin, 2018).

Noor and Zainordin (2018) defined job satisfaction as a combination of an individual's feelings towards both their job and the organisation. Luthans and Sommer (2005) advised employers to be highly aware of factors that can either foster or undermine employee job satisfaction.

The importance of job satisfaction goes beyond being a feeling where it guides companies to improve productivity (Stankovska et al., 2017). Job satisfaction is also viewed as an employee's connection, with their job, which is closely linked to their experience within the organisation (Olen, 2017). Hoppock (1935) provided one of the definitions describing job satisfaction as a combination of psychological, and environmental factors that contribute to an individual's liking for their job. Olen further explored this concept acknowledging its ambiguity, and he found that positive and negative aspects of job satisfaction have reaching effects throughout an organisation influencing productivity and the overall work environment (Olen, 2017). Che Nawi et al. (2016) aligned their definition with experts in the field by considering job satisfaction as a measure of success—a characteristic that enhances not only the reputation but also motivation and productivity, across all employees. Thus, it is evident that the concept of job satisfaction is challenging to define due to the factors that contribute to its meaning, and it is a realm that is difficult to capture accurately (Che Nawi et al. 2016).

Employee appreciation and job satisfaction

Existing literature emphasizes the importance of investigating how methods of appreciation relate to levels of job satisfaction. Recognizing employees offers advantages such, as boosting job satisfaction increasing workplace engagement enhancing work quality and fostering a sense of value within the organisation (Jalilianhasanpour et al., 2021). Motivation can be nurtured through methods like incentives, acknowledgment or tangible rewards which contribute to a perception of one's job and drive productivity (Ana & Ardita, 2021). Researchers can utilise these insights to develop resources that

employers can implement to enhance employee job satisfaction and cultivate work environments.

Pathak's study in 2014 holds a special place in this discussion as it highlights the importance of gratitude in workplaces and distinguishes it from financial compensation, where he challenges the idea that challenging goals are the driving force behind employee productivity emphasizing that appreciation can be a powerful motivator for excellence (Pathak, 2014). Further, leadership practices such as enhancing employees' skills involving them in decision-making, and fostering a work environment serve as a blueprint for increasing job satisfaction (Pathak, 2014). Thus, direct communication emerges as a way of showing appreciation and nurturing job satisfaction.

Theoretical foundation

The theoretical framework of this research encompasses four pillars.

- Abraham Maslow's theory on motivation (1943)
- Victor Vroom's expectancy theory (1964)
- Frederick Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory (1959)
- Arne L. Kalleberg's theory of job satisfaction (1977)

Abraham Maslow's theory on motivation (1943)

Abraham Maslow's theory on motivation played a role in the framework of this study. According to Maslow's work in 1943, individuals have five levels of needs, which include security, social needs, self-esteem, and self-actualisation, the desire to achieve one's highest potential (Maslow, 1943). One key aspect of Maslow's theory suggests that people prioritise addressing their significant unmet needs first (Alajmi & Alasousi, 2019). In this research, author relied on Maslow's theory as a foundation to understand different types of unmet needs in the work environment and explore how employer-applied methods of appreciation impact job satisfaction among ATCs.

Victor Vroom's expectancy theory (1964)

Victor Vroom's expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) examines how employees perceive the actions required to attain organisational rewards as a driving force behind their motivation.

Vrooms' theory consists of three components; Expectancy, which refers to the belief that actions will lead to desired outcomes; Instrumentality, which focuses on the connection between job performance and expected results; and Valence, which pertains to the value individuals assign to expected outcomes (Vroom, 1964). In the context of this study, Vroom's theory helps to understand how ATCs experience job satisfaction based on their perception of the appreciation methods provided by their employers.

Frederick Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory (1959)

Frederick Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory (1959) differentiates between factors that can demotivate individuals, such as pay and job security (external factors) and factors that can motivate them such as recognition and responsibility (related to the nature of work itself).

Arne L. Kalleberg's theory of job satisfaction (1977)

Another component of the framework is Kalleberg's theory of job satisfaction (1977) which emphasised that six aspects of work influence an employee's level of satisfaction, i.e. intrinsic facet, convenience facet, financial facet, extrinsic facet related to relationships with co-workers, extrinsic facet related to long-term career prospects within one institution and resource adequacy. Each of these elements plays a role in determining job satisfaction in the relationship between employees and employers.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy and Approach

This study is guided by a positivist research philosophy, which emphasizes objectivity, reproducibility, and the use of measurable variables. Positivism is well-suited for data analysis as it allows for the exploration of relationships and patterns, facilitating credible and reliable findings that can be validated. The study employs a deductive research approach, enabling the testing of well-defined hypotheses within a controlled framework. This approach acknowledges the importance of established concepts and previous research findings, promoting precision in data collection and analysis.

Research Strategy

A quantitative research strategy was adopted to systematically measure and analyze variables, allowing for the examination of causal relationships between employee appreciation and job satisfaction. This strategy enhances the accuracy of findings and enables hypothesis testing through statistical analysis.

Sampling Strategy

The study utilized a purposive sampling method to select Air Traffic Controllers (ATCs) based on criteria such as experience level and work environment, ensuring the homogeneity and comparability of the sample. Participants were drawn from both Airport and Aviation Services Sri Lanka (Private) Limited (AASL) and the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF), reflecting the characteristics of the population. Simple random sampling was then used to administer the questionnaire, avoiding biases associated with non-probability sampling methods. The distribution of the sample was based on the proportion of ATCs within each organization, ensuring representation across different positions.

To determine the appropriate sample size, Yamane's formula was applied, setting a significance level of 0.05, a precision level of $\pm 5\%$, and a confidence level of 95%, as recommended by Uakarn et al. (2021). This calculation indicated a minimum requirement of 242 participants. Accordingly, a sample size of 257 participants was deemed sufficient to ensure precise and reliable results while minimizing the likelihood of abnormal data distribution. The identification of variables and the conceptual framework of the study are as depicted below.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using an online questionnaire, developed through a rigorous multi-step process. Comprehensive research informed the creation of the questions, and a draft version was reviewed by five experts using the Item Objective Congruence (IOC) index, which requires a minimum score of 0.50 for acceptance (Kraiwani et al., 2023; Thetlek et al., 2023). The questionnaire achieved IOC values between 0.80 and 1.00, ensuring relevance and clarity in terms of content, language, and structure.

The finalized questionnaire was disseminated via various online platforms. Respondents provided explicit consent to use their responses for research purposes, with an option to opt-out if they did not wish to participate.

Table 1. Identification of the variables

Dependent Variable	DV	Job Satisfaction
Independent Variables	IV1	Verbal (one, on one) Having a conversation between a supervisor and employee to privately acknowledge their efforts and build a connection in the workplace
	IV2	Verbal (in public) Publicly recognizing an employee's accomplishments boosts visibility and morale by acknowledging their contributions in front of the team.
	IV3	Electronic note (media, email, LinkedIn) Using platforms like social media, email, or LinkedIn to express recognition and celebrate achievements in the virtual space.
	IV4	Written/ Typed (letters, cards) Showing appreciation through letters or typed cards adds a touch and conveys lasting sentiments that acknowledge an employee's dedication.
	IV5	Tangible items (gift card token of appreciation) Offering rewards such as gift cards or tokens as symbols of recognition that employees can enjoy for their hard work.
	IV6	Monetary bonus Providing compensation as a reward for exceptional job performance, demonstrating the organization's commitment to valuing outstanding contributions.
	IV7	No expression of gratitude When there is no acknowledgment or appreciation given.

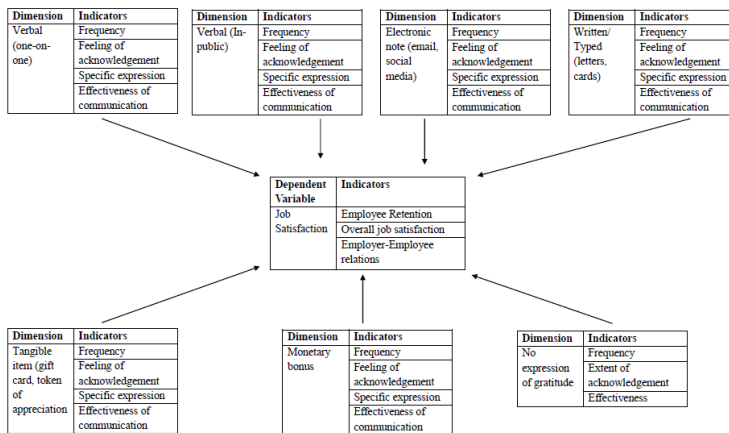


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Data analysis

IBM SPSS was used to calculate the Cronbach's Alpha for internal consistency. For all the instruments, Cronbach's Alpha was above 0.7 with a significance of $P < 0.005$. So the internal consistency was good for all the variables. Hence, the research tools were identified as reliable and they would provide credible results. Thereafter, the data were tested for normality and it was identified that all the variables were normally distributed. Subsequently, the data collected were then analyzed in detail by the use of descriptive statistics and the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Since the study employed an ex-post research design, the first step in analyzing the data was descriptive statistics, which entailed the use of percentages and means so as to get a general feel of the appearance of the commencement as well as to get an awareness of the inherent tendencies of the identified variables in the study. This approach uses Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to study the relationships between the multiple dependent variables and ensure the correlations and dependencies between the variables. This approach was more helpful in the analysis, as it provided insights into the patterns of data that helped to expound on the results of the study by providing a detailed assessment of the dataset.

4. RESULTS

The main objective of this study was to investigate how various employee appreciation methods impact

job satisfaction of ATCs. Understanding how this segment of operational staff perceives these methods and whether they directly influence their job satisfaction can provide insights for supervisors, managers and leaders. The findings of this study offer information that institutional leaders and managers can utilise to foster a work environment for all employees, which Buil et al. (2018) emphasised for those in operational roles who play a major part in organisational workflow (Chambliss, 2017).

A total of 257 (Male- 211, Female-46) responses were collected from participants. All those 257 respondents met the criteria for inclusion and were considered usable as they were comprehensively completed by respondents. The majority of participants were individuals within the age range of 30 to 39 years, from Sri Lanka. They had either been employed by AASL (205) or by SLAF (52) as ATCs.

In order to analyse each appreciation method, one sample t test was conducted on all seven methods. Hypothesis of the study and the results of the one sample t test is depicted in the table below. All the hypotheses were accepted with the relationships as depicted on the Table 2.

Based on the methods of appreciation, there was a statistical impact, on job satisfaction ($p < .001$) which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis suggesting a significant effect on job satisfaction. However, due to multicollinearity detected in the four variables namely Verbal (in public), Written/ Typed (letters, cards), Tangible items (gift card, token of appreciation) and Monetary bonus, hypotheses pertaining to aforementioned variables were not considered for this study. The results of the multiple regression are shown in Tables 5, 6 and 7.

Table 3. Inter correlation matrix for multicollinearity statistics

An inter-correlation matrix for multicollinearity statistics displays the correlation coefficients between multiple variables, highlighting the degree of linear

Table 2. Hypothesis of the research and one sample T test results

Hypothesis			Pearson's Correlation	Significance	Conclusion	Relationship
H1	H01	The method of appreciating employees in one-on-one (verbal), setting holds a significant influence on job satisfaction among Air Traffic Controllers.	0.581	<0.001	Accepted	Moderately Positive
	H _a 1	The approach of appreciating employees in one-on-one (verbal), interactions does not have a statistically significant effect on job satisfaction within the Air Traffic Controllers.			Rejected	
H2	H02	The act of verbalizing (public) employee appreciation exerts a significant effect on job satisfaction among Air Traffic Controllers.	0.377	<0.001	Accepted	Weakly Positive
	H _a 2	Verbalizing (Public) employee appreciation does not result in a statistically significant impact on job satisfaction among Air Traffic Controllers.			Rejected	
H3	H03	The method of employee appreciation involving notes holds a significant influence on job satisfaction, among Air Traffic Controllers	0.606	<0.001	Accepted	Strongly Positive
	H _a 3	Utilizing electronic notes (media, email, LinkedIn) as a means of employee appreciation does not demonstrate a significant influence on job satisfaction among Air Traffic Controllers.			Rejected	
H4	H04	Using written or typed items like letters and cards to show employee appreciation has an influence on job satisfaction among Air Traffic Controllers.	0.514	<0.001	Accepted	Moderately Positive
	H _a 4	Using written or typed items like letters and cards to show employee appreciation does not have an impact on job satisfaction among Air Traffic Controllers.			Rejected	
H5	H05	Using items such as gift cards and tokens of appreciation has a significant impact on job satisfaction, among Air Traffic Controllers.	0.142	0.023	Accepted	Very Weakly Positive
	H _a 5	Using items such as gift cards and tokens of appreciation does not have a significant effect on job satisfaction among Air Traffic Controllers.			Rejected	
H6	H06	Offering bonuses to appreciate employees has a significant influence on the job satisfaction of Air Traffic Controllers	0.367	<0.001	Accepted	Weakly Positive
	H _a 6	The method of appreciating employees through bonuses does not show any significant effect on the job satisfaction of Air Traffic Controllers			Rejected	
H7	H07	The absence of expressing gratitude holds an influence on the job satisfaction of Air Traffic Controllers.	-0.739	<0.001	Accepted	Strongly Negative
	H _a 7	Not expressing gratitude does not have an impact on the job satisfaction of Air Traffic Controllers			Rejected	

relationship among them. It aids in identifying multicollinearity issues in regression models, where high correlations suggest potential redundancies. This matrix is essential for ensuring model accuracy and interpretability in statistical analyses. Table 3 provides the intercorrelation matrix for this study.

Table 3. Inter correlation matrix for Multicollinearity Statistics

		Correlations						
		Verbal One-on-one Appreciation	Verbal In-person Appreciation	Electronic Note appreciation	Typed Letters and cards	Gift Cards and Token of Appreciation	Bonuses as Rewards	No Expression of Gratitude
Verbal One-on-one Appreciation	Pearson Correlation	1	.632**	.511**	.808**	.266**	.003	-.331**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.960	<.001
	N	257	257	257	257	257	257	257
Verbal In-person Appreciation	Pearson Correlation	.632**	1	.468**	.803**	.360**	.036	-.216**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	.564	<.001
	N	257	257	257	257	257	257	257
Electronic Note appreciation	Pearson Correlation	.511**	.468**	1	.574**	.199**	.330**	-.449**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001	.001	<.001	<.001
	N	257	257	257	257	257	257	257
Typed Letters and cards	Pearson Correlation	.808**	.803**	.574**	1	.466**	.061	-.277**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	.328	<.001
	N	257	257	257	257	257	257	257
Gift Cards and Token of Appreciation	Pearson Correlation	.266**	.360**	.199**	.466**	1	-.335**	.102
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	.001	<.001		<.001	.104
	N	257	257	257	257	257	257	257
Bonuses as Rewards	Pearson Correlation	.003	.036	.330**	.061	-.335**	1	-.558**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.960	.564	<.001	.328	<.001		<.001
	N	257	257	257	257	257	257	257
No Expression of Gratitude	Pearson Correlation	-.331**	-.216**	-.449**	-.277**	.102	-.558**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.104	<.001	
	N	257	257	257	257	257	257	257

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

multicollinearity statistics

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance values are essential metrics for diagnosing multicollinearity in regression analysis. VIF quantifies the extent of multicollinearity, with values above 5 indicating potential issues. Tolerance, the reciprocal of VIF, should exceed 0.2. Adhering to these standards ensures model stability and reliable results.

Table 4. Tolerance and VIF values for multicollinearity statistics

Coefficients ^a			
Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Verbal One-on-one Appreciation	.290	3.448
	Verbal In-person Appreciation	.353	2.831
	Electronic Note appreciation	.547	1.828
	Typed Letters and cards	.158	6.320
	Gift Cards and Token of Appreciation	.594	1.684
	Bonuses as Rewards	.519	1.926
	No Expression of Gratitude	.559	1.789

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Satisfaction

Source: Author, Generated using IBM SPSS 26

Due to the multicollinearity identified through above tests, 4 independent variables were deemed unfit for the model. Verbal in public appreciation, Gift cards or tokens of appreciation, Bonuses and rewards and Written, typed letters or cards were deemed unfit.

Table 5. Multiple Regression Analysis- Model Summary of the sample

Model Summary ^a										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.838 ^a	.702	.698	.66602	.702	198.614	3	253	<.001	1.636

a. Predictors: (Constant), No Expression of Gratitude, Verbal One-on-one Appreciation, Electronic Note appreciation

b. Dependent Variable: Employee Satisfaction

Source: Author, Generated using IBM SPSS 26

As per the Table 5, multiple regression model summary provides essential metrics for evaluating model performance. An R-squared value above 0.7 is generally considered strong, while adjusted R-squared accounts for model complexity. The F-statistic p-value should be below 0.05 for overall significance. Coefficients' p-values should also be below 0.05 to denote individual predictor significance.

Table 6. Multiple Regression Analysis- ANOVA table

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	264.303	3	88.101	198.614	<.001 ^b
	Residual	112.226	253	.444		
	Total	376.529	256			

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), No Expression of Gratitude, Verbal One-on-one Appreciation , Electronic Note appreciation

Source: Author, Generated using IBM SPSS 26

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), No Expression of Gratitude, Verbal One-on-one Appreciation, Electronic Note appreciation

Source: Author, Generated using IBM SPSS 26

A Multiple Regression Analysis ANOVA table evaluates model significance. The F-statistic compares model fit to a null model, with p-values below 0.05 indicating significance. Sum of Squares (Regression and Residual) assess explained and unexplained variance, respectively. Mean Squares, derived by dividing Sum of Squares by degrees of freedom, facilitate comparison and model assessment.

Table 7. Multiple Regression Analysis- Coefficients table					
Coefficients ^a					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	2.439	.176		13.851 <.001
	Verbal One-on-one Appreciation	.257	.035	.292	7.253 <.001
	Electronic Note appreciation	.195	.039	.211	4.965 <.001
	No Expression of Gratitude	-.365	.026	-.547	-14.120 <.001

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Satisfaction

Source: Author, Generated using IBM SPSS 26

Table 7. Multiple Regression Analysis- Coefficients table

Multiple Regression Analysis assesses the relationship between multiple independent variables and a dependent variable. The coefficients table presents the impact of each independent variable on the dependent variable, with generally accepted values indicating the strength and direction of influence. Accepted values vary depending on the field but typically range from -1 to 1, representing weak to strong relationships.

Study limitations

This study aimed to examine how seven employee appreciation methods affect the job satisfaction of ATCs. After completing the study, it is crucial to review the data collection process for improvements in future research endeavours. While this study yielded results with dependent variables such as one on one communication, electronic note (social media, email, LinkedIn), verbal (in public), written/ typed (letters, cards), tangible items (gift card, token of appreciation) and monetary bonus which were identified as effective methods, there are limitations that future researchers should address and minimise.

One limitation worth noting is that this study only considered seven employee appreciation methods.

Some companies may offer ways to show appreciation to their employees, which are not covered in the seven methods mentioned in this study. These unique methods, tailored to each organisation can have an even greater impact, on employees compared to the seven mentioned methods.

Further, this study specifically focuses on a region and may be influenced by cultural and organisational factors unique, to Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is needed to concern these findings before applying them to other contexts. Further research is necessary for generalisability.

5. DISCUSSION

Organisational leaders and managers often face the challenge of finding ways to appreciate their employees, which can positively affect outcomes such as job satisfaction (Aguenza & Som 2012). However, there is no information on how employee appreciation methods specifically influence the job satisfaction of operational staff (Bradler & Neckermann 2019; Haider et al., 2015). This quantitative study helped to fill this gap by examining the impact of employee appreciation methods on ATCs' job satisfaction and these methods can be adopted by employers to further the job satisfaction of their employees.

The statistical analysis of the regression analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how various employee appreciation approaches influence job satisfaction; the model summary found an R-value of .838 indicating a strong correlation between observed and predicted values. An R Square of .702 shows that 70.2% of the variance in economic outcomes is explained by the model. Significant Predictors found: Verbal one-on-one appreciation and Electronic Note appreciation. Negative Predictor found: Absence of gratitude to the employee. Implications of these insights highlight the complex interplay of psychological, behavioural, and technological factors in shaping the job satisfaction of Air Traffic Controllers. Based on the statistical analysis, the following recommendations could be drawn.

Enhance personalized verbal appreciation

One significant finding from this study is the connection between verbal appreciation and job satisfaction among ATCs in Sri Lanka. This underscores the importance of fostering personal communication between supervisors and ATCs. In order to further improve on this aspect employers are able to carry out the following,

Training in Communication Skills; Develop and implement training programs that focus on equipping supervisors and team leads with the skills to deliver constructive feedback effectively.

Encourage Open Communication Channels; Foster an environment where ATCs feel comfortable approaching their superiors with any concerns or feedback they may have. This approach promotes a culture of trust and transparency.

Embrace electronic appreciation notes

The study indicates a positive relationship between electronic appreciation notes and job satisfaction. In today's age, electronic communication plays a major role in workplace dynamics. In order to harness its benefits, it is important to:

Implement Dedicated Electronic Platforms; Consider implementing platforms solely dedicated to expressing appreciation and acknowledgment varying from email recognitions to more advanced tools designed specifically for peer-to-peer recognition.

Provide training on the use of Electronic Communication; Provide ATCs with training, on how to use electronic communication to express gratitude.

This involves creating messages and using technology to facilitate genuine acknowledgments.

Dealing with a lack of gratitude

The negative correlation with the lack of gratitude emphasizes the negative impact it has, on job satisfaction. In order to confront this issue, it is important to:

Promote Awareness Programmes; Promote the value of showing appreciation at work by organising initiatives such as workshops, seminars and

communication campaigns. These activities can effectively emphasise the impact of acknowledgment on employee morale and job satisfaction.

Cultivate a Culture of Gratitude; Foster an environment where gratitude is valued within the organisation by incorporating practices that promote appreciation into activities and encouraging supervisors and team members to acknowledge and recognise each other's efforts.

Continuous monitoring and adaptation

To ensure that these methods remain sustainable and effective, it is vital to establish a strategy for regular monitoring and adaptation;

Implement Feedback Mechanisms; Create avenues for feedback from ATCs regarding the implemented recommendations. This could involve surveys, focus groups or even anonymous suggestion boxes to gather constructive input.

Data Driven Decision Making; Utilise data analytics to assess the impact of implemented strategies on job satisfaction, continuously monitor trends over time and make informed adjustments based on evolving workforce needs and preferences.

Mechanism, for gathering employee feedback

It is crucial to empower ATCs to participate in the improvement of appreciation practices through the means given below.

Structured Feedback Mechanism; Create a well-organized and confidential system where ATCs can freely express their opinions and suggestions. This can be done through feedback sessions, anonymous surveys or a dedicated feedback portal.

Incorporating Feedback in Decision Making; Integrate the feedback received into decision making processes. By demonstrating a commitment to listening and addressing employee concerns, trust can be strengthened, leading to appreciation initiatives.

In addition to the above, further research should be conducted to explore the implications of employee appreciation methods across organisations beyond institutions providing Air Traffic Services. By using a research model with adjustments, to requirements and

including additional employee appreciation methods, a wider range of data can be collected for analysis.

It would be valuable to conduct research, on how different methods of appreciating employees impact the job satisfaction of operational staff in institutions, such as financial, sales, legal, medical and educational organisations. Additionally, it would be interesting to expand these studies to Air Traffic Service providers and consider how cultural factors might influence the preferred methods of appreciation. By including operational staff from countries and institutions in the research, it is possible to gain a comprehensive understanding. It is recommended that leaders and managers within organisations review the findings from this study and other similar studies to recognize the significance of establishing relationships with employees who feel valued (Hamrick & White, 2020).

The implications of this study have both internal and external impacts. Within an organisation, leaders who fully grasp the impact of employee appreciation methods can foster job satisfaction, loyalty and positive morale among employees. Understanding which methods of appreciation lead to job satisfaction is crucial as it influences employee's motivation to stay in their job. A positive work environment not only boosts productivity, but also attracts individuals to be a part of the organisation ultimately shaping a favourable perception of the organisation in society beyond its boundaries.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion this quantitative study aimed to examine the impact of seven employee appreciation strategies on the job satisfaction of ATCs. Building upon Becks 2016 study, data was collected from 257 participants who met the criteria of being ATC staff members of AASL or SLAF. The results revealed that all seven methods had an influence on the job satisfaction of ATCs with one-on-one communication, electronic notes (social media, email, LinkedIn), verbal (in public) communication, written/ typed (letters, cards) communication, tangible items (gift card, token of appreciation) and monetary bonus as the effective methods of appreciation.

Thus, this study offers insights into the factors that influence job satisfaction among ATCs in Sri Lanka. The comprehensive nature of appreciation strategies as revealed by regression analysis highlights the importance of adopting an approach to enhance satisfaction.

In conclusion, the below model can be instrumented by employers and other stakeholders of ATC in identifying and quantifying job satisfaction of ATCs all around the world. It also suggests best suiting appreciation techniques to increase job satisfaction of ATCs.

$$\text{Job Satisfaction} = 2.439 + 0.257 (\text{Verbal One-on-one Appreciation}) + 0.195 (\text{Electronic Note Appreciation}) - 0.365 (\text{No expression of Gratitude})$$

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