

THE INFLUENCE OF GRATITUDE EXPRESSION ON MOTIVATION LEVEL AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF

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Abstract

Gratitude and motivation level among employees within an organisation are always linked to each other for the big role they play in achieving individual and organisational goals. This study aims to investigate the perceptions of the academic staff towards the expression of gratitude and employee motivation level, as well as to investigate the differences of the expression of gratitude and motivation level in terms of gender, race and types of institutions. A quantitative approach was employed, utilising a 27-item questionnaire administered through an online platform to 104 academic staff from both public and private higher learning institutions in Selangor. The finding revealed that there is no influence from gender, race and types of institutions towards the expression of gratitude and employee motivation. However, there is a positive relationship between the expression of gratitude and the academic staffs' motivation level. This is an important and valuable insight to be provided to the higher management of learning institutions in Malaysia for a possible consideration on the adjustment of the appreciation method in boosting employee's motivation level.

Keywords: gratitude, employee motivation level, organisational communication

INTRODUCTION

'Thank you'. Those two words of gratitude may sound simple and sweet, but they carry significant influence in everyone's social life. It is typical for anyone to express their gratitude after getting their requests fulfilled, or their favours answered. Gratitude can be defined as a temperamental characteristic that is seen as the sign of trust (Chen & Wu, 2014). Communicating and expressing gratitude especially at the workplace actually enhances job satisfaction among employees in any organisational direction (Beck, 2016). By expressing gratitude, people being expressed to will feel valued and appreciated, of which in turn would enhance the employee's willingness to cooperate with others and improve work productivity (Beck, 2016). It has been shown in psychological researches that the expression of gratitude can influence other people's well-being (Chen & Wu, 2014).

To obtain talents and skills from employees require lesser work than to retain them. Sustained level of motivation at the workplace has close association to the expression of

gratitude. Researchers have pointed out that motivation can be increased by showing appreciation and communication gratitude towards each other. Grant and Gino (2010) in their study investigated on what kind of psychological processes does receiving gratitude lead helpers (i.e. teachers) to help others (students) more. Their research revealed that the expressions of gratitude actually increase social worth and encourages helpers, who feel socially valued, to provide more help. They also found out that a socially valued and motivated helper would feel more prompted to provide help to a larger group of individuals (beneficiaries). This shows how significant the effect of gratitude towards a person's motivation. It is further supported by Beck (2016) who investigated on managerial gratitude. In her study, she explored the employment, efficiency and the dark sides of gratitude communication in organisations from the perspective of the subordinate employees. She found out that gratitude increases their motivation and sense of value. Her study also revealed that sincerity is an important element in gratitude, and verbal one-on-one gratitude is preferred. A similar study was done by Patil et al. (2018) who also obtained similar findings. They found out that gratitude itself produce a positive effect on employee's motivation, joy and contentment. They highlighted that gratitude, when communicated personally on one-to-one communication, offers greater effect than group communication.

Despite the importance of expressing sincere gratitude, which is the simplest form of appreciation, and its significance in keeping skilled and talented human force in an organisation, the problem pertaining lack of appreciation still exists. According to the 2017 Randstad Employer Brand Research Report, 35% of Malaysian employee planned on leaving their companies that year, with some already looking for new career opportunities. The major factor was the lack of appreciation from the management. Following with the Global Report in 2018, the factor of lack of recognition still persists (27%) in driving employees of the Asia-Pacific region away. The report concluded that a more personal approach is required with emphasis on inclusion to increase self-worth. If this problem is not addressed, it will affect the motivation level of employee and cause a loss to the company.

Past studies did provide some valuable insights in the effect of gratitude towards individuals, however few explored on the expressions of gratitude at the workplace in Malaysia especially at a higher learning institution. Many also focused on the psychological aspect of it, and not much had ventured into the aspects of business communication. Hence, this study will explore and study on the expression of gratitude at the workplace and provide more insight on

the relationship between gratitude and self-motivation at the workplace. Specifically, this study will answer the following research questions:

- RQ 1: What are the perceptions of academic staff towards gratitude in higher learning institutions?
- RQ 2: What is the motivation level of academic staff in higher learning institutions?
- RQ 3: Do gender, race and types of higher learning institutions affect the perceptions towards gratitude and the motivation level?
- RQ 4: Is there any significant relationship between the gratitude and the motivation level of the academic staff?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gratitude can be understood as the tendency to identify and react with thankful emotions to the goodwill of others, and this process includes both elements of cognition and affect (Chen & Wu, 2014). Within an organisation, gratitude is seen as an important element for its role to boost employee's morale and it serves as a form of valuable recognition (Patil et al., 2018). In determining the perceptions towards gratitude, this term itself can be divided into several dimensions. The dimensions covered in this research are mediums of gratitude (verbal vs. handwritten, personal vs. group, monetary vs. non-monetary) and culture of gratitude.

There are several ways to express gratitude at the workplace. It can be done verbally, through handwritten, sent through electronic means or presented in the form of monetary reward. Verbal communication is the method that is commonly used. A one-to-one verbal expression of gratitude is found to be more preferable compared to a group setting. Beck (2016) conducted a study to explore the use of gratitude and its effectiveness in workplace organisations, which incorporated narratives from three focus groups and questionnaire involving 883 professionals in various industries in the United States. Her study revealed that the employees prefer verbal one-to-one gratitude to electronic, handwritten and monetary gratitude. Patil et al. (2018) in their study explored on the same field and obtained similar results, in which personally expressed gratitude brings greater impact, and that gratitude in its nature does not need to be monetary.

It is crucial to note that in each organisation and each team, every member possesses the desire to feel respected and appreciated. In fulfilling that need, it calls for the fostering of gratitude culture. Siegel (2018) mentioned in his writing that when gratitude is cultivated within an organisation, it drives productivity and employees' well-being, as well as promotes pro-social behaviour among educators and higher organisational commitment. These are proven in previously done researches. McCullough et al. (2002) (cited in Sansone & Sansone, 2010) investigated on gratitude and well-being through three experimental conditions which involves the three groups to respectively write a journal on negative events, things they were grateful about and neutral life events. They found that the gratitude group showed higher evidence of well-being compared to the other two subsamples. Grant and Gino (2010) on the other hand examined the effects of gratitude on pro-social behaviour, which is the intention to help others among teachers. Through four experiments, their results reveal that the expression of gratitude elevates pro-social behaviour as it enables individuals to feel socially valued. Other than that, the culture of gratitude, if fostered, will also increase organisational commitment. A study done by Baker (2011) examined the effect of gratitude of well-being and work specific outcomes, where the participants recorded grateful events and answered a survey. The results revealed that gratitude has significant influence towards organisational commitment, of which the author concluded that gratitude actually brings a lot of positive attitudes in the organisation.

Gratitude and Gender

It has been revealed that women express gratitude more compared to men. Kashdan et al. (2009) did a study on how different men and women perceive gratitude. They found that women were more likely to feel and express gratitude, while men evaluated gratitude in a critical manner hence expressing it less. Konig and Gluck (2013) did a study on gratitude, gender and wisdom which involves interviewing 94 participants and distributing questionnaire to 443 individuals. Their results revealed that spontaneously, women expressed gratitude more than men. This is in line with another study done by Roa-Meggo (2017), which involves 200 participants using The Gratitude Scale by Alarcon and Rodriguez (2015) revealed that women have higher level of gratitude as compared to men. According to Solomon (1995) in Kashdan et al. (2009), gratitude could be linked with being indebted and dependent which might explain such differences if masculinity is taken into account. Thus, it can be said that there are differences in the expression of gratitude across gender.

Motivation in the Workplace

Motivation in the workplace is important in crafting a working environment that is dynamic, filled with employees who are positively driven and committed to the organisation. Motivation can be divided into two categories, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation can be defined as doing something driven by internal rewards, which come from within the individual to its natural satisfaction (Singh, 2016). People who are motivated intrinsically would enjoy doing their work and see it as a learning opportunity. Intrinsic motivation also involves social incentives, such as appreciation, acknowledgement of achievement, sense of achievement and job satisfaction (Khan, Khan, Rehman, Irshad, Rehman & Rehman, 2014). Extrinsic motivation, in contrast, can be defined as the willingness to do something with the intention to obtain positive consequences such as an tangible rewards, or to avoid negative consequences (Kuvaas et al., 2017). Extrinsically motivated people would stay committed to work for factors such as advancement opportunities, job security, monetary reward and organisation characteristics (Singh, 2016).

Previous studies have found that intrinsic motivation is superior to extrinsic motivation at the workplace. Thomas and Holley (2012) conducted a study to look at ways for motivating staff assigned to do repetitive tasks at a library. Through extensive management literature review and management experience, the researchers found out that intrinsic factors like improving working experience, offering proper incentives and showing dignity and respect towards the employee help in increasing the employee motivation.

A study done by Khan et al. (2014) provided similar interesting insights on the role of non-monetary incentives towards employees' motivation level. A 20-item questionnaire was distributed to 210 employees in a telecommunication company. Their findings revealed that there exists a positive significant relationship between non-monetary incentives (career growth and enrichment) and employees' motivation; hence they further suggested that organisations should improve employees' motivation by enhancing their reward system. This finding is supported by the study done by Singh (2016) who investigated on motivation at the workplace. Ninety-eight participants were involved in a discussion which were later analysed and reviewed in line with relevant management literature, and her finding revealed that intrinsic motivators are more influential towards the employees rather than extrinsic factors such as monetary means.

There are indeed several factors influential to the level of motivation among employees. Gratitude is considered as one of the intrinsic motivators towards employees within an organisation (Singh, 2016). Through the expression of gratitude, it provides the sense of recognition, facilitates trust, as well as increases social worth and organisational commitment. Several studies have proven that the expression of gratitude at the workplace increases employee motivation level. In a study done by Drażkowski et al. (2017), their findings revealed that when financial benefits are at risk, gratitude played its role in providing trust towards strangers and increased motivational intensity. They later concluded that gratitude facilitates trust and lead to an increase in motivation. Meanwhile, Patil et al. (2018) conducted a study to investigate the impact of gratitude towards employee morale in the workplace. Their findings also revealed that gratitude certainly has positive impact on motivation, where 87.5% of the respondents agreed that they get motivated and feel more enjoyment each time their organisations express gratitude upon their contribution.

The effects of gratitude on motivation do not only apply to the person being thanked for, but also to the person who thanked others. In another word, gratitude goes both ways. This is supported by a study done by Armenta (2017) who investigated on the impact of expressing gratitude on self-improvement. 1017 participants were required to weekly letters to express their gratefulness. Her findings revealed that the participants who expressed gratitude towards others felt more motivated and capable of improving themselves. Therefore, it can be said that the expression of gratitude aids in making the workplace a better environment, generates trust and increases motivation level.

METHODOLOGY

A conceptual framework to this study was developed to illustrate the variables employed in this current study, which is shown in Figure 1. The expression of gratitude is counted as one of the intrinsic motivator, as expressed by Singh (2016). It has been found that when it comes to the preferred mediums of gratitude, verbally expressed gratitude is better than handwritten one (Beck, 2016; Patil et al., 2018). They also stated that rather than gratitude expressed towards a group, employees prefer it to be expressed personally as it reflects sincerity. With these act of gratitude being practiced, it will lead to an improved culture of gratitude at the workplace of which will increase social worth and promotes pro-social behaviour (Grant & Gino, 2010).

Such improved culture of gratitude will also increase organisational commitment among employees (Baker, 2011). Such positive outcomes indicate the improved level of motivation among employees within an organisation.

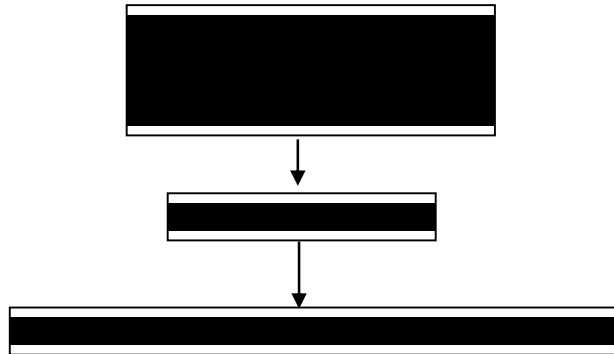


Figure 1: Expression of Gratitude and Its Influence on Employee Motivation Level

This study employed a quantitative approach. A quantitative research is best used to understand any relationship between an independent and dependent variable in a chosen population (Patten & Newhart, 2017). Quantitative research quantifies investigated problems by including statistical assignments to provide statistics in the result. This study used a questionnaire since a quantitative research obtains information through survey questions to obtain better prediction and specify causes and effects. It will allow researcher to determine relationships between variables. The sample chosen for this study is the academic staff working in both public and private higher learning institutions in Selangor. This study attempts to reflect the academic staffs working in higher learning institutions.

A questionnaire was employed in this research to elicit the responses from selected respondents. Questionnaire is chosen because it is easier for the researcher to collect and analyse the data received. There are three sections in the questionnaire. The first section consists of demographic questions which request the respondents' information on gender, race and types of institution. The next section consists of 17 items on the perception towards the expression of gratitude, while the third section consists of 10 items on employee motivation level. The survey questions on gratitude and motivation were adapted and modified from a study done by Patil et al. (2018) and Singh (2016) respectively. A reliability analysis has been carried out on the total of 27 items for this research's survey question. Cronbach's alpha was done and showed that the questionnaire reached the acceptable reliability, $\alpha = 9.29$. According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011), the recommended maximum, reliable alpha value is 0.90.

The survey questions were constructed and made available on Google Form. Then, a link was sent to targeted respondents through the Whatsapp messaging application. Responses were automatically generated on Google Form spreadsheet. The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) which can carry out highly complex data manipulation and analysis. The tools in the SPSS were employed to develop tabulations and correlations, and the data from the sample will be inferred using inferential statistics, which allow researchers to infer about the population obtained from the sample data (Rathi, 2018). The analysis on the result will then be illustrated thoroughly.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile

There was a total of 104 participants who took part in this research. The demographic details are presented in Table 1 as shown below:

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Gender		Race		Types of Institution	
Male	48.08 %	Malay	49.04 %	Public Institution	53.85%
Female	51.92 %	Chinese	25.96 %	Private Institution	46.15%
		Indian	18.27 %		
		Others	6.73 %		

Perceptions of Academic Staff Towards Gratitude in Higher Learning Institutions (RQ1)

There were 17 items from the questionnaire under the sub-topic gratitude. The data collected was analysed using the Means procedure under the Compare Mean submenu on SPSS, and the result is presented in Table 2 as shown below.

Table 2: Perceptions of Academic Staff towards Gratitude in Higher Learning Institutions

No.	Expression of gratitude	Mean
1.	I believe that gratitude is important within an organisation.	4.3077
2.	I prefer it when people thank me verbally and personally (one-to-one) rather than towards a group.	3.7115
3.	I believe that personally expressed gratitude is more sincere than the one expressed towards a group.	3.7885

4.	I prefer it when gratitude is expressed verbally rather than written.	3.7715
5.	I feel more appreciated if I am rewarded with monetary gift for my hard work.	3.4327
6.	I believe that the nature of gratitude needs to be monetary.	3.3077
7.	I think that a mere gesture of verbal nature of gratitude is enough.	3.6250
8.	I believe that a strong culture of gratitude in the workplace can drive employee's productivity, wellness and engagement.	4.1442
9.	I think my institution needs to promote more on gratitude at work by incorporating suitable practices.	4.183
10.	I believe that there are rooms for improvement in the culture of gratitude within my institution.	4.1538
11.	I believe that being thanked for equals to being respected.	4.2115
12.	I feel respected more if I am shown gratitude in my institution by my superiors	4.1538
13.	I frequently express gratitude towards my colleagues and subordinates/students	4.0192
14.	Overuse of gratitude makes me take it for granted.	3.5385
15.	I feel appreciated when my colleagues thank me.	4.1538
16.	I feel appreciated when my superiors thank me.	4.3173
17.	I feel appreciated when my subordinates/students thank me.	4.3269

As highlighted in Table 2, it is revealed that out of the gratitude items listed, item 17 (*I feel appreciated when my subordinates/students thank me*) scored the highest mean ($M=4.33$). This tells that the academic staffs find that being expressed gratitude by their subordinates/students gave them the feeling of appreciation the most. This is in line with the study done by Patil et al. (2018) who also revealed in their study that their respondents feel more appreciated when thanked by their subordinates, compared to when receiving it from their superiors or colleagues. This finding concurs relevantly with the study done by Grant and Gino (2010) who concluded that when educators receive gratitude upon their effort, their social worth is elevated, encouraging them to provide more assistance.

The research also revealed that the respondents agreed on gratitude needs not to be monetary, as shown by item 6 having the lowest mean score ($M=3.31$). This is in accordance to a study done by Singh (2016) which revealed that money (extrinsic motivator) has less impact than other intrinsic motivators like recognition and respect. This finding could also be explained by saying that money is considered short-lived satisfaction, compared to impactful recognition and appreciation.

Motivation Level of Academic Staff in Higher Learning Institutions (RQ2)

There were 10 items from the questionnaire under the sub-topic employee motivation. The data collected was analysed using the Means procedure under the Compare Mean submenu on SPSS, and the result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Employee Motivation Level

No.	Employee Motivation	Mean
1.	These days I feel motivated to work as hard as I can.	3.625
2.	I feel a sense of personal satisfaction when I do my job well.	4.067
3.	I do this job as it provides long term security for me.	3.683
4.	I only do this job so I get paid at the end of the month.	3.606
5.	I am satisfied with the opportunity to use my abilities in my job	3.923
6.	I am satisfied that I accomplish something worthwhile in this job	3.952
7.	I think that my work in this educational institution is valuable.	3.857
8.	I am proud to be working for this institution.	3.808
9.	I feel very committed to this institution.	3.817
10.	This institution really inspires me to do my very best on the job	3.702

In terms of employee motivation, it is found that the academic staffs' motivation is driven by the sense of achievement in their job, which is reflected by the highest mean score on item 2 (I feel a sense of personal satisfaction when I do my job well). The item with the lowest mean score is item 4 (I only do this job so I get paid at the end of the month), which could be well linked with the aforementioned high mean score for item 2. This finding reveals that the academic staffs are committed to their organisation, and are not only motivated by extrinsic factor such as their salary.

This result is in line with the study done by Tentama and Pranungsari (2016), who found that people have the tendency to accredit satisfying and fulfilling incidents at work (sense of achievement) when reflecting upon their own work. It can be said that the respondents of the current research are more driven by intrinsic rewards, particularly sense of achievement, which later provide job satisfaction that increases their commitment to the organisation.

The Influence of Gender, Race and Types of Institutions on The Expression of Gratitude and Motivation Level in Higher Learning Institutions (RQ3)

Influence of Gender on the Expression of Gratitude and Employee Motivation

In determining whether there is any significant mean difference between gender and the expression of gratitude, and also gender and employee motivation, the data was analysed using the Independent Samples T-Test, which compares the means of two independent groups whether they are significantly different in regards to the associated population (Kent State University Libraries, 2019). The results are presented in the following Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4: Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
AveGratitude	Male	50	3.9753	.55781	.07889
	Female	54	3.9194	.61475	.08366
AveMotivation	Male	50	3.7600	.66086	.09346
	Female	54	3.8407	.67054	.09125

Table 5: Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	Std. Error Diff	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Ave Gratitude	Equal variances assumed	1.694	.196	.484	102	.629	.05590	.11542	-.17303	.28484
	Equal variances not assumed			.486	101.961	.628	.05590	.11498	-.17217	.28398
Ave Motivation	Equal variances assumed	.011	.915	-.618	102	.538	-.08074	.13069	-.33997	.17849
	Equal variances not assumed			-.618	101.594	.538	-.08074	.13062	-.33983	.17835

Based on Table 4 and Table 5, there was no significant mean difference in the expression

of gratitude among male ($M=3.957$, $SD=0.558$) and female ($M=3.919$, $SD=0.6148$), $t(102)=0.484$, $p>0.05$ (Levene's test is not significant, thus we take the results in Equal variances assumed). Therefore, it can be concluded that both male and female express gratitude equally in the workplace. Similarly, there was also no significant mean difference in employee motivation among male ($M=3.76$, $SD=0.661$) and female ($M=3.841$, $SD=0.671$), $t(102)=0.618$, $p>0.05$ (Levene's test is not significant, thus we take the results in Equal variances assumed). Therefore, it can be concluded that the employee motivation level across gender is equal.

While most previous studies revealed that there are differences when it comes to gender, such contradiction is worth to explore. Some studies, however, do concur with the result of this research. Sood and Gupta (2012) in their study done in India revealed that gender plays no role in the participants' gratitude. They further explained that it may be due to influences of culture that encourages the expression of gratitude regardless of gender. This may be applied to the Malaysian context as well. Rydh (2019) also could not find any differences in gender when it comes to gratitude trait. They concluded quite similarly, mentioning that perhaps the traditional gender stereotypes were not as noticeable in Sweden, the third most gender equal nation in the world.

Influence of Race on the Expression of Gratitude and Employee Motivation

In determining whether there is any significant mean difference between race and the expression of gratitude, and between race and employee motivation, the ANOVA test was run. The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) compares the means between groups, determining whether any of the selected groups are statistically, significantly different from one another (Lund Research, 2018). The results are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: ANOVA Test

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
AveGratitude	Between Groups	.144	3	.048	.136	.938
	Within Groups	35.213	100	.352		
	Total	35.357	103			
AveMotivation	Between Groups	.633	3	.211	.471	.703
	Within Groups	44.767	100	.448		
	Total	45.400	103			

As seen in Table 6, the one-way ANOVA reveals that $F(3, 100)=0.136$, $p>0.05$. This

shows that there is no significant mean difference in the expression of gratitude across different race group. Thus, it can be concluded that employees from all race groups express gratitude equally at the workplace. Similarly, the one-way ANOVA also reveals that $F(3, 100)=0.471, p>0.05$. This shows that there is no significant mean difference in the level of employee motivation across different race group. So, it can be concluded that employees from all race groups have similar level of employee motivation.

This result is in accordance to that obtained by Browning (2012) who found that despite the existing differences between ethnicity and gratitude, it was not significant hence concluding that it will need a more sensitive measure on diversity before coming to any conclusion on the gratefulness of particular ethnicities. Hasemeyer (2013) also found no significant influence of ethnicity on the expression of gratitude.

The Influence of Types of Institutions towards the Expression of Gratitude and Employee Level of Motivation

In determining whether there is any significant mean difference between the types of institutions (public higher learning institutions and private higher learning institutions) and the expression of gratitude, the data was analysed using the Independent Samples T-Test. The result of this test is presented in the following Table 7 and Table 8.

Table 7: Group Statistics

	Institution	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
AveGratitude	Public	48	4.0159	.50656	.07312
	Private	56	3.8866	.64476	.08616
AveMotivation	Public	48	3.8896	.63287	.09135
	Private	56	3.7268	.68609	.09168

There was no significant mean difference in the expression of gratitude among academic staff in public higher learning institution ($M=4.016, SD=0.507$) and academic staff in private higher learning institution ($M=3.887, SD=0.645, t(101.277)=1.145, p>0.05$). Thus, it can be concluded that academic staff in both public and private higher learning institutions express gratitude equally in the workplace. Similarly, there was no significant mean difference in the employee motivation level among academic staff in public higher learning institution

(M=3.890, SD=0.633) and academic staff in private higher learning institution (M=3.727, SD=0.687), $t(102)=1.25$, $p>0.05$. Thus, it can be concluded that academic staff in both public and private higher learning institutions have equal level of motivation at the workplace.

Table 8: Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	Std. Error Diff	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Ave Gratitude	Equal variances assumed	8.368	.005	1.124	102	.264	.12938	.11510	-.09892	.35767
	Equal variances not assumed			1.145	101.277	.255	.12938	.11300	-.09478	.35353
Ave Motivation	Equal variances assumed	1.090	.299	1.250	102	.214	.16280	.13023	-.09552	.42112
	Equal variances not assumed			1.258	101.430	.211	.16280	.12942	-.09393	.41952

This research also revealed no significant difference in the expression of gratitude across the two types of institutions, namely private and public higher learning institutions. While most previous research do involve samples from private and public learning institutions, none had explored on the differences of the expression of gratitude among educators from these two different sectors.

Relationship Between Gratitude and Motivation Level

In an attempt to determine if there is any significant relationship between gratitude and motivation level. To determine this, the data was analysed using Pearson Correlation, which provides a sample correlation coefficient, r that measures the direction and strength of linear relationships between two continuous variables (Lund Research, 2018). The result is presented in Table 9. The result shows that there is a positive, significant correlation between expression of gratitude and employee motivation level ($r=0.627$, $p<0.01$). According to Moore and Kirkland (2007), if the r value is between 0.5 and 0.7, the strength of relationship is considered moderate.

Table 9: Pearson Correlation

		AveGratitud e	AveMotivation
AveGratitude	Pearson Correlation	1	.627**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	104	104
AveMotivation	Pearson Correlation	.627**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	104	104

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

This result reflects that when gratitude is expressed more in the workplace, it will increase employee motivation level. This finding concurs with the study done by both Beck (2016) and Patil et al. (2018). Both studies found that the increased level of motivation is influenced by the expression of gratitude as it represents appreciation and respect, which drive the employee towards enjoyment and commitment in the organisation. This shows that gratitude actually has a positive impact on motivation, because people who are being expressed with gratitude will feel valued and appreciated, enhancing their willingness to develop work productivity and collaborate with others. To restate, the expression of gratitude elevates social worth, motivating people to provide more aid and affect others' well-being (Grant & Gino, 2010).

CONCLUSION

As an intrinsic motivator, the expression of gratitude plays a vital role in driving employees' productivity to ensure the achievement of organisational goals. The findings in this research provide implications for the top management of higher learning institutions which could suggest possible improvement in the existing culture of gratitude.

Since this research has discovered that intrinsic motivation (expression of gratitude) has greater impact compared to extrinsic factors like money and end-of-month pay, the top management of higher learning institutions could cultivate the culture of gratitude and even make improvements on it, since recognition and appreciation plays a role in giving employees the sense of achievement. This research also found that there is a positive relationship

between the expression of gratitude and employees' motivation level. Hence, top management should promote the act of gratefulness towards all staff in order to increase motivation level.

The findings of this research can be instrumental for a more in-depth future research. With the limitation of population in this study (sample was only from Selangor) and lack of financial-related background information on the demographic part, future research could cover larger sample that involve academic staffs from other states in Malaysia. This will ensure a more accurate findings on whether the preference of intrinsic motivator over materialistic ones are applicable in a different setting as well. Future research employing longitudinal and experimental approaches, mixed with qualitative approach such as interviews and observation could produce stronger result.

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