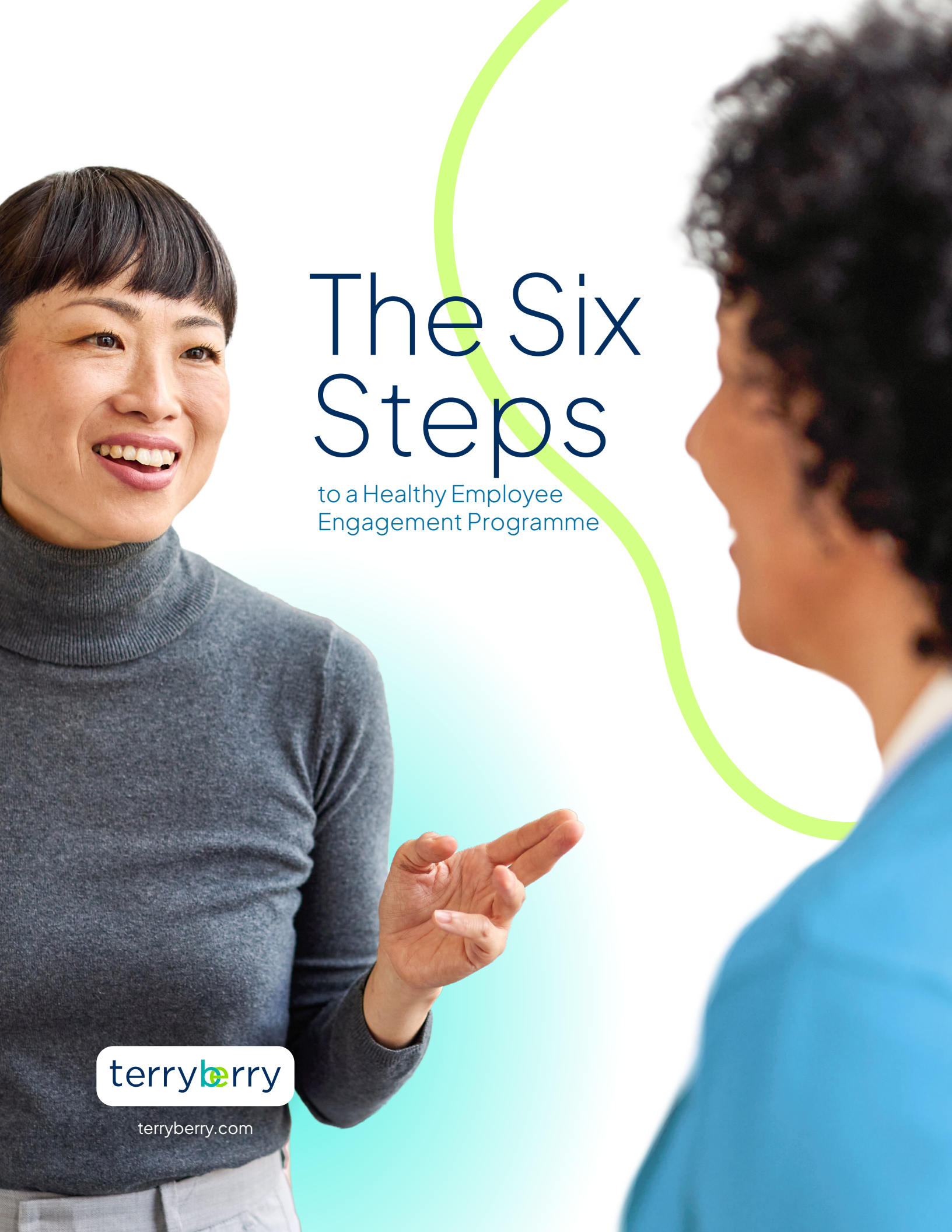




# The Six Steps

to a Healthy Employee  
Engagement Programme

terryberry

[terryberry.com](https://terryberry.com)



# The Six Steps

TO A HEALTHY EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

2026 may be remembered as a defining year for Artificial Intelligence.

As organisations race to adopt new tools, however, one factor continues to shape long-term success more than any technology: their people.

That's where many companies are encountering a challenge.

Employee engagement is often treated as a 'soft' metric, but in reality, it functions as a core structural driver of performance, culture, and business outcomes. Research consistently shows that organisations with highly engaged employees significantly outperform their peers. Engaged organisations report 23% higher profitability, 78% lower absenteeism, and 70% higher employee well-being.<sup>1</sup>

Many leaders understand this connection. Organisations worldwide invest billions each

year in engagement platforms, recognition programmes, and culture initiatives – and those investments continued to grow in 2025.

Yet engagement itself has remained stubbornly stagnant. Every year since 2022, only 10% of UK employees have reported being engaged at work. Over the last decade, this figure was lower only in 2021.

So what's holding organisations back?

While engagement is influenced by many factors, the actionable reality is that many of its strongest drivers are within an organisation's control.

This guide breaks down the core components of an effective employee engagement programme, explaining how each element works together to create a culture where people feel connected, motivated, and empowered to perform at their best.

# What Is an Employee Engagement Programme

## & HOW DOES IT WORK?

An employee engagement programme is a structured, organisation-wide strategy designed to strengthen employees' emotional commitment to their work, their teams, and the company's mission. It goes far beyond perks and occasional morale boosts. At its core, engagement is about creating the conditions where employees feel valued, connected, supported, and motivated to contribute at a high level.

Unlike isolated initiatives, a true engagement programme is intentional and integrated. It aligns leadership behaviours, recognition practices, communication strategies, feedback systems, and development opportunities around a shared goal: building a culture where people genuinely want to show up and perform.

Effective engagement programmes typically include components such as:

- 1 Clear alignment to company values and mission
- 2 Frequent, timely recognition
- 3 Social or peer-to-peer recognition platforms
- 4 Rewards, awards, and incentives
- 5 Well-being and work-life support
- 6 Surveys and feedback mechanisms

What makes engagement programmes successful isn't just what they offer; it's how consistently and strategically they're implemented. A successful engagement programme needs to be reinforced through daily experiences, not just annual campaigns.



# Values & Leadership Alignment

Every successful engagement programme begins with a clear foundation: company values and leadership commitment.

## VALUES IN ACTION

Core values shouldn't just exist in employee handbooks or on office posters. For engagement programmes to truly succeed, those values must be visible in everyday behaviour and recognition.

When organisations consistently communicate and reinforce their values, engagement outcomes improve dramatically. Employees who strongly agree that they feel connected to their organisation's culture are 4.3 times more likely to be engaged at work and 47% less likely to be actively looking for another job than those who don't feel that connection.<sup>2</sup>

If 'innovation' is a core value, employees should see risk-taking and experimentation acknowledged, even when outcomes aren't perfect. If 'collaboration' is emphasised, cross-functional teamwork should be visibly celebrated. If a 'customer first' approach is central, employees who go above and beyond should be recognised consistently.

When engagement initiatives reinforce clearly defined behaviours, they create cultural consistency. Employees begin to understand not just what they're expected to achieve, but how they're expected to achieve it.

That clarity drives alignment, and alignment drives performance.



#### LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT

Even the strongest values framework requires active leadership support to succeed. Leadership buy-in is the reinforcement that keeps an engagement programme intact and functioning.

Leaders shape culture through what they prioritise, model, and reinforce. Research shows that when leaders consistently demonstrate empathy, purpose, and recognition, engagement rises significantly. Gallup found that employees who receive high-quality recognition are 45% less likely to leave their organisation within a two-year period.<sup>3</sup>

Commitment from leadership goes beyond occasional recognition moments. It shows up in clarity, communication, and purpose.

Yet only a minority of employees strongly agree that their leaders communicate a clear direction or genuinely care about their well-being, which directly impacts engagement levels.

Managers themselves also play an outsized role. Gallup estimates that managers account for up to 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores across teams. This means that leadership quality, especially at the manager level, is one of the single most predictive factors of engagement outcomes.

When leaders actively embody the company values, they promote and consistently model engagement behaviours. This creates a cultural framework that not only supports strategy but also drives performance, retention, and long-term success.



## Frequent, Timely Recognition

Recognition is one of the most powerful drivers of engagement - but only when it happens regularly.

Annual bonuses or occasional awards are valuable, but they cannot sustain long-term engagement on their own. High-performing organisations make recognition a consistent part of everyday work.

Engagement isn't built in grand gestures. It's built in creating meaningful moments - small, consistent acknowledgements that signal, 'What you did mattered'.

### WHY FREQUENCY MATTERS

Recognition activates the brain's reward system. When employees receive genuine appreciation, the brain releases dopamine, a neurotransmitter that reinforces behaviour and increases motivation. That surge creates a neurological link between effort and positive reinforcement.

But dopamine's effects are short-lived. Just as a single workout doesn't build long-term strength, one annual award doesn't sustain motivation. Frequent recognition keeps that motivational loop active. It tells employees that their contributions are consistently seen, not just occasionally remembered.

Over time, this steady reinforcement shapes habits. The behaviours you recognise most often (like collaboration, innovation, customer focus, and resilience) become the behaviours your culture naturally produces.



#### RECOGNITION IN REAL TIME

In today's hybrid and distributed workplaces, timeliness is everything. Delayed recognition loses emotional impact. Waiting until a quarterly meeting to acknowledge a major win disconnects the appreciation from the action that earned it.

It's key that any engagement programme prioritises real-time recognition by celebrating achievements as they happen, whether an employee is in the office, on the road, or working remotely.

Immediate recognition accomplishes three things:

- 1 It strengthens behavioural reinforcement.
- 2 It amplifies visibility across teams.
- 3 It builds momentum in the moment.

In a world where employees receive instant feedback from technology, social media, and even customers, workplace appreciation needs to operate at the same speed to be effective.

When recognition is frequent, timely, and visible, it fuels energy, strengthens connection, and ensures culture thrives.



# Social & Peer-to-Peer Recognition

Recognition is most effective when it flows across the entire organisation – not just from the top down.

A centralised social recognition platform allows appreciation to be visible, shared, and accessible across teams.

Without this visibility, recognition often remains siloed. Wins go unnoticed, contributions stay hidden in email threads, and engagement becomes inconsistent.

With a social recognition platform, appreciation travels.

## PEER-TO-PEER RECOGNITION

Recognition should never rely solely on managers. While leadership acknowledgement carries influence, peer-to-peer recognition expands reach and authenticity.

Research from Gallup shows that employees who receive regular recognition are significantly more engaged and less likely to leave their organisation. But equally important is the fact that peer recognition amplifies frequency because appreciation is no longer limited to managerial touchpoints.

In fact, data from SHRM has found that organisations with peer-to-peer recognition programmes report stronger collaboration, improved morale, and higher engagement than those relying solely on manager-driven models.

When colleagues celebrate each other, employees feel seen by the people who understand their daily work. Silos break down as cross-functional contributions become visible. And inclusion strengthens because recognition is not dependent on leadership proximity.

Peer-driven appreciation builds a cultural network where engagement is reinforced laterally, not just vertically.



#### VISIBILITY & EQUITY

A centralised platform ensures recognition reaches everyone, not just those physically present in the office or within leadership's immediate line of sight.

This matters because manager visibility is naturally uneven. Research has found that managers account for up to 70% of the variance in employee engagement across teams.<sup>4</sup> That means engagement can fluctuate dramatically depending on local leadership behaviour.

A centralised social recognition platform helps stabilise that variance by creating shared visibility and access to appreciation across the organisation. Whether an employee is collaborating in New York, working remotely in London, or operating on the floor, recognition should arrive instantly and equitably.

When recognition is social, visible, and embedded into daily workflows, engagement moves faster, spreads further, and reaches everyone.



## Rewards, Awards & Incentives

Recognition becomes even more powerful when paired with meaningful rewards. In an engagement programme, thoughtfully designed rewards and incentives energise participation, reinforce priorities, and convert appreciation into sustained motivation. But like any critical system, they must be calibrated carefully.

Well-designed rewards and incentives reinforce positive behaviours, encourage participation, and sustain motivation over time.

However, not all rewards have the same impact.

### MEANINGFUL AWARDS & REWARDS

Cash bonuses are appreciated, but they're often absorbed into everyday expenses and quickly forgotten. Research in behavioural science shows that experiential and physical symbolic awards – like bespoke commemorative pieces, milestone awards, curated merchandise, or personalised experiences – create what's known as 'trophy value'. They create stronger emotional memory because they're tied to identity and personal meaning, not just utility.

In fact, research shows that employees who receive custom symbolic awards are 5x more likely to produce great work and 4x more likely to be engaged than those receiving generic awards. Recognition that highlights specific contributions and impact is also up to 10–12x more meaningful to employees.<sup>5</sup>

These awards serve as lasting reminders of accomplishment. Employees see them, display them, talk about them, and relive the achievement.

Conversely, symbolic awards alone aren't enough. Frequent choice-based rewards should be layered into your programme. A flexible reward catalogue allows employees to select items that resonate with their lifestyle, culture, and personal interests. That autonomy increases perceived value and fairness, especially across multigenerational and global teams.

When employees feel the reward reflects them, not just the company, the emotional impact multiplies.

#### INCENTIVES THAT SUPPORT BUSINESS GOALS

Beyond appreciation, incentives can be structured to reinforce specific business priorities. Well-designed incentive programmes link measurable outcomes to meaningful rewards. For example:

- Well-being initiatives tied to healthy behaviours
- Operational safety milestones in manufacturing and logistics environments
- Sales performance incentives
- Innovation challenges or productivity goals

When incentives are transparent, achievable, and aligned to organisational objectives, they create clarity. Employees understand what success looks like and why it matters.

However, incentives should complement culture, not replace it. Rewards are most powerful when layered onto a foundation of frequent recognition and values alignment. Without that foundation, incentives can feel transactional. With it, they feel purposeful.



# 5

## Employee Well-Being

Well-being is the oxygen of your engagement programme. It fuels performance, protects against burnout, and ensures your culture can sustain high output without collapsing.

### THE ENERGY EQUATION

Engagement isn't just emotional commitment; it's energy availability. Chronic stress, lack of sleep, and mental overload drain the very capacity employees need to perform.

High-performing organisations recognise that:

- Burnout is a business risk, not just a personal issue.
- Stress directly impacts productivity, creativity, and decision-making.
- Recovery is as important as output.

When employees feel physically and mentally supported, engagement becomes sustainable rather than seasonal.

### WHOLE-PERSON SUPPORT

Modern engagement programmes integrate well-being across multiple dimensions:

- Mental health resources – EAPs, therapy access, stress management workshops
- Physical well-being – movement challenges, heart health education, preventive screenings
- Social connection – community-building initiatives that reduce isolation in hybrid environments

Well-being initiatives shouldn't exist in a silo. They should be recognised, rewarded, and embedded into your culture.

### INCENTIVISING HEALTHY HABITS

The most effective programmes align incentives with a range of well-being outcomes:

- Rewarding participation in well-being challenges
- Recognising managers who model healthy boundaries
- Celebrating teams that prioritise safety and sustainable workloads

When you attach recognition to well-being behaviours, you reinforce the message that performance and health aren't competing priorities but go hand in hand.



# Feedback & Listening

A strong engagement programme also includes listening to employees' voices. Employee feedback allows organisations to identify potential issues early and improve the overall employee experience.

## A MULTI-SURVEY APPROACH

Annual engagement surveys are like yearly check-ups: helpful, but far too infrequent to catch emerging threats in real time. Instead of discovering disengagement only after turnover spikes, intervene through a range of surveys while issues are still reversible.

- Engagement surveys – deep dives into purpose, recognition, leadership trust, and belonging
- Onboarding surveys – measuring early connection and clarity
- Stay interviews and surveys – understanding why top performers remain
- Exit surveys – identifying systemic breakdowns

Together, these tools create a comprehensive picture of employee experience across the full lifecycle.

## TURNING FEEDBACK INTO ACTION

Data without action erodes trust. When employees share honest feedback and don't see any change, participation drops as surveys become performative. To prevent this, advanced analytics must move beyond surface-level results to uncover the specific patterns shaping your culture.

Survey tools that provide participant filters help you understand how engagement varies across departments, managers, and employment types. They allow you to drill down into demographic trends, such as location, identity attributes, and life stage, without any guesswork.

This transparency ensures that trust compounds as engagement strengthens. A truly effective feedback loop requires more than just data; it demands transparent communication of results, clear action plans tied to findings, visible leadership accountability, and consistent follow-up to measure long-term improvement.

# The Diagnostic

IS YOUR PROGRAMME HEALTHY?



Review your current initiative against Terryberry's Five-Point Health Check:

- 1 Is it genuine? (Does it feel authentic or like a box-ticking exercise?)
- 2 Is it consistent? (Do employees know when and how to expect it?)
- 3 Is it inclusive? (Are remote and deskless workers included?)
- 4 Is it easy? (Is the platform intuitive, or is there a barrier to entry?)
- 5 Is it measurable? (Can you link recognition to your retention KPIs?)

**READY TO CHECK THE HEALTH  
OF YOUR ENGAGEMENT  
PROGRAMME?**

Building a programme that lasts requires more than just a spreadsheet. It requires a partner who understands the science of appreciation.

Schedule a 15-minute demo with a Terryberry specialist today. We'll show you how our platform supports the 'Anatomy of Engagement', so you can focus on what matters most: your people.

[Schedule My Demo](#)

# Citations

1

Gallup. State of the Global Workplace: 2025 Report.

<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx>

2

Gallup. How to Improve Employee Engagement in the Workplace.

<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/285674/improve-employee-engagement-workplace.aspx>

3

Gallup. Employee Recognition: Low Cost, High Impact.

<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236441/employee-recognition-low-cost-high-impact.aspx>

4

Gallup. Why Great Managers Are So Rare.

<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/231593/why-great-managers-rare.aspx>

5

O.C. Tanner. Global Culture Report: State of Employee Recognition.

<https://www.octanner.com/state-of-employee-recognition-report>

## ADDITIONAL SOURCES CONSULTED

SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management) research on peer-to-peer recognition and workplace culture

Deloitte Human Capital Trends reports

McKinsey & Company research on employee experience and organisational performance