

**EFFECT OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES ON JOB SATISFACTION OF
AIRTEL TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The telecommunications industry in Nigeria, a rapidly growing and competitive sector, faces considerable challenges in employee retention, productivity, and job satisfaction. This study therefore examined the effect of flexible work schedules and recognition programs elements of Employee Engagement Strategies on employee job satisfaction of Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design whereby structured 5-point likert scale questionnaire was administered to a sample of two hundred and eight (208) employees of Airtel Telecommunications in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. Partial Least Square (PLS-SEM) statistic was employed to test the hypotheses formulated of which the study found a positive and insignificant effect of flexible work schedules on employee job satisfaction of Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria, while recognition programs has positive and significant effect on employee job satisfaction of Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria. The study recommends that management of Airtel should consider reassessing how flexible schedules are currently implemented to identify areas for improvement. This might involve allowing greater choice in work hours, increasing the availability of remote work options, or aligning flexibility options with specific employee roles and responsibilities. Management of Airtel should further enhance and expand its recognition programs. This can be achieved by implementing more personalized and frequent recognition initiatives, ensuring that employees feel valued for their contributions.

Keywords: Employee Engagement Strategies, Job Satisfaction, Flexible Work Schedules, Recognition Programs.

Introduction

Employee job satisfaction has long been a central focus in organizational research, as satisfied employees contribute significantly to organizational success and stability. Globally, companies across industries have increasingly acknowledged that high job satisfaction levels are crucial for reducing turnover, improving morale, and enhancing performance (Anitha, 2014). Scholars and practitioners

note that job satisfaction is not merely a function of compensation but is deeply influenced by factors such as work environment, employee relationships, growth opportunities, and recognition (Huang et al., 2016). The modern workplace emphasizes strategic approaches to employee engagement as organizations recognize that engaged employees are generally more satisfied, motivated, and committed to their roles (Saks, 2019).

Employee engagement has become a key tool for improving job satisfaction, particularly in competitive sectors like telecommunications, where high demands and rapid industry changes present unique challenges for retaining skilled employees (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). In developed countries, companies actively employ engagement strategies such as flexible work schedules, continuous professional development, and recognition programs to foster satisfaction and loyalty among employees (Chhetri, 2017). Employee engagement refers to the emotional and intellectual commitment of employees towards their work roles and organizational objectives (Kaur, 2017). Employee engagement is defined as the involvement and enthusiasm of employees in their work and workplace (Gallup, 2020).

Job satisfaction is a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job experiences (Kaur, 2017). Job satisfaction refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of their work experience, encompassing feelings of contentment, fulfillment, and happiness derived from their job roles and work environment (Kaur, 2023). Engagement strategies, especially those that offer personal growth, inclusivity, and support from leadership, have demonstrated positive effects on employee morale and satisfaction in several industries (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016).

In Africa, the importance of employee engagement in enhancing job satisfaction is also evident. However, the context presents unique challenges, as companies often contend with issues like limited resources, varying leadership practices, and cultural diversity (Yalabik et al., 2017). In Nigeria, specifically, the telecommunications sector has experienced rapid expansion, which has led to increased competition among major providers such as Airtel, MTN, and Glo. This growth has amplified the need for employee engagement strategies to enhance job satisfaction as a means of retaining talent and sustaining competitive advantage. Nigerian telecommunications firms, including Airtel, have recognized that satisfied employees are essential for achieving operational efficiency and customer satisfaction, leading to higher profitability (Ojiabo et al., 2021).

The telecommunications industry in Nigeria faces significant challenges in employee retention, productivity, and job satisfaction, including high turnover, workplace stress, and limited career development opportunities. Additionally, inadequate compensation, poor work-life balance, and constant technological changes contribute to low employee motivation and job dissatisfaction. As one of the leading telecom providers, Airtel Nigeria continually invests in talent management and

engagement initiatives to maintain a competitive edge. However, despite these efforts, employee job satisfaction remains suboptimal, evidenced by high turnover rates, reduced morale, and declining productivity levels. This issue may be attributed to engagement strategies that do not fully address employees' specific needs and expectations in Nigeria's unique socio-economic context. Employee disengagement not only impacts individual performance but also affects overall organizational outcomes, including customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

Previous studies on employee engagement in Nigeria largely focus on banking and manufacturing, with little research specifically examining the high-pressure telecom environment (Ojiabo et al., 2021; Omoniyi, 2019). Existing studies (Yalabik et al., 2017, Audu et al., 2016) also often isolate engagement strategies without addressing comprehensive approaches tailored to the telecom workforce's specific needs in Nigeria. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the impact of tailored employee engagement strategies on job satisfaction within Airtel Nigeria, providing actionable insights for fostering a more satisfied, committed workforce in the face of competitive and operational challenges.

Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the Effect of Employee Engagement Strategies on Job Satisfaction of Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to;

- i. Examine the effect of flexible work schedules on employee job satisfaction of Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria.
- ii. Investigate the effect of recognition programs on employee job satisfaction of Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria.

Employee Engagement Strategies

Employee engagement strategies are structured initiatives designed to foster a strong sense of commitment, satisfaction, and productivity among employees. By focusing on elements such as clear communication, recognition, and opportunities for growth, these strategies help build a positive work culture, leading to higher levels of morale and organizational loyalty (Empuls, 2023).

According to Harter et al. (2023), employee engagement strategies involve practices that align employees' roles with organizational goals, ensuring they feel valued and supported. This alignment includes providing regular feedback, ensuring employee well-being, and cultivating strong connections among employees, which enhance organizational performance and reduce turnover.

Employee engagement strategies encompass various methods such as promoting open communication, enhancing workplace flexibility, and empowering employees to share feedback. These strategies build trust within teams, improve employee satisfaction, and foster alignment with

the company's objectives, making employees more likely to stay and perform at their best (Ryfit, 2023).

Flexible Work Schedules

Flexible work schedules refer to arrangements that allow employees to set or modify their start and end times or work outside of a traditional nine-to-five schedule. This approach provides employees with autonomy over their work hours, which can lead to higher morale and a more balanced work-life integration (Market Business News, 2024).

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, a flexible schedule is an alternative to the standard 40-hour work week, enabling employees to vary their arrival and departure times. This flexibility can also include teleworking or working remotely, which has become increasingly viable due to advancements in technology (Time Doctor, 2024).

Flexible scheduling models encompass various formats, such as part-time hours, job sharing, or hybrid work setups, aimed at promoting a balanced work-life experience for employees. These schedules have been shown to enhance productivity and employee retention by aligning work hours more closely with individual needs and personal obligations (Indeed, 2024).

Recognition Programs

Recognition Programs as Formalized Incentive Structures: Recognition programs are structured initiatives by organizations to formally acknowledge and reward employees for their achievements, often aiming to boost engagement and morale. They typically include various forms of rewards, such as "Employee of the Month" awards, spot bonuses, and peer-to-peer acknowledgments, designed to reinforce positive behaviors that align with company values (HubEngage, 2023).

Recognition Programs as Motivational Tools: Defined as systematic processes for acknowledging exceptional employee performance, recognition programs foster motivation and job satisfaction by celebrating both significant milestones and day-to-day contributions. This creates an inclusive, appreciative culture that promotes loyalty and reduces turnover (McQuerrey, 2023).

Recognition Programs and Employee Well-being: In organizational behavior, recognition programs are formal approaches to boost employee well-being and engagement by acknowledging efforts, accomplishments, and contributions. These programs impact workplace morale, increase retention, and enhance productivity by establishing a supportive environment that values employees (Empuls, 2023).

Employee Job Satisfaction

Employee job satisfaction represents the positive emotional state that employees experience when their work and work environment align with their values and goals. This satisfaction depends

on factors like company culture, work-life balance, recognition, and career advancement opportunities. Employees are more likely to experience job satisfaction when they feel valued, have a clear career trajectory, and enjoy a supportive and inclusive workplace environment (Achievers, 2024).

Defined as an employee's contentment with their job role and the workplace, job satisfaction is influenced by elements such as compensation, leadership, and the physical and cultural work environment. Supportive leadership and a work culture that encourages open communication and inclusivity help foster job satisfaction. Organizations that recognize these factors and adapt their policies to address employees' needs can see improvements in retention and productivity (Handwrytten, 2024).

Job satisfaction is the fulfillment employees feel from their job and workplace, which can lead to higher motivation and loyalty. Key factors include fair compensation, recognition, work-life balance, and opportunities for professional growth. Providing a conducive work environment and actively seeking employee feedback are essential for enhancing job satisfaction and creating a positive workplace (Employee Satisfaction Guide, 2024).

Empirical Review

Flexible work schedules and Employee job satisfaction

Nwekpa et al. (2023) examined the effect of Flexible Work schedules on Employees' job satisfaction in Nigerian Breweries PLC. Enugu. The study employed a correlational research design and structured questionnaire designed in 5-point Likert scale and was administered on the sample of two hundred and eighty six (286), out of which, two hundred and eighty three (283) were returned and were used for the analysis. Pearson correlation coefficient formed the basis for analysis while cronbach's alpha test was used for testing internal reliability of the instrument. The study found insignificant and positive relationship between Flexible Work schedules and Employees' job satisfaction in Nigerian Breweries PLC. Enugu.

Obisi (2021) examined the effect of Flexible Work schedules on Employees' job satisfaction in Public Schools in Lagos State, Nigeria. Questionnaire were designed to assess the views of respondents and potency of flexible work arrangement in the state. The study adopted a survey research and CMS Grammar School as a case study. Based on random sampling method, a total of 160 employees were selected as sample size drawn from a population size of 400 workers. Analysis was conducted with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Pearson correlation coefficient as test statistics. The study found that there is a significant relationship between flexible work schedules and employees' job satisfaction in Public Schools in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Recognition programs and Employee job satisfaction

Olanipon et al. (2024) examined the financial incentive reward system on employee job satisfaction among casual workers at the Distilled companies in Lagos State was the primary goal of the study. There were 1263 casual workers in all, employed by four Lagos-based distillery enterprises. Taro Yamane (1967) was used as a formula to determine the sample size of 304 for this investigation. Only 300 surveys were returned, though. For the study, correlation and regression tests were used to assess hypotheses. The study found that financial incentive reward system has positive and significant effect on employee job satisfaction among casual workers at the Distilled companies in Lagos State.

Sam-Eleyi and Josiah (2024) assessed the effect of recognition programs on employee job satisfaction of teachers in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area in Rivers State. The study adopted a correlation survey design. The research area was Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The population of this study comprised of 236 business studies teachers. A sample of the study comprised of 92 male and 144 female respondents. The instrument for data collection are two structured questionnaire titled “Reward Management Strategies of Business Studies Teachers Questionnaire (ReMaSoBuSTQu)” and Job Performance of Business Studies Teachers Questionnaire (JoPoBuSTQu). The data obtained were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. From the study it was concluded that recognition programs has positive insignificant effect on employee job satisfaction of teachers in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area in Rivers State.

Theoretical framework

Social Exchange Theory (SET) was originally proposed by sociologist George Homans in the 1950s, specifically in his 1958 work "Social Behavior as Exchange." The theory is based on the premise that social behavior is the result of an exchange process, where individuals seek to maximize benefits and minimize costs in their interactions. The motivation behind SET lies in the understanding that human relationships are formed based on subjective cost-benefit analyses, where individuals weigh the rewards of their interactions against the potential drawbacks. This perspective helps explain how interpersonal relationships, including those in organizational contexts, are influenced by the perceived value of exchanges.

In the context of employee job satisfaction, particularly at Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria, SET provides a framework for understanding how employees evaluate their workplace relationships and conditions. Employees are likely to feel satisfied when they perceive a favorable balance between the rewards they receive such as salary, recognition, and opportunities for growth and the costs associated with their roles, like stress and long working hours. By fostering positive

exchanges through supportive management practices and a conducive work environment, Airtel can enhance job satisfaction among its employees. The theory highlights the importance of mutual benefit and reciprocity in building a motivated workforce.

Despite its contributions, Social Exchange Theory faces criticism, particularly regarding its overly simplistic view of human relationships. Critics argue that SET may neglect the influence of non-economic factors, such as emotions and moral considerations, which can significantly impact employee satisfaction and organizational commitment. Furthermore, the emphasis on rationality in decision-making may not fully capture the complexities of human behavior in the workplace. Nevertheless, understanding the principles of SET can benefit organizations like Airtel by encouraging the development of practices that foster positive exchanges, ultimately leading to improved employee job satisfaction and performance (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Methodology

The study adopts a survey research design. The population consists of 433 employees of Airtel Telecommunications in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. Purposeful sampling technique was adopted for this study. The study employed Taro Yamane (1967) formula for determining the minimum sample size. Thus, minimum sample size is 208.

The study used primary source of data to collect data for the study. The questionnaire utilised for this study was adapted from various sources to fit the aims of this work. Flexible Work schedules questionnaire was adapted from the work of Obisi (2021) with (5-items), recognition questionnaire was adapted from the work of Sam-Eleyi and Josiah (2024) with 5-items and job satisfaction questionnaire was adapted from the work of Olanipon et al. (2024) with 5-items. The choice of the method was the need to gather reliable information using simple approach that is time saving and efficient. The study employed the use of well-structured five-point likert scale (SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, U = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree), close-ended questionnaire was used to obtain data from employees of Airtel Telecommunications in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. The data collected was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the aid of SmartPls3.

Model specification

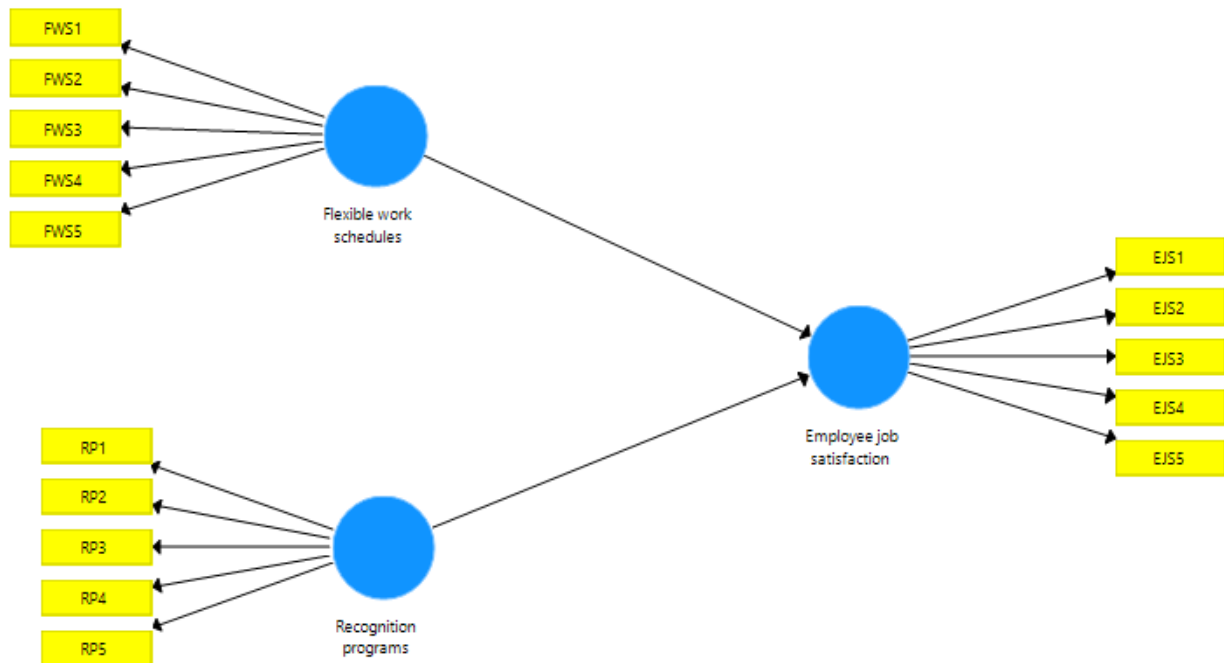


Figure 3.1 Structural model for direct relationship between Employee Engagement Strategies and Employee Job Satisfaction

Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 208 copies of questionnaire distributed, only four hundred and sixteen (198) was retrieved giving a response rate of 95%. 10(5%) were not properly filled but returned. All further analyses were carried out using 198 responses.

Indicator Reliability

When evaluating the measurement model, we initiate the process by examining the item outer loadings. Generally, it is recommended to consider loadings above 0.708, as they signify that the construct accounts for more than 50 percent of the variance in the indicator, ensuring acceptable item reliability (Hair et al., 2019). However, Hair et al. (2019) also suggest that low but statistically significant indicator loadings (below 0.50) may be included. Conversely, outer loadings below 0.4 should be eliminated, and in exploratory research, loadings between 0.4 and 0.7 may be retained if the average variance extracted is satisfactory (Hair et al., 2014). This justifies the decision not to exclude indicators with loadings below 0.70 and above 0.40 from the model.

Table 1: Factor Loadings of the Constructs

	Employee job satisfaction	Flexible work schedules	Recognition programs
EJS1	0.791		
EJS2	0.810		
EJS3	0.772		
EJS4	0.791		
EJS5	0.691		
FWS1		0.707	
FWS2		0.781	
FWS3		0.795	
FWS4		0.846	
FWS5		0.714	
RP1			0.707
RP2			0.731
RP3			0.737
RP4			0.843
RP5			0.771

Source: SMARP-PLS Output, 2024

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity gauges the degree to which a construct converges to elucidate the variance within its items. To evaluate convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) should exceed 0.5. As depicted in Table 2, the AVE values for all constructs surpass 0.5, affirming that our constructs meet the criteria for convergent validity. This observation suggests that the entire construct accounts for 50 percent or more of the variance present in the items comprising the construct.

Table 2: Construct Reliability and Validity of the Indicators

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Extracted (AVE)	Variance
Employee job satisfaction	0.831	0.840	0.880	0.596	
Flexible work schedules	0.829	0.840	0.879	0.594	
Recognition programs	0.819	0.834	0.871	0.576	

Source: SMART PLS Output, 2024

Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Variables	Employee satisfaction	job	Flexible schedules	work	Recognition programs
Employee satisfaction	1.000				
Flexible work schedules	8.102		1.000		
Recognition programs	7.046		5.082		1.000

Source: SMART-PLS Output, 2024

Model Goodness of Fit (GoF)

To validate the PLS model, it is essential to evaluate its goodness of fit, as recommended by Hair et al. (2017). In this study, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) was employed for this purpose. The selection of this index was based on the fact that SRMR provides an absolute fit measure, where a value of zero signifies a perfect fit. Following Hu and Bentler's (1998) suggestion that a value below 0.08 represents a good fit when using SRMR for model assessment, the study's result revealed an SRMR value of 0.02. This indicates that the model fits well. Besides the chi-square, other measures corroborate the goodness of fit in the study's model.

Table 4: Model of Goodness of fit Summary

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.02	0.02
d_ULS	5.778	5.778
d_G	5.451	5.451
Chi-Square	7338.713	7338.713
NFI	0.297	0.297

Source: SMART-PLS Output, 2024

Test of Hypotheses

The table below showed the path coefficients, t-values and p-values used to test the first four null hypotheses of the study:

Table 5: Path Coefficient of the Model

Variables	Beta	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Decision	F ² Value
Flexible work schedules -> Employee job satisfaction	0.286	5.213	0.200	Accepted	0.126
Recognition programs -> Employee job satisfaction	0.657	12.348	0.000	Rejected	0.667

Notes: ***($P < 0.01$), **($P < 0.05$), *($P < 0.1$)

Source: SMART-PLS Output, 2024

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Flexible work schedules has no significant effect on employee job satisfaction of Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria.

The result of the test as shown in table 5 revealed that flexible work schedules positively and insignificantly affected employee job satisfaction of Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria, with $\beta = 0.286$ and $p = 0.200$. Thus, hypothesis one was supported and therefore accepted at 5% level of insignificance. There is adequate evidence to accept the alternative hypothesis and the study therefore conclude that flexible work schedules has positive and insignificant effect on employee job satisfaction of Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: Recognition programs has no significant effect on employee job satisfaction of Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria.

The result from table 5 shows that recognition programs has positive and significant effects on employee job satisfaction of Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria, with $\beta = 0.657$ and $p = 0.000$. Thus, hypothesis two was not supported and therefore rejected at 5% level of significance. There is adequate evidence to reject the null hypothesis and the study therefore conclude that recognition programs has positive and significant effects on employee job satisfaction of Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria.

Table 6: R square Statistics

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Employee job satisfaction	0.473	0.470

Source: Researcher’s computation in Smart-PLS (2024)

The r-square statistics shows the level of determinism of the dependent variable by the independent variables of the study. Table 6 show that the study has an r-square value of 0.473 which

indicates that the variables used for the study account for about 47.3% of the variability in the dependent variable. Other factors not captured in the model may account for the remaining 52.7%.

Discussion of Findings

Flexible work schedules have a positive but insignificant effect on employee job satisfaction at Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria, indicating that while such schedules contribute to a better work-life balance and offer employees greater autonomy, they do not strongly influence overall job satisfaction levels. The finding was supported by the finding of Nwekpa et al. (2023), who found insignificant and positive relationship between Flexible Work schedules and Employees' job satisfaction in Nigerian Breweries PLC. Enugu, while it disagreed with the finding of Obisi (2021), who found that there is a significant relationship between flexible work schedules and employees' job satisfaction in Public Schools in Lagos State, Nigeria

Recognition programs have a positive and significant effect on employee job satisfaction at Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria, implying that acknowledging employees' efforts, achievements, and contributions plays a crucial role in enhancing their satisfaction levels. This suggests that when employees feel valued and appreciated, they are more likely to experience a sense of fulfillment, motivation, and commitment to the organization, which ultimately boosts their overall job satisfaction. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Olanipon et al. (2024), who found financial incentive reward system has positive and significant effect on employee job satisfaction among casual workers at the Distilled companies in Lagos State, however, the finding disagree with the finding of Sam-Eleyi and Josiah (2024), who found that recognition programs has positive insignificant effect on employee job satisfaction of teachers in public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area in Rivers State

Conclusions

Flexible work schedules have a positive but insignificant effect on employee job satisfaction at Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria, concluding that while such schedules may enhance work-life balance and offer employees some level of convenience, they do not substantially impact overall job satisfaction. This may suggest that other aspects of the job, such as recognition, career advancement, or compensation, have a stronger influence on employee satisfaction than flexible scheduling alone.

Recognition programs have a positive and significant effect on employee job satisfaction at Airtel Telecommunications in Nigeria, concluding that acknowledging employees' contributions and achievements is essential for enhancing job satisfaction. This finding suggests that when employees feel recognized and valued, their sense of fulfillment, motivation, and loyalty to the organization increases, leading to higher overall satisfaction with their job roles.

Recommendations

- i. Management of Airtel should consider reassessing how flexible schedules are currently implemented to identify areas for improvement. This might involve allowing greater choice in work hours, increasing the availability of remote work options, or aligning flexibility options with specific employee roles and responsibilities.
- ii. Management of Airtel should further enhance and expand its recognition programs. This can be achieved by implementing more personalized and frequent recognition initiatives, ensuring that employees feel valued for their contributions.

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