Recognition-Based Professional Titles as a Non-Financial Recognition Mechanism for Experienced IT Professionals: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract: *This exploratory study examines how recognition-based professional titles are perceived by experienced professionals in the information technology sector, particularly where conventional career progression may become limited. The study treats such titles as formal acknowledgements of expertise and contribution that may make professional value more visible without necessarily changing salary or organizational level. Survey responses from 56 professionals were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, four simple linear regressions, and a ranking task covering five motivational factors. Mean scores on a five-point scale were 3.57 for recognition-based titles, 3.48 for job satisfaction, 3.46 for motivation, 3.41 for organizational commitment, 3.65 for career experience/plateau-related perceptions, and 3.57 for perceived authenticity. In the full sample, recognition-based title scores were positively associated with job satisfaction ($r = .43$, $p = .001$) and organizational commitment ($r = .39$, $p = .003$). Job satisfaction was associated with motivation ($r = .55$, $p < .001$), while motivation was associated with organizational commitment ($r = .40$, $p = .003$). Salary increase was the most frequently ranked first among the five motivational factors (35.7%); recognition-based titles received 17.9% of first-place rankings. The results suggest that professional titles may be considered as one component of a broader recognition approach, rather than a replacement for financial rewards or promotion. The findings remain preliminary because several scales show low internal consistency and 55.4% of respondents selected the instructed response to the attention-check item, while 44.6% did not. All submitted responses were retained in the reported analyses. No mediation or moderation effects are inferred from these bivariate models. Further work should refine the measures and test the proposed relationships in a larger and more diverse sample.*

Keywords: Recognition-Based Professional Titles, Intrinsic Named Designations, Job Satisfaction, Motivation, Organizational Commitment, Career Plateau, Experienced It Professionals

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Introduction

Experienced professionals accumulate specialist knowledge, organizational memory and the ability to guide complex work over the course of their careers. Yet formal advancement opportunities can narrow as organizations become flatter or senior positions become less available. Employees may continue to contribute at a high level while perceiving fewer visible signs of career progress. Career plateau research has examined the consequences of restricted hierarchical advancement and the ways employees respond to constrained career movement [1,2].

Organizations recognize contribution through pay, promotion, expanded responsibility, autonomy and professional recognition. This paper focuses on recognition-based professional titles: formal designations intended to acknowledge expertise or contribution without necessarily changing salary, reporting level or job responsibilities. In the broader research project, this idea is described as an intrinsic named designation (IND). The survey used the respondent-facing term “recognition-based professional titles”; this paper retains that wording to reflect the measure actually administered.

A title may be meaningful when employees see it as credible and connected to real expertise. A designation awarded inconsistently or without corresponding respect may instead be experienced as symbolic. Recognition may also make contribution more visible, strengthen professional identity or signal that expertise is valued. Motivation theory emphasizes that autonomy, competence and relatedness are relevant to sustained motivation [3,7], while job design research links meaningful work characteristics to internal work motivation [4]. Classic accounts of work motivation also distinguish the role of recognition and achievement from basic working conditions [8]. These perspectives provide a rationale for studying recognition, but they do not imply that a title automatically improves employee attitudes.

The present study is exploratory. It examines how experienced IT professionals rated recognition-based titles and related constructs, how these measures were associated in the initial dataset, and how titles compared with salary increase, formal promotion, autonomy and strategic influence in a forced ranking task. It does not aim to establish causality or to claim that titles replace financial rewards or promotion.

Background and Conceptual Basis

Career plateau and experienced professionals

Career plateau is commonly used to describe a point at which further hierarchical advancement becomes less likely. Plateau experiences can also involve limited development or challenge, and these forms should not be assumed to be identical. Earlier research suggests that employees experiencing different types of plateau may report different job attitudes [1,2]. For experienced IT professionals, this issue can arise when

specialist expertise continues to deepen while the number of higher-level positions remains limited.

Recognition, professional identity and motivation

Recognition is one way organizations communicate the value of an employee's contribution. Self-determination theory highlights the importance of autonomy, competence and relatedness in understanding motivation [3]. Work-design research similarly suggests that job characteristics can influence experienced meaningfulness and internal work motivation [4]. A professional title could operate as a signal of competence or contribution, but its meaning depends on whether employees view the designation as authentic and supported by organizational practice. The current data measure perceptions and associations; they do not observe the implementation of a title program.

Job satisfaction, motivation and commitment

Job satisfaction refers to an employee's evaluation of their work experience [9,10], whereas motivation concerns the direction and intensity of effort. Organizational commitment describes an employee's psychological relationship with the organization and is often treated as a multidimensional construct [5]. Recognition and meaningful work have been discussed as potential influences on work attitudes, but related constructs remain distinct. For example, evidence on task significance suggests that seeing the impact of one's work can be related to dedication and helping behavior, though this is not the same as receiving a professional title [6].

The present study therefore considers four core constructs: recognition-based titles, job satisfaction, motivation and organizational commitment. Career plateau and perceived authenticity are included in the conceptual framework as potential moderators. They are not tested as moderators in the current analysis. The proposed framework is shown in Figure 1. The analysis is limited to descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations, simple regressions and a motivational-factor ranking.

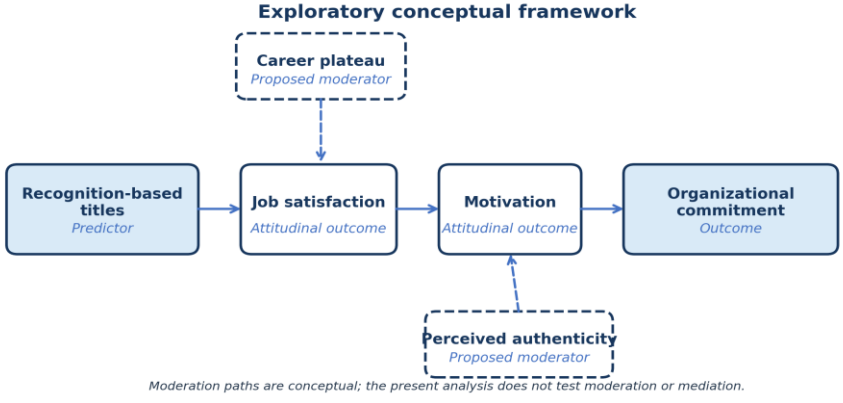


Figure 1. Exploratory conceptual framework. Dashed paths represent proposed moderators; moderation and mediation are not tested in the current analysis. Source: Author's conceptualization.

Research questions

The study addresses three questions. First, how do experienced IT professionals rate recognition-based titles and related psychological and organizational constructs? Second, how are title perceptions associated with job satisfaction, motivation and organizational commitment in the initial dataset? Third, how do recognition-based titles compare with salary increase, promotion, autonomy and strategic influence when respondents rank motivational factors?

Method

Research design and participants

The study used a cross-sectional online survey and an exploratory quantitative design. The supplied dataset contains 56 submitted responses. Respondents reported between 15 and 30 years of professional experience, across the categories recorded in the questionnaire. Program or delivery leadership was the most common role category, and IT services was the most common organization category. The sample was not drawn from a documented probability-based sampling frame, so results should not be treated as representative of the wider IT workforce.

Measures and scoring

Attitudinal items used a five-point response scale. Construct scores were calculated as each respondent's mean across the questionnaire items mapped to each construct: career experience/plateau-related perceptions (items 1–3; three items), recognition-based titles (items 4–7; four items), job satisfaction (items 8–11; four items), motivation (items 12–15; four items), organizational commitment (items 16–18; three items), and perceived authenticity (items 20–22; three items). The survey also included an attention-check item (item 19), a scenario-understanding item (item 23), a forced ranking of five motivational factors, and a reverse-validation statement (item 24). The scenario-understanding and reverse-validation items were treated as standalone items and were not included in the multi-item construct scores. In the thesis, the respondent-facing term "recognition-based professional titles" corresponds to "Intrinsic Named Designations" (IND).

Data preparation and analysis

The CSV file was treated as the primary source for respondent-level responses. Category labels affected by typographic dash encoding were normalized for tabulation. Construct means and standard deviations were calculated from the mapped items. Cronbach's alpha was calculated as an exploratory estimate of internal consistency. Pearson correlations were computed for the four core constructs. Four simple linear regressions were estimated, each with one predictor and one outcome: recognition-based titles predicting job satisfaction; job satisfaction predicting motivation; motivation predicting organizational commitment; and recognition-based titles predicting organizational commitment. Because each model included one predictor, the standardized slope is equivalent to the Pearson correlation. The models do not adjust for demographic variables and do not test mediation. The processing sequence is summarized in Figure 2.

All submitted responses were retained in the reported analyses. The attention-check item instructed respondents to select "Agree"; 55.4% selected the instructed response, while 44.6% did not. Responses were not excluded on this basis. This decision preserves the initial exploratory dataset but introduces a potential data-quality limitation that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Ranking results were calculated from all submitted ranking records.

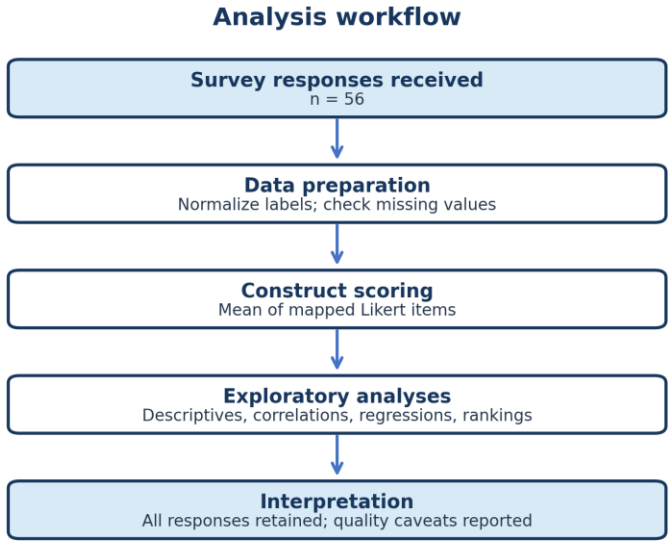


Figure 2. Analysis workflow from submitted survey records through construct scoring and exploratory analyses. Source: Author's analysis.

Ethical considerations

The supplied dataset does not establish whether institutional ethics approval was required or obtained, what consent language was presented, or which data-management protocol was followed. The author must verify and report these details accurately before submission. No ethics approval number or consent procedure is assumed in this draft.

Results

Respondent profile

The dataset contains 56 responses. Professional experience was recorded as 20–25 years for 23 respondents, 25–30 years for 18, and 15–20 years for 14; one response was missing for this item. Program or delivery leadership was the most common role category (27), followed by engineering or technical leadership (13). IT services was the most common organization type (21), followed by global capability centers (12). Table 1 summarizes the recorded categories using the non-missing response count for each variable.

Table 1. Respondent profile

Variable	Category	n	% of valid responses	Valid N
Professional experience	20–25 years	23	41.8%	55
Professional experience	25–30 years	18	32.7%	55
Professional experience	15–20 years	14	25.5%	55
Current role type	Program / Delivery Leadership	27	49.1%	55
Current role type	Engineering / Technical Leadership	13	23.6%	55
Current role type	Other	8	14.5%	55
Current role type	Consulting / Advisory	4	7.3%	55
Current role type	Business / Product Leadership	3	5.5%	55
Years in current role/designation	More than 8 years	18	32.7%	55
Years in current role/designation	4–6 years	17	30.9%	55
Years in current role/designation	6–8 years	10	18.2%	55
Years in current role/designation	2–4 years	6	10.9%	55
Years in current role/designation	Less than 2 years	4	7.3%	55
Organization type	IT Services	21	38.9%	54
Organization type	Global Capability Center (GCC)	12	22.2%	54
Organization type	Consulting	8	14.8%	54
Organization type	Technology Company	7	13.0%	54
Organization type	Product	4	7.4%	54
Organization type	Other	2	3.7%	54
Age group	46–50	37	67.3%	55
Age group	41–45	16	29.1%	55
Age group	36–40	2	3.6%	55

Note: Percentages are calculated within each demographic item using non-missing responses. Some demographic fields contain one or two missing responses.

Descriptive statistics and internal consistency

Mean construct scores ranged from 3.41 for organizational commitment to 3.65 for career plateau. Recognition-based titles and perceived authenticity both had a mean of 3.57. The means are above the numerical midpoint of the five-point scale, but they should not be interpreted as evidence that every respondent endorsed every statement. The standard deviations show meaningful variation across respondents.

Table 2. Construct-level descriptive statistics and internal consistency

Construct	Items	n	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Cronbach α
Career experience / plateau perceptions	3	56	3.65	0.64	2.33	5.00	0.24
Recognition-based titles	4	56	3.57	0.67	2.00	5.00	0.34
Job satisfaction	4	56	3.48	0.77	1.75	5.00	0.63
Motivation	4	56	3.46	0.77	1.25	5.00	0.57
Organizational commitment	3	56	3.41	0.82	1.33	5.00	0.58
Perceived authenticity	3	56	3.57	0.82	1.67	5.00	0.53

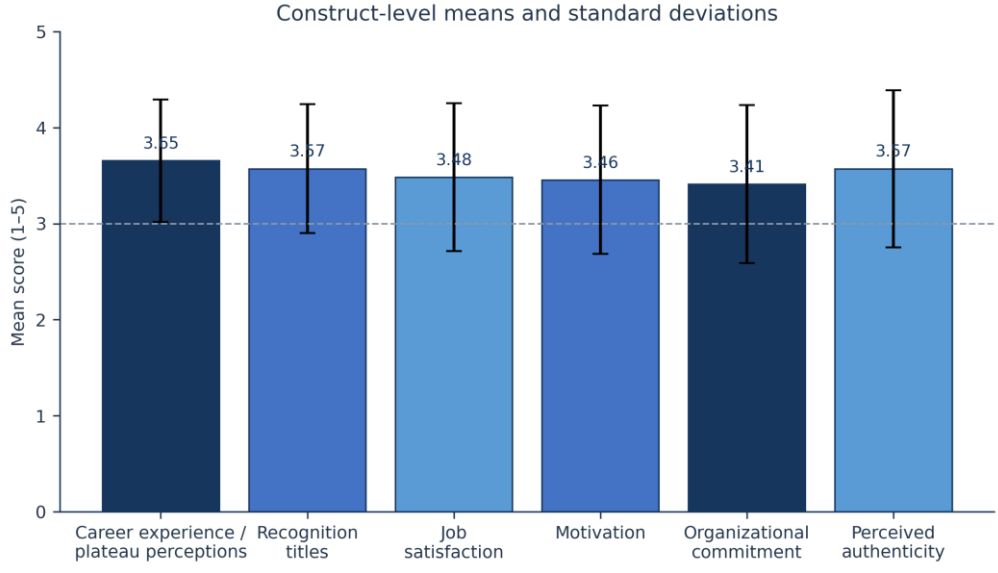


Figure 3. Construct means with ±1 standard deviation bars. The dashed horizontal line marks the scale midpoint (3). Error bars show standard deviations, not confidence intervals. Source: Author's analysis of survey data.

Internal consistency estimates were modest or low across the constructs: α = .34 for recognition-based titles, .63 for job satisfaction, .57 for motivation, .58 for organizational commitment, .24 for career plateau and .53 for perceived authenticity. These values indicate that the item sets should not be treated as validated scales without further examination. In particular, the recognition-based title and career plateau items may require

refinement. Because the paper is exploratory, the construct means are reported as descriptive summaries, not as validated latent measures.

Correlations among core constructs

In the full sample, recognition-based title perceptions were positively correlated with job satisfaction (r = .431, p = .001) and organizational commitment (r = .395, p = .003). Job satisfaction had the largest bivariate correlation in the core construct set, with motivation (r = .551, p < .001). Motivation was positively correlated with organizational commitment (r = .396, p = .003). Table 3 presents the correlation coefficients. Figure 4 provides a visual summary. These associations indicate covariation, not causal direction.

Table 3. Pearson correlation matrix among core constructs (n = 56)

Construct	Recognition titles	Job satisfaction	Motivation	Organizational commitment
Recognition-based titles	1.00	0.43	0.28	0.39
Job satisfaction	0.43	1.00	0.55	0.37
Motivation	0.28	0.55	1.00	0.40
Organizational commitment	0.39	0.37	0.40	1.00

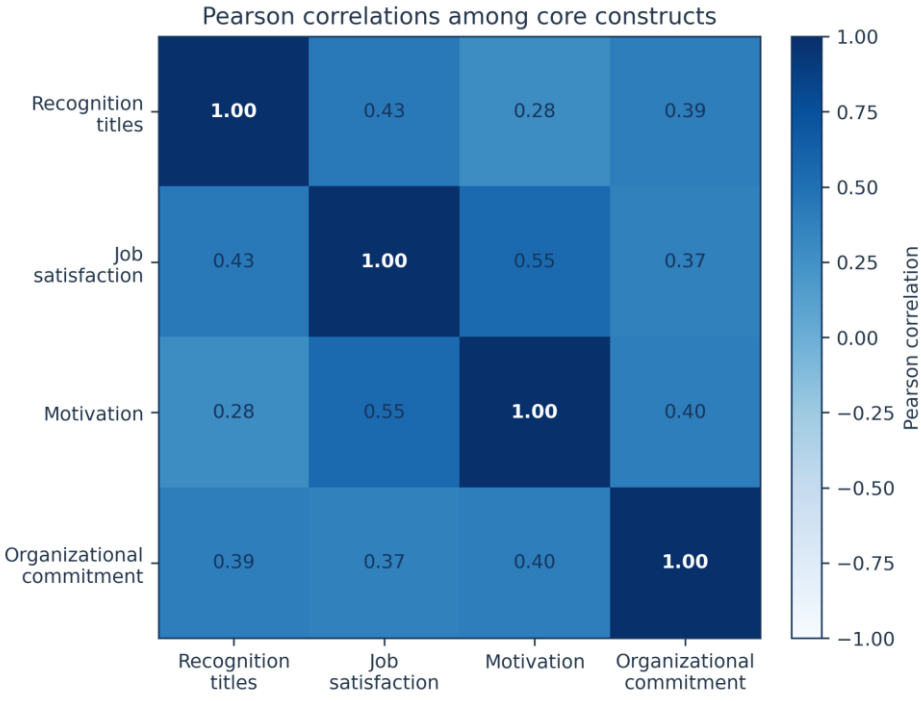


Figure 4. Pearson correlations among recognition-based titles, job satisfaction, motivation and organizational commitment. Values are pairwise Pearson correlation coefficients. Source: Author's analysis of survey data.

Simple regression results

The four simple linear regressions were statistically significant in the full sample. Recognition-based title scores were associated with job satisfaction, B = 0.494, R^2 = .186, p = .001. Job satisfaction was associated with motivation, B = 0.553, R^2 = .304, p < .001. Motivation was associated with organizational commitment, B = 0.423, R^2 = .157, p = .003. Recognition-based title scores were also associated with organizational commitment, B = 0.484, R^2 = .156, p = .003. The unstandardized coefficients represent the expected difference in the outcome score associated with a one-point difference in the predictor score in each separate bivariate model. The estimated slopes are visualized in Figure 5.

Table 4. Simple linear regression results (all respondents)

Predictor	Outcome	n	B	r	R^2
Recognition-based titles	Job satisfaction	56	0.494	0.431	0.186
Job satisfaction	Motivation	56	0.553	0.551	0.304
Motivation	Organizational commitment	56	0.423	0.396	0.157
Recognition-based titles	Organizational commitment	56	0.484	0.395	0.156

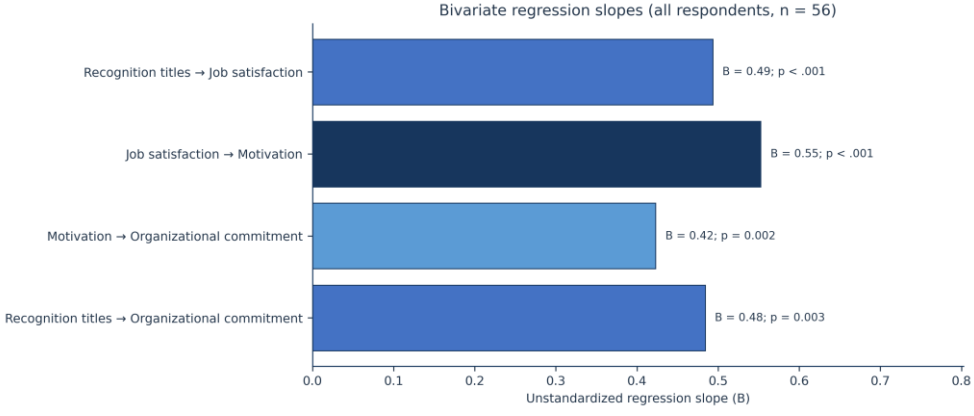


Figure 5. Unstandardized slopes from four separate simple regressions. These models are bivariate and are not causal estimates. Source: Author's analysis of survey data.

Ranking of motivational factors

Salary increase was the most frequently selected first-place factor: 20 respondents (35.7%) ranked it as most motivating. Greater autonomy was ranked first by 12 respondents (21.4%), recognition-based professional titles by 10 (17.9%), formal promotion by 8 (14.3%), and opportunity to influence strategy by 6 (10.7%). The mean ranking placed salary increase first (2.50), followed by autonomy (2.88), formal promotion (3.04), strategic influence (3.29), and recognition-based titles (3.30). The one-hundredth difference between the last two mean ranks is small and should not be overinterpreted. The ranking suggests that recognition-based titles were a first choice for some respondents, but not the dominant preference overall. Figure 6 shows the share assigning each factor the first-place rank.

Table 5. Motivational-factor rankings (1 = most motivating; 5 = least motivating)

Factor	Mean rank	Rank 1 n	Rank 1 %	Rank 5 n
Salary increase	2.50	20	35.7%	5
Greater autonomy in work	2.88	12	21.4%	7
Formal promotion	3.04	8	14.3%	14
Opportunity to influence strategy	3.29	6	10.7%	14
Recognition-based professional title	3.30	10	17.9%	16

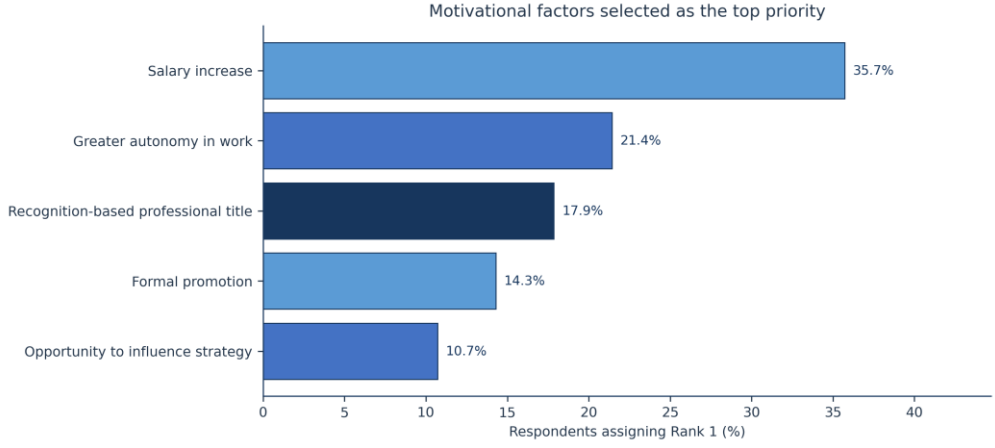


Figure 6. Percentage of respondents assigning each motivational factor the first-place rank. Source: Author's analysis of survey data.

Discussion

The exploratory findings point to three observations. First, the average rating for recognition-based titles was above the midpoint of the response scale. This suggests that the idea was not uniformly rejected by this sample. It does not establish that a title would produce the same response if introduced in a real organization, because the survey measured hypothetical perceptions rather than an observed intervention.

Second, recognition-based title scores were positively associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the full dataset. These patterns are compatible with

perspectives that emphasize the role of competence, meaningful work and perceived contribution in employee motivation and work attitudes [3,4,6]. However, the measures showed modest internal consistency, and the cross-sectional design cannot determine whether title perceptions precede more positive attitudes, whether more satisfied employees evaluate titles more positively, or whether another factor influences both.

Third, salary increase was the most frequent first-place choice in the ranking task, while autonomy was second. Recognition-based titles received more first-place rankings than formal promotion or strategic influence, but fewer than salary increase or autonomy. This result does not support presenting titles as a preferred substitute for pay. A more defensible interpretation is that titles may have value for a segment of experienced professionals, alongside compensation, autonomy and career opportunity.

The low alpha estimate for recognition-based titles is a significant measurement concern. The career experience items also combine limited advancement, slowing career growth and a possible motivational consequence, so they may not capture a single narrow career-plateau construct. The recognition-based title items cover several possible meanings, including acknowledgement of expertise, respect, professional identity and organizational perception. These may not behave as a single construct in this exploratory dataset. The career experience/plateau-related item set also had low internal consistency. Before testing a more complex model, future work should examine item distributions, reverse coding where applicable, item-total relationships and the conceptual coherence of each scale. The reliability estimates should not be hidden simply because they weaken the headline narrative.

The attention-check response pattern is another limitation. The analysis retains all submitted records, but 55.4% of respondents selected the instructed response and 44.6% did not. This may reflect inattentive responding, misinterpretation of the instruction, survey fatigue or other factors; the current data do not establish which explanation applies. The results should therefore be interpreted as preliminary. Future studies should use a clearly worded attention check, define an inclusion rule in advance, and report analyses with a transparent rationale.

Practical Implications

Organizations may consider professional titles as one element of a broader recognition system, not as a low-cost substitute for compensation or advancement. A designation is more likely to be credible when it is tied to transparent criteria, demonstrated expertise, contribution and clear expectations. Governance should define eligibility, approval authority, how the title is communicated and how it relates to existing job grades.

Organizations should also guard against title inflation. If designations are awarded too frequently or without visible standards, employees may view them as cosmetic. When a title recognizes expertise rather than a promotion, the distinction should be communicated honestly. The ranking results reinforce the need to consider financial progression and

autonomy alongside recognition. A title alone is unlikely to resolve dissatisfaction associated with pay, workload, limited decision authority or lack of meaningful development.

The concept of perceived authenticity deserves further attention. A title may be more credible when it corresponds to genuine expertise and is supported by responsibilities, influence or organizational respect. This interpretation is consistent with the survey's authenticity items, but the current analysis did not test perceived authenticity as a moderator. Organizations should therefore treat authenticity as a design principle to evaluate, not as a confirmed statistical condition in this dataset.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations qualify the findings. The sample was recruited through a non-probability approach, and the results should be treated as exploratory rather than representative of the wider IT workforce. Data are cross-sectional and self-reported, so causal direction cannot be established. Internal consistency was low for multiple constructs, especially the recognition-based title items and the career experience/plateau-related items. The attention-check result suggests a potential data-quality issue, although all records were retained for this exploratory analysis. Some demographic fields contain missing responses. Finally, only bivariate correlations and simple regressions were calculated; mediation and moderation were not formally tested.

Future research should recruit a larger and more diverse sample, refine the measurement scales and predefine data-quality rules. Cognitive interviews and pilot testing could establish whether respondents distinguish recognition from promotion, compensation and expanded responsibility. A subsequent study could test whether career plateau or perceived authenticity moderates the relationship between title perceptions and employee attitudes. Mediation should be evaluated using a clearly specified indirect-effect model, preferably with bootstrap confidence intervals. A longitudinal or field-based design could assess whether introducing a governed title framework is followed by changes in satisfaction, motivation, retention or other outcomes.

Conclusion

This exploratory study examined recognition-based professional titles as a possible non-financial recognition mechanism for experienced IT professionals. In the full sample, title perceptions were positively associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment, while job satisfaction was associated with motivation. Salary increase remained the most frequently selected first-choice motivational factor, and internal consistency was modest for several scales.

The evidence supports a cautious conclusion: recognition-based titles may be worth examining as a supplementary form of professional recognition, but this dataset does not

establish that titles cause improved motivation or can replace financial rewards and promotion. A refined instrument and a larger, carefully screened sample are needed.

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