huggg RESEARCH REPORT

The recognition problem no platform has solved

Why team-level recognition keeps falling short, and what the data says.

Most HR teams agree recognition matters. Far fewer can say it is actually happening at team level. We combined 30,000+ platform reviews with 40+ HR forum threads to find out why, and what the evidence says actually works.

10%
annual decline in manager-led recognition (UK, 2026)

78%
of UK hiring in 2026 is replacement, not growth

30,000+
platform reviews analysed across five tools

A Huggg research report . June 2026 . huggg.me

IN THIS REPORT

What is inside

"How do I get my managers to actually do recognition?"

The question that runs through this whole report, asked across HR forums for years, never resolved.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Everyone agrees recognition matters. Few can make it happen.

Ask HR whether recognition is a priority and you will get a yes. Ask whether it is happening, consistently, at team level, and the answer changes, usually with a sigh.

This report combines two independent datasets: 40+ threads from r/humanresources and HR forums between 2024 and 2026, and 30,000+ public reviews of five of the UK's most used recognition platforms: Perkbox, Reward Gateway, Awardco, Bonusly and Nectar.

Both point to the same structural problem. The platforms are built around the employee experience. The people running them keep hitting one wall: manager adoption simply does not happen. Training, objectives, reporting and workshops have all been tried. None of it sticks.

The question that recurs across the forums, unresolved for years, is blunt: how do I get my managers to actually do recognition? The answer the community keeps reaching for is not a new platform. It is a mechanism that makes recognition easier to do than to skip: budget per manager, a faster process, recipient choice, team visibility.

Manager adoption just doesn't happen.

Not because managers don't care, but because the friction is bigger than the moment they had. Every login, form or approval between the impulse and the act is a place recognition quietly dies.

WHY WE DID THIS

We wanted the unfiltered version

Recognition is a well-established HR priority. It is also one of those terms we are so over-familiar with that it slightly loses its meaning (like asking someone 'how are you' when you both know neither of you wants the real answer).

The research in its favour is not new: recognised employees stay longer and perform better. The question is not whether recognition matters. It is why, given everyone agrees it does, so few can make it reliably happen.

Most data on this comes from platform vendors, who have a slight bias about the value of using a platform. So we went looking for what HR managers say when no one is selling them anything.

Two sources gave us that. Public reviews on G2, Capterra and related sites: the view from people who have bought, used and occasionally regretted these platforms. And r/humanresources and similar forums, where HR people talk honestly to each other while trying to solve real problems.

Neither is a scientific sample. But the consistency across both is striking. The same friction points keep surfacing, and the same description of what would actually work keeps emerging, independently.

THE PROBLEM

Recognition should happen at team level. Mostly, it doesn't.

Recognition has always relied on line managers. HR can design a beautiful programme, launch it with a fanfare and communicate it perfectly. But the moment that makes someone feel seen has to come from the person who knows what they did, and why it mattered. Usually their direct manager.

Right now that matters more than usual. Retention has become more valuable than recruitment, which makes non-cash recognition, done well, a disproportionately good return.

10%

year-on-year decline in manager-led recognition

41%

more likely to enable peer recognition at best-in-class orgs

31%

lower voluntary turnover where recognition is frictionless

> "How should I motivate my managers to do better recognition?"
>
> Appearing in at least four separate HR forum threads, multiple years running, never fully resolved.

That is the bind. HR is held accountable for recognition outcomes it cannot directly control, with no way to make manager-led recognition frictionless enough to actually happen.

PART ONE OF THREE

What HR managers say to each other

FORUM FINDINGS

Money first, then friction

01 The honest answer is always money

Across every high-engagement thread on what works, the top answer is a version of the same thing: money, then being treated well, consistently. This does not make non-cash recognition pointless. It sets the context. Recognition works once pay is fair, not as a substitute for it. Offered where people feel underpaid, it lands like a consolation prize.

02 Platforms cost more than they deliver

The pattern repeats across products: a company buys a platform, launch adoption is fine, usage drifts without constant HR effort, the cost-per-active-user creeps up, and eventually someone posts a thread asking what to switch to. The platforms rarely fail technically. The admin and engagement overhead just is not realistic for the team running them.

> "We are literally spending more on the programme than on our employees, so we have decided to move on."
>
> r/humanresources, Awardco user, January 2025

FORUM FINDINGS

The manager bottleneck

03 Managers are the bottleneck

This is the most common theme in our research, and a genuine structural puzzle. The community answers are sensible: train managers, add recognition to objectives, make it visible, run workshops. All good ideas. None solve the in-the-moment problem.

The recognition that needed to happen on Tuesday afternoon, after a hard client call, did not happen, because the manager's next free moment was Thursday. By then the moment had passed.

> "It goes beyond relying on the manager to provide recognition. Most managers don't do this well."
>
> r/humanresources

04 Peer-to-peer works, but only when frictionless

Peer recognition is increasingly recommended as a way around the manager problem, and it can work. The condition the community keeps naming is simplicity: as easy as posting on social media. A Slack kudos channel costs nothing and is visible to the team, but it delivers nothing tangible. For small moments that is enough. For the bigger wins, less so.

FORUM FINDINGS

Nobody wants the swag

05 Generic gifts are dreaded, by HR most of all

Asked what used to be fun but is now dreadful, HR professionals' top answer was picking out gifts and swag. The most upvoted recommendation, without exception, is a gift card where the recipient chooses the retailer. Not branded merchandise. Not a mystery hamper. Not a company hoodie.

The reason is not only that it makes recipients happier. It eliminates the admin of sourcing, ordering, storing, distributing and fielding complaints. That is a lot of work for a task employees do not get excited about.

> "Give us money, nobody wants your swag."
>
> r/humanresources

PART TWO OF THREE

What 30,000+ reviews tell us

PLATFORM REVIEWS

High ratings, frustrated administrators

All five platforms rate well, between 4.5 and 4.9 stars. The interesting question is who writes the critical reviews. Employees who receive the perks are satisfied. The HR administrators running the platform day to day are the ones surfacing friction: admin complexity, manager adoption, and discounts blurred into recognition.

Perkbox

Reviewers draw a hard line between perks, discounts and genuine appreciation, and feel the platform sits on the wrong side of it. Adoption is a recurring issue, running below 10% of the team at some organisations.

Reward Gateway

Loved by employees, frustrating for admins: no rules engine, a mobile app that does far less than desktop, and buy-in that only holds while HR keeps actively encouraging it.

> “Hard to get staff and manager buy-in to use the programme more frequently.”
>
> Director of HR, Capterra, Reward Gateway

PLATFORM REVIEWS

Marketplaces and expiring points

Awardco

At 4.9 stars it is the ratings outlier, but reviewers flag the 'Amazon Tax': the same item costs more points in Awardco's marketplace than on Amazon directly. When the tool leaves people feeling short-changed, the recognition moment is undermined.

38%

of Awardco reviewers who mentioned order tracking flagged it negatively

Bonusly

The platform people most often switch to. The Slack integration is genuinely praised. But points expire monthly with no rollover, and per-user fees stack up fast at scale.

42%

of Bonusly reviewers who mentioned cost rated it negatively

PLATFORM REVIEWS

Nectar, and what they all share

Nectar

The highest review count of the five, with one nagging complaint: logging in. 54% of reviewers who mentioned login flagged it as a pain point. Points expire monthly, the same friction that tops Bonusly's reviews.

54%

of Nectar reviewers who mentioned login called it a pain point

ACROSS ALL FIVE PLATFORMS

What they all share

1. High ratings come from recipients, not the admins running the system.
2. Manager adoption still needs ongoing HR effort on every platform.
3. Reporting is too thin to defend the spend at renewal.
4. Points systems consistently frustrate the people using them.

WHAT THE DATA POINTS TO

What good actually looks like

Both datasets point to the same short list, described independently by HR people who never compared notes. Five conditions, every one about removing friction rather than adding features.

01 **Budget that sits with the manager**

Theirs to act from each quarter, with no HR sign-off in the way.

02 **No approval process**

Every step between the impulse and the act is where recognition quietly dies.

03 **Done in under a minute**

Fast enough to fit the gap between two meetings, or it will not happen.

04 **The recipient chooses**

Choice fixes the unwanted-gift problem and deletes a pile of admin at once.

05 **Visible to the team**

Public beats private. The social signal is the point, no fancy feed required.

Every condition here is about removing friction, not adding features.

PART THREE OF THREE

The case you can now make

THE CASE YOU CAN MAKE

Three arguments, now with evidence

The findings probably confirm what you suspected. What they also give you is the evidence to make three arguments that HR teams tell us are hard to land without it.

For your CFO

78% of UK hiring is replacement, not growth. Strong recognition can cut voluntary turnover by up to 31%. Holding on to two or three flight-risk people at around £35,000 each pays for the whole approach many times over. And recognised employees are 2.6x more likely to be at their most productive, with industry sources putting the return at £5-7 for every £1 spent.

For your leadership team

This is not a training problem, it is a mechanism problem. Managers recognise people when the act takes thirty seconds and needs nothing they do not already have. Anything that asks for a separate login, a nomination flow or an approval will fail.

For the platform decision

Those 4.5-to-4.9-star ratings are powered by employees enjoying the discounts. The critical reviews come from the HR admins running the tool. So the question to ask is not whether people will like the catalogue, but whether the mechanism lets managers recognise someone in the moment, without HR keeping it alive like a campaign.

ONE APPROACH

A different way to do it

Budget per manager, no approval, recipient choice, under a minute. That is not a standard feature set in this market, where most tools are built around a catalogue or a points system that hands the work back to HR. Huggg is a UK employee gifting tool that goes about it differently.

No platform fees

Free to set up and use. You pay for the gift itself, and that is it.

No addresses needed

Recipients claim on their own device. No logistics, no collections.

No approval process

Managers act the moment they want to. No HR sign-off.

Recipients choose

2,000+ brands. Nobody gets something they didn't want.

Under a minute

No friction between the impulse and the act.

2,000+ UK companies

Where cutting admin and keeping people are the same job.

We'll leave you to draw your own conclusions. If it fits, Huggg is worth fifteen minutes.

Book a demo

METHODOLOGY

How we did the research

Platform reviews

Perkbox, Reward Gateway, Awardco, Bonusly and Nectar. Sources: G2, Capterra, SoftwareAdvice, GetApp, SelectSoftware Reviews, TrustRadius and PeopleManagingPeople. Approximately 30,000+ reviews examined.

Forum research

r/humanresources (primary), with r/HumanResourcesUK and r/managers. Around 40 threads covering June 2024 to June 2026, sourced via Google-indexed content and PullPush metadata.

Market and ROI data

Rippling UK Hiring Trends 2026, Reed HR Salary Guide 2026, DynamicsHub UK Employee Recognition Report 2026, and Gallup State of the Global Workplace 2025. ROI figures from Achievers, SelectSoftware Reviews and Vantage Circle.

Neither dataset is a scientific sample. The value is in the consistency: independent sources, the same conclusions.

huggg

Because gifting, and recognition, doesn't have to be complicated.

Huggg makes it easy to send thoughtful gifts to employees, clients and teams, without addresses, the risk of getting it wrong, or hefty platform fees. More personal than a voucher, more meaningful than points.

Book a demo

See how it works, then decide.

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