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Reward Systems and Organizational Justice in Human Resource Management: Implications for Employee Performance

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Abstract : *Reward systems are important human resource management practices for recognizing employee contributions and supporting organizational performance. However, their effectiveness may depend not only on the rewards provided but also on employees' perceptions of organizational justice. This article examines the relationship between reward systems, organizational justice, motivation, employee loyalty, and performance through a narrative literature review of eight journal articles published between 2022 and 2026. The reviewed literature was analyzed using expectancy theory, equity theory, organizational justice theory, and social exchange theory. The findings generally indicate positive associations between reward systems and employee motivation, loyalty, and performance. However, the evidence is not entirely consistent. In particular, a study involving 51 hospital nurses found that the association between rewards and performance was no longer statistically significant in multivariate analysis ($p = 0.731$). Qualitative findings further indicate that perceived unfairness and unclear reward criteria may generate jealousy, conflict, and reduced employee trust. The synthesis suggests that organizational justice may play an important role in shaping employees' responses to reward practices, while performance is also associated with other factors, including leadership, competencies, and the work environment. Accordingly, organizations should establish transparent and measurable reward criteria, provide complaint mechanisms, and integrate reward policies with competency development and supportive leadership. The proposed relationships provide a basis for further empirical investigation.*

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Introduction

An organization's success in achieving its goals is influenced by the quality of its human resources (HR). Employee performance is understood as the result of carrying out tasks and responsibilities, assessed through quality, quantity, timeliness, and effectiveness based on organizational standards. In service organizations, such as hospitals and government agencies, employee performance is directly related to the quality of service received by users.

One HR strategy for maintaining performance is a reward system, a form of organizational appreciation or reward for employee contributions and achievements. Rewards can be financial, such as incentives and benefits, or non-financial, such as praise, recognition, promotions, development opportunities, and additional responsibilities. Aurelika and Verawati (2022) position reward systems as part of HR management to support performance improvement.

Previous research in various contexts generally reports a positive relationship between rewards and performance. Alfarizi et al. (2026) found a positive and significant influence of rewards and organizational justice on employee performance at a personnel agency in Bireuen Regency, and Duwiyaningrum (2026) reported that, in a study of 62 employees at a company in Medan, the reward system had a positive and significant effect on employee loyalty. However, this evidence is not consistent. In hospital nurses, Rahayu et al. (2023) found that the significant relationship between rewards and performance in a bivariate analysis did not persist in a multivariate model. Qualitative studies in state-owned enterprises (Jumarti, 2025) and civil servants (Fathurrahman & Susanti, 2026) showed that rewards can actually trigger jealousy if the process is perceived to be influenced by personal closeness or the criteria are unknown.

This lack of consistency highlights an unanswered gap: under what conditions are rewards related to motivation, loyalty, and performance? The organizational justice literature offers a plausible answer: that employees assess not only the magnitude of rewards but also the fairness of the outcomes, processes, and treatment that accompany them (Greenberg, 1990; Colquitt, 2001). However, evidence from studies examining rewards and fairness simultaneously in Indonesia remains limited and scattered across different contexts, so there has been no synthesis that links them to a theoretical foundation and critically examines the strength of the evidence.

This article contributes by (a) synthesizing evidence from eight articles in the context of the public, state-owned enterprises, private, and hospital sectors into a single theoretical framework, (b) critically assessing the strengths and limitations of this evidence, and (c) formulating testable propositions and managerial implications. The objectives of this article are: (1) to explain the concept and form of reward systems along with their theoretical basis; (2) to outline the role of organizational justice in the implementation of rewards; (3) to synthesize literature findings regarding the relationship between rewards, motivation, loyalty, and performance; and (4) to formulate managerial implications.

The scope of this article focuses on rewards. Punishment is not a primary variable, but it is briefly discussed for comparison, as some of the sources reviewed examine both.

Theoretical basis

Reward system

A reward system is a set of organizational policies and practices for rewarding or recognizing employee contributions. Financial rewards include salary, incentives, bonuses, and allowances, while non-financial rewards include praise, recognition of achievement, promotions, education and training, career development, and professional support. The form of reward should be tailored to the organization's capabilities, job responsibilities, and applicable regulations.

Expectancy theory, two-factor theory, and equity theory

Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) states that motivation depends on an employee's belief that effort will lead to performance, that performance will be followed by certain outcomes such as rewards, and that these outcomes are valuable to the individual. Consequently, rewards are motivating only when the criteria for obtaining them are clear and linked to achievable performance. Two-factor theory (Herzberg et al., 1959) distinguishes motivating factors, such as recognition, achievement, and

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responsibility, from hygiene factors, such as pay and working conditions. This distinction helps explain why non-financial rewards can be meaningful even if they are not monetary.

Equity theory (Adams, 1965) explains that employees compare the ratio of inputs (effort, competence, workload) and outcomes (rewards, recognition) they receive with the ratio of a comparator. Perceived inequity creates tension and a drive to restore balance, for example by reducing effort or withdrawing. This theory forms the basis for the dimension of distributive justice.

Organizational justice

Organizational justice is an employee's perception of the fairness of organizational treatment and decisions. Greenberg (1990) outlined three dimensions: distributive justice, which is the fairness of outcomes received; procedural justice, which is the fairness of the procedures used to determine outcomes; and interactional justice, which is the quality of interpersonal treatment in the application of procedures (Bies & Moag, 1986). Colquitt (2001) further divided interactional justice into interpersonal justice (respect and courtesy) and informational justice (clarity of explanations for decisions), resulting in four dimensions. This article uses a three-dimensional classification because it is commonly used by the sources reviewed, distinguishing between interpersonal and informational aspects when relevant.

Social exchange and conceptual framework

Social exchange theory views employment relationships as reciprocal exchanges, so that perceived fair treatment encourages employees to reciprocate with positive work attitudes and behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Meta-analyses indicate that organizational justice is associated with job performance and attitudes (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001), with pathways through the quality of the exchange relationship and affective reactions (Colquitt et al., 2013). This choice of framework aligns with a review by Maryadi et al. (2026), who found that social exchange theory, social capital theory, and Herzberg's two-factor theory are the most frequently used theories in employee performance research.

Based on these theories, this article develops a conceptual framework in Figure 1 and three analytical propositions that have not been empirically tested. P1: Reward systems are positively associated with motivation, job satisfaction, performance, and loyalty. P2: Perceptions of organizational justice determine the strength of these relationships; perceived unfair rewards have the potential to weaken or reverse the effect. P3: Performance is also influenced by factors beyond rewards, so rewards cannot be viewed as the sole determinant of performance.

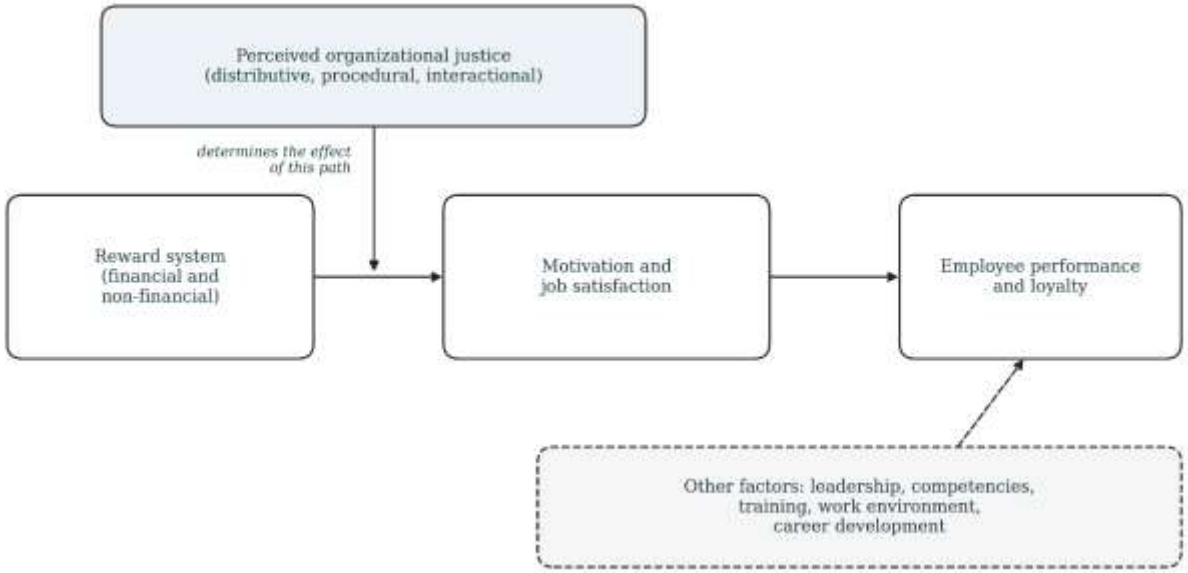


Figure 1. Conceptual framework resulting from literature synthesis (propositions, untested)

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Research methods

This article uses a narrative literature review approach. Eight core articles were identified by the authors from the initial review: Aurelika and Verawati (2022), Rahayu et al. (2023), Jumarti (2025), Duwiyaningrum (2026), Alfarizi et al. (2026), Fathurrahman and Susanti (2026), Girsang et al. (2026), and Maryadi et al. (2026). The eligibility of each article was confirmed against the criteria in Table 1. Classic theoretical literature (Adams, 1965; Vroom, 1964; Herzberg et al., 1959; Greenberg, 1990; Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt, 2001; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Colquitt et al., 2013) was added as an analytical framework and was not counted as empirical evidence in the synthesis.

Table 1. Core article eligibility criteria

Aspect	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Topic	Discusses rewards and/or organizational justice in relation to employee performance, motivation, or loyalty.	Does not contain outcome variables such as performance, motivation, or loyalty
Publication type	Journal articles, both empirical research and literature reviews	Not a journal article
Period and language	Published 2022–2026; in Indonesian or English	Outside of that period or language
Context	Public sector, state-owned enterprises, private sector, or health sector	There isn't any

Data extraction was performed for each article, noting the context, design and sample, key findings, and methodological notes (Table 2). The quality of evidence was assessed narratively based on design, sample size, and completeness of statistical reporting. Findings were then grouped according to the following themes: rewards and performance; the role of organizational justice; motivation and loyalty; and comparator punishment. The context of each study was maintained to avoid conflating findings from hospitals, government agencies, state-owned enterprises, and corporations.

This study is not a systematic review. A database search with documented search strategies, keywords, and dates was not performed. Therefore, this article does not claim comprehensive coverage of the literature and does not produce pooled effect estimates or causal inferences. The consequences are discussed in Section 4.8.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics and quality of evidence

Eight articles covered five contexts: conceptual HRM, hospitals, government agencies and civil servants, state-owned enterprises and companies, and cross-organizational reviews. Only three articles reported quantitative analysis of primary data: Alfarizi et al. (2026; n = 47), Rahayu et al. (2023; n = 51), and Duwiyaningrum (2026; n = 62). Two articles were qualitative (Jumarti, 2025; Fathurrahman & Susanti, 2026), one was a literature study (Aurelika & Verawati, 2022), and two were systematic reviews (Girsang et al., 2026; Maryadi et al., 2026). Table 2 summarizes these characteristics.

Table 2. Synthesis of reviewed articles

Author (year)	Context	Design and samples	Main findings	Critical notes
Aurelika & Verawati (2022)	Human Resources Management	Literature study	Analyze how managerial efforts through reward systems can improve performance and support organizational success.	Literature review, not empirical testing; serves as a conceptual foundation
Rahayu et al. (2023)	TNI Hospital, Padangsidimpuan	*Cross-sectional*; total sampling of 51 nurses; chi-square test and logistic regression	Bivariate: motivation ($p = 0.000$), achievement ($p = 0.005$), and reward ($p = 0.000$) are related to performance. Multivariate: only achievement is significant ($p = 0.014$); reward $p = 0.731$; and motivation $p = 0.175$.	Small sample; very wide confidence interval (0.154–14.333); limited instrument description; association, not causality

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Author (year)	Context	Design and samples	Main findings	Critical notes
Friday (2025)	State-Owned Enterprises, Makassar	Qualitative phenomenology; in-depth interviews; number of informants not stated	Rewards motivate when they are perceived as fair and transparent, and trigger jealousy when they are perceived as not objective. Informants want two-way communication and regular evaluations.	Describes the mechanisms of perception; cannot be statistically generalized
Duwiyaningrum (2026)	PT Pelita Gemilang Abadi, Medan (Digital Marketing Division)	Quantitative; saturated sampling of 62 employees; questionnaire; multiple linear regression	Reward ($t = 3.016$; $p = 0.004$) and the quality of punishment implementation ($t = 2.069$; $p = 0.043$) have a positive effect on loyalty; simultaneously $F = 29.575$ ($p < 0.001$); adjusted $R^2 = 0.484$	One division (77% female respondents); perception data; beta reward (0.444) is greater than punishment (0.304) does not prove that reward is the biggest factor
Alfarizi et al. (2026)	BKPSDM Bireuen Regency	Quantitative; questionnaire; entire population of 47 employees; multiple linear regression	Rewards and organizational justice each have a positive and significant partial effect on performance.	Small sample; perceptual data from a single source, susceptible to common method bias
Fathurrahman & Susanti (2026)	ASN, Batang Pratama Tax Office	Descriptive qualitative; 8 informants (purposive); interviews, observation, documentation	Rewards increase motivation, loyalty, and work enthusiasm; non-financial appreciation is considered to have a greater psychological impact; some informants stated that giving rewards is influenced by personal closeness; punishment increases discipline but is oppressive if excessive or uneven; the effectiveness of both depends on perceptions of fairness.	Eight informants in one office; cannot be generalized
Girsang et al. (2026)	Cross-organizational	Systematic review (PRISMA), literature of the last 10 years	Fair performance-based rewards increase job satisfaction and performance; disproportionate punishment decreases both; job satisfaction acts as an intervening variable	The authors suggest empirical testing across sectors and cultures.
Maryadi et al. (2026)	Cross-organizational	Systematic review (PRISMA), 24 Scopus-indexed English articles, period 2020–2025	There are 13 factors related to performance, including motivation, work environment, leadership, compensation, training, and career development.	Limited to Scopus-indexed English-language articles; compensation is only one of 13 factors

Awards and performance

The most direct evidence comes from Alfarizi et al. (2026), who reported a positive and partially significant effect of rewards and organizational justice on employee performance. This finding supports P1 and P2, but needs to be considered proportionally: the sample size was 47 employees in a single agency, and perceptual data from a single source tends to inflate the relationship between the variables.

Rahayu et al.'s (2023) study provides a more nuanced picture. In the bivariate analysis, rewards were associated with nurse performance ($p = 0.000$), but in the multivariate logistic regression, the coefficient was insignificant ($p = 0.731$), and only achievement remained significant ($p = 0.014$). The study authors concluded that motivation was the most influential variable based on an Exp(B) value of 6.364. This conclusion is less robust because the motivation coefficient was insignificant ($p = 0.175$) and the confidence interval was very wide (0.440–92.151), making it difficult to interpret as the largest influence. With 51 respondents and three predictors, the multivariate estimate is indeed prone to instability.

The differences in bivariate and multivariate results can be interpreted with two untested explanations. First, rewards, performance, and motivation are likely interrelated, so that the effects of rewards become inseparable when all three are included together. Second, according to expectancy and equity theories, the effects of rewards depend on employees' perceptions of their congruence with their contributions, something not measured in the study. Because of its cross-sectional design, these results only indicate an association. Maryadi et al. (2026) add a broader perspective: of the 24 articles reviewed, compensation was only one of 13 factors related to performance, thus supporting P3.

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The role of organizational justice

Organizational justice is half the focus of this article, but only Alfarizi et al. (2026) tested it quantitatively on performance. Other support is qualitative. Jumarti (2025) showed that rewards motivate when they are perceived as fair and transparent, and trigger jealousy and conflict when they are perceived as not objective. Fathurrahman and Susanti (2026), through interviews with eight informants at the Batang Pratama Tax Office, reported that some informants perceived that reward distribution was sometimes influenced by personal closeness to the leader. The three dimensions of justice were also perceived in practice: reward distribution was considered unequal (distributive), decisions were more accepted when procedures were transparent (procedural), and superiors who were open and respectful to employees were valued (interactional). These two findings demonstrate how the dimensions of justice operate in practice, albeit from a limited context.

Within the three-dimensional framework, the criteria and fairness of distribution constitute distributive justice issues; the clarity and consistency of the assessment mechanism constitute procedural justice issues; and the two-way communication and open explanations requested by Jumarti's informant (2025) constitute interactional justice issues, particularly the informational aspect according to Colquitt (2001). Employees may accept different outcomes if the basis for distribution is clear, procedures are consistent, and they are treated respectfully. Conversely, unclear criteria or perceived favoritism undermine trust, in line with social exchange mechanisms (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Overall, the evidence from the sources reviewed is consistent with P2, but does not prove it. No studies in this collection tested the moderating effect of justice on the reward-performance relationship. Meta-analyses outside this collection support the same direction, namely that justice is associated with both performance and job attitudes (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013).

Motivation, job satisfaction, and loyalty

Girsang et al. (2026) synthesized the literature and concluded that fair performance-based rewards increase job satisfaction, which in turn improves performance, thus acting as an intervening variable. This finding aligns with the motivation and job satisfaction pathway in Figure 1 and with Herzberg et al.'s (1959) view that recognition and achievement enhance satisfaction. Jumarti's (2025) research further states that some employees perceive rewards as enhancing motivation, loyalty, and morale, but only if they are perceived as appropriate.

For loyalty, Duwiyaningrum (2026) analyzed 62 employees of the Digital Marketing Division of PT Pelita Gemilang Abadi Medan using multiple linear regression. Rewards had a positive and significant effect ($t = 3.016$; $p = 0.004$), as did the quality of punishment implementation ($t = 2.069$; $p = 0.043$), and the two together explained 48.4% of the variation in loyalty (adjusted $R^2 = 0.484$). These results align with the logic of social exchange, where employees who feel appreciated reciprocate with engagement. The standardized coefficient for rewards (0.444) is indeed greater than that for punishment (0.304), but this comparison does not prove that rewards are the largest factor because other factors were not included in the model. It should also be noted that loyalty is supported by only one study in a single division within a single company. Loyalty should also not be built solely through rewards: policy consistency, mutual respect, reasonable workloads, and development opportunities also play a role. The reward system also needs to be designed so as not to trigger unhealthy competition, as reminded by Jumarti's (2025) findings that the social impact can be in the form of solidarity or competition, depending on its implementation.

Comparator: punishment

Several sources have studied rewards alongside punishment. Girsang et al. (2026) report that disproportionate punishment decreases job satisfaction and performance, although in certain contexts it can serve as a behavioral control. Jumarti (2025) notes that punishment without clarification or guidance causes stress and lowers self-confidence. Fathurrahman and Susanti (2026) report a similar finding: punishment increases discipline and compliance when objective and proportional, but creates psychological distress when excessive or disproportionately applied to similar violations. Quantitatively, Duwiyaningrum (2026) found that the quality of punishment implementation (clarity,

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consistency, gradualness, and proportionality of sanctions) has a positive effect on loyalty; the positive coefficient indicates the benefits of clear and proportional implementation, not the benefits of the severity of the sanctions. This pattern confirms that the elements of fairness, clarity, and respectful treatment apply to both rewards and sanctions, so that justice is inherent in the entire system of consequences, not just rewards.

4.6 Why are the results not uniform?

The inconsistencies in findings can be traced to four factors. First, the different contexts: hospital nurses, agency employees, state-owned enterprise employees, and private sector employees face different reward systems and work norms. Second, the design: small quantitative and qualitative studies address different questions, namely, how strong the relationship is and how it is experienced. Third, the measurement: variables such as performance, rewards, and fairness are measured using different perceptual instruments. Fourth, the analytical model: strong bivariate relationships can diminish when other variables are controlled, as in Rahayu et al. (2023). Furthermore, journals tend to publish significant results, so small collections like this may overestimate the existence of relationships. Maryadi et al. (2026) also note that findings on frequently studied variables often differ depending on organizational context and research method.

Managerial implications

Table 3 links the findings to implications that organizations can consider. The examples of hospital implementation are illustrations provided by the authors, not findings from the sources reviewed.

Table 3. Findings, implications, and examples of application

Findings	Implications	Examples of implementation in hospitals
Rewards motivate when they are judged fairly and transparently; unknown criteria create jealousy (Jumarti, 2025)	Set clear indicators and distribute them to all employees before the appraisal period.	Nurse assessment indicators (e.g., procedure compliance, attendance, patient feedback) are announced at the beginning of the period.
Some employees believe that giving rewards is influenced by personal closeness (Fathurrahman & Susanti, 2026)	Use measurable performance data, more than one rater, and provide a complaint mechanism.	Assessment by the head of the ward and the nursing committee, with written clarification channels
Non-financial rewards such as superior appreciation are meaningful for employees (Fathurrahman & Susanti, 2026)	Combine financial and non-financial rewards according to the organization's capabilities.	Public appreciation, training opportunities, and career paths in addition to incentives
Rewards are not the only determinant of performance (Rahayu et al., 2023; Maryadi et al., 2026)	Integrate rewards with training, supervision, leadership, and the work environment.	Competency training programs and work facility support run alongside incentive schemes.
The reward system can trigger solidarity or unhealthy competition (Jumarti, 2025)	Balance individual and team recognition	Award for the best quality of care unit in addition to the exemplary nurse award
Job satisfaction bridges rewards and performance (Girsang et al., 2026)	Periodic evaluation of perceptions of fairness, satisfaction, motivation, and performance after the policy is implemented	Survey of perceptions of fairness and job satisfaction every semester to adjust policies

Limitations of the study

First, this study is not a systematic review. The source selection was purposive and did not involve a documented database search, potentially leaving relevant studies unavailable. Second, only eight articles were reviewed, and the quantitative evidence comes from only three small-scale studies (n = 47, 51, and 62) with cross-sectional designs, thus not supporting causal conclusions. Third, the study contexts were so diverse that findings across government agencies, state-owned enterprises, companies, and hospitals cannot be directly compared. Fourth, publication bias was not assessed. Fifth, the conceptual framework and propositions proposed are analytical in nature and have not been empirically tested.

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Conclusion

Based on the article's objectives, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, reward systems encompass both financial and non-financial forms, and their influence on motivation can be explained through expectancy theory, two-factor theory, and equity theory. Second, organizational justice, encompassing distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions, determines how rewards are perceived; rewards perceived as unfair can trigger jealousy and conflict. Third, evidence from the sources reviewed generally indicates a positive association between rewards, motivation, loyalty, and performance, but this is not uniform. Among hospital nurses, the relationship between rewards and performance did not persist in a multivariate model, and performance is also influenced by other factors such as leadership, competence, work environment, and career development. Fourth, organizations need to implement reward systems that are transparent, based on measurable data, consistent, and integrated with comprehensive human resource management.

Suggestion

1. **For organizations, including hospitals:**establish and communicate award criteria prior to the assessment period, provide a grievance mechanism, and periodically evaluate perceptions of fairness.
2. **For further research:**empirically test the moderating role of justice perceptions on the reward-performance relationship, and the mediating role of job satisfaction and motivation, with a larger sample and a longitudinal or mixed design.
3. **For the next literature review:**using documented database searches with standard inclusion and exclusion criteria, and assessing publication quality and bias, to ensure more comprehensive coverage of evidence.

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