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The Effects of Incentives and Job Satisfaction on Employee Performance: The Mediating Role of Work Motivation in the East Kolaka Regency Government

Santi¹, Sudirman Zaid¹, Juharsah¹, Noval Nur¹

¹ Halu Oleo University, Kendari, Indonesia,

* Corresponding author: pahrulumk@gmail.com

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Abstract: This study examines the effects of incentive and reward systems and job satisfaction on employee performance, with work motivation as a mediating variable and demographic characteristics as a moderating variable, in the East Kolaka Regency Government. An explanatory quantitative research design was employed. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 367 members of the Indonesian State Civil Apparatus (ASN), selected using proportional random sampling from a population of 4,260 employees. The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that incentive and reward systems and job satisfaction positively influence work motivation, which, in turn, significantly enhances employee performance. Work motivation also mediates the relationships between incentive and reward systems and employee performance, as well as between job satisfaction and employee performance. However, demographic characteristics do not significantly moderate the examined relationships. These findings contribute to the literature on public-sector human resource management by highlighting the central role of work motivation in translating organizational rewards and job satisfaction into improved employee performance. The results also provide practical implications for developing fair, transparent, and performance-oriented HR policies in local government institutions.



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Keywords: incentive and reward systems; job satisfaction; work motivation; employee performance; demographic characteristics; public-sector human resource management; local government.

激励与工作满意度对员工绩效的影响：工作动机在东科拉卡县政府中的中介作用

摘要: 本研究考察激励与奖励制度以及工作满意度对员工绩效的影响，并以工作动机作为中介变量、人口统计特征作为调节变量，研究对象为东科拉卡县政府。研究采用解释性定量研究设计。数据通过结构化问卷收集，样本包括从4260名员工总体中采用比例随机抽样方法选取的367名印度尼西亚国家公务人员（ASN）。数据采用偏最小二乘结构方程模型（PLS - SEM）进行分析。研究结果表明，激励与奖励制度以及工作满意度对工作动机具有积极影响，而工作动机进一步显著提升员工绩效。工作动机还在激励与奖励制度和员工绩效之间，以及工作满意度和员工绩效之间发挥中介作用。然而，人口统计特征并未显著调节所考察的关系。研究结果通过强调工作动机在将组织奖励和工作满意度转化为员工绩效提升过程中的核心作用，丰富了公共部门人力资源管理领域的相关文献。同时，研究结果也为地方政府机构制定公平、透明和绩效导向型的人力资源政策提供了实践启示。

关键词: 激励与奖励制度；工作满意度；工作动机；员工绩效；人口统计特征；公共部门人力资源管理；地方政府。

1. Introduction

Human resources are a critical determinant of organizational success, particularly in the public sector, where institutions are expected to provide effective, accountable, and high-quality public services. Effective human resource management plays an important role in improving organizational performance and long-term institutional sustainability [5]. Employee performance, which refers to the quality and quantity of work achieved in accordance with assigned duties and responsibilities [29], is influenced by both internal factors, such as work motivation and job satisfaction, and external factors, including management systems, organizational policies, and reward practices [31].

Among these factors, incentive and reward systems have a strategic role in encouraging employees to perform effectively. Incentives generally refer to performance-based compensation, whereas rewards represent organizational recognition of employee contributions and achievements [34]. In line with Vroom's Expectancy Theory, employees tend to be more motivated when they perceive a clear relationship between effort, performance, and expected rewards [48]. In addition, job satisfaction reflects employees' positive emotional responses to their work experiences

and has been widely associated with higher organizational commitment, motivation, and performance [27], [42].

However, previous empirical findings suggest that the relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance is not always direct, indicating the possible presence of intervening mechanisms. Work motivation is therefore considered an important mediating mechanism that explains how incentive and reward systems and job satisfaction may influence employee performance. Motivation reflects the internal and external forces that encourage employees to exert effort, remain persistent in completing their tasks, and contribute to the achievement of organizational objectives. Even when organizations provide attractive rewards and favorable working conditions, improvements in employee performance may not occur unless employees are sufficiently motivated.

Furthermore, demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, education level, length of service, and employment status, may influence how employees respond to organizational policies, incentives, and workplace conditions [37]. In the East Kolaka Regency Government, variations in employee performance remain evident, with some employees not consistently achieving established performance targets. These

differences may be associated with variations in work motivation, job satisfaction, perceptions of incentive and reward systems, and demographic backgrounds. Therefore, this study integrates incentive and reward systems and job satisfaction as antecedent variables, work motivation as a mediating variable, and demographic characteristics as a moderating variable to provide a more comprehensive explanation of employee performance in the public sector.

Research Novelty

The novelty of this study lies in the development and empirical testing of a comprehensive research model that integrates incentive and reward systems and job satisfaction as antecedents of employee performance, with work motivation serving as a mediating variable and demographic characteristics examined as a moderating variable. In the context of public-sector organizations, particularly the East Kolaka Regency Government, this study provides a more integrated explanation of how organizational reward practices and employees' job satisfaction contribute to performance outcomes. Unlike previous studies that have generally examined these relationships separately, this research simultaneously analyzes direct effects, mediating mechanisms, and potential differences in influence based on employee demographic characteristics. Therefore, the study offers a more comprehensive perspective on employee performance in local government institutions and contributes to the development of public-sector human resource management literature.

2. Literature review and research hypothesis

Incentive and Reward System

The incentive and reward system is a strategic human resource management mechanism designed to recognize employee contributions, achievements, and performance in order to enhance motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness. Incentives may take financial forms, such as bonuses and performance allowances, as well as non-financial forms, including recognition, promotion opportunities, and career development programs [5], [33]. By linking rewards to performance outcomes, organizations can encourage employees to improve productivity, commitment, and work quality [11].

The theoretical foundation of incentive and reward systems is supported by several motivational theories, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Adams' Equity Theory, Vroom's Expectancy Theory,

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and Skinner's Reinforcement Theory. These theories emphasize the importance of fair, meaningful, and performance-related rewards in shaping employee behavior and motivation [1], [20], [30], [45], [48]. Contemporary studies also suggest that the effectiveness of reward systems depends on their alignment with employee needs and organizational objectives [21].

In this study, the incentive and reward system is measured through five dimensions: distributive justice, procedural justice, variety of reward forms, timeliness of reward provision, and suitability to employee needs. These dimensions reflect employees' perceptions of the fairness, transparency, relevance, and effectiveness of organizational reward practices.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to employees' positive feelings, attitudes, and evaluations of their work, which arise from various aspects of the job experience, including job tasks, work environment, supervision, compensation, and relationships with coworkers [12], [46]. Employees with higher levels of job satisfaction tend to demonstrate stronger organizational commitment, lower absenteeism, higher productivity, and a greater willingness to contribute to organizational goals. Conversely, job dissatisfaction may lead to stress, turnover intentions, reduced motivation, and lower performance [25], [35].

Contemporary perspectives emphasize that job satisfaction is shaped not only by material rewards but also by psychological and organizational factors, such as meaningful work, work-life balance, employee engagement, recognition, and a supportive organizational climate [8], [11], [43]. These factors are particularly important in public-sector organizations, where employee satisfaction can influence service quality, organizational effectiveness, and the achievement of institutional objectives.

In this study, job satisfaction is measured using Spector's Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS), which consists of nine dimensions: salary, promotion, supervision, benefits, rewards, operational procedures, coworkers, nature of work, and communication [46]. These dimensions provide a comprehensive assessment of employees' perceptions of their work, organizational environment, and overall employment experience.

Work motivation

Work motivation is a fundamental concept in organizational behavior that explains the internal and external forces that encourage individuals to act, exert effort, and achieve desired goals. Classical motivation theories suggest that employee motivation originates from human needs, expectations, and perceived rewards. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory explains that individuals are motivated by a sequence

of needs ranging from physiological needs to self-actualization [30]. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between motivator factors, such as achievement, recognition, and responsibility, and hygiene factors, such as salary, supervision, and working conditions [20]. McClelland further emphasizes the importance of achievement, affiliation, and power needs in shaping individual motivation [32].

In the organizational context, work motivation is commonly understood as the drive that encourages employees to achieve organizational goals while fulfilling their personal needs [17]. Robbins and Judge define motivation as the intensity, direction, and persistence of individual effort toward the achievement of work-related objectives [41]. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, motivation is shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors and is strengthened when employees experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the workplace [15].

In this study, work motivation is measured through several indicators, including enjoyment of work, pride in work outcomes, responsibility, achievement orientation, financial rewards, recognition, promotion opportunities, and compliance with organizational rules. These indicators reflect employees' willingness to exert effort, maintain commitment, and contribute effectively to the achievement of organizational goals.

Demographic Characteristics

Employee Demographic Characteristics (Moderating Variable). Employee demographic characteristics refer to individual attributes inherent in employees and can influence how employees respond to incentive and reward systems and their job satisfaction in relation to performance. In this study, demographic characteristics are measured through five main dimensions that will be analyzed as moderating variables: age, gender, education level, and length of service.

Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to the work outcomes achieved by individuals or groups in carrying out their duties and responsibilities in accordance with organizational objectives, standards, and expectations [29], [39]. It is commonly assessed through the quality and quantity of work outcomes, achievement of targets, and effectiveness in completing assigned tasks [9], [49]. Performance reflects not only the final results of work but also the processes, behaviors, and efforts demonstrated by employees in performing their roles [12], [40].

The level of employee performance is influenced by various factors, including competence, motivation, organizational support, work opportunities, and the quality of human resource management

practices [11], [47]. Contemporary perspectives further emphasize adaptability, collaboration, contextual contribution, and organizational effectiveness as important aspects of employee performance [8]. In the public sector, performance is particularly important because it is closely related to service quality, accountability, and the achievement of institutional objectives.

In this study, employee performance is measured using the Individual Work Performance concept developed by Koopmans et al., which is relevant to public-sector performance assessment and employee work behavior [23]. Employee performance is measured through four dimensions: task performance, contextual performance, adaptive performance, and counterproductive work behavior. These dimensions collectively reflect employee effectiveness, contribution, adaptability, discipline, and the ability to perform duties in accordance with organizational standards and public service requirements.

Research Hypothesis

- H1. Incentive and reward systems have a positive and significant effect on work motivation.
- H2. Job satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on work motivation.
- H3. Work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.
- H4. Work motivation mediates the effect of incentive and reward systems on employee performance.
- H5. Work motivation mediates the effect of job satisfaction on employee performance.
- H6. Demographic characteristics moderate the effect of incentive and reward systems on work motivation.
- H7. Demographic characteristics moderate the effect of job satisfaction on work motivation.

3. Research methods

This study was conducted in the Regional Apparatus Organizations (OPD) of the East Kolaka Regency Government from September to December 2024. The research employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory design grounded in the positivist paradigm to examine the causal relationships among incentive and reward systems, job satisfaction, work motivation, employee performance, and demographic characteristics.

The study focuses on human resource management and organizational behavior in the public sector, particularly the mediating role of work motivation and the moderating role of demographic characteristics. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is appropriate for testing complex relationships among

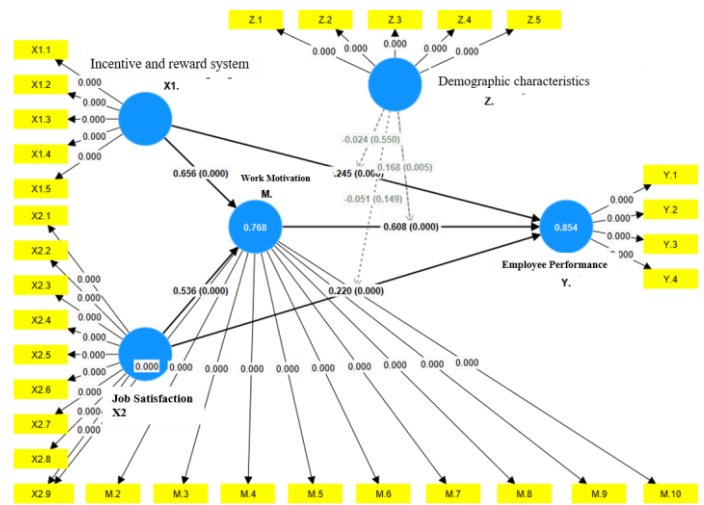
latent variables and is suitable for models that do not require strict normality assumptions.

The population consisted of 4,260 members of the Indonesian State Civil Apparatus (ASN), including civil servants and government employees with work agreements. Using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, a sample of 367 respondents was selected through proportional random sampling across all OPDs. This sampling technique was applied to ensure that the selected respondents proportionally represented the overall population of ASN within the East Kolaka Regency Government.

4. Research results

Overall, the research results indicate that incentive and reward systems are the most dominant variables, followed by work motivation and job satisfaction, in improving employee performance. Meanwhile, demographic characteristics have a very limited and insignificant direct influence, although

under certain conditions they can play a role through interactions with other variables.



R Square and Q Square Values

Table 1. R Square

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	R Square	Model Strength Category
Employee Performance (Y)	Incentive and Reward System (X1), Job Satisfaction (X2)	0.854	Strong
Work Motivation (M)	Incentive and Reward System (X1), Job Satisfaction (X2), Work Motivation (M)	0.768	Strong

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

In the employee performance variable (Y), the R Square value of 0.854 was obtained, indicating that the incentive and reward system (X1) and job satisfaction (X2) were able to explain 85.4% of the variation in employee performance, while the remaining 14.6% was influenced by other variables outside the model, so it was included in the strong category and reflected the model's excellent capabilities. Meanwhile, in the work motivation variable (M), the R Square value of 0.768 indicated that variables X1 and X2 were able to explain 76.8% of the variation in work motivation, while 23.2% was explained by other factors outside the model, which were also included in the strong category, so it can be

concluded that the research model has good capabilities in explaining variations in work motivation.

Table 2. Q Square

Variabel	Q Square	Model Strength Category
Employee Performance (Y)	0.787	Strong
Work Motivation (M)	0.665	Strong

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

In the employee performance variable (Y), the Q Square value of 0.787 indicates that the model has strong predictive ability and high predictive relevance, where the incentive and reward system, job satisfaction, and work motivation are able to predict employee performance well. Meanwhile, in the work motivation variable (M), the Q Square value of 0.665 is also included in the strong category, indicating that the incentive and reward system and job satisfaction have good ability in predicting work motivation. Overall, the Q Square values of all dependent variables are above zero and in the strong category confirming that the research model has good predictive relevance and is worthy of use for further analysis.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 3. Summary of Path Analysis Results

No	Variable Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	P-Value	Conclusion
H1	Incentive and reward systems on work motivation	0.656	0.000	Significant
H2	Job satisfaction on work motivation	0.536	0.000	Significant
H3	Work motivation on employee performance	0.608	0.000	Significant
H4	The effect of incentive and reward systems on employee performance, mediating work motivation	0.325	0.000	Significant (mediation accepted)
H5	Job satisfaction on employee performance, mediating work motivation	0.398	0.000	Significant (mediation accepted)
H6	The effect of incentive and reward systems on performance, moderating demographic characteristics	-0.024	0.550	Not significant
H7	The effect of job satisfaction on performance, moderating demographic characteristics	-0.051	0.149	Not significant

Source: Processed Primary Data, 2026

5. Discussion

The Influence of Incentive and Reward Systems on Work Motivation

Work motivation is an important psychological factor that encourages employees to work productively and contribute to the achievement of organizational goals. In public-sector organizations, employee motivation is strongly influenced by incentive and reward systems that provide recognition for employee contributions, achievements, and performance. The results of this study indicate that incentive and reward systems have a positive and significant effect on work motivation. This means that improvements in the quality, fairness, transparency, and performance orientation of rewards are associated with higher levels of employee motivation.

This finding is consistent with Skinner's Reinforcement Theory, Vroom's Expectancy Theory, and Adams' Equity Theory, which emphasize that employees are more likely to be motivated when rewards are perceived as valuable, attainable, and fairly distributed [1], [45], [48]. The finding is also supported by previous studies showing that well-designed reward systems can strengthen employee motivation in public-sector organizations [3], [22]. Therefore, public organizations need to implement fair, transparent, and performance-based incentive and reward systems to strengthen employee motivation and support the achievement of institutional objectives.

The Influence of Job Satisfaction on Work Motivation

Job satisfaction reflects employees' positive feelings and evaluations of their work and represents an important factor in shaping work motivation. Employees who are satisfied with their jobs generally demonstrate higher enthusiasm, stronger commitment, and a greater willingness to contribute to organizational success. The results of this study indicate that job satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on

work motivation. This suggests that employees who experience higher levels of satisfaction with their work are more motivated to perform their duties and achieve organizational objectives.

This finding is consistent with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which highlights the importance of achievement, recognition, responsibility, and personal growth as sources of motivation [20]. It is also supported by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, which explains that individuals become more motivated when their needs are progressively fulfilled [30]. In addition, Self-Determination Theory emphasizes that motivation increases when employees experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the workplace [15]. These findings are also consistent with previous studies indicating that job satisfaction contributes significantly to employee motivation and performance [13], [44]. Therefore, public-sector organizations should foster a supportive work environment, positive workplace relationships, clear career development opportunities, and fair management practices to strengthen employee motivation and sustain organizational performance.

The Influence of Work Motivation on Employee Performance

Employee performance is a key indicator of organizational success because it reflects the effectiveness of task completion, the achievement of work targets, and the quality of services provided to the public. In the context of the East Kolaka Regency Government, improving employee performance is essential to meet increasing public expectations and organizational demands. One of the main factors influencing performance is work motivation, which represents the internal and external drive that encourages employees to perform their duties effectively.

The results of this study indicate that work motivation has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. This means that employees

with higher levels of motivation tend to achieve better work outcomes, demonstrate stronger commitment, and contribute more effectively to organizational objectives. This finding is consistent with Vroom's Expectancy Theory, which explains that individuals exert greater effort when they believe that their effort will lead to desirable performance outcomes and rewards [48]. It is also supported by Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and Self-Determination Theory, which emphasize the importance of intrinsic motivation, recognition, responsibility, autonomy, and competence in enhancing employee performance [15], [20].

Previous studies also support these findings by showing that motivation is an important factor in improving employee performance in organizational and public-sector contexts [13], [22], [44]. Therefore, public-sector organizations should strengthen employee motivation through fair reward systems, supportive work environments, recognition of employee contributions, and clear career development opportunities.

The Role of Work Motivation in Mediating the Effect of Incentive and Reward Systems on Employee Performance

In this study, work motivation serves as a mediating variable that explains how incentive and reward systems influence employee performance. This indicates that incentives and rewards do not improve employee performance solely through direct effects, but also by increasing employees' motivation to work. The findings show that incentive and reward systems have a positive and significant indirect effect on employee performance through work motivation. This suggests that well-designed reward mechanisms can strengthen employee motivation, which subsequently contributes to improved performance outcomes.

This result is consistent with Vroom's Expectancy Theory, which argues that employees are more motivated when they believe that their efforts will lead to valued outcomes and rewards [48]. It is also supported by Skinner's Reinforcement Theory, which emphasizes that rewards can strengthen desirable work behaviors, and Adams' Equity Theory, which highlights the importance of fairness in shaping employee motivation [1], [45]. Empirical studies by Kim et al. and Alfandi and Bahri similarly demonstrate that incentive and reward systems can enhance both employee motivation and performance [3], [22].

Therefore, work motivation plays a crucial mediating role in translating organizational reward practices into improved employee performance. These findings imply that public-sector organizations should not only provide incentives and rewards, but also ensure that such systems are fair, transparent, performance-based, and capable of strengthening

employees' internal motivation to achieve organizational goals.

The Role of Work Motivation in Mediating the Effect of Job Satisfaction on Employee Performance

In addition to incentive and reward systems, job satisfaction also influences employee performance indirectly through work motivation. This indicates that employees who experience higher levels of job satisfaction are more likely to develop stronger motivation, which subsequently contributes to better performance. The findings of this study show that job satisfaction has a positive and significant indirect effect on employee performance through work motivation, confirming the important role of motivation as a mechanism that translates positive work experiences into improved work outcomes.

This result is supported by Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which emphasizes that achievement, recognition, responsibility, and opportunities for growth can strengthen intrinsic motivation [20]. It is also consistent with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, which suggests that individuals become more motivated when their needs are progressively fulfilled [30]. In addition, Self-Determination Theory highlights the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering motivation [15]. Empirical evidence from previous studies also confirms that job satisfaction contributes significantly to both work motivation and employee performance [13], [44].

Therefore, work motivation serves as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance. These findings imply that public-sector organizations should improve job satisfaction by creating a supportive work environment, strengthening recognition practices, improving communication, and providing career development opportunities that can enhance employee motivation and performance.

The Effect of Incentive and Reward Systems on Performance Moderated by Demographic Characteristics

In this study, demographic characteristics were examined as moderating variables that could potentially strengthen or weaken the relationship between incentive and reward systems and employee performance. However, the findings indicate that demographic characteristics do not significantly moderate this relationship. This suggests that the effect of incentives and rewards on employee performance remains relatively consistent regardless of differences in age, education level, or length of service among employees of the East Kolaka Regency Government.

This result is consistent with Skinner's Reinforcement Theory, which emphasizes that employee behavior can be influenced by rewards as

external reinforcement [45]. It is also in line with Vroom's Expectancy Theory, which explains that motivation arises from employees' expectations regarding the relationship between effort, performance, and rewards [48]. These mechanisms may operate similarly across different demographic groups, particularly in public-sector organizations where policies, procedures, and reward systems are generally standardized.

The findings also suggest that employees may share relatively uniform perceptions of the existing incentive and reward system due to the standardized nature of public-sector regulations and administrative procedures. Therefore, demographic characteristics do not play a significant moderating role in this relationship. This indicates that incentive and reward policies can be implemented broadly and consistently, provided that they remain fair, transparent, and performance-oriented.

The Effect of Job Satisfaction on Performance Moderated by Demographic Characteristics

This study also examined whether demographic characteristics moderate the relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance. The findings indicate that demographic characteristics do not significantly moderate this relationship, suggesting that the positive effect of job satisfaction on employee performance remains relatively consistent regardless of differences in age, education level, or length of service among employees.

This result is consistent with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which suggests that job satisfaction is largely influenced by motivator factors such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, and opportunities for personal growth [20]. It is also supported by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, which explains that human needs and the motivation to fulfill them are generally shared across individuals [30]. In the context of the East Kolaka Regency Government, this finding may reflect the standardized nature of public-sector work environments, administrative procedures, and employment policies, which may lead employees to have relatively similar perceptions of job satisfaction and its contribution to performance.

Therefore, demographic characteristics do not play a significant moderating role in the relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance. This implies that efforts to improve job satisfaction can be implemented comprehensively across employee groups without requiring substantial differentiation based on demographic backgrounds, provided that such efforts remain fair, inclusive, and responsive to employees' work-related needs.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

Based on the findings, this study concludes that incentive and reward systems and job satisfaction have positive and significant effects on work motivation. Work motivation, in turn, has a positive and significant effect on employee performance within the East Kolaka Regency Government. The findings also confirm that work motivation serves as a significant mediating variable in the relationships between incentive and reward systems and employee performance, as well as between job satisfaction and employee performance. This indicates that work motivation is a key mechanism through which organizational rewards and job satisfaction contribute to improved employee performance.

However, demographic characteristics were not found to have a significant moderating effect on the examined relationships. This suggests that the influence of incentive and reward systems and job satisfaction remains relatively consistent across different employee demographic groups. Therefore, demographic characteristics do not substantially change the strength of these relationships in the context of the East Kolaka Regency Government.

Based on these findings, the East Kolaka Regency Government is encouraged to continue improving the effectiveness of fair, transparent, and performance-based incentive and reward systems. In addition, efforts should be made to strengthen job satisfaction by improving the work environment, promoting harmonious workplace relationships, clarifying tasks and responsibilities, and providing better career development opportunities. These efforts are expected to enhance employee motivation, which plays a central role in improving employee performance.

Future research is recommended to adopt a longitudinal design and use multi-source data to obtain more robust findings. Further studies may also include additional variables, such as leadership, organizational culture, organizational commitment, self-efficacy, and locus of control, to provide a broader explanation of employee performance. In addition, the use of mixed-methods approaches and the expansion of research locations are recommended to generate more comprehensive and generalizable results.

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