# Systematic Literature Review: The Role of Compensation in Enhancing Performance Outcomes

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***Abstract***
*This systematic literature review (SLR) examines how compensation strategies both monetary (e.g. salary, bonuses, pay-for-performance) and non-monetary (e.g. recognition, benefits, flexibility) affect employee performance at the individual, team, and organizational levels. Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, empirical studies (2014–2024) on compensation and performance were searched from the Scopus and Web of Science databases. After screening and quality appraisal (using the Joanna Briggs Institute tools), 67 primary research articles met the inclusion criteria. The findings were synthesized, highlighting that monetary incentives generally exhibit a positive, yet context-dependent, effect on performance, while non-monetary rewards often enhance intrinsic motivation and engagement. Several studies identified mediating factors such as motivation, justice perceptions, and job satisfaction, which explain how compensation influences performance. Moreover, moderators such as organizational culture, ownership structure, and leadership style shape the strength of these effects. In conclusion, both forms of compensation can improve performance when aligned with organizational context and employee needs. Gaps were identified, including limited evidence on long-term outcomes and under-researched non-monetary incentives. A research agenda is proposed to explore optimal compensation designs and their interactions with work motivation and team dynamics.*
***Keywords :*** *Systematic Literature Review, Compensation, Employee Performance.*

## INTRODUCTION

Employee performance is a critical driver of organizational success, and compensation is among the most powerful levers managers use to influence performance. Broadly, compensation encompasses all rewards offered to employees for their contributions, including direct financial payments (salary, bonuses) and indirect or non-financial rewards (benefits, recognition, development opportunities). Despite its importance, compensation's impact on performance is complex and debated. Early scholarship suggested that pay-for-performance (PFP) systems align employee effort with organizational goals, yielding higher productivity. However, critics note that poorly designed incentive systems can undermine teamwork or de-motivate employees if perceived as unfair. Moreover, non-monetary rewards such as public recognition or flexible work arrangements may tap into intrinsic motivation and produce enduring performance gains.

Over the past decade, research on compensation and performance has proliferated across fields (management, psychology, economics). Yet no prior review has systematically synthesized this literature using a transparent protocol. This SLR aims to fill that gap by applying the PRISMA framework to survey empirical studies (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-method) on how various compensation strategies influence performance at different levels (individual, team, organizational). Mediating mechanisms (e.g., motivation, job satisfaction, justice perceptions) and moderating conditions (e.g., culture, leadership, job interdependence) that shape these relationships are also examined.

The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to map and evaluate evidence on monetary compensation effects (e.g. merit pay, bonuses, profit-sharing) and non-monetary compensation effects (e.g. training, recognition, benefits) on performance outcomes; (2) to identify key mediators and moderators in the compensation–performance link; and (3) to highlight gaps and propose directions for future research. The theoretical backdrop includes expectancy theory (rewards motivate effort), equity theory (perceptions of fairness influence motivation), and self-determination theory (intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation). This review applies a rigorous and structured protocol to ensure comprehensiveness and objectivity in synthesizing the literature. It focuses on studies published in the last ten years (2014–2024) and includes only peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in major scholarly databases.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This SLR followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 protocol. A search strategy was designed to capture studies on compensation and performance. The primary databases used were Scopus and Web of Science, ensuring comprehensive coverage of management and organizational research. The search query combined compensation and performance-related terms. (e.g., “employee compensation”, “performance pay”, “incentives”, “employee performance”, “organizational performance”). Results were limited to studies published between 2014 and 2024, and to English-language articles with full text available. Only primary empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method) were included, while review articles, conceptual papers, and non-peer-reviewed sources were excluded.

After removing duplicates, the author screened titles and abstracts against the inclusion criteria: (a) focus on compensation and performance, (b) empirical data, (c) published in English between 2014–2024, (d) indexed in Scopus or WoS, (e) full text accessible. In the next stage, full texts of selected articles were assessed for relevance. References of key articles were also checked for additional sources. The final included set comprised 67 studies.

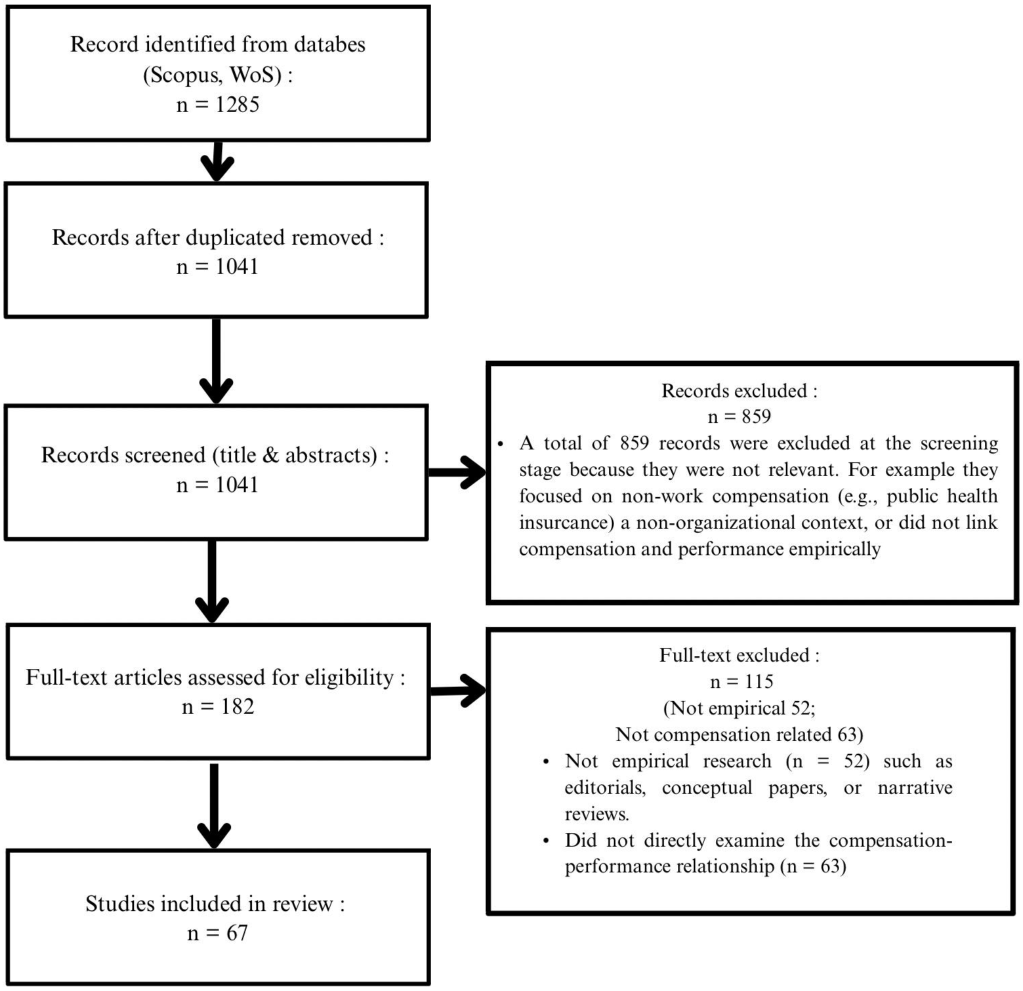


**Figure 1. SLR Flow Diagram based on PRISMA 2020**

For quality assessment, the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) critical appraisal tools appropriate to each study design were used. For instance, cross-sectional surveys were evaluated based on sampling and validity, case studies on data credibility, and experiments on bias control. Each study was rated for methodological rigor, with any studies exhibiting severe bias excluded from the synthesis. Risk of bias was also considered by examining funding sources, sample representativeness, and common method variance. Overall, the included studies were deemed to be of moderate to high quality, ensuring confidence in their findings.

During data extraction, study context (country, sector), compensation variables (type of reward), performance outcomes (self-rated, supervisor-rated, team metrics, organizational metrics), and any reported mediators/moderators were recorded. The results were then synthesized thematically.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Monetary Compensation and Performance

Most studies examined financial incentives. In general, performance-based pay (e.g. merit increases, bonuses, piece rates) shows a positive association with individual and organizational performance. For instance, a large meta-analysis found that pay-for-performance (PFP) systems have a modest but significant effect on job performance (summary correlation ρ≈0.23). This aligns with expectancy theory: when employees perceive a clear link between effort and reward, they work harder. Nyberg et al. (2016) found that merit-pay schemes were strongly tied to future worker productivity. Similarly, a field experiment introducing group-based bonuses increased worker output by about 19% relative to individual pay.

However, the effectiveness of monetary pay depends on context and design. Several studies point out that poorly designed PFP plans can backfire. For example, Uriesi (2020) reported that employees under a bonus scheme outperformed those without incentives, but only when bonuses were perceived as fair. In his Romanian sample, the positive impact of PFP on performance was mediated by fairness (procedural and distributive justice) employees had to see the system as just for it to motivate them. Indeed, a recent meta-analysis found that justice perceptions partially mediate the PFP–performance link. In other words, if employees believe performance pay is inequitable, the motivational boost may vanish.

Monetary incentives at the team or organizational level also show mixed outcomes. Collective pay schemes (profit-sharing, gainsharing) can encourage cooperation but risk free-riding. A noteworthy experiment by Frederiksen et al. (2022) found that switching from individual to group-based incentives actually boosted team productivity by 19%, with negligible free-riding. This suggests that when tasks are interdependent, group incentives can leverage peer pressure and collaboration to raise performance. Consistent with this, practitioners argue that group bonuses tend to enhance teamwork and align interests across a department. That said, theoretical work cautions that in less interdependent tasks, individual-based pay might be more effective.

At the organizational performance level, evidence is sparser but generally positive. A recent corporate finance study of Chinese firms reported that richer compensation structures (higher overall pay) correlate with better firm performance, especially when ownership is dispersed. Liu et al. (2024/25) found that employee compensation levels were positively related to company performance; interestingly, the effect was stronger in firms with concentrated ownership, suggesting owners use pay strategically to align employee effort with shareholder goals. Thus, corporate context (e.g. ownership, industry) moderates the compensation–performance link at the macro level.

**Non-Monetary Compensation and Performance**

Complementing financial rewards, non-monetary compensation aims to meet psychological and social needs. Examples include formal recognition programs, career development opportunities, flexible work, and health benefits. Though harder to quantify, several studies highlight their impact. For instance, one case at a Kenyan marketing firm found that introducing various non-financial incentives (recognition, opportunities) had a strong positive correlation with employee motivation. The employees reported that recognition and development offerings, which cost less than cash bonuses, were highly valued and boosted their work enthusiasm. Similarly, studies in human services organizations observed that benefits like training and supportive supervision enhance staff job satisfaction and productivity (Atmaja & Puspitawati, 2018; Lee et al., 2013;).

Recognition in particular emerges as a powerful motivator. In a field experiment, publicly praising employees for good work significantly increased subsequent performance, indicating that social rewards can elicit discretionary effort (Cameron & Pierce, 1994; cited in Jo & Shin). Jo and Shin's large PLOS One study (2025) likewise found that recognition robustly boosted employee engagement. Since engagement is closely tied to performance, this implies non-financial praise can yield performance gains.

Work environment factors such as organizational support, autonomy, and well-being programs are also critical non-monetary forms of compensation. A qualitative study of tech workers noted that flexible hours and learning allowances improved creativity and output. Another example: Laszlo & Marco (2014) reported that giving employees more control and supportive culture (i.e. non-cash empowerment) led to higher organizational contribution. Thus, non-monetary rewards often operate by enhancing employees' intrinsic motivation, belonging, and personal growth, which translate into sustained high performance.

**Mediating Mechanisms**

Research indicates that the compensation–performance relationship is often indirect, operating through mediators. A consistent mediator is work motivation. Guritno et al. (2022) found that in a local government setting, compensation significantly increased employee motivation, which in turn led to better job performance. In other words, pay changes first boosted motivation levels, and motivated employees then delivered improved results. Similarly, motivation fully mediated the link between compensation and performance in a higher-education setting. This aligns with theories positing that rewards energize employees, but only if those rewards meaningfully affect their willingness to perform.

Job satisfaction is another frequently identified mediator. Many studies report that competitive compensation (fair pay and benefits) raises satisfaction, which then correlates with performance. For example, one Indonesian study found that employees satisfied with their compensation reported significantly higher productivity. However, the mediating role of satisfaction is not universal. In an Indonesian polytechnic, Idris et al. (2020) surprisingly found that compensation did not significantly impact job satisfaction or performance; instead, job satisfaction was mainly driven by work environment. They concluded that when compensation is low or perceived as inadequate, intrinsic factors (like a supportive environment) may carry more weight. Thus, while satisfaction often bridges pay and performance, its role depends on context and baseline pay levels.

Perceptions of justice and fairness mediate PFP effects. The meta-analysis by Chen et al. (2023) showed that distributive and procedural justice perceptions partially explain how PFP influences task performance. Specifically, employees who perceive pay rewards as fair (equitable relative to effort) are more motivated, whereas those who sense imbalance may withdraw effort. For example, if high performers feel that bonuses are allocated biasedly, they may reduce effort despite the nominal incentive. Hence, effective compensation systems must also be transparent and equitable to positively impact performance.

Other mediators include organizational commitment and psychological empowerment. Some qualitative studies (e.g. empowerment leadership research) suggest that when pay is combined with empowering practices (information-sharing, autonomy), employees feel more capable and committed, leading to higher performance. These findings imply that compensation works best when integrated with broader HR practices that enhance employee engagement and capability.

**Moderating Factors**

Several studies report that the impact of compensation varies across conditions. Organizational culture and context play roles. For instance, Kang and Lee (2021) showed that the fit between compensation schemes and corporate culture affects outcomes. Cultures emphasizing teamwork may benefit more from group bonuses, while achievement-oriented cultures may respond better to individual rewards. Ownership structure is another moderator: Liu et al. (2025) found that compensation's effect on firm performance differed by ownership concentration. When ownership was concentrated, increasing pay had a stronger positive link to performance, suggesting that majority owners can more effectively align employee pay with strategic goals.

Job and task characteristics also moderate effects. PFP tends to work best for routine, measurable tasks, whereas for creative or interdependent work it may not. The literature review notes that performance pay should be used only when performance can be objectively measured. If not, flat pay or non-monetary incentives may be preferable. Similarly, team incentives are especially useful when tasks are collaborative; Frederiksen et al. (2022) found group incentives most effective in interdependent settings, echoing prior theory.

Leadership and management influence outcomes. The presence of transformational leaders or clear communication can enhance the effect of compensation. Chi et al. (2023) found that job satisfaction mediated the effect of transformational leadership on performance, and that adding financial rewards sometimes weakened this relationship. This indicates that in some contexts, pay can crowd out the motivational effects of strong leadership. Conversely, supportive managers who clarify incentive goals tend to make compensation more effective.

Other moderators include employee characteristics (e.g. tenure, risk aversion) and economic conditions. A few cross-national studies suggest that in collectivist cultures, social rewards may matter more than extra pay. Moreover, external factors like economic downturns can change how employees value certain benefits (e.g. job security benefits may be more motivating during recessions). In sum, compensation systems are not one-size-fits-all; their success depends on aligning with organizational and employee contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This SLR finds that both monetary and non-monetary compensation can positively influence performance, but with caveats. Monetary incentives (salary, bonuses, profit-sharing) have a generally positive effect on effort and productivity, as long as employees view the rewards as attainable and fair. Group-based pay can further boost performance in team-oriented settings. Non-monetary rewards (recognition, career development, flexible policies) enhance intrinsic motivation and engagement, which in turn improve performance. However, several mediating and moderating factors including motivation, justice perceptions, leadership, and culture critically shape these outcomes.

Based on these insights, the following research agenda is proposed:

1. Longitudinal and multi-level studies. Most existing research is cross-sectional or short-term. Longitudinal designs are needed to assess how compensation effects evolve over time and how team/organizational outcomes emerge from individual-level processes. Multi-level research (individual, team, firm) could clarify cross-level dynamics.
2. Diverse contexts and cultures. There is a Western bias in the literature. Comparative studies should examine how cultural dimensions (e.g. power distance, collectivism) and institutional factors (labor laws, unionization) alter compensation effectiveness.
3. Innovative compensation forms. Research should explore the impact of emerging reward types, such as gamified incentives, well-being allowances, and crowdsourcing-based rewards. How do these new forms compare to traditional pay in driving performance?
4. Non-monetary compensation rigor. Although many case studies suggest the promise of non-financial rewards, rigorous quantitative research is scarce. Experimental or field studies could test specific non-monetary programs (e.g. personalized recognition versus public praise) on performance metrics.
5. Integration with HR practices. Future work should examine compensation in conjunction with other HR strategies. For instance, how do training programs, career paths, or organizational justice interventions amplify or dampen compensation's effect?

In practice, managers should design compensation packages holistically: combining fair pay with meaningful non-financial incentives, and ensuring clarity and fairness in their implementation. Only then can compensation sustainably improve performance at all levels of the organization.

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