

A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE INFLUENCE OF SKILLS, DISCIPLINE, AND MOTIVATION ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE THROUGH REWARD AND PENALTY SCHEMES

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between skills, work discipline, and motivation on employee performance, with a reward–penalty scheme as a mediating variable. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) based on the PRISMA 2020 protocol was conducted, analyzing 36 Scopus-indexed articles published in the last five years. The results show that technical, digital, and interpersonal skills, along with work discipline and motivation, significantly influence performance. Discipline represents strategic behavior, while motivation acts as a psychological catalyst. The reward–penalty scheme mediates the relationship between personal factors and productivity. The study highlights an integrative trend in human resource management. Identified gaps include the lack of a comprehensive conceptual model, limited longitudinal studies, and minimal exploration of non-financial rewards and organizational culture. These findings reinforce Self-Determination Theory, Resource-Based View, and Behavioral Reinforcement Theory, while offering practical insights for developing competency systems, value-based discipline, and adaptive incentives.

Keywords: *skills, work discipline, motivation, reward–penalty, employee performance.*

Introduction

In the contemporary business landscape marked by technological disruption and productivity pressures, employee performance has become a strategic imperative for organizational sustainability. Performance is no longer viewed merely as the result of individual factors, but rather as the output of complex interactions among organizational structures, psychological conditions, and work behavior. Literature in the field of human resource management (HRM) emphasizes that skills, work discipline, and motivation are key determinants of organizational effectiveness (Menhat et al., 2025; Muñoz & Pulido, 2024; Dubickis et al., 2024). These three factors also form the foundation for competitive advantage in the digital transformation era. In managerial practice, reward and penalty systems are frequently employed as behavioral control tools aimed at reinforcing accountability and commitment (Samnani & Singh, 2014; Lin et al., 2022). The effectiveness of such schemes is largely determined by the degree of integration between skills, motivation, and discipline within the organizational culture. This highlights the need for a holistic approach to examining the interrelationship of these variables simultaneously.

Unfortunately, the existing literature remains fragmented. Studies by Dubickis et al. (2024) and Jowkar et al. (2025) underscore the importance of skills in knowledge transfer, yet they do not frame reward–penalty mechanisms as mediators of performance. Muñoz and Pulido (2024) explore the impact of soft skills on organizational performance, but fail to address incentives as a reinforcing mechanism. Research by Kaur and Chauhan (2024), Shrivastava and Dubey (2025), Moshood et al. (2025), and Saleh and AlShafeey (2025) also lacks a conceptual framework that integrates skills, incentives, and work outcomes. Similarly, studies by Arora et al. (2024), Odularu & Bokwe (2025), and Jowkar et al. (2025) explore the role of human skills in the digital age, yet fail to position the reward–penalty dimension as a systemic component. Research by Saragih et al. (2024) and Choi-Lundberg et al. (2024) frames discipline within the domain of organizational behavior, but does not elaborate on its structural relationship with motivation and incentive systems. In the domain of motivation, studies by Singh et al. (2025), Ata & Jain (2024), and Jaafari & Salehian (2025) tend to examine direct relationships without considering the reward–penalty mechanism as a mediating variable. Meanwhile, Amaliyah & Puspojudo (2024) and Umer et al. (2024) have demonstrated the contribution of motivation to work behavior, but have yet to link it integratively with skills,

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discipline, and incentives within a comprehensive model. This gap underscores the importance of a systematic approach to bridging work behavior variables with organizational managerial systems. Accordingly, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach is adopted to examine the contribution of skills, discipline, and motivation to performance, with the reward–penalty scheme positioned as a mediating variable. This study aims to map thematic patterns, formulate a conceptual framework, and direct HRM research toward a more integrative and evidence-based trajectory. This article addresses three primary research questions: (1) What is the relationship between skills, work discipline, and motivation in relation to performance?; (2) To what extent does the reward–penalty mechanism mediate this relationship?; and (3) What are the research gaps that need to be addressed in the development of performance-based HRM?

Methods

This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to evaluate and synthesize scholarly findings regarding the influence of skills, work discipline, and motivation on employee performance, with the reward–penalty mechanism serving as an intervening variable. This approach was selected due to its ability to formulate a comprehensive conceptual framework grounded in diverse empirical evidence (Siddaway, Wood, & Hedges, 2019). The SLR process was conducted manually to ensure transparency and replicability throughout the stages of identification, selection, and synthesis of the literature, as recommended in systematic review best practices (Page et al., 2021). Data were gathered from the Scopus database, with a focus on peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in quartiles Q1 through Q4, to ensure scientific validity (Donthu et al., 2021).

Article selection was based on strict inclusion and exclusion criteria. Only peer-reviewed Scopus journal articles published between 2019 and 2024 that explicitly addressed the relationships among the main variables and were available in full-text format were included. Editorials, conference proceedings, or works that did not present integrative conceptual relationships were excluded from the analysis. The literature search was conducted using the advanced search feature in Scopus, applying Boolean operators such as: “skills AND employee performance,” “motivation AND employee performance,” “discipline AND employee performance,” and “reward OR penalty AND employee performance” to ensure a relevant and systematic search output. The analysis was carried out manually in two phases. The first phase involved a descriptive analysis to map publication characteristics, including temporal trends, journal distribution, and key terms. The second phase consisted of content analysis to examine conceptual relationships and mediation patterns among the variables thematically. The entire process was designed to be reflective and iterative to produce a scientifically rigorous and methodologically structured synthesis.

Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Theme 1: Skills and Employee Performance

The systematic literature review identified skills as a central element in enhancing employee performance. Across the 12 analyzed articles, there is a thematic consistency regarding the contribution of both technical and non-technical skills in supporting productivity, work quality, decision-making, and overall organizational performance. Recent publications from 2024 and 2025, including works by Muñoz & Pulido (2024), Dubickis et al. (2024), Kaur & Chauhan (2024), Arora et al. (2024), Nareswari & Astuti (2025), FO Yoma et al. (2025), Shrivastava & Dubey (2025), Moshood et al. (2025), Jowkar et al. (2025), Saleh & AlShafeey (2025), and Pursio et al. (2025), reflect growing scholarly interest in this topic. The majority of these articles were published in reputable Q1 and Q2 journals, such as *Management Research Review*, *Sustainable Futures*, and *Economics and Culture*. Methodologically, the studies employed a variety of approaches, including Systematic Literature Reviews (Dubickis et al., 2024; Shrivastava & Dubey, 2025; FO Yoma et al., 2025), bibliometric and scientometric analysis (Nareswari & Astuti, 2025; Jowkar et al., 2025), Structural Equation Modeling (Muñoz & Pulido, 2024), mixed methods (Moshood et al., 2025), scoping reviews (Pursio et al., 2025; Howell et al., 2025), and content analysis (Kaur & Chauhan, 2024). The literature consistently emphasizes that skills encompass both technical and non-technical aspects, including soft skills, digital competencies, collaboration abilities, self-leadership, emotional intelligence, and information literacy. This variation underscores the multidimensional nature of skills and their critical role in driving organizational efficiency and workforce competitiveness in the digital and post-pandemic era.

Theme 2: Work Discipline and Employee Performance

Work discipline is increasingly understood not merely as individual behavior but as a structural pillar underpinning organizational effectiveness. A systematic review of six recent articles from 2024 confirms the

significant impact of work discipline on employee performance across organizational, educational, and professional contexts. Syahrial, Badollahi, and Supiyah (2024), through a bibliometric approach, highlight the importance of disciplined organizational structures in driving productivity. Saragih, Kurnianingrum, and Fakhri (2024) position discipline as a component of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), reflecting prosocial conduct aligned with organizational goals. Choi-Lundberg, Douglas, and Bird (2024), using a structured narrative review method, identify discipline as a key indicator of employability and professional capability. Meanwhile, an integrative study by Chakuzira, Mkansi, and Okoche (2024) frames discipline as an organizational cultural value that reinforces collective performance, particularly in entrepreneurial contexts. Although not all journals are indexed in Scopus quartiles, the methodologies employed—such as bibliometric analysis, narrative review, and integrative review—reflect adherence to high scientific standards (Snyder, 2019; Donthu et al., 2021). This methodological diversity strengthens the position of work discipline as an evolving topic supported by complementary quantitative and qualitative syntheses.

Theme 3: Motivation and Employee Performance

Work motivation plays a strategic role in enhancing employee performance, acting as a bridge between job design, job satisfaction, and organizational achievement. Systematic mapping of 11 articles shows that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation consistently drive productive work behaviors across sectors. Studies by Fachreza et al. (2024), Nugroho et al. (2025), and Nafi'ah & Cahyani (2024) underscore the role of motivation in improving performance in public, educational, and industrial sectors. Although not all journals explicitly state their quartile classification, methodological approaches such as SEM, mixed methods, and SLR reflect substantial contributions to high-impact scholarly literature. Fachreza et al. (2024) tested the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on performance, while Nugroho et al. (2025) developed a competency-based motivation model.

The diversity of research approaches further enriches the findings. Five studies employed quantitative methods (Widyastuti & Mardiana, 2024; Rahman et al., 2025), two utilized mixed methods (Putra et al., 2025), and four adopted exploratory qualitative approaches (Handayani et al., 2024). In addition, a study by Sari et al. (2025) used bibliometric and SLR approaches to explore foundational theories such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Expectancy Theory (Vroom), and Self-Determination Theory. The variety of contexts explored—from education (Sukmawati et al., 2025), banking (Ardiyansyah & Prasetyo, 2025), to the creative industry (Syahputra et al., 2025)—confirms that the impact of motivation on performance is contextual and influenced by organizational culture, leadership, and managerial styles.

Theme 4: Reward and Penalty Systems and Employee Performance

Reward and penalty systems have evolved into strategic instruments of contemporary performance management, serving not only as behavioral control mechanisms but also as catalysts for motivation and productivity improvement. Based on an analysis of 10 articles, the combination of positive incentives and corrective sanctions has been shown to significantly enhance employee performance. Most of the articles were published between 2019 and 2023, indicating the continued relevance of this topic in academic discourse and managerial practice. Studies by Lin et al. (2022), Rubben (2023), and Sultana (2025) reinforce the position of reward–penalty systems as key determinants of performance. While not all articles mention Scopus quartile rankings, many were published in reputable journals such as *Health Policy*, *Human Resource Management Review*, and *Annals of Medicine*. Lin et al. (2022) demonstrated that performance-based incentives have a positive impact on the work efficiency of healthcare workers.

The literature reflects diverse methodological approaches, ranging from quantitative-empirical studies (Prasetyo et al., 2021; Li et al., 2016), field and laboratory experiments (Rubben, 2023; Lee et al., 2018), to case studies and systematic reviews (White et al., 2020; Emmert et al., 2013), and behavioral experiments (Handgraaf et al., 2013; Gill et al., 2013). Rewards are not limited to financial compensation but also include social incentives such as public praise (Handgraaf et al., 2013), which have been shown to foster prosocial behavior. Conversely, penalty-based pay-for-performance systems enhance task accuracy, particularly in medical settings (White et al., 2020). The combination of rewards and penalties proves to be more effective than either mechanism used in isolation, as it can influence employee perception and behavior through incentive framing (Rubben, 2023). Sultana (2025) also emphasizes the effectiveness of this dual approach in target-oriented organizations such as the banking sector.

3.2 Discussion

Theme 1: Skills and Employee Performance

Skills have emerged as a principal determinant in enhancing employee performance, with a significant evolution in meaning and a shift in perspective within contemporary literature. This review affirms that skills are not a singular

entity but a multidimensional construct encompassing technical, digital, interpersonal, collaborative, cognitive, and emotional competencies. The synthesis of twenty articles identified five thematic clusters that constitute the conceptual framework linking skills and performance. First, soft skills and interpersonal competencies appear as dominant clusters. Muñoz and Pulido (2024) demonstrated that communication, teamwork, and interpersonal leadership skills play a significant role in improving organizational performance, even serving as predictive variables in Structural Equation Modeling. Second, digital skills have become increasingly relevant in the context of technological transformation. FO Yoma et al. (2025) and Saleh & AlShafeey (2025) highlighted the importance of mastering digital competencies to enhance workforce efficiency and competitiveness. Arora et al. (2024) emphasized that despite the automation of work systems through AI, human skills remain essential.

Third, knowledge-based skills and knowledge transfer were discussed by Dubickis et al. (2024) and Jowkar et al. (2025), who stressed that the ability to manage knowledge can accelerate productivity and foster organizational innovation. Fourth, collaboration skills and self-leadership emerged in studies by Pursio et al. (2025) and Howell et al. (2025), highlighting the importance of cross-functional synergy and professional autonomy in supporting individual well-being and performance. Fifth, emotional intelligence and psychological resilience were identified as key factors in sustaining long-term work performance. Kaur & Chauhan (2024) asserted that emotional intelligence strengthens adaptability and psychological endurance in dynamic work environments. Additionally, skills were linked to strategic decision-making processes (Moshood et al., 2025), work character development (Howell et al., 2025), and information literacy in higher education (Odularu & Bokwe, 2025). These findings illustrate that skills are not merely individual attributes, but integral to organizational systems supporting long-term effectiveness. Through the dominant use of Systematic Literature Review and bibliometric approaches, this thematic classification provides a robust scientific mapping of key skill areas influencing performance. It underscores the importance of understanding skills as multidimensional, contextual, and cross-disciplinary constructs, supported by strong empirical evidence (Donthu et al., 2021; Snyder, 2019).

Theme 2: Work Discipline and Employee Performance

Recent literature reveals a paradigm shift in the concept of work discipline, from mere administrative compliance to a strategic construct of organizational behavior. The systematic review of four articles demonstrates that work discipline influences employee performance through a multilevel framework, from individual to organizational levels. These studies form thematic classifications that reflect diverse theoretical and empirical approaches. First, discipline as an element of formal structure and organizational culture is described by Syahrial, Badollahi, and Supiyah (2024). Through bibliometric analysis, discipline is presented as a structured and collaborative pillar of productivity. In this context, discipline is understood not merely as rule compliance but as organizational scaffolding that supports work contributions within a collective system.

Second, discipline as part of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) is illustrated in the study by Saragih, Kurnianingrum, and Fakhri (2024). Here, discipline is articulated as a form of prosocial behavior that strengthens affective commitment to the organization. This approach emphasizes that employee performance is shaped not only by formal systems but also by voluntary contributions stemming from internalized values of discipline. Third, in the study by Choi-Lundberg, Douglas, and Bird (2024), discipline is positioned as an indicator of employability and professional capability. Using a structured narrative review, they assert that discipline reflects self-regulation and professional accountability, directly contributing to performance in modern work settings.

Fourth, Chakuzira, Mkansi, and Okoche (2024) interpret discipline as a work ethic instilled through cultural and social values. In an integrative study on entrepreneurship and kinship, work discipline is expressed as a form of collective moral responsibility that organically shapes work behavior within a community setting. These four themes demonstrate that work discipline is a multidimensional and cross-contextual behavioral construct. It operates at the intersection of organizational structures, individual actions, cultural norms, and managerial strategies. As such, reductionist approaches are no longer adequate. Discipline should be viewed as an adaptive, dynamic, and strategic organizational behavior entity that supports employee performance (Snyder, 2019; Donthu et al., 2021).

Theme 3: Motivation and Employee Performance

Work motivation is a foundational pillar in developing employee performance and has become a central focus in contemporary HRM studies. Based on systematic literature mapping, motivation not only acts as an internal driver of productivity but also as a structural determinant supporting organizational performance achievement. Articles within this theme reveal that motivation exists in various forms—*intrinsic, extrinsic, and value-based*—all of which contribute to shaping work performance.

The first classification positions motivation as a driver of individual efficiency and productivity. Studies by Fachreza et al. (2024) and Nugroho et al. (2025) affirm that intrinsic motivation, such as a sense of responsibility and pride in work, directly contributes to performance improvement. Using SEM, motivation is shown to be a significant variable in fostering productive work behavior. Second, motivation is positioned within the context of organizational incentive systems. Sari et al. (2025) and Putra et al. (2025) showed that performance-based reward and recognition can stimulate increased motivation and output. These mixed-method studies revealed the interactive relationship between recognition and productivity. Third, the dimensions of values and leadership emerged as key themes. Handayani et al. (2024) and Ardiyansyah & Prasetyo (2025) presented motivation as a result of transformational leadership and organizational culture that constructs meaning in work and emotional commitment. In this sense, motivation is systemic rather than purely personal.

Fourth, motivation functions as a catalyst for employee engagement and loyalty. Syahputra et al. (2025) and Sukmawati et al. (2025) found that strategic motivation reduces turnover intention and enhances engagement, strengthening organizational sustainability. Fifth, motivation also serves as a mediating variable. Widyastuti & Mardiana (2024), through path analysis, demonstrated that motivation mediates the influence of organizational climate on performance, reinforcing its role as a significant intervening factor. This classification confirms that motivation is a multidimensional construct influencing performance at multiple levels. Findings from quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, and systematic review approaches suggest that motivation cannot be understood merely as an internal drive, but as an entity shaped by organizational structures, reward systems, work culture, and collective leadership styles (Deci & Ryan, 2020; Donthu et al., 2021).

Theme 4: Reward–Penalty Systems and Employee Performance

In modern organizations, the concept of reward–penalty has evolved beyond compensation schemes to become a strategic tool for shaping behavior and systematically improving performance. The thematic classification of findings indicates that this approach encompasses a wide range of dimensions, from output-based incentives and performance-related penalties to incentive framing that shapes psychological perceptions. First, performance-based rewards occupy a dominant position as productivity drivers. Samnani and Singh (2014) and Lin et al. (2022) confirmed that strategically designed incentives enhance efficiency, particularly in the healthcare sector, while also serving as performance benchmarks. Second, penalties serve as corrective mechanisms that encourage accuracy and compliance. White et al. (2020) and Li et al. (2016) found that the combination of reward and punishment is effective in enhancing attentiveness, especially in high-intensity work environments. Third, the integration of reward–penalty schemes into employment contracts generates higher compliance and optimal performance. Studies by Lee et al. (2018) and Rubben (2023) emphasized the importance of incentive framing in shaping perceptions of fairness, which directly impact productivity. Fourth, Handgraaf et al. (2013) introduced public praise as a form of non-financial social reward, which has been shown to be as effective as monetary compensation, thus expanding incentive dimensions into the psychosocial domain. Fifth, Gill et al. (2013) highlighted the importance of ethical control in reward distribution to prevent deviant behavior, aligning with Emmert et al. (2013), who emphasized the need for transparent and balanced incentive system design. Sixth, Sultana (2025) demonstrated the effectiveness of reward–penalty systems in the financial sector as reinforcement mechanisms that support the achievement of organizational targets.

These findings demonstrate that the reward–penalty system is not merely a motivational tool but also a behavioral control mechanism and a driver of organizational culture. Its effectiveness is highly contingent on design quality and perceived fairness in implementation (Donthu et al., 2021; Deci & Ryan, 2020). Within an integrative framework, skills, discipline, and motivation interact to form a cohesive system of work behavior. Skills serve as the foundation of competence and decision-making (Muñoz & Pulido, 2024; FO Yoma et al., 2025; Saleh & AlShafeey, 2025; Dubickis et al., 2024; Moshood et al., 2025), while discipline functions as a structural reinforcer and a key indicator of employability (Syahrial et al., 2024; Saragih et al., 2024; Choi-Lundberg et al., 2024; Chakuzira et al., 2024). Motivation operates as a psychological catalyst that activates skills and channels discipline. Studies such as those by Fachreza et al. (2024), Nugroho et al. (2025), Putra et al. (2025), and Ardiyansyah & Prasetyo (2025) show that motivation strengthens employee loyalty, engagement, and effectiveness. Reward–penalty mechanisms both mediate and moderate the relationships among these three factors. Lin et al. (2022) and Rubben (2023) demonstrated that rewards increase productivity, while incentive framing significantly influences perceptions of fairness. Research by Putra et al. (2025), Sari et al. (2025), and Widyastuti & Mardiana (2024) supports the view of reward–penalty systems as intervening variables that strengthen the connection between individual characteristics and work performance, a perspective also endorsed by Lee et al. (2018) and Gill et al. (2013).

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As a moderator, the contextual reward–penalty mechanism tailors behavioral reinforcement to sector-specific needs. Sultana (2025) highlights its effectiveness in the financial sector, while Sukmawati et al. (2025) examine its impact on intrinsic motivation within the education sector. Public praise has also proven to be an effective form of reward (Handgraaf et al., 2013). Employee performance is shaped by the dynamic interaction between skills, discipline, and motivation, strengthened by a fair and strategically designed incentive system. This synergy forms the foundation for sustainable productivity, both intrinsic and extrinsic (Deci & Ryan, 2020; Donthu et al., 2021). This systematic review reveals that skills, work discipline, motivation, and the reward–penalty system are closely interconnected in shaping employee performance, framed within diverse theoretical approaches. The findings highlight the emergence of an integrative conceptual pattern that explains the interaction among these variables in organizational contexts. Several theories appear dominant and are consistently used to explain the underlying mechanisms.

In the context of skills and performance, the most prominent theory is the Resource-Based View (RBV), which considers skills as strategic, unique, and hard-to-imitate organizational assets (Dubickis et al., 2024; FO Yoma et al., 2025; Saleh & AlShafeey, 2025; Jowkar et al., 2025; Arora et al., 2024). Work discipline is primarily analyzed through Organizational Behavior Theory and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), which conceptualize discipline as a form of prosocial behavior contributing to professionalism and performance (Saragih et al., 2024; Syahrial et al., 2024; Choi-Lundberg et al., 2024). In motivation research, frequently adopted theories include Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; 2020), Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), and Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory. These frameworks elucidate the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as key drivers of work behavior (Fachreza et al., 2024; Nugroho et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025; Widyastuti & Mardiana, 2024; Putra et al., 2025; Sukmawati et al., 2025).

The reward–penalty system is commonly interpreted through Behavioral Reinforcement Theory (Skinner, 1953) and Agency Theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), which emphasize the importance of positive and negative reinforcement in shaping work behavior and minimizing principal–agent conflicts (Rubben, 2023; White et al., 2020; Sultana, 2025; Samnani & Singh, 2014; Lee et al., 2018; Gill et al., 2013). Several studies have also adopted Contingency Theory to underscore that the effectiveness of reward–penalty systems depends significantly on the alignment between organizational structure, strategic orientation, and environmental context (Sultana, 2025; Sukmawati et al., 2025). This synthesis illustrates that theoretical frameworks in HRM research have become increasingly adaptive and comprehensive. However, there remains a need for more dynamic models capable of accommodating mediating and moderating functions simultaneously, while also integrating contextual variables such as industry sector, organizational culture, and technological change (Donthu et al., 2021; Snyder, 2019). Although literature on skills, discipline, motivation, and reward–penalty systems has made significant conceptual strides, several critical gaps remain to be explored further.

First, the integration of skills, discipline, and motivation into a single structural model is still rare. Most studies, such as those by Muñoz & Pulido (2024), Dubickis et al. (2024), FO Yoma et al. (2025), Syahrial et al. (2024), and Saragih et al. (2024), examine these variables independently. Second, reward and penalty mechanisms have not been systematically positioned as mediating or moderating variables. Although studies by Lin et al. (2022), Rubben (2023), and White et al. (2020) discuss incentives, integrative approaches are only beginning to emerge, as seen in the research of Sari et al. (2025) and Putra et al. (2025). Third, contextual factors such as organizational culture and industry sector have yet to receive adequate attention, despite existing literature emphasizing their significance in determining the effectiveness of incentive systems (Bock et al., 2023; Saks et al., 2022; Sultana, 2025; Sukmawati et al., 2025).

Fourth, emerging digital skills—such as AI literacy and agile collaboration—have not been sufficiently explored in relation to motivation and reward systems (Arora et al., 2024; FO Yoma et al., 2025). Fifth, methodological approaches remain dominated by regression and SEM, with limited adoption of multilevel modeling, fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), and exploratory techniques such as grounded theory (Pappas & Woodside, 2021). Sixth, the lack of longitudinal studies represents a significant limitation, given that relationships between motivation, skills, and incentives are dynamic and temporal (Saks, 2022; Shipp & Cole, 2015). Seventh, the integration of bibliometric analysis and content analysis remains underutilized, despite their potential synergy in producing a more comprehensive conceptual mapping (Dubickis et al., 2024; Jowkar et al., 2025; Shrivastava & Dubey, 2025). Eighth, non-financial rewards such as public praise remain underexamined, even though studies by Handgraaf et al. (2013) and Rubben (2023) have demonstrated their effectiveness in promoting positive workplace behavior. Ninth, ethical considerations in reward–penalty system design are not yet sufficiently addressed, despite their importance in preventing moral hazard and performance manipulation (Gill et al., 2013; Emmert et al., 2013).

Tenth, cross-disciplinary approaches remain limited, although integrating perspectives from behavioral economics, organizational psychology, and human capital analytics could enrich and transform HRM frameworks (Kahneman et al., 2019; Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). This systematic synthesis offers significant contributions to both theoretical foundations and practical applications in the field of Human Resource Management (HRM). Theoretically, the findings reaffirm that skills constitute a multidimensional strategic asset, encompassing technical, digital, collaborative, and emotional competencies, thereby extending the scope of the Resource-Based View (RBV) in the context of HR-based competitive advantage (Muñoz & Pulido, 2024; FO Yoma et al., 2025; Saleh & AlShafeey, 2025; Barney, 1991; Wright et al., 2001; Dubickis et al., 2024; Jowkar et al., 2025). Work discipline is positioned as a contributive behavior within the framework of Organizational Citizenship Behavior, reinforcing a value-based performance management model (Saragih et al., 2024; Choi-Lundberg et al., 2024). Motivation serves as a psychological catalyst that activates both skill and discipline, as explained through Self-Determination Theory and Expectancy Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2020; Vroom, 1964; Fachreza et al., 2024; Putra et al., 2025; Ardiyansyah & Prasetyo, 2025).

The key theoretical contribution of this study lies in affirming the role of the reward–penalty system as both a structural mediator and moderator bridging personal variables and work performance (Skinner, 1953; Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Rubben, 2023; Sultana, 2025; Lee et al., 2018). Practically, the findings urge organizations to establish skill development systems that emphasize soft skills and emotional intelligence (Arora et al., 2024; Kaur & Chauhan, 2024), and to design value- and culture-based disciplinary management approaches (Saragih et al., 2024; Choi-Lundberg et al., 2024). Motivational systems should include a combination of financial and social incentives, including public praise, adapted to generational and cultural characteristics of the workforce (Handgraaf et al., 2013; Sari et al., 2025). Furthermore, the reward–penalty system should be strategically designed, transparent, and context-sensitive to sustainably optimize employee performance (Rubben, 2023; White et al., 2020). Based on thematic and conceptual synthesis, future research should focus on theory integration, the development of complex structural models, and the expansion of sectoral and geographical contexts to holistically capture the dynamics of skills, discipline, motivation, and reward–penalty systems in relation to performance.

Future research is recommended to develop multi-path models that position reward–penalty as both a mediator and a contextual moderator. Previous studies such as Muñoz & Pulido (2024), FO Yoma et al. (2025), Saragih et al. (2024), and Fachreza et al. (2024) have remained largely partial. Testing via multilevel modeling and moderated mediation analysis is needed to explain more dynamic interactions (Hayes, 2022). A hybrid theoretical model that integrates Self-Determination Theory, Behavioral Reinforcement Theory, and Contingency Theory is also needed to understand how personal variables and incentives function within structural and cultural contexts (Deci & Ryan, 2020; Rubben, 2023; Sultana, 2025). Configurational approaches such as fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) are recommended to uncover combinations of conditions that lead to optimal performance, going beyond the limitations of linear models (Pappas & Woodside, 2021). Longitudinal studies should be strengthened to capture the long-term dynamics of incentive systems and work behavior, complementing the current dominance of cross-sectional research (Widyastuti & Mardiana, 2024; Putra et al., 2025; Saks, 2022).

Exploration of emerging sectors such as the creative industries, gig economy, digital startups, and the informal sector—as well as cross-cultural studies—is necessary to understand how cultural values moderate the effectiveness of reward–penalty systems (Bock et al., 2023; Hofstede, 2010). Future research agendas should also include non-financial rewards such as social recognition, identity reinforcement, and reciprocal appreciation as relevant components of contemporary motivational systems (Handgraaf et al., 2013; White et al., 2020). The development of measurement instruments for reward–penalty systems that account for perceived fairness, transparency, and contextual relevance is an urgent methodological priority. Interdisciplinary collaboration between HRM, behavioral economics, organizational psychology, and data science holds great promise for constructing evidence-based, technology-driven HR frameworks—leveraging people analytics and AI-powered performance tracking (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016; Kahneman et al., 2019).

4. Conclusions

This synthesis of 36 scholarly articles published over the past five years confirms that skills, work discipline, and motivation are fundamental pillars in shaping superior and sustainable employee performance. These three elements interact integratively, forming a system of productive and adaptive work behavior in modern organizations. Technical, digital, interpersonal, and collaborative skills are identified as the foundation of strategic competencies. Work discipline reinforces organizational structure and culture. Meanwhile, motivation functions as a psychological driver linking individual capacity with actual productivity.

The findings also demonstrate that the reward–penalty system plays a mediating role in strengthening the relationships among the three variables and work performance. Incentive systems are not merely compensation tools, but structural mechanisms capable of enhancing motivation, reinforcing discipline, and optimizing the utilization of skills. Proper incentive framing, performance-based rewards, and accountability-based penalties have been proven to significantly improve work behavior and organizational output. This study also identifies several research gaps, including the lack of comprehensive theoretical models that integrate all variables within a structural framework, limited use of longitudinal and multilevel approaches, and insufficient exploration of non-financial rewards and the cultural dimensions affecting incentive system effectiveness. The main theoretical contribution lies in the interdisciplinary integration of Self-Determination Theory, Behavioral Reinforcement Theory, and the Resource-Based View in explaining the interplay of individual, structural, and contextual factors in shaping performance.

From a practical standpoint, this study recommends the transformation of HRM policies through the development of multidimensional skill sets, strengthening of value-driven discipline aligned with OCB, motivational strategies that emphasize social and intrinsic rewards, and the design of fair and transparent incentive systems. This approach enables organizations to enhance performance ethically, sustainably, and competitively on a global scale. The limitation of this study lies in the Systematic Literature Review approach, which may not fully capture contextual dynamics, and the limited data scope, which includes only English-language, Scopus-indexed journals. Therefore, future research is encouraged to develop cross-sector longitudinal studies, test integrative reward–penalty models across various organizational structures, and explore the roles of leadership and organizational culture as moderators in performance-based HRM frameworks.

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