

Selected Reward Factors and Work Motivation: The Potential Moderating Role of Self-Directed Career Goals

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Abstract

Employee motivation is important to organisational functioning, yet the relationship between reward provisions and work motivation may vary across reward types and employee circumstances. This study examined associations between four selected reward factors (bonus, compensation, free medical treatment, and a safe working environment) and work motivation. It also tested whether self-directed career goals moderated the relationship between the overall reward factor and work motivation. Spearman's rank-order correlations were used to examine the bivariate associations, while hierarchical regression was used to test the proposed moderation. The overall reward factor was not significantly associated with work motivation ($r_s = -.078, p = .142$). Bonus ($r_s = -.019, p = .714$), free medical treatment ($r_s = -.010, p = .855$), and a safe working environment ($r_s = -.025, p = .631$) were also not significantly associated with work motivation. Compensation showed a very weak negative association ($r_s = -.103, p = .050$). The interaction between the overall reward factor and self-directed career goals was not statistically significant ($\beta = -3.380, p = .141$), and the explained variance increased only slightly from $R^2 = .016$ to $R^2 = .021$. The very high reported variance inflation factor values warrant checks of predictor coding and model specification, although they do not independently demonstrate that the interaction test is invalid. The findings underline the importance of examining reward dimensions separately and of ensuring appropriate model specification when testing individual-level moderators.

Keywords: Reward Factors, Work Motivation, Compensation, Bonus, Self-Directed Career Goals, Moderation Analysis

Introduction

Employee work motivation remains a significant concern in human resource management because it influences employees' willingness to exert effort, pursue work-related goals, and contribute to organisational objectives. Organisations therefore use reward management practices to recognise employee contributions and encourage desired workplace behaviours.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of reward systems cannot be assumed to be uniform across all employees or organisational settings. Understanding which reward components are associated with work motivation, and the conditions under which these relationships may vary, remains important for developing reward practices that respond to employees' needs and organisational requirements.

Reward management encompasses various financial and non-financial provisions, including compensation, performance bonuses, employee benefits, recognition, and opportunities for development. Although these provisions are commonly used to attract, retain, and motivate employees, their relationships with work motivation may differ according to the nature of the reward and how employees perceive its value. Figueiredo et al. (2025), in a systematic review of 61 studies on organisational reward systems, examined the relationships between financial and non-financial rewards and outcomes such as employee motivation and satisfaction. Their review highlights the importance of considering reward practices in relation to organisational objectives, employee expectations, fairness, and transparency. However, the broad range of reward practices also indicates the need to examine specific reward dimensions within particular organisational contexts rather than assuming that all rewards have similar relationships with work motivation.

In the present study, four reward dimensions are examined: bonus, compensation, free medical treatment, and a safe working environment. These dimensions represent different aspects of employees' financial returns, welfare benefits, and working conditions. Bonuses may recognise employee contributions or encourage desired performance, while compensation represents the financial returns associated with employment. Free medical treatment provides healthcare-related support, whereas a safe working environment concerns the protection and conditions under which employees perform their duties. Although these provisions may contribute to employees' employment experiences, their respective relationships with work motivation require empirical examination. In particular, it remains necessary to establish whether these selected reward dimensions are significantly associated with work motivation among employees in the organisational setting investigated in this study.

The issue is relevant to electronics manufacturing, where employees perform their duties within structured operational environments. Reward practices in this setting need to be considered in relation to both organisational requirements and employees' expectations. Although research on reward management provides a foundation for understanding employee motivation, findings from other industries, countries, and organisational settings may not fully explain the experiences of employees in electronics companies in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. The extent to which bonus, compensation, free medical treatment, and a safe working environment are associated with work motivation in the participating companies therefore requires context-specific empirical investigation. Examining these dimensions separately may also help distinguish which aspects of the reward arrangements warrant greater attention in understanding employee motivation.

Another issue concerns the possibility that employees' personal career orientations may influence how they respond to organisational rewards. Self-directed career goals in this study refer to employees' personally defined career objectives and their orientation towards

pursuing those objectives. Briscoe et al. (2006) distinguish self-directed career management from values-driven career attitudes within the protean career perspective. Although these concepts provide a relevant background for understanding individual career orientations, they are not identical to the self-directed career-goal construct operationalised in the present study. Employees with different career objectives may evaluate the relevance of organisational rewards differently; however, whether such differences are associated with variations in work motivation requires empirical testing.

Goal-setting theory provides a basis for considering the potential relevance of personal goals to employees' work-related effort and persistence. Locke and Latham (2002) explain the role of goals in directing attention and effort, while highlighting the importance of conditions such as goal commitment. Building on this perspective, the present study proposes that self-directed career goals may moderate the relationship between selected reward factors and work motivation. However, the specific moderating role of self-directed career goals in the reward–motivation relationship should not be assumed without empirical evidence. Testing this proposed interaction may help clarify whether the association between the overall selected reward factor and work motivation differs according to employees' self-directed career goals.

Accordingly, the central research problem concerns the extent to which four selected reward dimensions bonus, compensation, free medical treatment, and a safe working environment— are associated with work motivation among employees of two electronics companies in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia, and whether self-directed career goals moderate the relationship between the overall selected reward factor and work motivation. While existing literature provides a foundation for understanding reward management and employee motivation, further context-specific evidence is needed to address these relationships within the participating organisations. This study addresses this issue by examining the associations between the four reward dimensions and work motivation and testing the proposed moderating effect of self-directed career goals.

The study contributes context-specific empirical evidence to the literature on reward management and work motivation by examining distinct reward dimensions within the electronics manufacturing context in Kuching, Sarawak. It further extends the investigation by testing whether self-directed career goals moderate the relationship between the overall selected reward factor and work motivation. The findings may inform further research and provide practical insights for human resource practitioners when reviewing reward arrangements and considering employees' career orientations. The extent of these contributions will depend on the empirical findings and should be interpreted in accordance with the study's design and scope.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Reward factors and work motivation

Organisational rewards encompass financial and non-financial provisions that employees may value as returns for their work. Their relationship with motivation is unlikely to be uniform across all reward types. The meaning of a reward depends not only on whether it is provided, but also on its adequacy, accessibility, perceived fairness, and perceived connection to

employees' contributions. Accordingly, a composite reward measure may not fully capture the different ways employees interpret particular benefits.

Compensation is commonly understood as a direct return for work, while bonuses may be perceived as additional or performance-contingent payments. Healthcare benefits and a safe working environment may be considered important employment conditions, but employees may not necessarily view them as immediate incentives for greater work effort. The present study therefore considers the overall reward factor and four selected dimensions separately. Self-determination theory distinguishes autonomous motivation from controlled motivation, including forms of extrinsic motivation that differ in their degree of internalisation (Gagné & Deci, 2005). This distinction cautions against interpreting work motivation solely as a response to financial returns. In their meta-analysis of experimental studies, Deci et al. (1999) examined how reward types and contingencies affect intrinsic motivation. These findings concern intrinsic motivation under specific experimental conditions; they do not imply that compensation, healthcare provision, or workplace safety necessarily reduces employees' overall work motivation.

Cerasoli et al. (2014) further demonstrated that intrinsic motivation and extrinsic incentives jointly predict performance, with their relative importance varying by performance type and incentive contingency. Their evidence supports a differentiated account of rewards, although performance and work motivation remain distinct outcomes. For the present study, these perspectives justify examining the selected reward dimensions separately and considering whether individual career objectives condition their motivational relevance.

H1: The overall selected reward factor is significantly associated with work motivation.

H2: Bonus is significantly associated with work motivation.

H3: Compensation is significantly associated with work motivation.

H4: Free medical treatment is significantly associated with work motivation.

H5: A safe working environment is significantly associated with work motivation.

Self-directed Career Goals as a Moderator

Self-directed career goals are examined as a potential boundary condition for the association between organisational rewards and work motivation. Goal-setting theory provides a rationale for considering how personally relevant objectives guide effort and persistence (Locke & Latham, 2002). Social cognitive career theory's career self-management model further explains adaptive career behaviours, including career advancement and the management of work transitions (Lent & Brown, 2013). Together, these perspectives justify examining career goals alongside organisational rewards, while retaining the distinction between career self-management and the specific career-goal measure used in this study.

Social cognitive career theory identifies self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals as interrelated mechanisms through which individuals exercise career agency (Lent et al., 1994). Its contextual extension emphasises supports and barriers that can facilitate or constrain career development (Lent et al., 2000). Applied to the present research question, organisational rewards may be interpreted as career-relevant resources, but whether they fulfil that role depends on employees' objectives and circumstances. This application is a theoretical extension rather than an established classification of all four reward dimensions as career supports.

The protean-career perspective offers a complementary explanation of why employees may evaluate organisational rewards differently. Hall (2004) emphasises personally directed careers and internally defined criteria of success. Hall et al. (2018) elaborate the roles of self-direction, values, identity awareness, adaptability, and agency in career processes. Employees who pursue personally meaningful career outcomes may therefore evaluate rewards according to their relevance to those outcomes. However, a protean career orientation encompasses more than career-goal strength and should not be treated as equivalent to the moderator measured here.

The self-concordance model also distinguishes goals that reflect individuals' interests and core values from goals pursued for external or internal pressures. Sheldon and Elliot (1999) associated self-concordant goals with sustained effort and subsequent goal attainment, need satisfaction, and well-being. This provides an additional rationale for considering the personal meaning of career objectives. It does not establish that stronger career goals always amplify reward effects: personally endorsed goals could also sustain effort where organisational rewards have limited relevance.

Construct precision is essential to this argument. Gubler et al. (2014) identify inconsistent terminology and limitations in existing measures of the protean-career concept. Wiernik and Kostal's (2019) meta-analysis also questions traditional distinctions among several protean and boundaryless orientations, identifying substantial overlap in a broader proactive career orientation. These findings reinforce the need to establish what the study's career-goal items actually measure. The proposed moderation consequently concerns the operationalised career-goal construct, rather than assuming that evidence about related career orientations directly validates H6.

The proposed moderating mechanism concerns the perceived relevance of rewards to employees' career objectives. Rewards may be more closely associated with work motivation when employees regard them as supporting their desired career progress; the association may be weaker when rewards have limited relevance to those objectives. This explanation is an inference developed for the present study, rather than a moderation effect demonstrated by Briscoe et al. (2006), Lent and Brown (2013), or Locke and Latham (2002). Because stronger career goals could either increase sensitivity to relevant rewards or sustain effort independently of them, H6 specifies moderation without assuming its direction. Moderation concerns variation in the reward–motivation association across levels of career goals, whereas mediation would require a separate explanation of how rewards influence motivation through changes in career goals.

H6: Self-directed career goals moderate the association between the overall selected reward factor and work motivation.

Methodology

Research Design and Participants

The study examined employees in two electronics companies located in Kuching, Sarawak. The reported target population was 5,160 employees, and stratified random sampling was used to select a sample of 360 respondents: 77 from Khind and 283 from Taiyo Yuden. A pilot study involving 30 respondents was conducted at Murata Toko Electronic before the main data collection.

Data Analysis

Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to examine the direction and strength of associations between the overall selected reward factor, its four dimensions, and work motivation. The significance threshold was $\alpha = .05$. The moderation hypothesis was examined using hierarchical regression. Model 1 included the overall selected reward factor and self-directed career goals as predictors. Model 2 added their product interaction term. Evidence of moderation was assessed using the interaction test and the change in explained variance. Bivariate rank correlations and regression coefficients address different statistical relationships and were interpreted separately.

Results*Associations between reward factors and work motivation*

The correlation analysis did not identify a statistically significant association between the overall selected reward factor and work motivation ($r_s = -.078$, $p = .142$). The coefficient was negative and very small. At the dimension level, bonus ($r_s = -.019$, $p = .714$), free medical treatment ($r_s = -.010$, $p = .855$), and a safe working environment ($r_s = -.025$, $p = .631$) were not significantly associated with work motivation.

Compensation had a very weak negative correlation with work motivation ($r_s = -.103$, $p = .050$). The reported p -value is rounded to three decimal places and lies at the conventional .05 threshold. The result is therefore treated as borderline rather than as definitive support for H3 until the unrounded p -value and the prespecified decision rule are verified. Its small magnitude does not indicate a practically strong relationship.

Table 1

Spearman's correlations between selected reward factors and work motivation

Reward factor	Spearman's r_s	p	Hypothesis decision
Overall selected reward factor	-.078	.142	Not supported
Bonus	-.019	.714	Not supported
Compensation	-.103	.050	Borderline; verify unrounded p
Free medical treatment	-.010	.855	Not supported
Safe working environment	-.025	.631	Not supported

Note. H1–H5 correspond to the rows in order. The reported compensation p -value (.050) is rounded; a definitive H3 decision requires the unrounded p -value and prespecified significance rule. Non-significance does not demonstrate the absence of an association.

Moderation Analysis

In Model 1, the overall selected reward factor and self-directed career goals jointly explained 1.6% of the variance in work motivation ($R^2 = .016$). The model-level test was not statistically significant at the .05 level ($F = 2.812$, $p = .061$). The coefficient for the overall selected reward factor was $\beta = -.094$ ($p = .074$), while the coefficient for self-directed career goals was $\beta = -.078$ ($p = .138$).

In Model 2, the reported R^2 increased from .016 to .021 after the interaction term was added. The output reports $\Delta R^2 = .006$, whereas subtracting the displayed, rounded R^2 values gives .005; these figures require reconciliation using the unrounded output. The change test was not statistically significant ($\Delta F = 2.175$, $p = .141$), and the interaction coefficient was also non-significant ($\beta = -3.380$, $p = .141$). The reported analysis therefore did not provide evidence supporting H6.

The reported VIF values were 345.788 for the overall reward factor, 1,513.105 for self-directed career goals, and 1,911.351 for the interaction term. These values indicate substantial collinearity among the model terms and warrant checks of scale scoring, coefficient labelling, and interaction construction. In product-term models, high VIF values can partly reflect the use of uncentred predictors and should not, by themselves, be treated as proof that the interaction test is invalid. Mean centring may aid interpretation, but it does not invariably reduce collinearity (Olvera Astivia & Kroc, 2019).

Table 2

Hierarchical regression testing the moderation hypothesis

Model	Predictor	β	p	R^2	Model/change test
1	Overall selected-reward factor	-.094	.074	.016	$F = 2.812$, $p = .061$
1	Self-directed career goals	-.078	.138	.016	—
2	Overall selected-reward factor	1.342	.170	.021	$\Delta R^2 = .006$
2	Self-directed career goals	2.928	.152	.021	$\Delta F = 2.175$, $p = .141$
2	Reward $\times$ career-goal interaction	-3.380	.141	.021	Interaction not significant

Note. β denotes the reported standardised regression coefficient; its labelling must be confirmed against the original output. In Model 2, each lower-order coefficient represents the conditional association when the other predictor equals zero, or its mean if mean-centred. $\Delta R^2 = .006$ is the reported change and must be reconciled with the rounded model R^2 values (.016 and .021). The interaction test was non-significant ($p = .141$).

Discussion*Overall Selected Rewards and Work Motivation*

The findings revealed that the overall selected reward factor was not significantly associated with work motivation among employees in the participating electronics companies in Kuching, Sarawak. This suggests that the combined reward measure did not demonstrate a statistically significant monotonic association with work motivation in the present sample. The finding should not, however, be interpreted as evidence that rewards are unimportant. Rather, it indicates that the study did not establish a statistically significant relationship between the overall selected reward factor and work motivation.

Figueiredo et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of considering reward management in relation to organisational objectives, employee expectations, fairness, and transparency. In this context, the present finding suggests that the relationship between rewards and work motivation may require examination beyond an overall reward measure. Employees may perceive financial compensation, bonuses, healthcare benefits, and workplace safety differently because these provisions serve different purposes. For example, employees may evaluate financial rewards in terms of adequacy and fairness, while healthcare benefits and workplace safety may be regarded as essential employment provisions.

One possible explanation is that combining different reward dimensions into a single measure may obscure variations in their individual relationships with work motivation. However, this interpretation remains tentative and requires further examination of the instrument's scoring structure and the characteristics of the respondents. The findings therefore highlight the importance of examining both overall reward measures and individual reward dimensions when investigating work motivation in specific organisational contexts.

Reward Dimensions

The analysis showed that bonus, free medical treatment, and a safe working environment were not significantly correlated with work motivation. These results indicate that the study did not establish statistically significant associations between these individual reward dimensions and work motivation in the participating organisations. They do not demonstrate that these provisions have no value or that they are ineffective in other organisational settings.

The findings can be considered in light of Figueiredo et al. (2025), who emphasised the importance of employee expectations and perceptions in understanding reward management. The presence of a particular reward provision may not necessarily correspond to differences in work motivation. Employees may evaluate rewards according to their perceived adequacy, accessibility, fairness, and relevance to their individual circumstances. Nevertheless, these explanations were not directly tested in the present study and should be treated as possible interpretations rather than established reasons for the non-significant findings.

Compensation demonstrated a very weak negative correlation with work motivation, with a reported p -value at the conventional significance boundary. This result requires careful interpretation. If confirmed using the unrounded statistical output, the negative coefficient would indicate a very weak inverse association between compensation scores and work motivation scores in this sample. It would not establish that higher compensation reduces work motivation. The coding and direction of the measurement scale should also be verified before interpreting the coefficient.

Overall, the results do not provide sufficient evidence to rank the four reward dimensions according to their relationship with work motivation. Instead, they suggest that the associations between specific reward provisions and work motivation should be evaluated empirically rather than assumed. Future studies could examine employees' perceptions of compensation adequacy, reward fairness, benefit accessibility, and workplace conditions to provide a more detailed understanding of these relationships.

Self-Directed Career Goals and the Proposed Moderation

The hierarchical regression analysis did not identify a statistically significant interaction between the overall selected reward factor and self-directed career goals. Therefore, the findings did not support the proposed hypothesis that self-directed career goals moderate the relationship between selected rewards and work motivation. The reported increase in explained variance attributable to the interaction was also small, although the exact change in r^2 must be verified against the original regression output.

This finding does not establish that career goals are irrelevant to employees' work behaviour. Rather, it indicates that the specific moderating effect proposed in this study was not supported by the reported analysis. The result should be interpreted in relation to the particular constructs, measures, sample, and statistical model examined.

Goal-setting theory explains how goals can direct attention, effort, and persistence, while recognising the importance of conditions such as goal commitment (Locke & Latham, 2002). Similarly, the social cognitive model of career self-management provides a framework for understanding individual agency in career-related behaviour (Lent & Brown, 2013). These perspectives offer a theoretical basis for considering the potential relevance of personal goals; however, they do not independently establish that self-directed career goals moderate the relationship between organisational rewards and work motivation.

The non-significant interaction may also warrant further consideration of construct and outcome specificity. Wiernik and Kostal (2019) reported stronger relationships between proactive career orientations and career-focused outcomes than with non-career-focused attitudes. This provides a possible direction for future investigation, rather than a confirmed explanation for the present result. Likewise, research on self-concordant goal pursuit (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999) and the relationship between incentives and performance (Cerasoli et al., 2014) offers relevant background but does not directly establish the interaction tested in this study.

Future research could examine whether the content of employees' career goals, their personal commitment to those goals, and their perceptions of reward relevance help explain variations in work motivation. Such investigations should distinguish self-directed career goals from broader career-management attitudes and test the proposed relationships using clearly specified and validated measures.

Theoretical Implications

This study examined the relationship between selected reward factors and work motivation and tested self-directed career goals as a potential moderator. By investigating these relationships among employees in two electronics companies in Kuching, Sarawak, the study provides context-specific evidence concerning the proposed relationships within this employment setting.

The findings did not establish a significant association between the overall selected reward factor and work motivation, nor did they support the proposed moderating effect of self-directed career goals. Accordingly, the theoretical contribution lies primarily in examining these propositions empirically within the study context, rather than confirming a moderating

mechanism. The findings also highlight the importance of distinguishing between the general theoretical relevance of goal-directed behaviour and empirical evidence for a specific interaction effect.

The interpretation of this contribution depends on the extent to which the study instrument adequately represents the intended self-directed career-goal construct. Future studies should clarify the conceptual boundaries between self-directed career goals, protean career attitudes, and career self-management to strengthen theoretical precision and improve the comparability of findings across studies.

Practical Implications

The findings suggest that organisations should evaluate their reward arrangements rather than assume that the availability of particular rewards is necessarily associated with stronger work motivation. Human resource practitioners in electronics manufacturing may review how employees perceive compensation, bonuses, healthcare benefits, and workplace safety, including their adequacy, fairness, accessibility, and relevance.

The non-significant findings should not be used as a basis for removing existing benefits or concluding that particular reward practices are ineffective. Instead, organisations could gather employee feedback and assess the perceived value of individual reward components before making changes to reward policies. The very weak negative association reported for compensation also requires verification and should not be interpreted as evidence that increasing compensation would reduce motivation.

Although self-directed career goals were not supported as a moderator in this study, organisations may continue to consider employees' career aspirations when planning career development and human resource initiatives. Such practices are reasonable areas for organisational assessment, but their effects on work motivation would need to be evaluated separately. These implications should therefore be understood as suggestions for review and further assessment rather than causal conclusions from the present correlational findings.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the correlational design does not establish causal relationships between the selected reward factors and work motivation. Second, the observed associations were generally small, and most of the relationships examined were not statistically significant. Third, the reported p-value for compensation is close to the conventional significance threshold and requires verification using the unrounded statistical output before a definitive conclusion about the corresponding hypothesis is made.

Future research should employ validated measures and provide clear evidence of reliability and validity. Examining individual reward dimensions separately may help clarify their respective relationships with work motivation. Additional variables, such as perceived pay fairness, reward adequacy, leadership, career development, and intrinsic motivation, could be investigated where supported by an appropriate theoretical rationale.

Further studies across different organisations and manufacturing settings would help determine whether the observed patterns are consistent across contexts. Longitudinal research could also examine whether relationships between reward perceptions and work motivation change over time. In moderation research, investigators should clearly distinguish self-defined career goals from broader attitudes towards self-directed career management (Briscoe et al., 2006) and specify how particular rewards may relate to particular career objectives. Career advancement and career-transition behaviours could also be examined as distinct outcomes within career self-management research (Lent & Brown, 2013).

Conclusion

This study examined the relationships between selected reward factors and work motivation among employees in two electronics companies in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia, and tested the potential moderating role of self-directed career goals. The reported results showed no statistically significant association between the overall selected reward factor and work motivation. Bonus, free medical treatment, and a safe working environment were also not significantly correlated with work motivation. Compensation demonstrated a very weak negative and significant correlation.

The proposed moderating effect of self-directed career goals was not supported by the reported hierarchical regression analysis. These findings should be interpreted within the scope of the study and do not establish that rewards or career goals are generally unimportant to employees. Instead, they indicate that the specific relationships examined were not sufficiently supported by the present data.

The study provides context-specific evidence on selected reward dimensions and work motivation in the participating electronics companies. Further research using validated measures, verified statistical models, and broader organisational samples is needed to clarify these relationships and assess the potential role of employees' career orientations.

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