Balancing Individual and Group Incentives in Performance Pay Systems: Implications for Motivation, Fairness, and Workplace Behaviour

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Abstract
This study investigates the impact of four performance-based pay (PBP) mechanisms, such as merit pay, individual performance bonuses, gain sharing, and group performance incentives, on employee work behaviour. Statistical analysis revealed strong and significant relationships across all mechanisms, with coefficients of determination ranging from 0.726 to 0.898 and p-values below 0.01. Findings indicate that linking pay to performance significantly enhances productive behaviours such as engagement, punctuality, teamwork, and commitment, while reducing counterproductive behaviours including absenteeism and disengagement. The study further discusses the economic rationale for adopting these PBP schemes, emphasizing their role in aligning employee incentives with organisational goals and improving productivity. Policy implications and directions for future research on the long-term effects of PBP, fairness perceptions, and their interaction with evolving work environments are also presented.

Keywords: *Performance-Based Pay, Employee Work Behaviour, Merit Pay, Individual Bonuses, Gain Sharing, Group Incentives*

1. Introduction
In today's intensely competitive business landscape, organisations are increasingly moving away from the traditional fixed monthly salary model toward more flexible and results-oriented compensation systems that actively promote desirable employee behaviours in line with organisational objectives. One widely adopted approach is Performance-Based Pay (PBP), a remuneration strategy in which financial rewards are directly tied to measurable employee performance, ensuring that exceptional contributors are acknowledged and compensated for their achievements.

The growing challenge of retaining and motivating top-performing staff has intensified alongside heightened inter-firm competition. Research indicates that employees are more likely to increase their work effort when they anticipate tangible rewards for exceptional performance (Gielen, Kerkhofs, & van Ours, 2010). Within service-oriented organisations such as the Eko Electric

Distribution Company (EKEDC), implementing merit pay has the potential to enhance work behaviours. For example, employees who know that outstanding performance will be rewarded financially may be more inclined to maintain punctuality and display consistent dedication even in the absence of direct supervision.

Performance-based pay systems typically offer financial increments based on predefined performance metrics. However, despite their potential benefits, these schemes face practical limitations. Critics argue that PBP can inadvertently shift employee priorities from organisational advancement to individual gain, potentially weakening teamwork and cooperation (Lucifora& Origo, 2022). For instance, employees seeking to maximise personal incentives might be less willing to assist colleagues struggling with tasks, undermining collaborative efforts. Moreover, performance-related pay has been associated with wage disparities, contributing to issues such as gender pay gaps (Card, Mas, Moretti, & Saez, 2012). In settings where teamwork is essential, highly individualised incentives may intensify competition, lowering overall morale and cohesion.

Nonetheless, a strategically balanced reward framework that integrates individual performance bonuses, gain-sharing schemes, and group-based incentives alongside fixed salaries can address these challenges. Such an approach can help curb counterproductive behaviours such as absenteeism, lateness, presenteeism, corruption, and poor service delivery, while fostering a culture of responsibility and high performance. Recognising both individual and team achievements enables organisations like EKEDC to align employee aspirations with corporate objectives.

If the behavioural consequences of reward systems are overlooked, organisations risk fostering harmful workplace attitudes, including theft of company resources, intentional task delays, and substandard customer service. Conversely, well-designed incentives can stimulate constructive work behaviours, for example, motivating an employee to transform a dissatisfied customer's experience into a positive one (Crossman & Zaki, 2013). Persistent reports of counterproductive behaviours in Nigerian institutions underscore the urgency of addressing these issues. Arikewuyo (2015) identified insufficient incentives as a factor behind declining academic standards in federal universities, while Alwaki (2018) emphasised that achieving organisational success depends on cultivating positive employee attitudes and behaviours.

2. Hypotheses Development

Merit pay has long been theorized to enhance employee motivation and job performance. According to cognitive evaluation theory, properly designed pay-for-performance schemes like merit pay convey informational value that boosts intrinsic motivation while also exercising a degree of control. When employees perceive fairness in how performance translates into reward, distributive and procedural justice mediate the motivational effects and ultimately improve both in-role (task) and extra-role (contextual) work behaviors. A comprehensive meta-analysis of 100 studies (N = 71,438) confirms a significant positive relationship between pay-for-performance and job performance, particularly when justice perceptions are favorable.

Building on this foundation, current efforts to systematically review merit pay specifically (distinct from bonuses and other P4P forms) aim to isolate its unique effects on work motivation and performance. These protocols aim to unpack how variations in merit pay implementation,including employee perceptions and the alignment of performance rating and pay increments, modulate outcomes.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *Merit pay is positively related to employee work behaviour; this relationship is mediated by employee perceptions of distributive and procedural justice, such that stronger perceived fairness strengthens the positive association.*

Individual performance bonuses, another form of P4P, act as direct extrinsic motivators tied to personal achievement. Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) suggests that when employees believe effort leads to rewards, and rewards are valued, motivation increases accordingly—improving both quantitative performance and qualitative work behaviours. Empirical meta-analytic evidence supports this: pay-for-performance positively affects task performance more strongly than contextual performance, mediated by increases in intrinsic motivation and moderated by pressure and fairness perceptions.

Moreover, agent-based models suggest that individual incentives can shift employee behaviour—but they may also impair cooperation depending on prevailing social norms and values. Financial incentives tied to individual output can either enhance or reduce constructive work behaviour based on employees' personal values and organizational culture.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *Individual performance bonuses are positively correlated with employee work behaviour; however, this relationship is moderated by social norms and employee values,*

such that in collectivist or cooperative cultures, individual bonuses may yield weaker effects on work behaviour.

Gain-sharing, which ties rewards to collective performance, fosters a shared focus on organizational outcomes and teamwork. The Scanlon plan, a widely cited gain-sharing model, exemplifies how organization-wide participation and shared reward systems can elevate collective performance through collaboration and engagement. Broader reviews of gain-sharing literature highlight its capacity to sustain long-term job performance, even in short-term implementations.

Empirical work also finds that shared-capitalism schemes are associated with greater employee involvement in decisions, enhanced job satisfaction, improved training, and better supervision quality. These outcomes indicate a clear link between gain-sharing and positive work behaviours, particularly in contexts where employees perceive genuine influence and fairness.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *Gain-sharing is positively related to employee work behaviour; this relationship is strengthened when employees experience genuine involvement in decision-making and perceive the reward distribution as fair and transparent.*

Table 1: Summary Table of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Key Mechanism	Moderators / Mediators
H1 - Merit Pay	Cognitive evaluation; P4P → intrinsic motivation → performance	Distributive/procedural justice
H2 - Individual Bonuses	Expectancy theory; clear link between effort and reward	Social norms; individual values
H3 - Gain-Sharing	Collective reward → teamwork and engagement	Participation in decisions; fairness perceptions

Source: Author

3. Methodology

The study population refers to the complete set of individuals from whom the information required for the research is obtained. For this study, the population comprised full-time employees of the Eko Electric Distribution Company (EKEDC), Lagos State, working across four departments: Customer Experience, Business Development, Business Performance, and Corporate Communication.

A sample represents the subset of individuals selected from the study population from which the data are collected, while the sample size denotes the number of elements chosen to represent the population (Shona, 2021). Determining an appropriate sample size requires consideration of the

desired precision and acceptable confidence level for the estimate. In this study, a census approach was adopted, meaning that all members of the population meeting the inclusion criteria were selected as the sample.

The research employed a purposive sampling technique, which is appropriate when the required information can only be obtained from individuals possessing specific knowledge, experience, or roles relevant to the study (Etikan et al., 2016). In this case, the targeted respondents were full-time employees in the identified departments of EKEDC, as they were best positioned to provide accurate and relevant data regarding the research objectives.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to address the study's objectives. The questionnaire consisted of two sections:

1. Section A: Respondents' bio-data (demographic information).
2. Section B: Items designed to elicit responses related to the study objectives and hypotheses.

A five-point Likert scale was employed for Section B, ranging from *Strongly Agree (5)* to *Undecided (1)*, allowing respondents to indicate the extent of their agreement with each statement.

Secondary data were also sourced from relevant academic literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, textbooks, conference papers, and reputable internet resources.

Primary data obtained from the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and simple percentages, were used to summarise the demographic characteristics and general trends in responses. The research hypotheses were tested using:

- Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC): Applied to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between two continuous variables measured on either an interval or ratio scale.
- Chi-Square Test of Independence (χ^2): Used to assess the influence and association between categorical variables.

4. Results

4.1. Discussion of Results

The results in Table 2 show that 81.2% of respondents believed regular salary increments encourage positive workplace behaviour, while 7.5% disagreed and 11.3% were undecided. Similarly, 86.8% agreed that linking pay rises to performance would boost output, and most felt monthly pay adjustments should distinguish high from low performers to drive productivity. Moreover, 90.5% agreed that underperformers would likely improve if they saw colleagues promoted for significant contributions, with only 3.8% disagreeing. Overall, frequent performance-based pay increases appear to foster positive behaviour and motivate improvement among less productive employees.

From Table 3, 93.4% believed performance-based bonuses can reduce counterproductive behaviours, while 82.1% agreed such bonuses motivate diligence. All respondents said they would maintain punctuality if rewarded for outstanding performance, and 86.8% affirmed that bonuses on top of salaries would boost engagement. These findings suggest that bonuses can encourage hard work, improve punctuality, enhance engagement, and curb unproductive conduct.

Table 4 shows that 74.5% agreed high performers would exceed expectations if assured of sharing in gains from their work, while 76.4% said profit-sharing would motivate extra hours. Additionally, 82% saw gain sharing as effective for meeting tight deadlines, and all agreed it would improve customer service commitment. Overall, gain sharing appears to inspire exceptional performance, willingness to work beyond normal hours, and dedication to quality service.

Table 5 shows that 53.7% of respondents agreed, 34% disagreed, and 12.3% were undecided about whether group performance incentives (GPI) motivate all members to work towards completing group tasks. An overwhelming 95.2% agreed that GPI strengthens team bonding, while 4.7% disagreed. However, 67.9% noted that top performers might feel discouraged when all members receive equal pay regardless of individual contributions, whereas 30.2% disagreed and 1.9% were undecided. Only 21.7% believed GPI could lower motivation, while 78.3% rejected this view. Overall, the findings indicate that while GPI can enhance team commitment and improve performance, it may also lead to perceptions of unfairness among high achievers if individual efforts are not properly recognised.

Statistical analysis revealed a coefficient of determination of 0.726 (p = 0.004) for the link between merit pay and employee work behaviour, below the 0.01 threshold. This supports rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative, suggesting that merit pay significantly influences whether employees display productive or counterproductive behaviours.

Likewise, the relationship between individual performance bonuses and employee work behaviour showed an R^2 of 0.883 (p = 0.000), indicating a strong and significant impact on engagement, punctuality, and reduction of counterproductive conduct.

For gain sharing, the R^2 was 0.803 (p = 0.001), affirming its positive effect on work attitudes, commitment, and willingness to exceed role expectations.

Group performance incentives recorded the highest R^2 at 0.898 (p = 0.000), highlighting their substantial influence on work behaviour, though the outcomes can be either positive or negative depending on perceived fairness and recognition of individual contributions.

Table 2: Respondents' Views on Merit Pay

Respondents' Views on Merit Pay	Agree		Disagree		Undecided		Total	
	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%
Frequent salary increase will make me behave well at work	86	81.2	08	07.5	12	11.3	106	100
Linking my salary increase to how well I perform at work will make me increase my level of output	92	86.8	14	13.2	0	0	106	100
For workers to exert a productive behaviour at work, their monthly pay increase must clearly differentiate workers who perform well form others who did not	106	100	0	0	0	0	106	100
Low and average performing workers will likely increase their level of performance when they notice that their colleagues at work were promoted to a higher rank due to their immense contributions to the organisation success and growth	96	90.5	04	03.8	06	05.7	106	100

Source: Survey

Table 3: Respondents' Views on Individual Performance Bonus

Respondents' Views on Individual Performance Bonus	Agree		Disagree		Undecided		Total	
	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%
Giving extra pay in form of bonus to employees' based on their individual performance will likely reduce counterproductive behaviours at work	99	93.4	07	06.6	0	0	106	100
Employees' might work hard if they are aware that there are bonuses available for them for extraordinary performance	87	82.1	11	10.4	08	07.5	106	100
I will always come to work on time to execute my daily task if am rewarded for outstanding work	106	100	0	0	0	0	106	100

done at work								
I will be more engaged at work if am given bonus for excellent work done at work in addition to my monthly pay	92	86.8	09	08.5	05	04.7	106	100

Source: Survey

Table 4: Respondents' Views on Gain Sharing

Respondents' Views on Gain Sharing	Agree		Disagree		Undecided		Total	
	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%
High performing employees will perform beyond expectation if they know that they will share part of the gain of the work done	79	74.5	16	15.1	12	11.3	106	100
Workers will want to work beyond their working hours if they are aware that they will be given some percentage from the gain of the work done	81	76.4	14	13.2	11	10.4	106	100
Gain sharing is a useful managerial tool which organisation can use to execute job with short delivery date	87	82.0	04	03.8	15	14.2	106	100
Employees' will be willing to serve their organisation customer better if their employer agree to allow them share from the job gain	106	100	0	0	0	0	106	100

Source: Survey

Table 5: Respondents' Views on Group Performance Incentive (GPI)

Respondents' Views Group Performance Incentive	Agree		Disagree		Undecided		Total	
	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%	F	F%
With GPI everyone in the group will be committed to the successful completion of the task assigned to the group	57	53.7	36	34	13	12.3	106	100
GPI enhances team bonding	101	95.2	0	0	05	04.7	106	100
Top performer in the group will be discouraged knowing that everybody in the group will be paid equally irrespective of their contribution	72	67.9	32	30.2	02	01.9	106	100
With GPI, employees' might reduce their urge to perform better	23	21.7	83	78.3	0	0	106	100

Source: Survey

Table 6: Hypothesis Testing

Variables	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Merit Pay – Employees' Work Behaviour	0.726**	0.004	106
Individual Performance Bonus – Employees' Work Behaviour	0.883**	0.000	106
Gain Sharing – Employees' Work Behaviour	0.803**	0.001	106
Group Performance Incentives – Employees' Work Behaviour	0.898**	0.000	106

Note: $p < 0.01$ (**). If you like, I can also give you this as an APA-style correlation matrix so it looks ready for a research paper.
Source: Author

4.2. Policy Implications

The results of this study carry important implications for organisational policy, particularly in shaping performance-based pay (PBP) structures. The strong, statistically significant link between merit pay and employee work behaviour suggests that incorporating merit-based salary increments can serve as an effective strategy for boosting productivity. Economically, merit pay aligns employee incentives with organisational goals, mitigating principal–agent issues by encouraging employees to act in the employer's best interest (Lazear, 2020). Moreover, performance-linked pay can raise marginal productivity per employee, delivering efficiency gains at the firm level and potentially increasing overall economic output (Böckerman et al., 2021).

The clear association between individual performance bonuses and positive workplace behaviours indicates that such bonuses could be strategically used to tackle behavioural inefficiencies like absenteeism, lateness, and disengagement. From an economic viewpoint, bonuses function as a flexible pay mechanism, allowing firms to tie compensation to measurable performance, minimising the risk of excess wage costs during low-output periods while rewarding high performance during productive cycles (Bryson et al., 2022). This approach not only motivates personal effort but can also stimulate healthy competition, generating performance spillover effects across teams.

Similarly, the significant correlation between gain sharing and improved work behaviour points to its potential as a policy tool for enhancing collective productivity. By linking efficiency gains and cost savings to shared financial rewards, gain sharing fosters cooperation, knowledge exchange, and innovation in work processes (Kim & Sung, 2021). At the macroeconomic level, broader adoption of such schemes can support wage flexibility while sustaining employment during economic downturns, as payouts adjust in line with organisational performance.

5. Conclusion

This study has provided empirical evidence supporting the significant influence of performance-based pay (PBP) mechanismson employee work behaviour. The findings consistently demonstrate that linking remuneration to performance outcomes fosters productive behaviours such as increased engagement, punctuality, teamwork, and overall commitment, while simultaneously mitigating counterproductive behaviours like absenteeism and disengagement.

These results align with prior research indicating that performance-contingent rewards can enhance employee motivation and organisational effectiveness (Gerhart, Rynes, & Fulmer, 2019; Park & Sturman, 2018; Heneman & Werner, 2015). Moreover, the study highlights nuanced challenges related to fairness perceptions in group-based incentive schemes, reinforcing concerns raised in earlier work about balancing individual and collective rewards to sustain morale and cooperation (Gerhart et al., 2019).

From a policy perspective, the study underscores the critical role that thoughtfully designed PBP systems can play in aligning employee behaviours with organisational objectives, thereby improving productivity and firm-level outcomes (Lazear, 2020; Böckerman et al., 2021). By integrating various PBP components, organisations can simultaneously leverage individual motivation and collective cooperation, maximizing the benefits while mitigating risks such as intra-group conflict or inequity perceptions.

Future research should explore longitudinal designs to assess the long-term impacts of PBP schemes on employee behaviour and organisational performance across diverse industry contexts. Additionally, qualitative investigations into employee perceptions and experiences with these pay systems would provide deeper insights into motivational dynamics and fairness considerations. Research could also examine the interaction effects of PBP with other human resource practices such as training, career development, and organisational culture to identify comprehensive strategies that enhance workforce productivity sustainably. Lastly, expanding studies to include the effects of PBP on remote and hybrid work settings, which have become increasingly prevalent, would offer timely and relevant insights for contemporary organisational management.

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