




REWARDS, PUNISHMENTS, AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF DISCIPLINE IN CREDIT UNIONS IN WEST KALIMANTAN

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Abstract

Good performance reflects staff effectiveness at work, which can be achieved through disciplined behavior. However, disciplined behavior is shaped by policies related to rewards and punishments for staff. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of rewards and punishments on the performance of Credit Union staff, with discipline as a mediating factor. The sample in this study consisted of 160 staff members from 78 branches of the Credit Union. The method employed was SEM-PLS 4.0. The findings demonstrate that disciplined behavior has a significant effect on staff performance, and the implementation of punishment significantly affects staff discipline. However, punishment does not directly influence performance, meaning it alters disciplined behavior but does not immediately improve work outcomes. Indirectly, however, punishment, through its effect on discipline, significantly influences staff performance. Meanwhile, the reward system implemented does not affect either disciplinary behavior or staff performance at Credit Union. Furthermore, indirectly, the reward system mediated by discipline also shows no significant effect on staff performance. The novelty of this study lies in the finding that the punishment system has a significant indirect effect on performance through discipline, whereas rewards do not exert any influence, either directly or indirectly. This finding challenges the prevailing assumption in human resource management, which tends to position rewards as the primary driver of performance improvement, particularly within the context of Credit Union organizations.

Keywords: Credit Union, Discipline, Performance, Punishment, Reward



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INTRODUCTION

In the context of increasingly intense global competition, organizations are required to consistently improve their performance in order to maintain sustainability and competitiveness (Marlina et al., 2021). In this regard, human resources play a strategic role, as employee performance serves as a key indicator of organizational success in achieving predetermined goals (Simamora et al., 2026). Optimal performance not only reflects individual effectiveness but also determines the overall efficiency and quality of organizational outputs (Kahono et al., 2026).

However, achieving optimal performance remains a major challenge for many organizations (Frimayasa et al., 2021). One of the critical issues that frequently arises is the low consistency of employee disciplinary behavior (Danladi & Abdullahi, 2023). Work discipline is a fundamental element in maintaining order, compliance with rules, and responsibility in task execution (Wibowo et al., 2022). Inconsistent discipline not only leads to a decline in individual performance but also has the potential to disrupt overall organizational stability and productivity (Laksana & Siregar, n.d.). In response to these issues, organizations generally rely on reward and punishment systems as managerial instruments to control and direct employee behavior (Arifin et al., 2024). Rewards are used to reinforce positive behavior through recognition and incentives (Arifin et al., 2024), while punishment functions as a corrective mechanism to suppress negative behavior and ensure compliance with organizational rules (Studies, 2024). Conceptually, these two approaches are considered complementary strategies in shaping the desired work behavior (Alam et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, empirical findings regarding the effectiveness of reward and punishment in improving employee performance remain inconsistent (Ngabito et al., 2023). Several studies have reported a positive effect of these variables on performance, as shown in studies by I. Journal et al. (2019), Wira et al. (2023), and Kadir et al. (2023). However, other studies have found that these effects are weak, insignificant, or even indirect, as reported by Kumo (2023) and Seputra et al. (2024). A major limitation of previous studies is their tendency to focus solely on the direct effects of reward and punishment on performance, without exploring the underlying psychological or behavioral mechanisms.

As found in the study conducted by Pujianti et al (2022), the results obtained in a government office setting indicate that reward and punishment have a significant effect on both work discipline and employee performance. However, these findings are not always consistent. For instance, the study by Ekowati et al., (2024) shows that reward and punishment do not have a direct effect on the performance of PDAM employees, but must operate through disciplinary behavior.

This research is important to conduct, particularly in the context of organizations such as Credit Unions, which are based on solidarity among members and function as community-based financial institutions with organizational characteristics that differ from conventional companies. The findings of this study can serve as a reference for Credit Unions in formulating appropriate reward and punishment policies for their staff, considering that common forms of punishment for poor performance include demotion and job transfer. Therefore, this study offers novelty in the context of organizations that emphasize solidarity, where rewards are given based on work outcomes or achievements, and punishments such as demotion and transfer are imposed due to poor performance to create a deterrent effect. Thus, this research differs in terms of subject and object characteristics, as well as in positioning discipline as a mediating variable that may influence staff performance or potentially show no effect at all of reward and punishment through discipline on performance.

Based on the above explanation, this study aims to analyze the effect of reward and punishment on employee performance with discipline as a mediating variable in Credit Union organizations, as well as to examine the direct effects of reward and punishment on employee performance. This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions in understanding the mechanisms for improving employee performance in a more comprehensive manner.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive method, employing a descriptive approach to examine the research object, particularly the implementation of rewards and punishments in enhancing employee performance. (Zulita et al., 2021).

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive method, employing a descriptive approach to examine the research object, particularly the implementation of rewards and punishments in enhancing employee performance. (Zulita et al., 2021). In another sense, a reward is defined as a reward or gift given as a result of outstanding achievement by individuals. It is the benefit arising as a result of overcoming the desired task

Research Target/Subject

Research targets/subjects (for qualitative research) or sample-population (for quantitative research) need to be explained clearly in this section. It is also necessary to write down the technique of obtaining subjects (qualitative research) and/or the sampling technique (quantitative research).

Research Procedure

The population in this study consists of all 734 Credit Union staff members distributed across 78 offices in West Kalimantan. The sample size was determined using the Isaac and Michael formula as cited in Sugiyono (2020) with a 10% margin of error, resulting in 160 staff members being randomly selected as respondents.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The data for this study were collected using a questionnaire. The researcher distributed the questionnaires directly to respondents for completion. This study employed a survey method, with data obtained from the original research site through the distribution of questionnaires (Sugiyono, 2017; Sugiharti et al, 2023). A questionnaire is a data collection instrument that consists of a set of written questions or statements presented to respondents Sugiyono (Monika et al., 2023). In another sense, a reward is defined as a reward or gift given as a result of outstanding achievement by individuals. It is the benefit arising as a result of overcoming the desired task (Educação, 2025) and Reward (X1) is measured through the dimensions of salary and bonuses, welfare, career development, and psychological rewards,(Ka et al., 2026).

Punishment refers to actions taken in response to performance that falls below established standards. It may take the form of warnings, sanctions, reductions in incentives, or termination of employment (Rezky et al., 2023),while punishment (X2) is assessed based on the dimensions of light, moderate, and severe punishment (Bugdol, 2023). Meanwhile, Hasibuan (Kurniawan et al., 2023) Work discipline is defined as an individual's awareness and willingness to comply with all organizational rules and prevailing norms. In this context, awareness refers to a person's attitude of voluntarily adhering to applicable regulations and recognizing their responsibilities. Work discipline (Y) is evaluated through compliance with time regulations, adherence to company policies, and conformity to behavioral rules in the workplace (Septiana et al., 2022). Employee Performance Indicators According to Mathis & Jackson in (Hidayat et al., n.d.), according (Ratikaningsih & Josiah, n.d.) Performance is the outcome achieved by an individual based on the standards applicable to the job concerned. performance indicators are as follows: Work results, Level of work errors, Task completion time, Creativity in work, Compliance with instructions

Data analysis technique

This study employs SEM-PLS analysis using SmartPLS, as it is capable of analyzing complex relationships among variables and does not require normal data distribution (Motivation, 2024). The variables examined in this study include reward, punishment, work discipline, and employee performance, which are measured using a 5-point Likert scale based on indicators adapted from previous studies. Validity is assessed through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and loading factors, while reliability is evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (Xueyun et al., 2024). The research instruments are adapted from relevant prior studies and have been adjusted to fit the context of this study (Alam et al., 2021).

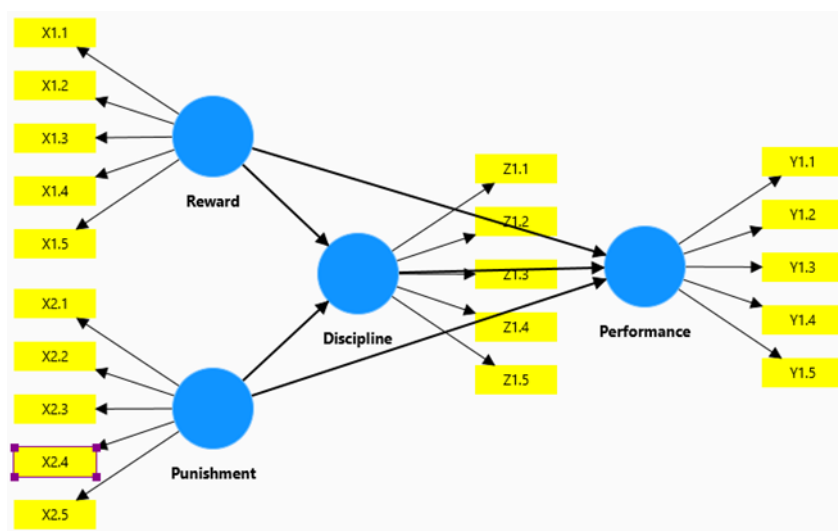


Figure 1. Framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents in this study are Credit Union staff who are directly involved in the organization’s operations. The characteristics of the respondents are analyzed based on gender and work experience to provide an overview of the respondents’ profiles in this study. Based on gender, the respondents consist of both male and female employees. This composition indicates that workforce participation within the Credit Union organization is relatively balanced between males and females, which is expected to provide diverse perspectives in responding to the research questionnaire. The following is the data on the study participants:

Table 1. Participan

No	Gender	Amount
1	Man	109 Person
2	Fimale	51 Person
	Years of Sevice	Amount
1	3-6	43 Person
2	7-9	57 Person
3	10-13	40 Person
4	< 13	20 Person
	Amount	160 Person

Based on Table 1, The participants in this study were predominantly male, consisting of 109 male staff members of CU Keling Kumang and 51 female participants. The respondents in this study are Credit Union staff with varying lengths of service; however, all respondents have a minimum of more than two years of work experience. This criterion is established based on the consideration that employees who have worked for more than two years are assumed to have sufficient understanding of the organization’s systems, policies, and culture, including the implementation of rewards, punishments, and work discipline.

In addition, having more than two years of work experience enables respondents to possess adequate exposure to various work situations, allowing them to provide more objective and accurate assessments of the variables under study. Therefore, the data obtained are expected to be more valid and capable of reflecting the actual conditions within the Credit Union organization.

Output Measurement Model (Outer Model)

The purpose of the measurement model is to represent the relationships between constructs and their corresponding variable indicators (commonly referred to as the outer model in PLS-SEM). The measurement model demonstrates how a construct is measured and assesses whether it is reliable, valid,

and consistent, taking into account convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability (Hair et al., 2017). The outer model generated in SmartPLS is presented as follows:

Evaluation of the Measurement Model (Outer Model)

The evaluation of the measurement model involves several stages, namely convergent validity testing, discriminant validity testing, and composite reliability testing.

Convergent Validity Test

Reflective indicator values and construct values can be associated to assess their validity. When one construct indicator changes, the reflective indicator reflects a corresponding change in that construct(Hair et al., 2017). The results generated using SmartPLS 4.0 are presented as follows

Table 2 Aouter Loading

	Discipline	Performance	Punishment	Reward
X1.1				0.860
X1.2				0.907
X1.3				0.884
X1.4				0.824
X1.5				0.715
X2.1			0.675	
X2.2			0.935	
X2.3			0.849	
X2.4			0.909	
X2.5			0.906	
Y1.1		0.884		
Y1.2		0.848		
Y1.3		0.854		
Y1.4		0.893		
Y1.5		0.830		
Z1.1	0.633			
Z1.2	0.862			
Z1.3	0.524			
Z1.4	0.877			
Z1.5	0.579			

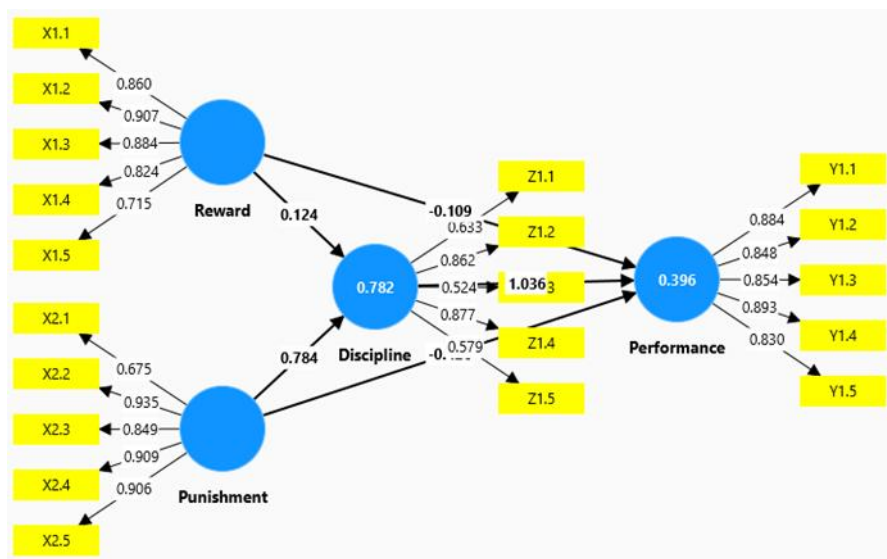


Figure 2. Output Image of Loading Factor Modeling

According to Mulyati (2024), a correlation loading value greater than 0.5 is considered to meet the requirement for convergent validity. The results indicate that the factor loading values obtained from the measurements are greater than 0.5. Thus, the parameters in this study fulfill the criteria for convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity Test

Discriminant validity is assessed for reflective indicators by comparing values in the cross-loading table. An indicator is considered valid if it shows the highest factor loading value for the intended construct compared to other constructs.

Reliability Test

The results of the reliability test indicate that a latent variable can be considered reliable if the composite reliability value is greater than 0.7 and the Cronbach’s alpha value is also greater than 0.7.

Table 3 Validity and Reability

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Discipline	0.737	0.777	0.830	0.505
Performance	0.914	0.915	0.935	0.743
Punishment	0.909	0.924	0.933	0.740
Reward	0.895	0.895	0.923	0.707

Table 3 shows that all latent variables measured in this study have Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability values greater than 0.7, indicating that all latent variables are reliable. Evaluation of the Structural Model (Inner Model)

R-squared (R²) Test on the Structural Model in SEM with PLS 4.0

R-squared (R²) Testing

Table 4 R-Square

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Discipline	0.782	0.779
Performance	0.396	0.384

Based on Table 4, the R² (R Square) value obtained is 0.779, or 77.9%, indicating that the independent variables contribute 77.9% to the dependent variable (Z), while the remaining 0.221, or 22.1%, is influenced by variables not included in this study. Based on Table 4, the R² (R Square) value obtained is 0.496, or 49.6%, indicating the percentage contribution of the independent variable to the dependent variable.

Significance Test

The purpose of the SEM-PLS significance test is to examine how internal variables are influenced by external factors. The bootstrapping process, conducted using SmartPLS 4.0 software, is employed to test these assumptions within the SEM-PLS framework. The test results demonstrate the relationships between external variables and internal variables as follows:

Table 5 Coefficient

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	Tstatistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Discipline → Performance	1.036	1.070	0.260	3.987	0.000
Punishment → Discipline	0.784	0.784	0.131	5.999	0.000
Punishment →	-0.426	-0.466	0.226	1.884	0.060

		Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	Tstatistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Performance						
Reward	->	0.124	0.131	0.151	0.819	0.413
Discipline						
Reward	->	-0.109	-0.135	0.147	0.738	0.461
Performance						

The t-table value at a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 5\%$) with the corresponding degrees of freedom (df) is 1.975, determined prior to conducting the hypothesis test.

Table 6. Indirect Effect

Variable		Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Punishment	->	0.813	0.848	0.272	2.983	0.003
Discipline -> Performance						
Reward	->	0.128	0.137	0.169	0.761	0.447
Discipline -> Performance						

The hypothesis test results for each relationship between latent variables are presented as follows:

Hypothesis Testing of the Discipline Variable (Z) on the Performance (Y) of Credit Union Staff

Based on the bootstrapping results, the T-statistic value of 3.987 is greater than the t-table value of 1.975, indicating that Discipline (Z) has a significant effect on the Performance (Y) of Credit Union employees. The original sample shows a positive value of 1.036, suggesting a positive relationship between the Discipline (Z) variable and the Staff Performance (Y) variable. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted, confirming that Discipline (Z), along with its indicators, significantly affects the latent variable Performance (Y). This finding implies that when staff members demonstrate discipline, their performance will also improve. The results of this study support the statement that discipline is the most important operational function in human resource management, as better work discipline leads to higher levels of performance (Hotmauli & Effendy, 2020), These findings are also supported by previous research.(Rezky et al., 2023)

The Effect of Punishment (X2) on Work Discipline (Z) of Credit Union Staff

Based on the T-statistic test, a value of 5.999 was obtained, which is greater than the T-table value, indicating that Punishment (X2) has a significant effect on the work discipline of Credit Union staff. The original sample shows a positive correlation of 0.784, suggesting a strong positive relationship. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that punishment has a positive and significant effect on staff work discipline can be accepted, as reflected in the work discipline indicators. According to Sudirman (Agustin, 2024), punishment represents one of the negative consequences experienced by an individual in a fair and prudent manner, based on the principles of sanctioning. In conclusion, punishment serves as a form of threat and negative consequence imposed on individuals who violate regulations, designed to create a deterrent effect in accordance with the principles of imposing sanctions, These research findings are supported by the statement(Yuningsih, 2021).

Hypothesis Testing of the Punishment Variable (X2) on the Performance (Y) of Credit Union Staff

Table 5 shows that the T-statistic value for the Punishment variable (X2) is 1.884, which is smaller than the T-table value of 1.975, with a P-value of 0.060. Therefore, the Punishment variable (X2) does not have a significant effect on the Performance (Y) Credit Union staff, and the hypothesis is rejected. The original sample (O) value is -0.426, indicating a negative relationship. This result suggests that imposing punishment on staff who violate regulations may decrease their performance. The

findings of this study are consistent with those of a study conducted by (Ekowati et al., 2024) , Punishment does not have a direct effect on employee performance. The findings of this study are consistent with Richard Lazarus's theory, which suggests that excessive punishment can lead to employee stress, ultimately resulting in decreased productivity and a decline in performance (Gligor et al., 2025).

Hypothesis Testing of the Reward Variable (X1) on Work Discipline (Z) of Credit Union Staff

The results in Table 5 indicate that Reward (X1) does not significantly affect the work discipline (Z) of Credit Union staff. The T-statistic value is 0.819, which is smaller than the T-table value of 1.975, with a P-value of 0.413, which is greater than 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis is rejected. The original sample (O) value is 0.124, showing a positive but insignificant relationship. Although the institution provides annual rewards as recognition for staff with the best performance, in practice, these rewards do not significantly influence the work discipline of Credit Union staff.

This situation may occur when the performance appraisal system is inaccurate or does not adequately reflect the actual level of work discipline, which in turn can affect the relationship between rewards and work discipline. If performance indicators such as attendance or work quality are not included in a rigorous evaluation of discipline and consistent work behavior, employees may perceive that the rewards they receive are not aligned with the discipline they demonstrate. As a result, this perception can reduce their motivation to maintain a high level of discipline in the workplace. The results of this study are also consistent with the findings of (Setiarini et al., 2025).

Several theoretical perspectives suggest that rewards are not always effective in enhancing work discipline. According to Self-Determination Theory proposed by Deci and Ryan (1971, *Deci.Pdf*, n.d.), external incentives such as rewards may undermine individuals' intrinsic motivation, resulting in discipline that is often temporary rather than sustained. Furthermore, Kohn argues that rewards can weaken internal awareness and tend to produce superficial compliance rather than genuine commitment. Therefore, long-term work discipline is more strongly influenced by internal factors than by the provision of external rewards alone.

Hypothesis Testing of the Reward Variable (X2) on the Performance (Y) of Credit Union Staff

Table 5 shows that the T-statistic value of 0.738 is smaller than the T-table value of 1.975 at the 95% confidence level. Therefore, the Reward variable (X2) does not have a significant effect on the Performance (Y) of Credit Union staff. This is also supported by the P-value of 0.461, which is greater than 0.05, indicating that the hypothesis is rejected. The original sample (O) value of -0.109 shows a negative direction, meaning that providing rewards (X2) does not improve the performance of Credit Union staff.

A number of theoretical perspectives and empirical studies suggest that rewards do not always have a significant impact on employee performance. From the viewpoint of Self-Determination Theory proposed by Deci and Ryan (Armstrong, n.d.), rewards function as external motivators that may undermine intrinsic motivation, thereby limiting their ability to enhance performance in a sustainable manner. This perspective is consistent with Kohn's argument that rewards tend to generate only short-term compliance rather than fostering long-term performance improvement. Furthermore, Herzberg's (Armstrong, n.d.) Two-Factor Theory posits that rewards primarily serve as hygiene factors, which do not directly contribute to improved performance. Empirical evidence also supports this notion, as several studies have found that rewards do not exert a significant influence on employee performance.

The Effect of Punishment on the Work Performance of Credit Union Staff through Work Discipline

Table 6 shows a T-statistic value of 2.983, which is greater than the T-table value of 1.975, with a P-value of 0.003, which is less than 0.05. This indicates that Punishment (X2) has a significant effect on the work performance of Credit Union staff when mediated by work discipline. The original sample value of 0.813 demonstrates a positive direction, meaning that the hypothesis can be accepted, along with the indicators of punishment and staff work discipline.

When punishment is applied at Credit Union, it has been shown to effectively increase staff awareness of existing regulations, thereby fostering a disciplined attitude in carrying out tasks. With improved discipline, staff members become more compliant with institutional procedures and standard operating procedures (SOPs), which ultimately has a positive impact on performance improvement. Conversely, without proper work discipline regulations, the imposition of sanctions tends to create only

superficial and temporary compliance, rather than encouraging sustainable behavioral change. These findings are consistent with the study of (Kunci, 2023).

The Effect of Rewards (X1) on the Performance (Y) of Credit Union Staff through Work Discipline

The output in Table 6 shows a T-statistic value of 0.761, which is smaller than the T-table value of 1.975, with a P-value of 0.447, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. This indicates that the provision of rewards (X1) does not significantly influence the work performance of Credit Union staff when mediated by work discipline; therefore, the hypothesis is rejected as (Rahadi et al., 2024).

However, the original sample value of 0.128 shows a positive direction, although not significant. This finding demonstrates that work discipline cannot mediate the effect of rewards (X1) on the performance (Y) of Credit Union staff. This may occur because the rewards provided are not sufficiently meaningful, and therefore do not effectively encourage disciplined behavior that could positively impact staff performance. The findings of this study indicate that rewards mediated by work discipline do not have a significant effect on employee performance. This may be because rewards function primarily as external motivators that are unable to foster internal and sustainable work discipline. According to Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation plays a more dominant role in shaping consistent work behavior. In addition, the rewards provided may not be fully based on discipline-related indicators, leading employees to not associate disciplined behavior with improved performance. Therefore, the level of discipline developed is not strong enough to significantly enhance employee performance.

The findings of this study offer important implications for human resource management practices, particularly within Credit Union organizations. The results indicate that punishment has a significant effect on work discipline, which in turn influences employee performance, whereas rewards do not demonstrate a significant impact. This suggests that organizations should place greater emphasis on the effectiveness of punishment as a mechanism for regulating work behavior. From a practical perspective, organizations are encouraged to implement punishment in a firm, consistent, and fair manner to enhance work discipline. In addition, punishment systems should be designed to be educational rather than merely punitive, so they can foster more constructive work behavior. Organizations should also re-evaluate their reward systems to ensure they are aligned with employees' needs and based on clear performance and discipline indicators. Furthermore, it is essential to strengthen the internalization of disciplinary values, as discipline grounded in internal awareness has been shown to contribute more significantly to performance improvement than reliance on external motivation alone.

This study also presents several key contributions. First, it demonstrates that rewards do not have a significant effect on employee performance, either directly or indirectly through discipline, challenging the conventional assumption in human resource management. Second, it reveals that punishment exerts a stronger indirect influence on performance through work discipline, positioning punishment as a more dominant factor in shaping employee behavior. Third, it reinforces the role of discipline as a key mediating variable that explains the relationship between organizational policies (reward and punishment) and employee performance. Finally, this study provides empirical evidence within the context of Credit Union organizations, which remain relatively underexplored in management research. Overall, these findings suggest that performance improvement is not solely dependent on reward systems, but is more strongly influenced by the mechanisms through which work discipline is developed. This study has several limitations, including a limited sample size, a specific research context, and a restricted number of variables. Future research is expected to incorporate additional variables, expand the scope of the research setting, employ a mixed-method approach, and examine potential moderating variables.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that punishment has a significant effect on work discipline, and work discipline, in turn, has a significant effect on employee performance. In addition, punishment is shown to have an indirect effect on performance through work discipline. In contrast, rewards do not demonstrate a significant influence on either work discipline or employee performance, both directly and indirectly. These findings indicate that the formation of work discipline is more effectively influenced by the implementation of punishment rather than rewards. From a theoretical perspective,

this study contributes to the human resource management literature by offering an expanded view that rewards are not always the primary driver of employee performance. It also reinforces the role of work discipline as a crucial mediating variable in explaining the relationship between organizational policies and employee performance. From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that organizations should place greater emphasis on implementing punishment in a fair, consistent, and educational manner to enhance work discipline. Additionally, organizations need to re-evaluate their reward systems to ensure they are more relevant and aligned with clear performance and discipline indicators. Therefore, human resource management policies can be made more effective in promoting improved employee performance.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

At each stage of this research, the authors contributed according to the agreement that had been made. The first author wrote the introduction and research background, the second author covered the theory and literature review, and the third author developed the research methodology. Field data collection, as well as the presentation of results and discussion, were conducted jointly by all three researchers to foster teamwork.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

This research was conducted as part of the university's threefold mission, so there is no conflict of interest regarding funding or any other matters. This research is fully supported by the institution.

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