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Bridging the gap in reward management: development and validation of a conceptual framework for employee expectations of extrinsic rewards

Abstract

Purpose: To develop and empirically validate a conceptual framework for extrinsic rewards to map employees' expectations, enabling employers to understand reward preferences and design effective extrinsic rewards.
Design/methodology/approach: This study adopts a two-phase approach. Phase 1: Framework development based on expectation-disconfirmation theory, integrating six extrinsic reward types with flexibility as a moderator. Content validity was established through an expert panel (N=6; S-CVI=0.976). The empirical validation used cross-sectional survey data from 294 employees in the UAE and Bahrain, analyzed via PLS-SEM.
Findings: The framework showed robust psychometric properties: convergent validity (all loadings >0.77, AVE >0.65, and Cronbach's >0.84), discriminant validity (HTMT <0.85), and strong predictive power (R^2=0.629, Q^2=0.476).
Originality/value: This is the first empirically validated framework that directly evaluates a priori expectations rather than post-hoc satisfaction, closing a critical gap in rewards management. The designed questionnaire serves as a standardized tool adaptable to diverse organizational contexts for researchers and practitioners.

Keywords: *extrinsic rewards, employee expectations, reward management, Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory, scale development*

JEL Classification: J33, M52, J28

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1. Introduction

Employee turnover is a key reason for the underperformance of an organization (Li et al., 2021). Employee turnover in any organization is largely driven by job satisfaction, regardless of the industry (Barnabas & Amah, 2018). The common variables of job satisfaction are salary, promotion, work environment, and job nature (Khan & Aleem, 2014). More than 80% of employees look for flexible work hours, and more than 63% seek opportunities for growth within the company (Ideanote, 2024).

Job satisfaction plays a vital role in job performance (Pugno & Depedri, 2009). Rewards and compensation significantly impact job satisfaction (Poatob, 2023). Human resource practices continue to evolve, with some traditional approaches becoming less prevalent. One of the most interesting trends in job satisfaction is that recognition and rewards are major elements for keeping employees motivated to stay with their current employer (Ideanote, 2024). Various researchers have proven a positive association between job satisfaction and extrinsic rewards (Ajmal et al., 2015). A lack of group-based reward systems can lead to disengagement rather than motivation, as employees may feel undervalued or neglected (Koskey & Sakataka, 2015). Organizations must adopt a more focused and strategic approach to employee recognition to ensure sustained motivation and satisfaction.

Researchers have explored how extrinsic motivation influences employee performance (Azhari & Riadi, 2022). However, a major element has not yet been explored by researchers. Many companies offer extrinsic compensation and rewards in general. A further limitation of these reward systems is that the same type is offered in different departments of an organization. Entry-level employees are more keen on developing their skills so that they can jump to the next level and will be looking for training courses on the skills that they have already mastered. The application of the same reward system diagonally and vertically will not be effective, as needs differ across organizations.

There is only one way organizations can ensure the effectiveness of these reward systems: to create a separate extrinsic reward system for each level of employees in the organization, tailored to their expectations, and add some flexibility so that they can choose among themselves and feel more comfortable with it. In addition, the workforce should be an active participant in these kinds of reward system generation, as they are the ultimate beneficiaries. Expectation is one of the key elements in satisfaction (Babalola Oluwayemi et al., 2018), but it is the most overlooked element when it comes to rewards. This study bridges this gap by developing an empirically validated conceptual framework and associated measurement tool. This enables a novel, practical instrument for researchers and industry experts to

assess employees' priori reward expectations, moving beyond traditional post-hoc satisfaction measures. The key aim of this study is the development and validation of a framework to capture workforce expectations towards extrinsic rewards. To support the research framework, hypotheses are proposed and are not empirically tested at this stage.

The primary reason organizations, both SME and MNCs, are forced to adopt a generic reward program is the unavailability of a framework that can be deployed to evaluate employees' expectations and, in turn, design an effective reward system. Researchers are unable to contribute because of the absence of a conceptual framework that can be modified to meet local requirements. Consequently, SMEs have no option but to rely on a generic reward system.

This article presents a conceptual framework for evaluating employees' expectations of extrinsic rewards. These results can be used by employers to design a reward system that is meaningful for the workforce and effective in improving employees' performance towards the organization. Researchers can use the framework as a base, modify it according to local characteristics, and conduct further research.

2. Literature review

Extrinsic rewards refer to all kinds of rewards, both tangible and intangible, awarded by an organization to its workforce to deliver results above the expected level. In the 21st century, reward practices continue to advance because of changing needs and social expectations. Organizations have understood the importance of non-monetary forms of rewards, such as work-life balance initiatives, employee appreciation programs, and skills development programs (Hilmarsson & Rikhardsson, 2011).

Extrinsic rewards play a major role in organizations, impacting numerous aspects of organizational outcomes and employee behavior. Research has revealed that extrinsic rewards, such as bonuses and allowances, lead to a parallel increase in employee performance (Salah, 2016). In addition to performance influence, extrinsic rewards are key in "adding values to employee job commitment and satisfaction" (Khushk, 2019). One of the most notable benefits of extrinsic compensation and rewards is their influence on employee retention (Shafira et al., 2024). Rewards and benefits serve as a "magic bullet for management to boost employee engagement, job happiness, and ultimately lead towards retention" (Hoole & Hotz, 2016). Companies are implementing various strategies to ameliorate retention, as it is a major part of organizational growth (Oorwin, 2023). Rewards such as a recognition certificate and awards do influence intrinsic motivation, but this study focuses on extrinsic reward expectations.

2.1. Selected motivational theories

2.1.1. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Frederick Herzberg's book "The Motivation to Work" was written based on observations made by Maslow and filtered the results into a two-factor theory. The theory categorizes the issues that impact employees into Hygiene Factors or Motivators. Hygiene factors can reduce dissatisfaction and can lead to satisfaction with the use of Motivators. Prior research indicates that if hygiene factors are missing, they can lead to unhappiness (Wright, 2009). Extrinsic rewards are primarily associated with hygiene factors. When hygiene factors, such as extrinsic rewards, are omitted or unable to meet the expectations of the workforce, they can immediately lead to dissatisfaction and affect the attrition rate (Nazir et al., 2016). Extrinsic rewards have evolved. Various types of extrinsic rewards are included in the motivators, such as recognition and promotion.

2.1.2. Expectancy Theory of Motivation

Motivation is essential for healthy workplace behavior (Zajda, 2023). The theory states that the motivation to perform is based on the end result being beneficial to the individual. This was divided into three sections. Expectancy: Employees trust that making an effort will achieve their expectations. Instrumentality: The workforce trusts that their contributions will be acknowledged by employers and that they will be compensated and recognized. Valence: Rewards are meaningful and valuable to the workforce. Expectancy is the most significant component of this process. Therefore, identifying the expected extrinsic reward types is essential for employers to retain their employees. In accordance with Blotnicky et al. (2015), the three elements of Vroom's expectancy theory are based on two expectancy levels: (1) Effort leads to Performance - Expectancy: This is the view that efforts will lead to adequate performance. On a workforce level, employees anticipate that greater effort will boost their job performance and (2) Performance leads to Outcomes - Expectancy: This leads to the belief that better performance will lead to the desired rewards.

2.1.3. Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT)

This theory was initially developed in the consumer behavior domain. Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) facilitates a deep understanding of human satisfaction. This theory posits that satisfaction ultimately depends on whether a person's initial expectations are met by the actual outcome. When an outcome fulfills or exceeds expectations, satisfaction occurs. Dissatisfaction occurs when an outcome falls short of one's expectations (Oliver, 1977, 1980).

Although EDT originated in the marketing context, its core human psychological principles hold true universally and have been used effectively to study job satisfaction (Brown & Peterson, 1993; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). This theory is extremely relevant to reward management. This suggests that the workforce is not tied to reward by itself, but on how it measures up against their pre-existing expectations. Therefore, measuring and understanding a priori expectations is essential, as it is an essential component in designing an effective reward system.

2.1.4. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a psychological theory that presents that people are motivated by a series of needs, which is a five-tier model (Maslow, 1943). This is illustrated as a pyramid in which people must meet their lower-tier needs first before moving on to higher levels to meet other needs (Maslow, 1943). The five-tier model starts with physiological needs, followed by safety needs, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization.

Among the types of extrinsic rewards, both bonus payments and salary increments can be linked to employees' physiological needs (Lussier & Achua, 2016). The second tier of safety includes social security and welfare. These consist mainly of job security, health, and financial security. In this tier, both bonus payments and salary increments can be correlated again, as an increased salary and bonus can improve living standards and help employees feel financially secure. The third tier reflects humans' need for social connection. This connection exists between families, friends, and other relationships in the community. Paid time off is the main factor, which is an extrinsic reward for employees. The fourth tier is esteem needs, which include self-respect, achievement, and recognition. Recognition certificates and awards boost self-esteem and respect from peers and family, fulfilling the need for appreciation. Training programs also lead to skill development and achievement, which improves confidence and creates recognition in the workplace (Noe, 2017). The highest tier is self-actualization, which includes personal growth, fulfillment, and understanding the meaning of one's life. The high flyers travel reward, which is an employer-sponsored travel reward program awarded to the top-performing employees, is linked to self-actualization, as it is an exclusive aspiration that allows individuals to explore new cultures and ideas (Maslow, 1943).

This theory is used to include the extrinsic reward type, which is available at each tier of the motivation to understand which level of needs different types of employees The lower and medium levels are expecting from their employers.

Based on the above motivational theories, the following section presents the key constructs included in the proposed framework:

1. Expected extrinsic rewards
   Employers have deployed various types of extrinsic rewards to their employees. However, the ultimate issue is that it has not helped in controlling retention rates (HR Observer, 2024). It is evident that extrinsic rewards are not effectively used in this context. Employees have already rejected one-size-fits-all compensation and rewards (Fast Company Middle East., 2024). Ultimately, what matters is whether they meet workforce expectations. Expectations are strongly and positively correlated with satisfaction (Babalola et al., 2018). These expectations must be recognized so that extrinsic rewards can be designed to meet them. Various researchers have stressed that without employee input, risk misalignment with employee needs and expectations will lead to dissatisfaction and reduced performance (Gerhart & Milkovich, 1992). Compensation and reward plans that ignore employee expectations contribute to turnover intention (Price, 2001). Each employee maintains distinct expectations according to their management level. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the expectations at each level of the workforce and design extrinsic rewards in a manner that satisfies them and increases the motivation to work, combined with exhibiting dedication to the employer.
2. Bonus payment
   Bonuses are a form of reward that positively influences employees' motivation and performance. Based on the principles of expectancy theory, bonuses develop a strong link between performance and reward (instrumentality), encouraging employees to achieve the desired results (valence) for their dedicated efforts (Vroom, 1995). Bonuses are conditional rewards that align organizational goals with employee behavior (Milkovich & Newman, 2019). This alignment supports an incentive-based performance culture in which employees are encouraged to exceed expectations and receive additional financial compensation.
   There is an underlying problem with the bonus; it is often expected by employees who are in the production line and staff who are engaged with end customers in sales. Other types of workers are included in the bonus criteria on a performance basis, based on the evaluation of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). It is essential to discover whether the bonus is the expectation of the non-sales staff and whether it motivates them to work. The greater challenge in designing bonus structures for non-sales roles is the clear objective performance metrics. It has also been discovered that motivation is often obtained through non-financial factors, such as recognition and opportunities for development (Suff & Reilly, 2005).
3. Salary increment
   Salary increment is the most vital extrinsic reward, which is essential for establishing an employment relationship. It directly contributes to retention,

job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Pay increments are ongoing financial benefits that promote long-term value and recognition among employees. Based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, salary increments specifically target psychological and safety needs by strengthening financial stability (Maslow, 1943). The absence of fair and consistent increments can crack the psychological contract between the organization and the employee, resulting in reduced performance and elevated turnover rates. Research has shown that employees place great value on salary growth (Judge et al., 2010). In addition, it is an evident form of recognition and appraisal that strengthens employees' sense of value to the organization (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020).

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, once basic and safety needs are fulfilled, they are no longer the primary motivators for humans. As a salary increment is permanent, basic and safety needs will not arise in the future unless there is a change in personal circumstances. Therefore, there is a major need to evaluate whether salary increments are effective at all levels of management. The mid- and top-level management workforce might not expect a salary increment as a reward, as they may be satisfied with the existing compensation. It is essential to map the expectations of employees at each level so that if a reward is not expected by that particular level of employee, or does not act as a motivator. Employers can then revise their reward strategies accordingly.

4. Recognition certificates and awards

Recognition certificates and awards are a type of non-monetary extrinsic reward. It is a key to accomplishing the esteemed deeds of employees, and at the same time, acts as a crucial role in improving job satisfaction and motivation. According to Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, recognition is a key satisfier that leads directly to job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1959). Such recognition is a sign that the workforce's efforts are noticed and honored by employers. Recognition also matches the concept of Reinforcement Theory, where positive social reinforcement (praise, recognition) strengthens desired behaviors (Skinner, 1953). This type of reward explicitly tackles esteem needs in Maslow's hierarchy, which includes the desire for recognition and respect from others (Maslow, 1943).

Recognition certificates and awards also improve intrinsic motivation, because they affirm employees' competence (Deci et al., 1999). It must be reaffirmed that recognition has a strong impact on lower levels of the workforce. They will be more attentive to physiological and safety needs at first. Therefore, offering recognition to a person seeking physiological and safety needs is ineffective in addressing their needs. It is necessary to examine whether lower-level employees expect recognition rewards from their employers.

5. Paid time off
   Paid Time Off (PTO) is a critical type of extrinsic reward because it plays a direct role in employee well-being and work-life balance. PTO fulfills several purposes: it meets safety needs, minimizes burnout, enables recovery, and tackles belongingness and esteem needs by indicating that employers are concerned about employees' overall wellness (Maslow, 1943). Studies have shown that PTO significantly decreases the possibility of employees quitting their jobs voluntarily, with data showing a comprehensive decrease in turnover of 35% (Vander Weerdt et al., 2025). PTO can be grouped as a hygiene factor in Herzberg's framework, a good policy where extra PTO can be awarded to employees as a reward (Herzberg, 1959). Across various regions, PTO is mandatory as per the labor law, whereas in other countries, it is the choice of the corporation (WORLD Policy Analysis Center, n.d.). Several employers provide extra PTO for high-performance employees. Top performers are rewarded with extra PTO that they can utilize. Employers can also give the option to redeem the annual leave after each year of service to outstanding performers. Therefore, it is necessary to understand employees' expectations, whether they are seeking extra PTO to fulfill their safety and belongingness needs or would like to redeem the existing PTO to accomplish their physiological and safety needs.
6. Training
   Training and development opportunities are powerful, extrinsic, and future-oriented rewards. This investment reflects that the employee is valued by the company and identifies a lasting future with them, thus improving loyalty and commitment through the principles of the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). It is a strategic extrinsic reward that makes a substantial contribution to both individual development and organizational performance. By allocating resources to employees' skills and competencies, training activities make a major contribution to their motivation and enhance team performance (Ozkeser, 2019). Training is a significant driver of boosting employee motivation, as it strengthens the individual, boosts their competence, and reveals an organization's commitment to growth (Kraimer et al., 2011).
   Employees recognize training opportunities as a form of investment in their careers by corporations (Noe, 2017). However, if the reward is to be effective, it should be relevant to individual career growth and development. Often, the same type of training program is provided to different departments in the same organization. For instance, "Train the trainer" is being provided for all managers in every department. Not everyone may seek skill addition in that domain. Finally, there is a skill addition step. However, it is not relevant to individual career goals, creating dissatisfaction among employees. Another common practice is delivering the same

level of course to high performers in the same department. Every employee in the same department will not have the same skill level, which in turn leaves the training program skill addition as a duplicate. Therefore, the key is to uncover the training needs and programs required by each individual according to their skill level.

7. High flyers travel
   High flyers travel is a type of reward program in which the top performers of the company will be awarded a domestic or international trip fully sponsored by the organization. The travel programs provided for the best-performing employees are a highly powerful and exclusive form of extrinsic reward aimed at encouraging exceptional performance. This is a distinct type of extrinsic reward that motivates the performance of recipient and non-recipient employees. Individuals who have availed themselves of this reward once will always have memories of it, which further trigger them to secure it the next time. These travel rewards have an extremely high perceived value (valence) in the framework of Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1995). As they are limited and designated for the highest performers, they create powerful incentives for employees to exert their maximum effort.
   These rewards also align with self-actualization and esteem needs, as they provide employees with experiences that go beyond everyday tasks and enhance their social status within the organization. As per the current practice in multiple organizations, employees do not have a choice of destination, and it is often handled by the company. These are mostly group trips in which other colleagues join. It is necessary to examine whether the workforce enjoys these trips and whether they serve their true purpose.
8. Flexibility
   Flexibility has evolved from a basic benefit to a cornerstone of strategic human resource management. It acts as a moderator in influencing decisions. The word flexibility started attracting interest from the 2020s, when employees started relating it to the workplace and timings. Survey data consistently show that employees have started considering flexibility in job priority (Facilitate, 2023). It has evolved into various other elements in the human resource domain. Flexibility plays a key role in extrinsic reward types. It directly influences workforce satisfaction, as they have more flexibility in extrinsic reward types and choose the required one that serves their purpose.
   The principle of flexibility significantly strengthens non-monetary extrinsic rewards. Paid time off flexibility in its use, such as the option to encash days or use leave for diverse personal needs, allows the reward to better meet individual circumstances. Training can be a perfect motivator when it aligns with employees'

specific needs (Kraimer et al., 2011). Therefore, it must be evaluated whether the workforce needs flexibility in company-arranged or self-arranged, company-funded training. In high flyers travel, the flexibility of company or leisure trips can be evaluated. It is critical to evaluate the role of flexibility in the expectation of extrinsic rewards.

After an in-depth analysis of existing literature and past research, there are multiple research gaps that this study will cover. Firstly, there is a lack of a priori reward expectation framework, as all the current frameworks are evaluation post reward satisfaction. Second, the absence of a validated instrument to capture extrinsic reward expectations. Third, remaining within the one-size-fits-all approach in the reward system, expecting the employees at different management levels will be satisfied with the same type of reward. Fourth, the underexplored role of flexibility, which can enhance the perceived value of the reward. Fifth, a lack of evidence based framework that can act as a practical tool for SMEs and researchers to understand workforce expectations towards rewards and redesign the reward strategies.

3. Conceptual framework

The core objective of this framework is to bridge the gap between employee expectations and employer-designed reward programs. The effectiveness of these reward programs is critical for employers to ensure the retention and performance of employees. The designed framework is based on the concept of a uniform compensation structure, which fails to consider the diverse expectations of employees across various departments and organizational levels. The framework is based on the foundational statement that when rewards match employees' expectations, they become more valuable, leading to boosted satisfaction, performance, and retention.

The structure of this conceptual framework is designed to function as an analytical tool for employers and researchers. The core process is explained so that the framework can be adapted to the local environment for further research by other scholars. The structure is as follows:

- identify key rewards: This framework highlights six key types of extrinsic rewards popular among the workforce.
- hypotheses formulation: For each type of reward, a hypothesis is formulated to test employees' expectations.
- utilizes a moderator: This framework introduces "flexibility" as a moderating variable to understand how it affects employee expectations on three non-monetary rewards.

The study considers several key components of extrinsic rewards as independent variables, including bonus payments, salary increments, recognition through

certificates and awards, paid time off (PTO), training opportunities, and high-flyers travel. These elements collectively represent the external motivational factors provided by organizations to influence employee performance and satisfaction. As illustrated in Figure 1, these variables are hypothesized to have a direct relationship with employees' expected extrinsic rewards.

The dependent variable in this study is the expected extrinsic rewards, which reflect how employees perceive and value these external incentives. Additionally, flexibility is introduced as a moderating variable, as it may influence the strength and direction of the relationship between paid time off (PTO), training opportunities, and high-flyers travel and employee expectations, as depicted in Figure 1.

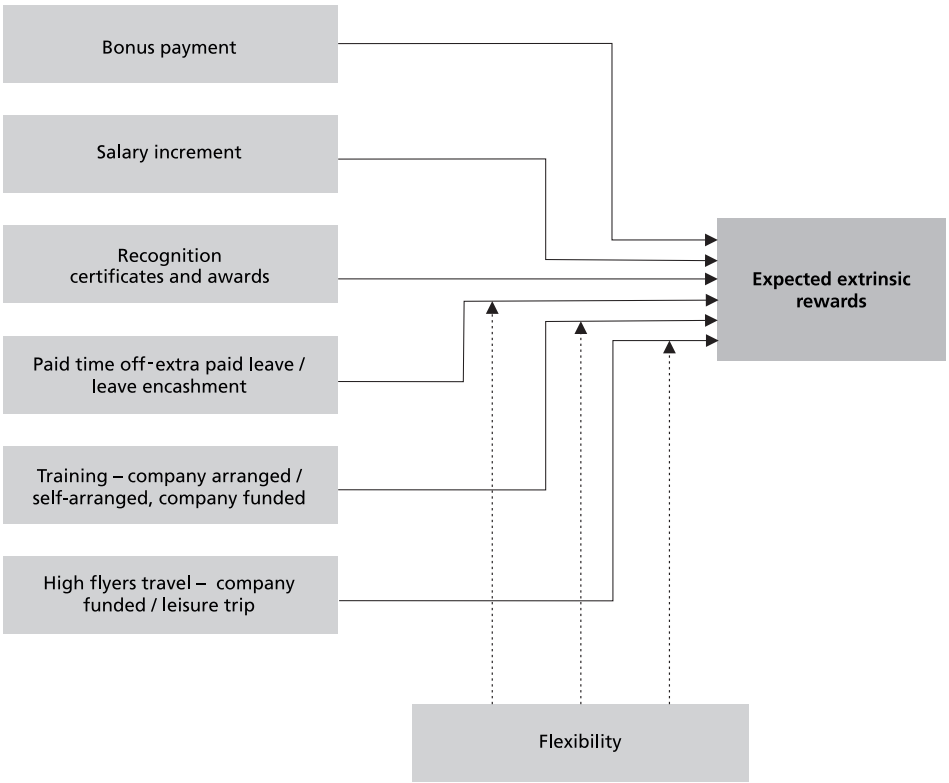

Figure 1. **Expected extrinsic rewards framework**

Source: own study

Finally, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

H1. Bonus Payments have a positive relationship to employees' overall expectations for extrinsic rewards.
H2. Salary Increment has a positive relationship to employees' overall expectations for extrinsic rewards.
H3. Recognition Certificates and Awards have a positive relationship to employees' overall expectations for extrinsic rewards.
H4. Paid Time Off has a positive relationship to employees' overall expectations for extrinsic rewards.
H5. Training Program has a positive relationship to employees' overall expectations for extrinsic rewards.
H6. High Flyers Travel has a positive relationship to employees' overall expectations for extrinsic rewards.
H7. Flexibility moderates the positive relationship between Paid Time Off and employees' overall expectations for extrinsic rewards.
H8. Flexibility moderates the positive relationship between Training Programs and employees' overall expectations for extrinsic rewards.
H9. Flexibility moderates the positive relationship between High Flyers Travel and employees' overall expectations for extrinsic rewards.

The nine hypotheses were proposed only to conceptually support the proposed framework. The testing of the hypothesis is not the objective of this paper, as the core aim is to develop and validate the framework to map expectations towards extrinsic rewards.

4. Methods

The questionnaire was developed using established scales from prior research to map employees' expectations of extrinsic rewards and empirically test the conceptual framework and the corresponding hypotheses. The questionnaire adopted a 5-point Likert scale applied consistently to each statement, selected based on various methodological considerations. Item statements were systematically adapted from established, validated scales to capture employee expectations while maintaining the structure and points of the original scale (Table 1):

- expected extrinsic rewards: four statements from the pay satisfaction questionnaire were adapted and combined to form three statements (Heneman & Schwab, 1985),
- bonus payment: four factors were adapted from the lump-sum bonus satisfaction scale (Sturman & Short, 2000) for four statements,
- salary increment: from the pay satisfaction questionnaire, three statements have been customized for forming three statements (Heneman & Schwab, 1985). One

factor from the job satisfaction survey was modified to form one statement (Spector, 1985),
- recognition certificates and awards: two factors were extracted from the job satisfaction survey (Spector, 1985). One statement was adapted from recognition-related items (Eisenberger et al., 1986). These were combined to create three statements,
- training: adapted from the T-VIES to form one statement for valence, instrumentality, and expectancy (Zaniboni et al., 2011),
- high flyers travel: six statements from the pay satisfaction questionnaire were combined and adapted to create three statements (Heneman & Schwab, 1985),
- paid time off: three statements from the job satisfaction survey were adapted to create three statements (Spector, 1985),
- flexibility: evaluated using perceived flexibility and supportive policies (Hill et al., 2008). Adaptations were made exclusively to measure choice in paid time off, training, and travel rewards.

Table 1. **Item statements**

Constructs	Variables	Statements
Expected extrinsic rewards	1.1	I expect to receive meaningful extrinsic rewards from my employer
	1.2	I anticipate that my organization will provide appropriate extrinsic rewards that match my contributions
	1.3	I expect my employer to offer a comprehensive range of extrinsic rewards
Bonus payment	1.4	The amount of bonuses provided would matter to me
	1.5	Bonuses should be directly linked to performance
	1.6	The method of awarding bonuses should be fair and transparent
	1.7	Bonus opportunities should be available regularly, not just as a one-time reward
Salary increment	1.8	Regular salary increases are an important part of a fair reward system
	1.9	The process for deciding salary raises should be fair
	1.10	Supervisors should have only some control over salary increments
	1.11	Salary raise opportunities should be linked to performance
	1.12	Opportunities for salary growth should be part of employment

Recognition certificates and awards	1.13	Good performance should be acknowledged with formal recognition, such as certificates or awards
	1.14	I expect to receive recognition for my contributions to maintain my motivation
	1.15	Recognition from the employer is expected for work contributions
Training	1.16	Training opportunities would support my career growth
	1.17	Training should provide knowledge directly applicable to my work
	1.18	I expect the organization to provide training that enables me to master new job skills
High flyers travel	1.19	Company-sponsored travel rewards for high performers are highly valued
	1.20	Travel rewards would motivate higher performance
	1.21	Travel benefits provide more meaningful experiences than other rewards
Paid time off	1.22	Paid Time Off is an essential element of a reward system
	1.23	The amount of paid leave offered should meet employee needs
	1.24	Additional leave for strong performance is an attractive reward
Flexibility	1.25	Having the option to choose between extra paid leave or cash compensation makes rewards more meaningful
	1.26	Flexibility in selecting training programs increases their value
	1.27	Choosing between company-organized travel and personal travel options makes travel rewards more attractive
	1.28	The ability to adjust benefits to personal needs enhances the overall reward system

Source: own study

The designed questionnaire items and statements for the proposed framework were adapted from validated existing scales. These had to be modified to align with the theoretical focus of the framework. This is essential because the framework focuses on employees' a priori expectations of rewards rather than measuring post-hoc satisfaction. This is in accordance with the foundational principles of Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), a framework explaining how satisfaction arises when expectations are met or exceeded (Oliver, 1977, 1980). Researchers have effectively applied the theory to study the antecedents of salespersons' job satisfaction (Brown & Peterson, 1993) and job satisfaction antecedents (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Following this logic, the proposed framework focuses on the initial expectations of extrinsic rewards.

Existing scales, such as the pay satisfaction questionnaire (Heneman & Schwab, 1985), capture the results at the end of the process. This framework is designed to capture what employees expect and value in the reward system, ultimately ensuring satisfaction if they meet the expectations. Therefore, the wording was systematically altered. For instance, the statement measuring satisfaction, "I am satisfied with my last salary raise" was rephrased to measure the expectation: "Regular salary increases are an important part of a fair reward system". This adaptation ensured that the statement was aligned with the core theoretical construct of the study, employee expectations.

The content validity index (CVI) was tested using domain experts in the human resources industry. A minimum of three experts is required to establish content validity; having more than ten experts will decrease the chances of agreement (Polit & Beck, 2006). Six domain experts – four academic and two industry experts–were selected based on their expertise and experience (Table 2).

Table 2. **Details of domain experts for content validity**

Designation of domain experts	Organization	Years of experience
1- Associate Professor	Bahrain Polytechnic	21
2- Associate Professor	University College of Bahrain	10
3- Associate Professor	Gulf University	10
4- Associate Professor	Kingdom University	21
5- Human Resources Manager	Hilton Garden Inn	11
6- Vice President HR	Adilstone Group	17

Source: own study

The panel of experts was asked to provide their viewpoints on the framework proposed to evaluate extrinsic reward expectations. The CVI was calculated for all individual statements (I-CVI) and the complete scale (S-CVI). The experts were asked to rate each statement in terms of its relevance. To mitigate the neutral response, a 4-point scale was used: 1 = not relevant, 2 = somewhat relevant, 3 = quite relevant, and 4 = highly relevant. A comment section was added to each statement, and instructions were provided to fill in if any of them were marked as 1, 2, or 3. It is proposed that in the case of five or fewer experts, I-CVI should be 1.00, and in the case of six or more experts, I-CVI should not be less than 0.78. To ensure the content validity of the overall statements in the framework, the S-CVI was also computed in two ways: S-CVI (Universal Agreement) and S-CVI (Average). The Minimum S-CVI recommended is 0.8 to ensure content validity (Polit & Beck, 2006). The Kappa Statistic was also used to ensure that the random chance

agreement was removed, and values above 0.74 were considered excellent (Polit & Beck, 2006).

Table 3. **Ratings of 28 statements of expected extrinsic rewards by six experts**

Variables	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Expert 4	Expert 5	Expert 6	No in agreement	I-CVI	Pc	Kappa statistic
1.1	4	3	4	4	4	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.2	4	4	3	4	4	3	6	1	0.015625	1
1.3	4	4	4	3	4	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.4	4	4	4	4	3	2	5	0.83	0.09375	0.81
1.5	4	4	4	4	4	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.6	4	4	4	4	4	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.7	4	3	3	4	4	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.8	3	4	4	4	4	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.9	4	4	4	4	4	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.10	4	3	3	4	4	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.11	2	3	4	4	3	4	5	0.83	0.09375	0.81
1.12	4	4	4	4	3	3	6	1	0.015625	1
1.13	4	4	3	4	4	3	6	1	0.015625	1
1.14	3	3	4	3	4	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.15	4	4	2	4	3	3	5	0.83	0.09375	0.81
1.16	4	4	4	4	4	3	6	1	0.015625	1
1.17	4	4	4	3	3	3	6	1	0.015625	1
1.18	4	4	3	4	4	3	6	1	0.015625	1
1.19	3	3	3	4	3	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.20	4	4	4	3	3	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.21	4	2	4	3	3	4	5	0.83	0.09375	0.81
1.22	4	4	4	3	4	3	6	1	0.015625	1
1.23	4	4	4	3	4	4	6	1	0.015625	1

1.24	4	4	4	4	4	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.25	4	4	4	4	3	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.26	4	4	4	4	4	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.27	4	4	4	3	3	4	6	1	0.015625	1
1.28	4	3	4	4	4	4	6	1	0.015625	1

Note- Variables 1.1-1.28 statements can be found in Table 1
Source: own study

The I-CVI for all statements ranged from 0.83 to 1.00. The S-CVI (Average) was 0.976, and the S-CVI (Universal Agreement) was 0.857, which confirmed the validity of the statements for capturing the expected extrinsic rewards. Kappa Statistic ranged from 0.81 to 1 for all the items. Even though all the content validity indexes were excellent, experts who marked 2,3 in relevance comments were taken into consideration, and minor revisions were made to 10 statements (Table 3).

A construct and reliability test is required to validate the proposed framework so that SMEs and researchers can deploy it without any further validation from their end. To determine the minimum sample size, the "10 times" rule of thumb was used (Hair et al., 2010). As the number of items in this framework is 28, the minimum acceptable size for validating the framework is 280 respondents. The final sample of 294 is deemed strong, providing adequate statistical power for the complexity of the proposed PLS-SEM model, which includes eight latent variables and their associated measurement items. Employees in Bahrain and the UAE were selected as the study population. Emphasis was placed on including employees with work experience of one year or more. A non-probability sampling approach was used because of practical constraints. Online forms were used to collect data, as details of the research were posted in multiple forums and groups, and 312 respondents completed the survey. Freelancers and Self-Employed individuals were excluded from the survey because their expectations are likely to vary or may not have any expectations. We also received responses from respondents employed in the public sector, but they were removed because public sector rewards and compensation are governed by different government policies. After excluding respondents in the categories mentioned above, the final sample size used for data analysis was 294, which is above the minimum acceptable size of 280 respondents.

5. Results

This study used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4.1.1.6. software to validate the framework. The results start with the section

of convergent validity, showing loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, CR (rho_c), and AVE in Table 4. The acceptable range for loadings and AVE is 0.5 or higher, and Cronbach's Alpha and CR are 0.7 or higher. The values shown in Table 4 indicate a high correlation among the items.

Table 4. **Convergent validity**

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Expected extrinsic rewards	EER1	0.914	0.888	0.931	0.817
	EER2	0.903			
	EER3	0.896			
Bonus payment	BP1	0.824	0.849	0.898	0.687
	BP2	0.858			
	BP3	0.852			
	BP4	0.778			
Salary increment	SI1	0.775	0.821	0.869	0.571
	SI2	0.797			
	SI3	0.727			
	SI4	0.745			
	SI5	0.731			
Recognition certificates and awards	RCA1	0.862	0.782	0.872	0.695
	RCA2	0.787			
	RCA3	0.850			
Training	TRN1	0.912	0.819	0.893	0.735
	TRN2	0.796			
	TRN3	0.860			
High flyers travel	HFT1	0.861	0.809	0.884	0.718
	HFT2	0.826			
	HFT3	0.855			

Paid time off	PTO1	0.857	0.836	0.898	0.746
	PTO2	0.862			
	PTO3	0.873			
Flexibility	FLX1	0.718	0.810	0.875	0.637
	FLX2	0.864			
	FLX3	0.792			
	FLX4	0.811			

Source: author's calculation using SmartPLS

To examine the discriminant validity, two tests were conducted. The first is the Fornell and Larcker criterion, which states that the measurement model is considered to have discriminant validity if the square root of the AVE of each construct is larger than the correlation with other constructs. As shown in Table 5, the square root of all constructs is larger than their correlation.

Table 5. **Discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion**

	BP	EER	FLX	HFT	PTO	RCA	SI	TRN
BP	0.829							
EER	0.629	0.904						
FLX	0.551	0.574	0.798					
HFT	0.508	0.539	0.418	0.847				
PTO	0.572	0.221	0.483	0.312	0.864			
RCA	0.522	0.666	0.588	0.562	0.296	0.834		
SI	0.613	0.450	0.608	0.357	0.602	0.511	0.755	
TRN	0.368	0.492	0.580	0.315	0.282	0.523	0.448	0.858

Note: BP = Bonus Payment; EER = Expected Extrinsic Rewards; FLX = Flexibility; HFT = High Flyers Travel; PTO = Paid Time Off; RCA = Recognition Certificates and Awards; SI = Salary Increment; TRN = Training.

Source: author's calculation using SmartPLS

The Second criterion used to assess discriminant validity was the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). Table 6 shows the HTMT for the overall construct of the study, and all values are below 0.9, establishing that the constructs are distinct from each other.

Table 6. **Discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio**

	BP	EER	FLX	HFT	PTO	RCA	SI	TRN
BP								
EER	0.716							
FLX	0.659	0.670						
HFT	0.615	0.612	0.506					
PTO	0.687	0.243	0.594	0.388				
RCA	0.639	0.788	0.734	0.696	0.369			
SI	0.704	0.469	0.749	0.409	0.747	0.584		
TRN	0.434	0.576	0.702	0.391	0.332	0.657	0.528	

Note: BP = Bonus Payment; EER = Expected Extrinsic Rewards; FLX = Flexibility; HFT = High Flyers Travel; PTO = Paid Time Off; RCA = Recognition Certificates and Awards; SI = Salary Increment; TRN = Training.

Source: author's calculation using SmartPLS

The structural model of the framework was evaluated using four different metrics. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is used to examine the issue of higher correlation between the exogenous variables of the framework. The VIF is shown in Table 7, and the acceptable range is less than 5.0. Both the individual and mean scores of the VIF were less than 5.0, affirming that there were no issues with multicollinearity between the exogenous variables of the study. The Coefficient of Determination (R^2) was used to validate the overall predictive intensity of the dependent variable. The R^2 values are presented in Table 8. A value greater than 0.26 represents a large effect, demonstrating extreme explanatory power. The next metric is Effect Size (f^2), which helps identify the in size of R^2 due to specific exogenous constructs on the endogenous construct. A value of 0.35 is considered a large effect, 0.15 a medium effect size, and 0.02 a small effect. In Table 9, f^2 is displayed for all Exogenous Latent Constructs. All the variables showed a small effect, except bonus payment, which showed a medium effect, and salary increment, which showed no effect. The last metric, Predictive Relevance (Q^2), is essential to indicate that the framework is capable of predicting the endogenous

latent construct. A Q^2 value greater than 0 indicates that the model has predictive relevance. In Table 10, the Q^2 value is displayed and **is** above 0, affirming the predictive relevance of the endogenous latent construct. As data were collected via self-reported questionnaires at a single time point, we assessed common method bias (CMB) using VIF. The full collinearity VIF values (all <3.3) further confirm that common method variance does not threaten the validity of these findings.

Table 7. **Variance Inflation Factor**

	VIF
BP	2.178
FLX	2.272
HFT	1.624
PTO	1.833
RCA	2.158
SI	2.270
TRN	1.649
Mean VIF	1.998

Note: BP = Bonus Payment; FLX = Flexibility; HFT = High Flyers Travel; PTO = Paid Time Off; RCA = Recognition Certificates and Awards; SI = Salary Increment; TRN = Training.

Source: author's calculation using SmartPLS

Table 8. **R^2 of endogenous latent construct**

	R^2	Result
EER	0.629	Large effect

Note: EER = Expected Extrinsic Rewards.

Source: author's calculation using SmartPLS

Table 9. **Effect size of exogenous latent constructs**

	f^2	Result
BP	0.224	Medium effect
FLX	0.039	Small
HFT	0.032	Small
PTO	0.103	Small
RCA	0.097	Small
SI	0.000	No effect
TRN	0.023	Small

Note: BP = Bonus Payment; FLX = Flexibility; HFT = High Flyers Travel; PTO = Paid Time Off; RCA = Recognition Certificates and Awards; SI = Salary Increment; TRN = Training.

Source: author's calculation using SmartPLS

Table 10. **Predictive relevance of endogenous variable**

	Q^2predict
EER	0.485

Note: EER = Expected Extrinsic Rewards.

Source: author's calculation using SmartPLS

6. Discussion

The framework was rigorously tested to ensure its effectiveness, so that it does not remain a conceptual framework but a validated framework that can be used for future research in various industries. Hypothesis and moderation tests were not conducted because the main reason for the data analysis was to validate the framework. The respondents were from two countries and various industries working at various levels of management; therefore, if the hypothesis is tested, it will be scattered and form a one-size-fits-all approach. The primary goal was to establish the measurement reliability and construct validity of the reward expectation framework, which was achieved. To the best of our knowledge, there have been no prior studies that focused on capturing a priori expectations of the workforce towards extrinsic rewards or any other type of rewards.

For sampling the workforce in two countries across industries and management levels, heterogeneity was chosen as it is methodologically appropriate for validation studies (Hinkin, 1998).

A content validity test was performed to verify that the adapted statements will be able to capture the expectations of the workforce. Content validity metrics were all in the acceptable range, confirming that the content matches to capture the expectation of extrinsic rewards. Convergent validity, discriminant validity, and the structural model were tested. All metrics of the structural model showed a higher correlation of both endogenous and exogenous variables. Every metric, from content validity to the structural model, validated the conceptual framework of expected extrinsic rewards.

All current instruments, such as the pay satisfaction questionnaire, measure post-reward evaluation, but the framework in this article uniquely captures a priori expectations. This distinction is theoretically critical, as Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory posits that satisfaction arises when expectations are fulfilled (Oliver, 1980). Much of the existing research has concentrated on outcomes rather than antecedents.

The current framework only covers six major types of extrinsic rewards. Rewards vary across industries and countries. Therefore, when researchers or employers plan to add another extrinsic reward related to their industry or demographics, new statements must be adapted from this framework. The content and framework must be revalidated to ensure the effectiveness of the research, which is the main limitation of this framework.

This framework provides directions for researchers and organizations to conduct research on diverse viewpoints and understand the expectations of extrinsic rewards in various industries. Future research should also prove that expectations differ according to the level of management.

Organizations can deploy this framework as a diagnostic tool to evaluate and redesign their current reward systems. This helps employers remove undifferentiated reward policies implemented in multiple departments. Enterprises can focus on rewards that align closely with the needs of the workforce, thereby enhancing satisfaction and retention. For SMEs, the framework is highly significant, considering their financial and Human Resource limitations. SMEs can utilize this framework within the workforce and design reward programs from the start or redesign existing policies (Armstrong & Murlis, 2007).

This framework offers considerable advantages to researchers. Research specialists can alter the reward types to match and study the reward expectations within the socio-economic context, understanding that employee expectations vary across industries and regions. For example, while ESOPs may be among the expectations in countries such as the U.S.A. and India, they will not be effective in regions like

the Gulf, where expatriates dominate the workforce. Implementing the framework in diverse scenarios will contribute to theoretical knowledge by offering cross-cultural insights and extending the literature on employee expectations (Babalola et al., 2018; Lee, 2006). Its significance extends to sector-specific studies, mainly in limited research industries such as hospitality, healthcare, and education. By effectively using this framework, researchers can gather data to develop an effective reward system tailored to the needs and expectations of the workforce in numerous industries and regions.

7. Conclusion

This study introduces a validated conceptual framework designed to create an effective reward system by evaluating employee expectations. Moving away from the one-size-fits-all approach, the framework stresses aligning the reward to particular workforce needs, thus ensuring employee satisfaction and retention. By discovering six important extrinsic reward types: bonus payment, salary increment, recognition certificates, paid time off, training, and high flyers travel, while initiating a flexibility factor for three types of rewards, it highlights the need for options in rewards. The recommended questionnaire further allows for concrete mapping of employee expectations towards rewards, providing employers with an analytical tool to redesign their reward policies. This framework also enhances theoretical insights through the inclusion of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Vroom's Expectancy Theory, and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. The adaptability of the framework, which allows it to be executed in different environments, makes it beneficial for both SMEs and researchers. Finally, this framework emphasizes that integrating employee expectations with extrinsic rewards is crucial for sustainable organizational success.

Authors' contribution

N.P.S.: article conception, theoretical content of the article, research methods applied, conducting the research, data collection. **N.B.R.:** analysis and interpretation of results, draft manuscript preparation.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

The authors have used the AI Tools Grammarly and Paperpal to ensure clarity of thoughts. No other AI tools have been used.

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