



Analysis of the connection between the reward system and the perception of efficiency in sales management

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between satisfaction with the reward system and the perception of salary fairness of food industry sales management employees. The starting point is that employees do not value the reward only through the amount of salary, but through the perception of fairness and transparency. Quantitative research was conducted through a standardized questionnaire on a sample of $N = 92$ sales management employees in the Croatian food industry. Variables were measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 10, and the data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation and difference testing. An extremely strong positive correlation between reward satisfaction and the perception of remuneration fairness ($\rho=0.981$; $p<0.01$) was found, with almost identical mean values, and employees do not perceive these two variances separately. Fairness and transparency of the remuneration system are essential to maintain motivation and retain employees. The paper provides an empirical insight into the sales management of the food industry, a sector that is insufficiently researched.

Keywords: compensation systems, wage fairness, employee motivation, performance management, sales management

JEL classification: M52; J33; M54

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DOI 10.32015/JIBM.2025.17.2.9

Mednarodno inovativno poslovanje =
Journal of Innovative Business and Management

ISSN 1855-6175

Analiza povezave med sistemom nagrajevanja in zaznavo učinkovitosti v prodajnem managementu

Povzetek: Namen tega prispevka je preučiti odnos med zadovoljstvom z nagrajevalnim sistemom in zaznavo pravičnosti plačila med zaposlenimi v prodajnem managementu živilske industrije. Izhodišče je, da zaposleni nagrade ne vrednotijo le skozi višino plače, temveč skozi zaznavo pravičnosti in transparentnosti. Kvantitativna raziskava je bila izvedena s pomočjo standardiziranega vprašalnika na vzorcu $N = 92$ zaposlenih v prodajnem managementu hrvaške živilske industrije. Spremenljivke so bile merjene na Likertovi lestvici od 1 do 10, podatki pa analizirani z deskriptivno statistiko, Spearmanovo korelacijo in testi razlik. Ugotovljena je bila izjemno močna pozitivna korelacija med zadovoljstvom z nagrajevanjem in zaznavo pravičnosti plačila ($\rho = 0.981$; $p < 0.01$), z skoraj identičnimi povprečnimi vrednostmi, pri čemer zaposleni teh dveh vidikov ne dojemajo ločeno. Pravičnost in transparentnost sistema nagrajevanja sta ključni za ohranjanje motivacije in zadržanje zaposlenih. Prispevek ponuja empirični vpogled v prodajni management živilske industrije, sektor, ki je premalo raziskan.

Ključne besede: sistemi nagrajevanja, pravičnost plač, motivacija zaposlenih, upravljanje uspešnosti, prodajni management

1 INTRODUCTION

Designing a reward system in modern companies is an economic issue, but also a question of the perception of fairness, respect for employees and managerial participation (Zhu et al., 2025). Awards imply financial compensation for the work done, they also work on a symbolic level that tells employees how much their engagement is valued, whether the company is fair and whether there is an equivalent connection between the engagement and the associated recognition. Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman (1959) pointed out that pay and a sense of security prevent dissatisfaction, but do not in themselves create true motivation, but recognition, responsibility and opportunities for advancement shape real work engagement. Vroom (1964) goes on to say that an individual will make an effort only if he believes that this effort will be turned into an effect, and the effect will be rewarded. Adams (1965) adds a key social perspective: employees evaluate the fairness of remuneration not in absolute amounts, but by comparing, they ask themselves whether the ratio of their effort invested and the rewards received for it corresponds to the ratios of other employees. The sense of experiencing the fairness of the reward system is inseparable from its motivational component (Chaudhry, Coyle-Shapiro, & Wayne, 2020).

Although in all three classical theories, Herzberg's two-factor theory, Vroom's theory of expectation, and Adams' theory of fairness emphasize the relationship between effort, reward, and motivation, the difference is evident in their focus. Herzberg distinguishes between factors that prevent dissatisfaction from those that encourage real motivation, while Vroom introduces the cognitive dimension of expected outcomes, while Adams further emphasizes social comparison and a sense of fairness between employees. In recent research, it is emphasized that these theories complement each other, but also that their empirical application encounters methodological challenges, for example, the overlap of the constructs of satisfaction and fairness and the possibility of bias due to the subjects' self-assessments. This opens up the need for an integrated approach that looks at fairness in the broader context of the legitimacy of reward systems.

The formed logic is confirmed by recent empirical research, which consistently shows that the perception of fairness and transparency in correlation with rewards are strong drivers of motivation, additional engagement and behaviour for the benefit of the company. Colquitt et al. (2020) have shown that the experience of fairness is one of the strongest signs of work engagement and organizational civic behaviour. Kuvaas, Buch and Dysvik (2022) found that transparent reward criteria encourage intrinsic motivation because employees believe that the system reflects their actual contribution rather than organizational policy or favouritism. In the case where employees perceive rewarding as deserved and consistently applied, they are more likely to identify with the organization and maintain high efficiency in the long run, while on the contrary, the experience of arbitrariness, bias or unequal treatment degrades motivation and work efficiency (De Clercq, Haq & Azeem, 2023).

The link between reward, fairness and motivation is seen as particularly pronounced in demanding jobs such as sales management in the food industry. The industry recognizes strong competitive pressures, sensitive margins, and complex and multi-channel distribution systems (Galić, Sudarić, & Vretenar Cobović, 2025). There is also a pronounced seasonality of demand, while at the same time it is expected to achieve sales targets while maintaining relationships with key customers. Research by Kim and Yang (2021) finds that in food sales teams, recognition and a sense of fairness are key to maintaining long-term commitment to work. When the reward system is perceived as fair and clear, a greater willingness of employees for additional engagement is recorded (Thneibat & Sweis, 2023). On the contrary, when this system is perceived as unfair, an increase in withdrawal, emotional detachment and hidden dissatisfaction is observed (Bahtijarević-Šiber, 2014).

Despite the current knowledge, a pronounced research gap is still recognized in the literature. Although it has long been emphasized in theory that satisfaction with the reward system and perceived salary fairness are interrelated concepts, there is still a lack of quantitative research that would directly examine this relationship within the context of sales management in the food industry (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Most contemporary studies are based on analyses of other sectors, such as construction (Chapano & Iwu, 2025), business consulting services (Costa et al., 2022), service industries with a high degree of customer interaction (Rastogi & Karatepe, 2022) or small family and medium-sized enterprises (Dowie et al., 2025). However, these sectors differ significantly from the food industry in the amount of margins, the duration and dynamics of sales cycles, bargaining power in relation to customers, labour intensity and seasonal fluctuations in demand. Due to these differences, it has not yet been confirmed whether the same logic of the relationship between fairness and reward satisfaction applies in the sales management environment of the food sector. In other words, there is still a lack of empirical evidence to show how these specific conditions affect the perception of fairness and the motivation of employees within the industry. The uncovered question defines the research problem of this paper. The analysis focuses on employees in sales managerial roles in the food industry, and the goal is to answer two questions: (1) Is there a strong positive correlation between satisfaction with the reward system and the perception of pay fairness? and (2) Do employees evaluate these two dimensions at different levels, or do they actually perceive them as part of the same broader experience of "being fairly rewarded"? In this way, the paper addresses a clearly identified gap in the literature and the lack of sector-specific, data-based analyses of reward fairness in sales management in the food industry, although previous research highlights that the experience of fairness is key to employee motivation and retention (Colquitt et al., 2020; Kim & Jang, 2021; Kuvaas et al., 2022).

Based on the established theoretical and empirical framework, two working hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: There is a strong positive correlation between satisfaction with the reward system and the perception of salary fairness of sales management employees in the food industry.
- H2: There is no statistically significant difference between the average ratings of satisfaction with the reward system and the perceived salary fairness, which would mean that employees perceive these factors as mutually harmonized dimensions of organizational fairness.

The analysis measures satisfaction with the reward system, perception of salary fairness, and related motivational ratings. Analytics include descriptive statistics, normality tests, nonparametric correlation (Spearman's ρ), and a test of differences in paired estimates (Wilcoxon's character and rank test) to simultaneously assess (a) the strength of the association and (b) any differences in the average scores of these two factors. In this way, the research question is directly linked to the measured perceptions of employees and empirical insight into the movement of satisfaction and the experience of fairness in this specific industry context is given, or they will need to be treated as analytically separate dimensions in future research.

2 METHODOLOGY

The research applies a quantitative approach based on a survey of employees employed in the sales management of the food industry. The aim of the study was to empirically examine the correlation between two key perceptual variables: (1) satisfaction with the reward system and (2) perception of income fairness. The chosen approach enables the systematic collection and analysis of subjective attitudes of employees on a sufficiently

large sample within one organization. This provides reliable insight into how employees perceive the fairness and effectiveness of the reward system. In addition, the use of quantitative methodology enables a statistical assessment of the strength and direction of the correlation between these variables, thus creating the foundations for a clearer understanding of the dynamics between the perception of fairness and reward satisfaction.

Research data were collected using a standardized questionnaire that was distributed to the employees of the Croatian meat industry company. The choice of the company as the target sample was chosen deliberately, because it is an economically significant business entity with a clearly defined sales function and a structured remuneration system. It is these characteristics that make it a suitable environment for analysing the perception of fairness and reward satisfaction in terms of expressed market and commercial pressure. The survey included a total of 92 employees who perform tasks within sales management. The sample included employees of different ages, genders, length of service and hierarchical levels within the company's sales management.

2.1 Measurement instruments and validation

The research tool consisted of 12 statements divided into two groups: satisfaction with the reward system (6 related claims) and perception of salary fairness (6 related claims). Examples of claims include: "My company's reward system is transparent" and "My salary is commensurate with the effort I put in." All claims were measured on a Likert scale of 1 to 10.

The reliability of the measurement constructs was checked by Cronbach α coefficient ($\alpha=0.89$ for satisfaction with the reward system; $\alpha=0.87$ for the perception of fairness), and this shows high internal consistency.

As the distributions of variables deviate from normal (verified by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, $p<0.05$), the Spearman correlation coefficient (ρ) was used to estimate the correlation of the variables and the Wilcoxon test of signs and ranks to test the differences in paired scores (Table 1).

The survey questionnaire used in the research is structured through three thematic units. The first unit included the collection of basic demographic and work characteristics of respondents such as gender, age, length of service and position in the company. The collected data served as a basis for describing the sample and enabled a better understanding of the context in which employees form their own attitudes about the reward system. The second thematic unit is focused on measuring satisfaction with the reward system. Respondents assessed the transparency of reward criteria, the correlation between realized performance and rewards received, and the compliance of the reward system with personal expectations. In this way, satisfaction was reflected as an experience of system transparency, consistency and meaningfulness from the employee's perspective. The third thematic unit focused on the perception of income fairness. In this part, the respondents assessed the extent to which they believe that their salary is in line with the results achieved, i.e. that it is comparable to the salaries of colleagues and proportional to the effort invested. Such a conception of justice itself stems from the theory of justice, according to which the sense of justice is formed by comparing one's own contribution and the reward received.

The observations of the conducted research were entirely collected using a unique numerical scale. All claims were scored using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 10, with a value of 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and a value of 10 indicating "strongly agree".

The process of analysing the collected data was carried out according to pre-structured step-by-step processes. Descriptive statistics (means, range) were calculated, then the correlation analysis (Spearman's ρ) was used to assess the correlation of variables, and the Wilcoxon difference test was used to examine the differences in paired scores.

The entire data collected was processed using the IBM SPSS 26.0 statistical package. Its application is multiple, it enabled the systematic organization of the database, the calculation of basic descriptive indicators and the implementation of tests that examined the relationships and differences between the observed variables.

The presented research in this paper is part of a broader doctoral research project that deals with reward systems and the perception of income fairness within the sales management of the food industry. In this article, a selected segment of the collected data is analysed, with a special focus on examining the relationship between satisfaction with the reward system and perceived salary fairness. Such a focus allows for a deeper understanding of how employees in this specific sector connect a sense of fairness with their own satisfaction with the system in which they are employed.

Table 1. Hypotheses and tests used
(source: Author, 2025)

Hypothesis	Description	Statistical method used
H1	There is a positive correlation between satisfaction with the reward system and the perception of salary fairness.	Spearman's correlation coefficient (ρ)
H2	There is no statistically significant difference between the average scores of these variables.	Wilcoxon's Character and Rank Test

3 RESULTS

Before the hypothesis testing was carried out, the structure of the sample was analysed according to gender, age and length of service (Table 2). The sample is dominated by men (80.4%), with the largest age group from 31 to 40 years (37.0%) and from 41 to 50 years (27.2%). The length of service is most represented in the interval from 11 to 20 years (33.7%), followed by 6 to 10 years (30.4%). The observed heterogeneity shows how the results reflect the perceptions of employees through different career stages within sales management.

Table 2. Characteristics of the sample
(source: Author, 2025)

Characteristic	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	74	80,4
	Female	18	19,6
Age	up to 30 years	21	22,8
	31 - 40 years	34	37,0
	41 - 50 years	25	27,2
	Over 50 years	12	13,0
Seniority	up to 5 years	15	16,3
	6 - 10 years	28	30,4
	11 - 20 years	31	33,7
	Over 20 years	18	19,6

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 3 provide a summary of the main investigated variances. Both satisfaction with the reward system and the perception of salary fairness are at a moderately positive level ($M \approx 6.3$ on a scale of 1 to 10), with a comparative dispersiveness of responses ($SD \approx 1.9$). He addresses this to generally favourable, but not unambiguous estimates, because there are both very satisfied and extremely dissatisfied employees within the same company.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of key variables
(source: Author, 2025)

Variable	N	M	SD	Min	Max
Satisfaction with the reward system	92	6,34	1,95	1	10
Perception of salary fairness	92	6,29	1,92	1	10

The correlation between variances and the relationship between the two variables was tested correlationally (Table 4). An extremely strong positive relationship has been established, which means that greater satisfaction with the reward system almost always goes hand in hand with a higher perception of pay fairness.

Table 4. Spearman's correlation between key variables
(source: Author, 2025)

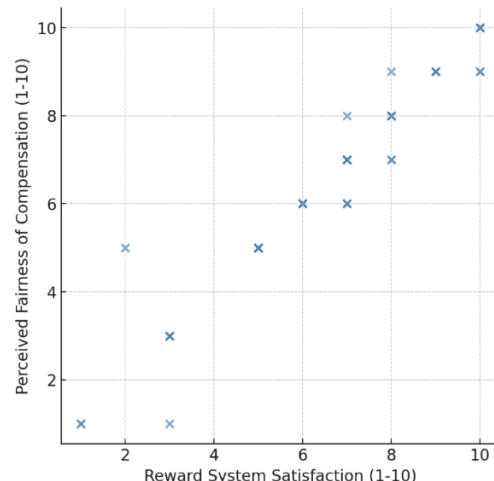
Variable	1	2
1. Satisfaction with the reward system	1	0,981**
2. Perception of Income Fairness	0,981**	1

Remark: ** $p < 0.01$

Satisfaction with the reward system \leftrightarrow Perception of income fairness: $p=0,981$; $p < 0,01$

The observed subject pattern is also visible in Figure 1, where the responses are grouped into a medium to high range of the scale (approximately from 5 to 8) with a clear upward trend. Such an upward pattern corresponds to the calculated correlation and confirms the H1 hypothesis of a strong positive association between variances.

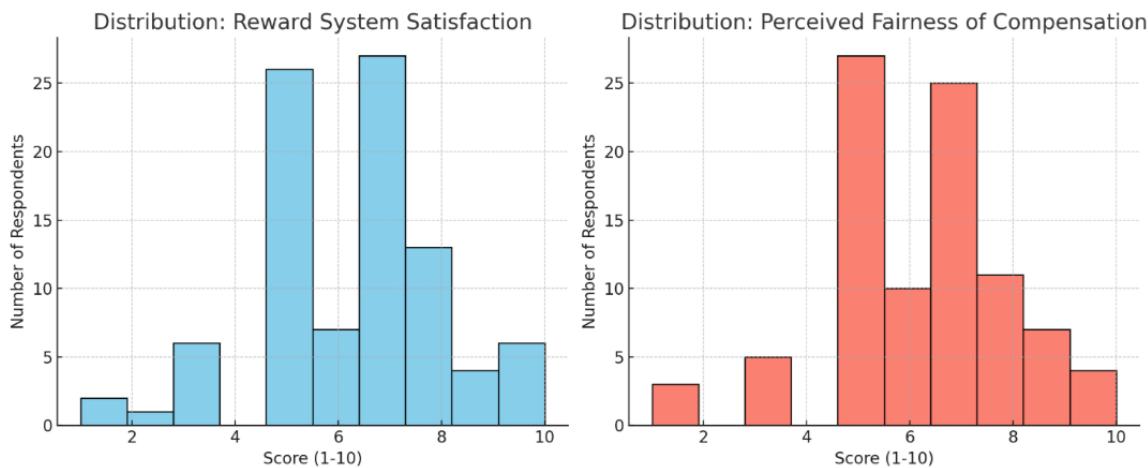
Figure 1. Scattered diagram of the relationship between satisfaction and perception of fairness
(source: Author, 2025)



The mean values of the two variables are almost the same (6.34 vs. 6.29), and the difference between them is not statistically significant. This suggests that respondents do not perceive the reward system as "better" than pay fairness, or vice versa. Instead, the checks are practically identical. This result confirms the H2 hypothesis, according to which there is no significant difference in the average scores of the two variances.

The distributions deviate from the normal distribution, with the majority of responses in the middle to high part of the scale (5 to 8), as confirmed by normality tests (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Response distribution histograms
(source: Author, 2025)



In summary, the results show that: (1) the sample includes employees of different ages and length of service within the sales management of the food industry, and this allows insight into several internal perspectives of the same organization; (2) both satisfaction with the remuneration system and the perception of wage fairness are at a moderately positive level (around 6.3 out of 10), with clearly visible internal variability; (3) there is an extremely strong positive correlation between these two variables ($p=0.981$; $p<0.01$), and this suggests that employees perceive them almost identically; and (4) the mean values of the variables in question do not differ from each other in fact, which supports the interpretation that reward satisfaction and perceived salary fairness represent aligned variances of the same perception of reward. In other words, the results of the research confirm both hypotheses, employees who believe that they are paid fairly are also satisfied with the reward system, and both perceptions are on average at an approximate level.

4 DISCUSSION

The results of the conducted research show an extremely strong and statistically significant correlation between satisfaction with the reward system and the perception of salary fairness of employees in the sales management of the food industry ($p=0.981$; $p < 0.01$). At the same time, no significant difference was found between the average scores of these two variables. This result suggests that respondents do not perceive "reward satisfaction" and "pay fairness" as two separate variables, but as one unique perception. That is, when employees believe that the reward system is fair, they are satisfied with that system, and if they perceive it as unfair, the level of satisfaction with the system automatically decreases.

The obtained results are harmoniously related to key theoretical approaches that explain employee motivation. According to Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg, Mausner &

Snyderman, 1959), we distinguish between factors that prevent dissatisfaction, such as wages, a sense of security, and working conditions, from those that are real motivators, such as recognition, a sense of responsibility, and the possibility of professional development. The level of salary alone does not create long-term motivation, but the perception that the reward system is fair, transparent and thoughtful proves to be a necessary prerequisite for achieving job satisfaction. Vroom's theory of expectations (1964) further emphasizes that employees will only make an effort if they believe that there is an evident and constant connection between the effort invested, work performance and adequate reward. When the relationship in question becomes unclear or perceived as unfair, the motivational effect of the reward system is significantly weakened. Adams' theory of fairness (1965) goes a step further, explaining how employees evaluate their relationship between the effort invested and the reward received in a broader social context, comparing it to what their colleagues in similar positions receive. Employees who see the system as fair are also satisfied with it, while those who feel injustice show lower satisfaction (Ćupurdija, Moslavac, & Balog, 2019). The results confirm that fairness is perceived as a fundamental criterion of the legitimacy of the entire reward system, without it the motivational effects of the system are not sustainable in the long term.

The results of the research are in line with recent empirical research that confirms that the perceived fairness and transparency of the reward system play a crucial role in the formation of employee engagement and their willingness to invest additional effort. According to the findings of Colquitt et al. (2020), the perception of organizational fairness has a strong impact on the level of employee engagement and on their organizational social behavior, i.e. the willingness to contribute beyond the formal demands of the job. Along these lines, Kuvaas, Buch and Dysvik (2022) emphasized how clearly defined and transparently communicated reward criteria, with a visible connection between work performance and reward, encourage intrinsic motivation. When employees believe that the system really reflects their real contribution, and not the personal affinities of management, their trust in the organization grows. A system that is not perceived as fair loses its motivational effect, regardless of the amount of reward it offers.

The results of the research are of particular importance when viewed in the context of the food industry and sales management, where the working environment is characterized by high market demands, seasonality of demand, complex sales channels and the constant need to achieve high goals in a short period of time. Previous research conducted in the food industry sector has already indicated that the recognition of contributions and the perception of fairness are among the most important factors in retaining employees and encouraging their long-term motivation to work (Kim & Jang, 2021). The results of the conducted research further confirm this finding, in the context of challenging working conditions, fair compensation is not perceived as an additional motivation, but as a basic prerequisite for sustainable engagement. That is, when employees perceive the reward system as fair and consistent, they simultaneously maintain trust in the organization and are willing to put in the extra effort. In contrast, if rewarding is perceived as unfair or arbitrary, work motivation quickly weakens, regardless of other forms of recognition or incentives. The food industry, in which the results of the day-to-day measurement, perceives the perception of fairness as a key mechanism for preserving work commitment and stability of sales management.

The results of the conducted research are harmoniously integrated into contemporary discussions that look at rewards much more broadly than salary or material compensation. Recent research increasingly shows that employees value the reward system through relationships with superiors, a sense of recognition and the experience of the purposefulness of their own work. Destructive or inconsistent leadership styles have been found to severely impair the perception of fairness, even when the reward system is

formally properly set up (Dowie, Palonen, Varis, Provitera & Sayyadi, 2025). In contrast, a supportive and transparent leadership style, accompanied by sincere acknowledgment of employee contributions, reinforces the perception that rewards are justified and deserved (Costa et al., 2022). Also, research has shown that the experience of purposefulness of work and the sense of personal competence significantly affect the daily engagement and commitment of employees (Tommasi, Sartori, Ceschi & Dickert, 2025). This means that employees do not see the reward system only as a set of financial benefits, but as a sign of how much the organization actually appreciates them and recognizes their contribution.

Current research emphasizes that employees do not value rewarding solely through the amount of salary, but through the compliance of the reward system with the values and legitimacy of the organization itself (Lee, 2021). It shows that practices that are perceived as socially responsible and sustainable encourage employees to be more effective, because they have a sense that they are working for an organization whose behavior is worthy of support (Tejasmayee, Agarwal, Kanoujiya & Rastogi, 2025). The question of fairness is not reduced to personal gain "am I getting enough for my efforts?", but implies a broader context of "is this organization and its reward system something I can trust?". The results of the research further confirm this logic. The perception of reward fairness acts as an assessment of the internal balance between effort and reward and as an indicator of trust in the organization itself. In this context, fairness becomes a certain guideline of the ethics of the organization, with the help of which employees assess how consistent, credible and moral the system in which they work is. A fair reward system builds satisfaction and trust, and trust is the foundation of long-term commitment and stability of employment relationships.

The practical implications of the obtained results are very clear and applicable to management. A sense of fairness must be seen as a central element of the reward system, and not as a secondary topic of internal communications. The criteria for awarding awards and bonuses should be clear, consistently applied and transparently explained to employees. When reward decisions are perceived as understandable and justified, trust in the system grows and the room for doubt or frustration decreases. Rewarding must not be reduced solely to the financial context. Financial compensation certainly influences the sense of distributive fairness "do I get in proportion to my contribution?", but long-term satisfaction also stems from intangible factors of public recognition, opportunities for professional development, opportunities for advancement, and a sense of autonomy in work (Costa et al., 2022; Tommasi et al., 2025). It is these elements that strengthen the sense of respect and create an emotional connection between employees and the organization. The results show that the average does not capture the overall context. The average ratings of satisfaction and fairness range around 6.3 from 1 to 10, yet there are individuals who perceive the system as extremely non-transparent.

The study also has significant theoretical implications. Most previous research treats satisfaction with the reward system and the perception of salary fairness as two separate, albeit related variables (Bakotić, 2016). However, the results of the conducted research question the justification of such a concept, at least in the analyzed context of sales management of the food industry. Based on the results obtained, it seems that these two dimensions merge into one unique variance, which can be described as the "perceived legitimacy of the reward system". That is, employees do not perceive a significant difference between the attitudes "I am satisfied with the system" and "the system is fair", but perceive them as a reflection of the same assessment. Such a conclusion opens up an important space for further theoretical development. Instead of looking at satisfaction and fairness separately, they could be understood as a demonstration of a deeper phenomenon, which is how employees perceive the legitimacy and moral justification of the reward

system in their organization. Such an approach could lead to more precise motivational models and a better understanding of the psychological foundations of work performance.

Despite the results obtained, it is important to take into account the limitations of the conducted study when interpreting the results. First, the research was conducted within one company in the food and meat industry, on a sample of 92 employees. Second, a cross-sectional design was used, where all data is based on employee self-assessments. Such an approach allows for a reliable description of perceptions at the time of measurement, but it does not reveal how perceptions change over time, nor can it reliably distinguish subjective experience from operational organizational reward practices. Third, the research focused on two key variables, satisfaction with the reward system and perceived salary fairness, while other possibly important factors remained outside the analytical model. They include the quality of leadership, the sense of purposefulness of work, internal communication, the possibility of professional development and perceived organizational responsibility. According to previously conducted research (Dowie et al., 2025; Tejasmayee et al., 2025; Tommasi et al., 2025), it is these factors that can have a catalyst effect or a mediating effect on the relationship between fairness and the degree of motivation of employees. Due to all of the above, the results of the conducted research should be viewed as reliable, but contextually limited to the image of a specific segment of the complex process of motivation and reward in the food industry.

Future research should replicate the analysis across different industrial sectors to verify that the same logic applies in environments with different labour cost structures, sales organisation or levels of market pressure. Such a comparison, for example, with the construction sector, retail, logistics or service activities, could show how universal and how specific the context of the food industry is (comparisons with Kim & Jang, 2021; Chapano & Iwu, 2025). Also, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal research to monitor changes in the perception of fairness and reward satisfaction over a longer period. This would enable an understanding of how the analysed perceptions affect the intention to stay in the organization, loyalty and the actual work performance of employees. Future research must include a broader set of organizational variables, such as leadership style, the level of perceived support for employee development, internal transparency of goals, and the sense of organizational responsibility itself. In this way, it would be more precisely examined whether these factors act as a protective layer that mitigates the negative effect of an unfair remuneration system, or on the contrary as a trigger for dissatisfaction when the system loses legitimacy in the perception of employees.

Overall, the results of the study place the reward system in the broader context of organizational legitimacy. For employees, it is not only a mechanism for the distribution of financial resources, but it represents a key message of their value in the organization itself, about how much they are recognized, appreciated and treated fairly. In this context, the fairness of remuneration becomes a matter of management policy and the foundation of trust that reflects the identity of the organization and the long-term engagement of employees.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The conducted research has shown that satisfaction with the reward system and the perception of fairness of remuneration for employees of sales management in the food industry are practically inseparable dimensions of the same work perception. An extremely strong positive correlation was found between the variables in question ($\rho=0.981$; $p<0.01$), and their average scores did not differ statistically significantly. This implies that employees do not separate the questions "am I satisfied with the reward system?" from the question "am I paid fairly?", but evaluate them together.

The results are integrated into classical motivational theoretical frameworks (Herzberg; Vroom; Adams) and support contemporary claims that perceived fairness and transparency of remuneration are not just technical issues of compensation, but key prerequisites for employee motivation, engagement and retention. In the conditions characteristic of the food industry, strong market competition, seasonality, short sales cycles and constant pressures on results, the perception of the fairness of the remuneration system represents the foundation of management legitimacy and an indispensable source of organizational stability.

A practical recommendation to management is that the reward system must be transparent, consistent and transparently related to the achieved effects. Remuneration must not be reduced solely to the issue of the amount of salary. Intangible factors, public recognition of contributions, personal professional development, the opportunity for advancement, also create the impression of fairness and respect. Organizations that neglect this dimension risk a decline in motivation, retention and loyalty of key people, even if they have set up "competitive" salary models at the formal level.

At the same time, the conducted research has its limitations. It was conducted in one food industry company, on a sample of 92 employees, and is based on average self-assessment data. For this reason, the results cannot be automatically induced to other sectors or different organizational structures.

The results of the research indicate that reward satisfaction and the perception of salary fairness can be seen as a common variance of the legitimacy of the reward system in the perception of employees. In this case, the reward system does not only act as a mechanism for distributing value, but as a sign of respect, recognition and trust. Understanding and managing this feedback link is not just a question for HR, but a strategic issue of the company's competitiveness.

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