



The Effect of Extrinsic Rewards on Employee Creativity: The Sequential Mediating Role of Perceived Organizational Support and Work Engagement Among Startup Employees in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Fostering employee creativity is pivotal for driving organizational innovation and competitive advantage, especially within the dynamic startup sector. This study explores the direct impact of extrinsic rewards on staff creativity, alongside the serial mediating mechanisms of perceived organizational support (POS) and work engagement. Employing a quantitative explanatory design, primary data were gathered via a survey involving 160 startup employees in Greater Jakarta selected through purposive sampling. The hypotheses were tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The empirical findings reveal that extrinsic rewards significantly augment employee creativity, with POS and work engagement functioning as crucial sequential mediators. Consequently, these results underscore the imperative role of well-structured reward systems and organizational backing in cultivating workforce engagement and creative performance in startup environments.

INTRODUCTION

Human resource management (HRM) focuses on the effective utilization, development, and management of employees' potential to support the achievement of organizational goals (Verdian & Hosen, 2024). Beyond administrative functions such as recruitment and payroll management, HRM encompasses strategic processes related to competency development, employee motivation, performance evaluation, reward systems, and the creation of a supportive work environment, all of which contribute to organizational sustainability and long-term competitiveness (Wardhana et al., 2024). The digital era has created various new business opportunities, including e-commerce, technology startups, and platform-based digital businesses (Simbolon et al., 2026). The rapid growth of startup companies has transformed business competition and increased the need for innovative and adaptive human resources. Unlike conventional organizations, startups operate in uncertain and rapidly changing environments, requiring employees who are capable of generating creative ideas and innovative solutions to support organizational growth and survival.

Cultivating workforce creativity has emerged as a primary driver of corporate innovation and enduring market competitiveness. Creativity among employees entails individual behaviors centered on generating original and practical ideas regarding products, services, processes, and operational procedures (Zhou & George, 2001). Within the startup ecosystem, this capability holds exceptional significance given that emerging enterprises frequently confront rapid technological disruptions, volatile market conditions, and fierce competition. Highly creative personnel empower companies to tackle challenges efficiently, refine internal workflows, and sustain a competitive edge.

Indonesia is recognized as one of the countries with the largest startup ecosystems globally. However, despite the rapid growth of startup companies, human resource management remains a major challenge. Many startups experience difficulties in retaining talented employees, building effective work systems, and maintaining employee engagement. Furthermore, the phenomenon of "tech winter," characterized by efficiency measures and layoffs in startup companies, highlights the importance of employee involvement and creativity in sustaining organizational performance under uncertain conditions.

Prior research has highlighted various determinants affecting staff creativity, such as external incentives, perceived organizational support (POS), and work engagement. Extrinsic rewards refer to external rewards provided by organizations in the form of salaries, bonuses, incentives, benefits, promotions, and other forms of compensation as recognition for employees' contributions and performance. Appropriate extrinsic rewards can enhance employees' motivation and job satisfaction because employees perceive that their dedication and performance are fairly recognized and appreciated by the organization (Danish & Usman, 2010). Grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET), employees typically reciprocate favorable organizational treatment with positive attitudes and workplace behaviors. Consequently, when staff members perceive that they

receive equitable compensation and robust corporate backing, they are inclined to demonstrate elevated levels of work engagement and innovative performance.

Perceived organizational support (POS) represents an employee's personal evaluation regarding how much the organization appreciates their contributions and concerns itself with their overall well-being (Ayu Sarah Panjaitan et al., 2025; Eisenberger et al., 1986). Staff members who experience high levels of institutional support typically cultivate stronger emotional bonds and loyalty to the firm. Concurrently, work engagement—defined by dimensions of vigor, dedication, and absorption—is known to elevate staff motivation and readiness to perform beyond formal job descriptions, encompassing innovative performance. Highly engaged workers are generally more focused, passionate, and dedicated to fulfilling company objectives, which empowers them to investigate novel work methodologies, thereby boosting their creativity and capacity to produce valuable organizational ideas (Afsar et al., 2021).

Despite widespread academic consensus on the favorable impacts of extrinsic rewards, perceived organizational support, and work engagement on employee creativity, significant empirical limitations endure. A major weakness of prior work is its heavy reliance on conventional businesses and public organizations, which leaves the dynamics of startup settings relatively unexplored. In addition, findings regarding the impact of extrinsic rewards on employee creativity have shown inconsistent results across different organizational settings. Consequently, further investigation is required to examine these relationships within startup companies, particularly in Indonesia's rapidly growing startup ecosystem.

This study extends the model developed (Aldabbas et al., 2025) by focusing on startup employees in Indonesia and examining the sequential mediating roles of perceived organizational support and work engagement in explaining the relationship between extrinsic rewards and employee creativity. Unlike the original model, this study excludes intrinsic motivation as a moderating variable and emphasizes organizational mechanisms that stimulate employee creativity.

Driven by these contextual gaps, this research explores the direct impact of extrinsic rewards on creative outcomes among Indonesian startup staff, alongside the chain-mediating effects of perceived organizational support and work engagement. By doing so, the study contributes to human resource literature while supplying practical guidelines for startup enterprises to optimize reward strategies and build supportive environments conducive to employee innovation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Exchange Theory

Grounded in the tenets of Social Exchange Theory (SET), this paper adopts the premise that employment dynamics are governed by reciprocal transactions (Blau, 2017). When organizations extend beneficial resources or treatment, staff members typically respond with enhanced engagement, positive mindsets, and discretionary actions. When organizations provide fair rewards, support, and

recognition, employees perceive that their contributions are valued, thereby encouraging greater commitment and positive work outcomes.

In organizational settings, extrinsic rewards can be viewed as positive treatment from the organization. Such rewards enhance employees' perceived organizational support (POS), which subsequently increases work engagement and motivates employees to contribute beyond their formal job responsibilities. Employee creativity, therefore, may emerge as a reciprocal response to organizational support and appreciation. The application of SET provides a theoretical explanation of how extrinsic rewards influence employee creativity through perceived organizational support and work engagement.

Extrinsic rewards refer to external compensation provided by organizations, including salaries, bonuses, incentives, promotions, and other forms of recognition. Appropriate reward systems encourage employees to perform better and motivate them to generate innovative ideas and solutions. Previous studies have demonstrated that extrinsic rewards positively influence employee creativity because employees perceive rewards as recognition of their contributions and achievements.

Research by (Yoon et al., 2015) found that reward systems stimulate creative behaviors by increasing employee motivation. Similarly, (Aldabbas et al., 2025) reported that extrinsic rewards significantly enhance employee creativity. Employees who feel appreciated by their organizations are more likely to contribute innovative ideas and actively participate in organizational improvement initiatives.

H1: Extrinsic rewards significantly affect employee creativity.

Perceived organizational support (POS) captures an individual's conviction that their employer acknowledges their worth and looks after their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). A vital mechanism for demonstrating this organizational recognition is extrinsic rewards, where tangible returns – such as wages, bonuses, incentive packages, and promotional opportunities – reinforce the belief among staff that their labor and achievements are recognized by the firm (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Therefore, fair and adequate rewards signal organizational appreciation, leading employees to perceive stronger organizational support.

Prior research has shown that compensation and benefits contribute significantly to POS. (Jolly et al., 2021) found that employees who perceive fair compensation tend to develop stronger perceptions of organizational support. Likewise, (Aldabbas et al., 2025) reported that extrinsic rewards positively influence POS. In accordance with Social Exchange Theory, employees interpret rewards as evidence of organizational concern, thereby strengthening their perceived organizational support.

H2: Extrinsic rewards significantly affect perceived organizational support.

Defined by Schaufeli et al. (2002), work engagement represents a positive mental state encompassing vigor, dedication, and complete task absorption. When staff members experience substantial organizational backing, they tend to exhibit heightened psychological attachment and greater personal investment in their work activities.

(Saks, 2019) argued that supportive organizations foster greater employee engagement because employees feel valued and respected. Empirical studies by (Inam et al., 2021) and (Bonaiuto et al., 2022) further demonstrated that POS significantly improves work engagement. Employees who receive organizational support are more willing to invest their energy and effort into achieving organizational goals.

H3: Perceived organizational support significantly affects work engagement.

Work engagement plays a crucial role in enhancing employee creativity. Engaged employees tend to exhibit enthusiasm, dedication, and persistence in their work, enabling them to generate creative ideas and innovative solutions.

(Schaufeli et al., 2002) suggested that highly engaged employees possess greater motivation to perform beyond their formal responsibilities. Similarly, (Inam et al., 2021) found that work engagement positively contributes to employee creativity by increasing proactive behaviors and problem-solving capabilities. Recent studies (Gürbüz et al., 2024) also confirmed that engaged employees are more likely to demonstrate creative performance.

H4: Work engagement significantly affects employee creativity

Upon completing the hypothesis section, authors conducting quantitative research ought to present a conceptual model, while those utilizing a qualitative approach are expected to include an analytical mind map.

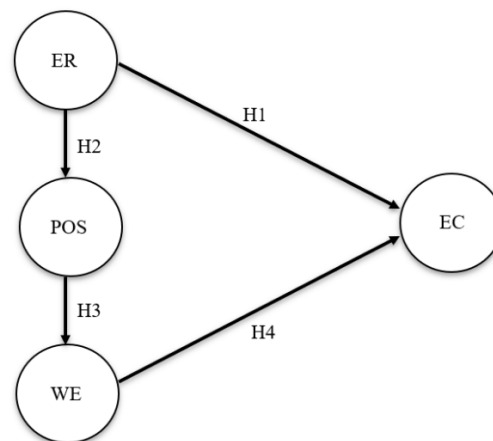


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

Grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET) – which delineates reciprocal dynamics between employers and staff – this quantitative study utilizes an explanatory design to investigate how extrinsic rewards, perceived organizational support (POS), and work engagement influence employee creativity within startup enterprises. The conceptual framework was adapted from the research of (Aldabbas et al., 2025).

This research executed a cross-sectional survey strategy, gathering empirical data concurrently at a single juncture. The targeted sample comprised startup personnel in Indonesia, with a primary geographic emphasis on the

Greater Jakarta region (Jabodetabek) due to its high density of tech venture headquarters.

The target population encompassed personnel from Indonesian startup enterprises. A non-probability, purposive sampling method was implemented to enroll participants fulfilling four predetermined criteria: active employment in a startup, a minimum tenure of one year, full-time status, and base location within the Greater Jakarta region. The finalized sample of 160 respondents exceeds the minimum threshold mandated for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), adhering to the recommendation by (Hair and Alamer., 2022) that sample sizes must equal at least fivefold the quantity of measurement indicators.

Primary data collection was executed via a web-based questionnaire disseminated through digital platforms. Construct measurements utilized a five-point Likert rating scale—spanning from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)—a standard instrument in social science inquiry for quantifying individual attitudes and perceptions (Likert, 1932). To preserve content validity and reliability, all survey items were adapted from previously validated literature.

The measurement of extrinsic rewards drew upon indicators derived from existing literature on organizational incentive systems. Perceived organizational support was evaluated by assessing how staff perceive the company's valuation of their contributions and welfare. Work engagement was conceptualized through the tri-dimensional framework of vigor, dedication, and absorption formulated by (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Finally, employee creativity was quantified via metrics that capture an individual's capacity to produce innovative and practical concepts in the workplace.

Analytical procedures were executed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) utilizing the SmartPLS 4 application. The estimation process involved a two-tier evaluation framework: the outer (measurement) model and the inner (structural) model. Assessment of the measurement model encompassed convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability via outer loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach's alpha, and Composite Reliability (CR). Subsequently, inner model evaluation examined the coefficient of determination (R^2), path estimates, and hypothesis validation through a bootstrapping resampling technique, employing *t*-statistics and *p*-values to verify the statistical significance of the hypothesized paths.

RESEARCH RESULT

Empirical data were initially gathered from 164 individuals. Following a preliminary screening against the established inclusion criteria, four submissions were disqualified due to non-employment within startup entities. This resulted in a final analytical sample of 160 valid responses processed via SmartPLS 4. The statistical procedure comprised both outer (measurement) and inner (structural) model evaluations, with the final sample exceeding the minimum threshold required for PLS-SEM. Participants spanned diverse market segments,

predominantly originating from the e-commerce, financial technology (fintech), and logistics sectors.

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

To confirm that the operational indicators accurately capture their corresponding variables, an assessment of the measurement (outer) model was conducted – a crucial step for ensuring instrument validity (Dash & Paul, 2021). Model validation involved examining construct reliability along with convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity was appraised via indicator loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). During initial screening, three items (ER08, POS10, and WE09) failed to meet the standard loading cutoff of 0.70 and were subsequently deleted to enhance construct validity. The refined model demonstrated robust convergent validity, as all retained indicators exceeded the 0.70 threshold.

To evaluate discriminant validity, the analysis utilized cross-loadings, the Fornell-Larcker matrix, and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). The empirical findings satisfied all established benchmarks, confirming that the latent constructs are distinct from one another and successfully capture unique theoretical concepts.

Construct reliability was appraised through Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) values. As detailed in Table 1, every construct surpassed the standard 0.70 benchmark, confirming high internal consistency and measurement reliability across the latent variables.

Table 1. Construct Reliability Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Employee Creativity (EC)	0.859	0.898
Extrinsic Rewards (ER)	0.891	0.915
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	0.913	0.928
Work Engagement (WE)	0.911	0.928

These findings confirm that all constructs in the research model were reliable and suitable for further structural model analysis.

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

The structural model was assessed through the coefficient of determination (R^2) and hypothesis testing using bootstrapping procedures.

The R^2 values indicate that employee creativity had an R^2 value of 0.151, suggesting that 15.1% of the variance in employee creativity was explained by the variables included in the model. Perceived organizational support had an R^2 value of 0.134, while work engagement showed an R^2 value of 0.225. Although these values indicate modest explanatory power, they are acceptable in behavioral and organizational research.

Table 2. Coefficient of Determination (R²)

Variable	R ²
Employee Creativity (EC)	0.151
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	0.134
Work Engagement (WE)	0.225

Hypothesis testing was conducted using path coefficients and p-values. The results revealed that extrinsic rewards significantly influenced employee creativity ($\beta = 0.267$, $p < 0.001$). Extrinsic rewards also significantly affected perceived organizational support ($\beta = 0.374$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, perceived organizational support significantly enhanced work engagement ($\beta = 0.480$, $p < 0.001$), while work engagement significantly increased employee creativity ($\beta = 0.215$, $p = 0.005$).

Table 3. Direct Effects and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	p-value	Result
H1	ER $\rightarrow$ EC	0.267	0.000	Supported
H2	ER $\rightarrow$ POS	0.374	0.000	Supported
H3	POS $\rightarrow$ WE	0.480	0.000	Supported
H4	WE $\rightarrow$ EC	0.215	0.005	Supported

The mediation analysis further revealed significant indirect effects. The sequential mediation of perceived organizational support and work engagement in the relationship between extrinsic rewards and employee creativity was significant ($\beta = 0.039$, $p = 0.017$). Additionally, perceived organizational support mediated the relationship between extrinsic rewards and work engagement ($\beta = 0.179$, $p < 0.001$), while work engagement mediated the relationship between perceived organizational support and employee creativity ($\beta = 0.103$, $p = 0.009$).

These findings provide empirical evidence that organizational reward systems enhance employee creativity not only directly but also indirectly through employees' perceptions of organizational support and their engagement in work activities.

DISCUSSION

These empirical insights reinforce the core tenets of Social Exchange Theory (SET), which contends that personnel respond to beneficial organizational practices by exhibiting favorable attitudes and actions. The evidence indicates that extrinsic incentives, perceived organizational support (POS), and work engagement serve as critical drivers in fostering creative performance among Indonesian startup personnel.

First, the empirical evidence demonstrates that extrinsic rewards exert a significant impact on employee creativity. This finding implies that when startup workers are provided with equitable compensation, financial incentives, bonuses, and professional recognition, their inclination to produce original ideas

and innovative solutions increases substantially. In startup environments characterized by uncertainty and intense competition, reward systems function not only as compensation mechanisms but also as motivational tools that encourage employees to contribute beyond their formal job responsibilities. This finding is consistent with previous studies by (Yoon et al., 2015) and (Aldabbas et al., 2025), which reported that extrinsic rewards positively affect employee creativity. The result also supports the Social Exchange Theory perspective, suggesting that employees respond to organizational appreciation through enhanced creative behavior.

Second, the study confirms that extrinsic rewards significantly affect perceived organizational support. Employees who perceive that rewards are distributed fairly tend to believe that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. In startup companies, where employees often face high workloads and dynamic work environments, organizational recognition becomes particularly important in fostering positive employee perceptions. This finding aligns with the studies of (Jolly et al., 2021) and (Aldabbas et al., 2025), which found that compensation and reward systems strengthen employees' perceptions of organizational support. According to SET, rewards serve as signals of organizational care, thereby reinforcing reciprocal relationships between employees and organizations.

Third, perceived organizational support was found to significantly enhance work engagement. Employees who feel supported by their organizations are more likely to exhibit greater enthusiasm, dedication, and absorption in their work. Organizational support creates a sense of security and appreciation, motivating employees to invest more energy and commitment in their jobs. This result is in line with prior studies conducted by (Saks, 2019), (Inam et al., 2021), and (Bonaiuto et al., 2022), all of which demonstrated that perceived organizational support positively influences work engagement. The findings suggest that supportive organizational practices are essential for maintaining employee engagement in startup settings.

Fourth, work engagement significantly affects employee creativity. Employees who are highly engaged tend to display stronger motivation, persistence, and proactive behavior, enabling them to generate innovative ideas and solutions. In startup organizations, where adaptability and innovation are critical for survival, engaged employees become valuable assets for sustaining competitiveness. This finding supports the studies of (Schaufeli et al., 2002), and (Inam et al., 2021) which emphasized the positive relationship between work engagement and creativity. From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, engaged employees reciprocate organizational support by contributing creative efforts that benefit the organization.

The mediation analysis further enriches the literature by demonstrating that perceived organizational support and work engagement sequentially mediate the relationship between extrinsic rewards and employee creativity. These findings indicate that rewards alone may not directly maximize creativity unless employees perceive organizational support and become psychologically engaged in their work. Therefore, startup companies should not rely solely on

financial incentives but should also create supportive work environments that strengthen employee engagement and foster innovative behavior.

This research offers several notable contributions to human resource management literature. Primarily, it broadens the scope of Social Exchange Theory by applying its principles to employee creativity within startup environments. Additionally, it delivers empirical insights from the Indonesian startup landscape—a domain relatively underrepresented in existing scholarship. Furthermore, departing from the framework established by (Aldabbas et al., 2025), this study spotlights structural organizational mechanisms through a sequential mediation path involving perceived organizational support and work engagement. As a result, the conclusions provide both conceptual advancement and actionable recommendations for startup leaders looking to foster innovation and competitive advantage via strategic HR initiatives.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study examined the effect of extrinsic rewards on employee creativity through the sequential mediating roles of perceived organizational support (POS) and work engagement among startup employees in Indonesia. The findings indicate that extrinsic rewards significantly enhance employee creativity. Employees who receive fair compensation, incentives, and recognition tend to demonstrate higher levels of creativity in the workplace.

The results further reveal that extrinsic rewards positively influence perceived organizational support, suggesting that employees interpret reward systems as signals of organizational appreciation and concern for their well-being. Moreover, perceived organizational support significantly increases work engagement, indicating that supportive organizational environments encourage employees to become more dedicated and involved in their work.

The study also confirms that work engagement positively affects employee creativity. Employees who are enthusiastic and highly engaged in their work are more likely to generate innovative ideas and creative solutions. In addition, the mediation analysis demonstrates that perceived organizational support and work engagement sequentially mediate the relationship between extrinsic rewards and employee creativity.

Overall, the findings support Social Exchange Theory by demonstrating that favorable organizational treatment in the form of rewards and support encourages employees to reciprocate through greater engagement and creative performance. This study contributes to the literature by extending the understanding of employee creativity within the context of startup companies in Indonesia.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, startup companies are encouraged to develop fair and competitive reward systems that recognize employee contributions and achievements. Financial incentives should be accompanied by non-financial forms of recognition, such as career advancement opportunities, appreciation

programs, and constructive feedback, to strengthen employees' perceptions of organizational support.

Organizations should also foster supportive work environments that prioritize employee well-being, open communication, and professional development. By enhancing perceived organizational support, companies can increase work engagement and ultimately stimulate employee creativity and innovation.

From a managerial perspective, startup leaders should view employee creativity not merely as an individual capability but as an outcome of organizational practices. Therefore, integrating reward systems with supportive human resource policies may help startups maintain competitiveness and sustain long-term growth in dynamic business environments.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Like any empirical study, this research has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, in which data were collected at a single point in time. Consequently, the findings capture respondents' perceptions only during the period of data collection and may not fully reflect changes in employee attitudes and behaviors over time.

Second, the study focused exclusively on startup employees located in the Greater Jakarta area (Jabodetabek). Although this region represents one of the largest startup ecosystems in Indonesia, the findings may not be fully generalizable to startup companies in other regions or countries with different organizational and cultural characteristics.

Third, the explanatory power of the research model remains relatively modest, as indicated by the R^2 values of employee creativity, perceived organizational support, and work engagement. This suggests that additional factors outside the model may also influence employee creativity in startup organizations.

Furthermore, this study concentrated on organizational mechanisms by examining perceived organizational support and work engagement as mediating variables while excluding intrinsic motivation as a moderating variable. Therefore, the model may not fully capture the complexity of factors affecting employee creativity.

Future research is encouraged to adopt longitudinal research designs to better examine causal relationships and changes in employee behavior over time. Researchers may also expand the study to different industries or geographic regions to improve the generalizability of the findings.

In addition, future studies are recommended to incorporate other variables that may influence employee creativity, such as intrinsic motivation, leadership style, organizational culture, psychological empowerment, job satisfaction, or innovative work behavior. Exploring these variables may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms that drive employee creativity in contemporary organizations.

Finally, future research may compare startup companies with conventional organizations to identify whether the effects of extrinsic rewards, perceived

organizational support, and work engagement differ across organizational contexts.

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