

# Effectiveness of Staff Rewards on Employee Satisfaction in Sexual Reproductive Health Organizations in Malawi: A Case of Banja La Mtsogolo

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**Abstract:** This study examines how staff reward systems shape employee satisfaction at Banja La Mtsogolo (BLM), a leading sexual reproductive health organization operating across Malawi. The motivation for the inquiry arose from a recognized gap in the scholarly literature: while considerable attention has been paid to healthcare workforce challenges in sub-Saharan Africa broadly, relatively little empirical work has focused specifically on how monetary and non-monetary incentives function within sexual reproductive health settings constrained by limited resources. Three objectives framed the research: assessing prevailing satisfaction levels among BLM staff, interrogating the organization's existing reward architecture, and examining how different reward categories influence employee motivation and retention.

A mixed-methods design was adopted, drawing on survey data from 63 outreach and clinic employees alongside qualitative material gathered through semi-structured interviews. What emerged was a picture of pervasive dissatisfaction, felt most intensely by employees with the longest tenure. Inadequate salaries, precarious job security, and a sense of being overlooked surfaced repeatedly as the main sources of low morale. Monetary rewards were rated most highly in overall importance, but non-monetary incentives, especially professional development and genuine recognition, proved particularly meaningful to those in managerial roles. The study concludes that both reward categories carry real weight in shaping motivation and retention, and recommends that BLM pursue a thorough overhaul of its reward systems with equity, transparency, and sufficiency as guiding principles. Doing so, the evidence suggests, would strengthen workforce commitment and ultimately improve BLM's capacity to deliver quality sexual reproductive health services across the country.

**Keywords:** staff rewards, employee satisfaction, healthcare workers, Malawi, Banja La Mtsogolo, motivation, retention, non-monetary incentives

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## 1. Introduction

This opening chapter situates the research within the wider landscape of employee welfare in Malawian healthcare. Its central preoccupation is understanding how reward structures, both financial and non-financial, shape satisfaction, motivation, and retention among workers at BLM. The chapter traces the institutional history of the organization, clarifies the nature of its current reward practices, and identifies the specific knowledge gaps this study aims to address. It closes with the research objectives, questions, and the study's significance, followed by an outline of the paper's structure.

### Background and Justification History of Banja La Mtsogolo

Banja La Mtsogolo, a name that translates loosely from Chichewa as 'Family of the Future', was established in 1987 as a Malawian non-governmental organization committed to providing affordable and accessible family planning and reproductive healthcare services, including HIV/AIDS information and counselling (MSI, 2024). The organization operates as a senior affiliate of Marie Stopes International (MSI) Reproductive Choices, a partnership present in 37 countries. Through its network of 25 clinics and outreach sites, BLM serves in excess of 800,000 clients each year, placing it among the most significant providers of sexual and reproductive health services in Malawi (MSI, 2024).

BLM came into being against a backdrop of pressing public health challenges, among them high fertility rates and severely limited access to modern contraception. In the years since its founding, its service portfolio has expanded to include contraceptive counselling, prenatal and postnatal care, cervical cancer screening, and HIV testing and counselling. The organization reaches underserved populations through a community-based

model anchored in partnerships with local organizations and government agencies, and it has maintained an active voice in national and international advocacy for sexual and reproductive health rights (MSI, 2024).

### **Rewards and Recognition at BLM**

Consistent with its MSI affiliation, BLM administers a range of reward and recognition programmes intended to celebrate both individual and collective achievement. Performance is acknowledged through monetary incentives, certificates, and public commendation; target attainment brings supplementary compensation; and long-serving employees are honoured through personalized recognition gifts and additional leave. Team contributions are celebrated through shared activities, and peer-to-peer nomination schemes are intended to embed a culture of mutual appreciation. Professional growth is supported through access to workshops, conferences, and training opportunities, while employee wellbeing is promoted through fitness and mental health initiatives (MSI, 2024). The overarching aim is a workplace where staff feel genuinely valued, motivated, and equipped to deliver high-quality services.

### **Sexual Reproductive Health in Malawi**

Reproductive health occupies a strategic position in Malawi's socio-economic development, with direct consequences for public health outcomes and the country's capacity to fulfill its developmental ambitions. The United Nations and the World Health Organization have consistently maintained that reproductive health is indispensable to realizing Sustainable Development Goal 3, which calls for good health and wellbeing for all (UN, 2020). Organizations like BLM are therefore integral to Malawi's healthcare architecture.

Yet significant challenges persist around organizational effectiveness and service quality, particularly where employee satisfaction is concerned. Research conducted on mid-level cadres in Malawi has pointed to the multidimensional nature of job satisfaction, highlighting the influence of promotion opportunities, organizational fairness, and the nature of work itself (McAuliffe et al., 2009a). Despite this, comparatively little empirical work has examined how these dynamics play out specifically within sexual reproductive health organizations. The existing literature does confirm that reward systems help motivate healthcare workers and reduce attrition (Chanza, Snelgar and Louw, 2013), but a clear gap remains regarding how those systems shape satisfaction within organizations like BLM.

The Malawi National Health Sector Strategic Plan recognizes that a motivated and satisfied health workforce is central to achieving national health objectives (Malawi Ministry of Health, 2023), yet the absence of targeted empirical evidence constrains the design of context-appropriate interventions. Given Malawi's commitment to the aspirations captured in the Malawi 2063 vision, filling this gap is both timely and necessary. This study is therefore positioned to generate actionable evidence for improving reward practices at BLM and comparable organizations.

### **Problem Statement**

Concerns about employee retention and engagement at BLM came sharply into focus during a recent management meeting, accompanied by an annual internal survey that documented widespread dissatisfaction and low engagement across the workforce (MSI, 2024). The implications for organizational stability and service continuity are serious. Whether the root causes lie in inadequate compensation, constrained career development, or communication breakdowns between management and frontline staff, they demand systematic investigation.

Evidence from comparable settings in the region affirms that reward structures can meaningfully motivate healthcare professionals, particularly where resource constraints are pronounced (Cantarelli, Vainieri and Seghieri, 2023). Nonetheless, empirical work on the effectiveness of reward systems within Malawi's sexual reproductive health sector specifically remains thin. This gap limits the development of targeted strategies for improving satisfaction and curbing turnover (Chanza, Snelgar and Louw, 2013). The global movement of health workers from lower-income to higher-income countries is a recognized policy challenge, and Malawi, with its fragile health infrastructure and heavy dependence on international aid, is especially exposed to the consequences of that movement. This study seeks to narrow the evidential gap by clarifying how reward systems influence satisfaction and retention in this critical sector.

### **Research Objectives**

#### **Main Objective**

The main objective of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of staff rewards on employee satisfaction in sexual reproductive health organizations in Malawi, with specific reference to Banja La Mtsogolo.

### **Specific Objectives**

Three specific objectives guide the inquiry: to evaluate the current level of employee satisfaction within Banja La Mtsogolo; to analyse the existing staff reward structure and systems at Banja La Mtsogolo; and to examine the impact of different categories of staff reward, both monetary and non-monetary, on employee satisfaction.

### **Research Questions**

Three research questions frame the study: What is the current level of employee satisfaction within Banja La Mtsogolo? How effective are the existing staff reward structures and systems at Banja La Mtsogolo? What is the impact of different types of staff reward, monetary and non-monetary, on employee job satisfaction at Banja La Mtsogolo?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to a field where empirical evidence remains scarce: the intersection of staff reward systems and employee satisfaction within specialized healthcare organizations in sub-Saharan Africa. By engaging with the particular dynamics of a resource-constrained sexual reproductive health setting, the research generates insights that extend beyond BLM to inform management practice more broadly within Malawi's health sector. The findings are intended to produce actionable recommendations for human resource managers, organizational leaders, and policymakers working to strengthen healthcare workforce retention and performance.

The study also speaks directly to the priorities articulated in the Malawi 2063 vision and the National Health Sector Strategic Plan, both of which treat a motivated health workforce as foundational to national development. By bridging theoretical frameworks and practical organizational realities, the research supports evidence-based management within a sector where the stakes for service quality and population health are exceptionally high.

### **Research Outline**

The paper is organized across six chapters. Chapter 2 presents a Literature Review, drawing together relevant scholarly work and theoretical perspectives to underpin the empirical inquiry. Chapter 3 describes the Research Methodology, covering the philosophical orientation, research design, sampling strategy, data collection instruments, and analytical procedures. Chapter 4 presents the Research Findings, reporting quantitative and qualitative data from the field. Chapter 5 discusses those findings in relation to the broader academic literature. Chapter 6 presents Conclusions and Recommendations, synthesizing key insights and proposing actionable strategies for BLM and comparable organizations. A References list and Appendices follow.

### **Summary**

This chapter has established the rationale and scope of the study. It introduced BLM as the organizational setting, identified the gap in empirical evidence concerning staff rewards and employee satisfaction in Malawian sexual reproductive health organizations, and presented the research objectives and questions. The study is grounded in Malawi's broader health sector priorities and is designed to produce evidence that can genuinely inform organizational practice. The chapters that follow develop the theoretical, methodological, and empirical dimensions through which that evidence is built.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This chapter draws together the scholarship most directly relevant to the study's central concern: the relationship between staff reward systems and employee satisfaction in healthcare organizations, with particular attention to the Malawian context and to BLM. The review moves through several interconnected sections, beginning with foundational theoretical and conceptual definitions before turning to empirical work conducted in comparable organizational and geographic settings. The theoretical framework guiding the study is then elaborated, weaving together three motivational theories that collectively offer a multi-layered lens through which to understand how rewards shape satisfaction. A conceptual framework capturing the study's key hypothesized relationships is presented, and the chapter closes with a synthesis of the principal insights.

## **Theoretical Literature Review**

### **Employee Satisfaction**

In organizational behaviour, employee satisfaction is understood as the overall sense of contentment that individuals experience in relation to their working lives. It is shaped by factors that reach well beyond remuneration to include the quality of workplace relationships, opportunities for advancement, perceived fairness in treatment, and the intrinsic nature of work assignments (McAuliffe et al., 2009a). Stone et al. (2006) demonstrated that satisfaction exerts a pronounced influence on organizational performance and service delivery outcomes in healthcare settings, making it a variable of considerable strategic importance. Within Malawi specifically, Chanza, Snelgar, and Louw (2013) have linked employee satisfaction to healthcare workforce motivation and retention, with downstream consequences for patient care. This study examines satisfaction as it manifests within the particular context of a sexual reproductive health organization, attending closely to how reward structures mediate that experience.

### **Staff Rewards**

Staff rewards encompass the full range of monetary and non-monetary incentives that organizations deploy in recognition of employee contribution. Monetary rewards include salaries, performance-related bonuses, and allowances, while non-monetary rewards cover recognition programmes, professional development opportunities, and work-life balance initiatives (CIPD, 2024). Within healthcare, the available evidence consistently positions rewards as a meaningful driver of motivation, influencing both the quality of professional engagement and the probability of retention (Mathauer and Imhoff, 2006). Expectancy Theory, developed by Victor Vroom in 1964, offers one influential account of how rewards produce these effects: the theory holds that employees are moved to exert effort when they believe that effort will generate adequate performance, and that performance will be followed by rewards they actually value (Irfan Wani, 2022). This chain linking effort, outcome, and reward valence provides a useful starting point for understanding why the adequacy and perceived fairness of reward systems carry such weight for workforce behaviour.

## **Empirical Literature Review**

### **Employee Satisfaction in Healthcare**

The empirical literature on employee satisfaction in Malawian healthcare settings is consistent in its portrait of dissatisfaction shaped by structural inadequacy. Chikaphupha et al. (2016) found that insufficient compensation and limited career advancement were among the most significant contributors to low morale: workers who felt financially undervalued and professionally stagnant were less engaged and more inclined to contemplate leaving. McAuliffe et al. (2009a) similarly examined satisfaction among healthcare workers in sexual and reproductive health facilities, identifying workload management, recognition practices, and remuneration as the principal determinants of how employees assessed their jobs. Together, these findings affirm the need for a rigorous evaluation of satisfaction within organizations like BLM, where the same structural pressures are at work.

### **Assessing Existing Staff Reward Systems**

Several studies have examined reward systems within comparable healthcare contexts. Schriedeknecht et al. (2015), in their analysis of workforce retention among Malawian nurse graduates, found that promotion opportunities functioned as a meaningful motivator: nurses who perceived genuine prospects for career progression reported stronger commitment to remaining in the public health sector. Fairness in reward distribution, regular engagement with programme staff, and access to continuing education each fostered a sense of organizational belonging that translated into improved retention. The study also found that structural conditions, adequate resource allocation and manageable nurse-to-patient ratios, were necessary for other reward elements to achieve their intended effects. Hagopian et al. (2009) reached broadly similar conclusions in their examination of Ugandan health workers, where dissatisfaction was attributable to low salaries, poor working conditions, and limited pathways for professional development, pointing to systemic shortcomings that, left unaddressed, erode the organizational conditions necessary for sustained motivation and high-quality service delivery.

### **Impact of Staff Rewards on Motivation, Job Satisfaction and Retention**

Ge et al. (2021) documented a positive association between the availability of both monetary and non-monetary rewards and overall satisfaction levels among healthcare professionals across several settings, reinforcing the importance of designing reward strategies that address the full spectrum of employee needs rather than concentrating resources on financial compensation alone. Research drawing on Ugandan health worker data by Lutwama, Roos and Dolamo (2012) further illuminated the relationship between individual

performance behaviours and organizational structures, showing that workers who felt supported and fairly treated demonstrated greater adaptability and initiative. The authors argued that reward systems attentive to this behavioural dimension are better positioned to build the engaged, proactive workforce that effective service delivery demands. For sexual reproductive health organizations in Malawi, these findings suggest that tailoring reward frameworks to the specific relational and developmental needs of employees could meaningfully improve both individual performance and organizational outcomes.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Overview**

The theoretical framework for this study integrates three complementary motivational theories: Expectancy Theory, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and Equity Theory. Each illuminates a distinct dimension of the relationship between rewards and satisfaction, and together they provide a comprehensive conceptual architecture for interpreting the study's findings.

### **Expectancy Theory**

Victor Vroom's Expectancy Theory, formulated in 1964, situates the source of employee motivation in cognitive calculations about the links between effort, performance, and reward. Motivation depends on three core beliefs: valence, the degree to which an employee values a particular reward; expectancy, the conviction that effort will yield the desired level of performance; and instrumentality, the belief that performance will actually be followed by the anticipated reward (Govender, Migiro and Kyule, 2018; Irfan Wani, 2022). Where any of these links is weak or absent, motivation declines. The theory therefore implies that effective reward systems must be perceived as consistent, transparent, and genuinely aligned with what employees care about.

Mdhlalose (2022) applied Expectancy Theory to the study of reward equity and found that employees are more likely to be satisfied and productive when they perceive their rewards as proportionate to their effort and broadly comparable to those received by colleagues. This equity dimension reinforces the conclusion that perceptions of fairness are not peripheral to reward effectiveness but central to it.

### **Two-Factor Theory**

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between two independent sets of workplace factors. Hygiene factors, including salary, physical working conditions, and organizational policies, are extrinsic to the work itself: when present, they prevent active dissatisfaction, but they do not, on their own, generate positive motivation (Herzberg, 2003). Motivators, by contrast, are intrinsic to the role and include recognition, achievement, personal growth, and the assumption of greater responsibility. When these factors are present and meaningful, employees experience genuine satisfaction and higher engagement.

The applicability of this framework to BLM is clear. Alrawahi et al. (2020) confirmed in a healthcare setting that career development opportunities and intellectually stimulating assignments were strongly associated with satisfaction, while salary and working conditions, though important for preventing dissatisfaction, did not independently drive positive motivation. Ishfaq et al. (2021) reached comparable conclusions in a different sector, finding that recognition and advancement were the primary satisfaction drivers. These findings reinforce the need for BLM's reward strategy to address both the hygiene and motivational dimensions of the employee experience.

### **Equity Theory**

John Stacey Adams' Equity Theory, developed in 1963, examines how employees' perceptions of fairness in reward distribution affect their motivation and satisfaction. The theory holds that individuals assess the ratio between what they contribute, effort, skills, and experience, and what they receive, rewards and recognition, in comparison to the same perceived ratio among their peers. Where this comparative assessment produces a sense of imbalance, employees are likely to experience reduced motivation, diminished organizational commitment, and in more severe cases, elevated intentions to leave (Adams, 1963).

Recent scholarship continues to validate these propositions. Hamouche et al. (2023) found that perceived inequity in reward distribution was associated with reduced organizational citizenship behaviour and heightened turnover intentions, while Ha and Moon (2023) demonstrated that distributive justice is a meaningful predictor of employee engagement and organizational sustainability. At BLM, where employees work in close proximity to colleagues performing comparable roles, perceptions of fairness are particularly salient. If staff feel that rewards are distributed inequitably, whether across departments, tenure categories, or hierarchical levels, the resulting sense of injustice is likely to undermine precisely the kind of motivated, committed workforce that BLM's mission depends upon.

### **Conceptual Framework**

[Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework (to be inserted by author)]

Source: Researcher (2024)

The conceptual framework represents three hypothesized relationships. First, higher levels of reward are expected to be associated with stronger perceptions of fairness, thereby contributing to increased satisfaction and motivation. Second, fair reward distribution is anticipated to positively predict employee satisfaction, while perceived inequity is expected to undermine it. Third, satisfied employees are hypothesized to demonstrate higher levels of motivation and organizational commitment, which in turn should produce improved performance and reduced turnover.

### **Summary**

This chapter has examined the theoretical and empirical foundations of the study. Drawing on Expectancy Theory, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and Equity Theory, it has established a multi-layered conceptual basis for understanding how reward structures influence satisfaction, motivation, and retention. The empirical review has documented widespread dissatisfaction in comparable healthcare settings, driven by inadequate financial compensation, limited career development, and perceived unfairness in reward distribution. These insights inform both the conceptual framework and the specific hypotheses that the empirical chapters explore.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter sets out the methodological framework through which the study's research questions were addressed. It describes the philosophical stance adopted, the approach to theory development, the overall research design, the sampling strategy, data collection instruments, and analytical procedures. Attention is also given to measures taken to ensure reliability and validity, and to the ethical considerations governing the conduct of the research. The chapter concludes with an honest account of the study's limitations.

### **Study Location**

The research was conducted across BLM's organizational network, encompassing its clinics, outreach sites, and head office in Malawi. Respondents were drawn from staff working in different capacities and locations within the organization, so that the study captured perspectives from across BLM's operational geography.

### **Study Participants**

Participants were selected from employees working within BLM's clinic and outreach channels. Eligibility criteria were designed to ensure diversity: the study included full-time employees currently in post, spanning a range of departments and hierarchical levels from frontline service delivery staff through to management. Former employees, those on temporary or extended contracts not actively engaged in daily operations, and individuals who declined to participate were excluded.

### **Research Design**

#### **Research Philosophy**

The study adopted an interpretivist research philosophy. Interpretivism holds that social reality is constructed through human experience and meaning-making, and that understanding it requires close attention to the subjective perceptions and lived experiences of participants (Nordqvist, Hall and Melin, 2009). In the context of a healthcare organization where individual and cultural factors profoundly shape how employees experience their conditions of work, interpretivism offered a particularly well-suited philosophical orientation. It permitted a nuanced engagement with the complexity of employee satisfaction across an environment characterized by resource constraints, diverse staffing structures, and varied organizational cultures across sites (Rautenbach, 2023).

#### **Approach to Theory Development**

An abductive approach to theory development was adopted. Abductive reasoning begins with the identification of surprising or poorly understood patterns in empirical data and moves iteratively between observation and theoretical reflection to generate the most plausible explanation for what has been found (Rautenbach, 2023; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). This approach suits mixed-methods inquiry well because it accommodates the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of organizational behaviour. By

combining inductive sensitivity to emerging data patterns with deductive engagement with established theoretical frameworks, the abductive approach enabled the study to generate contextually relevant and theoretically grounded insights into the relationship between rewards and satisfaction at BLM.

### **Methodological Choice**

A mixed-methods design was employed, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative material gathered through semi-structured interviews, workplace observations, and document analysis. This integration was judged appropriate to the complexity of the research problem. Quantitative methods provided statistical insight into the prevalence and distribution of satisfaction levels and reward perceptions across the sample, while qualitative approaches enabled a richer understanding of the reasoning, values, and experiences underlying those perceptions (Creswell and Clark, 2018). The combination of data sources also strengthened validity and reliability through triangulation, offering a more complete picture of organizational dynamics than either approach alone could provide (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

### **Research Strategy**

A survey-based strategy was selected as the primary vehicle for quantitative data collection. Surveys allowed systematic data gathering from a substantial proportion of the target population and provided the standardization necessary for statistical comparison across employee groups (Creswell, 2014; Dillman et al., 2014). The instrument was designed to elicit information on satisfaction levels, reward awareness, perceptions of fairness, the types of rewards received, and the motivational significance attributed to those rewards. This quantitative foundation was complemented by qualitative inquiry, which provided interpretive depth and contextual texture.

### **Sampling Design**

BLM employs approximately 200 staff across three operational segments: 100 clinic employees, 26 head office support staff, and 74 outreach personnel. The target population was defined as the outreach segment, whose members are distributed across the country and whose working conditions differ in important ways from those of clinic-based or head office staff.

Sample size was determined using a standard statistical formula, applying a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and assuming a population proportion of 50% to produce the most conservative estimate. With a population of 74, this calculation yielded a required sample of approximately 62 participants (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Simple random sampling was used to select participants from within the outreach segment, ensuring every eligible employee had an equal probability of inclusion and thereby strengthening the representativeness of the findings.

### **Data Collection Methods and Tools**

Data were gathered through three complementary methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with outreach team members, using an interview guide of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed accounts of employees' experiences of and attitudes toward BLM's reward systems. These interviews allowed participants to communicate nuance, context, and personal significance in ways that a survey instrument alone cannot capture. Direct observation of workplace dynamics was also undertaken using structured observation checklists, yielding contextual data on communication patterns, recognition practices, and organizational climate. Document analysis was conducted through structured review templates, examining existing policies, procedures, and records related to employee rewards and recognition. Together, these three methods enabled triangulation of data across independent sources, enhancing the credibility and completeness of the study's findings.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data from interviews, observations, and document review were analysed using thematic analysis: a systematic process of identifying, coding, and interpreting recurring patterns across the data (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). Codes were developed inductively from the data itself, allowing themes to emerge from participants' own language and conceptual categories. Quantitative survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarize distributions and central tendencies, supplemented where appropriate by inferential techniques such as correlation analysis. The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings followed an explanatory sequential logic, in which survey results provided an empirical overview that qualitative data then illuminated and enriched.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Multiple strategies were adopted to strengthen reliability and validity. Standardized procedures for data collection were established and consistently applied across all sites and participant groups. Reliability checks on coding were conducted by reviewing a subset of coded data against initial categorizations, with Cohen's kappa coefficient used as a measure of internal consistency. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and document analysis provided convergent evidence from independent sources (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Validity was pursued through careful alignment of research instruments with the study's theoretical frameworks and objectives, complemented by pilot testing to assess instrument clarity. Member checking was undertaken by sharing preliminary findings with a subset of participants to verify interpretive accuracy. Reflexivity was practised throughout, with explicit attention to potential biases and their implications for data interpretation. An audit trail documenting key methodological decisions was maintained to support transparency and replicability (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Malawi School of Government's Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in data collection. Participants were clearly informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and their unconditional right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. All data were anonymized and participants assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. No procedures were used that posed a risk of harm or unnecessary discomfort, and ethical standards were maintained throughout all phases of the research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

### **Limitations**

Several limitations of the study warrant acknowledgement. The focus on BLM's outreach department, though appropriate given the research objectives, constrains the generalizability of findings to other segments of the organization and to comparable entities in different sectors or national contexts. Reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, particularly on sensitive matters such as management effectiveness or reward fairness. The sample size, though statistically determined, may not capture the full diversity of perspectives within the outreach team. Finally, the cross-sectional design captures a moment in organizational time rather than tracking change over a sustained period, and practical constraints of time and resources placed limits on the depth and breadth of the inquiry. These limitations are acknowledged throughout the interpretation of findings and suggest productive directions for future research.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 has laid out the methodological foundation for the study. An interpretivist philosophy, an abductive approach to theory development, and a mixed-methods design combining surveys, semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis were employed to generate a rich and contextually grounded understanding of reward practices and employee satisfaction at BLM. Rigorous attention to reliability, validity, and ethical conduct underpinned all phases of the research, and the study's limitations have been openly acknowledged. The following chapter presents the findings generated through these methods.

## **4. Research Results and Findings**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the study's findings in relation to each of its three research objectives. The results draw on the 63 completed survey responses collected from BLM outreach and clinic employees, supplemented by qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. Demographic data are presented first to contextualize the findings, followed by a structured discussion organized around the three areas of inquiry: the current level of employee satisfaction, the characteristics and perceived fairness of existing reward structures, and the impact of different reward types on motivation and retention.

### **Restating Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study was to evaluate employee satisfaction and reward systems at BLM and their influence on motivation and retention. The specific objectives were: to evaluate the current level of employee satisfaction within BLM; to analyse the existing staff reward structure and systems; and to examine the impact of monetary and non-monetary rewards on employee job satisfaction.

### **Demographic Data**

The survey was completed by 63 participants. Gender distribution was moderately unequal, with 57.1% of respondents identifying as male and 42.9% as female. This distribution is noted as a contextual factor that may shape how different aspects of the reward system are experienced and evaluated, since gender-related factors can influence both the actual and perceived equity of reward outcomes.

[Figure 4.1: Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents (n=63) — to be inserted by author]

The age profile of respondents was dominated by the 35 to 44 bracket, accounting for 52.4% of participants. Those aged 25 to 34 represented 22.2%, those aged 45 to 54 constituted 17.5%, while those under 25 and over 55 accounted for 4.8% and 3.2% respectively. The concentration of mid-career employees in the sample matters for interpretation, since workers at this stage typically have well-formed expectations regarding career progression, reward equity, and organizational recognition.

[Figure 4.2: Age Distribution of Survey Respondents (n=63) — to be inserted by author]

In terms of departmental affiliation, 52.4% of respondents came from the outreach department and 47.6% from the clinic department. This near-even split ensures that the data reflect perspectives from both of BLM's main operational streams. Job position data showed that 69.8% occupied mid-level positions, with entry-level employees constituting 22.2% of the sample. Senior-level and clinician roles were less represented, at 4.8% and 3.2% respectively.

[Figure 4.3: Department Distribution of Survey Respondents (n=63) — to be inserted by author]

[Figure 4.4: Distribution of Survey Respondents by Job Position — to be inserted by author]

Tenure data revealed that 60.3% of respondents had served between seven and ten years, followed by 19% with four to six years, 14.3% with one to three years, and 6.4% with less than one year. The predominance of long-serving employees in the sample is particularly significant given that subsequent findings revealed dissatisfaction to be most pronounced among those with the longest tenure.

[Figure 4.5: Distribution of Years of Service Among Survey Respondents — to be inserted by author]

### **Objective 1: Employee Satisfaction**

Survey data revealed that 49.2% of respondents described their satisfaction as neutral, indicating neither strong satisfaction nor strong dissatisfaction. A further 27% reported being satisfied with their role. However, 17.5% expressed dissatisfaction, and the remaining 6.3% were spread between the extremes of very dissatisfied and very satisfied. The concentration of responses in the neutral and dissatisfied categories, alongside the relatively small proportion expressing genuine positive satisfaction, suggests that the organizational conditions at BLM are not currently conducive to a deeply engaged or motivated workforce.

[Figure 4.6: Job Satisfaction Among 63 Respondents at Banja La Mtsogolo — to be inserted by author]

Analysis of the specific factors shaping satisfaction revealed that relational and environmental elements were rated most highly. Relationship with colleagues was identified as a key contributor by 50.8% of respondents, and the broader work environment by 49.2%. Job security was noted by 44.4%, while recognition and rewards, alongside salary, were each cited by 41.3%. Work-life balance featured in responses from 38.1% of participants, followed by career advancement opportunities at 31.7% and quality of management at 22.2%. While physical and relational conditions carry considerable weight, concerns about compensation, job security, and professional growth are also substantial and closely interrelated.

[Figure 4.7: Factors Contributing to Job Satisfaction at BLM (n=63) — to be inserted by author]

### **Objective 2: Reward Structures**

A substantial majority of respondents, 79.4%, reported awareness of the reward systems in place at BLM. This relatively high level of awareness provides a constructive foundation on which improvement efforts can build, since employees cannot meaningfully engage with reward structures they are unaware of. However, awareness alone does not constitute satisfaction with those structures.

[Figure 4.8: Awareness of Staff Reward Systems at BLM — to be inserted by author]

Perceptions of fairness were notably ambivalent. The largest group, comprising 60.3% of respondents, rated the reward system as neutral in terms of fairness. A further 34.9% viewed it as fair, and only 4.8% regarded it as very fair. Notably, no respondents actively described the system as unfair in this particular item,

yet the dominance of neutral responses points to a missed opportunity: when employees feel indifferent rather than genuinely affirmed by a reward system, its motivational potential is substantially diminished.

[Figure 4.9: Perceived Fairness of the Reward System at BLM — to be inserted by author]

Data on reward types received in the preceding year showed that monetary rewards, including bonuses and salary increments, were the most common, reported by 61.9% of respondents. Professional development opportunities such as workshops and training were accessed by 28.6%, while 27% received non-monetary recognition in the form of certificates or public commendation. Extra vacation days were reported by 3.2%, and 11.1% identified other rewards not captured by the survey categories.

[Figure 4.10: Types of Rewards Received by Employees in the Past Year — to be inserted by author]

Qualitative data gathered through interviews deepened this quantitative picture considerably. Respondents consistently raised concerns about the adequacy of financial compensation, particularly in the context of currency devaluation and rising living costs. Many employees called for the reinstatement of the thirteenth cheque and for housing and transport allowances. Concerns about transparency and merit in promotion decisions were also prominent: several interviewees expressed the view that promotions were not consistently awarded on the basis of performance, generating perceptions of favouritism and procedural unfairness. Professional development was identified as a significant gap, with employees in clinical roles noting that insufficient access to continuing education left them struggling to keep pace with evolving clinical practices.

### **Objective 3: Impact of Rewards on Motivation and Retention**

Motivation levels among respondents were generally low. The largest proportion, 33.3%, described themselves as only slightly motivated, while 27% reported moderate motivation and 20.6% indicated they felt motivated. At the more positive end, 6.4% described themselves as highly motivated. At the other extreme, 12.7% reported no motivation at all. This distribution indicates a workforce where engagement is fragile and the conditions for sustained high performance are not yet firmly established.

[Figure 4.11: Distribution of Employee Motivation Levels at BLM — to be inserted by author]

Despite these low baseline motivation levels, the data make clear that staff rewards were perceived as highly relevant to motivation. The largest group, 33.3% of respondents, reported that rewards influenced their motivation extremely, and a combined total of 55.5% indicated that rewards influenced their motivation either significantly or extremely. Only 6.3% reported being not at all influenced by rewards, confirming that the reward system, whatever its current deficiencies, remains a lever that management can meaningfully deploy to improve motivation outcomes.

[Figure 4.12: The Influence of Staff Rewards on Employee Motivation at BLM — to be inserted by author]

Data on the relative importance of different reward types revealed that career advancement opportunities and monetary rewards were rated as very important by the largest proportions of respondents, followed closely by recognition, professional development, and work-life balance. This hierarchy reinforces the finding that compensation is a primary concern while confirming that employees also place considerable value on conditions and opportunities that allow them to grow professionally and be genuinely acknowledged for their contributions.

[Figure 4.13: Importance of Different Types of Rewards According to Respondents — to be inserted by author]

Perceptions of fairness in promotion processes were similarly mixed. A plurality of 38.1% described promotion opportunities as neutral, 23.8% regarded them as fair, and 17.5% considered them unfair. A further 15.9% found them very fair, while 4.8% rated them as very unfair. The concentration of responses in the neutral range reflects an organizational environment where promotion processes lack sufficient transparency to generate confident assessments, leaving many employees unable to trust fully in the fairness of advancement decisions.

[Figure 4.14: Perceptions of Fairness in Promotion Opportunities at BLM — to be inserted by author]

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 has presented the study's empirical findings across three dimensions: the current level of employee satisfaction at BLM, the characteristics and perceived fairness of existing reward structures, and the influence of different reward types on motivation and retention intentions. The data reveal a workforce that is predominantly neutral to dissatisfied, where monetary rewards are valued most highly but widely perceived as inadequate, non-monetary recognition is appreciated but frequently judged insufficient, and both promotion processes and reward distribution practices are seen by many employees as lacking in fairness and transparency.

Both monetary and non-monetary rewards emerged as meaningful determinants of motivation, and the evidence strongly suggests that improving the equity, adequacy, and transparency of BLM's reward systems would produce substantial gains in employee engagement and retention.

## **Discussion**

### **Introduction**

This chapter places the empirical findings from Chapter 4 in dialogue with the theoretical frameworks and empirical literature presented in Chapter 2. The aim is not simply to confirm or disconfirm what the literature predicts, but to interpret the findings within their specific organizational context, draw out their broader implications, and propose evidence-based conclusions and recommendations that can meaningfully inform practice at BLM and comparable organizations.

### **Employee Satisfaction**

The finding that satisfaction at BLM is low, and that dissatisfaction deepens with length of service, is both consistent with the theoretical frameworks adopted in this study and well supported by the comparative empirical literature. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory would predict precisely this outcome: where hygiene factors such as salary and job security are inadequate, the result is not motivational neutrality but active dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 2003). Long-serving employees, who have accumulated expectations of recognition and career progression over years of sustained contribution, are likely to feel the gap between their expectations and organizational reality most acutely. This is consistent with Osman and Noordin's (2019) finding that clearly defined career development pathways are particularly important for sustaining satisfaction among experienced employees.

Contemporary research by Deci and Ryan (2021) supports the need for a holistic motivational approach that does not reduce employee wellbeing to the satisfaction of extrinsic needs alone. Judge et al. (2020) similarly found that intrinsic motivation, shaped by meaningful work and genuine recognition, predicts sustained satisfaction in ways that financial compensation on its own cannot replicate. These insights reinforce the study's finding that BLM faces a structural challenge extending beyond pay levels to encompass the quality of the work experience itself.

### **Reward Structures**

The analysis of BLM's reward structures revealed a system widely perceived as inequitable and insufficient, particularly with regard to monetary compensation. This aligns with the predictions of Adams' Equity Theory: when employees judge that the ratio between their contributions and their rewards compares unfavourably to that of their peers, a corrosive sense of organizational injustice takes hold, undermining both motivation and trust in management (Adams, 1963). Gupta and Shaw (2018) and Armstrong and Taylor (2020) have both argued that transparency in reward distribution and clear, merit-based criteria for recognition are essential conditions for the perception of equity. In the absence of these conditions, even well-designed reward programmes risk failing to achieve their intended motivational effects.

The findings also indicate an underinvestment in non-monetary rewards. While recognition and professional development were valued by employees, they were frequently described as insufficient and inconsistently applied. Armstrong and Taylor (2020) have stressed that a balanced reward system must treat monetary and non-monetary components as equally important and mutually reinforcing, not deploy recognition as a low-cost substitute for adequate financial compensation.

### **Impact of Rewards on Motivation and Retention**

The study confirmed that both monetary and non-monetary rewards significantly influence motivation and retention intentions at BLM. The finding that more than half of respondents reported being significantly or extremely influenced by rewards in their motivation is notable and should be read as an organizational opportunity: targeted improvements to the reward system have the potential to yield substantial gains in workforce engagement. Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory would anticipate this relationship, since motivation depends on the perception that desired rewards are attainable through effort and performance. Where rewards are perceived as inadequate or inconsistently delivered, the instrumentality link in this motivational chain breaks down.

Research by Kantor and Kao (2023) and Meyer and Allen (2020) has demonstrated that organizations offering a balanced combination of tangible and intangible rewards tend to achieve higher retention rates and stronger organizational commitment. The implication for BLM is that no single reward category, however well designed, is sufficient on its own. The most effective approach will address financial adequacy, professional

development, recognition, and the structural conditions that allow employees to perceive their treatment as fundamentally fair.

### **Conclusions**

Several conclusions emerge from this analysis. Employee satisfaction at BLM is low, particularly among long-serving staff, and its primary drivers are structural: inadequate remuneration, constrained career development, and insufficient recognition. Existing reward systems are perceived as inequitable and insufficiently transparent, which compounds the motivational deficit created by financial inadequacy. Both monetary and non-monetary rewards are meaningfully linked to motivation and retention, and the evidence indicates that a balanced, equity-oriented revision of BLM's reward practices could generate significant improvements in workforce engagement and organizational effectiveness.

### **Recommendations**

Four key recommendations emerge from the findings. First, BLM should undertake a comprehensive review of its reward structures with the explicit goals of improving fairness, adequacy, and transparency. Salary structures should be benchmarked against the market and the cost of living, and the criteria for performance-related rewards should be clearly communicated to all staff. Second, BLM should invest more deliberately in non-monetary rewards, particularly recognition programmes and professional development opportunities, treating these not as peripheral additions but as integral components of a coherent total reward strategy (Armstrong and Taylor, 2020). Third, the organization should develop and communicate clear career pathways at all levels, with particular attention to long-serving staff who may feel that their contributions have been overlooked and their career prospects limited (Osman and Noordin, 2019). Fourth, BLM should establish regular, structured feedback mechanisms through which employees can raise concerns about reward equity and contribute to ongoing improvement of reward practices (Meyer and Allen, 2020). Such mechanisms would serve both as a tool for organizational learning and as a tangible signal to employees that their voices are heard and their experiences matter.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

The study's focus on a single department within one organization, while appropriate for an in-depth inquiry, limits the transferability of findings. Future research should broaden the sample to encompass all operational segments of BLM and extend inquiry to other sexual reproductive health organizations in Malawi and the wider region. Longitudinal designs would illuminate how changes to reward systems translate into shifts in satisfaction and retention over time, and comparative studies across different healthcare contexts would clarify the extent to which the findings are specific to BLM's organizational culture and circumstances.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 5 has interpreted the study's findings against theoretical frameworks and empirical literature, drawing conclusions about the state of employee satisfaction and reward systems at BLM and proposing evidence-based recommendations for organizational improvement. The discussion confirms that both the adequacy of financial compensation and the perceived fairness of reward distribution are critical determinants of satisfaction and motivation, and that a comprehensive and equitably applied reward strategy is essential for improving BLM's capacity to attract, retain, and motivate the workforce its mission demands.

## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

This final chapter brings the study to a close by synthesizing its key contributions, elaborating their strategic implications, and situating the findings within the broader landscape of human resource management in healthcare. The chapter provides a comprehensive and practically oriented reflection on what the study has established, what it implies for organizational practice, and where future inquiry would be most productive.

### **Synthesis of Key Findings**

The research has generated three overarching findings. First, employee satisfaction at BLM falls significantly below what would be expected in a high-performing organization, and the problem is most acute among long-serving employees whose accumulated experience has given them well-formed expectations that the current reward environment consistently fails to meet. Inadequate monetary compensation, constrained career development, and insufficient recognition are the primary drivers of this dissatisfaction.

Second, BLM's reward systems are perceived by a substantial proportion of employees as inequitable and insufficiently transparent, particularly with respect to financial compensation and promotion decisions. The gap between what employees contribute and what they receive, when assessed against the perceived contributions

and rewards of colleagues, generates a sense of organizational injustice that Equity Theory predicts will undermine motivation and commitment over time.

Third, the data confirm that both monetary and non-monetary rewards are meaningfully linked to employee motivation and retention intentions. The current imbalance between these two categories, with financial compensation dominating the reward landscape while non-monetary recognition and professional development remain underdeveloped, is producing suboptimal motivational outcomes and contributing to elevated turnover intentions.

### **Strategic Implications**

The findings carry several strategic implications for BLM. The organization faces a clear imperative to revise its reward systems in ways that address both financial and non-financial dimensions simultaneously. Salary structures need to be brought into alignment with market realities and the cost of living, while non-monetary rewards, including recognition programmes and professional development opportunities, need to be elevated from their current peripheral status to central components of a coherent total reward strategy.

Employee engagement at BLM would benefit substantially from a more deliberate and structured approach to career development, including clearly communicated progression pathways and investment in leadership and succession planning. This is especially important for long-serving employees, who represent a repository of organizational knowledge and experience that BLM cannot afford to lose to disengagement or attrition. Regular, transparent feedback mechanisms connecting employees to decision-makers would further strengthen engagement by demonstrating that the organization is genuinely responsive to workforce concerns.

Equity must be positioned as a foundational criterion for all reward-related decisions. This means ensuring not only that reward levels are adequate in absolute terms, but that the processes through which rewards are allocated are transparent, consistently applied, and understood by employees to be fair. Regular audits of reward practices, informed by employee feedback, would support the continuous improvement that sustained equity requires.

### **Broader Implications for Business Practice**

The lessons from this study carry relevance well beyond BLM. Organizations operating in resource-constrained environments, where financial rewards are inevitably limited, need to invest particularly carefully in the non-monetary dimensions of their total reward offer. Recognition, meaningful work, professional growth, and the experience of being treated fairly are powerful motivators that cost comparatively little and can sustain engagement in ways that salary increases alone cannot.

The evidence also cautions against standardized, one-size-fits-all reward systems. Employees differ in their priorities and in the aspects of their working lives they find most motivating, and reward systems that are sensitive to these differences, whether across departments, tenure categories, or career stages, will generally outperform those that are not. Continuous monitoring of satisfaction and reward perceptions through regular surveys and qualitative feedback is essential for keeping reward practices aligned with a changing workforce in a changing organizational environment.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

As with all organizational research, the findings of this study must be interpreted in light of its methodological constraints. The single-organization, single-department focus limits generalizability, and the cross-sectional design precludes conclusions about how satisfaction changes over time or in response to specific interventions. Future research addressing these limitations through multi-site, longitudinal designs would substantially strengthen the evidential base for reward system reform in Malawi's healthcare sector. Comparative studies examining the effectiveness of specific non-monetary reward interventions across different cultural and organizational contexts would also make a valuable contribution to the literature.

### **Conclusion**

This study has established that the effectiveness of BLM's staff reward systems in promoting employee satisfaction, motivation, and retention is currently constrained by financial inadequacy, perceptions of inequity, and an underdevelopment of non-monetary recognition and professional development practices. The evidence supports a comprehensive reform of BLM's reward approach, grounded in the principles of equity, transparency, and balance across monetary and non-monetary components. By acting on these recommendations, BLM stands to strengthen the organizational conditions under which its workforce can genuinely thrive, and through that workforce, to improve the quality and reach of the sexual reproductive health services on which hundreds of thousands of Malawians depend.

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