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Linking Organizational Justice to Employee In-Role Performance: The Mediating Role of Embeddedness and the Moderating Role of Advocacy

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Abstract

Organizational sustainability is largely driven by employee performance. This study aims to investigate the association between organizational justice and employees' in-role performance. In addition, organizational embeddedness and employee advocacy are examined as the mediating and moderating variables, respectively. Data were collected from 402 medical doctors employed in various hospitals through a snowball sampling approach, utilizing a structured, closed-ended questionnaire. The analysis was conducted using the partial least squares (PLS) technique. Findings reveal that perceptions of organizational justice positively influence employees' in-role performance. Moreover, organizational embeddedness mediates this relationship, while employee advocacy strengthens it as a moderating factor. The study extends prior theoretical models by incorporating the role of interactional justice and emphasizing the significance of employee advocacy in enhancing performance outcomes. From a practical standpoint, hospital administrators can foster higher in-role performance by ensuring fair treatment, implementing unbiased procedures, and maintaining transparent communication with employees. These initiatives can be further reinforced through supportive managerial practices. However, the cross-sectional design of this study limits the generalizability of its findings.

Keywords: Distributive justice, Organizational justice, Procedural justice, Employee embeddedness, Interactional justice, Employee advocacy, Conservation of resources theory, Social exchange theory

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Introduction

Managing employees' in-role performance continues to be a central concern for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers alike [1-3]. The competitiveness of any organization largely depends on how effectively its employees perform their assigned roles. Conversely, inadequate in-role performance can lead to increased turnover, which has detrimental implications for both individuals and organizations [4]. Nesheim *et al.* [5] define in-role performance as "a work-related behavior that is considered to be part of the formal job requirements." Thus, in-role performance represents a critical set of behaviors directly influencing the technical core of the organization and, in turn, its overall effectiveness.

Organizational justice refers to the ethical and fair treatment of individuals within an organization [6]. Prior research has shown that fairness in managerial practices enhances employees' in-role performance [7]. Equitable treatment provides employees with valuable psychological and social resources, fostering stronger organizational embeddedness and improved performance outcomes. Employee advocacy, on the other hand, refers to the act of promoting and safeguarding employees' interests while demonstrating organizational transparency [8]. It encompasses addressing employee grievances, preventing unfair treatment and harassment, and responding to concerns in an ethical and constructive manner [9]. Such advocacy can further reinforce employees' in-role performance.



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The literature offers multiple theoretical perspectives explaining how justice influences performance. This study draws on Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory [10]. According to SET, social interactions involve reciprocal exchanges where both parties seek mutual benefit, whether in tangible or intangible forms. Within organizational settings, employers and employees engage in such exchanges: when employees perceive fairness and equal treatment, they develop trust and respond through higher engagement and stronger embeddedness. This relationship is further strengthened by employee advocacy, as employees who feel heard and supported by management are more likely to reciprocate through improved performance.

From the COR theory perspective, organizations seek to protect and sustain their valuable resources—one of which is organizational justice. By ensuring fairness, employers cultivate trust and foster employees' embeddedness, which in turn enhances performance. Employee advocacy acts as an additional reinforcing factor, as supportive organizational behavior encourages employee loyalty and retention. Both theories thus describe complementary mechanisms: social exchange can be viewed as a form of resource exchange, wherein organizational justice functions as a key resource provided by employers, and employees reciprocate by contributing higher levels of performance and commitment—further enriching organizational resources.

Empirical evidence supports these theoretical arguments. Prior studies have found that employees perceiving higher distributive justice experience lower job dissatisfaction [11-14]. Similarly, Lee *et al.* [15] emphasized distributive justice as a critical factor that strengthens employee embeddedness by reducing turnover intentions. Conversely, inequitable treatment fosters negative outcomes, including disengagement and dissatisfaction [16]. Greenberg [17] further argued that employees who perceive high levels of procedural, distributive, and interactional justice exhibit greater organizational embeddedness, which ultimately enhances performance—especially when supported by strong employee advocacy mechanisms.

Building upon the framework developed by Ghosh *et al.* [10], this study seeks to extend the existing literature by integrating employee advocacy as a moderating factor in the relationship between organizational justice, job embeddedness, and in-role performance. Although Ghosh *et al.* [10] demonstrated that organizational justice enhances in-role performance, their model did not fully capture the underlying mechanisms. We propose that this relationship is better understood when moderated by employee advocacy, as organizational efforts to support and protect employees strengthen trust and positive perceptions—leading to improved in-role performance.

Moreover, while Ghosh *et al.* [10] considered organizational justice as comprising only distributive and procedural justice, this study incorporates interactional justice as a third dimension. Interactional justice emphasizes open communication and respectful interpersonal treatment—factors that are crucial for embedding employees within the organization. By adding this dimension, the present study contributes to existing models by highlighting the importance of transparent and respectful organizational communication in fostering fairness perceptions and enhancing employee performance.

Literature Review

Organizational justice and In-Role performance

The construct of organizational justice is composed of three main dimensions: distributive, procedural, and interactional justice [18]. According to Gilliland and Paddock [19], distributive justice concerns the equitable allocation of rewards and resources in accordance with principles of fairness. Procedural justice, on the other hand, emphasizes the impartiality and transparency of the decision-making process [20]. Interactional justice reflects the degree of respect, dignity, and quality of interpersonal treatment experienced by individuals within organizational interactions [21].

Rooted in social exchange theory [10], organizational justice highlights the importance of reciprocal relationships between employers and employees. When employees perceive that they are treated fairly, they tend to develop positive work attitudes and stronger motivation toward achieving organizational goals [18]. Zhang *et al.* [22] also noted that fairness perceptions prompt employees to engage more actively in goal-oriented behaviors that enhance both individual and organizational performance.

A substantial body of literature [23-25] links justice perceptions to greater job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and both in-role and extra-role performance. Fischer and Smith [26] argued that justice serves as a core factor shaping employees' self-reported behaviors, which ultimately leads to improved organizational outcomes. When employees experience fairness, they tend to demonstrate higher levels of trust [27], cooperation [28, 29], and organizational citizenship behavior [6]. Such trust and collaboration naturally enhance motivation and productivity within formal job roles. In contrast, perceived injustice can fuel counterproductive tendencies, withdrawal, and retaliatory actions [30, 31].

H1: Organizational justice has a positive influence on employees' in-role performance.

Organizational embeddedness

The notion of organizational embeddedness refers to how deeply employees are integrated into and connected with their organization [10]. The broader concept, job embeddedness, was initially introduced by Mitchell *et al.* [32], encompassing two

dimensions: organizational embeddedness and community embeddedness. Each dimension consists of three subcomponents—fit, links, and sacrifice—that collectively describe an employee's level of attachment.

According to Mitchell *et al.* [32], *links* represent the formal and informal ties an employee maintains with individuals and institutions in the workplace. A greater number of significant connections strengthens one's embeddedness. *Fit* denotes the degree to which an individual's values, abilities, and goals align with the organizational culture and environment [33]. *Sacrifice* pertains to the perceived personal and professional losses—such as financial benefits, prestige, or social relationships—that would result from leaving the organization.

Shahriari [34] identified fair rule enforcement, opportunities to appeal decisions, and employee participation in decision-making as key expressions of procedural justice. Similarly, Greenberg [17] emphasized that when employees are given a voice in policy development and are treated with respect, their sense of belonging and embeddedness within the organization is reinforced. Empirical studies [11, 13, 31, 35-38] consistently show that equitable treatment and dignified interaction cultivate emotional attachment and reduce turnover intentions.

Hence, employees who perceive fairness across distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions are likely to become more rooted in their organizations.

H2: Distributive justice positively affects organizational embeddedness.

H3: Procedural justice positively affects organizational embeddedness.

H4: Interactional justice positively affects organizational embeddedness.

Drawing on conservation of resources (COR) theory, Harris *et al.* [39] explained that individuals strive to preserve their existing resources while also seeking new ones. Employees who are highly embedded gain access to more resources—such as professional networks, alignment with organizational goals, and job-related security. When this resource abundance is reinforced by fair treatment, it leads to improved performance within formal job roles. Prior research [10, 40] supports this notion, highlighting the link between embeddedness and in-role performance. Justice serves as a foundational resource that strengthens embeddedness, which in turn fosters higher productivity.

H5: Organizational embeddedness mediates the relationship between organizational justice and employees' in-role performance.

Employee advocacy

Employee advocacy reflects an organization's commitment to act in the best interests of its employees [8]. It can also be viewed as the extent to which employees believe that their contributions are valued and that the organization genuinely cares about their welfare [9]. Advocacy involves allocating additional resources to improve employee performance and well-being. Organizations that actively promote advocacy create a mutually beneficial environment, fostering satisfaction and loyalty [41]. These supportive conditions enhance employees' sense of belonging and embeddedness within the organization. According to Otake and Wong [42], employees who perceive that their rights and interests are acknowledged report greater job satisfaction and commitment, accompanied by lower turnover intentions. Supported employees are more resilient, exert greater effort in fulfilling their responsibilities, and maintain persistence even when facing obstacles [8].

H6: Employee advocacy moderates the relationship between organizational embeddedness and employees' in-role performance.

Theories in Action

The Social Exchange Theory (SET), originating from sociology and psychology, explains how relationships within organizations are shaped by reciprocal interactions and mutual benefits. It suggests that individuals engage in exchanges based on perceived costs and rewards, aiming to achieve outcomes that are advantageous for both parties [43]. In contrast, the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory focuses on the motivation underlying human behavior, proposing that people are driven not only to preserve their existing resources but also to acquire additional ones that enhance their well-being [44].

Drawing upon these theoretical foundations, organizational justice can be interpreted through the lens of SET as a mechanism that nurtures equitable and reciprocal relationships between employees and organizations. When employees perceive fairness in treatment and decision-making, they tend to safeguard and utilize their current resources effectively. This process aligns with COR theory, as the satisfaction of fundamental needs and access to fair treatment encourages employees to seek further resource enrichment—such as stronger professional connections (links), better person-organization alignment (fit), and greater perceived value of staying with the organization (sacrifice).

The accumulation of these resources fosters higher levels of organizational embeddedness, which subsequently encourages employee advocacy—a proactive and supportive behavior toward the organization. Ultimately, this chain of psychological and behavioral processes enhances employees' in-role performance by increasing their motivation, commitment, and engagement at work.

The interrelations among these constructs are illustrated in **Figure 1**, which presents the proposed conceptual framework.

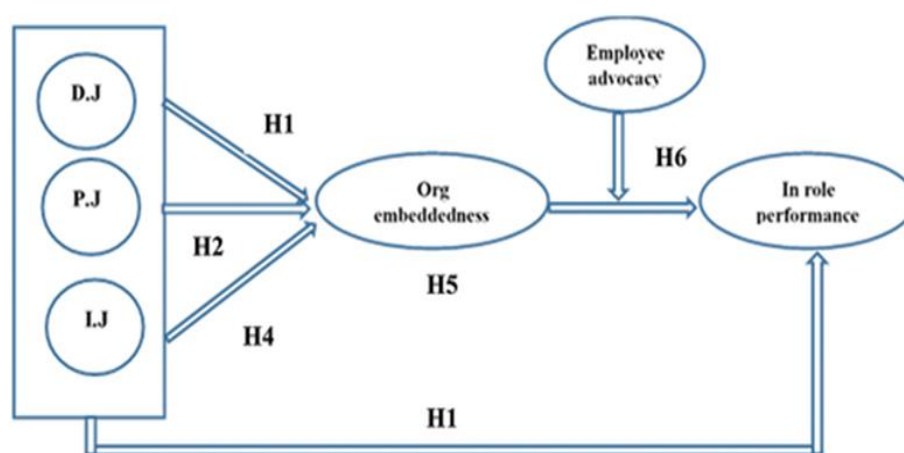


Figure 1. Research framework

Methodology

Sampling and data collection

Data for this study were collected from doctors working in Pakistan's healthcare sector. This group was chosen as the unit of analysis because the national health system is currently undergoing a period of transition, during which the government is increasingly involving the private sector in the administration of public hospitals. This shift has generated considerable uncertainty among physicians regarding their job security and organizational stability, making them an appropriate population for studying organizational justice, embeddedness, and performance.

The data were gathered through a structured questionnaire distributed among doctors using a snowball sampling approach. The respondents were invited to participate voluntarily and were encouraged to share the survey with other colleagues in their professional networks. A total of 402 valid responses were received and analyzed statistically. Among these participants, 222 were male and 181 were female, representing a balanced gender distribution suitable for quantitative analysis.

Instruments used

Data were collected using standardized and validated research instruments adapted from prior studies. Organizational justice was measured through a fifteen-item scale developed and validated by Colquitt *et al.* [23], which employs a five-point Likert format ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement. Organizational embeddedness was assessed using a seven-item scale adapted from the study of Akgunduz and Sanli [41], originally designed by Crossley *et al.* [45]. The measurement of employee advocacy was also based on the scale used by Akgunduz and Sanli [41], which was initially developed by Yeh [8]. Finally, employees' in-role performance was evaluated through the scale proposed by Janssen and Van Yperen (2004). These instruments were selected due to their strong reliability and consistent application in prior organizational behavior research.

Common method bias

Several procedural and statistical techniques were applied to minimize the risk of common method bias. To ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, respondents were not asked to provide any identifying information such as names or employee codes, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. This approach helped reduce social desirability bias and encouraged honest responses. Moreover, the arrangement of questions in the questionnaire was carefully structured so that independent and dependent variables were placed separately, preventing respondents from identifying the relationships under investigation. This design strategy minimized contextual and perceptual bias, consistent with the recommendations of Podsakoff *et al.* [46].

In addition, Harman's single-factor test was conducted to statistically assess the extent of common method bias. The results of the unrotated factor analysis indicated that the first factor accounted for 24.5 percent of the total variance, which is well below the critical threshold of 50 percent generally considered problematic. Therefore, it was concluded that the risk of common method bias was minimal in this study.

Results

The study employed the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique for data analysis. This approach was selected because of its suitability for testing complex models with multiple constructs and mediating effects. Following the guidelines proposed by Fornell *et al.* [47], the analysis proceeded in two stages. The first stage involved the

evaluation of the measurement model to verify the reliability and validity of the constructs, while the second stage focused on testing the structural model to examine the hypothesized relationships.

Measurement model

Table 1 presents the results of the measurement model assessment. The factor loadings for each indicator are reported along with Cronbach's alpha values, which demonstrate acceptable levels of internal consistency for all constructs. Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each dimension, all of which met the recommended threshold, confirming that the indicators adequately represented their respective latent variables. Collectively, these results indicate that the measurement model possessed satisfactory reliability and validity for further analysis.

Table 1. Properties of measurement model

Dimensions	Items	Factors loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Organizational justice	DDJ1	0.749	0.674	0.804	0.510
	DJ2	0.629			
	DJ4	0.741			
	IJ1	0.750			
	IJ2	0.827			
	IJ4	0.763			
	PJ3	0.891			
	PJ5	0.708			
	PJ7	0.616			
Organizational embeddedness	OE1	0.746	0.817	0.872	0.576
	OE2	0.755			
	OE3	0.819			
	OE4	0.747			
	OE7	0.725			
Employees Advocacy	EA1	0.703	0.779	0.849	0.531
	EA2	0.803			
	EA3	0.755			
	EA5	0.733			
	EA6	0.639			
In-role performance	IR1	0.796	0.657	0.798	0.502
	IR2	0.745			
	IR3	0.721			
	IR4	0.547			

Source: SmartPLS results

Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct with the inter-construct correlations. According to the criterion proposed by Fornell and Larcker [47], discriminant validity is established when the square root of a construct's AVE exceeds the correlations between that construct and any other constructs in the model. The results of the analysis, presented in **Table 2**, demonstrate that the square root of each construct's AVE was indeed greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations. As indicated by the diagonal elements being higher than the off-diagonal elements in their respective rows and columns, these findings confirm that discriminant validity was achieved in this study.

Table 2. Discriminant validity

Variable	EA	OE	IR	OJ
EA	0.729			
OE	0.429	0.759		
IR	0.333	0.565	0.708	
OJ	0.543	0.246	0.240	0.714

*Bold number on the diagonal represents the square-root of AVE. whereas the values outside the diagonal represents the inter-construct correlations; whereas, EA stands for employees' advocacy, OE shows organizational embeddedness, IR is in-role performance and OJ is organizational justice.

Overall, the findings from the measurement model provided adequate evidence of reliability and validity, justifying the continuation toward assessing the structural relationships among the study variables.

Structural model

The structural, or inner, model represents the causal pathways linking the latent constructs and demonstrates how exogenous factors shape endogenous outcomes [48]. In this research, evaluation of the structural model was carried out through two primary indicators: the coefficient of determination (R^2) and the estimated path coefficients. The R^2 statistic, which ranges from 0 to 1, indicates the extent to which the independent variables explain variation in the dependent variable. The model in this study yielded an R^2 value of 0.340, suggesting a moderate degree of explanatory strength.

The standardized estimates and their statistical significance are summarized in **Table 3**. To ensure the robustness of the results, a bootstrapping procedure was performed to generate t-values and assess the validity of each hypothesized path. All six proposed hypotheses (H1–H6) demonstrated significant support, as indicated in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Hypotheses testing

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	t-statistics	p-value
OJ-> IR	0.246	0.245	4.648	0.000
DJ->OE	0.020	0.020	2.698	0.007
PJ->OE	0.240	0.239	12.002	0.000
IJ->OE	0.889	0.887	6.675	0.000
OJ->OE->IR	0.542	0.541	11.977	0.000
Mod.EA b/wOE-IR->IR	0.104	0.100	2.302	0.022

Source: SmartPLS algorithm with boot strapping

This study advances the existing body of knowledge by clarifying the underlying mechanism through which organizational justice contributes to improving employees' in-role performance. The first objective was to examine how perceptions of justice within organizations influence employees' work performance. The findings aligned closely with prior research [18, 22, 30, 31], which collectively highlight fairness as a foundational element in shaping positive workplace attitudes. Employees who perceive fair treatment tend to respond with higher levels of engagement, efficiency, and initiative. Furthermore, the results revealed that fair distribution of rewards (distributive justice), consistent application of rules (procedural justice), and respectful interpersonal treatment (interactional justice) foster trust, satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors—all of which strengthen in-role performance.

Trust develops when employees perceive that rewards are allocated based on merit and effort. Ensuring distributive fairness is therefore crucial for strengthening organizational attachment and reducing disengagement. Prior evidence supports this relationship, demonstrating that distributive justice reduces burnout and enhances productivity [11, 12]. Similarly, procedural justice emerged as a significant predictor of in-role performance. When organizational policies and processes are applied consistently and transparently, employees are more likely to feel valued and impartiality is reinforced. This perception of fairness fosters stronger emotional bonds with the organization. Niehoff and Moorman [38] also noted that equitable procedural treatment promotes affective commitment and lowers turnover intentions, reinforcing employees' embeddedness. Interactional justice proved equally important, emphasizing the role of interpersonal respect and communication in driving positive organizational outcomes. Employees who are treated with dignity and openness tend to internalize organizational goals and develop a sense of belonging. Transparent communication encourages trust and collaboration, enabling employees to share ideas and resolve challenges more effectively. Such relational dynamics deepen their embeddedness within the organization. Consistent with earlier research [11, 36], this study reinforces that fairness in personal treatment enhances engagement and reduces turnover intentions, thereby improving overall productivity [30, 35, 49].

Another significant finding was the mediating role of organizational embeddedness between organizational justice and in-role performance. Employees who perceive fairness are more likely to feel compatible with their organizational environment and recognize themselves as integral members of the institution. This psychological attachment motivates them to perform more effectively. In this context, organizational justice functions as a precursor to embeddedness, which, in turn, fosters engagement and superior performance. Previous studies [10, 40] similarly describe embeddedness as a valuable resource—manifested through strong links, good fit, and willingness to sacrifice for the organization—that enhances performance. Supporting this perspective, Karatepe and Shahriari [50] found that employees perceiving high levels of justice in all three dimensions (distributive, procedural, and interactional) exhibit greater embeddedness and productivity.

Additionally, this study verified the moderating role of employee advocacy in the relationship between organizational embeddedness and in-role performance. Organizations that actively advocate for the needs and voices of their employees strengthen the bond between embeddedness and performance. Such advocacy involves fair policies, open communication, and genuine responsiveness to employee concerns. When employees are encouraged to share their experiences and opinions freely, organizational trust grows, and their engagement deepens. This empowerment fosters a cycle of positivity, where advocacy enhances satisfaction and motivation. Earlier studies [8, 42, 51] similarly highlighted advocacy as a win-win mechanism that promotes favorable work attitudes and amplifies the effect of embeddedness on performance.

Theoretically, this research enriches understanding of how justice and embeddedness interact to improve employees' performance—particularly within Pakistan's healthcare sector. Consistent with Social Exchange Theory, the findings suggest

that fair treatment evokes reciprocal behaviors, leading employees to invest greater effort and commitment in their work. Fair distribution of resources, unbiased procedures, and respectful relationships collectively strengthen employees' identification with their organization, even under less-than-ideal conditions such as pay disparities or workload imbalances. Conversely, perceived injustice may trigger withdrawal or counterproductive behaviors.

From the perspective of the Conservation of Resources Theory, the study further demonstrates that fairness operates as a vital organizational resource—one that can both be conserved and expanded. When employees experience justice, they develop additional psychological and social resources in the form of embeddedness (fit, links, and sacrifice). These resources, in turn, enhance performance while reducing turnover intentions. Thus, by institutionalizing fair practices, organizations not only retain their existing human capital but also cultivate a more motivated, stable, and high-performing workforce.

Implications

This study makes an important contribution by addressing a notable gap in the literature regarding doctors' in-role performance as an outcome of organizational embeddedness, while also introducing the moderating role of employee advocacy—an area that has received limited attention in prior research. The scarcity of empirical studies exploring these relationships within the healthcare sector underscores the significance of these findings. The present research not only enriches theoretical understanding but also offers practical insights for improving employee performance in medical institutions.

From a managerial standpoint, the findings provide valuable guidance for hospital administrators seeking to enhance doctors' work performance. The results emphasize the need to foster a fair and supportive organizational environment where justice—both distributive and procedural—is consistently practiced. Ensuring fairness in the allocation of resources, adherence to established procedures, and maintaining respectful interpersonal relationships are key to nurturing employees' engagement and commitment. When healthcare professionals perceive fairness and advocacy within their institutions, their intrinsic motivation increases, leading them to conserve and reinvest their personal and professional resources more effectively.

Employee advocacy emerges as a strategic tool through which management can demonstrate support for staff needs and well-being. By promoting open communication, acknowledging employee contributions, and addressing their concerns, hospital managers can strengthen the sense of embeddedness among doctors. This embeddedness, in turn, motivates employees to align their efforts with organizational goals, thereby enhancing their in-role performance. Such initiatives are particularly vital during periods of organizational transition in the healthcare sector, as they help reduce uncertainty, sustain morale, and encourage long-term organizational commitment. Moreover, the findings may also inform public health policy by highlighting the importance of fairness and advocacy in improving workforce stability and performance in hospitals.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As with any empirical study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional nature of this research restricts causal inferences, as data were collected at a single point in time. Future studies employing longitudinal designs would provide deeper insights into how the relationships among organizational justice, embeddedness, advocacy, and performance evolve over time.

Second, the present study focused exclusively on healthcare professionals within Pakistan's medical sector. To enhance the generalizability of the findings, future research could apply the same conceptual framework to other industries—such as information technology, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, tourism, or manufacturing—where employee performance dynamics may differ due to varying organizational contexts.

Third, the sample was limited to doctors as the primary unit of analysis. Expanding future research to include other healthcare personnel—such as nurses, medical technicians, and paramedical staff—would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of performance-related mechanisms across diverse professional roles within hospitals.

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