

Work Motivation between Scientific Theories and Islamic Perspective



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ABSTRACT: Work motivation is a fundamental factor influencing employee performance, productivity, and job satisfaction. Scientific theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Goal-Setting Theory provide comprehensive insights into intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drivers, including financial incentives, career growth, and psychological fulfillment. While these theories effectively explain motivation from a secular and empirical standpoint, they often neglect spiritual and ethical dimensions, which are crucial in many cultural and religious contexts. From an Islamic perspective, work is regarded as a form of worship (*Ibadah*) when performed with sincerity and excellence. Islamic teachings emphasize intention (*niyyah*), *Ihsan* (excellence), *Rizq* (sustenance), and *Hisab* (accountability before Allah) as key motivational factors. Unlike Western theories, which primarily focus on self-actualization and performance outcomes, Islam promotes a dual approach to motivation, balancing worldly rewards (salary, promotions, and financial stability) with spiritual rewards (divine blessings and rewards in the Hereafter). The concept of *Hisab* serves as an intrinsic moral regulator, ensuring ethical work behavior, transparency, and social responsibility. A comparative analysis reveals that while both scientific and Islamic perspectives recognize the importance of goal-setting, effort, and rewards, they differ in their ultimate purpose and underlying values. Scientific models emphasize individual achievement and external reinforcement, whereas Islamic principles integrate faith, ethics, and spiritual consciousness into work motivation. This study suggests that integrating modern psychological theories with Islamic ethical values can lead to a more balanced, ethical, and purpose-driven work environment. Such an approach enhances employee well-being, fosters ethical leadership, and strengthens workplace integrity. Future research should explore empirical applications of Islamic motivation in modern organizations, highlighting its potential to create engaged, responsible, and morally driven professionals.

KEYWORDS: Work motivation, Islamic work ethics, psychological theories, self-determination, goal-setting, intrinsic motivation, ethical work behavior, accountability (*Hisab*), *Ihsan*, *Rizq*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Work motivation is a fundamental psychological and social factor that determines an individual's willingness to exert effort in professional settings. It plays a crucial role in employee productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational success. Psychological theories have extensively explored motivation through empirical research, focusing on intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive human behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In contrast, Islamic teachings provide a holistic perspective on motivation by integrating spirituality, ethics, and accountability. Work in Islam is not only about fulfilling professional responsibilities but also about seeking divine pleasure and contributing to societal well-being (Ali, 2005). Understanding motivation from both scientific and Islamic perspectives enables individuals and organizations to create a balanced and fulfilling work environment. This article aims to:

- Examine major scientific theories of work motivation and their applications.
- Explore Islamic principles that influence motivation in the workplace.
- Compare and contrast scientific and Islamic perspectives on work motivation.
- Provide insights into integrating Islamic and psychological theories for workplace success.

2. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This study reviews socio-psychological theories of motivation from major academic sources and compares them with Islamic principles derived from the Quran, Hadith (Prophetic traditions), and scholarly interpretations. It also discusses practical applications of both perspectives in contemporary workplaces. This article employs a literature review to examine various theories related to

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work motivation and its connections with other variables, such as job satisfaction and employee performance. The review explores diverse sources, including academic books, research findings, and scholarly articles available on Google Scholar.

Additionally, a holistic approach is adopted by incorporating spiritual values derived from the Quran and Hadith, adding an enriched dimension to the understanding of work motivation. The study not only highlights the relationship between work motivation, job satisfaction, and employee performance but also delves deeper into how Islamic spiritual values can serve as a strong foundation for fostering a positive work ethic. By integrating contemporary academic sources with Islamic teachings, this review aims to provide a comprehensive perspective, particularly in the context of organizations or workplaces grounded in religious values. This approach enables to analyze the concept of work motivation from a multidimensional perspective, encompassing psychological, social, and spiritual aspects, thereby yielding insights that are valuable for both theoretical development and practical human resource management.

3. WESTERN SCIENTIFIC THEORIES OF WORK MOTIVATION

3.1. Classical Theories of Motivation

- Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow (1943) proposed a five-tier model of human needs, arguing that motivation arises from satisfying these needs in a hierarchical manner:

- Physiological needs (food, water, shelter).
- Safety needs (job security, financial stability).
- Love/belonging (relationships, workplace camaraderie).
- Esteem needs (recognition, achievements).
- Self-actualization (personal growth and fulfilment).

His theory suggests that employees are motivated at different levels, depending on their personal needs and circumstances.

- Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg (1959) categorized motivation into two factors:

- Hygiene factors (salary, work conditions, job security)—prevent dissatisfaction but don't necessarily motivate.
- Motivators (recognition, personal growth, meaningful work)—drive higher performance.

This theory emphasizes that true motivation comes from intrinsic factors rather than external rewards alone.

- McClelland's Theory of Needs

McClelland (1961) identified three key motivational drivers:

- Need for achievement (nAch) – Desire to excel and accomplish goals.
- Need for affiliation (nAff) – Seeking social relationships and teamwork.
- Need for power (nPow) – Aspiration for influence and leadership.

These needs vary among individuals and significantly impact workplace motivation.

3.2. Contemporary Theories of Work Motivation

- Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985)

This theory distinguishes between **intrinsic motivation** (doing work for personal satisfaction) and extrinsic motivation (working for rewards or recognition). It emphasizes three fundamental needs:

- Autonomy – Having control over one's work.
- Competence – Feeling confident and capable in one's role.
- Relatedness – Building strong social connections in the workplace.

- Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964)

According to Vroom's theory, motivation depends on three psychological processes:

Expectancy – Belief that effort will lead to success.

Instrumentality – Belief that success will result in rewards.

Valence – Value placed on the expected rewards.

- Goal-Setting Theory (Locke & Latham, 1990)

Goal-Setting Theory, developed by Edwin Locke and Gary Latham (1990), argues that clear, specific, and challenging goals significantly enhance motivation and performance. The theory is based on the premise that setting well-defined objectives increases an individual's commitment, effort, and persistence in achieving them. Unlike vague or easy tasks, challenging goals encourage individuals to stretch their abilities and maximize their potential (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Key Principles of Goal-Setting Theory are:

- Clarity – Goals must be specific and measurable rather than vague or ambiguous. For example, setting a target of "increasing sales by 20% in six months" is more effective than simply aiming to "improve sales" (Locke, 1996).

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- Challenge – The difficulty level of the goal should be high enough to be motivating but not so unrealistic that it leads to frustration or disengagement (Latham, 2004).
- Commitment – Employees are more likely to achieve goals when they are personally committed to them. Commitment increases when goals are meaningful, aligned with personal values, and supported by incentives (Klein et al., 1999).
- Feedback – Regular feedback on progress helps individuals adjust their strategies and stay on track. Constructive feedback enhances self-efficacy and motivation (Erez, 2006).
- Task Complexity – Complex goals require additional time and learning, meaning employees need appropriate training and support to succeed (Locke & Latham, 2006).

Impact of Goal-Setting in the Workplace

Empirical research has shown that goal-setting improves employee productivity and organizational performance. A meta-analysis by Tubbs (1986) found that individuals with specific and difficult goals outperformed those with easy or no goals in 90% of studies. Organizations that implement structured goal-setting strategies see improvements in employee engagement, time management, and efficiency (Latham & Locke, 2007). Moreover, goal-setting enhances intrinsic motivation by fostering a sense of accomplishment. Employees who successfully meet their goals experience higher job satisfaction, increased confidence, and greater willingness to take on new challenges (Locke et al., 1981).

4. CRITICISM AND LIMITATIONS OF SCIENTIFIC APPROACHES

While psychological theories provide valuable insights, they often focus on material and psychological needs while neglecting spiritual and ethical aspects of motivation (Beekun, 1997). Most traditional motivation theories, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, prioritize tangible factors like salary, job security, and recognition while overlooking the moral and religious dimensions that influence an individual's drive to work (Ali & Weir, 2005). These models assume that human motivation is primarily driven by self-fulfilment and external rewards, ignoring the role of faith, purpose, and ethical responsibility in work-related decisions (Ali, 2009).

Additionally, contemporary theories like Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) emphasize autonomy, competence, and relatedness but still frame motivation within a secular and individualistic framework. Such theories rarely acknowledge the role of spiritual fulfilment, divine accountability, or the pursuit of a higher moral purpose in shaping work behaviours (Nasr, 2004). In contrast, many religious and cultural traditions view work as an act of service, devotion, and ethical obligation rather than merely a means for personal success (Ali & Al-Owaidan, 2008).

Islamic perspectives on work motivation, for instance, highlight intention (*niyyah*) as a key determinant of work ethics, encouraging individuals to align their professional efforts with spiritual and moral principles (Ahmad, 2009). The concept of *Ihsan* (excellence in work for God's pleasure) serves as an intrinsic motivator that transcends material incentives, fostering a sense of responsibility, social justice, and ethical commitment in the workplace (Beekun & Badawi, 2005). By integrating spirituality with motivation, Islamic teachings provide a holistic framework that not only enhances productivity but also nurtures personal integrity and societal well-being.

5. ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON WORK MOTIVATION

5.1. Concept of Work in Islam

Islam considers work to be an integral part of a Muslim's spiritual and moral responsibility. Unlike secular perspectives that often separate religious beliefs from professional life, Islam views all lawful (*halal*) work as an act of worship (*'Ibadah*) when performed with sincerity, integrity, and excellence. The concept of work in Islam is not merely about earning a livelihood but is a means of fulfilling one's duty towards Allah, society, and oneself (Ali, 2005).

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized the dignity of labor, stating:

"No one has ever eaten a better meal than that which he earned with his own hands." (Sahih Bukhari, 2072).

This hadith underscores the importance of lawful labour (*kasb halal*) and the idea that honest work is not only a necessity but also a source of personal dignity and divine reward. Islam rejects laziness, dependency, and unethical means of earning, encouraging individuals to be self-reliant, productive, and ethical in their professions (Beekun, 1997).

5.2. Islamic Motivational Principles

- Intrinsic Motivation through Faith (*Iman*)

Islam teaches that true motivation comes from seeking Allah's pleasure, not just material rewards. This differs from secular theories that prioritize self-fulfilment or personal gain (Ali, 2009).

- Intention (*Niyyah*) and Work Ethics

- Islam places immense emphasis on intention (*niyyah*) in all actions, including work. A Muslim's profession, when pursued with a pure intention to serve society and uphold justice, becomes an act of worship.
- The Prophet (PBUH) said:

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"Actions are judged by intentions, and every person will be rewarded according to their intention." (Sahih Bukhari, 1).

- This means that even mundane tasks, such as earning a living, can become spiritually rewarding if done with sincerity, honesty, and a sense of responsibility.
- **Concept of *Rizq* (Sustenance) and *Tawakkul* (Trust in Allah)**

Islam balances effort and reliance on divine provision. Employees are encouraged to work hard but also trust in Allah's decree regarding outcomes.
- ***Ihsan* (Excellence) and Responsibility in Work**

Ihsan means striving for excellence in everything, including work. The Quran states:
"And do good; indeed, Allah loves the doers of good." (Quran 2:195)
- **Work as a Means of Avoiding Dependency and Poverty**
 - Islam discourages idleness and unnecessary dependency on others, advocating for economic self-sufficiency. The Prophet (PBUH) warned against laziness, stating:
"It is better for one of you to take a rope and bring a bundle of wood on his back and sell it than to beg from someone who may or may not give him anything." (Sahih Bukhari, 1401).
 - This narration encourages individuals to engage in dignified labour rather than relying on charity, promoting financial independence and self-respect.
- **Justice and Ethical Conduct in Work**
 - Islamic teachings emphasize fairness, honesty, and justice in financial transactions and employment. The Prophet (PBUH) said:
"Give the worker his wages before his sweat dries." (Ibn Majah, 2443).
 - This highlights the Islamic principle of employee rights, emphasizing timely payments, fair treatment, and ethical labor practices.

5.3. Worldly and Spiritual Rewards in Islam: A Balanced Approach to Work Motivation

Islam provides a comprehensive framework for work motivation by emphasizing both worldly rewards (salary, promotions, and material success) and spiritual rewards (divine blessings in this life and the Hereafter). Unlike secular motivation theories, which often focus solely on personal achievement and material gain, Islamic teachings integrate ethical and spiritual dimensions into the concept of work. This holistic approach ensures that individuals are not only motivated by financial incentives but also by a higher sense of purpose, accountability, and moral responsibility (Ali & Al-Owaidan, 2008).

- **The Balance Between Material and Spiritual Success**

Islam acknowledges that financial security and professional growth are important motivators in human life. The Quran encourages lawful earnings and financial prosperity, stating:
"And do not forget your share of the worldly life, and do good as Allah has done good to you." (Quran 28:77).

At the same time, Islam elevates the purpose of work beyond material wealth, urging individuals to seek spiritual rewards by aligning their efforts with ethical and moral values. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated: *"The best wealth is that which is earned through honest work and is spent in the way of Allah."* (Musnad Ahmad, 18048). Thus, a Muslim's motivation in work is not solely driven by money or status, but also by the pursuit of righteousness, ethical labor, and social responsibility (Beekun, 1997).
- **The Role of *Hisab* (Accountability) in Work Ethics**

A unique motivational factor in Islam is the belief in *Hisab* (accountability before Allah). Unlike secular work ethics, which rely on external supervision (such as management policies and legal consequences), Islam instills a deep sense of self-discipline by reminding believers that they are always under divine observation. Allah says in the Quran: *"And every soul will be fully compensated for what it did, and He is most knowing of what they do."* (Quran 39:70). This concept of divine accountability serves as an intrinsic motivator for Muslims to act with honesty, diligence, and integrity, even when no one is watching (Ali, 2005). *Hisab* reminds employees, employers, and business owners that all actions, including workplace conduct, will be judged in the Hereafter. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) reinforced this idea by stating: *"The honest and trustworthy merchant will be with the prophets, the truthful, and the martyrs (on the Day of Judgment)."* (Tirmidhi, 1209).

Thus, Islam encourages professionals to uphold ethical standards by:

 - Avoiding corruption, fraud, and dishonesty.
 - Treating employees and colleagues with fairness and respect.
 - Ensuring transparency in financial dealings.
 - Maintaining professionalism and fulfilling contractual obligations.

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Islam emphasizes both worldly rewards (salary, promotions) and spiritual rewards (blessings in this life and the Hereafter). The idea of *Hisab* (accountability before Allah) motivates Muslims to work ethically and avoid corruption. Islam provides a comprehensive framework for work motivation by emphasizing both worldly rewards (salary, promotions, and material success) and spiritual rewards (divine blessings in this life and the Hereafter). Unlike secular motivation theories, which often focus solely on personal achievement and material gain, Islamic teachings integrate ethical and spiritual dimensions into the concept of work. This holistic approach ensures that individuals are not only motivated by financial incentives but also by a higher sense of purpose, accountability, and moral responsibility (Ali & Al-Owaidan, 2008). Islam acknowledges that financial security and professional growth are important motivators in human life. The Quran encourages lawful earnings and financial prosperity, stating:

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- **Ethical Conduct and the Prevention of Corruption**

The belief in accountability before Allah acts as a powerful deterrent against unethical behaviour in the workplace (Possumah, et.al, 2013). Unlike secular legal systems, which rely on punishment or regulatory oversight, Islam fosters moral consciousness (*taqwa*) that influences personal and professional decisions. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) strongly condemned corruption, stating: *"Cursed is the one who offers a bribe and the one who accepts it."* (Tirmidhi, 1337). Additionally, the Quran warns against fraudulent business practices:

"Woe to those who give less than due, who, when they take a measure from people, take in full, but if they give by measure or by weight to them, they cause loss." (Quran 83:1-3).

This ethical foundation encourages:

- Employers to treat workers justly, provide fair wages, and ensure safe working conditions.
- Employees to work diligently, avoid laziness, and be responsible in their tasks.
- Business owners to conduct fair trade and avoid exploitation of customers or workers.

- **Work as a Means of Continuous Spiritual Growth**

Another key Islamic principle is that work is not just a duty but an opportunity for spiritual growth. Every effort made with sincerity and honesty becomes a source of divine blessings (*barakah*), which enhances productivity and life satisfaction (Nasr, 2004). The Prophet (PBUH) said: *"Allah loves a worker who, when he performs a task, does it with excellence."* (Sunan Al-Baihaqi, 5316). This concept transforms work from a mere necessity into a noble endeavour, ensuring that professionals seek excellence (*Ihsan*) and contribute positively to society.

6. INTEGRATING WESTERN CONCEPT AND ISLAMIC CONCEPT ON WORK MOTIVATION

Integrating Western theories and Islamic concepts of motivation can create a holistic and balanced approach. As well as can helps to achieve a balance between personal achievement and social contribution, enhancing both individual and community welfare. This involves:

- **Psychological and Spiritual Needs**

Addressing psychological and spiritual needs involves recognizing that human motivation is not solely driven by material or emotional factors but also by a deeper quest for meaning and purpose. In this integrated approach, individuals are encouraged to fulfill their basic psychological needs—such as safety, belonging, and esteem—while simultaneously nurturing their spiritual growth through practices like prayer, reflection, and community service. This dual focus helps individuals achieve a sense of fulfillment that transcends mere material success, fostering a holistic sense of well-being that encompasses both mental health and spiritual enlightenment.

- **Individualism and Collectivism**

The balance between individualism and collectivism emphasizes the importance of personal achievement while also recognizing the value of community contribution. In this framework, individuals are motivated to pursue their personal goals, aspirations, and ambitions, which can lead to self-actualization and personal satisfaction. However, this pursuit is complemented by a commitment to the welfare of the community, encouraging individuals to engage in acts of service, collaboration, and support for others. This synergy fosters a sense of belonging and interconnectedness, where personal success is viewed as a means to uplift and empower the community as a whole.

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- Moral and Ethical Values

Pursuing goals with integrity and honesty is fundamental to both Western and Islamic motivational frameworks. This principle underscores the importance of aligning one's actions with moral and ethical standards, ensuring that the means used to achieve success are just and honourable. By prioritizing values such as honesty, fairness, and respect, individuals not only enhance their own character but also build trust and credibility within their communities. This ethical approach to motivation encourages individuals to reflect on the impact of their actions on others, fostering a culture of accountability and responsibility.

Modern Motivation Theories with Islamic Guidance

Applying modern motivation theories within the framework of Islamic values involves integrating contemporary psychological insights with the ethical and spiritual teachings of Islam. For instance, theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs can be enriched by incorporating Islamic principles that emphasize the importance of intention (*niyyah*) and the pursuit of knowledge. This integration allows individuals to leverage effective motivational strategies while remaining grounded in their faith, ensuring that their goals align with both personal aspirations and spiritual obligations. This approach creates a comprehensive motivational framework that respects individual psychology while honoring religious teachings.

- Balance Between Worldly and Spiritual Success

Focusing on both worldly and spiritual success encourages individuals to pursue material achievements while also prioritizing their spiritual development. This balance recognizes that success is not solely defined by financial wealth or social status but also by one's relationship with God and the impact of one's actions on others. By striving for excellence in both areas, individuals can lead fulfilling lives that reflect their values and beliefs. This dual focus promotes a sense of purpose and direction, motivating individuals to seek success that is meaningful and aligned with their spiritual goals.

- Practical Application

Setting integrated and value-oriented goals involves creating actionable plans that reflect both personal aspirations and ethical considerations. This practical application encourages individuals to define clear, measurable objectives that resonate with their values and beliefs. By aligning their goals with their spiritual and moral principles, individuals can ensure that their pursuits are not only personally fulfilling but also contribute positively to their communities. This approach fosters a sense of accountability and purpose, motivating individuals to take consistent steps toward achieving their objectives while remaining true to their core values.

- Individual and Community Well-being

Enhancing individual and community well-being is a fundamental aspect of a balanced motivational approach. This concept emphasizes the interconnectedness of personal growth and social responsibility, suggesting that individual success should contribute to the greater good. By focusing on both personal development and community engagement, individuals can create a positive ripple effect that benefits society as a whole. This holistic perspective encourages individuals to invest in their own well-being while also supporting initiatives that uplift others, fostering a culture of compassion, cooperation, and mutual support within the community.

7. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: SCIENTIFIC VS. ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON WORK MOTIVATION

Aspect	Scientific Perspective	Islamic Perspective
Goal of Work	Personal success, self-actualization	Worship, ethical service, divine reward
Intrinsic Motivation	Personal satisfaction	Seeking Allah's pleasure
Extrinsic Motivation	Salary, promotions	Worldly success + spiritual reward
Accountability	To employers, society	To Allah (Hereafter) + employers
Aspect	Scientific Perspective	Islamic Perspective

8. WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM INTEGRATING WESTERN THEORIES AND ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF WORK MOTIVATION

Integrating Western and Islamic concepts of work motivation offers a holistic approach that addresses not only material and psychological needs but also spiritual and ethical dimensions. This comprehensive view encourages individuals to align their professional goals with personal values and spiritual beliefs, leading to greater job satisfaction and overall well-being. By recognizing the importance of both individual aspirations and collective responsibilities, this integration fosters a work environment where personal success is celebrated alongside contributions to the team and society, promoting a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

The integration also emphasizes the need for an ethical framework in decision-making processes. While Western motivation theories often focus on results and performance metrics, Islamic teachings stress integrity, honesty, and accountability. By adopting an ethical approach, individuals and organizations can cultivate trust and enhance their reputation, creating a positive workplace culture that values moral conduct. Additionally, the combined focus on resilience, continuous learning, and personal development encourages individuals to overcome challenges and seek opportunities for growth, ultimately leading to improved performance and innovation.

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Finally, integrating these concepts highlights the importance of community engagement and social responsibility in the workplace. While Western motivation often emphasizes personal success, Islamic principles encourage contributions to the community. This perspective can inspire organizations to adopt corporate social responsibility initiatives, fostering a culture of giving back and enhancing their societal impact. Overall, this integration leads to enhanced employee well-being by addressing psychological, spiritual, and ethical needs, creating a supportive environment that promotes mental health, job satisfaction, and productivity.

CONCLUSION

Integrating Western and Islamic concepts of work motivation offers a holistic approach that addresses not only material and psychological needs but also spiritual and ethical dimensions. This comprehensive view encourages individuals to align their professional goals with personal values and spiritual beliefs, leading to greater job satisfaction and overall well-being. By recognizing the importance of both individual aspirations and collective responsibilities, this integration fosters a work environment where personal success is celebrated alongside contributions to the team and society, promoting a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

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- 21) Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 2144.
- 22) Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 2443.



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