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### Employee Motivation Through An Islamic Lens: Integrating Spiritual And Material Tools For Workplace Success

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#### Abstract

This paper attempts to describe and explore effective tools for employee motivation from the perspective of Islam as outlined through various verses of Holy Quran and sayings of the Holy prophet (PBUH) using the existing and available review of literature. The fundamental theory of Motivation given by Abraham Maslow describes five essential human needs on the basis of the notion that humans want more and more. The uniqueness of the Islamic stand point is that in addition to the material dimensions, it highlights spiritual tools, like iman, tawbah, taqwah and ihsan. The phenomenon of Motivation has been specifically studied because of its immense importance and contribution towards the success of organizational activities as a motivated and dedicated Muslim worker would produce more efficient results than a non- motivated and disloyal one. According to Islam, the former has double rewards both in this world and the life hereafter because owing to the purity in faith, love and fear for God, all good work done by him is to please Allah Almighty. Extant literature is available on the concept of Motivation especially the traditional view inspired from the Western perspective. However, limited literature is found with specific reference to Islamic perspective, so this study adds contribution to theory by providing an integrated review of the employee motivating tools in the light of Islam. Also, this study has practical

implications for managers who are directly involved in the Muslim employees handling processes, like motivation in both Islamic and non- Islamic organizations.

**Keywords:** Employee, motivating tools, Islamic perspective, Western perspective.

## **Introduction**

The challenges of today's aggressive business environment around the world deems necessary for an organization to gain a competitive advantage for its survival and long- term success both in Muslim and non- Muslim countries. In either case, achieving this goal, an efficient and effective workforce plays a pivotal role. Only loyal and dedicated workers can work in such a way for organizational goals. Employees with low levels of loyalty and motivation do not diligently perform their duties and often resign from the organization. Only dedicated and motivated staff actively engages in their duties and yield innovative and productive results. Hence, building and fostering motivation in the workforce has become a significant area of research for academicians and managers now-a-days<sup>1</sup>.

Many studies have helped managers understand the personal and professional goals of employees and how they can be aligned with organizational goals whilst improving their involvement and motivation<sup>234</sup>. However, it is equally important that in Islamic countries, like Pakistan, organizations understand how to motivate employees according to Islamic perspectives. The challenges of current business era demands that many organizations, in general, attempt to adopt the Islamic perspective in modeling the motivation of their human resources. Also, the

<sup>1</sup> Omar Khalid Bhatti Uzma Aslam Arif Hassan Mohamed Sulaiman , (2016),"Employee motivation an Islamic perspective", Humanomics, Vol. 32 Iss 1 pp. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/H-10-2015-0066>

<sup>2</sup> Sulaiman, M., Mohsen, M. R. N., & Kamil, N. M. (2013). The Role of Spirituality and responsibility on Business Leadership Effectiveness: An Empirical Analysis in the Republic of Yemen. Paper presented at the 3rd Int. Management Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.

<sup>3</sup>Sulaiman, M., Ahmad, K., BaraaSbaih, B., & Kamil, M, N. (2014). The perspective of Muslim employees towards motivation and career success. Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 9(1), 45-62

<sup>4</sup> Bhatti, K, O., Alkahtani, A., Hassan, A., & Sulaiman, M. (2015). The Relationship between Islamic Piety (Taqwa) and Workplace Deviance with Organizational Justice as a Moderator. International Journal of Business and Management, 10(4), 136-154

<sup>5</sup> Zulkifli Khair, Nuradila Ahmad & Mohd Azhar Abd Hamid (2016). 'Motivation in Islamic Perspective: A Review'. Proceeding of 1st International Research Conference on Economics Business and Social Sciences, Penang. 12-13 April 2016

western communities must try to implement the Islamic perspective of Motivation in the modern organizations for utmost benefit<sup>1</sup>.

Extant theoretical literature is available on the phenomenon of Employee Motivation. The most widely accepted motivational theory of Abraham Maslow explain the factors influencing motivation based on the Western concept of basic human needs and that humans want more and more<sup>2</sup>. However, we see that limited research work is available on the religious perspectives of Motivation, especially the Islamic approach<sup>3 4 5</sup>. This desk- oriented paper attempts to fill this gap by exploring the Islamic perspective of employee motivation.

### **Motivation**

Human resource is the bloodline for any organization. Loyal and satisfied staff is an intangible asset who works in desirable ways for efficient organizational results. But understanding what makes these workers loyal and satisfied is important. Motivation is a mysterious force that moves people to work in desirable ways in any organization, which makes them feel satisfied towards their work<sup>4</sup>. Hence, it is important that managers provide the workers with an environment that enriches this mysterious force inside people, provides them with satisfaction and steers them to act most productive to the organization. This implies that without motivation, an organization will not be able to achieve the productivity at desired optimum levels. This explains why managers are concerned with knowing the dynamics of human motivation.

The word “motivation” comes from a Latin word “*movere*”, which means “to move”

<sup>3</sup>. Different definitions of Motivation are given:

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<sup>1</sup> Maslow, A. H. (1943). A Theory of Human Motivation. Psychological Review, 370-396

<sup>3</sup> Omar Khalid Bhatti Uzma Aslam Arif Hassan Mohamed Sulaiman , (2016),"Employee motivation an Islamic perspective", Humanomics, Vol. 32 Iss 1 pp. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/H-10-2015-0066>

<sup>3</sup> Zulkifli Khair, Nuradila Ahmad & Mohd Azhar Abd Hamid (2016). ‘Motivation in Islamic Perspective: A Review’. Proceeding of 1st International Research Conference on Economics Business and Social Sciences, Penang. 12-13 April 2016

<sup>4</sup> Ruhul Amin & Golam Mohiuddin, (2016), “Motivating people in Organizations: the Islamic way”, International Journal of Islamic management and Business, Vol. 2 No. 2 August 2016

<sup>5</sup> Tosi, H.L. and Carrol, S.T. (1982). Management, Second Edition, New York, USA, John Wiley & Sons Inc

1. “Motivation is an individuals state in which cause they behave in desirable work ways<sup>1</sup>.”
2. “Motivation is making people work in way to accomplish organizational goals and personal needs”<sup>2</sup>.
3. “Motivation is the process to determine the intensity, direction, and the provisions of the individual’s in achieving goal”<sup>3</sup>.
4. Daft (2010) defined motivation as forces either internal or external to a person that arouse enthusiasm and persistence to pursue a certain course of action.<sup>4</sup>
5. It is something that caused or regarded a physiological or psychological response to achieve a certain purpose or objective<sup>5</sup>.
6. Motivation is the needs, expectations and desires that stimulate a person to behave in a certain manner and the manager can use them to inspire or motivate his workers to fulfill the organizational goals<sup>6</sup>.

### **Motivation in Islam**

Islam is a universal religion that provides a code of life applicable to every human being. ‘Islam’, as a word, means “to surrender or obey”. This implies that all human beings must surrender and obey Allah Almighty as per his orders that are provided to us through the Holy Quran and Ahadith. The importance of human resources is shown through many verses of Quran and Hadith as Islam has declared “human resources” as “valuable Islamic asset, rather just servants”<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Wren, D.A. and Jr, D. V. (1984). Management (process, structure and behavior), 3rd Edition, New York, USA, John Wiley & Sons

<sup>2</sup> Robbin, S. P., & Coulter, M. 2005. Management. 8th edition. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc

<sup>3</sup> Daft, D. L. 2010. New Era of Management. 9th Edition. International Edition. Canada: Cengage Learning

<sup>4</sup> Zulkifli Khair, Nuradila Ahmad & Mohd Azhar Abd Hamid (2016). ‘Motivation in Islamic Perspective: A Review’. Proceeding of 1st International Research Conference on Economics Business and Social Sciences, Penang. 12-13 April 2016

<sup>5</sup> Ruhul Amin & Golam Mohiuddin, (2016), “Motivating people in Organizations: the Islamic way”, International Journal of Islamic management and Business, Vol. 2 No. 2 August 2016

<sup>6</sup> Al- Bokhari Muslim

The religion Islam fully accepts the significance and emphasizes on the role of motivation. Islam states that the humans are governed to perform activities that depend on their inner motives and intentions, as said by the Holy Prophet Mohammad (PBUH),

*“The acts depend on intentions. A man will get whatever he had intended for”<sup>1</sup>*

Every human being has desires for achievement in life. So, they need motivation to take actions for their achievement. Even for the basic human needs like food and shelter, one needs to act to attain them. However, for a Muslim, his hard work is a form of amal-e-saleh (good deed) and if it is performed by them in the right and sincere manner, it will be accepted as *ibadah* (worship). Only then, *falah* (true success) can be achieved<sup>2</sup>. In order to fulfill these responsibilities as a servant and *khalifah* (vicegerent), they must know the right way and keep away from that which is prohibited.

### **Motivating tools in Islam**

From the standpoint of Islam, motivation is a process in which the managers encourage to perform work efficiently as per Islamic perspectives. According to Islamic shariah, the primary tools for motivation are spiritual tools like “*Iman* (faith), *taqwa* (fear of Allah), *tawbah* (repentance) and *Ihsan* (love for Allah)”. The secondary tools for motivation in Islam are material tools which include “rewards & punishment, justice, freedom of thought, mutual consultation, profit sharing, discipline and honesty”<sup>1</sup>.

### **Iman**

Iman means “true faith and belief in unity of Allah, his angels, his messengers, his Book & the day of judgment and the resurrection”<sup>3</sup>. Iman is the most powerful of

<sup>1</sup> Omar Khalid Bhatti Uzma Aslam Arif Hassan Mohamed Sulaiman , (2016), "Employee motivation an Islamic perspective", Humanomics, Vol. 32 Iss 1 pp. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/H-10-2015-0066>

<sup>2</sup> Alawneh, S. F. (1998). Human motivation: An Islamic perspective. American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences, 15(4), 19-39

<sup>3</sup> Al-Qur“an 6: 162-164

all the motivating factors in Islam. Hence, iman has a great influence on the actions and behavior of a man.

As part of this Iman, every Muslim has to submit to Allah, as instructed in the Holy Quran:

*“Say O Muhammad (PBUH) my prayers, my sacrifice, my life and my death belongs to Allah; he has no partner and I am ordered to be among those who submit”<sup>1</sup>*

This verse shows that with Iman, Islam creates a feeling of inner motivation for the Muslim to perform all kinds of his actions including his work and job to please Allah. A person with an unshakable belief that his work is a part of his *Ibadah* (worship) will exhibit high levels of devotion and involvement in his work. He will perform his duties with more responsibility and accountability for his deeds in this life and the Hereafter<sup>2</sup>. Because of this iman, the person will choose the *halal* (right) path to do work and abstain from *haram*. Thus, the basic motive in Islam stays with having Iman.

### Taqwa

A motive in line with the Iman is *taqwa*. Taqwa has been mentioned 258 times in the Holy Quran. It means “the fear of Allah represented by adhering to his orders and commends and avoiding his disobedience”<sup>3</sup>. So, a man learns to obey Allah and his Prophet. Allah (SWT) says in the Holy Quran to support this motive.

*“Have Taqwa of Allah as much as you are able to.”<sup>4</sup>*

The motivating factor behind this notion is “the human emotion of fear that enables man to either avoid danger and problematic situations or face and

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad, K., & Fontaine, R. (2011). Management from Islamic Perspective (2Ed.). Pearson Malaysia Sdn Bhd: Person Custom Publishing

<sup>2</sup> Omar Khalid Bhatti Uzma Aslam Arif Hassan Mohamed Sulaiman , (2016), "Employee motivation an Islamic perspective", Humanomics, Vol. 32 Iss 1 pp. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/H-10-2015-0066>

<sup>3</sup> Quran, 64:16

<sup>4</sup> Ruhul Amin & Golam Mohiuddin, (2016), “Motivating people in Organizations: the Islamic way”, International Journal of Islamic management and Business, Vol. 2 No. 2 August 2016

<sup>5</sup> Quran, 27:11

<sup>6</sup> Al-Qur“an 6: 54

solve them”.<sup>1</sup> This is beneficial for the individual himself and the organization as a whole. Hence, Taqwa is another powerful motivating tool for the Muslims that fosters excellence and self- control in man and he, resultantly, becomes a morally strong individual.

### Tawbah

Another fundamental spiritual tool for motivation in Islam is the Tawbah (Repentance). Allah (SWT) says in the Quran,

“... if any have done wrong and have thereafter substituted good to take the place of evil, truly I am Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful”<sup>2</sup>

And

*“When those come to thee who believe in our signs, say: Peace be on you. Your lord hath inscribed upon Himself (the rule of) mercy, Verily, if any of you did evil in ignorance and thereafter repented and amended (his conduct), He is oft-forgiving, most merciful”<sup>3</sup>*

Hence, a Muslim recognizes the value of repentance that without Tawbah, he will still be pursuing evil and will not be able to change for the better. Tawbah (repentance) motivates a person to do as much good work as he possibly can so that the wrong- doing could be compensated to maximum extent. Tawbah helps a man stay away from immoral actions and deeds which is beneficial for him in this life and the life hereafter<sup>4</sup>.

### Ihsan

Compared to taqwa which is the fear of God, *Ihsan* is the love of God<sup>6</sup> and is another spiritual motivating tool in Islam. This love for God actually motivates and forges a Muslim to perform their best and absyain from wrong doings and hence, gain Allah’s pleasure and blessings<sup>5</sup>. Our Holy Prophet (PBUH) says:

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<sup>4</sup> Ahmad, K., & Fontaine, R. (2011). Management from Islamic Perspective (2Ed.). Pearson Malaysia Sdn Bhd: Person Custom Publishing

<sup>2</sup> Ramli, E. L., & Osman-Gani, A. M. (2011). Spirituality in leadership from Islamic Perspective. International Islamic University Malaysia: IIUM press



“To worship God as if you see Him, and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion, then you must consider that He is looking at you”<sup>1</sup>

### Reward & Punishment

Reward and punishment both can act as a motivator for workers. They must be rewarded not only for goals achievement but also for the efforts they put in their work.

The rewards and punishment mentioned in the Holy Quran is eternal as they will be granted both in this world and in the hereafter. In the Holy Quran, it is stated:

*“And Allah sent messengers with glad tiding and warnings”<sup>2</sup>*

This verse shows that Allah Almighty has sent messengers to inform the mankind of rewards for those who do their work diligently and penalty for those who follow the haram path in accomplishing tasks. This is proved by many verses of the Holy Quran, as follows:

*“As for him (a disbeliever in the Oneness of Allah) who does wrong, we shall punish him; and then he will be brought back unto his Lord; Who will punish him with a terrible torment (Hell). But as for him who believes (in Allah's Oneness) and works righteousness, he shall have the best reward, (Paradise), and we (Dhul-Qarnain) shall speak unto him mild words (as instructions).”<sup>3</sup>*

The fear of punishment better motives people to do right things. In Islam, the managers must remain very careful when giving punishment <sup>4</sup>.

### Justice

“Justice means a harmonious condition or state of affairs whereby everything is right such as cosmos, or similarly a state of equilibrium”<sup>5</sup>. Justice is the cornerstone of employee motivation because when a system of justice is set up in an organization, workers are assured that they will get fair reward for their work and

<sup>1</sup> Sahih Bukhari, Al Hadith, 47

<sup>2</sup> Al-Qur’an 2: 213

<sup>3</sup> Quran, 18:87-88

<sup>5</sup> Mohiuddin, M.G. (2004). Islamic Management and its Present Applications in Bangladesh, Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ramli, E. L., & Osman-Gani, A. M. (2011). Spirituality in leadership from Islamic Perspective. Pp.272. International Islamic University Malaysia: IIUM press



that their efforts will be relatively appreciated and recognized. Such organizations are less subject to grievances like lockout and strikes. In order to establish an organization characterized by moral justice, inequalities need to be eradicated in all the activities, which can serve as a motivating tool for the employees.

Allah orders the authorities to be just and fair to all in the Quran at several places, as he said:

*“O you who believe stand out fairly for justice, as witness to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parent, or your kin and whether it be against rich or poor, for Allah can protect both”<sup>1</sup>*

And

*“Allah (God) does command you to render back your trusts to those to whom they are due; and when you judge between man and man that you judge with justice [...]”<sup>2</sup>*

Our dear Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized the importance of justice by saying that:

*“Injustice is darkness in the hereafter”<sup>3</sup>*

### **Freedom of Thought**

The managers must give the workers an opportunity to freely express their opinions. Even positive criticism must be welcomed from them. In the era of four caliphs, they were answerable to the general people. The Islamic perspective of leadership is that they are a *khadem* to the people of the organization<sup>4</sup>. Our dear Prophet (PBUH) once said:

### **Mutual Consultation**

Another secondary motivating tool in Islam is *Shura* or mutual consultation among the people in an organization. This way they will feel as if they were a part of the decision- making and will be encouraged to do work more efficiently<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Al-Qur’an 4:135

<sup>2</sup> Quran, 4:58

<sup>3</sup> Al-Hadith

<sup>4</sup> Ruhul Amin & Golam Mohiuddin, (2016), “Motivating people in Organizations: the Islamic way”, International Journal of Islamic management and Business, Vol. 2 No. 2 August 2016

In the Holy Quran, Allah Almighty has advised Muslim leaders to consult others who have more knowledge of certain matters. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) himself was advised to consult his companions, as stated in the Quran:

*“And consult them in affairs (of moment), then, when you have taken a decision put your trust in Allah, For Allah loves those who put their trust (in him)”<sup>1</sup>*

### **Profit sharing**

Our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

*“Give due share to the workers from their assets, earned by physical ability (profits).”<sup>2</sup>*

This Hadith shows that workers must get the profits and salary. This way they will feel to be a part of the organization and will go extra mile for the welfare of the organizations

### **Discipline & Honesty**

Another crucial motivation tools in Islam for an organization are discipline and honesty. Both employer and employees need to maintain discipline and honesty in the organization for success<sup>1</sup>. A well- organized and well- disciplined organization will serve as a motivating factor for employees, as is said in the Holy Quran:

*“O ye who believe, Obey Allah and obey the messenger and those charged with authority among you”<sup>3</sup>*

The employees must be motivated by the employer and the employer so that he performs his duties honestly. The prophet (SAW) said:

*“Three types of people will be doubly rewarded, among them is included those who devotedly serve both Allah and their masters.”<sup>4</sup>*

### **Comparison of Traditional and Islamic concept of Motivation**

The traditional concept of motivation relies strongly on Western viewpoint of human needs and wants, in addition to the *spiritual dimensions* put forward by the Islamic perspective. The fundamental and most widely accepted traditional theory of Motivation was given by Abraham Maslow, in which he discussed five essential

<sup>1</sup> Al-Qur’an 3:159

<sup>2</sup> Al-Hadith

<sup>3</sup> Al-Qur’an 4:59

<sup>4</sup> Al-Hadith

human needs. The first of these needs is “the physiological needs” that are fulfilled with monetary wages and “security needs” that are fulfilled with pensions and insurance policies. Next is “the Affiliation” need for which man maintains social relationships. The final two needs are “the Esteem and Self-actualization needs” which involve status and power<sup>1</sup>. As can be seen from this, that Western perspective of motivating tools is concerned only with the fulfillment of material human needs and desires, which can easily demote the motivation and productivity level when not met. Islam supports the provision of material motivating tools like reward and punishment, profit sharing, etc, but the West has completely ignored the religious perspective. This way Islam gives a holistic approach to motivation as it has included and focused more on spirituality of eternal human soul as primary motivating tool characterized by faith in Allah and performing good deeds for His sake.

### **Implications of the Study and Future Recommendations**

In today’s dynamic organizational environment, the top managers must keep in mind that a motivated staff is vital for success. In an Islamic country like Pakistan where almost all employees are Muslims, Islamic values can be used as tools to motivate them and obtain an efficient work force. Ideally, the Islamic motivating tools, in combination with conventional motivators, can yield optimum results. However, spiritual motivators are considered as primary tools since these are most compelling to motivate Muslim employees. This way the Muslim workers can not only gain blessings and rewards of Allah in this world but also in the life hereafter.

This study, using available literature, highlights the values and importance of motivating tools which has managerial implications for both researchers and practitioners in organizations who want to achieve long- term sustainable success through motivating their Muslim employees. Muslim leaders must ensure that Muslim employee should be given proper training on grounds of Islamic values and that they are being practiced. Also, the leaders themselves must manage the employees according to the Islamic perspectives. Moreover, non-Muslim leaders can

use these tools to understand the behavior of Muslim employees at their workplace and to motivate them.

Theoretically, this study is an attempt to explore and integrate the motivating tools for Muslim employees in the light of Islamic principles, which can be used to remodel the already existing motivating tools as required. This study aims to bridge this gap since limited efforts have been made earlier to study motivation from an Islamic perspective.

This study can serve as a starting point for future researchers where this phenomenon or more dimensions of motivating tools can be explored in different fields like education, sports, learning and the like. Further, a comparison can be drawn between Islamic and traditional motivating theories. Also, a study on the extent of the benefits of these motivating tools can be studied in organizations.

### **Conclusion**

From the study, it can be concluded that business challenges deem significant the retention of efficient and loyal employees. This way, organizations can promote their performance and productivity for long- term survival. For this purpose, these employees need to be motivated. So, if the authorities use these Islamic motivating tools for motivating its people, the organizational goals can be achieved. As we see from the current paper, the concept of motivation balances the material and spiritual dimensions. The spiritual dimensions, like iman, taqwah, taubah and ihsan can be used in conjunction with the material dimensions, like rewards & punishment, freedom of thought, mutual consideration, profit sharing, discipline & honesty, to motivate the workers. The Islamic organizations must take proper steps to ensure these steps for motivating its Muslim employees.