

## PROMOTING EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION USING SELF-CONTROL CONCEPT FROM ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES

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### ABSTRACT

The economic recession of the recent years was difficult for many organizations, especially when it came to their employees. Layoffs, tight budgets, minimal or no pay raises, benefit cuts, long hours doing the work of those who had been laid off – this was the reality that many employees faced today. During these difficult times productivity of organizations might be affected. Productivity is one of the key aims of many organizations to ensure competitive edge in the industry. In order to attain high productivity, one of the key aspects that organizations have to take care of is the smallest yet vital unit in the organization that is individual employee. This concept paper aims to explore the concept of self-control that can be applied to promote employee motivation thus increase productivity of workers at workplace. Specifically, it aims to examine the human level of existence from the Islamic perspective. The results are expected to increase attention on the need to enhance self-control on individual workers which will then portrayed in employees' positive work behaviour.

**Keywords:** *Economic recession, employee motivation, self-control, human level of existence, Islamic perspective*

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### 1. Introduction

In this current era of economic recession, employee motivation issues have become a critical aspect to be managed. This is due to the fact that the economic recession makes it difficult for many organizations to achieve their goals. Among issues related to employee motivation and economic challenges are layoffs, tight budgets, minimal or no pay raises, benefit cuts, and long hours doing the work of those who had been laid off. During these difficult times productivity of organizations is badly affected.

Employees are the smallest unit in organization, yet they play vital role as assets that must be taken care of in order for organization to sustain its competitive advantage. This is because employees are unlikely to be committed if they are not sufficiently motivated

(Rafikul Islam, Ahmad Zaki Hj. Ismail, 2008). Thus, the challenge to management is to understand the diverse needs and motivation of employees and to come up with appropriate methods to boost employee motivation and thus increase organization success.

The analysis of publications on employee motivation discloses a frequent issue for managers which include how to achieve their employees' satisfaction with work, organization and managers. There is substantial amount of attention given by researchers to the survey and evaluation of theories related to employee motivation. However, many of them do not analyze employee motivation in the conditions of crisis (Irena et al., 2012) and do not relate motivation issues with Islamic concept.

This paper discusses on employee motivation and productivity challenges faced by organizations during economic recession. Next, this paper comprehends the concept of self-control from Islamic perspective by examining the concept of human level of existence. This paper concludes with several managerial implications that could be deliberated by organizations in order to ensure successful implementation of organizational goals. This study is a desk-based and library-oriented research. Thus, it relies primarily on secondary data sources such as literatures from various publications, books, journals, and from the internet. The study has been structured in the light of the research objectives.

## **2. Motivation**

The term motivation has been discussed and conceptualized by various researchers. Generally, all definition given by many scholars brings the same notion with respect to the term motivation. Motivation is defined by Robbins (2013) as the process by which a person's efforts are energized, directed, and sustained toward attaining a goal. When someone is motivated, he or she will persistently exert high effort in a direction that benefits his or her organization in order to achieve goals.

According to (Rafikul Islam, Ahmad Zaki Hj. Ismail, 2008), motivation represents psychological processes that energizes behavior, directs behavior, and underlies the tendency to persist. Yudhir (2012) claimed that in order to achieve goals, individuals must be sufficiently stimulated, have a clear picture on what to achieve, and have commitment to put utmost effort for a long enough period of time and never give up in realizing their aim.

## **3. Self-Control**

Self-control is defined as a person's ability to control emotions, behaviour, and impulses. It refers to the individual decision or the ability to delay immediate gratification of desires in order to reach larger alternative goals. The definition takes into consideration obstacles of the realities of life faced by individuals in this current dynamic and challenging world.

From the definition, this paper suggests that the key to promote employee motivation at work is by having employees who have the ability to exercise self-control. Indeed, strength of religious beliefs can enhance self-control in individual employees. Most religions including Islam believe in the necessity of self-control. The Glorious Quran says:

*“And as for him who fears to stand in the presence of his Lord (Allah) and forbids his own soul from its whims and caprices then surely Paradise is the abode.” (Qur’an 79:40 - 41).*

The five fundamentals of Islam revolve around self-control. For instance, in terms of pray, one of the reasons we pray five times a day is to gain discipline. We fast in the month of Ramadan to “learn self-restraint”, and we perform Hajj, partly, to practice endurance.

*“Guard strictly the Salah, especially the middle Salah. And stand before Allah with obedience.” (Quran 2:238).*

*“O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous.” (Qur’an 2:183).*

*“The knolls of Safa and Marwah are among the rites decreed by God. Anyone who observes Hajj or `Umrah commits no error by traversing the distance between them. If one volunteers more righteous works, then God is Appreciative, Omniscient.” (Quran 2:158).*

Islam believes that when individual employees practise self-control, they will try their best to transform their soul for good things and the best part is to get closer to Allah. If this state of self-control can be achieved they will be able to physically and mentally adept to face the challenges of life. Findings from many studies indicate that employees that have self-control tend to have high levels of job satisfaction and performance and cope better in stressful situations than employees that lack self-control (Yousef, D. A., 2000).

#### **4. Self-control and Level of Existence in Islam**

In the context of Islam, there are four psychological levels of existence. They are *sawala*, *ammara*, *lawama*, and *mutmainna*. At each particular level, a person exhibits beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours corresponding to that stage. A person might progress to a higher level when conditions changed.

*Sawala* (a passion for temptations) is the first level. At this level, a person’s soul prompts him to follow only his desires. He will always in state of resistance and ignorance from any forms of enlightenment. He is able to distinguish between good and bad, but lacks the capacity to integrate his needs with the surroundings. This is because his focus is on pursuing self-interest.

*Ammara* (the prone-to-evil psyche) is the second level. At this level, a person is aware that his soul induces him to do bad things and yet offers no resistance to it. A person at this stage is weak spiritually. In this context, a person is inclined intentionally and, perhaps contrary to self-interest, to engage in wrongdoing. Nevertheless, a person at this stage is willing to confess mistakes especially when he understands that conditions are no longer satisfying his self-pursuit.

*Lawama* (self-reproachment) is the third level. At this level, a person is conscious of evil. He continuously struggles between good and evil and seeks to repent whenever involves in bad conduct. In addition, a person at this level pursues to control self, sensitive to moral

and ethical standards, tries to resist selfish pursuits, and considers what happens to him a consequence of his own choices.

*Mutmainna* (the righteous) is the fourth level and it is the optimal level in human development. A person at this level has conscious mind that is perfectly in tune with good deeds. A person is a responsible and committed being and through intellectual and social involvement attains perfection, satisfaction, and spiritual fulfilment. At this level, a person is always determined and displays no uncertainty in his choices in life (Syed, J., & A. J. (2010).

Hence, if an individual lacks self-control, he is succumbing to the *sawala* and *ammara*; if he is behaving Islamically, he is fighting the evil impulses of the *sawala* and *ammara*, thus responds to the directions of the *lawama* and the *mutmainna*. So, what will govern his work behaviour and the interaction among these four levels of existence is his level of *taqwa* or piety.

Therefore, it can be summarized that the extent of self-control and the level of human existence are related to individual's level of religiosity. In turn, the level of religiosity will determine whether an individual will behave in accordance with Islamic principles or not (Ali, A. J., 2009).

## 5. Managerial Implications

This study has several implications. Firstly, management could benefit from the result that employees who have self-control and in *mutmainna* level of existence have the capability and capacity to control their work behaviour. In addition, they have high spiritual conscientiousness and are excellent servants of God. Thus, they are able to work under stressful conditions during economic crisis. They will do their work as usual and their motivation level will not be affected.

Secondly, employees who are at the *lawama* level appear to have lower level of self-control as compared to those who are at *mutmainna* level. However, they are still in control since they believe whatever happens to them is the result of their own choices. They will always struggle to control their work behaviour since their soul is always prone to the state of flux either towards good or evil as their spiritual needs are not yet completely internalized. In order to motivate them during economic crisis, employers need to use either supportive or participative style of leadership in dealing with them. Employers need to show concern on them, be supportive, and hear their problems and involve them in whatever decision that might affect them.

Thirdly, employees who are at the *sawala* and *ammara* level have low level of self-control. Among the two levels, *sawala* is the worst. Employees who are at these levels will find difficulty in managing work behaviour and easily de-motivated. They cannot work under crisis and stressful condition. This is because they consistently want to pursue their self-interest due to their low level of spiritual maturity. In order to motivate them, strict external control mechanisms need to be in place. This includes frequent monitoring and supervision by managers, tight organizational rules, formal policy and procedures, use of log book/punch card machine to record employees' attendance to work, and others.

According to Ibrahim Badr Shehab (2016), a Muslim individual who commits himself to following Allah's commands and prohibitions, will maintain a relatively constant level of performance, in all situations and in conformity with defined performance

benchmarks, to an acceptable extent. On the other hand, the performance level of a non-Muslim, or an uncommitted Muslim, would tend to fluctuate according to the kind of incentives offered, the extent to which those incentives are irresistible, or to how strict he may be monitored. If, for some reason or another, that employee was denied incentives, or if he escaped monitoring, his effort would be reduced to its minimum levels.

This suggests that those employees who are in *mutmainna* and *lawama* level of human existence (*mutmainna* is the best level) fall in the first category since they have high spiritual maturity, whereby those employees who are in *sawala* and *ammara* level fall in the second category as described by Ibrahim Badr Shehab. They would be easily de-motivated when economy is in crisis since they are prone to monetary and extrinsic benefits rather than intrinsic motivation.

Fourthly, in order to boost up employee motivation during crisis, apart from relying on individual employee self-control, there is also a need for the existence of an efficient extrinsic formal control system. This is because employees are human beings who occasionally make mistakes and who are unfortunately subject to weaknesses (Ibrahim Badr Shehab, 2016). Therefore, employers need to study, review, design, and develop various methods and strategies that are of course non-monetary, which meet the need of their diverse workforce. It is especially true that different individual have different work behaviour, life perspective, and level of existence. Thus, management has to recognize such diversity.

Finally, employers should regularly conduct training programs to help employees enhance their self-control as well as spiritual maturity level. For that, programs such as usrah/religious talk, motivation programs, and Emotional-Spiritual Quotient programs are highly recommended. Moreover, employers need to practise *management by example*, by showing high moral conduct and good behaviour towards work so that employees will be inspired and motivated to follow such behaviour. Furthermore, employers need to focus on motivating employees by using intrinsic motivation (which work best at all times) compared to extrinsic motivation.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, managers always feel confused on how to motivate employees especially when economic condition is not good. Conditions become worse since employees are always unique to each other and they have different personalities and dispositions. This happen solely because managers always devoted most of their attention to satisfying the psychological and physical needs of their employees (external), ignoring an aspect which should have been the focus of their attention and their number-one priority that is spiritual aspect manifested in the belief in Allah and the Hereafter (internal).

In fact, faith is considered a constant motivator and guide for individuals' behavior. The greater the faith an individual attains the greater the role faith plays in motivating human beings towards the desired behavior.

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