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# Levels of existence and motivation in Islam

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper seeks to shed light on Islamic perspectives on motivation and personality. It argues that original Islamic thinking in the seventh and eleventh centuries offer useful organizational insights for today's organizations.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This research contrasts an earlier Islamic writing on motivation and personality with contemporary humanistic theories on motivation. This study suggests that religion and spirituality can positively influence behavior and organizational performance.

**Findings** – It shows that religion may provide a potentially useful framework within which to study the relationship between faith and work. It was documented that the Islamic profile of human existence (*Mutamainna*) challenges most of the prevailing management assumptions on human beings.

**Practical implications** – Opens up a new avenue for viewing the nature of human existence and dispels the widely held belief that human beings by nature are destined to engage in destructive behavior.

**Originality/value** – The paper provides original conceptualizations and perspectives that are of value to researchers in the fields of spirituality and international comparative management. The paper offers a new perspective on how the degree of internalization of spiritual needs influences an individual's behavior and expectations.

**Keywords** Islam, Personality, Motivation (psychology), Management history

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

The competition for markets and the endless quest for improving organizational performance have motivated managers and students of management alike to look for new and relevant organizational perspectives and approaches. One area that seems to attract attention is spirituality. In fact, in recent years, a large amount of literature on spirituality has been growing steadily; a significant portion of which deals with spirituality in the workplace and the relationships between faith and work (Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Weston, 2002). Even though the relationships between spirituality and religion are not the topic of this paper, it is useful to mention at the outset that there is an overlap between spirituality and religion, as both of them place considerable emphasis on the conduct of conscience. In fact, in religious discourse the word spirituality is often used synonymously with religion and faith (Benefiel, 2003; Reiner, 2007). Other researchers, however (McCormick, 1994) argue that religion is not synonymous with spirituality. Spirituality, however, more likely corresponds only to the intrinsic aspects of religion. Religion, therefore, appears to stimulate researchers to assess the accuracy of

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common conventions regarding the influence of religion on management and organization (Weaver and Agle, 2002). These authors assert that the larger a role religion plays in one's self-identity, the more difficult it will be for other factors to thwart the influence of religious role expectations. The interest in the relationship between religion and management is expected to grow, as increasing number of managers in recent years publicly utter the importance of religion in their conduct of business (Kinni, 2003; Weaver and Agle, 2002). In today's business world, major corporations such as Ford, Texas Instruments, and Merrill Lynch have shown a greater interest in the role of religion in the workplace (Kinni, 2003). Religion and spirituality are increasingly on corporate agendas as employees search for more meaning at work and as business leaders seek more socially responsible approaches to business and new ways to motivate and inspire employees (Garcia-Zamor, 2003).

Traditionally, the relationship of religion to economic development and work ethics, and the religious impact on organizational culture and performance have been intensively debated in the context of Christianity and Judaism. The contributions of other religions, especially Islam, have been almost totally ignored in management literature. However, Islam as a faith not only shares many elements with Christianity and Judaism, but also stands to offer a unique perspective on balancing work and life and on the nature of organizational work and activities. Since its inception in 610, Islam has offered unique perspectives on work and management. In all probability, early Muslims' articulation of work ethic and desired behavior reinforced their faith and accelerated social and economic changes that were seldom experienced in Arabia, the birth place of Islam. At the time, the positive meaning that was attached to work was a novel development and arguably is still in tune with today's contemporary thinking. During the early years of Islam, Muslim business people, driven by Islamic teaching and instructions, built successful businesses where industries and trades were organized in corporations or guilds (Izeeddin, 1953). The emphasis was placed on goal-oriented tasks, responsible conduct, perfection of and hard work, virtue of competition and diversity, and centrality of work and trade in improving one's life and societal welfare (Ali, 2005). Indeed, as Imam Ali (598-661A.D.) asserted, the welfare of the state and the society is contingent on what businesspeople do in the marketplace. He asserted that even though tax collectors, judges, administrators, government agents, and soldiers play a vital role in the state, none of them, however (p. 315), "can do without traders and craftsmen who build and maintain facilities and markets, a task which they themselves [state employees] are unable to perform." This view was a novel departure from existing norms. It situated entrepreneurs, merchants, and workers among the privileged classes and bestowed upon them a much higher prestige than government bureaucrats.

In the context of work and motivation, there seem to be a linkage between human needs and economic activities and, by necessity, with having proper and peaceful societies. While, at times, the justifications appeared to be viewed strictly through a religious prism, the possibility of existing management and or organizational perspectives should not be minimized. Certainly, the sayings of the Prophet Mohamed and his immediate companions set the foundation for organization and entrepreneurial practices. This is signified by his insistence that "work is a worship" and that perfection of work is a religious duty: "God bless the worker who learns and perfects his profession" Similarly, Imam Ali, the (p. 483) stated, "Persist in your action with a noble end in

mind. . . Failure to perfect your work while you are sure of the reward is injustice to yourself” adding, “poverty almost amounts to impiety.”

The *Quran* (1989, 2:275) instructs Muslims to persistently work whenever and wherever it is available stating, “God hath permitted trade and forbidden usury.” Likewise, the Prophet Mohammed preached that merchants should perform tasks that were not only morally required, but that were essential for the survival and flourishing of a society. He declared, “I commend the merchants to you, for they are the couriers of the horizons and God’s trusted servants on earth.” His fourth successor, Imam Ali (died 661) stated in his letter to the Governor of Egypt (pp. 329-30):

Take good care of the merchants and artisans, and ensure their well-being whether they are settled or traveling, or working on their own. Those are the providers of benefits and goods, which they bring from far away by sea or by land through mountains and valleys, securing them for people who are unable to reach them. Those are the people who will assure you a durable peace and respected allegiance. Give them due care in your vicinity and in other areas of your land.

Even decades later, Muslim groups held work and business activities in high regard. For example, Ibn Khaldun (1989, p. 273), the medieval Arab sociologist, argued that engaging in business serves four objectives: facilitating cooperation and mutual understanding among people, satisfying the needs of people, increasing wealth and influence, and spurring the growth of cities. Previously, the *Ikhwan-us-Safa* (Brothers of Purity) who rose in the tenth century used terms corresponding to contemporary categorization of management and organizational behavior in describing the centrality and meaning of work. They indicated that engagement in trade and manufacturing served physical, psychological, social, and spiritual purposes. Specifically (Vol. 1, p. 286), *Ikhwan-us-Safa* underscored the importance of work, as they outlined reasons for pursuing business activities: alleviation of poverty; motivating people to be persistent and engaging creatively in an appropriate profession; complementing the human soul with verified knowledge, good manners, useful ideas, and responsible deeds; and reaching salvation. Furthermore, *Ikhwan-us-Safa* (1999, pp. 288-90) offered a strong rationale for treating any type of work as an honorable task and the perfection of work as the most blessed action by God.

While the Prophet Mohamed and Imam Ali were more specific in linking hard work and involvement in economic activities to the welfare of the society and the promotion of peace, the medieval writers (e.g. *Ikhwan-us-Safa*, Ibn Khaldun) articulated the importance of motivation in organizational setting. Indeed, *Ikhwan-us-Safa*, a tenth century intellectual society, were pioneers in underscoring the spiritual dimension of work in addition to meeting religious obligations. More importantly, their classification of human needs into four categories (physiological, psychological, social, and spiritual) reflects a degree of sophistication, at that time, in understanding the nature of work and organization. These correspond, to a large degree, with those provided by twentieth century scholars such as Maslow and Alderfer. However, unlike contemporary theorists, the *Ikhwan-us-Safa* were primarily concerned with the categorization of needs and the human potential for growth. According to available historical records, it appears that the Group did not address human needs in a systematic way. Their mere focusing, however, on the existence of these needs and human growth represents sophistication in thinking in the tenth century.

Therefore, the purposes of the present study are to:

- shed the light on the Islamic view of human needs in the context of level of existence as it was articulated in a document authored by Imam Ali in the middle of the seventh century;
- present original perspectives on human levels of existence in Islam and briefly compare it to contemporary theories on human existence;
- show Islamic perspectives on the linkage between the degree of internalization of the spiritual need to the individual's intentions and behavior; and
- clarify the style of management suitable for a particular behavioral level of group of employees.

The approach is new and offers challenging and genuine perspectives on issues that are essential for a healthy work environment. Furthermore, the present study offers a critical analysis of the complexity of management in an era of religious and cultural diversity.

### Islam and human needs

According to Islamic tradition, human beings have infinite choices to make in life. Shariati (1979, p. 92) argues that as a human being is drawn towards "infinite direction," either toward the physical (clay) or toward God, the individual is "compelled to be always in motion. His own self is the stage for a battle between two forces that results in a continuous evolution toward perfection." Consequently, attaining perfection is a desirable and virtuous goal.

In terms of needs, the nature of human beings in Islam dictates that human needs are complex and not necessarily hierarchical as Maslow proposed. This is based on the assumption that God created man from clay (physical) and spirit (spirituality) and, subsequently, God bestowed man with trust (free will) and knowledge (gave man the aptitude for understanding and comprehending the complexity of the universe). Scholars in Islamic studies, therefore, conclude that there are five general categories of needs: physiological, material, psychological, spiritual and mental, or intellectual (Al-Jasmani, 1996; Glaachi, 2000; Nusair, 1983; Shariati, 1979). The first two categories are mostly related to the clay or physical part of human nature. The last three categories are more likely derived from the spiritual part and the knowledge and the ability for independent thinking that God granted specifically to human beings. Physiological needs include food and shelter. It is important to indicate that in the early Islamic State (the era during Prophet Mohamed and his immediate four successors); a minimum level of physiological needs was guaranteed for citizens by the state. The material concerns the need to achieve acceptable levels of wealth and economic enjoyment. Psychological needs concern emotions, such as love, a sense of belonging, fear, and influence. Spiritual needs focus on faith, harmony, confidence and a purpose in life. The spiritual need represents a cushion that helps to absorb frustration, crisis, failure, and so on. Theoretically, it is supposed to provide a balance among existing needs. The intellectual revolves around capitalization on potential, a maximizing of contributions, and continuing learning and development.

The underlying assumption of human needs in Islam is that human beings are complex and dynamic creatures. That is, they are born to strive, to weigh the consequences of vice and virtue, and seek and reach perfection. They have various choices and options in life. These choices have consequences beyond immediate self-interest. Therefore, people of the

faith are reminded to view their actions in a broad context. The Prophet Mohamed once said, "One has an obligation toward God, self, and family; give due attention to each" (quoted in Glaachi, 2000, p. 59). While physiological needs are a prerequisite for existence and thus should be adequately met in Islam, other needs including economic and spiritual, are not hierarchically arranged. Rather, they are considered simultaneously, resulting in a perspective that differs from the hierarchal system of needs as was envisioned by Maslow. The consideration, however, is influenced by intellectual insight, aspirations, and emotion. Being able to attain a balance in satisfying these needs is a virtue. The *Quran* (28:77) instructs Muslims to "seek through your wealth the gains of the hereafter without ignoring your share of this life." Islamic teaching recognizes the interplay of the internal and external forces in shaping human needs. Nevertheless, Islam situates intellectual and spiritual needs in a unique place. In the *Quran* (58:11) people are told, "God will exalt those of you who believe and those who are given knowledge to high degree." That is, both faith and reason or their absence determines how other needs are prioritized. The spiritual need functions as a cushion that helps in sustaining self-confidence and security in adversity and hardship. The spiritual need is a potent factor that allows those who internalize it to display calm and be content with their surroundings though they may not have adequately met their physiological or other needs. Furthermore, the intellectual need makes it possible to act with clarity, insight, reduce doubts, and ponder alternatives (Ali, 2005).

It is important to note that the perspectives of the humanistic economic man (Tomer, 2001) and complex nature (Schein, 1980) perspectives share in common many elements that are integral parts of the Islamic view of human nature. Free will, the multiplicity of needs, infinite potential, and the desire for perfection, among others, is highly regarded by all three perspectives. As such, religious beliefs offer promising avenues for understanding human nature and motivation. Indeed, the recent growing interest in religion and spirituality in the workplace attests to this potentiality.

In terms of the linkage between religion and behavior, Islamic faith (see Imam Ali, the fourth Caliph, 598-661A.D.) differentiates between those who view religion as either a means to serve their worldly affairs or the end. Imam Ali (1989) stated:

I found only those who understand it [knowledge] quickly but cannot be trusted with it; either a person who uses religion for worldly purposes, who exploits the favours which God bestowed on him for [dominance] over His creatures, and the reasoning he is given to assume superiority over His devotees [...]

or those who use knowledge to:

[...] attain certitude, and endow them with the spirit of deep conviction. They find easy what the more affluent find difficult, and are in good company with what the ignorant find boring.

It is inconceivable for the latter to engage in any wrongdoing as they "have given themselves up to God and become steadfast in His obedience." These categorizations are similar to what is termed in contemporary literature as extrinsic and intrinsic religious orientations (Allport, 1954; Weaver and Agle, 2002). These authors suggest that intrinsic religion provides a stronger link between judgment and behavior. In particular, Weaver and Agle advocate that intrinsically oriented people treat religious belief and practice as an end in itself. In contrast, extrinsically oriented people view religion in terms of its usefulness – a means to obtain other benefits. Therefore, intrinsically motivated individuals are more likely to adhere to responsible conduct and are sensitive to what is considered, in a universal sense, ethical and harmful and

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tend to act accordingly. In spite of the terminologies, extrinsic vs intrinsic, their message to a large degree resembles that of the seventh century's.

### Psychological levels of existence

Psychological perspectives on human existence and development have produced fascinating yet conflicting assumptions. Most of the studies attempt to probe the motives beyond human behavior and actions. Their findings enable students of organizations and practicing managers to devise techniques to improve human relations, to interact, gain satisfaction, and increase productivity in the workplace, and reduce conflict among groups and nations. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), one of the pioneers in studying human psychology, suggested that people, due to their differences in personality, deal with their fundamental drives differently. He postulated that there is a battle between two parts of the soul, the "It" or id (unconscious part) and the "I" proper or the "ego" (an individual's picture of physical and social reality) and the "superego" (storehouse of an individual's values). Freud views "It" as the hidden or essence of the soul and the "I" as the open, and apparent part of the soul. The "It" and "I" are destined to remain continuously at war and that only "compromise, but never harmony, [can] be achieved between them" (Wilber, 1999, p. 583). Freud asserted that "It was stronger than I" and "It" represents an:

[...] urge which the weak "I" would like to resist, because it feels that [...] this urge may involve danger, may result in a traumatic situation, a collision with the outer world (quoted in Wilber, 1999, pp. 583-4).

Maslow was a pioneer in providing a framework for studying human motives and development. Even though Maslow's theory was extensively covered in the literature and without conclusive empirical results, his hierarchy of needs offers a general framework for understanding motivational challenges especially at the workplace. Indeed, Maslow (1954) saw human nature as progression through successive stages. This perspective stimulated researchers such as Erikson (1964) and Graves (1970) to further explore human existence and the complexity of human nature. In fact, the latter, in a large empirical study which was originally undertaken to support Maslow's theory, came up with contradictory results and subsequently questioned the validity and conclusion of the core theory. Erikson (1964), describing the fundamental human developmental stages, suggested that people mature and grow as a result of their handling of various problems and crises. He identified seven stages: infancy, young childhood, childhood and adolescence, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood and middle age, middle and old age. At each stage, a person faces different problems and difficulties. For example, at the young childhood stage, an individual struggles with autonomy versus shame, and initiative versus guilt. As people mature, they face the problem of maintaining effort and interest. In the later stage (middle and old age), individuals attempt to maintain a sense of self-worth and integrity. Erikson assumed that a healthy personality progresses in sequential stages. This, however, may be questioned in other cultures and, furthermore, not all individuals go through predetermined specific stages before other stages are completed.

Graves (1970) speculates that people progress through consecutive levels of "psychological existence." This progression is determined by their ability to acquire and assimilate knowledge and to exercise and to develop talents. Depending on the person's

cultural conditioning and perception of the opportunities and constraints in the environment, his/her level of psychological existence can become arrested at a given level or it can move upward or downward. The level of existence of the mature human being is an unfolding process marked by the progressive subordination of the older lower level of existence to newer, higher-level value systems. Graves identifies six levels for a mature person or groups of mature human beings. These are: tribalistic (a submissiveness to authority and/or tradition), egocentric (aggressive, selfish, restless, impulsive, and, in general, not inclined to live within the limits and constraints of society's norms), conformist (sacrificial, has a low tolerance for ambiguity and needs structure and rules to follow), manipulative (materialistic, expressive, and self-calculating to achieve an end), sociocentric (a high need for affiliation and little concern for wealth), and existential (a high tolerance for ambiguity and for those who have different values, usually expresses self but not at the expense of others). Unlike, Erikson and Freud, Graves places great emphasis on values as the major determinant of human attitude, behavior, and action. Feelings, motivations, preferences, thoughts, and acts reflect the value system at that particular level of existence. And unlike Maslow who considered self-actualization as the peak stage in human development or the goal, Graves sees a distinct hierarchy of needs on each level of the existence model. That is Graves proposes that there is no idealized state as mankind continuously evolves.

These humanistic psychologists, especially Maslow and Graves, though secular, share in common some similarities with Islamic thinking in terms of the human level of existence. This is especially true in their emphasis on the potential of the human being and the concept that growth and regression are a normal aspect of human existence. In the context of Islam, there are four levels of existence. These levels are in a state of flux and dynamism. This is because people are endowed with mental faculties and a free will to decide what is good for them. Choices and priorities are shaped by upbringing, social and economic constraints, knowledge, and perceived and actual opportunities. The *Quran* (12:53, 75:2, 89:27-30) specifies and details the levels of existence. The *Quran*, too, clarifies not only the circumstances that shape the evolution and existence of each level, but also the conditions that induce changes and progress. That is, the psychology of a healthy person changes according to their level of existence. At each particular level, a person exhibits beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviors corresponding to that stage. As conditions are changed, the person may progress or regress to a new stage. Subsequently, his/her aspirations, values, and behaviors are expected to change. This perspective closely resembles the one articulated by Graves. The levels in Islamic thinking are briefly discussed below.

#### *Sawala (a passion for temptations)*

At this level, a person's soul prompts him to follow only his/her desires, and to shy away from enlightenment. The psyche was explained well in the stories of Moses and Jacob and the difficulties they encountered. The propensity to evil made the Samiri lead Moses' people astray in his absence. When Moses asked the Samiri what he had done:

The Samiri told Moses "I had the skill (of carving), which they did not have. I followed some of the messenger's (Moses) tradition but I then ignored it. Thus, my soul prompted me (to carve a golden calf with an artificial hollow sound)" (20:96).

Similarly, in the *Quran*, there is a story of how Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and left him to die. The brothers told their father, Jacob, that Joseph had been killed by a wolf to which Jacob replied:

[...] your souls have tempted you in this matter [providing false proof], (for me) patience is most appropriate against that which ye assert, it is God whose help can be sought (12:18).

In these cases, these individuals, the Samiri and Joseph's brothers, acted in a way that eventually inhibited their optimal future organizational engagement. Imam Ali, the fourth Caliph (598-661A.D.) described the nature of a person at this stage (pp. 470-1):

If in doubt he obeys the reasoning of passions, and when the matter is clear he has no control over them [...] When he has a chance to satisfy a passion he seizes it and defers atonement. If he faces a test, he loses his patience [...] He is generous in talk and miserly in action. He competes for what is ephemeral, and is indifferent to what is eternal. He finds duties a burden and immediate gain an end [...] He is full of criticism of others and of praise for himself. Time which he spends with the rich in pleasure is dearer to him than time spent with the poor in obedience to God [...] He is obeyed, but disobeys; claims his dues but does not give the others theirs. He fears the people in matters that are not ordained by God, but does not fear God in dealing with His people.

It can be inferred that the primary preoccupation of a person at this level is to pursue self-interest. That is, people may possess the mental capacities for differentiating between good and bad, but they lack the capacity to integrate their needs with the rest of their surroundings. Their obsession with self-interest inhibits them from rationally capitalizing on opportunities and engaging in effective organizational behavior. Imam Ali argued that at this stage (p. 475) people find it "difficult to wrench the human soul from temptation. It would rather persist in sin and in passion."

#### *Ammara (the prone-to-evil psyche)*

This is a stage where a person is aware that his soul induces him/her to do bad things and yet offers no resistance to it. A person at this stage admits that his/her soul is the source of evil or wrongdoing; that the human soul is a burden with its desires and temptations. For example, according to the *Quran*, Joseph was put in Pharaoh's jail and then brought to the Pharaoh to interpret the latter's dream. Joseph was put in jail because he was accused by the wife of his master of trying to seduce her. She had urged invited noble society women to seduce Joseph. When Joseph stood firm and refused temptations, he was sent to jail. When the King asked his servants to bring Joseph before him, Joseph requested that the King first ask the ladies who had induced them to prosecute him to confirm if he was guilty of the charges. The King asked the women about their encounters with Joseph and demanded the whole truth. All the women except one acknowledged the truth of Joseph's innocence. When the rest finished, the one who kept silent decided to admit her guilt. She testified that it was her own soul, which was prone to evil. She admitted that she wanted to make love to him against his will because he was attractive and handsome. The *Quran* reports her saying (12:53), "Yet, I do not absolve myself (of blame): the human soul certainly incites evil, unless my Lord bestows His mercy." 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 under pressure or when he/she understands that conditions are no longer conducive to serving his/her interest. Perhaps, this

manifests a lack of internalization of the spiritual beliefs. But there is hope that a person may learn from his/her mistakes and can engage in behavior that leads to satisfactory involvement.

At this stage, a person is aware that for any action there are consequences, be they rewards or punishment. However, because the desire for passion overwhelms wisdom, the person is inclined to follow desires. Imam Ali attributed this state to the lack of clear vision with the result that a person tends to “entertain misgivings in his heart at the first sign of doubt.” In this case, Imam Ali (p. 701) suggested that the appropriate approach for a person at this level is to cover his “deficiencies with tolerance and fight . . . passion with wisdom.” This, however, requires profound rethinking and spiritual reconsideration that may lead, if successful, to transformation to one of the successive stages.

#### *Lawama (self-reproachment)*

At this stage, Man is conscious of evil. There is a struggle between good and evil and Man seeks to repent to achieve salvation. In Sections 75:2 and 75:14-15, the *Quran* explains the conflicts at this stage of human development saying, “And I swear by the self-reproaching soul” and “Nay, man will be evidence against himself, even though he were to put up his excuses.” Thus, the *Lawama* soul either drives a person toward good and perfection or toward evil action and aggression. In the latter, the person experiences anxiety and fear (Al-Jasmani, 1996).

In Islamic faith, responsibility is personal and accountability is a virtue. The *Quran* states (6:164), “No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another” and (9:108) “Those who receive guidance, do so for the good of their own souls; those who stray, do so to their own loss.” That is, people make choices in life and have to live with the consequences, whether these consequences are good or bad. Accordingly, a person at this stage is subject to a continuing internal struggle, hesitation, and frustration. Unlike the preceding stages, the inclination to follow one’s desires at this level is not unbridled, as one’s will seeks to constrain self. If the will to engage in positive activities overwhelms desires, a person may reach a sense of spiritual fulfillment. Otherwise, a person may experience self-accusation, doubt, and regrets. Imam Ali (p. 301) states that an individual should “restrain himself from following his passions, and . . . control the excessiveness of his soul, since man’s soul often leads him astray.” He asserts that the most effective way to restrain desire is through clarity of mind.

People at this level are sensitive to moral and ethical standards, aware of their weak tendencies, try to resist selfish pursuits, are troubled when things go wrong, and consider what happens to them a consequence of their own choices.

#### *Mutamainna (the righteous)*

This is the ultimate point in human development. At this level, the mind is perfectly in tune with good deeds and a person realizes complete satisfaction and self-actualization. The *Quran* (89:27-8), says, “To the righteous soul will be said, ‘oh soul come back thou to thy Lord, well pleased (thyself), and well-pleasing unto Him.’” Muslim scholars describe this soul as one that is content and satisfied with what it has, regardless of:

[...] abundance or scarcity, prosperity or shortages, prohibitions or permissiveness. It is content without any doubt and does not change heart or deviate from the straight path, and is not fearful during terrifying events (Al-Jasmani, 1996, p. 16).

Shariati (1979, p. 121) argues that an individual at this stage of development has traversed the difficult path of servitude and carried the burden of trust. Imam Ali (555-57) elaborated that the people at this stage:

[...]are characterized by all noble manners: they speak the truth, dress modestly, and behave humbly [...] They are not shaken by calamity or excited by abundance [...] They are not satisfied with little achievements, and do not consider anything they do as sufficient [...] If one of them is praised, he feels uneasy [...] If his soul does not obey him in what it does not like, he does not yield to it in what it likes. He is concerned with what is eternal, and despises what is not lasting. His knowledge is tempered with magnanimity, and he practices what he preaches [...] Good deeds are anticipated of him, bad ones inconceivable [...] He forgives those who deal him an injustice; he gives to those who deprive him, and behaves with magnanimity towards those who are mean to him [...] He is calm in the face of calamities, patient in facing hardship, and full of gratitude in times of prosperity. He does not encroach on the rights of those whom he dislikes, nor is he biased in favor of those whom he loves. He acknowledges the right before there is a witness for or against him. He is not forgetful of what he has been entrusted with. He does not disregard a fact when reminded of it. He does not speak ill of people [...] and does not rejoice in the misfortune of others.

According to Shariati, people who reach the *Mutamainna* stage “fend the earth . . . with the power of their industry. . . create a life overflowing with abundance, enjoyment and prosperity” without suspending feeling and all sense of value. They are those in whom the peculiarly human capacity “to perceive the spirit of the world, the profundity of life, the creation of beauty, and the belief in something higher than nature and history” has not been weakened or paralyzed. At the *Mutamainna* stage, a person is a responsible and committed being and through intellectual and social involvement this person attains perfection and spiritual fulfillment.

The above four levels of psyche are descriptive of personal values and life-styles. The domination by a particular psyche determines the intensity and priority of human needs and behavior. At each level, a person is conscious of his/her actions. This is significantly different from Freud’s model. In Islam, a person is free to choose his/her direction in life, depending on the psyche at a particular stage. The constant struggle or war within oneself, as Freud suggests, is found in the second (*Ammara*) and third (*Lawama*) levels. Even at these levels, the inclination to progress toward “goodness” and “perfection” is always an aim. That is contrary to Freud’s assumption; the urge to do things right is not considerably weaker, relative to the urge to do evil. At the last level (*Mutamainna*), people, more likely, appear to display no uncertainty or doubt in their choices in life. The *Quran* (49:15) explicitly refers to this state by stating that believers are the sincere ones who have “never since doubted.” Furthermore, contrary to Freud’s thinking, human beings in Islam are not unworthy and are considered the best creatures on earth. The *Quran* (17:70) declares, “We have honored the children of Adam, carried them on the land and the sea, given them pure sustenance and exalted them above most of My creatures.” That is, human beings are vice-regents and are endowed with knowledge, trust, and discretion to pursue multiple interests and activities. This is in contrast to the Freudian ethic which asserts that:

[...] man is by nature (or at least by virtue of the inevitable conflict between man’s nature and society) a weak and irresolute creature without the stamina to endure the stresses and strains of living, and who cannot therefore hope to enjoy life on this earth (LaPiere, 1959, p. 60).

The Islamic levels of development differ, too, from that of Graves' model and Maslow's. Graves assumes that the value system determines human motive, aspiration, and action. Certainly, values influence individuals' feeling, attitude, and behavior. Nevertheless, according to the Islamic perspective, values are a reflection of the human level of existence. At each level, individuals acquire certain tendencies and dispositions. These are the result of the nature of human "duality." Human beings, however, are in a constant struggle toward perfection and the realization of infinite possibilities, at least according to secular and Islamic models. In Islamic thinking, God has inspired in people both good and evil. It is their knowledge, and faith that guards them from going astray. Knowledge illuminates their path and faith helps to sustain hope and absorb frustration, crisis, and difficulties. The *Quran* (91:7-10) illustrates this state: "By the soul and the proportion and order given to it; and its inspiration as to its wrong and its right. Truly he succeeds that purifies it, and he fails that corrupt it."

Islamic perspectives, though validating some of Maslow's propositions in terms of human potential and the possibilities for growth and regression, appear to differ on some levels. It appears that in Islamic thinking there is an emphasis on the frame of reference, corresponding to each level of existence, in determining and shaping the order and importance of needs. For example, Islamic perspectives, especially at the *Mutamainna* stage do not directly link need satisfaction to behavior. Individuals at this stage, more likely, appear to display no doubt in their choices in life and thus are content irrespective of the degree of satisfying, for example, their social or esteem needs. Furthermore, from Islamic perspectives, tension is more likely to take place only on the second (*Ammara*) and third (*Lawama*) levels. At the *Mutamainna* level, individuals are at peace and satisfied, as indicated before, with what they have, regardless of ampleness or scarcity of resources, affluence or poverty, prohibitions or permissiveness.

Like Erikson's model, Islamic perspectives underscore the importance of progression in life. Unlike Erikson's model, however, Islamic views account for the possibility of regression, and the idea that the maturity of a healthy adult person is not strictly linked to certain age groups as both spirituality and knowledge, or their absence, shape the inclination to progress toward "goodness" and "perfection." Perhaps, Kohlberg's (1981) three level model of moral reasoning and development resembles, to a degree, Islamic views especially at the first and last levels. Kohlberg's first level – pre-conventional (unchecked impulsive self-centred behavior – corresponds to Sawala and his last – the post-conventional level (universal principles of justice, equity, etc.) – shares many in common with the *Mutamainna* stage. Kohlberg's secular model, however, differs from Islamic perspectives in its emphasis on hierarchal arrangements. For Islamic perspectives, it is knowledge along with spirituality that regulates rules governing behavior, tempers desires, and guides people away from impulsive urges and toward socially and ethically responsible involvement.

### **Implications for management**

Managerial perceptions and mapping of human nature and motivation demand that management rethink its strategies, especially in the context of the scope of the relationships between employees and organization. Primarily, this study uncovers three general perspectives: the relevance of the past to current organizational thinking, that both growth and deficient needs can co-exist, and that for each level of existence certain strategies may be appropriate for producing desired behavior. The seventh

century perspective on the role of intrinsic factors in motivating individual and achieving a sort of equilibrium in one's life demonstrates that the past is not irrelevant to the study of work and organization. Furthermore, the recognition and categorization of human needs by a tenth century group evidences that human thinking does not take place in isolation and that the past constitutes a useful reservoir for reflection and learning.

Of interest to organizational study is the proposition in Islamic perspectives that the ideal level of existence, the *Mutamainna* stage, is not by necessity an end, as it represents a quest for continuous perfection and opens the gate for unlimited possibilities. Furthermore, while growth is sought at this stage, it does not preclude the existence of deficient needs (e.g. social or esteem). This particular perspective may not fare well with Maslow's hierarchy. Nevertheless, it represents a thinking which may have a potential for future theorization. In particular, researchers may need to explore and reflect on ways to motivate employees who are perfectly content with little material possession and seemingly unconcerned with daily organizational politics but nevertheless are inspired and energized by ends which go beyond self.

In terms of level of existence, managers have to consider various options available for them in dealing with and motivating employees according to their level of psychological existence. That is, managers have to develop various strategies to effectively deal with employees at different levels of existence. Table I presents organizational implications at each level of human existence. At the first level (*Sawala*), a person is motivated by the urge to engage in temptation for the sake of personal enjoyment. Consequences are not

Area	<i>Sawala</i>	<i>Amara</i>	<i>Lawama</i>	<i>Mutamainna</i>
Control systems	Emphasis on accountability, highlight a link between performance and material rewards, and clearly identify and strictly enforce rules and standards	Link rewards to personal performance and highlight boundaries of acceptable conduct	Allow subordinates to participate in setting standards and goals and the necessity of meeting organizational standards	Flexible and is left for individual control
Reward systems	Economic rewards and personal incentives; emphasis on punishments	Economic rewards that are based on personal achievement and meeting organizational goals	Extrinsic and intrinsic rewards are emphasized and good performance is publicly acknowledged and appreciated	Reward comes from personal control over their work and personal fulfillment of mission; intrinsic rewards are a potent motivational factor
Growth opportunities	Promotion and personal advancement is strictly based on performance and following organization-al guidelines	Promotion and personal advancement are possible when organizational goals and objectives are observed	Allows exposure to groups and working with others to advance self and serve organization and show concerns for development of employees	Communicate existing and possible opportunities that strengthen involvement with group, society and organization

**Table I.**  
Human levels of  
development and  
motivation

thought about and the aim is to maximize personal pleasure. Individuals at this stage see the world from a very narrow perspective and believe that, for these individuals, their pleasure and enjoyment situates them in the center of the universe and can create further enjoyment and wealth. Neither spiritual nor intellectual needs are motivators. Physiological and material needs are the primary motivator (Table II). Managerial strategies should be designed to enhance performance through incentives that satisfy these employees' needs for pleasure, including monetary ones. The managers, however, have to be tough and make it clear that he/she is in charge. This is because employees at this stage appreciate firmness and this is precisely what keep them performing within established parameters. Their preoccupation with their self-interests prevents them from identifying with the needs and expectations of others. Furthermore, they have difficulties in grasping the logic of organizational goals if these goals are perceived as obstacles to maximizing their self-interests and meeting their desires.

At the second level (*Ammara*), a person is motivated by the urge to take action, even though there might be unpleasant consequences or harm might be inflicted on others. Unlike the previous stage, individuals at this level are aware that they are not separate from others and that they have to work with others to meet their goals. Therefore, they recognize that maximizing self-interests may dictate a manipulation of situations and events to achieve objectives. Psychological, physiological, and material needs are given priority in their calculation and tactical and strategic aims. Managers should highlight rewards and incentives in the context of the individual's career goals. At this stage, managers should not underestimate the fact that there is a potential for these employees to grow and have to make sure other incentives are in place to motivate them to engage in more constructive behavior which can lead to optimal realization of organizational goals. That is, managers have to create a work setting in which individuals at this stage feel that they have the opportunity to satisfy their needs while performing their organizational tasks.

At the third level (*Lawama*), a person is clear about the advantages of change, but is influenced by selfish desire. Thus, people at this level are aware of their actions and consequences. Nevertheless, spiritual needs are not yet completely internalized and the individual is left without a strong censor to temper selfish desire. Managers should understand that these employees represent a growing segment of the workforce where commitment to self-interest is not pursued without a conscious attempt to link them to organizational goals. Spiritual dimensions of work, therefore, should be incorporated in any motivational program and benefits for self and organization should be reiterated and reinforced.

The fourth level (*Mutamainna*) represents perfection and happiness in doing one's job and realizing one's goals. Spiritual and mental needs strengthen the quest for perfection and actualization of one's potential in serving the community and organization, while

Level of existence	Needs emphasis
<i>Sawala</i>	Physiological and materials
<i>Amara</i>	Physiological, material, and psychological
<i>Lawama</i>	Physiological, material, psychological, intellectual in addition to some spiritual needs
<i>Mutamainne</i>	All needs with considerable emphasis on spiritual ones

**Table II.**  
Level of existence and human needs

pursuing his/her activities. *Mutamainna* people are non-power seekers and receive comfort and pride from self-reflection, involvement, and creativity. This is a unique, but certainly a very challenging opportunity for managers. Traditionally, managers have dealt with employees, who have been driven, in various degrees, by self-interest, especially material gain. Therefore, most managerial strategies focus almost exclusively on motivating employees to do their best to improve performance. Employees at the *Mutamainna* stage exhibit an ideal situation where there is a state of harmony between rights and obligations, self and others, nature and material needs. Employees believe that there is no inconsistency between personal growth, doing things right and serving society. Their intrinsic feeling or spirituality, rather than extrinsic factors, induces them to engage, participate, and excel. This deepest and most genuine level of existence ensures a striving for excellence and is the foundation for the truest joy that stems from serving a noble cause. The managers' task, therefore, is to make sure that organizational goals are designed to optimally serve society and employees. In addition, they should align organizational culture with prevalent societal norms and values. Furthermore, managers should seek new avenues and cultivate an environment where their employees find meaning and purpose for their organizational engagement well beyond economic and social needs. Managers should recognize that while employees, at this stage, are content with their work and general life achievements, they are inclined, in case of perceived harm to society and community, to voice their concerns, show resentment to corporate actions and involvements, and more likely leave the firm.

More importantly, managers must understand that in today's global business environment, where the interplay of political, cultural, economics, and ecological considerations leave their immediate impact on workforce and organizational conduct, there is a need to design flexible motivational packages which meet the need of a highly mobile and diverse workforce. That is, management has to recognize the nature of existence levels; the diversity of the workforce in terms of spirituality. It is not adequate to design a uniform motivational package for all employees without taking into consideration diversity in existence and corresponding needs and aspirations. In terms of spiritual commitment and attachment, there is no specific leadership style, motivational approach, training or control package that can be utilized uniformly across the organization. This reality may not appeal to existing management practices in many organizations; a practice that celebrates similarity and is leery of diversity and those who have diverse aspirations. Furthermore, the application of levels of existence suggests that organizations should create a work environment that simultaneously appreciates diversity, while allowing employees to be aware and sensitive to growth opportunities that can lead to higher existence levels. In fact, management should foster an environment that reinforces progression along levels of existence. Various levels of existence groups can take the initiative in identifying their aspirations and goals. Subsequently, a suitable motivational program is designed for each group. This method may require indirect management involvement in motivating employees and is certain to lead to a less intrusive organizational approach.

### Conclusion

In this paper, levels of existence and motivation in the context of the Islamic faith are examined. The examination has sought to highlight the fact that there is a wide spectrum of views regarding human nature, and that concepts which were developed

in the far past may correspond to contemporary psychological and organizational perspectives. More importantly, the paper proposes that religion and spiritually inspired medieval thinkers offer some useful perspectives on the nature of human behavior and action. In fact, in the context of work and motivation, researchers may find it rewarding to investigate in a coherent way the interplay between religion and management. Though religion could be a divisive factor, it may provide a framework to study the relationship between faith and work. In particular, its intrinsic or spiritual components energize individuals and inspire them to invest time and money to serve their fellow workers, organization, or the society at large.

It was documented that Islamic perspectives provide insights that are consistent with humanistic and complex organizational perspectives. Essentially, the Islamic view offers a unique perspective on a level of human existence (*Mutamainna*). The quality and characteristics of this type are qualitatively different from existing typologies in the organizational literature and, therefore, challenges most of the prevailing management assumptions of human beings. Indeed, this type provides a challenge to existing human resource strategies and necessitates profound changes in organizational approach in managing people at this particular level.

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