

# Islamic Work Ethics and Locus of Control in Facing COVID 19 Pandemic: A Literature Review

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**Abstract.** COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenging time for most people. The new norm facing workers all around the world has affected their daily lives and ways of life. Islamic work ethics and locus of control are seen to be important aspects. This is true especially when unethical ways of life, such as bribery, plagiarism, and others are prevalent. The growing number of unethical doings are due to financial problems, depression, carelessness, and other reasons due to the impact of the pandemic. This review studies outline literature dated between 1966-2023 on how Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) and Locus of Control (LOC) could be beneficial in suggesting ways to improve workers' performance during the pandemic. IWE consists of spirituality in work place, effective management, economic development, transparency and sincerity. While LOC consists of the internal (depends on oneself), external (outside forces: fate, chance or luck) and God locus of control. IWE has positive and significant relationships with various variables in organizational behaviour have been proven in a number of recent studies, while LOC has been found to be positively related to job performance This study contributes to the field of organizational psychology and Islamic psychology.

*Keywords: COVID-19; Islamic psychology; Islamic Work Ethics; Locus of Control; pandemic*

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## Islamic Work Ethic

Beekun (1997) asserted that Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) can be defined as a set of moral principles that distinguish what is right from what is wrong in the Islamic context. According to Ali (2005) and Rizk (2008) IWE is an orientation towards work and approaches work as a good value in humans' lives. In addition, Yousef (2001) critically evaluated those studies on IWE which emphasized hard work, commitment, devotion to work, work creativity, avoidance of immoral method of wealth accumulation, cooperation and competitiveness at the workplace is still inadequate. Concerning spirituality, which is directly related to IWE, it is a state or quality of being dedicated to religion. In this sense, IWE is considered as spirituality in the workplace whereby one who practices spirituality in the workplace is the one who is practicing IWE. Nur and Organ (2006) emphasized that spirituality in the workplace is said to be a manifestation of workers' needs for meaning and rationale in their work lives.

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Mitroff and Denton (1999) and Ashmos and Duchon (2000) stated that certain beliefs are said to characterize managers who avowedly practice management-by-virtues. According to them, the main associated precepts are belief in deity, belief in the meaningfulness and purposefulness of life and work-life, and a sense of community and connectedness. Furthermore, Sharifah Hayaati (2010) emphasized that the question of ethics is a very important issue in performing a task as involving ethical values not only better secures the success of the work, but the quality is codified as a foundation, focus, mission, vision and so forth.

Islam outlined that things cannot be done disorderly as it is against Islamic teaching. In this case, the IWE is a guideline to be followed to structure and govern staff behaviour. The Prophet SAW said, as narrated by Abd al-Rahman ibn Hassan ibn Thabit from his mother, Sirin, the Prophet SAW said:

*“Verily, Allah loves one who does his work with itqan” (Reported by. al-Mu'jam al-Kabir, hadith no. 776).*

An organization will advance through effective management. This was emphasized by Ali ibn Abi Thalib, the last Caliph of Islam, who described how an organized evil could possibly defeat unorganized good deeds. “Truth or good if not properly organized can be defeated by organized evil”. (Hafidhuddin & Tanjung 2006). This verse highlights the difference between spirituality in Islam and other religions or beliefs. Islam does not separate between spiritual and daily activities. Nur and Organ (2006) stated that spirituality is the quality of being dedicated to Islam. Faith is trust and confidence after being dedicated to Islam. Trust and confidence are basic requirements in the workplace. One is mutually dependent upon the other. Islam instructs Muslims to bow to the Creator who will guide them in their relationships with other men.

They also suggest that from the economic perspective. Islam encourages Muslims to strive for economic development without deviating from the right path guided by Islam. Once organizations achieve a good alignment between spirituality and work aspirations, the employers will fulfil the objectives and values of the organizations. It is encouraging for managers and subordinates to compete with one another to enhance their motivation through morality. The organization will benefit from the commitment and high morale of workers (Shamila, 2015).

In the Islamic worldview, working in the organization is considered ‘ibadah’ if they intend to get the pleasure of Allah SWT and perform their job with a spirit to Islam. Islam doesn’t regard ‘ibadah as only ritual acts such as prayer and fasting. It includes all acts that are intended for the pleasure of Allah SWT. One important condition of ibadah is that the act is done properly. Islam does not separate ritual activities from other activities that are acts of worship. Allah SWT mentions in al-Quran, surah al-Qasas 28:77:

*"But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on thee, the home of the hereafter, nor forget thy portion in this world: but do thou good, as Allah has been good to thee, and seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land: for Allah loves not those who do mischief."*

According to Sidek (2005), the Islamic worldview is a dual-dimension worldview. The vertical dimension is the relationship between the creatures and the Creator, and the horizontal dimension is the relationship among the creatures. The dual-dimension of hablu minallah (man’s relationship with Allah SWT, the Creator) and hablu minannas (the relationship among the creatures) was adopted from al-Quran.

It is the root of all thoughts and actions. In this case, IWE, when applied in the organization is considered *hablu minAllah, hablu minannas*. They are interrelated (Shamila, 2015).

However, the way we look at things is important. Some of us perceive things wrongly as a result of misconception about the Islamic worldview. The difference that differentiates between the conventional and Islamic dimensions is that in the conventional dimension, the horizontal dimension is separated from the vertical dimension. There is no combination between the two, whereas in Islam they are interrelated (Shamila, 2015). In relation to this, the I-Theory introduced by Sidek (2005) which is adopted from al-Quran, stated that the I-Theory is a specific concept in the Islamic worldview whereby the Islamic worldview is based on the two aforementioned dimensions. The relationship between the Creator and the creatures is “*ihsan*” and the relationship between the creatures and other creatures is “*insan*”. For the “*ihsan*”, on one occasion where a man asked the Prophet SAW:

*Then he (the man) said, "Inform me about Ihsan" He (the Messenger of Allah) answered, "It is that you should serve Allah as though you could see Him, for though you cannot see Him yet He sees you." (Narrated by al-Bukhari, hadith no. 5).*

In addition, self-management, and responsible management of resources forms a fundamental basis for human integrity. To manage things with transparency and sincerity is the best foundation for accountability and responsibility in the workplace. This is what is called IWE (Sidek 2005).

### **Locus of Control (LOC)**

Locus of control (LOC) is a person’s belief about how much power one has over the events in one’s life. As an academic concept, it was coined by Julian B. Rotter in 1954 initially as an extension of social learning theory to explain “the extent to which people believe that the rewards they receive in life can be controlled by their personal actions” (Wang, Bowling, & Eschleman, 2010, p. 761). Rotter’s (1966) first introduced the LOC construct, which jumpstarted an avalanche of studies in clinical and social psychology, business and management, child and adult development, and education for over four decades. Rotter formulated the concept of LOC within the framework of his Social Learning Theory and defined it as the general belief of a person about the extent to which the consequences of events are under one’s own control.

As a measurable construct, locus of control is viewed as an individual personality construct similar to a number of other constructs such as self-esteem, self-efficacy and emotional stability (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2002). However, what makes locus of control rather unique is its division into two categories – internal and external, which makes it an enticing variable for studies that incorporate some form of religious perspective.

Numerous studies have investigated locus of control as either correlating or moderating variables for a variety of organizational behavioural constructs. For example, internal locus of control has been found to be positively related to variables such as job satisfaction (Sembiring & Purba, 2019; Padmanabhan, 2021; Pandia, et al, 2023), job performance (He, et al, 2022; Dagsan, 2023), organizational commitment (Brahmana, et al, 2021; Pambuena, 2022), and work ethics (Siswanto & Darus, 2020; Adnyani & Suwandana, 2021). In relation to Islamic work ethics (IWE), IWE is most

commonly examined as a moderating variable, among others, in the relationship between locus of control and employee performance (Nasution, et al, 2021), and between locus of control and entrepreneurial behaviour (Hasan et al, 2022). Fiori et al. (2006) emphasized that religiosity is correlated with both positive and negative effects of psychological health. It was hypothesized that these contradictory findings may be because different LOC beliefs affect psychological health differently.

Specifically, an internal LOC is the belief that the course of one's life largely depends on oneself. In contrast, those with an external LOC regard the events in their lives as happening regardless of their own efforts. Internal LOC individuals tend to be less influenced by others, more politically active and more motivated to achieve. In contrast, an external LOC views the outcome as largely influenced by outside forces. Briefly, if we look at internal versus external control, it refers to the degree to which persons expect that a reinforcement or an outcome of their behaviour is contingent on their personal characteristics versus the degree to which persons expect that the reinforcement or outcome is a function of chance, luck or fate and is under the control of powerful others or is simply unpredictable (Shamila 2015). Such expectancies may generalize along a gradient based on the degree of semantic similarity of the situational cues (Rotter 1966). In addition, according to Ray (1980) the external LOC believes that outside forces, such as fate, chance or luck are dictating their outcomes. Stachowiak (2010) and Lefcourt (1976) said that those with this perspective feel powerless to affect a final result or impact their obtaining a desired reward.

A few researchers have expanded on the meaning and concept of the LOC (Shamila, 2015). Judge and Bono (2001) stated that LOC is the extent to which people feel they personally control the events in their lives as opposed to those events being controlled by the external environment. Lefcourt (1976) stated that LOC is a psychological, social learning theory that refers to the extent to which individuals perceive control over their lives and environment. He also assured that LOC is a personality construct that reflects one's belief or perception about who controls life and the environment. Connolly (1980) views LOC as a belief that can exist at varying levels, reflecting the degree to which one perceives personal control in life and over the environment.

In relation to Rotter's two-dimensional LOC, Lee-Kelley (2006) stated that LOC has been described as a dimension with two opposing differentiations. In addition to the dimension of LOC, Carrim, Basson and Coetzee (2006) alleged that the dimensions reflect the extent to which individuals believe what happens to them is within their control or beyond it. For the two dimensions of LOC, Littunen and Storhammar (2000) extended that the two dimensions of LOC are a continuum of an internal-external belief system. Consequently, Rotter (1966) assured that the theory of LOC is understood as a cognitive model of personality. He noticed that individual differences are important because people have responsibility for what happens to them. For that reason, LOC is based on the general expectancy and reinforcement regarding future outcomes and behaviour and its development is generally influenced by family, culture and past experiences that led to rewards or punishments.

Additionally, Tsai, Wang and Lo (2014) explored the relationships among LOC, moral disengagement in sport and rule transgression by athletes and whether or not moral disengagement mediates the relationship between LOC and rule transgression. Moral and rules in this study are related to IWE. Their study involved 462 athletes at a college in Taiwan. Results revealed that high external

LOC positively was related to moral disengagement in sport and frequent rule transgression while the relationship between LOC and rule transgression was mediated by moral disengagement in sport. In their study, they suggest that athletes with an external LOC should receive moral education to enhance their quality in sports' contests and competitions by reducing rule transgressions and possessing moral engagement.

Terpstra, Rozell and Robinson (1993) found evidence for the influence of LOC on a person's level of ethicality. Among others, they investigated the influence of interpersonal competitiveness, LOC and the need for achievement on a person's tendency to make ethical business decisions. The respondents were 201 advanced business students. The findings indicate that interpersonal competitiveness and LOC have a positive influence on a person's level of ethicality.

As a matter of fact, LOC is a positive personality attribute. An inference can be made based on the research by Stead, Worrell, Spalding, Stead (1987). Here, situational or social-learning factors were found to be the strongest influence on unethical decisions. On the other hand, personality factors, such as LOC were found to be unrelated to unethical decision-making behaviours. Since LOC was not found to relate to unethical behaviours, it can be assumed here that it relates to ethical decision-making behaviours.

On the influence of LOC in the relationship between religiosity and psychological health, Fiori, Brown, Cortina and Antonucci (2006) conducted a study to verify a model in which LOC mediates the relationship between religiosity and life satisfaction; and secondly, to examine whether the model varies by age, gender and race. The results verify the model and suggest that the relationship between religiosity and life satisfaction varies by age and gender. Religiosity was found to be positively associated with psychological health; contrary to other studies that indicated a negative effect. These contradictory findings may be due to its unique influence.

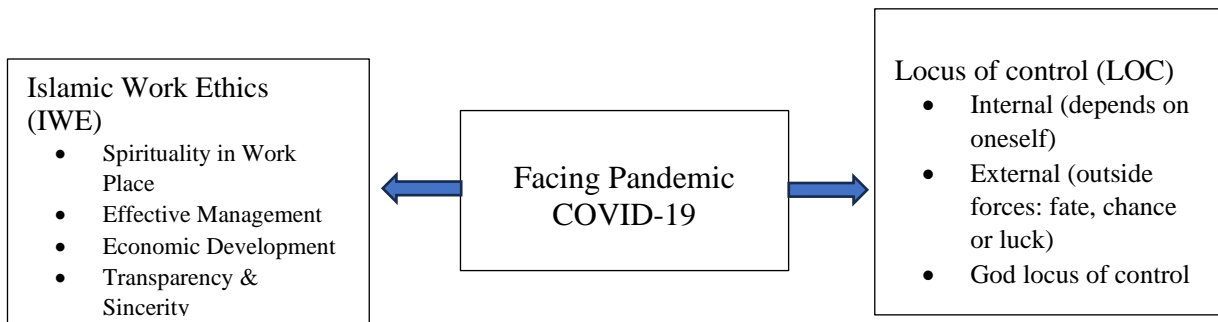
A discussion on IWE and LOC should also take into consideration the literature on Protestant Work Ethics (PWE), which was one of the main references in the construction of IWE as an academic concept (Yousef 2000). There is credible scientific evidence to suggest that there is a significant correlation between Protestant ethical values and internal LOC (Jones 1997). Similarly, according to Yousef (2000), a number of Western scholars such as Furnham (1987), Lied and Pritchard (1976), MacDonald (1972), Mirels and Garrett (1971) and Waters et al. (1975) found that individuals who subscribe to PWE tend to have higher internal LOC beliefs.

Furthermore, in another study by Mccuddy and Peery (1996) where the relationship between LOC and different ethical beliefs was explored, the results indicated that individuals with internal LOC have higher ethical standards than those with external LOC. In contrast, external LOC individuals are more likely to engage in unethical behaviour. Various studies have found similar evidence. Jones (1997) stated that Lefcourt and Wine (1969) and Seeman (1963) for example, suggested that external LOC individuals are more likely to engage in unethical behaviour. In addition, Jones and Kavanagh (1996) also found evidence that suggests individuals with an external LOC will report higher unethical behaviour intentions than those with an internal LOC.

From a religious and spiritual perspective, there are attempts to develop a more specific construct of locus of control to measure one's belief and faith that God is in control of one's fate and circumstances. For example, Murray et al (2006) developed and validated an alcohol-related God locus of control scale to measure perceptions of God or a Higher Being's role in one's ability to recover from alcoholism. Huinzing (2010), on the other hand, examines God locus of control as a significant predictor of how one perceives and reacts to high levels of stress. And, more recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, God locus of control was examined as the moderating variable in a study on the relationship between loneliness and student engagement, and academic achievement specifically when remote or online teaching was used during the pandemic (Mizani et al, 2022).

Studies with Muslim participants are rare but have been attempted. For example, Mohsen Alyami et al (2020) investigated the association of illness perceptions and God locus of control with self-care behaviours among diabetes patients in Saudi Arabia. God locus of control was measured using the God Locus of Health Control (GLHC) scale developed by Wallston et al. (1999). The Arabic version of the scale was used which was originally translated from its original English version by Albargawi et al. (2016). Although the internal consistency scores reported by both Albargawi et al. (2016) and Alyami et al (2020) were high, the GLHC remains a general measure of the God locus of control construct. An indigenised Islamic version of the scale should be developed for future studies with Muslim respondents.

In addition, it should be noted that previous studies on God locus of control were primarily in relation to physical and mental health. No significant attempt has been made to examine God locus of control in the context of organizational behaviour. This, together with a deeper conceptual inquiry from an Islamic-philosophical perspective are potential areas to be explored by researchers in the future.



### **Pandemic, IWE and LOC**

Previous studies on LOC have consistently proven their significant relationships with various variables in organisational behaviour and educational psychology. In several recent organisational behavioural studies conducted in Indonesia, LOC has been found to be positively related to job performance (Rahmisyari & Rizal 2020), communication and employee performance (Soleh et al 2020). As for studies in educational psychology, LOC has been proven to be a significant predictor of academic achievement among Iranian college students (Barzegar 2011), and an effective diagnostic tool for high school students in the US who are likely not to struggle with online learning (Lowes & Lin 2015).

Similarly, for IWE, its significant relationships with various variables in organisational behaviour have been proven in a number of recent studies. For example, in a study conducted by Romi et al (2019) with lecturers from private universities in Indonesia, IWE was found to have a significant positive effect on organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and organisational commitment (OC). This result is consistent with an earlier finding by Ibrahim and Kamri (2016) which indicated a strong positive correlation between IWE and job performance particularly on three out of the eight dimensions of IWE. The three IWE dimensions are collectively (or the spirit of togetherness), religiousness and equality (Ibrahim & Kamri 2016). Likewise, in a recent study conducted by Kalid (2019) in Malaysia with employees of SME (small and medium enterprises), the impact of IWE on business performance and OC was tested and the results reaffirm IWE as having a significant positive impact on both variables.

The global COVID-19 pandemic and the ensued in lockdown measures have resulted in a number of forced changes on how employees perform their work duties, and how teachers and students experience teaching and learning. They were largely performed and conducted through online communication tools from home. Their emotions, spiritual and mental wellbeing were also affected (Zahrin et al, 2021). Thus, many people were forced to adjust their previous routines and embrace a number of quick and sudden changes. What would be of great interest to many researchers would be to identify significant predictors of those who could positively react to these changes. In this respect, based on the numerous studies previously cited, both IWE and LOC are constructs that can be hypothesised to have a positive impact on one's ability to positively embrace the new normal of working and studying online from home.

For students, the current pandemic has forced them to endure a prolonged online learning process. In relation to LOC, the study by Lowes and Lin (2015) has in fact indicated how LOC can be used as a reliable teaching and diagnostic tool for students, especially for those who could potentially struggle as online learners. Furthermore, the study indicates there is a significant gender difference in the variations of internal and external LOC vis-à-vis academic performance from the online learning experience, and a potential significant moderating influence of religious-cultural values on the different levels of LOC expressed and manifested by respondents. A potential religious-cultural construct that can be tested, therefore, is IWE.

## **Conclusion**

While there have been numerous studies in recent years that have investigated the influence and impact of IWE and LOC on various organisational behavioural and educational variables, very few of them have attempted to investigate both constructs simultaneously. The COVID-19 pandemic and the prolonged lockdown measures that came as a result, have forced many people to embrace some major changes in their job performance and learning experiences.

IWE has positive and significant relationships with various variables in organisational behaviour have been proven in a number of recent studies, such as in organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and organisational commitment (OC). While LOC has been found to be positively related to job performance and this is crucial not only before COVID-19 pandemic, but also during and after the pandemic. Both of these important constructs or variables should be implemented in various organizations and working environment.

It is vital, therefore, for researchers to identify significant predictors for those who are more likely to positively embrace these changes, and inadvertently, identify those who are more likely to struggle. The latter would be very useful for administrators, educators and supervisors to plan and execute suitable interventions that help reduce the struggle. To have both IWE and LOC as the main variables, however, poses some methodological challenges, particularly in relation to the suitability of existing research instruments. Thus, it is vital for researchers to ensure that the appropriate cross-cultural adaptation process is observed.

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