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Intrinsic Motivation and Employee Performance Improvement in Educational Organizations

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Abstract

The main issue addressed in this study is the lack of organizational attention to the development of employees' intrinsic motivation, particularly within religious educational institutions, which has led to decreased productivity, loyalty, and job satisfaction. This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of intrinsic motivation in enhancing employee performance, and to identify managerial and organizational cultural factors that either support or hinder the realization of such motivation. The research employs a qualitative approach through a case study at Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Yerusalem Baru Manado, utilizing data collection techniques including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Data were analyzed thematically using the framework of Braun and Clarke. The findings indicate that intrinsic motivation significantly influences performance, as employees who experience autonomy, competence, and social relatedness demonstrate higher levels of loyalty and productivity. Supporting factors identified include participatory leadership, a spiritual organizational culture, and flexible working arrangements. Conversely, the obstacles observed comprise limited training opportunities, the absence of regular evaluations, and financial constraints. The implications of these findings suggest that organizations, particularly in the education sector, need to design managerial strategies focused on strengthening intrinsic motivation through value-based policies, non-material rewards, and the development of a work environment that fosters employees' psychological growth.

Keywords

Employee Performance, Educational Organizations, Human Resource Management, Intrinsic Motivation.

1. Introduction

In today's globalized and technology-driven era, organizational competitiveness depends largely on the quality of human resources, requiring effective management and development of employee potential (Gagné et al., 2022). Work motivation is a key driver of performance, loyalty, and engagement, and can be extrinsic, based on external rewards, or intrinsic, stemming from personal challenge, competence, and meaningful work (Battaglio et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022). With increasing emphasis on employee well-being, intrinsic motivation has gained attention, and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a framework for understanding how fulfilling autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs promotes sustained high performance (Chen et al., 2022).

At Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Yerusalem Baru (STTYB) Manado, human resource challenges extend beyond administrative issues to employees' psychological needs and work motivation. Preliminary interviews indicate strong intrinsic interest among staff and lecturers, but performance is limited by insufficient organizational support, highlighting a gap between employee motivation and systems that enable its full potential.

Previous studies have consistently highlighted the positive effects of intrinsic motivation on employee performance across various sectors, including education, public service, and nonprofit organizations. Research indicates that factors such as autonomy, meaningful work, constructive feedback, and social support enhance individual productivity, engagement, and organizational commitment (Engidaw, 2021; Iqbal et al., 2023; Singh & Ramdeo, 2023; Goldfarb et al., 2023; Mensah et al., 2025). International studies further confirm that fulfilling basic psychological needs positively influences job satisfaction, efficiency, and prosocial behaviors in employees, demonstrating that intrinsic motivation is often more effective than financial incentives in driving performance (Aljumah, 2023; Mishra et al., 2023; Olafsen et al., 2024; Phuong et al., 2025). In higher education, intrinsic motivation has been shown to support academic achievement, curriculum development, and long-term institutional loyalty (Mintz & Kelly, 2021; Proudfoot & Boyd, 2024; Le et al., 2024).

Despite the extensive evidence, gaps remain in understanding how intrinsic motivation interacts with organizational culture, managerial approaches, and contextual factors in shaping sustainable performance, particularly in religious and value-driven institutions. Studies suggest that while autonomy, recognition, and social support enhance motivation, overreliance on external incentives may undermine intrinsic engagement, especially in creative or long-term tasks (Nazah & Nafil, 2021; Sari & Prayekti, 2022; Filisia et al., 2025; Rikmaratri et al., 2025). Therefore, further research is needed to explore how intrinsic motivation can be effectively fostered in diverse organizational contexts, balancing internal drives and external support to maximize employee performance and organizational commitment.

However, most of the existing literature remains focused on commercial organizations or private-sector enterprises. Studies on intrinsic motivation within educational organizations particularly religious institutions such as STTYB are still relatively scarce. This study addresses a research gap on the relationship between intrinsic motivation and employee performance in religious educational institutions, focusing on STTYB Manado. Using a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, the study explores how autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs are fulfilled and how these factors influence individual and organizational performance. The research highlights the limitations of reward-based HR strategies in value-based institutions and emphasizes the importance of meaningful work, competence development, and social engagement. By extending Self-Determination Theory (SDT) into the underexplored context of

religious educational work, the study offers practical insights for intrinsic-based human resource strategies and contributes to theory development in motivation research. The objective of this study is to examine how intrinsic motivation, guided by autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs, influences employee performance in higher education institutions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Self Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has become one of the most influential macro theories of human motivation, offering a comprehensive framework that has been successfully applied across diverse domains such as parenting, education, healthcare, sports, psychotherapy, virtual environments, and the field of work motivation and management (Ryan & Deci, 2024). Central to SDT is the classification of motivation into three types: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation (Tran et al., 2021). Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in activities for inherent interest, satisfaction, or enjoyment, while extrinsic motivation is driven by external pressures or rewards, and amotivation reflects the absence of intentionality or motivation altogether. The distinguish between these types by emphasizing that intrinsic motivation emerges when activities themselves are inherently satisfying, whereas extrinsically motivated behaviors are contingent upon external outcomes or controlling goals (Tran et al., 2021). Building on this, Deci et al. (2017) highlight that intrinsic motivation is a form of autonomous motivation, whereby the “reward” lies in the activity itself rather than in any external reinforcement. It is most clearly observed in children’s spontaneous play, yet it is equally significant in adulthood, where it manifests in hobbies, sports, and importantly, workplace behaviors. Within organizational contexts, intrinsic motivation is crucial because employees who find inherent interest and enjoyment in their tasks tend to display greater persistence, creativity, and overall well-being. This aligns with SDT’s proposition that the type of motivation employees experience profoundly shapes both performance and psychological health. Specifically, SDT posits that motivation types have distinct antecedents, correlates, and consequences, meaning that intrinsic motivation not only fosters higher-quality performance but also promotes wellness and long-term engagement. Thus, by differentiating among types of motivation, SDT provides a nuanced understanding of why intrinsically motivated employees often excel and maintain higher levels of satisfaction in their professional lives compared to those driven predominantly by external controls.

2.2 Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is defined as an individual’s inner drive to engage in activities for the inherent interest, enjoyment, or satisfaction they provide, rather than for external pressures or rewards. This form of motivation plays a crucial role in shaping the intensity of effort, accuracy of actions, and the duration of persistence in various tasks, making its understanding significant across contexts such as the workplace, education, and everyday life (Dahrani & Sohiron, 2024). Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), intrinsic motivation is strongly associated with the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In educational settings, these needs foster deeper learning, persistence, and student engagement, ultimately influencing academic outcomes. For instance, research has shown that intrinsic motivation enhances output and participation coursework, suggesting its critical role in sustaining individual active involvement (Ansyari et al., 2022; Chou, 2025; Garbers et al., 2025)

In the workplace, intrinsic motivation has been linked to broader organizational dynamics and employee well-being. Studies utilizing the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire have demonstrated that motivators and organizational characteristics

contribute to latent variables such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which collectively shape employee contentment. Employee contentment, in turn, has been found to exert a positive and statistically significant effect on job satisfaction, performance, and intention to stay within an organization. Interestingly, while employee contentment more strongly predicts performance, job satisfaction appears to have a greater influence on retention (Mardanov, 2020). Similarly, research by Sarwani et al. (2025) highlighted that both workplace environment and intrinsic motivation significantly affect employee morale, emphasizing the synergy between contextual factors and internal drives.

Further evidence of the organizational relevance of intrinsic motivation is provided by Setioko et al. (2024), who found that job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and work discipline positively contribute to organizational loyalty. Their findings indicate that a simultaneous increase in these factors enhances employee loyalty, reflecting the multidimensional impact of intrinsic motivation not only on individual performance but also on long-term organizational commitment. Collectively, these studies underscore the centrality of intrinsic motivation as a driver of learning, performance, satisfaction, and loyalty across educational and organizational domains

2.3 Employee Performance

Employee performance is a multidimensional construct that reflects the degree to which individuals successfully fulfill their job roles and contribute to organizational goals. It encompasses both task performance, such as the effective execution of job-related duties, and contextual performance, which includes discretionary behaviors like cooperation, initiative, and adaptability (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Sonnentag & Frese, 2002). Performance is therefore not limited to outcomes but also involves the processes and behaviors that facilitate goal achievement. Research in organizational psychology further emphasizes that performance is shaped by personal characteristics, including motivation and ability, as well as organizational factors such as leadership, support systems, and work environment (Campbell, 1990; Koopmans et al., 2011). Among these factors, motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation, plays a crucial role in sustaining employee performance.

Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in work out of interest, enjoyment, or inherent satisfaction rather than external rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2024). Studies demonstrate that intrinsically motivated employees are more engaged, proactive, and committed to delivering high-quality work, which strengthens both task and contextual performance (Gizaw, 2025). In the academic context, organizational support has been shown to positively influence lecturer performance, both directly and indirectly, by fostering greater engagement (Novitasari & Asbari, 2024). Similarly, leadership styles such as transformational leadership can enhance intrinsic motivation, which in turn boosts employee discipline and overall performance (Sugito, 2025). These findings align with Self-Determination Theory, which posits that when employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported, they develop stronger intrinsic motivation that translates into improved performance. Therefore, the interplay between intrinsic motivation and employee performance highlights that fostering internal drive is not merely an individual matter but also contingent on organizational practices, leadership behaviors, and supportive work environments. By nurturing intrinsic motivation, organizations can cultivate employees who not only achieve tasks effectively but also engage in broader behaviors that contribute to long-term organizational effectiveness and sustainability.

3. Methods

This study applied a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of intrinsic motivation in enhancing employee performance within Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Yerusalem Baru (STTYB) Manado, a faith-based higher education institution. The qualitative method was chosen to capture the meaning, perceptions, and subjective experiences of employees in their professional environment, while the intrinsic case study design allowed a focused exploration of one unique context without aiming for broad generalization. STTYB was selected due to its integration of spiritual values into organizational management alongside the demands for professionalism and high performance.

The study population consisted of 15 employees, with eight key informants selected purposively. Selection criteria included a minimum of two years' service, active involvement in teaching, administration, or human resource management, the ability to articulate perceptions and experiences, and holding positions that provide direct exposure to managerial influence on motivation. The final sample comprised four permanent lecturers, two administrative staff, and two unit heads (HR and academic), ensuring diverse perspectives.

Data collection employed three complementary techniques. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews using open-ended questions to explore themes such as work meaning, autonomy, relationships, opportunities for growth, and the impact of managerial systems on motivation. Second, three weeks of participant observation to capture workplace interactions, leadership styles, communication patterns, and non-verbal dynamics. Third, document analysis of organizational structures, Standard Operating Procedures, HR development policies, performance evaluation reports, and training materials to provide contextual reinforcement. Interviews lasted 45–60 minutes, were recorded with consent, and allowed flexibility to follow emerging topics.

Thematic analysis by Creswell & Guetterman (2024) guided data analysis through five stages: familiarization with transcripts and notes, initial coding of relevant segments, grouping codes into broader themes, reviewing and refining these themes against the dataset, and interpreting them through the lens of Self-Determination Theory. This process produced a rich and structured narrative connecting the field findings with theoretical concepts.

Credibility and trustworthiness were enhanced through data triangulation (across informants, methods, and sources), member checking (returning interpretations to participants for validation), maintaining a detailed audit trail of research decisions, and prolonged engagement in the field to build trust and reduce bias. Rapee et al. (2023) stated that these strategies ensured that the findings were accurate, meaningful, and grounded in the lived realities of participants within a spiritually oriented organizational context.

4. Results

This study involved 8 informants from STTYB Manado, consisting of 4 permanent lecturers, 2 educational staff members, and 2 managerial unit leaders. The following is a brief profile of the informants stated in Table 1.

Table 1. Brief Profile of Research Participants

Informant Code	Position	Years of Service	Brief Description
I1	Permanent Lecturer	10 years	Focuses on teaching and ministry
I2	Permanent Lecturer	7 years	Also active in human resource development

Informant Code	Position	Years of Service	Brief Description
I3	Permanent Lecturer	4 years	Involved in academic curriculum development
I4	Educational Staff	6 years	Handles administration and student services
I5	Educational Staff	5 years	Responsible for financial affairs
I6	Head of HRD	9 years	Develops HR development strategies
I7	Vice Chairperson I	12 years	Oversees academics and staffing
I8	Chairperson of STT	15 years	Highest leader, responsible for strategic policies

At Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Yerusalem Baru (STTYB) Manado, employees view their work not merely as a source of income but as a spiritual calling and act of service. In-depth interviews with eight informants revealed that this sense of purpose fosters strong and enduring intrinsic motivation, distinct from business or private sector contexts.

At STTYB Manado, teaching is experienced as more than a routine or administrative task; it is perceived as a moral and spiritual responsibility deeply rooted in personal values. This sense of purpose exemplifies autonomous motivation, as described in Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2024), where engagement arises from internal values aligned with one's identity rather than external pressures.

Furthermore, the meaningfulness of work perceived by STTYB employees is closely influenced by the institution's mission, which is rooted in theological development and spiritual ministry. Faith-based educational institutions differ from general educational institutions in that their goals are not limited to producing intellectually competent graduates, but also spiritually grounded and morally upright individuals. In such a context, employees are not just professional workers, but also spiritual and moral actors who help shape the learning environment and the holistic development of students. Therefore, when work is understood as part of a transcendent mission, intrinsic motivation can grow significantly even in circumstances that may be financially unrewarding.

At STTYB Manado, the perception of meaningful work cultivates a strong sense of ownership and professional responsibility. Lecturers engaged in curriculum development view their role as shaping students' thinking and life attitudes, which motivates ongoing learning and improvement. This sense of purpose arises not from formal job descriptions but from recognizing the long-term impact of their work on others' development.

In the organizational psychology literature, meaningful work has long been linked to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee performance. (Sansone & Tang, 2021) found that workers who view their job as a "calling" tend to have a stronger emotional attachment to their work and show greater loyalty to the organization. This finding resonates with the situation at STTYB, where employees who view their job as a ministry calling are more motivated to exceed the minimum expectations outlined in their job descriptions.

At STTYB Manado, the perception of work's meaning is shaped by each employee's spiritual background and personal values, with a value-based organizational culture reinforcing intrinsic motivation (I6, head of HR). This internalization of shared values sustains employees' enthusiasm even without large material incentives. Moreover, meaningful work enhances social interactions, as employees who perceive their contributions as significant are more likely to cultivate supportive and trusting relationships, aligning with Printer's (2023) findings that healthy social relationships are crucial for intrinsic motivation. Strong bonds

between lecturers and leadership, as well as among administrative staff and faculty (I5, finance staff), create a collaborative environment that reinforces the sense of working toward a common mission, fostering both personal fulfillment and collective commitment.

The perception of work's meaning also directly impacts employees' work orientation. When individuals find their work meaningful, their focus shifts from short-term output to long-term outcomes. At STTYB, lecturers expressed that they prepare their teaching materials seriously not just to fulfill academic schedules, but to ensure that students gain life values and character. In other words, intrinsic motivation derived from meaningful work creates a deeper and broader work orientation that benefits both individuals and the institution.

Intrinsic motivation at STTYB fosters resilience to work-related stress, providing employees with a "purpose buffer" that helps them navigate pressures despite limited facilities and heavy workloads. This sense of meaningful work sustains loyalty and enthusiasm, aligning with Steger et al. (2012), who highlight its role as a predictor of psychological well-being.

From a managerial perspective, cultivating meaningful work is crucial for sustaining performance. Beyond task assignments, organizations should foster cultures and practices such as reflection forums, spiritual mentoring, and participatory decision-making that reinforce the significance and impact of employees' contributions. However, intrinsic motivation remains fragile; unjust management, internal conflict, or inconsistent adherence to organizational values can quickly erode employees' sense of purpose, emphasizing the need for integrity-driven, value-based leadership.

In modern human resource management, motivation extends beyond incentives and penalties to include employees' psychological needs and personal values. Intrinsic motivation rooted in perceived work meaning drives productive, loyal, and dedicated performance, with work meaning mediating the relationship between work conditions and outcomes (Zhou & Zhang, 2024). In faith-based institutions like STTYB, where salary is not the primary motivator and success includes moral and spiritual growth, meaningful work fosters pride, belonging, and strong work engagement. Maintaining such motivation requires management to adopt humanistic, participatory, and value-driven practices that continually reinforce the purpose and significance of employees' contributions.

A key aspect of intrinsic motivation at STTYB Manado is the autonomy perceived by lecturers and academic staff. In this value- and spirituality-based institution, autonomy extends beyond task flexibility to reflect managerial trust in employees' capacity and integrity. Observations and interviews reveal that staff enjoy considerable freedom to design learning materials, choose evaluation methods, and develop mentoring strategies tailored to student needs.

Autonomy at STTYB extends beyond administrative freedom to recognition of professional values and moral responsibility (I2, Permanent Lecturer). According to Self-Determination Theory, autonomy is a core psychological need that underpins intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2024). Participatory observations show that lecturers actively design interactive, context-based teaching methods and engage in informal student guidance, reflecting internal motivation to make a meaningful impact. This environment fosters responsibility, ownership, and strengthened intrinsic motivation. Management at STTYB reinforces autonomy through participatory and service-oriented leadership (I7, Vice Chair I). By encouraging creativity and collaboration rather than strict control, managerial policies foster a psychologically healthy climate where employees feel valued, trusted, and empowered to make decisions, further strengthening intrinsic motivation.

Administrative staff at STTYB also experience autonomy in student services and operational tasks, exercising discretion in resolving issues such as payment

delays while maintaining fairness and empathy. Overall, autonomy at STTYB is multidimensional spanning pedagogical freedom, administrative flexibility, and emotional engagement which collectively fosters intrinsic motivation by allowing employees to see their work as a meaningful personal choice rather than a system-imposed obligation. To summarize the dimensions of intrinsic motivation identified at STTYB, the following thematic table presents key aspects based on the Self-Determination Theory framework.

Table 2. Intrinsic Motivation Dimensions

Self-Determination Dimension	Manifestations at STTYB
Autonomy	Freedom in teaching, independent material development
Competence	Opportunities for training, internal mentoring
Relatedness	Familial and spiritual work environment

Table 2 above illustrates that STTYB has, either deliberately or incidentally, fulfilled the primary prerequisites for fostering healthy and sustainable intrinsic motivation. When these three dimensions are integrated into the workplace, employees are more likely to function optimally not only in terms of productivity but also in psychological well-being. These findings align with Van den Broeck et al. (2021), who identify autonomy, mastery, and purpose as core elements of motivation. Autonomy allows employees to act as active agents, linking work to their professional and personal identity. Similarly, Hosseini et al. (2022) note that decision-making freedom and goal-setting foster engagement and creativity, evident at STTYB in lecturers' initiatives to develop training programs, contextualized courses, and voluntary mentoring.

Effective autonomy at STTYB is supported by a culture grounded in spirituality and service, which provides a "moral compass" guiding freedom within professional and ethical boundaries. Leadership addresses potential challenges, such as inequality or bias in decision-making, through open communication and cross-unit collaboration, fostering collective involvement and minimizing the dominance of any single party.

Autonomy at STTYB enhances performance by fostering responsibility, accelerating task completion, and encouraging innovation. For instance, administrative staff developed a digital archiving system to streamline document processing (I5, Administrative Staff). Such initiatives reflect ownership and creative freedom, which are often limited in more bureaucratic, low-autonomy environments.

A growth-supportive work environment goes beyond physical and technical aspects of the job; it deeply encompasses social and psychological structures that enable holistic individual development. At STTYB, managerial strategies to establish such an environment are rooted in a deep awareness of educational and spiritual values. The leadership deliberately fosters a culture that not only appreciates academic achievement but also encourages personal and spiritual growth among employees. This is evident in initiatives such as mentoring programs for junior lecturers, weekly spiritual formation sessions, and internal trainings that emphasize not only technical skills but also spiritual leadership development.

At STTYB, management emphasizes a human-development approach rather than relying solely on financial rewards (I6, Head of HR). The institution fosters an ecosystem that supports inner growth and professional development, offering training and workshops on pedagogical skills, character building, spiritual communication, and values-based leadership. These activities enhance both technical competence and the psychological meaning of work, fulfilling the "competence" dimension of Self-Determination Theory and promoting higher motivation and emotional attachment among staff (Ryan & Deci, 2024).

At STTYB, managerial strategies that foster autonomy empower employees to shape lesson plans, curriculum, and extracurricular programs, reflecting trust in their professional judgment and stimulating proactive initiatives without strict supervision, consistent with Forson et al. (2021). This autonomy, combined with a collegial and spiritually supportive work environment characterized by mutual assistance and open communication, strengthens social relatedness, buffers against stress, and reinforces intrinsic motivation, encouraging employees to give their best for the institution.

STTYB's managerial strategy also emphasizes non-material rewards, such as verbal appreciation, involvement in decision-making, and strategic responsibilities, to foster intrinsic motivation. Such recognition enhances self-worth, self-actualization, and the social meaning of work. As I4, an administrative staff member, noted, being trusted to lead a project was more meaningful than financial compensation, reflecting a broader culture where active participation signals management's trust and nurtures a strong sense of belonging.

Non-material recognition practices at STTYB are also manifested in forms of public appreciation, such as name mentions in monthly meetings, award certificates, or open expressions of gratitude from leadership. While these may seem simple, such forms of acknowledgment significantly impact the formation of positive self-image and motivation. This is reinforced by Xu et al. (2021), who stated that social recognition can enhance intrinsic motivation more effectively than monetary incentives, particularly in cognitive and socially-oriented work contexts.

At STTYB, non-material rewards are personalized to reflect each employee's contributions, such as providing lecturers a platform to present research or offering staff mentoring roles. These forms of recognition fulfill competence and social relatedness needs under Self-Determination Theory, reinforcing employees' sense of impact and value within the community and fostering stable, sustainable intrinsic motivation.

The effectiveness of non-material recognition at STTYB relies on management's consistency, credibility, and sensitivity to employees' needs, requiring emotional intelligence and reflective leadership. Combined with a growth-supportive work environment, meaningful recognition fosters intrinsic motivation, encouraging management to view employees as individuals with values and aspirations. This approach enhances performance while strengthening the identity and competitiveness of value-based institutions like STTYB.

Intrinsic motivation at STTYB Manado is strongly linked to employee initiative, creativity, and loyalty. Driven by personal growth, ownership, and internal satisfaction, employees proactively solve problems, innovate in teaching, and take responsibility for their work. This motivation also sustains long-term loyalty, as staff remain committed despite modest pay, valuing the spiritual work environment and contributions to student development. Intrinsic motivation at STTYB Manado is supported by participative leadership, organizational spirituality, and flexible work arrangements, which fulfill employees' needs for autonomy, relatedness, and meaningful work. However, it is hindered by limited performance feedback, unequal training access, and financial constraints that restrict professional development and may increase burnout.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the relevance of Self-Determination Theory, which posits the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the primary foundation for cultivating healthy and sustainable intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2024). In the context of STTYB Manado, these three dimensions are clearly manifested in the organizational work dynamics, even though they are not always supported by modern infrastructure or

management systems. Employees experience autonomy through the freedom to determine their own work methods, especially due to the absence of rigid attendance systems and the high level of trust from leadership. Competence is enhanced through informal learning opportunities and engagement in challenging tasks, although this is not yet balanced by equitable access to formal training systems (Ismail et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the need for social relatedness is fulfilled by a work culture that emphasizes togetherness, service, and collective spirituality. Thus, STTYB serves as evidence that intrinsic motivation does not rely solely on financial resources or structural policies, but is greatly shaped by organizational values and a consciously cultivated social climate.

These findings are consistent with Martín-Núñez et al. (2023), who emphasize that intrinsic motivation thrives in work environments that support basic psychological needs without necessarily depending on external reinforcement. Martín asserts that when organizations provide space for autonomy, foster competence, and build healthy interpersonal relationships, employees are more likely to be committed, creative, and stay longer within the institution. Similar alignment is found in the study by Fidan & Gencel (2022), which highlights that high levels of autonomy in the workplace encourage more innovative and result-oriented work behaviors, particularly within knowledge-based institutions. This resonates with the situation at STTYB, where many employees reported that the freedom to manage their work made them feel more responsible and motivated to contribute meaningfully. Furthermore, this study supports the findings of Shin & Bolkan (2021), which demonstrate that a strong sense of belonging within an institution has a significant relationship with increased productivity and employee loyalty, especially in public and non-profit sectors. At STTYB, the familial atmosphere, spiritual values, and emotional closeness to the institution's vision serve as motivational resources that are even more powerful than material incentives.

Interestingly, this study also reveals a critical divergence from earlier studies that overemphasize financial incentives as the main drivers of performance. For instance, Maryani et al. (2021), within the framework of Expectancy Theory, underscore the role of compensation, bonuses, and financial rewards in shaping work expectations and outcomes. While such theories may be highly relevant in many industrial and corporate sectors, this study demonstrates that, in the context of faith-based educational organizations like STTYB, employee motivation is more strongly influenced by intrinsic factors such as spiritual values, the meaning of work, and social relationships. This underscores the need to reconsider the universal application of motivational theories when applied to sectors or organizations that operate under different value orientations and cultural structures. Employee experiences at STTYB illustrate that non-material recognition, a sense of being valued, and emotional engagement with one's work have greater impact than economic incentives.

This study offers new insights for human resource management in small, value-driven organizations. Unlike research focused on large corporations or formal systems where motivation relies on rewards and penalties, STTYB demonstrates that employees maintain high work enthusiasm even with limited resources and irregular financial incentives (Manzoor et al., 2021). Embedded values of trust, service, and spirituality fulfill psychological needs through humanistic pathways (Jawahira et al., 2024). Theoretically, the findings affirm that Self-Determination Theory applies beyond competitive business contexts, with relatedness particularly reinforced in environments emphasizing trust, empathy, and mutual support. This expands motivational theory by highlighting spiritual values and collective culture as key drivers of intrinsic motivation while revealing the limits of approaches focused solely on economic rationality.

Practically, this study suggests that religious educational and social non-profit organizations can boost performance by fostering a workplace that values humanity, encourages participation, and embeds meaning in every task. Such intrinsic motivation proves resilient, adaptable, and aligned with the organization's long-term mission. The findings reinforce motivational theories while highlighting the limitations of approaches focused solely on monetary incentives, emphasizing the effectiveness of humanistic, value-driven management in complex, high-pressure environments.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussions presented earlier, it can be concluded that intrinsic motivation plays a crucial role in enhancing employee performance within religious educational organizations. The fulfillment of basic psychological needs autonomy, competence, and social relatedness serves as the fundamental basis for the emergence of motivation that originates from within the individual. The case study at STTYB demonstrates that when employees feel valued in non-material ways, are given opportunities for growth, and work in a participatory and spiritually meaningful environment, their performance improves significantly.

In addition, managerial factors such as open leadership and an inclusive organizational culture have been shown to support the development of intrinsic motivation, while obstacles such as limited access to training and the lack of formal evaluation mechanisms present challenges that must be addressed. Therefore, the cultivation of intrinsic motivation should be regarded as a long-term managerial strategy aimed at building sustainable performance in alignment with the institution's core values.

The study implies that value-driven management emphasizing trust, service, and spirituality can effectively foster intrinsic motivation and enhance employee performance, even in resource-limited, small-scale organizations. However, a key limitation is that the research focuses on a single faith-based institution, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other organizational types or cultural contexts. Future research could expand this investigation to multiple religious or non-profit organizations across diverse settings, examine the long-term impact of intrinsic motivation on organizational outcomes, and explore additional contextual factors, such as leadership styles or cross-cultural differences, that influence the development and sustainability of intrinsic motivation.

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Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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