



Can work ethics enhance work motivation and innovative work behavior? An educational setting

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the influence of work ethics on employees' work motivation and innovative work behavior. To strengthen the theoretical foundation, relevant literature was reviewed. A descriptive and correlational research design was employed, with data gathered through questionnaires administered to employees of the institution.

Findings revealed that employees demonstrated high levels of work ethics, work motivation, and innovative work behavior. However, in the educational setting, correlation analysis revealed no significant relationship between work ethics and work motivation, thereby rejecting the first hypothesis. In contrast, a statistically significant—though weak—relationship was found between work ethics and innovative work behavior; thus, the second hypothesis was accepted.

These results contribute to the ongoing discourse on the role of work ethics in shaping motivation and innovation in the workplace. The study suggests that the influence of work ethics on work motivation and innovative work behavior is largely shaped by the social and organizational context. Acknowledging its limitations, the study recommends that future research involve a broader population and additional variables to further validate and expand these findings.

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Introduction

The success of both business organizations and higher educational institutions is fundamentally anchored in the

quality of their human resources. Hiring the right people is therefore a critical determinant of institutional effectiveness. Human resources, however, extend beyond technical competence and job-related knowledge. While these “hard skills” are essential for task execution, equally important are the intangible dimensions of the human person—namely attitudes, beliefs, and values toward work, commonly referred to as work ethics. Despite their significance, these dimensions are often overlooked in recruitment, training, and development processes, which tend to prioritize technical proficiency while paying insufficient attention to employees’ attitudes and values, or “soft skills.”

Soft skills such as positive work attitudes and strong moral values play a crucial role in enhancing employee performance, often acting as moderating factors that enable more effective work outcomes. Individuals who embody positive values demonstrate greater collaboration, resilience, and professionalism—qualities that allow them to work productively with others, persevere in challenging situations, and willingly make sacrifices for the organization (Deshpande & Munshi, 2022; Kubatova et al., 2025; Crespi et al., 2025; Gneco et al., 2023). Consequently, training and development, as a vital component of educational instruction, should address not only skills and knowledge but also employees’ or students’ attitudes, values, and ethical orientations.

Recent developments indicate that industries have increasingly recognized the importance of employee attitudes and values, particularly within the context of Industry 5.0. This paradigm marks a shift from purely automation-focused manufacturing toward a human-centric model that integrates human expertise with advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics to promote sustainability, resilience, and personalization. Within this framework, positive employee attitudes enhance collaboration, innovation, and problem-solving—capabilities that are essential to achieving the goals of Industry 5.0 by enabling employees to leverage their unique human strengths alongside sophisticated automation systems (Lu et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2021; Ikenga & Sijde, 2024).

In addition, contemporary workforce trends reveal that factors such as work–life balance and a strong sense of purpose are primary motivators for younger generations, particularly Millennials and Generation Z. These groups increasingly seek employment that aligns with their personal values and provides a sense of meaningful contribution, rather than focusing solely on financial incentives (Hui et al., 2021; Bulut & Maraba, 2021; Krishna & Agrawal, 2025). This shift has prompted organizations to place greater emphasis on soft skills and to develop work environments that foster positive attitudes and value alignment, ultimately influencing organizational performance and sustainability (Fasih et al., 2025; Bisschoff & Massyn, 2024; Hussein, 2024).

Among the various domains of soft skills, work ethics is widely regarded as essential (Miller et al., 2002; Park & Hill, 2016). Work ethics encompasses an individual’s attitude toward oneself, moral orientation toward work, and intrinsic motivation (Sharma & Rai, 2015). Employees’ perceptions of their work and its purpose, along with qualities such as sincerity, honesty, integrity, and inner motivation, are critical to effective performance. A positive perception of work and strong ethical character foster a supportive and productive environment that enhances employee engagement, satisfaction, and output, whereas negative perceptions can undermine these outcomes (Seitl et al., 2023; Schroeder et al., 2019). Moreover, positive values have been shown to strengthen work motivation and encourage innovative behavior (Shah et al., 2022; Sypniewska et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2020).

Despite growing recognition of the role of work ethics in improving performance, motivation, and work behavior, existing literature indicates that relatively few studies have examined the direct impact of work ethics on work motivation and innovative work behavior. While some research has demonstrated positive relationships between work attitudes or work ethics and performance, these findings cannot readily be generalized to educational settings. In response to this gap, the present study investigates the influence of work ethics on work motivation and innovative behavior within an academic context.

Literature review

The philosophy of work

Work ethics are closely linked to an individual's attitude toward work, which is fundamentally shaped by one's underlying philosophy of work (Abun et al., 2025). A person's philosophy of work informs how they perceive their role, responsibilities, and purpose, and this perception, in turn, guides ethical orientations such as diligence, integrity, and responsibility. In this sense, work ethics do not emerge in isolation but are grounded in deeper beliefs about why people work and what work ultimately means.

Work may be broadly understood as both physical and mental effort directed toward achieving a purpose. This general understanding is reflected in common definitions. Dictionary.com and the Free Dictionary describe work as an activity involving effort aimed at producing results, while the Britannica Encyclopedia emphasizes work's essential function in bringing about change, highlighting both its physical and cognitive dimensions. However, while these definitions clarify what work involves, they do not fully address the deeper question of why people work. This limitation invites examination of philosophical perspectives on the purpose and meaning of work.

Classical philosophy offers a richer understanding of work beyond mere effort or productivity. Plato, for instance, viewed work as intrinsically connected to both societal welfare and personal flourishing, or eudaimonia (Frede, 2023). In his ideal society, individuals were assigned roles according to their natural abilities, allowing them to contribute meaningfully to the common good while simultaneously cultivating their own potential. From this perspective, work serves a dual purpose: it enables social harmony and progress while fostering individual development and fulfillment (Cholbi, 2022).

This philosophical view contrasts sharply with utilitarian and capitalist frameworks, which often reduce work to a means of personal gain or social obligation (Harsanyi, 1980). From such perspectives, work becomes a commodity—valued primarily for its capacity to generate income or maintain economic order—leaving little room to consider its role in human self-perfection. As noted by Little (1948) and Richard (1998), this transactional understanding of work, particularly evident in capitalist and totalitarian systems, diminishes the human experience of labor by framing it merely as a means of earning a living or fulfilling prescribed social functions. For many individuals, this reductionist view contributes to job dissatisfaction, disengagement, and distorted working conditions, as work is no longer seen as meaningful but merely as a necessity for survival.

Schwartz (1982) strongly critiques this utilitarian conception of work, arguing that viewing work solely as a pathway to financial reward distorts both individual and organizational expectations. This perspective fosters the mistaken belief that employees are motivated only by pay, ignoring intrinsic motivation and the deeper value that meaningful work can provide. Such assumptions are often reinforced by management practices that prioritize extrinsic rewards over purpose and autonomy, perpetuating cycles of dissatisfaction and disengagement among workers (Nesterak, 2022).

In contrast, Little (1948) presents a more holistic understanding of work by distinguishing between its narrow and broad meanings. In its narrow sense, work refers to physical labor; in its broader sense, it involves the deliberate transformation of matter or effort for the benefit of others. From this standpoint, work should not be viewed merely as a means of earning wages but as an opportunity for individuals to contribute to society and, more importantly, to improve themselves. This aligns with contemporary views of self-actualization, which emphasize the fulfillment of core psychological needs—such as autonomy and competence—as pathways to meaning and personal growth through work (Martela et al., 2021). When work allows for self-expression and the exercise of

This understanding of work as a means of self-perfection is further reinforced by Aristotle, who argued that meaningful work enables individuals to realize their rational potential. Through purposeful activity, humans exercise their rational capacities, developing virtues that extend beyond mere survival or compliance with social norms (Clark, 2017; Elster, 1989; Sayers, 2005). Work, therefore, becomes an essential component of human flourishing rather than a burdensome obligation.

Viewed through this philosophical lens, work ethics transcend the pursuit of monetary gain. Grounded in a deeper philosophy of work, ethical behavior emerges from seeing work as a vehicle for personal growth and meaningful contribution to society. These perspectives challenge conventional views that treat work as a commodity and call for broader recognition of its intrinsic value—one that honors both the dignity of the individual and the collective good.

The concept of work ethics

Understanding the philosophy of work provides a critical foundation for comprehending work ethics. From a philosophical perspective, work entails both physical and mental effort and should not be understood merely as a social obligation or a means of earning a living. Rather, work functions as a pathway to self-perfection and human fulfillment (Martela & Pessi, 2018). In this view, work is inseparable from human existence; it is an integral expression of human nature. Humans are, by nature, workers, and engaging in work is part of their inherent purpose (Little, 1948). Consequently, work should not be narrowly equated with employment or income generation but recognized as a fundamental aspect of human life itself (Tommasi et al., 2025; van der Laan et al., 2023).

Anchored in this philosophical understanding of work, scholars have offered various definitions of work ethics, each emphasizing different aspects of the concept. Bazzy (2018) defines work ethics as an individual's attitude toward work and effortful activities. While this definition highlights the attitudinal component of work ethics, it does not clarify the nature of these attitudes or the underlying purpose of work-related effort. This limitation is addressed by Bouma (1973) and Nelson (1973), who define work ethics as a belief in the value and importance of work for its own sake. From this perspective, work is pursued for intrinsic reasons rather than external rewards, reflecting the idea that work is an essential and natural part of human existence. This definition closely aligns with the philosophical view that work is inherent to human nature.

Lessnoff (1994) offers a different emphasis by defining work ethics as a complete and relentless devotion to one's economic role. This perspective reflects the concept of *homo economicus*, which portrays humans as rational actors who pursue wealth in their own self-interest (Petrovic, 2008; Efeoğlu & Çalışkan, 2018). Within this framework, economic productivity becomes a defining characteristic of individuals and societies (Petrovic, 2008). However, this economic orientation does not necessarily contradict the philosophical view of work as a means of self-perfection. As Cholbi (2022) explains, human rational capacity enables them to transform matter into goods of objective value, suggesting that work allows individuals to realize their rational nature through creativity and purposeful activity.

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the positive effects of work ethics on various work-related outcomes. Bazzy (2016) found that strong work ethics are associated with success, a finding that echoes earlier research by Mudrack (1997), which showed that individuals with strong work ethics tend to be more committed, satisfied, and engaged in their work. Similarly, Marri et al. (2012) reported significant relationships between work

ethics, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Further studies have reinforced these findings, showing that work ethics positively influence job performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Ud Din et al., 2019; Athar et al., 2016; Udin et al., 2022; Aflah et al., 2021; Salahuddin, 2011; Salahuddin et al., 2016).

Despite the growing body of literature, confusion between the philosophy of work and work ethics has contributed to ongoing debate regarding how work ethics should be conceptualized and measured. Scholars remain divided on whether work ethics is a multidimensional or single-dimensional construct. Miller (2002) argues that work ethics is multifaceted, encompassing work-related activities, attitudes, beliefs, and motivation as reflected in behavior. He emphasizes that work ethics is a secular concept, independent of specific occupations, behaviors, or religious values. Similarly, Bazzy (2018) conceptualizes work ethics as a multidimensional construct composed of hard work and self-reliance. Van Ness et al. (2010) further expand this view by proposing seven dimensions of work ethics: self-reliance, morality/ethics, leisure, hard work, centrality of work, waste of time, and delay of gratification.

In contrast, Sharma and Rai (2015) challenge multidimensional approaches, arguing that many existing measures lack rigorous validity testing and are rooted primarily in the Protestant work ethic framework, which contradicts the secular nature of work ethics. To address this limitation, they propose a single-dimensional construct consisting of three interrelated components: work centrality, moral attitude toward work, and intrinsic work motivation. Although these components may appear distinct, Sharma and Rai conceptualize them as a unified work-ethics dimension that captures individuals' attitudes toward work, moral orientation, and motivational drive. They developed a 10-item Work Ethics Scale, which was subjected to convergent and discriminant validity testing.

In the present study, the single-dimensional construct proposed by Sharma and Rai (2015) is adopted, as it is consistent with the philosophy of work that emphasizes attitude toward work as a central element. Accordingly, the study employs the 10-item Work Ethics Scale developed by Sharma and Rai (2015), as it has demonstrated empirical validity and remains free from religious bias.

The concept of work motivation

The psychological understanding of motivation differs in important ways from how motivation is defined in work and management contexts. From a psychological perspective, motivation is generally understood as the internal driving force behind human action (Mannell, 2014). It energizes behavior, sustains effort, and enables individuals to persist in pursuing goals even in the face of difficulty or adversity (Cherry, 2023). Because motivation is complex, scholars have conceptualized it in multiple ways, resulting in a wide range of motivational theories.

Early psychological explanations emphasized biological and instinctual foundations. The instinct theory of motivation, associated with **William James** and **Sigmund Freud**, proposes that human behavior is driven by innate instincts essential for survival (Bandhu et al., 2024). Building on biological explanations, **Clark Hull** introduced drive theory, which suggests that behavior is motivated by the need to maintain internal balance. According to this view, physiological drives such as hunger, thirst, and sleep push individuals to engage in actions that restore homeostasis (Remley, 1980).

Another influential framework is arousal theory, associated with **William James** and **Carl Lange**, which explains behavior as an attempt to maintain an optimal level of psychological arousal. Individuals seek activities that keep their level of alertness and excitement within a comfortable range—not too high and not too low—so they can function effectively (Hancock, 1987; Ningjian, 2024).

A shift toward human-centered explanations emerged with the development of humanistic theories of motivation. Abraham Maslow proposed that behavior is motivated by the desire to satisfy human needs (Madsen & Wilson, 2012). Meanwhile, behavioral and cognitive perspectives emphasized external reinforcement and expectation. B. F. Skinner advanced incentive-based explanations, arguing that behavior is shaped by rewards and consequences. Closely related is expectancy-based thinking, which holds that individuals act based on anticipated future outcomes (Cherry, 2023).

In organizational contexts, motivation becomes closely tied to work and performance. In management literature, work motivation is commonly defined as the process that stimulates individuals to act to achieve desired goals (Scott, 1961). Brech (1969, p. 4) describes motivation as “a general inspirational process which gets members of the team to put their weight effectively, to give their loyalty to the group, to carry out properly the task they have accepted, and generally to play an effective part in the job that the group has undertaken.” In this sense, motivation reflects how management inspires employees to contribute effort, loyalty, and commitment toward organizational objectives.

Within the workplace, motivation is goal-directed (Chen, 2016). It is not accidental but intentionally designed by management to encourage employees to work efficiently and effectively in pursuit of organizational goals. Motivating employees, therefore, becomes a core managerial skill. To address this challenge, scholars have proposed several theoretical approaches to work motivation.

One major category is the need-based or content theory of motivation. This approach includes the theories of Abraham Maslow (1943, 1954), Clayton Alderfer (1969), Frederick Herzberg (1959, 1965), and David McClelland and Burnham (1976). Maslow’s hierarchy of needs proposes that human needs are arranged from basic to higher-level needs and that individuals are motivated to satisfy lower needs before progressing upward. At the base are physiological needs necessary for survival, such as food, water, and air. Once these are met, individuals seek safety, followed by social belongingness—the need for relationships, attachment, and acceptance (Navy, 2020). Research suggests that the absence of social connection can negatively affect well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

As social needs are satisfied, motivation shifts toward esteem needs, including recognition, respect, and a sense of importance. Ultimately, individuals strive for self-actualization—the fulfillment of personal potential and aspirations. At this stage, work transcends basic survival and becomes a means of realizing one’s dreams and capabilities.

Alderfer (1969) challenged Maslow’s rigid hierarchy, arguing that needs do not operate in a fixed order. His ERG theory condenses human needs into three categories: existence, relatedness, and growth. Existence needs correspond to Maslow’s physiological and safety needs, relatedness aligns with social needs, and growth encompasses esteem and self-actualization. Unlike Maslow, Alderfer proposed that multiple needs can operate simultaneously and that frustration at higher levels may cause individuals to regress to lower needs (Weber-Kramer, 2023).

Another influential framework is Herzberg’s two-factor theory. Herzberg et al. (1959) and Herzberg (1965) distinguished between hygiene factors and motivators. Hygiene factors—such as salary, working conditions, supervision, and company policies—do not motivate employees but prevent dissatisfaction. True motivation arises from factors such as achievement, recognition, meaningful work, responsibility, advancement, and personal growth. When hygiene factors are inadequate, dissatisfaction emerges; when motivators are present, genuine

McClelland's acquired needs theory further refines need-based motivation by identifying three learned needs: achievement, affiliation, and power (McClelland & Burnham, 1976). Individuals with a high need for achievement strive for excellence, set challenging goals, and seek feedback (Harrell & Stahl, 1981; Trevis & Certo, 2005; Turban & Keon, 1993). Those with a strong need for affiliation prioritize harmonious relationships and social acceptance, similar to Maslow's social needs (Wong & Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). The need for power reflects a desire to influence others and control resources; although potentially harmful if misdirected, it is essential for leadership and managerial effectiveness (Spangler & House, 1991; Spreier, 2006).

Beyond content theories, motivation has also been explained by process-based theories that focus on how individuals choose goals and regulate effort (Sandvik et al., 1985). These include operant conditioning, equity theory, goal-setting theory, and expectancy theory. Operant conditioning theory, developed by B. F. Skinner, emphasizes that behavior is shaped by rewards and punishments (Skinner, 1953). Individuals are more likely to repeat rewarded behaviors and avoid punished ones.

Equity theory proposes that motivation is influenced by perceptions of fairness. Individuals compare their inputs and outcomes with those of others, and perceived inequity leads to dissatisfaction and reduced motivation (Adams, 1965). Goal-setting theory argues that motivation increases when individuals are given specific, challenging, and accepted goals (Locke, 1978; Taylor, 1911; Pinder, 1984).

Finally, expectancy theory explains motivation as a rational decision-making process in which individuals assess whether their effort will lead to performance and whether that performance will result in a valued outcome (Vroom, 1964; Porter & Lawler, 1968). Motivation depends on effort–performance expectancy and performance–outcome expectancy—beliefs that effort will improve performance and that performance will yield desired rewards (Filipova, 2016; Sewandono et al., 2023). In essence, individuals exert effort when they believe it will lead to meaningful outcomes, making performance a critical instrument for attaining rewards.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

According to Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2002), not all human activities are performed for intrinsic enjoyment. In early life, individuals—such as children—often engage in activities purely for the pleasure they provide. However, as individuals mature, activities and work are increasingly pursued for external reasons rather than for enjoyment alone. In adulthood, work is commonly performed as a means to attain rewards, recognition, or other external outcomes, rather than for the inherent pleasure of the activity itself (Schröder, 2023).

Earlier motivation theories—such as those proposed by Maslow, Herzberg, Alderfer, and McClelland—attempted to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic needs by categorizing human motives into specific types. While these frameworks are valuable for understanding general human motivation, they offer limited guidance for explaining motivation in complex work settings, where intrinsic and extrinsic factors often coexist and interact (Gagné & Deci, 2005). In organizational contexts, motivation is typically classified into two broad types: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and because the individual derives satisfaction from the activity itself (Deci, 1975). In contrast, extrinsic motivation involves performing an activity because of its anticipated consequences, such as rewards, praise, or recognition. In this case, satisfaction is derived not from the activity itself, but from the external outcomes it produces (Gagné & Deci, 2005). However, Gagné and Deci (2005) argue that this simple intrinsic–extrinsic dichotomy is insufficient for

To address this limitation, they advanced Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which introduces a more nuanced distinction between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation (Poppelaars et al., 2014). Autonomous motivation occurs when individuals engage in an activity with volition and personal endorsement. In this state, people perceive themselves as the origin of their actions and experience freedom in choosing to act (Dworkin, 1988). Individuals are autonomously motivated when they perform tasks because they genuinely want to, find them meaningful or enjoyable, and derive satisfaction from the activity itself rather than from external rewards or pressures (Zhu et al., 2024).

In contrast, controlled motivation is characterized by external or internal pressure. Individuals act not because they want to, but because they feel compelled to do so—whether to obtain rewards, avoid punishment, or meet external demands (Gagné & Deci, 2005). The use of tangible rewards as incentives exemplifies controlled motivation, as behavior is regulated by external contingencies rather than personal choice (Deci, 1971). Thus, autonomous and controlled motivation differ fundamentally in their regulatory processes and in the subjective experiences associated with them. Motivation, therefore, can be understood as the degree to which behavior is self-endorsed rather than externally pressured (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Within SDT, motivation is not treated as a single, uniform construct but as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing intrinsic motivation and multiple forms of extrinsic motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005, pp. 331–362). Intrinsic motivation is defined as the inherent desire to seek challenges, engage in activities that align with one's capacities, and experience enjoyment in the process of doing so (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation, by contrast, refers to engaging in activities not for inherent enjoyment, but to achieve outcomes that are separable from the activity itself, such as financial rewards, recognition, or approval (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The degree to which extrinsic motivation is internalized is further explained by Organismic Integration Theory (OIT), a sub-theory of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985). OIT identifies four types of extrinsic regulation that vary along a continuum from controlled to autonomous motivation. External regulation represents the most controlled form, in which behavior is governed entirely by external rewards or punishments and has an external locus of causality (deCharms, 1968). Introjected regulation involves partial internalization, in which individuals act to avoid guilt, shame, or loss of self-worth rather than out of genuine personal endorsement (Williams et al., 1996; Uzun & Aydemir, 2020).

Identified regulation reflects a more autonomous form of extrinsic motivation, in which individuals consciously value a behavior and recognize its importance, even if the activity itself is not inherently enjoyable (Brenner, 2022). The most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation is integrated regulation, where individuals fully assimilate external goals into their personal value system, ensuring consistency between their actions and their broader beliefs and identity (Brenner, 2022). Although integrated regulation remains extrinsic because the activity is performed for its outcomes, it closely resembles intrinsic motivation in terms of autonomy and self-endorsement.

Innovative work behavior

The concept of innovative work behavior (IWB) was introduced by **Scott and Bruce** (1994, 1998). While their work brought IWB to scholarly attention, they did not provide a formal definition of the construct. Since then, numerous definitions have been proposed in the literature. However, De Spiegelaere et al. (2014) observe that most of these definitions are largely derived from the seminal work of **West and Farr** (1990). West and Farr

(1990) define innovative work behavior as *the intentional introduction and application of ideas, processes, products, or procedures that are new to the relevant unit of adoption, designed to significantly benefit the individual, the group, the organization, or wider society.*

Subsequent definitions closely resemble this foundational description. For instance, Spreitzer (1995) characterizes innovative work behavior as the creation of something new or different, emphasizing its inherently change-oriented nature. Similarly, Janssen (2000, p. 288) defines it as “the intentional creation, introduction and application of new ideas within a work role, group or organization, to benefit role performance, the group, or the organization.” Dorenbosch et al. (2005, p. 129) describe it as “the willingness by individual employees to constitute on-the-job innovations,” such as improving work methods, enhancing communication with colleagues, utilizing new technologies, or developing new services or products. While these definitions differ in wording, they largely reiterate the core elements proposed by West and Farr (1990) and do not introduce substantially new dimensions.

Most existing definitions place strong emphasis on the novelty of innovation. However, De Spiegelaere et al. (2014) criticize the assumption that novelty alone is sufficient to define innovative work behavior. They argue that novelty is an outcome-dependent characteristic, observable only after an idea has been successfully implemented. When innovative work behavior is defined solely in terms of results or novelty, it overlooks the critical behavioral processes—such as idea generation, introduction, and application—that lead to innovation. As a result, such definitions fail to fully capture the essence of innovative work behavior.

To address this limitation, De Spiegelaere et al. (2014) propose a more comprehensive definition of innovative work behavior as *all behaviors aimed at the generation, introduction, and/or application (within a role, group, or organization) of ideas, processes, products, or procedures that are new and intended to benefit the relevant unit of adoption.* This definition shifts the focus from innovation as an outcome to innovation as a behavioral process.

Based on this perspective, innovative work behavior is best understood as a multidimensional construct rather than a single, result-based variable. It encompasses multiple stages, including idea generation, idea introduction, application, and the pursuit of positive outcomes or benefits for the relevant unit (Kleysen & Street, 2001). Expanding on this process-oriented view, **de Jong and Den Hartog** (2008) identify four key dimensions of innovative work behavior. These include opportunity exploration, which involves paying attention to issues beyond routine tasks and identifying areas for improvement; idea generation, which entails developing original solutions, new methods, or alternative approaches to work; championing, which refers to persuading and gaining support from influential organizational members for innovative ideas; and application, which involves implementing and integrating new ideas into work practices.

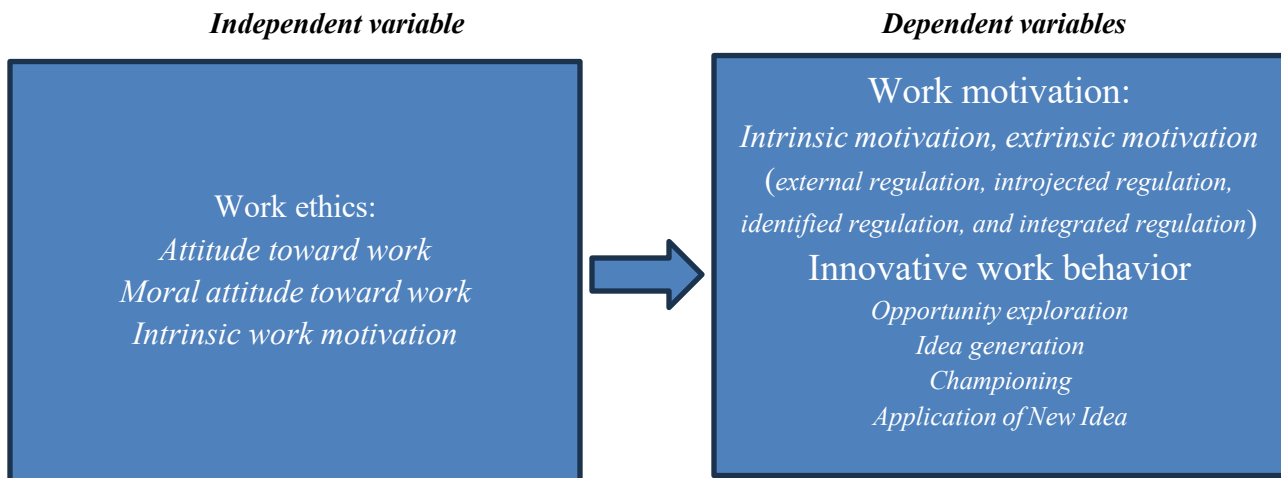
Although de Jong and Den Hartog’s (2008) framework does not explicitly include the benefit or outcome dimension, it provides a sufficiently robust basis for conceptualizing innovative work behavior in the present study. Innovation fundamentally begins with opportunity exploration, idea generation, championing, and application; without these behavioral processes, no tangible benefits or results can emerge (Kabir, 2019; Simon, 2009). Consequently, benefit is not treated as a separate dimension of innovative work behavior in this study, as it is understood to be a natural outcome of these preceding behaviors rather than a behavioral component itself.

A substantial body of research has examined the role and consequences of innovative work behavior, particularly in relation to organizational performance. For example, Shanker et al. (2017) found that innovative work behavior significantly contributes to organizational performance. Because organizational performance is largely driven by individual performance, innovative work behavior at the individual level plays a critical role in shaping

organizational outcomes, as Leong and Rasli (2013) show. Other studies indicate that innovative work behavior is influenced by contextual factors such as entrepreneurial culture and the broader entrepreneurial work environment (Nguyen et al., 2021).

These findings suggest that enhancing organizational performance requires careful attention to the work environment and to whether it effectively motivates employees to engage in innovative behavior (Purwanto, 2020). Among the various environmental factors, leadership and entrepreneurial culture emerge as two key dimensions that warrant particular focus, as they shape employees' willingness and capacity to explore opportunities, generate ideas, and implement innovation in the workplace.

Conceptual framework



Source: Sharma and Rai (2015), Ryan and Deci(2000), de Jong and Den Hartog (2008)

Figure 1: The conceptual frameworks explain the objective of the study. It examines the influence of work ethics on work motivation and innovative work behavior.

Statement of the problems

The study examined the impact of work ethics on work motivation and innovative work behavior. It specifically seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of work ethics of employees in terms of attitude toward work, moral attitude toward work, and intrinsic work motivation?
2. What is the level of work motivation of employees, along with:
3. Intrinsic work motivation
4. Extrinsic work motivation along with external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation?
5. What is the level of innovative work behavior in terms of opportunity exploration, idea generation, championing, and applying new ideas?

6. Is there a relationship between work ethics and work motivation?

7. Is there a relationship between work ethics and innovative work behavior?

Hypothesis

According to studies, work ethics and an organization's ethical climate significantly influence employees' behavior, leading to positive outcomes such as increased job satisfaction, job engagement, and reduced burnout. A high ethical climate fosters integrity, fairness, and respect, creating a supportive environment where employees are more motivated, innovative, productive, and less stressed (Koh & Boo, 2001; Mtsweni, 2024; Lysova et al., 2023; Elliotthey et al., 2024).

Scope and delimitation of the study

The study limits its scope and coverage. It investigates work ethics, attitude toward work, moral attitude, intrinsic work motivation, and innovative work behavior. The study population comprised employees of Divine Word College of Laoag.

Research methodology

This study adopts a quantitative approach, utilizing both descriptive and correlational research designs. The study was conducted at Divine Word College of Laoag, with its employees serving as the research population. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Specifically, the weighted mean was used to describe respondents' perceptions, while Pearson's r was used to assess relationships among the study variables.

Prior to data collection, the researcher formally requested permission from the College President to administer the questionnaires. Upon approval, data collection was facilitated through the employees' representatives. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. As the research did not involve sensitive issues or vulnerable populations, formal ethical review approval was waived.

The following ranges of values with their descriptive interpretation were used:

<i>Statistical</i>	<i>Range Descriptive</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>4.21-5.00</i>	<i>Strongly Agree/Very High</i>	<i>(SA/VH)</i>
<i>3.41-4.20</i>	<i>Agree/High</i>	<i>(A/H)</i>
<i>2.61-3.40</i>	<i>Somewhat Agree/Moderate</i>	<i>(SWA/M)</i>
<i>1.81-2.60</i>	<i>Disagree/Low</i>	<i>(D/L)</i>
<i>1.00-1.80</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree/Very Low</i>	<i>(SD/VL)</i>

Data presentation and analysis

Problem 1: What is the level of work ethics of employees in terms of attitude toward work, moral attitude toward work, and intrinsic work motivation?

Table 1: Work ethics.

Indicator	Mean	DI
<i>Attitude towards work</i>		
I consider my occupational career to be one of the most important activities in my life	4.13	A/H
I believe that a person is known in society by the work he does	3.88	A/H

I believe that one's work is the best way to achieve perfection in life.	4.07	A/H
Even if I don't have to work to earn a living, I would still prefer to continue working.	4.23	SA/VH
I believe that work provides a powerful channel for expressing one's knowledge, abilities, and creativity.	4.33	SA/VH
Composite Mean	4.13	A/H
<i>Moral attitude towards work</i>		
Even in this fast-changing world, sincerity, hard work, and integrity continue to be the golden keys to success in one's work life.	3.82	A/H
I feel a moral obligation to give a full day's work for a full day's pay.	4.15	A/H
I believe that one should never be late for work unless there is a real emergency	4.22	SA/VH
Composite Mean	4.06	H
<i>Intrinsic Work Motivation</i>		
I believe that a job well done is a reward in itself	4.40	SA/VH
I welcome jobs that involve greater responsibility and challenge as they contribute to my learning and growth.	4.37	SA/VH
Composite Mean	4.39	SA/VH
Overall Mean	4.19	A/H

Source: *Sharma and Rai (2015)*

Based on the table data, employees' work ethic obtained an overall mean rating of 4.19, which is interpreted as **high**. This finding indicates that employees generally demonstrate a strong level of work ethic rather than a low or merely average one. When the dimensions were examined individually, all components of work ethic likewise fell within the same high level of mean rating, suggesting consistency across its dimensions.

In terms of attitude toward work, employees agreed that work is an essential part of their lives. They view work as a means of achieving personal growth and self-perfection, as well as a channel for expressing knowledge, skills, and creativity. In this sense, work provides meaning, helps define personal identity, and serves not merely as a means to material ends but as a vital component of human fulfillment and self-actualization (Geuss, 2021; Tan et al., 2023; Buchholz, 1978).

Regarding moral attitudes toward work, employees affirmed that sincerity, diligence, and integrity are fundamental values that lead to success. Consequently, they believe in fulfilling their work responsibilities fully and honestly, including exerting appropriate effort in exchange for the compensation they receive (Zwarg et al., 2025; Taylor, 1992).

Regarding intrinsic work motivation, employees agreed that a job well done is rewarding in itself. They perceive work as an opportunity for learning and personal growth and therefore view challenges positively rather than as obstacles. This perspective reflects a strong intrinsic motivation, where satisfaction is derived from mastery, competence, and continuous development (Dahiya & Raghuvanshi, 2023; Kremer et al., 2021).

Problem 2: What is the level of work motivation of employees, along with:

1. *Intrinsic work motivation*
2. *Extrinsic work motivation along with external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation?*

Table 2: Work motivation

Indicator	Mean	DI
Intrinsic work motivation		
Because I derive much pleasure from learning new things in my job	3.99	A/H
For the satisfaction I experience from taking on interesting challenges	3.93	A/H
For the satisfaction I experience when I am successful at doing a difficult task	4.09	A/H
Composite Mean	4.00	A/H
Extrinsic work motivation:		
External regulation		
For the income, it provides me	3.74	A/H
Because it allows me to earn money	3.76	A/H
Because my work provides me with security	3.65	A/H
Sub-composite Mean	3.72	A/H
Introjected regulation		
Because I want to succeed at this job, if not, I would be very ashamed of myself	3.78	A/H
Because I want to be very good at this work, otherwise, I would be very disappointed	3.87	A/H
Because I want to be a winner in life	3.81	A/H
Sub-composite Mean	3.82	A/H
Identified regulation		
Because I want to attain a certain lifestyle	3.71	A/H
Because I want to attain my career goals	4.01	A/H
Because it is the type of work, I have chosen to attain certain important objectives	3.86	A/H
Sub-composite Mean	3.86	A/H
Integrated regulation		
because it is a fundamental part of who I am	3.85	A/H
Because it is part of how I have chosen to live my life	3.85	A/H
Because this job is part of my life	3.77	A/H
Sub-composite Mean	3.82	A/H
Composite Mean	3.81	A/H
Overall Mean	3.91	A/H

Source: Ryan and Deci (2000).

The data in the table show that, overall, employees' work motivation had a mean rating of 3.91, which is high. Such an overall mean rating suggests that employees' work motivation is not very high, nor is it very low; rather, it is high. When taken individually, both intrinsic and extrinsic work motivations were rated at the same high level. Regarding intrinsic work motivation, employees agree that they work for enjoyment, consider challenges a source

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of motivation, and find satisfaction in accomplishing them (Din Bandhu et al., 2024; Bakker & Van Woerkom, 2017). In terms of extrinsic motivation, employees agreed that they work for salary/money, recognition, career advancement, or lifestyle, and that these are part of their lives (Zhang et al., 2025; Gerhart & Fang, 2014).

Problem 3: What is the level of innovative work behavior in terms of opportunity exploration, idea generation, championing, and applying new ideas?

Table 3: Innovative work behavior

Indicator	Mean	DI
Opportunity exploration		
I pay attention to issues that are not part of my daily work	3.67	A/H
I wonder how things can be improved	4.10	A/H
Composite Mean	3.89	A/H
Idea generation		
I search out new working methods, techniques or instruments	4.18	A/H
I generate original solutions for problems	4.10	A/H
I find new approaches to executing tasks	4.16	A/H
Composite Mean	4.15	A/H
Championing		
I make important organizational members enthusiastic about innovative ideas	4.05	A/H
I attempt to convince people to support an innovative idea	4.06	A/H
Composite Mean	4.06	A/H
Idea application		

I systematically introduce innovative ideas into work practices	4.07	A/H
I contribute to the implementation of new ideas	4.04	A/H
I put the effort into the development of new things	4.10	A/H
Composite Mean	4.07	A/H
Overall Mean	4.04	A/H

Source: de Jong and Den Hartog (2008)

The data presented in the table show that employees' innovative work behavior obtained an overall mean rating of 4.04, which is interpreted as **high**. This result indicates that employees generally demonstrate a strong level of innovative work behavior rather than a low or moderate one. When the indicators were examined individually, all dimensions were likewise rated at the same high level, suggesting consistency across the components of innovative work behavior.

The findings reveal that employees do not limit themselves to their formal job descriptions. Instead, they focus on responsibilities beyond their assigned roles and actively seek opportunities for improvement. They reported regularly exploring alternative ways to perform tasks, replacing existing practices with more effective ones. In addition, employees acknowledged their willingness to persuade others to support new ideas and to apply them in real work situations.

Overall, these results imply that employees embody a strong spirit of innovation. This reflects a proactive mindset characterized by openness to change, curiosity, and creativity in addressing work-related challenges. Rather than merely adapting to existing conditions, employees actively pursue improvement and transformation through novel ideas, processes, and approaches (Yin et al., 2023; Artige, 2022; Gupta et al., 2016).

Problem 4: Is there a relationship between work ethics and work motivation?

Table 4: Work ethics and work motivation

		intrinsic work motivation	extrinsic work motivation	The overall level of work motivation of employees
attitude towards work	Pearson Correlation	-.066	-.001	-.044
attitude towards work	Sig. (2-tailed)	.403	.987	.574
moral attitude towards work	Pearson Correlation	.082	.017	.064
moral attitude towards work	Sig. (2-tailed)	.298	.832	.421
intrinsic work motivation	Pearson Correlation	-.052	-.052	-.064
intrinsic work motivation	Sig. (2-tailed)	.507	.507	.420
The overall level of work ethics of employees	Pearson Correlation	-.020	-.018	-.023
The overall level of work ethics of employees	Sig. (2-tailed)	.801	.816	.767

Source: SPSS

The correlation analysis reveals no statistically significant relationship between employees' work ethics and work motivation. Specifically, the association between overall work ethics and overall work motivation is negligible ($r = -.023$, $p = .767$), indicating that ethical orientations toward work are not systematically related to employees' motivational levels.

Analysis of individual dimensions supports this finding. Attitude toward work shows extremely weak negative

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 correlations with intrinsic ($r = -.066$), extrinsic ($r = -.001$), and overall motivation ($r = -.044$), while moral attitude toward work exhibits very weak positive correlations with intrinsic ($r = .082$), extrinsic ($r = .017$), and overall motivation ($r = .064$). All associations are statistically non-significant ($p = .298-.832$) and fall below thresholds for practical significance.

The consistently high self-reported ratings of work ethics across respondents may have restricted score variability, potentially attenuating correlations. Overall, the findings indicate that work ethics and work motivation are empirically distinct constructs, suggesting that efforts to enhance ethical behavior should be complemented by motivation-specific interventions rather than assumed to yield motivational gains.

Problem 5: Is there a relationship between work ethics and innovative work behavior?

Table 5: Work ethics and innovative work behavior

		opportunity exploration	idea generation	championing	idea application	The overall level of innovative work behavior
attitude towards work	Pearson Correlation	-.150	-.114	-.162*	-.165*	-.172*
attitude towards work	Sig. (2-tailed)	.057	.148	.039	.035	.028
moral attitude towards work	Pearson Correlation	-.100	-.139	-.177*	-.153	-.163*
moral attitude towards work	Sig. (2-tailed)	.204	.076	.023	.052	.038
intrinsic work motivation	Pearson Correlation	-.108	-.087	-.118	-.079	-.115
intrinsic work motivation	Sig. (2-tailed)	.171	.269	.133	.314	.145
overall level of work ethics of employees	Pearson Correlation	-.156*	-.146	-.197*	-.170*	-.194*
overall level of work ethics of employees	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047	.062	.012	.030	.013

Source: SPSS

The results indicate a statistically significant, albeit weak, inverse relationship between work ethics and innovative work behavior. Specifically, the overall level of work ethics is negatively associated with overall innovative work behavior ($r = -0.194$, $p = 0.013$), suggesting that greater adherence to traditional work ethics is associated with lower engagement in innovation-related activities among the respondents. Although the magnitude of the correlation is modest, its statistical significance highlights a pattern worthy of scholarly attention.

This inverse relationship is most evident in the championing dimension of innovative work behavior. Championing exhibits significant negative correlations with attitude toward work ($r = -0.162$, $p = 0.039$), moral attitude toward work ($r = -0.177$, $p = 0.023$), and overall work ethics ($r = -0.197$, $p = 0.012$). These findings

imply that employees who strongly emphasize discipline, compliance, and moral obligation may be less inclined to actively promote, defend, or mobilize support for novel ideas—behaviors that often require challenging existing norms and navigating uncertainty.

Notably, intrinsic work motivation shows no statistically significant relationship with any stage of the innovation process, as all corresponding p-values exceed the conventional 0.05 threshold. This result suggests that intrinsic motivation alone may be insufficient to drive innovative behavior in the absence of enabling contextual factors, such as psychological safety, autonomy, and supportive leadership. Innovation, therefore, may be less a function of individual motivation or ethical orientation and more contingent upon organizational climates that legitimize experimentation and tolerate failure.

Results and discussion

The results of the present study indicate that the employees of Divine Word College of Laoag demonstrate high levels of work ethics, work motivation, and innovative work behavior. Specifically, the overall mean ratings for work ethics (4.19), work motivation (3.91), and innovative work behavior (4.04) were all interpreted as **high**. These findings suggest that employees generally have strong ethical orientations toward work, exhibit high motivation, and actively engage in innovative behaviors within the organization.

Despite these high mean ratings, the correlation analyses revealed varying relationships among the variables. In particular, the results indicate **no significant correlation between work ethics and work motivation**, suggesting that a strong work ethic does not necessarily translate into higher work motivation, and vice versa. Although much of the existing literature reports a positive relationship between work ethics and work motivation (Grabowski et al., 2021; Hayati et al., 2012; Naquin et al., 2002), the current study's findings diverge from this trend. Instead, they support recent studies by Schroeder (2024), Shahzad et al. (2024), and Sypniewska et al. (2023), which argue that no universal or direct relationship exists between work ethics and work motivation across all contexts. These studies suggest that work motivation may also be influenced by factors such as age, generational differences, job characteristics, and organizational conditions, including leadership style, organizational culture, and individual personality traits (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Arifin et al., 2014).

Regarding the relationship between work ethics and innovative work behavior, the findings reveal a weak, **negligible correlation**. While a relationship exists, its strength is minimal, indicating that a strong work ethic alone does not necessarily lead to increased innovative behavior. This outcome may be attributed to contextual and organizational constraints, such as limited autonomy, ineffective leadership, unclear role expectations, and insufficient recognition or support for innovation (Aprilianty & Waskito, 2023; Slåtten et al., 2020; Storr, 2004).

These findings yield important theoretical and practical implications. The absence of a significant relationship between work ethics and work motivation reinforces the view that motivation is a complex and multifaceted construct shaped by the interaction of internal and external factors. Consistent with research in psychology and organizational behavior, motivation emerges from a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic drivers, as well as psychological, social, and environmental influences (Parjoleanu, 2020; Liu et al., 2021; Xie, 2024). From a practical standpoint, this implies that management initiatives aimed at enhancing employee motivation should not focus solely on strengthening work ethics, but should also address broader personal, social, and organizational factors.

Similarly, the weak relationship between work ethics and innovative work behavior confirms prior findings that innovation is driven by multiple determinants rather than a single individual characteristic (Schroeder, 2024;

Abun et al., *Divine Word International Journal of Management and Humanities* 5(1)(2026) 2808-2836 Shahzad et al., 2024; Sypniewska et al., 2023). Improving innovative work behavior, therefore, requires a comprehensive organizational approach that includes supportive leadership, an enabling work environment, autonomy, recognition, and a culture that encourages experimentation and creativity. While a strong work ethic may contribute to innovative behavior, it must be complemented by favorable organizational conditions. Moreover, work ethics and innovative work behavior are conceptually distinct constructs, and the presence of one does not automatically guarantee the other (Syahputra & Satrya, 2021).

Finally, the study acknowledges its limitations, particularly the relatively small population size and the limited number of variables examined. Future research is encouraged to include larger populations and a broader set of variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of innovative work behavior and its antecedents.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine levels of work ethics, work motivation, and innovative work behavior among employees, and to determine the influence of work ethics on work motivation and innovative work behavior. The findings revealed that employees demonstrated high levels of work ethics, work motivation, and innovative work behavior. However, the correlation analysis showed that work ethics had no significant relationship with work motivation and only a weak or negligible relationship with innovative work behavior. Consequently, the hypotheses proposing significant relationships among these variables were not supported and were therefore rejected.

While several previous studies have reported positive relationships between work ethics and work motivation, as well as between work ethics and innovative work behavior, the present study's results align with research suggesting otherwise. These findings indicate that work motivation and innovative work behavior are not solely determined by work ethics. Rather, they are influenced by a complex interplay of social, organizational, and individual factors. This underscores the importance of adopting a broader, more holistic approach to examining employee motivation and innovation, recognizing that strong work ethics alone may not be sufficient to enhance motivation or drive innovative behavior without supportive contextual and organizational conditions.

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