

Islamic Work Ethics is the Basis of Human Management

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Abstract

This paper intends to discuss Islamic work ethics applied in human management. Islamic work ethics is defined as a working culture that is implemented based on moral principles and in accordance with the demands of the syariat and Islamic teachings. Islamic work ethics and management are closely related because this work ethic is important when controlling the behaviour of members of an organisation. However, this work ethic has yet to be implemented by every member of an institution because there still exist a negative phenomenon among members of the institution who transgress work ethics. Due to this predicament, there is a need for an idea related to work ethics with a hope of overcoming negative practices frequently perpetrated by members of an institution. Several questions arise in relation to this predicament. What does ethical human behaviour mean? Which work ethic approach should be emphasised when forming human behaviour? Is this work ethic suitable when managing humans? This working paper intends to answer these questions. The theoretical approach through content analysis are used to examine Islamic work ethics and human management. Lastly, this working paper hopes to show that implementing Islamic work ethics in institutions is the best method for managing humans.

Keywords: Work Ethics, Islamic Work Ethics, Human, Human Management.

1.0 Introduction

Work ethics is one of the main functions in the management aspect (Hasan Ayyub, 1994). According to him, work ethics and management are closely related because this kind of ethics is important when controlling the behaviour of members of an institution. The features of work ethics such as trust, responsibility, patience, affability etc. had long been introduced to the members of an institution. However, it is evident that members of the institution have failed to implement work ethics. This is because there exist a negative phenomenon in these institutions that is becoming rampant such as breach of trust, sexual harassment, conflicts, lack of customer service and numerous other behaviours that transgress work ethics.

Hence, due to this predicament, there is a need for an innovative idea regarding the implementation of work ethics with the hope of overcoming negative practices that frequently occur among members of an organization. In relation to this, several questions have arisen, such as what is meant by humans who are ethical; what work ethic approach should be emphasised in order to form human behaviour; and are work ethics suitable for human management. In order to answer these questions, this discussion will focus on examining Islamic work ethic elements in human management.

Overall, this discussion is divided into four main sections. The first section discusses the work ethic concept in general and work ethics in Islam. The second section examines the human concept. The third section discusses Islamic work ethics as the basis for managing humans and the last section provides an overall conclusion of the discussions.

2.0 Work Ethics

In this section, the author will discuss the general work ethics concept and work ethics from an Islamic perspective.

2.1 General Work Ethics

The term “ethics” originated from the ancient Greek word “ethos”, which means character, behaviour and morals that influence actions (YaPEIM Management Academy, 2010). Ethics is also defined as a set of values, norms as well as basic morals that determine and differentiate human actions as being good or otherwise (Nor ‘Azzah Kamri, 2006). According to her work, ethics function as a guide to behaviour at the work place. The principles and values found in work ethics could become the beliefs of the members of an organization.

2.2 Islamic Work Ethics

Islamic work ethics are widely used in present writings. Exposure to Islamic work ethic practices first received attention from researchers because of the awareness of the importance of society in getting back to Islamic teachings when managing organizations, which is becoming ever challenging. The word “ethics” has its own meaning in Islam. More precisely, Islamic ethics refers to morality (Haron Din, 2000; Nor ‘Azzah Kamri, 2006). Morality is an entity found in a person and it influences that person to do something either good or bad. Islamic work ethics not only looks at the external aspects of humans but more towards the internal aspects too such as the human soul itself. Ethics are formed by cleansing the heart from matters other than thinking about Allah SWT. Thus, always thinking about Allah SWT helps form attitudes that are truly sincere about implementing whatever job given (Sharifah Hayaati Syed al-Qudsy, 2010). Allah SWT had mentioned about this kind of sincerity in Surah al-Bayyinah (98:5)¹ and Surah al-Zumar (39:11)².

Besides that, Islam has called upon every individual to earnestly implement an undertaking because Allah SWT always watches over every undertaking. Every good undertaking is presumed to be a form of worship and is given rewards in the form of blessings as promised by Allah SWT in Surah at-Taubah (9:105)³. If however, each undertaking were carried out believing that it is a trust bestowed by Allah SWT and always guided by the al-Qur’an and Hadith, then a person’s belief (*iman*) in Allah SWT would increase.

Islamic work ethic principles must be pivoted on belief (*iman*) in Allah SWT. A firm belief in Allah SWT would be able to move organizations towards achieving a balanced state of excellence in the world and in the hereafter. A strong belief will not only enhance the performance and productivity of an organization but it will also form noble moral values among the members of an organization. Hence, in order to enhance an organization’s development employees must be ready to adopt Islamic work ethics (Muhammad Mustakim Mohamed Noh et. al, 2014). In addition, Islamic ethics possess a vision that is based on two features. First, Islamic ethics does not contradict human instincts and secondly, Islamic ethics is rationalistic (Zalika Adam and Faridah Kassim, 2008). This is because Islam, as a supreme religion, always demands that its followers practice an ethical lifestyle covering every aspect of life (Mohamad Khadafi Rofie et. al, 2014).

3.0 The Human Concept

Humans are special creatures and the most noble of creations. The perfect creation of humankind is exhorted by Allah SWT and be explained in Surah al-Tin (95:4)⁴, Surah al-Isra’ (17:70)⁵ and Surah al-An’am (6:165)⁶. Humankind cannot contradict its natural instincts and if this occurs then it would destroy the uniqueness of its creation (Mustapha Kamal Ahmad Kassim et al., 2010).

¹ Translation: “Yet they were not commanded except to worship Allah, dedicating their faith to Him men of pure faith, and to maintain the prayer and pay the zakāt. That is the upright religion.

² Translation: “Say, ‘Indeed I have been commanded to worship Allah with exclusive faith in Him’.”

³ Translation: “And say, ‘Go on working: Allah will see your conduct, and His Apostle and the faithful [as well], and you will be returned to the Knower of the sensible and the Unseen, and He will inform you concerning what you used to do’”

⁴ Translation: “We certainly created man in the best of forms)”.

⁵ Translation: “Certainly We have honoured the Children of Adam, and carried them over land and sea, and provided them with all the good things, and given them an advantage over many of those We have created with a complete preference”.

⁶ Translation: “It is He who has made you successors on this earth, and raised some of you in rank above others so that He may test you in respect to what He has given you. Indeed *your* Lord is swift in retribution, and indeed He is all-forgiving, all-merciful”.

Besides the uniqueness of the creation, the creation of humankind in its beautiful physical form by Allah SWT is further perfected by another abstract element, which is the soul (*roh*). This is referred in Surah al-Hijr (15:28-29)⁷. The uniqueness of human creation from the physical and soul (*roh*) aspect is complete with the conferment of the mind so that humans are able to command knowledge as knowledge is the basis of human dignity (Mustapha Kamal Ahmad Kassim et. al, 2010). In order to become a perfect human, it requires a continuous learning process. Outstanding humans are those who are able to develop themselves from the aspect of knowledge, to possess an esteemed personality as well as nurture relationships with the Creator, amongst humans and between humans and other creatures.

For a human being, knowledge is important because it is capable of controlling and portraying the sensibility of a human. Humans who understand the virtue of knowledge would be able to differentiate the truth about a particular matter so that it is in accordance with Allah's SWT decrees and stipulations. Therefore, the first divine revelation, which is found in Surah al-'Alaq (96:1-5)⁸, clearly makes it mandatory for humans to seek knowledge. However, a person would not be successful if moral aspects are not developed in themselves (Mohd Fauzi Hamat and Mohd Khairul Naim Che Nordin, 2012).

The moral aspect involves an internal source in a human that determine what is to be done. This internal source is the heart (feelings) and it is highlighted in Riwayat Imam al-Bukhari (Hadith no. 1599)⁹. The development of morality is an important part of human development and it becomes evident when the good behaviour of a person is realised (Syed Othman al-Habshi and Hamiza Ibrahim, 1998). Thus, by developing a person's morals it inadvertently controls and nurtures a person by balancing his development in the world and in the hereafter. Therefore, ethics is the basis for managing humans because ethics reflects the moral values of a person.

4.0 Islamic Work Ethics is the Basis for Human Management

Work ethics is important for human management because humans are the main source entrusted to manage any form of organising in an institution. Hence, as a subject and *khalifah* of Allah SWT, a person has to portray work ethics that are based on Islamic principles. In order to ensure the work ethics that are to be learned, understood and practiced are indeed based on the al-Qur'an and Hadith, one has to entrench in oneself the four main moral values that were inherent in the Prophet SAW, namely *siddiq* (truthful), *amanah* (trustworthy), *tabligh* (deliver the message) and *fathonah* (wisdom).

Siddiq means being truthful. Truthfulness is a noble characteristic that decorates the Prophet's SAW morality and one who believes in Allah SWT. Thus, not only were the Prophet's SAW words truthful but HIS actions also reflected the truth. Allah SWT exhorted, meaning:

"It is not but a revelation revealed"

(Surah an-Najm, 53: 4)

Based on Allah's SWT exhortation, it is impossible for the Prophet SAW to possess characteristics of a liar or a cheat because all matters delivered by the Prophet SAW to HIS followers are divine revelations from Allah SWT. As an ethical person, *siddiq* (truthfulness) is noticeable from the earnestness and resoluteness in implementing a task. For example when following strict working hours, being honest, admitting to one's own weaknesses and so forth. Hence, if the features of *siddiq* were entrenched in a person then the personality would be in accordance with Islamic values.

Besides being truthful (*siddiq*), being trustworthy (*amanah*) is also a feature that should be entrenched in a person. Trustworthy means being trusted, honest and responsible. It is an important element needed to form good ethical values in a person or employee (Sharifah Hayaati Ismail al-Qudsy, 2010). A trustworthy employee will hold to the principle that the responsibility of each department and task entrusted is not only to the higher authorities but also more importantly to Allah SWT in the hereafter. Several exhortations by Allah SWT elaborate on the trustworthiness of a person as a subject and *khalifah* of Allah SWT in this world.

⁷ Translation: "When your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed I am going to create a human out of a dry clay [drawn] from an aging mud. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him'"

⁸ Translation: "Recite in the name of your Lord who created-Created man from a clinging substance-Recite and your Lord is the most Generous-Who taught by the pen- Taught man that which he knew not".

⁹ The Prophet S.W.T. exhorted, meaning: "Verily in the body is a clump of meat. If the piece of meat is good than the whole body is good and if the meat is rotten that the whole body is also rotten. Thus, it is the heart (qalb)".

Allah SWT exhorted, meaning:

“Lo! Allah commandeth you that ye restore deposits to their owners, and, if ye judge between mankind, that ye judge justly. Lo! comely is this which Allah admonished you. Lo! Allah is ever Hearer, Seer.

(Surah an-Nisaa', 4:58)

Allah SWT also exhorted, meaning:

“O ye who believe! Betray not Allah and His messenger, nor knowingly betray your trusts”.

(Surah al-Anfaal, 8:27)

Allah SWT further exhorted, meaning:

“And who are shepherds of their pledge and their covenant”

(Surah al-Mu'minuun, 23:8)

According to these exhortations by Allah SWT, the emphasis on trustworthiness is very important for a Muslim. As a subject, a person needs to perform his responsibilities to Allah SWT to the best of his ability based on a high level of self-restraint (*taqwa*). Meanwhile, as a *khalifah*, a person must possess the responsibility to be trustworthy so that he, the organization and the system are wisely managed (Hasan al-Banna et al., 2011). This quality would also encourage the person to perform a task to the best of his ability.

Next, the exemplary characteristic feature of the Prophet SAW is the *tabligh* feature, which means to deliver or convey a message. The act of delivering is always associated with leadership. It is the responsibility of a leader to set a good example to the members as well as to always implement the *amar ma'ruf nahi mungkar* (to do good and abstain from doing wrong) concept in the institution (Lokman Ab. Rahman, 1997). Verses of the al-Qur'an regarding this concept are found in Surah ali-'Imraan, Verses 104 and 110. Allah SWT exhorted, meaning:

“And there may spring from you a nation who invite to goodness, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency. Such are they who are successful”.

(Surah Ali-'Imraan, 3:104)

Allah SWT also exhorted, meaning:

“Ye are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; and ye believe in Allah. And if the People of the Scripture had believed it had been better for them. Some of them are believers; but most of them are evil-livers”.

(Surah Ali-'Imraan, 3:110)

Based on these verses, the objective of life for a Muslim is to work in all goodness in order to succeed in life on this earth and obey the commands of Allah SWT in order to receive HIS blessings in the afterlife. This value is adhered to when every person practices the *amar ma'ruf nahi mungkar* concept. With this awareness, the trustworthiness applied in every task that performed well would be done so with a sincere intention because of Allah SWT.

According to Sharifah Hayaati Ismail al-Qudsy (2010), individuals become more disciplined and avoid any form of corruption, abuse of power etc. because they realise that Allah SWT is monitoring every action. Therefore, human values will not be able to deliver good ethics if it does not adhere to values set by Allah SWT. As for leaders, ethics is intended to be a benchmark or standard when implementing tasks, completing responsibilities and making decisions in organizations (Auni Abdullah, 2007). Values attached to Islamic work ethics explain whether a particular instance is according to Islamic teachings or otherwise. Each individual that works in an organization would surely understand that good behaviour is a show of trust to Allah SWT who gave us a mind, life and energy to work (Siddiq Fadzil, 2011).

The next characteristic is wisdom, which has a strong influence on the life of an individual. A person's life would be better off if the person acts wisely and worse off if he acts unwisely. An ethical person would possess a high level of creativity and be able to provide innovative ideas to the institution (Mohd Janib Johar, 2001). According to him, creativity and innovation are assets owned by the individual, whereas, wisdom is obtained through continuous efforts to gain knowledge in various fields. Therefore, an individual needs a high level of knowledge in order to become wise. Allah SWT has elaborated on the importance of knowledge in Surah az-Zumar and Surah al-Baqarah so that individuals would think before acting any some matter that needs to be implemented. Allah S.W.T exhorted, meaning:

“Is he who supplicates (or is obedient) in the watches of the night, prostrating and standing, apprehensive of the Hereafter and expecting the mercy of his Lord like someone who is not such ...? Say, ‘Are those who know equal to those who do not know?’ Only those who possess intellect take admonition”.

(Surah az-Zumar, 39:9)

Allah SWT also exhorted, meaning:

“Allah SWT gives wisdom to whomever He wishes, and he who is given wisdom, is certainly given an abundant good. But none takes admonition except those who possess intellect”

(Surah al-Baqarah, 2:269)

Besides the verses in the al-Qur’an, there are Hadith that elaborate on the importance of this knowledge. The Prophet SAW exhorted, meaning:

“Seeking knowledge is a duty upon every Muslim, and he who imparts knowledge to those who do not deserve it.

(Hadith Riwayat Ibn Majah, no.224)

Based on these verses of the al-Qur’an and Hadith, Allah SWT has elaborated on the importance of knowledge. The development of knowledge according to Islam is not only capable of developing the mind and intellect of a human but can also develop practices and actions. A person cannot claim to be knowledgeable if the benefit of the knowledge does not manifest itself in the person through his actions (Mohd Fauzi Hamat and Mohd Khairul Naim Che Nordin, 2012). Knowledge that is put into practice is capable of fostering good morals and courteous behaviour because the development of knowledge according to Islam is a bridge between goodness and self-restraint (*taqwa*). Hence, the knowledge learnt is capable of developing moral values that groom humans to possess good ethical values.

The conclusion is if the four main characteristics in the Prophet SAW could become a guide for humans then Islamic work ethics could then be practiced. These ethics not only generate humans that are of quality, with good moral values and possess an Islamic identity but are also beneficial to the organization and the *ummah* (Auni Abdullah, 2010). Issues pertaining to corruption, breach of trust etc. could be overcome if individuals possess these noble characteristics. By possessing these noble values, it shows that an individual is aware that Allah SWT is constantly watching, evaluating and rewarding good deeds (Sharifah Hayaati Ismail al-Qudsy, 2010). Indirectly, relationships such a between individuals and Allah SWT as well as that amongst humans are protected.

5.0 Conclusion

Based on the overall discussion, it could be concluded that the Islamic work ethics element should be introduced from a conceptual, appreciative and practical perspective and in a comprehensive manner to all humans. These work ethics must emphasise the human development aspect, which includes the spiritual and physical aspects. Both these elements must be developed together within an individual. The reciprocal effect between these two elements will cause an individual to bind himself to religious teachings more than to self-created regulations or rules.

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