

Qur'anic Work Ethics

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Abstract

The Qur'an is the primary source in all Islamic matters, including in work ethics. This article attempts to discuss work ethics as scripted in the Qur'an. In overall, the values and ethics in the Qur'an could be classified into three major components, namely religious, quality and personal values. These three components have a significant impact on work culture in the organization. It is hoped that this article can enhance the understanding of Muslim employers/employees towards work ethics. This understanding will encourage them to implement work ethics in their daily activities.

Keywords: Qur'an, work ethics, work culture, organization, employers-employees

Etika Kerja dalam al-Qur'an

Abstrak

Al-Qur'an merupakan sumber rujukan utama dalam semua perkara berkaitan Islam, termasuklah dalam hal berhubung etika kerja. Makalah ini cuba membincangkan perihal etika kerja sebagaimana yang terkandung di dalam al-Qur'an. Secara keseluruhannya, nilai dan etika di dalam al-Qur'an boleh diklasifikasikan kepada tiga komponen utama iaitu nilai keagamaan, nilai kualiti dan nilai keperibadian. Ketiga-tiga komponen ini memberi kesan yang signifikan ke atas budaya kerja dalam organisasi. Dapatlah makalah ini diharap sedikit sebanyak dapat meningkatkan kefahaman majikan/pekerja Muslim terhadap etika kerja. Kefahaman ini seterusnya akan mendorong mereka untuk melaksanakan etika kerja dalam aktiviti seharian.

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Kata kunci: *al-Qur'an, etika kerja, budaya kerja, organisasi, majikan-pekerja*

Introduction

In the olden days, particularly in the Jewish time of classical or medieval period, hard work was not a cultural norm⁴ but it was regarded simply as a form of life survival, which mostly comes in the form of agricultural activities or domestic animal breeding. As times move on, work has become a basic human activity that commonly occupies a human's life until he is deemed unfit to do so. More than often, human beings are committed to perform work to benefit themselves physically, materially, socially, and to some extent, spiritually.⁵ In the meantime, the nature of work become more complex than it was in the early history of man, so was the process and the procedures. This trend demands human to inculcate proper work behavior that contributes to the quality of the work output. The responsibility of it is relied upon man, as he is still the integral cog of the work process; although machine has since replace most of the process. The accomplishment of work, hence, is still largely entrusted to human, and depends on his integrity, commitment and hard work to achieve the purview of the work.

To ensure the objective of the work is fulfilled, an attitudinal construct pertaining to work-oriented values is needed; and that is the work ethic. The construct of work ethic suggests responsible work behavior that centralizes hard work; as the panacea of the social ills, as well as multidimensional set of values.⁶ Over decades, countless research has been done on different dimensions of administrations, including in the view of ethics and values.⁷

⁴ M. Rose, *Reworking the Work Ethic: Economic Values and Socio-cultural Politics* (London: Schocken, 1985); R.B. Hill, "The History of Work Ethic," <http://rhill.coe.uga.edu/workethic/hist.htm>, retrieved on 15 July 2013.

⁵ Joanne B.Ciulla, *The Working Life: the Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work* (New York: Crown Business Books, 2000).

⁶ Michael J. Miller, David J. Woehr and Natasha Hudspeth, "The Meaning and Measurement of Work Ethic: Construction and Initial Validation of a Multidimensional Inventory," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 60, no.3 (2002): 451-489.

⁷ Osman Ayub, *Etika Kerja & Profesionalisme Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Frontier Enterprise, 1989). As quoted by Wan Norhasniah Wan Husin "Work Ethics

Especially after 1970s, when the workers' strikes that frequently occurred; the study has raised great awareness and attentions from scholars and practitioner alike. It has greatly provide understanding on human behavioral pattern, hence providing proactive solutions to interpret events thus pursue considerable changes and avoid major consequences due to misconduct.⁸ Moreover, such understanding helps managers to design long term plans,⁹ besides emphasizing the organizational administration system¹⁰ In the modern age, the implementation of the work ethic studies is very much common in the organizational and management practice.

Recently, the work ethic study has been researched and developed in the cross-cultural setting. This is attributed to the globalization wave in the latter half of the twentieth century, where people all over the world engaged in the economic activities, regardless of religious background. During this period, the influence of significant monotheistic religions (Islam, Christian and Judaism) is apparent on the economic behaviours of the advocates. Apparently, the appreciation of these religious work cultures individually assists in the cross-cultural contact.¹¹ Theoretically, the religious advocates tend to internalize religious teachings; they are more likely to practice religious ethics at work. Taking Islam as an example, it is expected of a Muslim to perform work at his best, for it does not fulfill his religious obligation and reflect his work personality but also represent the religion he advocates, especially within the country that hosted majority of non-Muslim.¹²

from the Islamic Perspective in Malaysia," *European Journal of Social Sciences* 29, no.1 (2012): 51-60.

⁸ Abbas J. Ali and Ali al-Kazemi, "The Kuwaiti Manager: Work Values and Orientations," *Journal of Business Ethics* 60, no. 1 (2005): 63-73.

⁹ T.E. Cooke, "An Assessment of Voluntary Disclosures in the Annual Reports of Japanese Corporations," *The International Journal of Accounting* 26 (1990): 174-189; R.R. Rizk, "Back to Basics: an Islamic Perspective on Business and Work Ethics," *Social Responsibility Journal* 4, no.1 (2008): 246-254.

¹⁰ Wan Norhasniah Wan Husin, "Work Ethics from the Islamic Perspective in Malaysia,"

¹¹ Adrian Furnham, *The Psychology of Behaviour at Work, the Individual in the Organization* (New York: Psychology Press, 2012), 272.

¹² M.A. Rauf, *Management and Administration: an Islamic Perspective*

But sadly, the modern Muslim societies today do not possess the traditional Islamic characteristic and traits of work ethic. The trend has been seen declining and eventually disappeared in most of the urban city areas.¹³ This could be attributes to the Western colonialism that infuses its culture on the Islamic nations, particularly Arab nations, and subsequently alienates the Islamic Work Ethic. The moral qualities of Muslim employers/employees today have detached from the Qur'anic and Prophetic traditions, the *shariite* foundation and the sufistic order. Consequently, they are lacking behind the western civilization due to the weakness of sound management and economic institutions,¹⁴ beside wide spread alienation of Islamic Work Ethic and growth of apathy at workplace.¹⁵

To address this concern, the Muslims should revert back to the work ethic that is preached in the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions. Thus, this paper tries to answer this issue, through promoting important values that is mentioned in the Qur'an. As the Qur'anic teaching trespasses time, cultural and national differences, it is believed that the compliance and adherence to the Qur'anic teaching, will enable the Muslims to progress economically and socially, without compromising religious principles and obligations.

(Malaysia: Islamic Affairs Division, Prime Ministers Department, 1987).

¹³ S.H. Nas, "Islamic Work Ethics," *Hamdard* VII, no.4 (1984): 25-35.

¹⁴ G. Abed, "Arab Financial Resources: a Critique and Analysis of Present Deployment Policies," in *Arab Resources*, ed. I. Ibrahim (Kent, England: Croom Helm, 1983); H. Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture and State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); O. El-fathaly and R. Chackerian, "Administration: The Forgotten Issue in Arab Development," in I. Ibrahim, *Arab Resources* (Kent, England: Croom Helm, 1983); A. Ali, "Scaling an Islamic Work Ethic," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 128, no.5 (1988): 575-583.

¹⁵ Abbas J. Ali and Mohammed al-Shakhis, "Multinationals and the Host Arab Society," *Leadership and Organizational Development*, no.11 (1990): 17-21; H. Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture and State*; ed. Abbas J. Ali, "Islamic Work Ethics in Arabia," *Journal of Social Psychology*, no.126 (1992): 507-519; I. Abu Saad, "Individualism and Islamic Work Beliefs," *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology* 29, no.2 (1998): 377-383.

Religion, Work and Ethics

The term 'religion' is defined as 'the service or worship of God or the supernatural' that is believed to possess 'controlling power'¹⁶ which commands 'commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance.' It is therefore develops 'personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs and practices' that 'is held with ardor and faith.'¹⁷ Religion seek to answer the quest of transcendental truth, that is founded on 'its principles that transcend time and space', whereas 'it thought is subject to change.' The nature of religion is 'sacred' and 'heavenly,' while its understanding is 'human and earthly.'¹⁸

According to a statistic, 86% of the world residents adhered to religions.¹⁹ Each religious society devotes to their own faith articles, understanding and practices that is unique and comparatively different among other religions. People embrace religion to fulfill their spiritual quest of the subjects of life, death, fate, destiny and deals directly with their ultimate mission of life.²⁰ These questions often initiate one's need to revere to some spiritual, divine, glorious, supreme force that able to render their needs and supplications, the worthy one to serve and to turn to during hard times, the one to guide their intuition and action, and the one who able to reward and punish them for their behavioral decision.

On the account of the origins, religions are termed as revealed religions, cultural religions, local religions, historical religions, and ancestral religions. The terminology of these religions actually

¹⁶ "Religion," the website of *Oxford Dictionaries Online*, <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/religion?q=religion>, retrieved on 31 March 2013.

¹⁷ "Religion," the website of *Merriam-Webster Online: Dictionary and Thesaurus*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religion>, retrieved on 29 March 2013.

¹⁸ F. Shehu, "The Role of Religion in Shaping Moral Character: Islamic and Catholic Perspective," in A.K.H. Solihu, *The Islamic Worldview, Ethics and Civilization-Issues in Contemporary Disciplinary Discourse* (Malaysia: IIUM Press, 2012).

¹⁹ Victoria Kennick Urubshurow, *Introducing World Religions* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2008).

²⁰ "Religion", the website of *Britannica Online Encyclopedia*, <http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/497082/religion>, retrieved on 29 March 2013.

depends on the main scripture or traditions that is considered sacred and played significant part in the religious teachings. In addition, religions are also described as exclusive and inclusive, which refers to the nature or principle of the religions. Some religions allow people to convert in and out freely, some limit converts in but not out, while others allow conversion only on special cases. Similarly, some religions practiced 'closed' religious principles, which is does not evolve ever since it was established, while other religion adapted the 'open-ended' principle, which continuously evolve with the transition of the period and time.²¹

Some religions are perceived as universal and all-compassing as the religious principles covers every aspect of life; be it earthly or heavenly, temporary or eternal, physical or spiritual, economic or religious, none of the matters is considered to be outside of the 'purview and the ambit' of the religion. On the contrary, some other religions exclusively segregate religious and non-religious matters, while others further limit the religious teaching to after-life matters.²²

The diverse religious perception of worldly affairs and religious affairs, indirectly influence the individual thinking and behavior. The concept of work, for example, some religions regards it as an earthly affair, while other regards it as part of religious obligations. Islam, particularly, perceives that work and worship are unitary. The term 'work' in Arabic itself, is one of the most important word in the 'Islamic language' and literally very closely related to the term '*amal*' which means action, and treated by the Divine law under the same category. It is also related to the word 'sun,' which means to make and produce something. Therefore, the term 'work' around the idea of act, make and produce.²³ In general, work is being simply referred to meaningful

²¹ "Religion", the website of *Britannica Online Encyclopedia*, <http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/497082/religion>, retrieved on 29 March 2013.

²² Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, *Religion and Pluralistic Co-Existence* (Malaysia: IIUM Press, 2010).

²³ Nasr, "Islamic Work Ethics."

and beneficial act.²⁴ The function it plays in the modern society cannot be trivialized, as its significant role can be seen through eliminating social problems such as crime, poverty and involvement in illegal activities as much as promoting individual qualities in terms of psychological and social interest, e.g. self-efficacy, self-motivation, connectedness and so on.²⁵

As much as work is perceived as burden, it also has been argued to provide leisure. On the other hand, unemployment will place impact greatly on the people and their society as it seems to extract vigor out of them.²⁶ This assumption was made based on a case study of a remote industrial residential area in Austria when the whole community faced the economic downfall. The unemployed citizens are described as “apathetic” and “gradually drifting out of ordered existence.”²⁷ Therefore, work is seen as an ideal activity for individuals, not just to secure self-material needs, but also to provide social spirit and common communal leisure.

Meanwhile, Islam views work as part of commercial activities that is regarded as divine calling, being it is part of human’s daily life and usually regarded as source of financial and material need. Ali²⁸ elaborates the importance of work as means of psychological and social fulfillment and inevitable section of a human being’s life. As he puts it: “Work is an obligatory activity and a virtue in light of the needs of man and the necessity to establish equilibrium in one’s individual and social life. Work enables man to be independent and is source of self-respect, satisfaction, and fulfillment.” In conjunction,²⁹ it is perceived as

²⁴ Abbas. J. Ali and Abdullah Ali al-Owaihian, “Islamic Work Ethic: a Critical Review,” *Cross Cultural Management: an International Journal* 1, no.1 (2008): 5-19.

²⁵ Joanne B.Ciulla, *The Working Life: the Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work*.

²⁶ Joanne B.Ciulla, *The Working Life: the Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work*.

²⁷ Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Marie Jahoda and Hans Zeisel, *Sociography of an Unemployed Community* (Chicago: Tavistock Publications, 1971); Joanne B.Ciulla, *The Working Life: the Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work*.

²⁸ A. Ali, “Scaling an Islamic Work Ethic,” *The Journal of Social Psychology* 128, no.5 (1988).

²⁹ Yusuf al-Qaradhawi, *Economic Security in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2010); Bayu Taufik Possumah, Abdul Ghafar Ismail, Shahida

primary weapon against poverty, and considered as part of religious act, in addition to promote the act of “self-reliance” and “self-supporting” within the Muslim society.³⁰ Islam promotes work as part of the worship act, every Muslim will envision his work in twofold manner; as a source of financial support and achieving good worldly life (*al-falah fī al-dunyā*), as well as a mean of serving Allah and preparing for the success of afterlife (*al-falah fī al-ākhirah*).

In contrast to western belief, which advocates work originated from the philosophy of materialism, and functions as servant of human physical pleasure;³¹ Islam views work beyond that matter. In addition to material achievement, work in Islam is also seen as a complying act of Sharia, a form of human engagement and cooperation (*al-ta'āwun*), an act of worship (*al-'ibādah*), an act of kindness towards others (*al-iḥsān*), execution of responsibilities and accountabilities (*al-amānah*), security of self-dignity (*hiḏ al-murū'ah*) and as a part of reliance toward God (*al-tawakkal*).³² For these number of reasons, Islam recognize work in the highest regards, to the extent of considering it as articulation one's faith, thus accentuate its vital role in life.

While promotes the graceful act of work, Islam also encourages good work quality. Such goal is also common among managers and organizations, for that are the very reason the work took place in the first place. Quality products and services contribute greatly to the societal and economic benefit, and most ultimately, sustain the harmonious co-existence of the earth being, especially the human kind. The quality can be produced, if the individuals manage to execute ethical conduct during/at work. As ethic concerns individual's perception of 'what is morally good

Shahimi, “Bringing Work Back in Islamic Ethics.” *Journal of Business Ethics* (2012): 257-270.

³⁰ Bayu Taufik Possumah, Abdul Ghafar Ismail, and Shahida Shahimi, “Bringing Work Back in Islamic Ethics.”

³¹ R. G. Ehrenberg, R.S. Smith, and S. Robert, *Modern Labor Economics: Theory and Public Practice* (Boston: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 2004). As quoted by Bayu Taufik Possumah, Abdul Ghafar Ismail, Shahida Shahimi “Bringing Work Back in Islamic Ethics.”

³² Bayu Taufik Possumah, Abdul Ghafar Ismail, Shahida Shahimi “Bringing Work Back in Islamic Ethics.”

and morally bad,³³ it assists in bringing out ‘the good self’ within every employee to give out the ‘best’.

From this broad definition, the term ‘work ethic’ is coined. The term is defined as a set of values, beliefs, intentions, objectives that drive people to perform work, thus create the environment that they work in it.³⁴ It is the basic foundation of the socialization process and reflect conditions of education, occupation, politics, religion, culture and family milieu,³⁵ which implies a way of thinking, rather than rate of business³⁶ through beliefs, principles and values, of moral codes in work that guide the conduct of individuals, which motivate them to perform their responsibilities and rights at any time within the working context.³⁷ Therefore, it is acceptable that every organization to inculcate work ethic in their working environment to ensure the fulfilment of the objective of their establishment.

The significance of work ethic is recognized through its role of defining human’s action and behavioural pattern culture.³⁸ Besides, work ethic functions as a set of moral system that govern

³³ “Ethic”, the website of *Britannica Online Encyclopedia*, <http://www.britannica.com/search?query=ethic>, retrieved on 4 April 2013.

³⁴ O. Clarke, “The work ethic: an International Perspective,” in J. Barbash, et al., ed., *The Work Ethic - a Critical Analysis* (Madison, WI: Industrial Relations Research Association Series, 1983); Y.F. Zulfikar, “Do Muslims Believe More in Protestant Work Ethic than Christians? Comparison of People with Different Religious Background Living in the US,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 105 (2012): 489-502.

³⁵ Dov Elizur, Ingwer Borg, Raymond Hunt and Istvan Magyari Beck, “The Structure of Work Values: a Cross Cultural Comparison,” *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, no.12 (1991): 21-38; Donald G. Zytowski, “A Super Contribution to Vocational Theory: Work Values,” *Career Development*, no. 43 (1991): 25-31; As quoted by I. Abu Saad, “Individualism and Islamic Work Beliefs.”

³⁶ Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).

³⁷ Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th edition (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, Inc; Miller, 1998); Pamela F. Miller and William T. Coady, *Vocational Ethics: Toward the Development of an Enabling Work Ethic* (Springfield: Illinois State Board of Education, 1984); Selçuk Uygur “The Islamic Work Ethic and the Emergence of Turkish SME Owner-Managers,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 88 (2009): 211–225.

³⁸ G. Hofstede, *Cultures Consequences: International/ Differences of Work-Related Values* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980); Ali and al-Kazemi, “The Kuwaiti Manager: Work Values and Orientations.”

the conduct of the employers and employees, to comply with the requirement of achieving goal, as much as to avoid any possible misdeeds and to cultivate good values that is profitable such as the value of loyalty. This value will hinder the unwanted betrayal towards organization, thus attract faithful customers.³⁹ In addition, loyal employees are willing to strive for the interest of the organization, go the extra mile to achieve the organizational goal, remain attached to the organization, especially during difficult times. They also will welcome any organizational changes, maintain good relation with peer colleagues and superiors, and minimize absent from work.⁴⁰

Apart from that, work ethic is the key foundation of professionalism in all of its philosophical and psychological attributes.⁴¹ This is due to the fact that work ethic deals with the harsh realities of human labour, as it addresses the employees-employers' psychology through values that connect the effort and aspiration. Moreover, work ethic helps to transform the work into meaningful actions, develop ideas and experiences.⁴² Therefore, the cultivation of ethic in the work context will ensure the continuation of the work flow, while either maintains the progress or moving towards the better.⁴³

Looking at the diverse context of these three terms literally, it is almost impossible to decipher the integrations of the terms in the modern context. However, it should be noted that ethics and

³⁹ Frederick F. Reichheld, "Loyalty-Based Management," *Harvard Business Review* (1993): 64-73.

⁴⁰ Abbas J. Ali, "Decision-Making Style, Individualism, and Attitudes Toward Risk of Arab Executives," *International Journal of Management* 23, no.3 (1993): 53-74; Abbas J. Ali and Al-Kazemi, "The Kuwaiti Manager: Work Values and Orientations."

⁴¹ Larson, M. S., *The Rise of Professionalism: a Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1977); Langford, G., *Teaching as a Profession* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978); Eraut, M. *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence* (London: Falmer, 1994); T. Hyland, "Professionalism, Ethics and Work-Based Learning," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 44, no. 2 (1996): 168-180.

⁴² Stewart W. Herman, "How Work Gains Meaning in Contractual Time: a Narrative Model for Reconstructing the Work Ethic," *Journal of Business Ethics* 38, no. ½. (2002): 65-79.

⁴³ Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism*; Langford, *Teaching as a Profession*; Eraut, *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence*; Hyland, "Professionalism, Ethics and Work-Based Learning."

morality are both religious and social concerns. Religions view that every action, might not only affect personal interest, but also social interest. It acts to prohibit the damage from it very early source.⁴⁴

Religions also aim to produce good individuals, which make up good societies and good nations. This process involves good value-judgments, in which every action is considered carefully under the religious principle of right and wrong and the consequences of such action. Almost all religions inhibit the same concept of good and bad behaviors, but may differ on the understanding and practice. The religious moral codes usually align with the national moral codes. They aim to secure the peace in the living ambience, to allow the human civilization to develop and prosper in many areas comfortably, besides strive to perfect individuals' personality.

Therefore, religious moral codes should be considered to be practiced at workplace. As much as an organization to enforce the code of ethics on its employees, it could not force a voluntary compliance toward ethical conduct. Religion assists to provide religious the sense of social responsibility as well as nurturing self-restriction and strict adherence to the rules of evil and good.⁴⁵ Besides, employees are motivated to observe their actions in accordance to their religious beliefs and driven by the promise of either reward or punishment from God.⁴⁶ These values, what are classified as self-restriction that develops from religious

⁴⁴ Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, "Education of Ethics and Morality in the Context of a Plural Society," in *Inter-religious Dialogue in Malaysia* (Centre for Civilizational Dialogue, University of Malaya and Academy of Civilizational Studies: Malaysia, 2009).

⁴⁵ Rodney Wilson, *Economic, Ethics and Religion: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Economic Thought* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Syed Nawab Haider Naqvi, "Rodney Wilson Economic, Ethics and Religion: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Economic Thought," *J.KAU: Islamic Econ* 12 (2000): 69-73.

⁴⁶ Donald L. McCabe and Linda Klebe Trevino, "Academic Dishonesty: Honor Codes and Other Contextual Influences," *Journal of Higher Education* 64, no. 5 (1993): 523-538; Choe Kum-Lung and Lau Teck-Chai, "Attitude Towards Business Ethics: Examining the Influence of Religiosity, Gender and Education Levels," *International Journal of Marketing Studies* 2, no.1 (2010): 225-232.

understanding of the value of work are essential for the sustenance of healthy economic activities.

Qur'an and Work Ethics

Be it social or economic, artistic or aesthetic, these moral aspect of work is actually inseparable from the religious notion. Many Qur'anic verses, Prophetic sayings, and even Islamic literatures emphasize this message repeatedly. Muslims are constantly reminded to observe moral responsibility that revolves around the mentioned aspects. They have to perceive that being work is an earthly task; it is part of deed questioned upon in the afterlife.⁴⁷ Thereafter, to ensure the salvation from hellfire, they have to accomplish the task according to the guideline as set by Sharia (the Divine Law).

The Qur'an is ranked as the core reference for the Islamic teachings. It is the book of God that is revealed on the seal of the Prophet (Muhammad P.B.U.H) with the seal of the religion (Islam).⁴⁸ It revealed to the mankind as guidance from the God (Allah the Almighty) for the benevolence and welfare of the mankind. The prophetic tradition came after as the intermediate, to support, define and clarify what God has revealed to human. The Qur'an, hence, is not just a mere the sacred book, but the valuable teachings that contains guidelines for humans in order to achieve eternal happiness in the world and the hereafter.

The Muslims' work ethical codes are firmly rooted on the Qur'an and the Prophetic Tradition, which promote "dialectical" or "methodological" details as well as to inculcate directly the spirit of Islam in every moral judgment.⁴⁹ The Qur'an does not alter or modify but prevent or avoid "the deficiencies of individual reasons and liability to error."⁵⁰ This proves the reliability of the Qur'an as the source of ethical guideline, rather than philosophical

⁴⁷ Nasr, "Islamic Work Ethics."

⁴⁸ Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm Al-Zarqanī, *Manāḥil al-'Irḡān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dār al-Salam, 2003).

⁴⁹ Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994).

⁵⁰ 'Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Sīnā, *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, ed. Aḥmad Fuād al-Ahwānī (Cairo: n. pb., 1952); Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *al-Mīlāl wa al-Niḥāl*, ed. A.A al-Wakil, (Cairo: n.pb, 1968); Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam*.

or “human” sourced ethic to govern human conduct, and altogether to preserve the benefit of human being itself.

As the nature of the Qur'an is timeless, universal and encompassing,⁵¹ its content is applicable to every strands of human life. This is due to the nature of it being God's word, for God is all seer and all knower. As He creates the destiny, fate, life and death, it is without any doubt that He knows what the best for human kind is. The subjects of the Qur'an cover completely, from life matters to death matters.⁵² The Qur'anic content is therefore, infinite and divine, that it verses capable of yielding multitude meaning,⁵³ which proves that it is not a creation of a man.

Generally, the main purpose of the Qur'an (*maqāsid al-Qur'an*) was revealed is to develop the human with total submission to Allah, according to its status as a servant ('*abd*) and vicegerent (*khalifah*) of God in the context of individual and community life. Specifically, the purposes of the Qur'an are as follows:

- to produce a good human (*sāliḥ*), who believes and practices on faith-based. The Qur'an says:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ

Translation: (The true) believers are those only who believe in Allah and His messenger and afterward doubt not, but strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of Allah. Such are the sincere.

al-Ḥujurāt 49:15

- to exclude human from any relationship or dependence on other than Allah, including human, desire and *jahiliyyah* lifestyle, as stated in the Qur'an:

⁵¹ Shehu, “The Role of Religion in Shaping Moral Character: Islamic and Catholic Perspective.”

⁵² Israrul Haque, *Towards Islamic Renaissance* (Lahore: Ferozsons Pvt. Ltd, 1987); Afzalur Rahman, *Islam: Ideology and the way of Life* (Kuala Lumpur: A.S Noordeen, 1995); M.R.A. Rahman, *Introduction to Islamic and Buddhist Personal Ethics* (Negeri Sembilan: n.pb., 2010).

⁵³ Shehu, “The Role of Religion in Shaping Moral Character: Islamic and Catholic Perspective.”

وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ
فَمِنْهُمْ مَن هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَن حَقَّتْ عَلَيْهِ الضَّلَالَةُ فَسِيرُوا فِي
الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَنَقِبَةُ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ

Translation: And verily We have raised in every nation a messenger, (proclaiming): Serve Allah and shun false gods. Then some of them (there were) whom Allah guided, and some of them (there were) upon whom error had just hold. Do but travel in the land and see the nature of the consequence for the deniers!

al-Nahl 16:36

- to develop intellect ('aql) in consistent with the purpose of human creation, which the intellect is used for thinking and understanding of knowledge within the permissible scope. The Qur'an says:

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ
كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا

Translation: (O man), follow not that whereof you have no knowledge. Lo! the hearing and the sight and the heart of each of these it will be asked.

al-Isrā' 17:36

- to educate the perfect arrangements for human living, including moral education and behavior individually and collectively. The Qur'an says:

وَاللَّهُ غَيْبُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُ الْأَمْرُ كُلُّهُ فَاعْبُدْهُ
وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَيْهِ وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِغَفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

Translation: And Allah's is the Invisible of the heavens and the earth, and unto Him the whole matter will be returned. So worship Him and put your trust in Him. Lo! your Lord is not unaware of what ye (mortals) do.

Hūd 11:123

One of the most important subjects that are discussed in the Qur'an, is the fundamental of moral and ethics. It preaches on intra-personal as aspect of relation such as the items of faith, the pillars of the religion, the lawful and unlawful acts and the personal religious obligations. The Qur'an also emphasizes on inter-personal relation⁵⁴ such as parental obligations, good social mannerism, and the law of crimes. Therefore, the teachings of the Qur'an are unconditional and applicable at all areas, be it earthly or heavenly, life or death, temporary or eternal affairs.

Through its teachings, Qur'an guides human to decide what is right and what is wrong. The human logic alone is not sufficient to clearly decipher the concept as the logic could be easily influenced by the desire (*shahwah*), which subsequently sabotages the human logical reasoning. Thereof, the Qur'an assists to shed the lights on the transcendental truth of right and wrong, through the commands and instructions of God, which are sometime illustrated in form of stories and parables, to enhance human understanding. It is only by adhering to the Divine truth, that human be able to thrive and prosper in their life.

In the light of the work ethic, the Qur'an set fundamental values that are essential to the field of work, such fulfilling responsibilities, prioritizing the *jumu'ah* prayer above trade, and providing the characteristics of ideal employees. The Prophet (P.B.U.H) further enhances these values through his sayings and practices, especially being him the trader, the leader of the first Muslim nation and the war commander. Furthermore, the Qur'an promises rewards in the form of profit, bounty and blessing, to whoever that follows the religious teaching, and in contrast promises punishment to whoever dare to defy. Hence, the Qur'an uses the method of punishment and reward system to nurture the human character by instilling self-awareness, self-control and self-motivation, and also to ensure that work is being carried out in the best manner. This method will create an inner voluntary compliance to the code of ethic, which make the conduct more neutral, rather than superficial.

⁵⁴ Shehu, "The Role of Religion in Shaping Moral Character: Islamic and Catholic Perspective."

Qur’anic Work Ethics

As mentioned earlier, work in Islam is an obligation activity, virtue in light of person’s need and necessity to establish equilibrium in one’s individual and social life. So, it can enable its followers to be independent and fulfill themselves with self-respect.⁵⁵ In term of ethics, the Qur’an specifically and clearly promotes ethics in various actions. In many verses, the Holy Qur’an instructs the faithful that involvement and commitment to work and not allow unethical work behavior like begging, laziness, waste of time and involved with unproductive activity.⁵⁶ Various verses of the Qur’an have addressed the issues of ethics in the workplaces. The Qur’an has outlined some values to be followed by Muslims in their daily activities. Thus, in context of work ethics, these verses provide guidelines for organizations to improve their administration practices to maintain success and quality in a sustainable manner. The main values of Qur’anic work ethics can be summarized as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: The Qur’anic Work Ethics⁵⁷

Values	Qur’anic References
<i>Amr ma ‘rūf nahy munkar</i>	Āli ‘Imrān 3:104, 110; al-Mā’idah 5:78-79
Benevolence	al-Raḥman 55:60; al-Baqarah 2:195; al-Aḥqaf 46:15
Consultation	al-Shūrā 42:38; Āli ‘Imrān 3:159
Cooperation and Collaboration	al-Mā’idah 5:2; al-Tawbah 9:71

⁵⁵ Abbas. J. Ali and Abdullah Ali al-Owaihian, “Islamic Work Ethic: a Critical Review.”

⁵⁶ Abbas J. Ali and Ali al-Kazemi, “Islamic Work Ethic in Kuwait,” *Cross Cultural Management: an International Journal* 14, no. 2 (2007): 93-104; D. A. Yousef, “Organizational Commitment as a Mediator of the Relationship between Islamic Work Ethic and Attitudes toward Organizational Change,” *Human Relations* 53, no. 4 (2000): 513-537.

⁵⁷ Modification from Azharsyah Ibrahim and Nor Azzah Kamri, “Measuring The Islamic Work Ethics: An Alternative Approach,” ed. Nor Azzah Kamri et al., ed., *Islamic Perspective on Management: Contemporary Issues* (Kuala Lumpur: YaPEIM Management Academy, 2013), 135-163.

Dignity	al-Furqān 25:72; al-Baqarah 2:188; al-Tawbah 9:34
Diligence	al-Inshirah 94:7, al-Najm 53:39, al-‘Aṣr 103:2-3
Equality	al-Nisā’ 4:1, al-Fuṣṣilat 41:46
Fairness and Justice	al-Naḥl 16:90; Hūd 11:85; al-Isrā’ 17:35; al-Raḥman 55:8-9; al-Baqarah 2:282
Friendliness	al-Ḥujurāt 49:10, 13
Generosity	al-Aḥzāb 33:35; al-Ḥadīd 57:18; al-Baqarah 2:272
Gratitude	Ibrāhīm 14:7, 37; al-Zumar 39:7, Luqman 31:12; Āli ‘Imrān 3:145; al-Baqarah 2:172
Honesty	al-Baqarah 2:261-283
Humbleness	al-Shu‘arā’ 26: 215; Hūd 11:23
Keep promise	al-Ṣaff 61: 2-3
Moderation	al-Baqarah 2:143; al-A‘raf 7:31, 55; Luqman 31:18-19
Patience	al-Furqān 25:63; Āli ‘Imrān 3:134; al-Baqarah 2:153; al-Muzammil 73:10; al-Ma‘ārīj 70:5
Professionalism	al-Qaṣaṣ 28:26
Punctuality	al-Mā’idah 5:8
Responsibility	al-Baqarah 2:286; al-Isrā’ 17:34, 36
Self-Reliance	al-Najm 53:39
<i>Taqwā</i>	al-Ḥujurāt 49:13; Āli ‘Imrān 3:186; al-Ṭalāq 65:2
<i>Tawakkal</i>	Āli ‘Imrān 3:159; al-Mā’idah 5:23; al-Ṭalāq 65:3
Tolerance	al-Ṭalāq 65:4; al-Baqarah 2:286, Āli ‘Imrān 3:159; al-Shūrā 42:40
Transparency	al-Baqarah 2:282
Trustworthiness	al-Naḥl, 16:90; al-Baqarah 2: 283; al-Nisā’ 4:58
Truthfulness	al-Mā’idah 5:119

The application of these values leads to the formation of three major components of values, namely religious, quality and personal values. Component of religious values is the pillar of the whole principle. It consists of the following values such as *taqwa*, benevolence, promoting good and forbidding evil (*amr ma'rūf nahy munkar*). It forms the basis for each member of an organization in determining whether his every action is right or wrong, good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate from the Sharia perspective. It finally leads to an improvement in the quality of work.

The component of quality values stresses on productivity and quality itself. Being professional, collective, punctual and mutual consultation (*shūrā*) are supporting values for the improvement of productivity and quality. Besides, knowledge and skill also should be possessed in carrying out daily work efficiently.

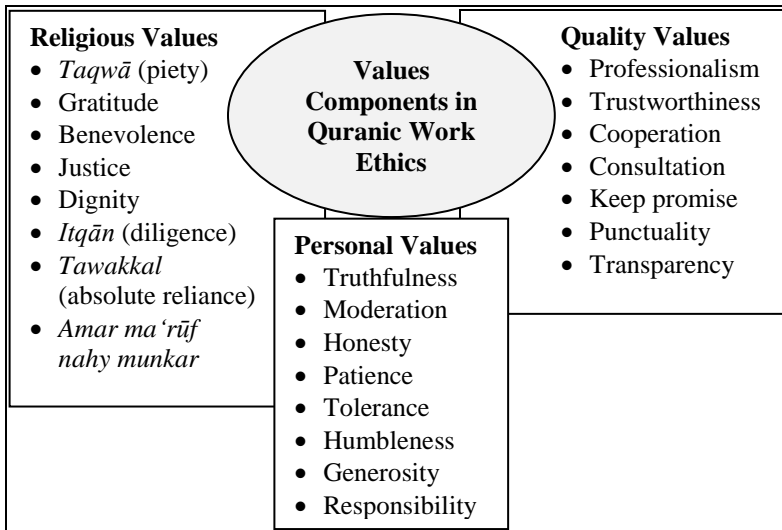
Component of personal values plays an important role as well in the success of an organization. Employees are engaged in interpersonal communications while carrying out their duty. Being moderate, patient, honest, tolerant, humble and accountable are among personal values for creating good relationship. These three components of values are illustrated in Figure 1.

In overall, the values of Qur'anic work ethics focus on the relations between man and man including its environment, and with their Creator. Above all, it can be concluded that the Qur'anic work ethics is highly dependent on one's state of religious faith towards Allah SWT. An organization could directly benefit by having devout workers as they are balanced in all aspects. According to Kamal, in philosophical view, a devout worshipper will not only improve performance and productivity of a corporation, but will result in noble conduct among workers and employers.⁵⁸ Hence, any effort to improve an organization should be made by instilling Islamic virtues that are based upon faith and devotion towards Allah.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Hassan, M.K., "Etika Kerja dan Professionalisme: Satu Tinjauan Semula," in *Seminar Etika Kerja dan Profesionalisme dari Perspektif Islam* (Selangor: Universiti Pertanian Malaysia, 1998).

⁵⁹ Wan Husin, "Work Ethics from the Islamic Perspective in Malaysia."

Figure 1: Values Components in Qur'anic Work Ethics⁶⁰



Implications of Qur'anic Work Ethics

The Qur'anic ethics have indeed shed the light on the moral obligations that are essential to promote positive work culture and consequently, assuring the accomplishment of organizational objective. The implications of these values and ethics are summarized as below:

- Optimizing work performance

The inculcation of the values such as *itqān* (diligence) will motivate the employee to perform up the job with the maximum effort. This is to say, that he will accomplish the job in orderly fashion and in compliance with the provided guideline. Driven by the spirit of *itqān*, the employee will put forth his best effort to ensure that each task and responsibility is accomplished with reasonable and desirable quality within the time frame. Without relying on extrinsic motivation such as salary increment, an

⁶⁰ Modification from Nor Azzah Kamri, "Implementation of Islamic Ethics in Organizations: Malaysian Experience" (Proceedings of 2010 International Conference on Humanities, Historical and Social Sciences, Singapore, 25-28 February 2010).

employee will eventually become accustomed to hard work and intensive effort to produce the intended result. In addition, the employee will also foresee the benefit from the outcome of his work that he strives to impart his skill, knowledge and effort in his work. Consequently, the employee will work hard in any field of interest and not preferring high leisure in work.

Similar to *itqān*, the value of *ihsān* (benevolence) is also important to generate dynamic work performance. An employee, who embodies *ihsān*, will perform his work with cautiousness, humble, and concern. He will strive to do his job as best as possible, as perfect as possible or full potential, on the expense of his benevolence towards himself and other people that he wants people to benefit from his work and enjoy his service. An *ihsān* employee will not be satisfied with his work, if he performs it half-heartedly or in careless manner. On the other hand, he understood that work is regarded as a deed and that by doing the service, it will provide him a great pleasure to assist and help others, while he himself is earning from the assistance. *Ihsān* also help to strike the balance between the character of individualism and collectivism, where an employee develop his self interest and concern, without neglecting his social responsibility and contribution to the society.

To further optimize work performance, the value of honesty and truthfulness is absolutely essential. Honesty is indeed one of the primary Islamic ethical maxims in business.⁶¹ Furthermore, absolute honesty is one of the important tenets of business in all business transactions and an open market.⁶² Indeed, Allah commands people to contribute to charity from the pure, honest money.⁶³ Honesty assists an employee to clarify any conflicts of interest and emphasize his intention and objective of work. The development of an honest characteristic is based on the consciousness towards the presence of Allah, which thereof remind an employee to display honest conduct in the work

⁶¹ M.A. Musa, "Islamic Business Ethics and Finance: an Exploratory Study of Islamic Banks in Malaysia" (Proceedings of 8th International Conference on Islamic Economics and Finance, Doha, 19-21 December 2011).

⁶² Nik Mohamed Affandi Nik Yusoff, *Islam & Business* (Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 2002).

⁶³ See Ibn Katsir, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, Chapter 2 on the Encouragement to Spend Honest Money for Allah's Sake.

process. Islam also promises honesty with rewards, which an employee does not only enjoy in the world but in the hereafter. Honesty does not only reward a person with the pleasure of Allah, but also assist the employee to focus and produce the output based on his best ability and capability.

Another important value in boosting up work performance is patience. Patience and perseverance are the law of the nature, hence the stimulus of success. In regard to work, patience is the key weapon to overcome any challenges and barriers that come along in the work process. Allah reinstate that He love the good doers; those who spend in the cause of Allah during ease and hardship, refrain anger and often pardon others (al-Furqān 25:63). This verse implies that patience is a part of good deed, which promises success and rewards in return for the action and that Allah's assistance will be with the patient ones (al-Baqarah 2:153). An employee, who possesses the value of patience, will perceive patience is an essence of his work ethic, in which he does not give up easily when things go wrong or come in undesirable manner, but view it as challenge for him to achieve his goal. The challenge does not demoralize him, but rather boost his spirit to further amplify his effort and enhance his performance, so that the objective of the work will be fulfilled. The success of patients is illustrated in the history of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H), who has been exhorted to have patience at the excesses being committed by his opponents.

In addition, effort is also seen as the necessary ingredient to enhance work performance. That is, productive involvement minimizes social and economic problems, while allowing a person to obtain reasonable living standards for self and family. What is significantly important is that effort in Islam is held in the highest regard. The second Caliph, 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r.a.), was quoted saying, "I would prefer dying while struggling for my sustenance and the sustenance of my children, to dying while fighting in the defense of faith"⁶⁴ and "The strength of any deed, is not to postpone today's work to tomorrow." The fourth Caliph, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (r.a.), stated, "Do not be one of those who hope

⁶⁴ Quoted in: Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, *a Muslim's Reflections on Democratic Capitalism* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1984), 23.

for a better world to come without working for it” and “He, who does not perfect his/her work, will bring confusion to self.”⁶⁵ The value of effort is manifested in an employee’s dedication, cooperation, responsibility, social relations and creativity to achieve the organizational goal.⁶⁶

Professionalism is another important value to enhance work performance. Professionalism encompasses the basic elements of education and qualification, training and experience, standards and regulations, ethics and integrity, responsibility and accountability, reasonableness and fairness, and the complementary but yet necessary scale of fees.⁶⁷ Professionalism is about motivating human resource to achieve organizational performance objectives. It is about achieving the best from available resources. It is about making an organization competitive and ahead of competitors.⁶⁸ The term of professionalism is interpreted in Islam can be explained by a combination of the meaning of two Qur’anic expressions, namely *al-qawī* and *al-amīn*, which is described as the most ideal person to be employed (al-Qaṣaṣ 28:26). In the context of work culture, the principle must be instilled in every worker, as it could drive an organization to maximize their achievements. One of the methods to measure an employee’s contribution is by evaluating his job quality and capability in performing his tasks. If the quality and work performance of a worker continues to improve, it will definitely result in a better performance by the organization.⁶⁹

- Performing work as worship

The Qur’an refers work (any beneficial work), as a good deed (*al-‘amal al-ṣāliḥ*), therefore an obligation of every Muslim. It is not merely an attempt to obtain a lawful (*ḥalāl*) income or

⁶⁵ ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib, *Nahjul Balagha: Sermons, Letters, and Sayings of Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.)*, ed. and trans F. Ebeid (Beirut: Dar Alkitab Al-Lubnani, 1989), 469.

⁶⁶ Nik Muhammad Rahman, N. Muhamad and A.S. Othman, “The Relationship Between Islamic Work Ethics and Organizational Commitment: a Case Analysis,” *Malaysian Management Review* 41, no. 1, (2006): 79-89.

⁶⁷ Muhammad Fuad Abdullah, “Professionalism: The Islamic Perspective,” *Jurutera* (February 2004): 9-11.

⁶⁸ Muhammad Fuad Abdullah, “Professionalism: The Islamic Perspective.”

⁶⁹ Wan Husin, “Work Ethics from the Islamic Perspective in Malaysia.”

nourishment (*rizq*) to fulfil the necessities of life, but it is also a part of worshipping Allah, to achieve success in the hereafter. Therefore, Muslim employees perceive the work as a transcendent spiritual consciousness, rather than just mere physical activities that pursues material benefits. In performing a deed, a Muslim is expected to always seek Allah's bounties and comply with His commands. Therefore, the understanding of work as worship is important to induce positive work attitude, in the regard of work as a deed that is the counterpart of faith (*īmān*). Furthermore, good deeds beckon the pleasure of Allah and His bounty, which is the anticipation of Muslims towards the success of their life.

In order for the work to be regarded as good deeds, it must be conducted properly and in accordance to the religious guideline. In other words, an employee must perform his work with dignity and respect, which he does not abuse, but rather observe the sanctity of work. Dignity negates meanness, arrogance, self-conceit, haughtiness or false pride. The Muslims are required to preserve dignity by refusing to conduct bad deeds such as lying, trading in alcohol, drug dealing and trading, production and sale of unethical goods, prostitution, monopoly and earning interests on investments⁷⁰. Islam places great emphasis on the code of lawful (*ḥalāl*) and unlawful (*ḥarām*) in the work activities, specifically referring to business transactions. Many Qur'anic verses disapprove the wrongful taking of the property, as well as consulting a judge in order to take other's property, while knowing it is a sinful act (al-Baqarah 2:188). The Qur'an also reproaches the practice of bribery in the work process as it incites biased decisions and negative moral judgments. Bribery is strongly condemned in Islam as it is considered as consuming the wealth of other people unjustly (al-Baqarah 2:188).

In complementary to dignity, the value of *taqwā* (piety) develops the notion of god-consciousness while performing duties. The devotion to God, which is interpreted in every aspects of life, does not segregate between social life and religious life. Every action of a pious employee deepens his belief towards Allah, regardless of his actions. Even while performing his job, he

⁷⁰ Samir Ahmad Abuznaid, "Business ethics in Islam: the Glaring Gap in Practice," *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management* 2, no. 4 (2009): 278-288.

remembers that Allah is watching him and that every of his action is blessed if he performed it according to Allah's command. The success of his work is entitled to Allah, in which in this situation, involves the value of *tawakkal* (absolute reliance); where a pious employee put in his effort and prayed to Allah for the best result. Combining the value of *taqwā* and *tawakkal*, an employee will be able to overcome any challenges that may come in the way and increase his effort along with his prayer, believing that Allah will answer his prayer and reward his effort. In return, the value of *taqwā* and *tawakkal* will elevate the meaning of work beyond physical elucidation towards a more holistic perception.

- Forging harmonious relation

The value of *tawḥīd* (unity) demonstrates the importance of unanimity in social relationship. In the work environment, the diversity background of the employees existed, often consisting of the racial, national and religious affiliation. To resolve the differences, trust and friendship must be developed under the umbrella of *tawḥīd*. The concept of *tawḥīd* does not intend to enforce the religion on the advocates of other religion, but rather implies the common humanity that is shared among the employees and binds the ties among them with love and affection towards one another. A significant mechanism that can be used to forge such trust is the unity objective and interest in the work process. By understanding that they are striving after the same goal, the employees will have the tendency to disregard their differences and work towards achieving their goal. On the other hand, the value of trusteeship can be interpreted as the action of caring the environment and the use the part of wealth for social purposes. This can be implemented as a business opportunity of making new environmental technology.

In the process of enhancing the harmonious relation among work associates, honesty and promptness with promises is the essence of the friendship. The Prophet (P.B.U.H) asserted that one of characteristics of the dishonest person (hypocrite) is cannot keep his promise, and thus cannot be trusted.⁷¹ The importance of keeping promises has been underlined by the Prophet (P.B.U.H)

⁷¹ See al-Bukhārī, Book 8, Vol. 73, no. of *Hadith* 117, Good Manners and Form (*al-Adāb*)

and he assured paradise in the hereafter to those who keep his promise. In the work environment, the values of honesty and keeping promises assist to develop good relation among colleagues as well as delivering the quality of the service to customers. Both values secure the continuity of an organization, internally and externally. In the internal dimension, once the value of honesty and keeping promises has embedded in the work culture, the employees have the tendency to share knowledge and experience among one another, which in turn enhance their personal relation. In regards to the external dimension, honesty and keeping promises develop ‘friendship marketing,’ which maintains existing customer and attract new customers, hence sustaining good relation among both parties.

On the other hand, humbleness is a positive attitude that is established as the foundation of moral excellence that assists the development of good relationship. It is indeed one of the traits of a true believer⁷² and that its absence removes any other virtue from the believer except for the superficial qualities. Humbleness is an attribute praised by the Holy Qur’an and Prophet Muhammad, for the prophet himself is advised by Allah to display humbleness towards believers (al-Shu‘arā’ 26:215). Being humble is best defined in general as being unassuming of one’s own greatness, precedence, or importance among others. In friendship, humbleness assists to degrade the egocentrism or selfishness of one self, and make the person to realize that he cannot survive alone and in the need of others to assist him. The value of humbleness also makes a person more socially acceptable with his modest personality and ability to be humble on his achievement hence sparing a room for further improvement.

Accompanying humbleness is humility, which is a person’s realization on his shortcoming. Humility is probably best defined by Ibn al-Qayyim: “There are two realities which we must fully grasp in order to be truly characterized with the noblest characteristic of humility. First and foremost is to come to truly know Allah’s perfection, His abundant favors upon us and how we are fully dependent upon Him. Secondly, we have to come to

⁷² Salmān al-‘Awdah, “How to Achieve Humbleness,” http://www.onislam.net/english/reading-islam/living-islam/growing-in_faith/453884-how-to-achieve-humbleness.html, retrieved on 14 September 2011.

know ourselves, where we come from and our numerous weaknesses and shortcomings.”⁷³ In the hereafter, Allah promises the paradise to all Muslims who humbled themselves to Allah as they are regarded among those who has perform righteous deeds (Hūd 11:23). Humility enables an employee to reflect his ability, which he able to seek help from others whenever possible and in turn, offer assistance to anybody who needs help. An employee who embodies humility tends to generate a group of work companion that may assist him to enhance his work performance.

- Developing mutual trust

Work and business generally rely on mutual trust. In order to develop mutual trust, honesty, responsibility (*amānah*) and truthfulness is an important value. The connotation of truthfulness is similar of honesty, which both values describe the ‘authenticity’ of a person intention and conduct. The concept of *amānah* (responsibility) will lead Muslims to undertake the responsibility of work with its consequences, appreciate a work which requires responsiveness, be an initiator of taking new responsibility, and follow up work to achieve results.⁷⁴ Trust is a very ‘fragile’ sentiment that requires time and effort to build it. But when a person wins the trust of others, he will be held in high regard and will always be entrusted with tasks, responsibilities and positions.⁷⁵ Thereof, both values are a useful instrument to bind

⁷³ Cited in: John Ederer, “Humility,” <http://www.suhaibwebb.com/personaldvlp/character/humility/>, retrieved on 4 August 2010.

⁷⁴ Hossein Khanifar et al., “Identifying the Dimensions and Components of Islamic Work Values (IWV) for Public Services Sector in Iran,” *European Journal of Social Sciences* 22, no.2 (2001): 246-261.

⁷⁵ According to a common assumption, truthfulness cannot have an intrinsic value in business. Instead, it is considered only instrumentally valuable for business, because it contributes to successful trust-building. Some authors deny truthfulness even this limited role by claiming that truth-telling is not an essential part of business. Some others, however, argue that truthfulness has indeed an intrinsic value in business and identify the conceptual confusions underlying the opposite view. The account of truthfulness as a virtue shows that truthfulness is both valuable for its own sake and instrumental to further valuable goals. It helps pinpoint the implicit contradiction in claiming that truthfulness has an instrumental value only. Please see Lubomira Radoilska, “Truthfulness and Business,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 79, no.1-2, (2008): 21-28.

employees of various backgrounds. An honest or truthful employee also has the higher possibility to embark career advancement than the dishonest ones. Honesty and trustfulness is repetitively mentioned in the Qur'an that Allah promises His pleasure and paradise for those who adhere truthfulness and honesty (al-Mā'idah 5:119).

Besides honesty and truthfulness, trustworthiness is among the positive values that are emphasized in the Qur'an. It demands sincerity in work and purity of intention from every believer. In business dealings, for example, Muslims are expected to always be trustworthy and prevent one from taking advantage over others.⁷⁶ Trustworthiness generates mutual trust among employees involved in the work process, which accelerate the progress and ease the communications between the individuals. It also creates a pleasant ambience for the employees to synergize their skills and capabilities, without any conflicts of interest or negative perception towards one another. In addition, it provides a strong foundation for the employees to bond, hence perpetuate the accomplishment of the organizational goal.

In addition to the abovementioned values, transparency is one of the silent prerequisites of any free and efficient market, which helps to prevent the corruption and abuse of the agreement. Transparency in Islam is conducted based on mutual understanding that faulty conduct and acts of deception obstruct justice and limit freedom of action in the marketplace. Islam demands fair, open and ethical behavior in all business transactions and they should be made through witnessed, written contracts. The concept of transparency has been demonstrated by Allah in the verse of debt, where a person whenever is engaged with a certain debt for a specific term, it must be written down in the name of justice (al-Baqarah 2:282). Transparency is the requirement for openness in all tenets of the public affairs. It allows stakeholders to gather information that may be critical to uncovering abuses and defending their interests.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Darwish A. Yousef, "Islamic Work Ethic: A Moderator between Organizational and Job Satisfaction in Cross Cultural Context," *Personnel Review* 30, no. 2 (2001): 152-169.

⁷⁷ A.S. Mikailu and M. M Maishanu, "Islamic Value System, Accountability and Transparency in the Public Service," from: <http://www.academia.edu>

Another important element of developing mutual trust is punctuality. Thus, in order to get the task of Islamic economics fully accomplished, a Muslim worker must be disciplined, responsible, punctual and performs the work to the highest quality. In the context of work culture, this principle could train an individual to comply with directives and responsibilities. It will prevent one from committing sinful acts such as deception, hypocrite, and slander, that could lead to cause others trouble.⁷⁸ This is in accordance with Allah's command to be punctual and standing firm for Allah, witness of justice and upholding justice, regardless of others hatred towards the action of just (al-Mā'idah 5:8). A disciplined worker will not only be faithful and responsible, but will also uphold the standing of an organization from slander and lies. In fact, punctuality is placed upon discussion and counsel whenever conflicts arise,⁷⁹ so that fairness and justice can be uphold.

- Enhancing organizational commitment

The organizational commitment is an important element in a work organization, whereby it ensures the employees dedication and loyalty to serve the organization. In this regards, the value of fair and justice is the gist, being that both values are an individual responsibility. No cheating and fraudulent should be tolerated in doing his/her work. Allah orders the believers to always maintain justice and conduct a good deeds, while being fair and just in all his/her dealings. At the same time, the believers are asked to avoid reproachable conducts in their activities (al-Nahl, 16:90). This value is a precision in business dealings, full information to the buyer, and the illegal actions of payment and receipt of interest.⁸⁰ The value of fairness and just will assist to evict bitterness and spitefulness among employees as well as cultivating the spirit of love and brotherhood between them. The employers are also highly commanded to be just and fair towards their employees by

/2570307/ISLAMIC_VALUE_SYSTEM_ACCOUNTABILITY_AND_TRANS
PARENCY_IN_THE_PUBLIC_SERVICE, retrieved on 14 March 2013.

⁷⁸ Wan Husin, "Work Ethics from the Islamic Perspective in Malaysia."

⁷⁹ Wan Husin, "Work Ethics from the Islamic Perspective in Malaysia."

⁸⁰ G. Rice, "Islamic Ethics and the Implications for Business," *Journal of Business Ethics* 18, no.4 (1999): 345-358.

providing fair wages, good working conditions, suitable work and excellent brotherly treatment and taking care of their welfare concerns.

In the meantime, generosity is a useful tool to promote employees' commitment towards organization. Islam views that generosity is a noble virtue that Allah promised a great reward and forgiveness in the hereafter to those who are being generous (al-Aḥzāb 33:35). In general sense, generosity often involves giving money and goods to the needy and is channelled through the payment of *zākah*, *infāq* and *ṣadaqah*. In the work environment, however, generosity implies being benevolent and unselfish with possessions, time and attitudes towards others. It also connotes the generosity of knowledge sharing among employees which enrich the work process and accelerate the work progress. The generosity of employers includes in the payment of wages to employees and the increment of salary, which motivate work performance and enhance organizational commitment.

Further, friendly and amicable work environment is also an important factor that promotes employees commitment towards organization. This is to say that the employees must practice towards one another and ousted hostility in the work environment. True Muslims will display gentle, friendly, pleasant and likeable personality. No discrimination must exist among Muslims, regardless of nationality, gender or color. The only difference between Muslims should be on the basis of piety. Allah explains that the significance behind the creation of different genders and tribes is that for one kind to befriend each other and to learn from one another (al-Ḥujurāt 49:1). The value of friendliness among employers and employees will provide a comfortable work environment that support dynamic work culture and generate the culture of assistance and helpfulness, while eliminating the marginalization of positions and ranks among members of the organization.

Another factor that also ensures employees commitment towards organization is equality. The value of equality ensures fair treatments among employees regardless of their positions and forges unity among them. The opportunity for career development and reward and punish systems must be applicable to all races and classes of people without any distinction and without any

privileged person acquiring immunity. On the other hand, none has the right to monopolize abuse or act for his personal interest on national resources. All members of the nation have the right to benefit from the national resources, each according to just and equitable rights and obligations.⁸¹ Thus, every individual is rewarded according to what he presents to his society and community. The only distinction between people is on the basis of service that they offer. For instance, it does not look at a hardworking individual and a sluggish individual on equal footing in terms of pay and financial rewards.⁸² In this regards, Allah reminds the employees that everyone is either rewarded or punished for deeds accordingly, and every of their actions is observed by God (al-An‘ām 6:132).

- Promoting teamwork and collectiveness

Cooperation and collaboration among workers is a highly-rated virtue in Islam, as both values promote the spirit of teamwork and collectiveness among members of work organization.⁸³ Islam advocates the importance of fostering good cooperation and collaboration, which in turn could improve the job quality. By instilling these values, job functions will run smoothly, with the cooperation among the employees towards one direction. Allah commands human being to cooperate in goodness and righteousness but part ways in sin and evilness (al-Mā'idah 5:2). In the context of work culture, an organization will only succeed when there exists cooperation and collaboration amongst the co-workers in performing their job.⁸⁴ Collaboration and cooperation is the foundation of success, as it the unity of people will create a synergy of skills and capability; hence produce a better work outcome. In an organization, although collaboration and cooperation exists, healthy competition is allowed as long as it could lead to better performance since it does not to deny human's

⁸¹ G. Rice, "Islamic Ethics and the Implications for Business."

⁸² G. Rice, "Islamic Ethics and the Implications for Business."

⁸³ Selat, N., "Adat Melayu: Kesenambungan dan Perubahan (Malay Customs: Continuity and change)," in *Adat Melayu Serumpun* (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya, 2001), 91.

⁸⁴ Wan Husin, "Work Ethics from the Islamic Perspective in Malaysia."

needs but to fulfil it with occupational objectives or business dealings that do not contradict the religious teachings.⁸⁵

Meanwhile, consultation is also important to create collectiveness of an organization. The power of consultation has been proven in this current business world, which it assist to robust the performance of an organization. A leader of an organization is encouraged to consult with his team in making a decision so that they can help one another by sharing their ideas and experiences concerning issues such as products, services and other matters. Allah mentioned the importance of consultation in parallel with the response to Allah and the establishment of prayer (al-Shūrā 42:38). Consulting others denotes an employee's humbleness on his self and his willingness to degrade his egocentrism to listen to others opinion. It also denotes his appreciation of his colleagues or employers that he seek out opinions from other to justify or analyze his judgment or decision. Consultation also develops ideas and diminish mind blocks that may occur at times, while expanding a simple thought to a huge concept. The process of consultation and sharing ideas will develop the spirit of togetherness and collectiveness among the employees. In a bigger picture, these values will lead to the unitary of Islamic *ummah* within the spirit of *ukhuwwah Islāmiyyah*.

Conclusion

Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that Qur'anic work ethics is the guidance to every Muslim individual to perform job ethically based on the core guidance of Islam, the Qur'an. The result of this study presents a comprehensive picture of work ethics based on Qur'anic teachings. As the Qur'anic teaching trespasses time, cultural and national differences, it is believed that the compliance and adherence to the Qur'anic teaching, will enable the Muslims to progress economically and socially, without compromising religious principles and obligations. This study shows the importance of religious moral be practiced at workplace as religion provides a complete rules of good and bad, right and wrong, and the evil and angel. Work ethics in Islam is generally derived from relationship between men and the God (*ḥabl min Allāh*), and men and his fellow human beings (*ḥabl min al-nās*)

⁸⁵ Ali, "Scaling an Islamic Work Ethic".

and other creatures. Thus, every human action (work) strives to fulfil the achievement in the world and also success in the hereafter (*al-falāḥ fī al-dunyā wa al-ākhirah*).

Therefore, unlike the western concept of work ethics that mainly based on the philosophy of materialism, work ethics in Islam is beyond that philosophy and seen as an act of worshipping Allah. This act forms some values that mentioned in many Qur’anic verses, such as trustfulness, honesty, fairness and justice, generosity, kindness, cooperation and responsibility, and so on. As promised in the Qur’an, adherence to these values will implicate to the growth of Muslim civilization and gain the Muslim identity. Consequently, it will boost up the Muslim righteousness, happiness and prosperity. Finally, there is no other way for Muslims to re-growth their civilization and re-gain their identity except for full obedience to the core guidance and the ultimate resource of Islamic teaching, which is the Qur’an.

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