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Islamic Work Ethics: An antecedent for “Sustainable Motivation” and “Effective Employee”

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Abstract:

From personnel management to human resource management, from human resource management to strategic human resource management and from strategic human resource management to talent management, quest of scholars and practitioners is to devise frameworks, processes and systems which help in finding, building and utilizing employees in such a way that organizational goals are achieved. Working on same lines, this conceptual paper intends to provide a framework of “Effective Employee”. Ethics are the rules of life that governs human interaction and human behavior. Ethics starts playing their part when a person needs to make choices from different available moral principles. Islamic ethics framework has been used to find out the effective behaviors of employees. Previous studies have been explored and based on already available literature, a framework has been devised. Framework hypothesized a significant relationship among Islamic work ethics and effective employee with the help of other variables including OCB, Innovative work behavior, knowledge sharing and sustainable motivation. Future researcher can validate or refine this model and then it will be ready to use for the practitioners.

Key Words: Islamic Work Ethics, Sustainable Motivation, Effective Employee

1. Introduction:

Organizations are supposed to perform in a direction, envisioned by its originators. Management literature is filled with notions like Strategic human resource management, innovation, creativity, knowledge sharing, knowledge diffusion, knowledge creation, organizational learning and work ethics etc. Purpose of implementing and improving each of these notions is to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. According to Agha, S.¹, there is a very strong and positive relationship among competitive advantage and firm's performance. So, focus of entire management activities are converged towards increasing firm's

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performance through achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

It is an established fact among the researchers and managers that human resource plays most important function in order to achieve desired firm performance ². Many corporate reports have stated firm's people as most important asset of the firm. Barney & Wright ³ argued that human resource is the only resource which can fit to the definition of valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable and hence provides sustainable competitive advantage to the firm. Discussion signifies the prominence of human resource for achieving sustainable competitive advantage and for increasing firm's performance (financial/non-financial) which is considered to be the ultimate desired outcome for any organization.

Management scholars have covered a long journey from personnel management to human resource management (HRM) and then from HRM to Strategic HRM and finally from talent management to strategic talent management. After the article "War of Talent" ⁴, talent management has attracted the attention of many scholars towards this concept. This recent concept has shifted the interest of scholars from traditional notions including human resource management and strategic human management. Now talent management has been again renamed with additional features as strategic talent management ⁵.

Organizations have focused on managing human resource and identifying the talented employees but no or very less research is available which highlights an effective employee. An employee that not only innovative, but also satisfied with the organization and intrinsically motivated to perform for the organization (sustainably motivated). In simple words, an effective employee requires a mental ability of as well as desirable work place behaviors. Combination of both attributes will come up in the shape of an "Effective Employee", having ability to perform well for the organization.

Managers have tried their best to keep employees motivated because a motivated employee can become an effective employee. There are many ways to keep employee motivated but in recent past Deci & Ryan ⁶ have given the concept of sustainable motivation which is more inclined towards internal motivation of an employee. Managers need to give lesser intention towards keeping employees motivated, if once they are self motivated or gain a state of sustainable motivation.

Workplace behaviors are guided by the work ethics. Many articles are available on Max Weber's Protestants work ethics (PWE) and conducted in American and European countries. These countries follow

the PWE for job commitment and job satisfaction ⁷. Muslims culture has its own work values that are guided by Qur'ān and Sharī'ah.

Religion is very controversial subject in social science. In west, there is no consensus among the academician on the definition of religion. Max Weber refused to define religion ⁸. Durkheim ⁹ tried to define religion as, “a unified set of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, all those who adhere to them”. This probably is a most fitted definition of religion in the context of business studies which explains life as guiding principles of social beliefs and practices. However most of the social scientists belong to western society in 19th century including Freud, Comte, Weber and Marx thought that with the advent of industrial society religion has lost its importance gradually. Hence, they considered religion as early human condition before politics, law and modern science emerged. This shows secular mindset of the 19th century western scholars. But this does not depict the whole story. Secularization theories have been criticized in the recent past ¹⁰. Recent study of Norris and Inglehart ¹¹ also admit the power of religion as, “the world as a whole now has more people with traditional religious views than ever before – and they constitute a growing proportion of the world population”. Even the foremost proponents of secularization during 1960s, has changed his view and admitted, “The world today, with some exceptions... is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labelled secularization theory is essentially mistaken” ¹².

Looking at this reality, few Muslim scholars have written articles on Islamic work ethics (IWE) and its relation with desirable work outcomes ¹³. But no one has explained the power of IWE in developing an employee into “Effective Employee” for the organization that has the capability to transform its abilities in gaining sustainable competitive advantage and ultimately increased performance of the firm.

This paper intends to propose a framework for “Effective Employee”. This is a conceptual paper which tries to find out linkages among different variables in order to finally reach up to a framework that probably help managers in identifying Effective employees.

2. Islamic Work Ethics:

2.1. Ethics:

Greece word “Ethos” is the origin of “Ethics”, which means attitude of people and culture, spirit and character ¹⁴. Oxford dictionary has defined

ethics as: “(1) a system of moral principles by which human actions may be judged as good or bad, right or wrong; (2) the rules of conduct recognized in respect of a particular class of human actions”¹⁵.

2.2. Ethical Theory:

There are several ethical theories existing in academic literature. Each one of them has its own boundaries, limitations and underlying assumptions. These include utilitarianism theory, virtue ethics theory, relativism theory, deontology theory, egoism theory and divine command theory. Ethics based on religion are guided by “Divine command theory”. According to this theory, “An action or kind of action is right or wrong if and only if and because it is commanded or forbidden by God”¹⁶. In simple words, theory claim, “What ultimately makes an action right or wrong, is its being commanded or forbidden by God and nothing else”¹⁷.

2.3. Islamic work ethics:

Guiding theory for Islamic work ethics study is “Divine command theory”. Islam guides its followers in every moment of life. Its instructions encompass all the fields of life. Work is given extreme importance in Islam. According to Nasr, S. H¹⁸, “Work carried out in accordance with the *Sharī’ah* is a form of *djihād* and inseparable from the religious and spiritual significance associated with it”. Two Arabic words, ‘amal’ and ‘sun’ are considered to be the equivalent of ‘work’. The first term means ‘action as contrasted with knowledge’ and second means ‘making or producing something artistically’. For the completion of work and sense of responsibility, Qur’ān has emphasized Muslims to fulfill their covenants. It’s mentioned in Qur’ān: “O you who have attained to faith! Be faithful to your covenants [*vōd*] (M. Asad translation) According to Nasr, S.H, these covenants include the whole of relationships with God, himself and the whole word.

In every traditional society, work is closely connected or associates with worship and prayer and this link is clearly visible in the Islamic teachings. There is a Qur’ānic verse as, “By the afternoon! Surely Man is in the way of loss, save those who believe, and do righteous deeds”, in which it is made clear to believers that righteous deeds are part of faith and principles of religion. Furthermore, relation between prayer and work is emphasized and prayerful nature of work is presented as long as it is performed in accordance with the rules of Sharī’ah.

It is mentioned in a book *Iḥyā’ Ulūm Al-Dīn* (Revival of religious sciences) written by Imām Ghazālī, “Jesus (peace and blessings be upon him) once saw a man who had completely devoted himself to worship. When he asked him how he got his daily bread, the man replied that his

brother, who worked, provided him with food. Jesus then told him, —That brother of yours is more religious than you are”¹⁹.

All the above discussion provides clear evidence that in Islam, work is not only important but also necessary. There are certain attitudes of work according to Qur’ān and Sunnah which are central to “Islamic Work Ethics”. These attitudes are: attitude to livelihood, attitude to wealth, attitude to leisure, attitude to time²⁰.

2.3.1. Attitude to Wealth:

Islam has a quiet balanced approach towards wealth. Equitable distribution of wealth is the key in the eyes of Islam. According to Owoyemi²¹, “There is no doubt that the Prophet does not like the amassing of wealth or using it solely for one's enjoyment or for leading a luxurious life. Indeed, all Islamic legislations in matters of finance are geared towards a fair distribution of wealth.” It is mandatory for Muslims to earn the livelihood for their families but should earn and spend it according to the boundaries defined by Islam.

2.3.2. Attitude to Leisure:

There is clear cut guidance available on the balance between leisure and work in the Sayings of Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him). According to Hadīth:

“The rational man, as long as his mind is healthy, should divide his time into four: time to link with their God, time to account of themselves, time to think about the creation of God, and time to fulfill their necessities such as eating and drinking (Ibn-Ḥibbān in his Saḥīḥ).

For accuracy and hard work in job, Holy Prophet (Peace be Upon Him) said: “Allah verily likes if one of you do his job thoroughly and proficiently” (Baihaqi and Abu Ya‘lā and Ibn-‘Asākir from ‘Aīsha).

2.3.3. Attitude to time:

Hadīth has mentioned the importance of time for a Muslim. Time must be invested wisely and one is accountable for whatever he/she does. The concept of time according to Hadīth, “The Prophet says that the feet of Adam’s son will not cross the path (to Paradise) until he has been questioned and he has answered satisfactorily, about his lifetime how he spent it, about his youth, how he invested it, and about his wealth, how he earned it and how he disposed of it”²². Hadīth clearly signifies the importance of time.

2.3.4. Attitude of livelihood:

There are plenty of Aḥadīth emphasizing the importance and praise of work. According to Hadīth: “if someone goes out to seek nourishment for his small children, he is in the way of Allah. And if he works for his old

father and mother he is in the way of Allah. And if he works for himself for modesty, it is in the way of Allah, but if he works for the purpose of pride and boasting, he is in the way of shētān” (Tibrāny).

3. Knowledge Sharing:

On the basis of knowledge, world economy has undergone a shift, “Over the past fifty years it has been widely acknowledged among scholars and observers from a wide range of fields that developed economies have undergone a slow transformation based on increasing knowledge”²³.

According to Hendriks²⁴, “Knowledge sharing has been identified as a major focus area for knowledge management. The relevance of this particularly derives from the fact that it provides a link between the level of the individual knowledge workers, where knowledge resides, and the level of the organization where knowledge attains its (economic, competitive) value”.

The primary purpose of implementing knowledge management practices within the organizations is to improve the knowledge sharing²⁵. Importance of knowledge sharing can be understood by the acknowledgement of that knowledge is among the few important sources of competitive advantage but most organizations are unsuccessful in evenly disseminating the knowledge. Mckenzie & Van Winkelen²⁶ have identified three main reasons of why people are reluctant to share their knowledge;

- a. The belief that knowledge sharing with others will slow down your position and progression within the organization.
- b. If someone uses the other people idea, it will show his/her less competency.
- c. It encourages people to act as they know the best.

Knowledge can be shared at different levels. It can be shared at individual, group, team, departmental and even at business unit level within a corporation. Knowledge sharing within an organization is facilitated by knowledge sharing technologies. KM projects are developed around shared databases, intranet, group software that facilitates discussions, idea sharing and communication for successful completion of projects. It is stated by Cabrera & Cabrera²⁷, “The exchange of information among employees constitutes a key component in the creation and management of collective wisdom, and, consequently, the availability of tools that support such exchanges facilitates tremendously the implementation of knowledge management systems”.

If the knowledge is not shared with appropriate employee, team or business unit, then KM system will be failed. So knowledge sharing

culture is required to facilitate exchange of knowledge with the proper person. Knowledge sharing culture can increase the competitive advantage which an organization can obtain through implementing knowledge management system ²⁸.

3.1.1. Knowledge Sharing, Innovation and IWE:

Relationship between knowledge sharing and innovation is an established fact. There are many researches being conducted in this regards. According to Zhou & Bingxin Li ²⁹, “a firm with a broad knowledge base is more likely to achieve radical innovation in the presence of internal knowledge sharing”. Lin ³⁰ found out in his research that willingness to donate and share knowledge will improve the innovation capability. Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, P. ³¹ also confirms that knowledge sharing improve innovation performance of the firm. There are many other researches being conducted with similar results.

As for as knowledge sharing relation with innovation by using IWE framework is concerned, very few researches are available. According to Kumar & Rose ³², “The relationship between knowledge sharing capability and innovation capability of employees in the public sector organizations was found to be contingent on IWE.” Similarly Awan & Akram ³³ have conducted study on the same pattern and found out that relationship between IWE and innovation is moderated by knowledge sharing of employees. Only these two researches are available which indicates the need for exploring this relationship.

4. Innovative work behavior (IWB):

4.1. Innovation:

Innovation is a familiar phenomenon to everyone. Lot of material on innovation is available on this variable. Everybody in the organization has talked about it as well as knows its importance for organizational survival and progress. But still people have vague idea of what actually is innovation. One of the first scholars, who tried to define innovation, is Schumpeter in 1947. According to him, it's a new way of doing thing which has the ability to change the existing system values. According to Roger ³⁴ and Kanter ³⁵, innovation is a transformation of idea into useful process, product, design or service which people can use. Kind & Anderson ³⁶ have given an interesting and comprehensive definition of innovation as:

- New to the social setting in which it is introduced, although not necessarily new to the person(s) introducing it.
- Based on an idea, which is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for innovation.

- Aimed at producing some kind of benefit.
- Intentional rather than accidental.
- Not a routine change
- Public in its effects

Therefore, innovation is a most important and frustrating part of business because converting an idea into a concrete form is a real trouble ³⁷.

Individuals show various behaviors for initiation and implement of innovation. Therefore, definition of innovative work behaviors must include both the factors. According to Kanter ³⁸, innovation consists of set of individuals behaviors including idea generation, coalition building, idea transfer and idea realization. Both the behaviors (initiation and implementation) can be clearly visible in Kanter`s definition. By looking at the essentials required, innovative work behaviors can be defined as, *“individuals’ behaviors directed towards the initiation and intentional introduction (within a work role, group or organization) of new and useful ideas, processes, products or procedures.”*

4.2. Innovation and IWE:

According to Awan & Akram ³⁹, there is a positive relationship between IWE and innovation. Similar results have found out by Kumar & Rose ⁴⁰ in their study. According to their research, “the innovation strength in the Malaysian public sector is mounting. The IWE measure was found to be significant with moderate correlation and positive relationship with the innovation capability scale.” Only above mentioned two researches are available showing relation between IWE and innovation. So there is big room available for exploring the relationships.

5. Organization Citizenship Behavior:

Organ ⁴¹ has coined the term Organizational Citizenship Behavior and defined it as; “Individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization. By *discretionary*, we mean that +the behavior is not an enforceable requirement of the role of the job description, that is, the clearly specifiable terms of the person`s employment contact with the organization; the behavior is rather a matter of personal choice, such that its omission is not generally understood as punishment.”

Organ, MacKenzie and Podsakoff has revised the book in 2006 and added, “in the aggregate promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization”, in the definition of OCB. According to Organ ⁴², OCB can be practiced in five different ways: 1) Altruism, 2) Conscientiousness, 3) Sportsmanship, 4) Courtesy, 5) Civic Virtue.

Podsakoff et al.,⁴³ reviewed the existing literature on OCB and found out a lack of consensus on the constructs of OCB. Based on published material on OCB, they found out seven dimensions of OCB. These are: 1) Helping behavior towards other`s work related issues, 2) Sportsmanship, 3) Organizational loyalty, 4) Organizational compliance, 5) Individual initiatives, 6) Civic virtue and finally self-development.

5.1. OCB and IWE:

There is not a single research available that directly measure or discuss the impact of IWE on OCB but few researches have discussed the influence of religion on citizenship behavior⁴⁴. Natlianis & Raja⁴⁵ in their book discussed the influence of religion on citizenship behavior and Gyekye & Haybatollahi⁴⁶ have taken the data from three religions in their exploratory study and result indicates positive relationship between organizational behavior (including OCB) and religious affiliation.

6. Sustainable Motivation:

Essene of sustainable motivation has been extracted from the “Self Determination theory”. According to Deci & Vansteenkiste⁴⁷, there are three basic elements of Self-determination theory:

- 1) Humans are inherently proactive.
- 2) Human have inherent tendency towards development and growth.
- 3) Although development intentions are inherent but they do not happen automatically.

Deci & Ryan⁴⁸ further elaborate it as, “Its arena is the investigation of people`s inherent growth tendencies and innate *psychological needs* that are the basis for their *self-motivation* and personality integration, as well as the conditions that foster those positive processes”. Owens⁴⁹ has used this variable in her PhD thesis in order to find the relationship among sustainable motivation, job satisfaction and intent to stay in hospital nurses. She got the idea of sustainable motivation from Deci & Ryan⁵⁰ study. According to her, sustainable motivation is a same concept as autonomous motivation. Employees remain sustainably motivated if the task is personally important for the employee. A task can be “Personally important” because it is part of employee values, belief or a source of self-satisfaction.

Owens⁵¹ has defined sustainable motivation with reference to the article of Deci & Ryan⁵² as;

“Freely choosing to perform an action that is not inherently enjoyable because the target behavior is accepted and owned as *personally important*. The motivation is external but has become part of the *individual`s values*”.

6.1. Motivation and IWE:

There are few studies available on the relationship among IWE and motivation. Nas⁵³ have found out mediating role of intrinsic motivation between Islamic work ethics and employee job satisfaction. Similarly, Hayati & Caniago⁵⁴ have studied the influence of IWE on intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job performance. Result shows that IWE have greater impact on intrinsic motivation and organizational commitment than on job satisfaction and job performance.

The concept under discussion in this study is sustainable motivation. The researcher will try to check the relationship of IWE with sustainable motivation.

7. Effective employee:

History of managing human resource has started from personnel management to HRM and from HRM to SHRM and from SHRM to Strategic talent management. All these notions have focused toward identifying the practices which helps in acquiring, efficient utilization, developing and retaining human resources. Human resource department has engaged in above mentioned four broad activities.

Scholars have given some focus on identifying talented employee⁵⁵. But having a talented employee does not mean that he/she will also be very motivated for performing or practice OCB or contribute enthusiastically in the development as well as progress of organization. For such reasons, we may not call "Talented employee" as most fitting person for the organization. Let's shortly elaborate talented employee in brief. This will give a good idea about the shortcomings this concepts have and for overcoming these shortcomings, a new concept of "Effective Employee" needs to be explored.

7.1. Talent:

Talent can be generally categorized as valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable. Scholars still not agreed upon a single definition of Talent. According to some scholars, talent has been defined according to organizational requirement, environment and strategy. However, there are some common and widely accepted definitions are available on talent.

Tansley et al,⁵⁶ has defined talent as;

"Talent consists of those individuals who can make a difference to organizational performance, either through their immediate contribution or in the longer term by demonstrating the highest levels of potential".

Above definition provide a brief conception of how people perceive about "Talented employee". Talented employee is one who is technically strong,

and has an ability to efficiently as well as effectively perform within the organization.

Having ability in an employee is not a surety of performance. The point can be understood with the help of “Want” and “Demand” concepts, originally belongs to economics but also used in social sciences like in marketing. Want is the willingness to purchase a commodity and demand is the willingness to purchase a commodity backed by the person’s purchasing power. So willingness is not enough unless backed by purchasing power. Similarly, ability is the intrinsic quality of employee to perform but unless it is backed by the willingness to perform, organization cannot take any benefit from the ability.

For this reason, “talented employee” is not a comprehensive concept for identifying the “Effective employee”. This discussion will give an idea that there is a need to explore the concept of “Effective employee”, an employee who has the ability as well as willing to perform in the organization. “Effective employee” concept will be explored in this study.

7.2. Effective employee, Innovation, OCB and Sustainable motivation:

It is already known that “Effective employee” is an unexplored concept. One objective of the research is to explore this concept, operationalize it, define it and develop an instrument to measure this concept. Obviously, no relationship can be available among effective employee, innovation, OCB and sustainable motivation.

Literature provide evidence of relationships between OCB and employee performance ⁵⁷. According to Turnipseed & Rassuli, ⁵⁸, seniors give high importance to OCB while evaluating the performance of the employee. It shows that according to the seniors, if an employee practices OCB it will be an effective employee for the organization.

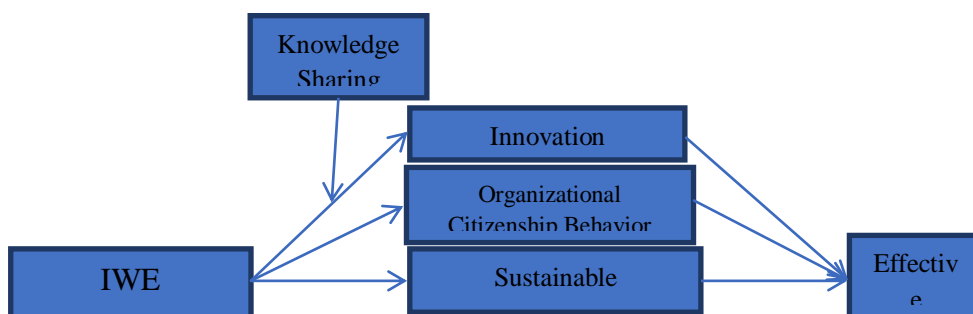
Loof & Heshmati ⁵⁹ find the relationship between innovation and performance. There are number of other studies revealing the same fact. Since innovation is an important factor for increasing the performance and OPQ32 model for selecting the suitable employee include innovative thinking style as required trait, so it can be proposed that there will a positive relationship between innovation and effective employee.

Finally, there are evidences of intrinsic motivation and work performance ⁶⁰. So it is proposed that there will be a positive relationship between sustainable motivation and effective employee.

8. Conceptual Model:

As there are few researches being conducted in the field of “Islamic Work Ethics” so there are few references available which are supporting the

model. Furthermore, sustainable motivation concept is not directly available in management literature and effective employee is also a new concept which is mentioned in this study and yet to be explored, so obviously there is no direct support available in the literature for their relationships with other variables. But still there are few indirect references available which are supporting below mentioned model.



Conclusion:

Although there is a debate on the purpose of the organization whether it is economical or social but whatever the purpose may be, organizations need capable employees for achieving the purpose. History revealed the importance of systems, processes and scientific methods in management literature as they are supposed to be the basic ingredients for achieving organizational excellence. But current shifts of scholars and practitioners for finding most effective employee is the result of studies conducted in the recent past in which scholars are seemed to agree upon the concept that human resource is the only sustainable resource which can create competitive advantage. Human behaviors are guided by the ethics he/she has. Ethics starts playing their part when a person needs to make choices from different available moral principles. So there is compelling need to deeply analyze which kind of work ethics can help employees in becoming effective employees for the organization. This study proposes a model which can help the world in answering above mentioned question. Based on the categorization of Creswell, ‘Sequential exploratory strategy’ can be used by future researchers which suggests first phase qualitative data collection and analysis, followed by second phase of quantitative data collection and analysis conducted on the base of first phase. Phase one can be the qualitative phase which aims at exploring the “Effective employee” variable. In second phase, quantitative data analysis can be used for measuring the variables and model can be tested by using statistical

techniques. Therefore, future researchers can work on this model so that it can be validated or refined.

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