



HOLISTIC APPROACH TO QUALITY: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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1. INTRODUCTION

- Islam is a progressive religion. Its worldview, principles and values are very dynamic and relevant towards creating a quality and productive society.



- It looks at human life in total perspective in line with the nature of man. It regards man as the best of all the creations. Allah says, *"We have indeed created man in the best moulds. Then do We abase him (to be) the lowest of the low, except such as believe and do righteous deeds. For they shall have a reward unfailing"*.



- This positive attitude towards the nature of human potential is the starting point for man to achieve success.
- In fact, every Muslim is required to be productive with righteous deeds and to continuously improve these deeds with quality.



- The Islamic concept of quality is comprehensive. Islam considers quality as a process of bringing positive change for excellent performance in all spectra of human endeavours. Its final objective is to improve quality living of man.
- It is a long term process and its improvement can continuously be refined as we go along. Every individual and organisation must embark seriously on quality performance with proper approach and planning.



- Quality performance cannot be narrowly understood as only to produce quality products and services which satisfy consumer demands.
- Instead, it includes all aspects that make a quality individual, organisation and society.



- Islam promotes productivity and discourages idleness or non-utilization of resources.
- Hoarding of money or other assets is discouraged. The religion imposes a 2.5% annual *zakat* on these assets.
- It also discourages privately-owned natural resources to be left unused. Non-used or under-utilisation of these resources can result in the invalidation of the private claim on them.



- For example, Caliph Umar took back for the state a piece of agricultural land belonging to Billal Ibn Rabah which was not properly utilised by the latter. This land was a gift by the state during the time of the Prophet (p.b.u.h).



- On top of that, productive activities have to be in harmony with the Islamic ethical values.
- Going against the Islamic values (which are in line with the nature of man) can do more harm rather than benefit to mankind. Because of that, Islam insists that economically non-productive activities such as gambling, or the practice of magic, or sorcery are prohibited. They are unproductive and injurious to man and society.



- Islam believes that struggle for existence without any regard for other's welfare is the rule of the jungle and cannot be tolerated, if a quality economy were to be developed. Nation's development will have to be achieved through upgrading quality performance of all organisations in the country. "Together we develop" should be the strategy and "together we share our quality living" should be the goal of the struggle.




- Serious effort in every aspect to refine our works continuously should be the concern of everybody. Every task of ours, should be done to the level of excellence. This culture of excellence if we are able to develop will definitely result in a quality society. The Prophet of Islam requested the Muslim workers to work hard. He said, *"The best income is that earned honestly by the hard-working labourer"*.
- He also taught the Muslims to be confident and optimistic in carrying out their works. He reminded, *"Ask Allah to help you and do not feel incapable, for nothing is impossible"*.

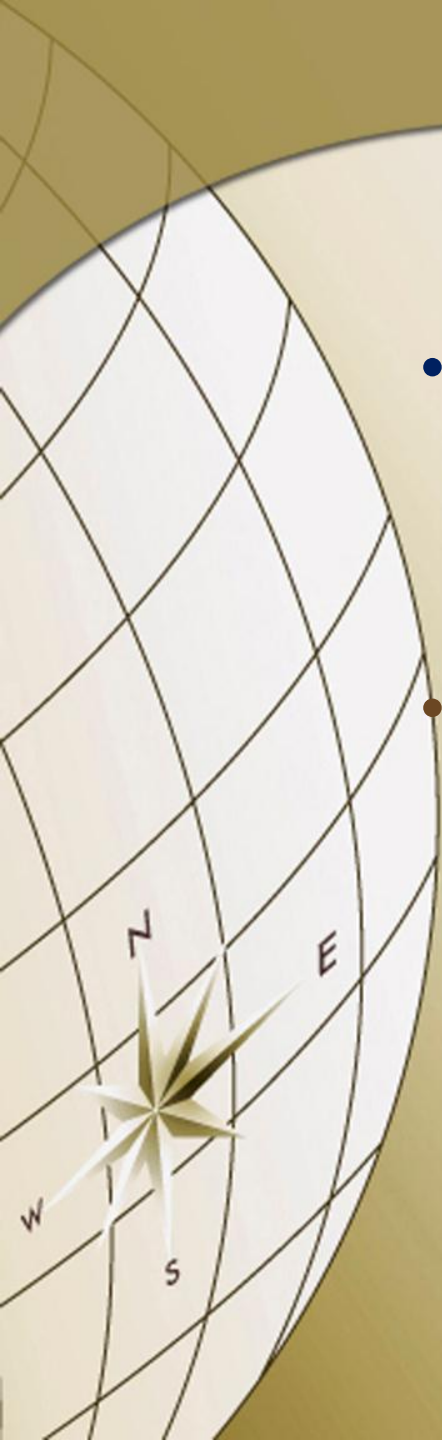
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- The Prophet (p.b.u.h) says: “God, The Exalted loves one when set to work on something to do it right (Reported by Al-Baihaqi).
 - The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) further reiterated: “God has prescribed the pursuit of perfection in every action”. (Reported by Muslim).




2. SOCIETY OF ORGANISATIONS

- The nature of our society today has become a society of organisations in which most social tasks are done in and by an organisation.
- Organisations, whether public or private, are human made institutions.

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- They are being designed through formal constitutions that outline their purposes, structures and functions. Being established for special purpose, organisations are normally effective because they concentrate on single task.



- Islam demands that the organisation be properly organised along the spirits of justice and co-operation. (***al-adl wal ihsan***)
- Proper management of an organisation can provide a conducive atmosphere for every individual worker to join efforts to undertake certain tasks in a most effective manner.

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- It is recognised by many these days that the central problem in business organisation is that modern man has lost his moral bearings or religious commitments so that he is now governed only by his immediate impulse and individual desire to earn quick and large returns immediately.




- These big returns may be through manipulations and unjust practices. This selfish desire oriented worldview can be detrimental to sustainability of the business organisation in the long run.
- In the long run, the ability of an organisation to function according to the natural laws can be a strong factor for success. The natural laws insist that in order to optimise the market shares, the organisation should be able to improve on quality and reduce the price.



- In line with the above Islamic perspective, the following presentation will discuss how an organisation should pursue quality and productivity. In order to embark for excellence, among serious considerations that need to be initiated by an organisation are the followings:

2.1 EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

- Leader is accountable to Allah s.w.t. It is an ***amanah***. i.e. he or she has to perform. Thus leadership quality in an organisation is an important factor. Good leader normally considers his opportunity to lead an organisation as a big responsibility. He will initiate changes if necessary for further improvement. He will not accept status quo if there is room for improvement. By nature in any organisation there are always areas that need further refinement. To the dynamic and good leader, quality performance of his organisation can continuously be improved.


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- The Prophet of Islam (p.b.u.h) and his rightly-guided Caliphs were very careful and decisive in appointing a leader.
 - Meritocracy and piety of a person are the very essential criteria adopted by them in making the appointments.
 - The appointment of Khalid Ibn Walid - a new convert to lead the Muslim army during the earlier period of Islam - is a very good example of the importance of meritocracy.




- The same is also true with the appointment of Usama bin Zaid at the age of eighteen to lead another military expedition.
- Both appointments were proven beyond doubt that they brought success to the Muslims.



- Since Islam does not recognise the dichotomy between worldly and religious, every act of man to assist the organisation attain its objectives, provided they are not contradicting the religion, is a religious responsibility. Thus a leader cannot be indifferent and cool to act in order to improve the organisation.

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- A stylized globe with a grid of latitude and longitude lines. A compass rose is positioned on the globe, showing the cardinal directions: North (N), South (S), East (E), and West (W). The globe is partially visible on the left side of the slide.
- The act of indifference to the problem encountered by the organisation is also very unbecoming of a Muslim leadership. The historical success of the Caliph Umar Abdul Aziz to turn-around the country from backwardness (due to the weaknesses of the earlier leadership) to prosperity was a very glaring example.

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- A successful organisation starts with a quality leader who has vision and a mission to lead the organisation realise its goals and objectives. The task to lead an organisation is a rare opportunity with a big responsibility. In Islam it is a trust (*amanah*).



- Recognising the subordinates' potentials is the very initial step. The ability to tap the potentials of the subordinates is an art. Human relations demand a lot of art. Man is a complicated creature. Each is different from the others. A good leader will be able to be effective in dealing with each individual under his supervision. Indeed leadership is an art.



- The ability to co-ordinate all these potentials to serve the objectives of the organisation requires skill in dealing with man. The leader must command the respect of his subordinates, not necessarily because of his position but essentially because of the respect that he earned from his subordinates.



- The act of transforming ideas into practical programmes or projects requires the skill and experience. Many organisations failed basically because of these shortcomings.



- A good quality leader must possess the ability to communicate his ideas in a very clear term. He needs to be a good communicator.
- Since a leader has to deal with different kinds of personalities under his supervision, he needs to be very patient and a good listener.



- Finally, Islam insists that despite all the above qualities of a good leadership, a leader must be a very pious person. From an Islamic point of view a pious person normally is a good leader. This is because if he is pious he should be able to evaluate his ability and if he does not have the good qualities of a leader, he, in the first instance, will not accept the responsibility.

2.2 QUALITY WORKERS

- Primarily, Islam insists on having quality workers in the organisation, who possess proper worldviews that can relate their positions and responsibilities with their loyalties to the Creator.
- Quality workers possess right attitudes, good characters and effective skills.



- Allah provides a positive outlook for men to be productive. The Quran says: *"It is God who hath created the heavens and the earth and sendeth down rain from the skies. And with it bringeth out fruits wherewith to feed you. It is He who hath made the ships subject to you that they may sail through the sea by His command. And the rivers (also) hath He made subject to you. And He hath made subject to you the sun and the moon, both diligently pursuing their courses, and the night and the day hath He (also) made subject to you. And He giveth you of all that ye ask for. But if ye count the favours of God, never will ye be able to number them. Verily, man is given up to injustice and ingratitude."*





2.3 GOOD MANAGEMENT

- The path to quality performance in an organisation requires a management approach based on human values and principles. Guided by the ability to provide space for individuals and strengthen team spirit. This management system considers the human resources as the most important. It starts with *the belief that man by nature is good* and can be trusted to carry out the job with full responsibility. High confidence in man's ability to quality performance is a starting point for the success of the organisation.



- If men are treated like machines, work becomes uninteresting and unsatisfying. Under such conditions, it is not possible to expect products with good quality and high reliability.
- A successful management system normally allows subordinates to make full use of their abilities. It provides the avenue where their potentials can be developed without any constraint.

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- Islam insists that management should be conducted through the democratic process of consultation (*Syura*). Allah says, "*And consult them in affairs*". In another verse, the Quran enjoins: "*And they conduct their affairs by mutual consultation*".


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- To embark on management that stresses "quality first" it requires the organisation to adopt long-term goal and objective. Consumer confidence has to be attained step by step in a very gradual process.



- If the management follows the principle of "profit first", it may obtain quick profit, but it cannot sustain competitiveness for a long period of time. Quality performance under this approach may not be a priority. It also may not be able to capture big market sales.
- The approach to quality product is an approach to have a big share of the market.




- Quality performance must not be restricted to the ability of the organisation to meet standard and regulation requirements for the products or services that it produced. If possible the organisation must consider standards and regulations as minimum requirements. They must strive to surpass these requirements and go for excellence.


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- The achievement by an organisation through quality performance has to be shared with the consumers through reduced prices and better quality products and services. The bigger profit margin obtained by the organisation concerned is obtained through bigger sales. (Market Optimisation Strategy)


2.4 APPROPRIATE STRUCTURAL SET-UP

- Organisational structure arranges the activities of the organisation to realise its goals and objectives. It co-ordinates and streamlines all functions being carried out by its various divisions. Without a proper set-up, an organisation's performance can be affected.



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- There is no hard and fast rule that an organisation must adopt a similar set-up of another successful organisation. There is a lot of flexibility in this area and it requires creativity on the part of the leader to come out with a good, relevant, and dynamic set-up. It can also be refined as the organisation expands or diversifies its activities. It also needs continuous assessment by the leadership.

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- Man by nature can reach his best capacity when the structure of the organisation provide some opportunities and room for him to manoeuvre while performing his tasks. In short, the organisation recognises that its workers are given opportunities to be creative and innovative. Without these opportunities, an individual's creativity will not be able to develop.

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- At the same time, it is a fact that team work is another important factor that must be nurtured in an organisation. The team spirit is a natural approach to productivity and quality. Team spirit can be developed in several ways. One of them is through adopting a participative management style.



- To strike a balance between the need to provide an individual opportunity and to build up a team spirit among the labour force, the structure of an organisation must be guided by several principles. These principle guidelines include:



- a. The organisational set-up will give great emphasis on a decentralised organisational structure.
- b. The divisional set-up in an organisation must be based on the requirement to serve effectively the mission statements of the respective organisation.



- c. Duplication of roles and responsibilities among different divisions should be minimised.
- d. Clear hierarchical role and authority of the position and division must be spelt out without any confusion.



- The ability to develop the need to harmonise -between creating individual opportunities and the development of team spirit among workers and divisions is the ultimate determinant for success.



3. CONCLUSION

- An Islamic approach for an organisation to pursue quality and productivity as has been deliberated above was and is part of an approach to human societal set-up as a whole. It is very relevant and has a strong case to address the complex situation of the present age. It is relevant and dynamic. This is basically because its perspective and approach to quality and productivity is in line with the nature of man. This holistic and multidimensional approach will forever benefit the entire humankind.

Allah knows best (Wal-Ilahu'alam.)