

## Islamic work ethic: where are we now? the map of Islamic work ethic

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### Abstract

Islamic Work Ethic (IWE) is a concept coined by Ali (1988) thirty years ago. IWE is interesting as Moslem population all around the world keeps growing and Moslem should pay attention toward the ethical conduct in the workplace as in Islam, working is an *ibadah* (a prayer or a virtue). This article aims to compile the researches with IWE topic, especially those explaining the relation between IWE and other variables in a sequence of antecedents and consequences. The final result of this article is an 'IWE Map' that might help researchers and practitioners to see the big picture of IWE, at least up to today. The dimensions and statements to characterize IWE is also compiled and shown in this article.

Key words: Islamic management, Ethics, Islamic Work Ethic

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### Abstrak

Islamic Work Ethic (IWE) adalah konsep yang diciptakan oleh Ali (1988) tiga puluh tahun yang lalu. IWE menarik karena populasi Muslim di seluruh dunia terus tumbuh dan Muslim harus memperhatikan perilaku etis di tempat kerja seperti dalam Islam, bekerja adalah ibadah (doa atau kata-kata). Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengkompilasi penelitian dengan topik IWE, terutama yang menjelaskan hubungan antara IWE dan variabel lain dalam urutan antededen dan konsekuensi. Hasil akhir dari artikel ini adalah 'Peta IWE' yang dapat membantu para peneliti dan praktisi untuk melihat gambaran besar IWE, setidaknya hingga hari ini. Dimensi dan pernyataan untuk mengkarakterisasi IWE juga dikompilasi dan ditunjukkan dalam artikel ini.

Kata kunci: Manajemen Islam, Etika, Etos Kerja Islami

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### Introduction

As cited in Cambridge Dictionary (2018), ethic is 'a system of accepted beliefs that control behaviour, especially such a system based on morals'. In short, ethic is a parameter to define what is morally right and what is morally wrong. Fieser (2015) states that ethics study involves systematizing, defending and recommending the right and wrong behavior. In any field, ethic will have its place to exist and regulates human live. As the main function of ethic is to determine human conduct, ethic studies will undeniably spreads widely and crossing other field of studies. Spirituality and workplace context are some of the fields that closely stand hand in hand with the growing discussion of ethic. Ali (1988) argues that the growing interest of spiritual ethic topic was started by Max Webber's treatise about Protestant ethic where later on the direction of the discussion heads to economic and social progress, or in a simple way, heads to workplace context. Krishnakumar and Neck (2002) argue that as the modern era evolves, people are starting to put more

concern on spirituality issues, not only in their personal lives but also in the work or professional lives as people spend a lot of their time there. However, to understand workplace spirituality is not an easy thing to do. Krishnakumar and Neck (2002) summarize that there are several most popular viewpoints of spirituality which are intrinsic-origin view, religious view and the existentialist view.

The author argues that among the most popular viewpoints, religious view is one of the most interesting viewpoint. Some discussions under this topic either scientific or not are often hot and controversial. For examples, an article written by Donahue (2006) entitled 'Does Ethics Require Religion?', and an article written by Plante (2011) entitled 'Do We Need Religion to be Ethical?'. As religion is vital for some people, for another people, religion is something uninteresting and unimportant to them, thus the discussion of religion pulls two extremely clashing viewpoints. Interestingly, the number of people who does not believe in religion or atheism is increasing along the years. Keysar and Navarro-Rivera (in Bullivant and Ruse, 2013) estimate that there are around 500 million non-believers in God worldwide or around 7% of the global adult population. Even study about non-believer is also grabs more attention along the years, proofed by the thousand page book's launching entitled 'The Oxford Handbook of Atheism', edited by Bullivant and Ruse (2013). Thus, this article will put more attention to religious view of the workplace over other viewpoints.

Religion is indeed inspire its believers to behave ethically anywhere at any time, especially if the particular religion tightly regulates all aspects of human live, like Islam. In Islam, everything are designated to follow the rules written in Al-Qur'an or to follow the path of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) (Rizk, 2008). The interest to deeper explore Islamic-themed topics are growing as the number of Moslem population in the world is also increasing (Zainuddin, 2015). By 2050, Moslem population are expected to reach 30% from the total world population (www.pewresearch.org, 2018). The data suggests that Islamic-themed topics might be the hot research topics for following years. One of the topic that deemed vital and closely related with Islamic-themed topics is 'work ethic'. The study of Islamic Work Ethic (IWE) will determine the standards of how Moslem should behave at the workplace. By knowing these information, the company or business decision makers might be able to understand better and give proper treatments to Moslem employees.

Moslem has a specific and a unique view about working. For Moslem, working is an ibadah, a worship (Ahmad & Owoyemi, 2012). Meanwhile, the study of IWE has started long time ago, started by Ali (1988). Ali (1988) constructs scales to measure the Islamic work ethic and individualism through literature review processes, scale screening by the help of Islamic experts and tests the proposed scale to 150 respondents. Ali (1988) decision to include individualism as one of the research variable based on the respondent's characteristic, that Arab people tend to be individualistic, thus his research is also aimed to test individualism, however, the author will only focus on his IWE's variable. According to Ali (1988), IWE is more than just a personal need and obligation for a Moslem, much more than that commitment to work is a part to improve community and societal welfare. Ali become one of the most key person in IWE topic as in the following years after his first research on IWE, he writes a lot of IWE-themed articles. For example, the article about IWE in Kuwait (Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2007), and A Critical Review of IWE (Ali & Al-Owaihian, 2008). The main backgrounds or concerns of Ali (1988, 2007, and 2008) to develop IWE theory are that 1) Moslem has a specific view upon 'working', and 2) Management scholars in general have no access to Islamic literature, specifically on the business and organization context, thus Ali tries to be the bridge for those gaps. This research share similar concerns with Ali's and adds several arguments strengthen the urge to develop IWE theory, such as 1) The growing number of Moslem population all around the world, 2) The absence of IWE theory mapping, 30 years after the theory firstly came up.

This research aims to compile all articles related to IWE topic, especially the articles refer to Ali's concept of IWE as the arguably strongest concept on this topic. Specifically, this research will make a map for Islamic Work Ethic variable, by portraying the antecedents and consequences of IWE gathered from any research-based articles to ensure that the antecedents and consequences variables are scientifically valid. By this article, the author suggests that the future researches on IWE topic might have a complete portray of IWE map so far and may explore the relation between IWE and other potential variables that still unexplored until now. This article might also beneficial from practical perspective, especially those working with Moslems. By IWE map, the employers might understand, what variables generate good IWE and what good variables resulted from good IWE. By those backgrounds and arguments, this article is titled as 'Islamic Work Ethic: Where are We Now?'

## **Research Methods**

This article is a conceptual article that employs literature review as the main method. The author firstly searches and gathers articles with 'Islamic Work Ethic' as the keyword then read those articles one by one. If the article tests the relation between IWE and other variables and the test result proven to be significant then the author will put the variable into IWE map. This research does not distinguish the articles based on the journal where the article published. There is no specific journal criteria to be included in the IWE map, thus there is a high possibility that journal on national or even local scope be included in the IWE map. For articles discuss IWE but not with the same perception with Ali's IWE concept, the author will examine further whether the articles is relevant to be considered or not. Even if the main reference is the IWE concept proposed by Ali, the author argue that IWE theory is still on its developing phase thus any other definition and dimension of IWE besides the one proposed by Ali still worth considering. The context or the place where the IWE researches take place is also out of consideration, all articles with IWE topic is included regardless their context and place. The literature review process starts with the oldest articles to the earliest published articles, however, the year of publication does not have any specific meaning on the IWE map. The discussion starts with antecedent first then consequences and finally ends with the IWE map.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Islamic Work Ethic**

As explained earlier, Islamic Work Ethic is a concept explains the ethical set in the workplace based on Islamic perspective. Ali (2015) explains that there are four pillars of IWE which are:

1. Effort: both physical and mental engagement in the workplace
2. Competition: to motivate the employees to put their best effort and perform their best quality
3. Transparency: sincerity and truthfulness and avoid wrong doing in the workplace
4. Responsible conduct

Similar to Ali's pillar of IWE, Yousef (2001) also makes a summary of 'Islamic work ethic' principles which are:

1. Hard work
2. Trade honesty and justice
3. Equity and fair wealth distribution in society
4. Encouragement to skills and technological development
5. Dedication to work as an ibadah (virtue)
6. Creative work results on happiness and accomplishment
7. Work as an obligation

IWE also deemed as a multidimensional concept, Ali (2015) argues that IWE has at least 5 dimensions which are:

1. Spiritual dimension: to portray the relation between work and faith
2. Social dimension: emphasis on continuity and social relation establishment
3. Philosophical dimension: regarding one's intention of work
4. Psychological dimension: strengthen one's identity as a productive person
5. Economic dimension: work as a means to improve society welfare

Finally, Ali (2015) summarize the statements that reflect IWE values (p. 20):

1. One should take community affairs into consideration in his work.
2. The state should provide work for every one willing and able to work.
3. One should not be denied his full wages.
4. One should strive to achieve better results.
5. Good work benefits both one's self and others.
6. Justice and generosity in the workplace are necessary conditions for society's welfare.
7. One must participate in economic activities.
8. Work should be done with sufficient effort.
9. Producing more than enough to meet one's personal needs contributes to the prosperity of society as a whole.
10. Work is an obligatory activity for every capable individual.
11. Hard work is a virtue in light of the needs of a person and the necessity to establish equilibrium in one's individual and social life.
12. Life has no meaning without work.
13. Exploitation in work is not praiseworthy.
14. Work gives one the chance to be independent.
15. Work is a source of self-respect.
16. Carelessness is unhealthy to one's welfare.
17. More leisure time is bad for individuals and society.
18. A successful person is the one who meet deadlines at work.
19. Hard work does not guarantee success.
20. One should constantly work hard to meet responsibilities.
21. Progress on the job can be obtained through self-reliance.
22. Devotion to quality work is a virtue.

### **Antecedents**

Islamic work ethic and Individualism (Ali, 1988)

Ali (1988) relates individualism to the one's view that self-reliance is the source of success and a man is the best judge for himself or herself. Individualism also stresses the point of self-awarding and self-proudness. Ali (1988) test the hypotheses between IWE and individualism on 150 Arab students. The test result shows that IWE is positively and significantly correlated with individualism. However, Ali (1988) suggests that the test result may not strong enough to be generalized as the respondents are coming from one same cultural background. Ali (1988) research finding counters the existing assumption that Islam is a counter-developmental force, at that time, by showing that the more committed a Moslem to his or her work, the more he or she be proud and rewarding himself or herself. The relation between IWE and individualism might work two ways, thus individualism will also be mentioned in the consequences part.

Islamic work ethic as a mediator between locus of control, role conflict and role ambiguity (Yousef, 2000)

Locus of control is a person's belief that his or her behavior will result on a particular conse-

quence. People who believe that they are in control for their own destiny have an internal locus of control, in contrary those believe that they are not in control for their own destiny have an external locus of control. High degree of locus of control means that the person has an internal locus of control and low degree of locus of control means that the person has an external locus of control. Role conflict is the incompatibility between the expectation of a person and the role to be performed. Role ambiguity is the situation where a person does not have clear direction about his or her work in a job or in an organization. Yousef (2000) examines 397 employees from various sectors in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The result shows that IWE mediates the relationship between locus of control and role ambiguity. IWE as the mediator means that locus of control is the antecedent of IWE and role ambiguity is the consequence of IWE.

#### Islamic work ethic and loyalty (Ali, 2007)

Previous researches before Ali (2007) has proven that loyalty has a strong link to work ethic. Employee loyalty is an important element for organizations. On his paper, Ali (2007) stated that loyal employees will show high attachment to organization, willing to perform additional efforts for organization sake, display positive attitude, support positive organizational changes and have low absenteeism. Ali (2007) uses 762 respondents of organization managers in Kuwait to test the hypotheses and find out that loyalty and IWE has a positive and a significant relation. Ali (2007) research does not clearly specified, which variable acts as the dependent and which acts the independent variable. The author assume that the relation between IWE and loyalty might works two ways, either loyalty affects IWE or IWE affects loyalty, thus in the 'consequences' part, loyalty variable will be mentioned. Ali (2007) research also finds that men has a higher score on IWE than women.

#### Islamic work ethic and individualism (Khalil & Abu-Saad, 2009)

Khalil and Abu-Saad (2009) try to strengthen the concept that says IWE and individualism has a strong relation (Ali, 1988). Khalil and Abu-Saad (2009) include 837 Arab college students as the respondents and find out that there is a strong and positive relation between IWE and individualism. Like previous similar researchers, Khalil and Abu-Saad (2009) also argue that there is a possibility, the positive relation between these two variables are applied since the respondents are coming from a high individualist culture.

#### Islamic work ethic and individualism (Alam & Talib, 2016)

The relationship between IWE and individualism becomes a hot topic to be investigated since the beginning of IWE theory emergence. If the early researches on IWE and individualism relationship take culturally homogeny respondents as the sample, Alam and Talib (2016) research try to find the generalizability of this relationship. Alan and Talib (2016) make a cross-cultural study at globalized workplace with 307 workers as the respondents originated from the United States of America, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and Pakistan. Once again, the research finding for these two variables' relationship shows that IWE is strongly correlated with individualism. Alam and Talib (2016) break the question of whether IWE only correlated with individualism in high individualist country or culture.

### **Consequences**

#### Islamic work ethic and Individualism (Ali, 1988)

Explained above.

#### Islamic work ethic as a mediator between locus of control, role conflict and role ambiguity (Yousef, 2000)

Explained above.

Islamic work ethic, organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Yousef, 2001)

Yousef (2001) examines the relationship between IWE, organizational commitment and job satisfaction on 425 employees in several organizations in the UAE. The result shows that IWE positively affects organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

Islamic work ethic and loyalty (Ali, 2007)

Explained above.

Islamic work ethic and individualism (Khalil & Abu-Saad, 2009)

Explained above.

Islamic work ethic and innovation capability (Kumar & Rose, 2010)

In Kumar and Rose (2010) research context, innovation capability is defined as the degree one's belief that the public sector is capable of producing a new and useful ideas to upscale its performance. Kumar and Rose (2010) examine 472 respondents from the Malaysian public sector employees and find out that IWE significantly and positively affects innovation capability.

Islamic work ethic, intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job performance (Hayati& Caniago, 2012)

Intrinsic motivation refers to the motive of a person to do something interesting or enjoyable. Job satisfaction is the degree of a person's positive feelings toward his or he job at a particular time. Organizational commitment is the degree of a person's identification with an organization. Hayati and Caniago (2012) examine 149 respondents of Indonesian Islamic banking employees and find out that IWE positively affects intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Meanwhile, in Hayati and Caniago (2012) construct, IWE was not directly tested to job performance variable, thus the author does not considers job performance as the consequences variable of IWE.

Islamic work ethic and innovation capability (Awan & Akram, 2012)

Awan and Akram (2012) investigate the relationship between IWE and innovation capability with knowledge sharing as the moderator. However since the main focus of this article is only the antecedents and consequences of IWE, the author does not highlight the existence of knowledge sharing as the moderator. Awan and Akram (2012) take 102 Pakistani public sector officers as the respondents and find out that IWE is significantly and positively influence innovation capability.

Islamic work ethic and organizational justice (Rokhman & Hassan, 2012)

Rokhman and Hassan (2012) examine 370 employees from 60 Islamic microfinance institution in Indonesia and find out that IWE positively affects all three dimensions of organizational justice. Organizational justice is the fairness of all aspects in organization's activities. There are three domains of organizational justice which are: distributive justice, related to the perceived fairness of the outcome employees receive; procedural justice, related to the fairness on the process, the way the outcome was determined; and interactional justice related to the interpersonal interaction between the individuals inside an organization.

Islamic work ethic and organizational citizenship behavior (Mohammad et al, 2015)

Mohammad et al (2015) examine 273 employees from Islamic financial institutions in Malaysia and find out that IWE positively and significantly affects organizational citizenship behavior

(OCB). OCB is a voluntary behavior from the employees that exceed his or her specified job duties that enhance performance of the organization. Commonly, OCB has two dimensions which are in-role behavior and extra-role behavior. In-role behavior is everything related to the job or duty of an employee as stated in the employment contract, while extra-role behavior is related to employee's contribution on organization development. In Mohammad et al (2015) research, IWE affects both in-role and extra-role behavior.

Islamic work ethic and individualism (Alam & Talib, 2016)  
Explained above.

Islamic work ethic and organizational commitment (Salahudin et al, 2016)  
Organizational commitment is the degree of attachment and behaviour of employees to their organization. Salahudin et al (2016) research adopt Meyer and Allen's concept of organizational commitment where there are three dimensions of organizational commitment. Affective commitment comes from positive work experience that makes emotional ties between the employees and the organization. Normative commitment is the commitment comes from the indebted feeling and ties to the social and/or organizational norms. Continuance commitment is related to the feeling comes from financial exchange between the employee and the organization. The respondents are 156 SMEs' employees in Malaysia and the research result shows that IWE positively and significantly affects organizational commitment and its three dimensions: affective, normative and continuance commitment.

## **Conclusion and Future Direction**

Based on the mapping above, a conclusion can be pulled that most researches are still examining IWE on the psychological dimensions only. All antecedents and consequences variables are concern on the psychological condition of a person with IWE values. This finding is understandable since the four other dimensions of IWE proposed by Ali (2015) either need a much bigger research scope (e.g. economic and social dimension) or need a deep and probably long research duration (e.g. spiritual dimension) before a conclusion can be drawn from such research. To relate the map with Ali's IWE four pillar, a conclusion can be drawn that all pillars are represented by the variables connect with IWE. For example, 'effort' pillar is shown by organizational commitment variable, 'competition' pillar is shown by innovation capability variable, 'transparency' pillar is shown by organizational justice variable and 'responsible conduct' pillar is shown by organizational citizenship behavior variable. Another short note regarding the map, is the existence of individualism variable as the antecedent and the consequences of IWE. The original research puts individualism in its relation to IWE take countries with high individualism degree as the research place. The author suggests that further researches are needed to clarify the relation between individualism and IWE, as for some Moslem, they might think that Islam taught communalities rather than individualistic behavior based on the dalil (argument) from Al-Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuh).

IWE is a very interesting growing concept that need more serious attention, especially from Islamic communities. By understand the set of Moslem's ethical standard, one can decide the best action to deal with Moslem in the workplace. To understand IWE also scientifically proven will bring many benefits for the organization as IWE relates to many good variables that supports organizational development. There are also many spaces on IWE concept left unexplored, like IWE dimensions. Currently, only one out of five dimensions of IWE that already came up from the dark and start to get serious attention from the researchers. Further researchers on IWE topic are needed not only for the sake of academic or knowledge purposes but also for practical purposes as IWE directly reflected by the daily work activities.

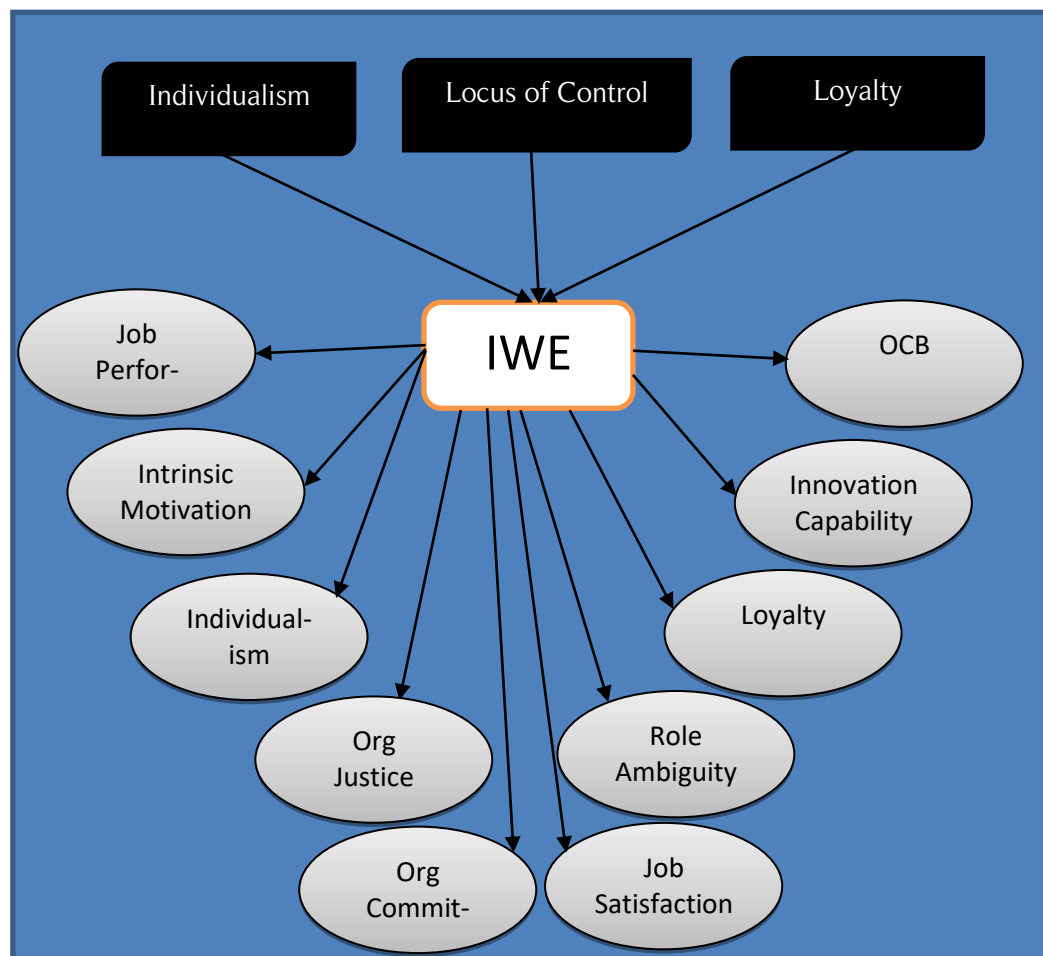


Figure 1. IWE Map

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