

## Understanding Islamic Perspectives on Quality Management: From Concept to Practice

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**Abstract:** The philosophy of quality management is dominantly contributed by Western and Japanese quality gurus. Despite the fact, since, the 1990's, contemporary scholars have consistently discussed Islamic perspectives on quality management. Their discussion is enlightened with primary sources of Islam. In Malaysia, the concept has been applied via. a national-level standard, the MS1900, known as 'Shariah-based quality management system'. Though implemented at the national level, it is a pioneer attempt of internalizing universal good values via. a standard. This study provides an analysis of the standard's acceptance among Malaysian organisations. Prior to that it narrates the proliferation of quality management, followed by Islamic conceptions on quality which is a reflective of the global Islamization spirit. Finally, the article concludes with potentials for future research in the area.

**Key words:** Quality management, Islamic values, MS1900, organisations, management, potentials

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### INTRODUCTION

Writings on integration between Islamic principles and management knowledge are increasing. Shafritz *et al.* (2011) argue that Al-Buraey's research in 1985 was found the first to discuss Islamic substance in modern management and administration techniques. Though he wrote on a broader perspective, later generation incorporates Islamic principles in other sciences. This gives birth to Islamic economy, Islamic banking, Islamic marketing, Islamic leadership, Islamic Human Resource Management (HRM) and not excluding Islamic quality management. The series of Islamic perspective on various disciplines has been referred to as Islamization of knowledge by Ahmad (2008) as it is linked with spirit of Islamization begun in the 1960's.

Known as the Muslim intellectual response to modernity, proponents of Islamization of knowledge view Western social sciences as lacking with revelation (Al-Faruqi, 1989; Alwani, 1995). Alwani (1995) further claims that Islamic perspectives on modern knowledge require a '2 book reading' methodology which refers to the revelation and the specific discipline area. In contrast, the Western social sciences are described as one book reading which depends on man's thought and understanding. As for the Muslims, the utmost guidance is the Quran and Prophetic traditions as mentioned in a verse; "O you who believe! obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority from among you then if you quarrel about anything, refer it to Allah and the

Messenger, if you believe in Allah and the last day this is better and very good in the end" (Surah al-Nisa: 59).

In a nutshell, Islamization of knowledge explains the origin of Islamic perspectives on various sciences. However, this study will not delve further into the matter. Instead, this study will elaborate on Islamic conceptions on quality management, based on extensive literature review. The matter has been discussed by contemporary scholars in '2 book reading' method which is considered as a method in Islamization of knowledge. Prior to that the study illustrates the development of quality management studies which started in a simple format at the advent of industrial revolution. From the conception of Islamic perspectives on quality this study moves on to a practical Islamic quality management system, the MS1900 which operates, since, 2005. As limited studies have been conducted on the standard this study provides an analysis of acceptance to inform on how the system is doing after a decade of establishment. The analysis then reveals some rooms for improvements which may open research opportunities.

### THE CONCEPTIONS OF QUALITY FROM ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES

Contemporary Muslim scholars have acknowledged the existence of quality concepts in primary sources of Islam (Ahmad, 1996, 2008; Sadeq and Ahmad, 1996; Al-Buraey, 2005; Al-Qudsy, 2010; Fadzil *et al.*, 2010; Ishak and Osman, 2015). They enrich

the essence of quality management through primary sources of Islam. There are a number of evidences (dalil) which are directly and repeatedly, linked to quality management. Among them is a hadith; "Allah loves those workers who perform their works to the best of their abilities" (Riwayat Baihaqi). The Hadith explains that Allah's love and blessings is with those who perform work in their best ability.

Based on the Hadith, Hammoudeh (2012), Fadzil *et al.* (2010), Shuriye and Ibrahim (2009) have agreed that itqan is the Arabic word which denotes quality. Besides the Hadith, scholars have also attributed traits of quality on the bases of Quran and Prophetic traditions which the researcher summarized into 5 values.

**Quality is beneficial elements:** Fadzil *et al.* (2010) elaborated quality as beneficial elements on the bases of a Quranic verse; "... , then as for the foam, it passes away as scum upon the banks while that which is for the good of mankind remains in the earth. Thus, Allah sets forth parables for the truth and falsehood" (Surah al-Ra'du: 17).

In the verse, Allah SWT uses 'azzabad' or bubbles symbolizing a thing of no quality as a comparison between truth and falsehood. He mentions the criteria of bubbles as non-durable and easily vanishes. Therefore, Fadzil *et al.* (2010) concludes that these criteria are the opposite of quality. Indeed, quality is something beneficial, useful, durable and relevant (Ishak, 2016).

**Quality is perfection:** Quality is attributed to perfection by Alhabshi (1996), Shuriye and Ibrahim (2009). Both relate perfection with the character of human creation and the universe in a perfect manner. This has been mentioned by Allah SWT in a verse; "He who created death and life that he may try which of you is best in deed and He is the Exalted in might, Forgiving. He who created seven heavens one above another: you can see no faults in the creations of The Most Beneficent. Then look again: can you see any rifts?. Then look again and yet again, your sight will return to you in a state of humiliation and worn out" (Surah al-Mulk: 2-4).

In Arabic, 'ahsan' is an isim mubalaghah which explains the highest rank. In reference to the verse, it describes Allah's perfect creation, denying any faulty, even if one examines repeatedly (Ishak, 2016).

Alhabshi (1996) and Al-Buraey (2005) also attribute perfection with an Arabic word, ihsan. The word is captured in a Hadith; "Verily Allah has enjoined goodness upon everything; so, when you kill, kill in good

way and when you slaughter, slaughter in good way. So, everyone of you should sharpen his knife and let the slaughtered animal die comfortably" (Sahih Muslim). The Hadith encourages one to perform the best in every deed.

Based on the Hadith, Al-Buraey (2005) proposes ihsan as means to increase efficiency and proficiency while Alhabshi (1996) relate ihsan to concentration and extra consideration. However, the Prophet had defined ihsan in a hadith. Umar al-Khattab, the Prophet's companion, reported that when Gabriel came to teach the religion, he (Gabriel) said: "then tell me about ihsan". The Prophet said: it is to worship Allah as though you are seeing Him and while you see Him not, yet truly He sees you" (Related by Ibn Majah) (Ibn Majah (n.d), Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith No. 64, Vol. 1, p.25.).

Alhabshi (1996) and Al-Buraey (2005) opine that the hadith is more applicable to religious obligation. Nevertheless, in a wider scope, the Hadith encourages performing the best in every deed through the understanding of Allah is always omnipotent, omniscience and the all-watching. The understanding is capable of creating the sense of responsibility and thus should not be limited to worship but should extend to other activities (Ishak, 2016; Ishak and Osman, 2015).

**Quality is providing more than marginally required:** Scholars have consistently attributed quality to providing more than minimum (Al-Buraey, 2005; Ahmad, 2008). In Islam, this is parallel with the function of recommended deeds (ibadah Sunnah) in complementing the flaws which might occurred in obligatory deeds (ibadah wajibah). The analogy is translated by Ahmad (2008), elaborating that a person should do whatever he can to suffice and improve his work more than what has been marginally outlined.

**Quality is following the best standard:** Ahmad (2008) and Hammoudeh (2012) attributed that Muslims should follow the best standard pointed in the primary sources of Islam which are characterized as complete and compatible. This has indeed decreed by Allah SWT in a verse; "And follow the best of what have been revealed to you from your God" (Surah al-Zumar, Verse 55).

**Quality is prior to quantity:** The Prophet had encouraged performing the best in worship in a Hadith narrated from Abu Hurairah that the Prophet said: "There are people who fast and get nothing from their fast except hunger and there are those who pray and get nothing from their prayer but a sleepless night" (Sunan Ibn Majah).

From the Hadith, Sadeq (1996) deduces that Islam emphasizes quality rather than quantity. On top of that in another Hadith, the Prophet also emphasized on the significance of quality, adding the element of continuity which is also very relevant to quality management. Narrated by 'Aishah, the Prophet was saying: "choose such actions as you are capable of performing for Allah does not grow weary till you do. The acts most pleasing to Allah are those which are done most continuously, even if they amount to little. Whenever he began an action, he would do it continuously" (Related by Ibn Majah).

Jabnoun (2005) relates the above Hadith with the responsibility of the producer's to continuously increase their productivity and quality to achieve customer's satisfaction, without boredom. This is parallel with quality management philosophy which highly values the attainment of customer's satisfaction.

In overall, these 5 elements explain that quality is to be achieved via. diligence in research (Ishak, 2016). The Quranic verses and Prophetic traditions encourages one to produce or serve something beneficial through the means of perfection, providing the best of one's ability, following the best with consistent interest. As highlighted by Ishak and Osman (2015), these are also the good values that should be embedded in order to pursue quality.

#### **THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MS1900, THE ISLAMIC QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

As an Islamic country, Malaysia have taken a step forward by formulating MS1900, known as quality management system requirements from Islamic perspective. It has three main objectives to inculcate, enhance and practice shariah requirements into an organization quality management system that emphasizes on universal values to enhance the good governance and efficiency of the organization which is consistent with the Islamic principles and to provide confidence and enhance satisfaction among Muslims and other stakeholders of the organization (Anonymous, 2014).

In 2014, the standard has undergone its first revision and has been renamed as shariah-based quality management system. To date, 29 institutions have implemented the standard ranging from manufacturing to service based institutions ([www.malaysiancertified.com](http://www.malaysiancertified.com)). The standard is operated by SIRIM (the Standards and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia) at the national

level. The certification scheme targets to improve work quality and performance for both private and civil servants. The standard is actually a continuation of Malaysian government efforts in internalizing Islamic values which has started since the country's independence. A series of policies, circulars and campaigns are established consistently by the government to nurture application of good values among the public service (Ishak and Osman, 2015).

The MS 1900, first gazette in 2005, generally aims to ensure universal values such as justice, honesty, transparent, truthfulness, sincerity, timeliness and discipline are fully appreciated and nurtured in the organization's culture. In addition, it also stresses on the permissible and prohibited elements (or the halal and non-halal) of the processes involved are identified and information of these practice are disseminated throughout the organization.

The standard is formulated by the Committee for Industrial Standard for the Halal Standard (ISC I) which is formed by representatives of 14 organization which are IKIM, SIRIM Berhad, JAKIM, Department of Standards Malaysia, Federation of Malaysian Consumer Association (FOMCA), Department of Veterinary Services, National Bureau of Pharmaceutical Control of the Ministry of Health, Food Quality Control Division of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development (MARDI), Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs, Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM), Institute of Quality Malaysia and Muslim Consumers Association of Malaysia. The membership of ISC-I have laid down the foundation to formulate halal standard of product and management systems.

As it carries Islamic connotation, monitoring of shariah requirements is crucial. For that purpose, a Shariah Advisory Council (SAC) is established. Its membership is formed by prominent and authorized individuals in Islam and quality management, including experienced administrators. These professionals act as the reference point for any disputes in relation to the standard. To date, the first appointment of membership has been maintained. On top of the central SAC, at the organizational level, a shariah officer is required to ensure the continuous observance and practice of shariah requirement (Mohd Mokhtar *et al.*, 2011).

In order to apply for MS1900, organizations are required to receive MS9001 in the first place. Additionally, they have to comply to additional tangible and intangible

shariah requirements. The tangibles refer to organization's activities, resources, processes and materials while the intangibles refer to the practice of good universal values such as integrity, teamwork, timeliness and discipline in the entire organizational culture.

However, the standard had been criticized by Mohd Mokhtar *et al.* (2011), Basir and Ghani Azmi (2011) for its generic nature. It merely exhibits the requirements of MS ISO 9001 in boxed text, followed by relevant requirements from the Islamic perspectives. However, none of the shariah-compliant aspects were being detailed out. These limitation had been improvised with the latest MS1900:2014 Version which nullifies the 2005 Version. The latest version which had undergone a thorough review process, established five significant improvements namely:

The title has been modified into "Shariah-based quality management systems-requirements with guidance". Previously, it is known as "quality management system-requirements from Islamic perspectives."

The structure has incorporated the Shariah elements into the text. Introduction of requirement on shariah critical control points within an organization's process or activities. The critical control points refer to any issue of non Shariah compliant which may arise which should be taken care of by the organization.

Introduction of organizational values management with the requirement to identify, establish, document, implement, monitor and measure a set of values applied in the organization. Introduction of guidance on the standard's usage.

**Analysis of MS1900 acceptance:** Though MS1900 has been introduced, since, 2005 the acceptance is unfavorable. With the initial launch among four pilot-test samples (Takaful Ikhlas, PNB Darby Suites, Natural Wellness Sdn Bhd and Century Logistics Sdn. Bhd.), after a decade, only 29 organizations is certified. The acceptance is minimal with only one organization receives the certification in 2009 and 2012. However, in 2013 there is a dramatic increase as 9 organizations, successfully certified with the standard. Unfortunately, in 2014 the number of receiving organizations dropped to 2. Table 1 shows the organizations and its year of certification.

Though its acceptance is minimal and inconsistent, every organizations which have successfully received the certification are reported to renew it. None have ever terminated it. The phenomenon warrants a systematic analysis.

Table 1: List of MS1900 certified organizations

Institutions	Year certified
Century Forwarding Agency	2008
Natural Wellness Holding (M) Sdn. Bhd	
PNB Darby Park Executives Suites	
Pusat Zakat Melaka	2009
Takaful Ikhlas Berhad	
Penang Port Sdn. Bhd	
Jabatan Kehakiman Syariah Perak	2010
Jabatan Waqaf Zakat dan Haji (JAWHAR)	
QSR Manufacturing Sdn. Bhd	
PNB Ilham Resort	2011
USIM	
UNITEN Sdn. Bhd	
Al-Rajhi Bank	2012
Kolej Komuniti Gerik	
Malaysia Airport Consultancy Services Sdn. Bhd	
Malaysia Electronic Payment System Sdn. Bhd	2013
Tabung Baitulmal Sarawak	
Jabatan Agama Islam Pulau Pinang	
Hospital Angkatan Tentera	2014
Maahad Tahfiz Negeri Pahang	
Pejabat Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Selangor	
USM Tissue Bank	2014
Majlis Agama Islam Melaka	
Royce Pharma Manufacturing Sdn. Bhd	
Kementerian Kesejahteraan Banda, Perumahan dan Kerajaan Tempatan	2014
PIHH Development Sdn. Bhd	
Pusat Kutipan Zakat Pahang	
Kolej Islam Pahang Sultan Ahmad Shah	2014
CCM Fertilizers Sdn. Bhd	

(www.malaysiancertified.com. assessed on 22 January 2015)

## CONCLUSION

The revised standard has two positive implication; Strengthening the standard's image and providing insights for the standard application. Both seem able to overcome critiques on the standard as explained earlier. The new entitlement and format of the standard have bring forward the identity of Islamic perspectives and clearly inform the public on the standards stance. The new added clause, entitled organizational values management is a very significant improvement. The new clause requires the management to identify, establish, document, implement, monitor and measure a set of values applied in the organization.

## IMPLEMENTATIONS

Though established, since, 2005 limited research has been conducted in the area, reflecting a vast opportunity for future research. Researchers may conduct empirical study of the standard's effectiveness in terms of organizational performance, employee work attitudes or customer's satisfaction. These may explain the minimal acceptance of the standard and subsequently may suggest some solutions. On top of that comparative analysis can also be conducted based on industry or

locality. Researchers also may propose Islamic conception for quality management dimensions or develop the principles and guidelines for specific industrial application for instance guidelines for the financial industry, logistics, hospitality, healthcare and education as the nature of quality conformance differs according to industry.

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