

A Study on Practice of Islamic Professional Ethics in Shaping an Ethical Work Culture within Malaysian Civil Service Sector

Zawiah Mat¹, Siti Arni Basir² & Jano Zanariah¹

¹ Centre of Languages and Human Development, Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka, Hang Tuah Jaya, Durian Tunggal, Melaka, Malaysia

² Department of Siasah Syar'iyah, Akademi Pengajian Islam, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Correspondence: Zawiah Mat, Centre of Languages and Human Development, Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka, Hang Tuah Jaya, 76100, Durian Tunggal, Melaka, Malaysia. Tel: 6-331-6900. E-mail: zawiah@utem.edu.my

Received: January 16, 2015 Accepted: January 28, 2015 Online Published: June 5, 2015

doi:10.5539/ass.v11n17p28

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v11n17p28>

Abstract

An implementation of Islamic Professional Ethics (IPE) is an essential aspect which requires understanding, appreciation and application by every employee in order to heighten moral virtues of each individual and elevate competency of an organization. This study aimed to identify the criteria for practices of Islamic Professional Ethics (IPE) in shaping the culture of professionalism and ethical work. This study employed a quantitative method through a survey using questionnaires which were distributed to a total of 380 managerial and professional employees in the Royal Malaysian Customs Department. The findings revealed eleven important criteria for IPE and the three most prominent were trust, sincerity and truth. This study helps in bridging the gaps in literature on Ethics Professionalism Islam in the organization. Future research should focus on the implementation of Professionalism Ethics Islam (IPE) in various organizations by analyzing the basics of IPE not only in theoretical but also practical aspects.

Keywords: ethical work culture, Islamic professional ethics, Malaysian public service sector

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

An implementation of Islamic Professional Ethics (IPE) is an essential aspect which requires understanding, appreciation and application by every employee in order to heighten moral virtues of each individual and elevate competency of an organization. Thus far, the revelations of ethical and professional issues are frequently expressed through print or electronic media on cases like ethical misconducts involving corruption, abuse of power, fraud, sexual harassment, workplace discrimination, violation of civil properties and other offenses. In the case of Malaysian Civil service sector, values and ethics have been introduced through few principles like purity, efficiency and honesty, Islamic values inculcation, Exemplary leadership, Excellent work culture and 12 Poles (INTAN, 1994). However, ethical misconducts still persist like rude attitude, irresponsible acts in performing duties, dishonest behavior and others (Zawiah, 2011).

Throughout history, the success and collapse of a civilization have often been linked to ethical issues, and breaches of moral virtues. For example, the powerful Roman and Persian civilizations were weakened by the betrayals of the dignitaries of the country (Abdullah, 2000). Hence, Islamic Professional Ethics (IPE) can be used as a standard guideline to improve the execution of tasks, responsibilities and decision-making in organizations (Nor 'Azzah, 2007). The guidelines generate efficiency and accuracy in terms of procedures, product specifications and decision making. This in turn will prevent fraud, abuse of power and other forms of moral misbehavior among civil servants in the organization. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the criteria for practices of Islamic Professional Ethics (IPE) in shaping the culture of professionalism and ethical work.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Ethics

The etymology of ethics consists of two essential bases; individual characteristics and social rules which govern and limit the right and wrong conduct of an individual (Shaw, 2002). Ethics is not only focusing on truth as

perceived by certain individual or groups but also involving moral conducts and principles in relation to human (Hosper, 1961). In other words, ethics refers to moral and philosophical domain (Pojman, 2002). Ibn Miskawayh, Al-Ghazali (1990) defines *akhlak* (moral) as a circumstance and nature which trigger one to act spontaneously without prior rational thinking. According to Teoh (2007), professionalism refers to skills, attitudes or behavior including preserving competency, ethics, integrity, honesty, justice, of individuals within his/her field of expertise.

1.2.2 Past Studies

Few studies have been conducted in terms of ethics. Francisco et al. (2008) conducted an empirical study on deontological ethics and professionalism in teaching and communicating. The objective was to analyze the roles of ethical and moral values in financial realms at institutions of higher learning. The findings indicate that students do not know ethical rules, being confused about the principles and values of ethics and morals. Therefore, it is high time to implement subject of ethics and moral and professional deontology in a syllabus. Rosli (2002) analyses level of professionalism based on five criteria namely function of posts, mastery of knowledge and skills, practice of ethics, skills of communication and style of leadership through conventional perspectives. In terms of practice of ethics, the findings yield that four essential elements namely integrity, sincerity, justice and transparency are factors that contribute to professional level of an individual. Hence, the present study employs the four elements for their importance. Wan Sabri (2001) focuses and measures the extent of Islamic ethics being practiced by Islamic and non-Islamic traders in Malaysia. The results show that practice of Islamic ethics like integrity, sincerity, transparency, justice and appreciation are key elements that drive traders in weathering a turmoil of economic downturn. Mohd Nazim (2007) analyzes the Islamic work ethics which focuses on the level of involvement, understanding, practice and effectiveness of the process in implementing Islamic values and work ethics in Malaysian Civil Service sectors. He analyses Islamic ethics values like justice, integrity, intelligence and transparency. The results show that generally the process of applying Islamic values and work ethic carried out in the PSD particularly in the service parts management is successful in reducing discipline problems especially with regards to non-punctuality. But it requires some improvements to make the process of applying Islamic values and work ethics implemented more effectively. In addition, Reamer (2009) analyzes the ethics and professionalism in technical communication realms. This study analyzes how ethics and professionalism contribute to technical communication theory. The results show that students from non-humanities field understand ethics and professionalism in technical communication services for their future career. Hence, emphasizing the importance of ethics and professionalism to be studied.

The results of the literature indicate studies on conventional ethics, moral and professionalism have been conducted in many areas. Most studies make reference to ethical and moral basis based on purely conventional theories. Even studies on professional ethics that have been conducted are also based on conventional theories. On the other hand, studies on the ethics of professionalism based on Islam are scarce. Hence this study can fill the gap in empirical literature on Islamic professional ethics.

1.3 Research Question

A research question that guided this study was as follows:

What are the criteria for practices of Islamic Professional Ethics (IPE) in shaping the culture of professionalism and ethical work in civil service sector?

2. Method

This section illustrates the approach, sample, instrument, theoretical framework, data collection and content validity and reliability.

2.1 Approach and Sample

A quantitative approach through a survey questionnaire was employed. A total of 380 questionnaires were distributed to respondents. Distribution of questionnaires was done from May 2012 until August 2012 to a randomly selected respondents of managerial and professional employees in seven divisions of JKDM ; Human Resource, enforcement, custom, internal tax, technical service, legislations and others. However, out of 380 questionnaires only 198 were returned.

2.2 Instrument

The questionnaire was divided into five sections. The first section consisted of questions regarding the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The second section comprised items regarding the criteria of Islamic professionalism while the third section regarding the practice of professional ethics. The fourth section

comprised items regarding factors which influence the practice of Islamic Professional ethics and finally, the fifth section comprised suggestions and recommendations of respondents. The instrument used in this survey was developed based on the literature. Meanwhile, the instruments have been approved by three experts in realms of professional ethics and management in order to establish face validity of the items. The five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used for the questions to indicate a degree of agreement or disagreement with each of a series of statements related to the stimulus objects.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The framework of this study is derived from a strong foundation of ethics and professionalism. According to Bertens (2003), the word ethics originates from an ancient Greek word *ethos* which consists of various meanings such as place of residence, pastures, stables, habits, customs, morals, character, feelings, attitudes and ways of thinking. From Islamic perspectives, ethics and moral fall under *akhlak*. According to Ibn Manzur (1990) and Al-Ghazali (2007) *akhlak* is a reflection of internal nature of human that gives special meaning in accordance with their status as created beings. The properties of these internal traits will be expressed through their good or bad characters and behavior. Teoh (2007) and Ibrahim (2008) refer professionalism as skills, attitudes or behavior of individuals as well as expertise and training in the profession. The framework is based on a common paradigm, positivism. The paradigm is illustrated in Table 1.

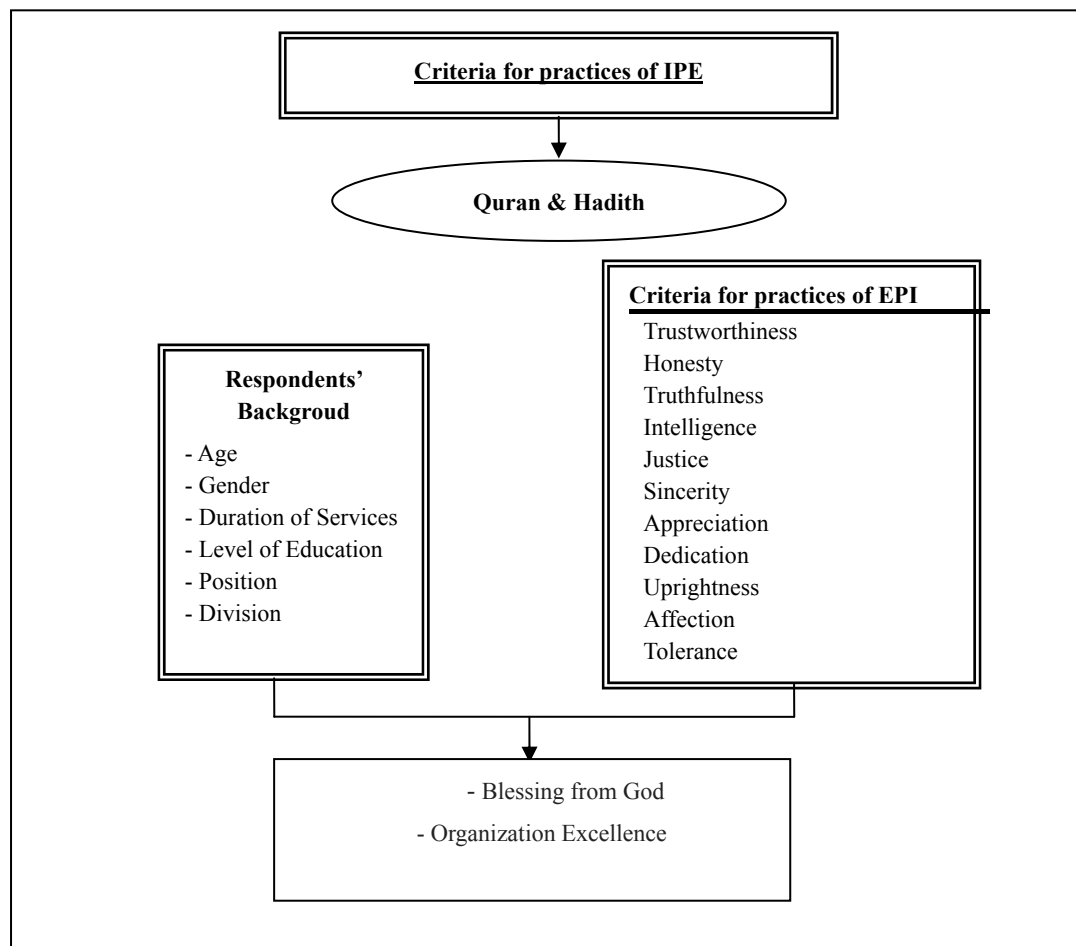
Table 1. Characteristics of positivism

Aspect	Positivism
Basic beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World is external • Based on objectivity • Anyone can be an observer • Science is value-free
Requirements	Focus on facts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • find causality between/among variables • test hypotheses and make a conclusion (deductive approach)
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • operate concepts that can be measured • large sample size • based on quantitative

Source: Easterby-Smith et al. (2002)

This study develops a theoretical framework based on positivism paradigm that focuses on facts, hypothesis testing and deductive conclusion. Positivism paradigm fits well with the chosen research question to analyze criteria for practices of Islamic Professionalism Ethics (IPE). In addition, the study is also based on Rosli (2002)'s criteria of the practice of ethical service. A framework used in the study is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. A framework on criteria for practices of Islamic professional ethics



2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was pre-tested through the pilot study within respondents in three sections of The Malaysian Royal Custom, Putrajaya. The pilot study resulted in the minor adjustment to the vagueness of wording and sequence of the questions. A subtraction of seventeen items from 120 original items to measure ethical confidentiality was based on the experts' suggestion during the pilot study. The revised questionnaire was then administered to respondents. The data were analyzed by examining the distribution of responses based on descriptive analyses; frequencies and percentages. Analysis of the data underwent three stages to ensure validity (validity) and reliability (reliability) for each item being measured, namely Cronbach alpha reliability test, descriptive and frequency analysis.

2.5 Content Validity

Content validity of the questionnaire was established by basing on extant literature. Most of the items intended to measure the variables in this study were based on experts' opinion. Wiersma (2009) states that high Cronbach Alpha is reached if the validity index is between 0.7600 and 0.9200. Hence, all items in this study have high Cronbach Alpha as validity index for all items ranges from 0.86 to 0.90.

2.6 Reliability

The IPE Inventory was invented and Cronbach's α (Cronbach, 1951) was used to measure the reliability. The reliability of each sub-scale and the Cronbach alpha coefficient was above 0.65. This shows that all instruments in this study had the reliability that can be accepted. It is in conformity with the recommendations by Piaw Yan Chua (2006) that the Cronbach alpha coefficient alpha value of 0.65 to 0.95 are considered satisfactory

3. Results

The findings discuss the demographic profile and the tested variables.

3.1 Demographic Profile

The samples were staff of The Malaysian Royal Custom departments. The demographic profile consisted of gender, age, academic qualification, grade and section. In terms of gender, 124 respondents (63%) represented males and 74 women (37%). In terms of age, the highest population was from the age group of 40-49 which made up about 41.4%. Furthermore, 151 (78%) graduated with Bachelor Degree, 20 respondents (10%) Master Degree, and others (8%). In terms of grade, most respondents were at Grade 48 (41%) and a total of 51 respondents (28%) worked in human resource management services, 46 (25%) in enforcement, 6 (3%) in customs, 26 (14%) in internal revenue, 24 (13%) in engineering services, 6 (3%) in legislations and 22 (12%) in other sections. Table 3 shows the demographic profile of respondents.

Table 3. Demographic profile (n=198)

Demographic	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	124	62.6
	Female	74	37.4
Age	29 yrs and below	18	9.1
	30-39 yrs	52	26.3
	40-49 yrs	82	41.4
	50-58 yrs	46	23.2
Academic Qualification	Diploma	19	9.8
	Bachelor Degree	151	77.8
	Master Degree	20	10.3
	Others	4	2.1
	Unknown	4	2.1
Grade	W41	42	21.3
	W44	53	26.8
	W48	81	40.9
	W52	18	9
	W54	3	1.5
	JUSA	1	.5
Section	Human Resource Services	51	28.2
	Enforcement	46	25.4
	Customs	6	3.3
	Internal Revenue	26	14.4
	Technical Services	24	13.3
	Legislations	6	3.3
	Others	22	12.2
	Unknown	17	

3.1 Findings on Variables

A frequency analysis yields the mean score for each variable tested. Table 4 shows the mean score for each criteria for practices for IPE.

Table 4. Mean score for criteria for practices of IPE

Criteria of practices for IPE	Min	SD	Level
Trustworthiness	4.62	.41	High
Honesty	4.54	.41	High
Truthfulness	4.42	.46	High
Wisdom	3.76	.57	High
Justice	4.20	.46	High
Sincerity	4.38	.38	High
Appreciation	4.30	.47	High
Dedication	4.15	.46	High
Uprightness	4.30	.43	High
Affection	4.07	.54	High
Tolerance	4.14	.54	High
Overall criteria of practices for IPE	4.26	.31	High

n=198

The findings yielded that three most prominent criteria were trustworthiness, honesty and truthfulness with the mean score ranged from 4.42 to 4.62. Other criteria namely wisdom, justice, sincerity, appreciation, dedication, uprightiness, affection and tolerance yielded high score as well with the mean score ranged from 3.76 to 4.38.

4. Discussion

In general, all elements of criteria for practices of IPE show high mean scores with three most prominent criteria are trustworthiness, honesty and truthfulness. These findings are in rhyme with a study of Wan Sabri (2001) and Mohd Nazim (2007) which find that a few criteria like honesty, uprightiness, justice, appreciation and wisdom are able to decrease disciplinary problems and increase a quality service. In addition, Rosli (2002) also finds that four elements namely honesty, trustworthiness, justice and uprightiness are the main factors contributing to a professional level of individuals. Hence, this study is bridging the gap between professionalism ethics and Islamic work ethics to produce a new concept known as IPE. These eleven criteria of practices for IPE are closely related to *akhlak* (character) which trigger and mould individuals to perform certain acts or skills. According to Ibn Miskawayh (1961) and Al-Ghazali (2007), *akhlak* is essential to trigger and train individuals in performing certain acts which will create a huge and positive impact on organizations. In a nutshell, if every employee practices all the criteria continuously, competency in individual and organization as a whole will be realized.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings revealed eleven important criteria for IPE and the three most prominent were trust, sincerity and truth. This study helps in bridging the gaps in literature on Ethics Professionalism Islam in organization. This study can also provide a guideline to organisations intending to adopt criteria for practices in IPE in their policy. Future research should focus on the implementation of Professionalism Ethics Islam (IPE) in various organizations by analyzing the basics of IPE not only in theoretical but also practical aspects.

Acknowledgments

This study is funded by Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), Malaysia and Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka.

References

- Barlett, J. E., Kotrlík, J. W., & Higgins, C. C. (2001). Organizational Research Determining Appropriate Sample Size in Survey Research. *Information Technology, Learning and Performance Journal*, 9(1), 43-50.
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods* (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Carriera, F. A., Amparo Guedes, M. D., & Da Conceic, M. (2008). Teaching, Communicating and Evaluating CSR. Can We Teach Ethics and Professional Deontology. An Empirical Study Regarding the Accounting and Finance Degree. *Social Responsibility Journal*, 4(1/2), 89-103. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17471110810856866>

- Comunale, C. L., Sexton, T. R., & Gara, S. C. (2006). Professional Ethical Crises: A Case Study of Accounting Majors. *Managerial Auditing Journal*, 21(6), 636-656. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02686900610674906>
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., & Lowe, A. (2002). *Management Research An Introduction* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Ghani, A. A. (2000). *Pengaruh Tingkah Laku Etika Ketua Terhadap Tingkahlaku Etika Subordinat di Sektor Kewangan di Malaysia* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation). Sintok, Kedah: Universiti Utara Malaysia.
- Ghazali, A. H. M. bin M. al-. (1990). *Ilhva' 'Ulum al-Din. juzu' 3*. Damsyik: Dar al-Khayr.
- Hasan, T. Hj. A. (1991). *Tahap Profesionalisme Pegawai Perkhidmatan Tadbir dan Diplomatik* (Unpublished Master Dissertation). Serdang: Universiti Putra Malaysia.
- Hospers, J. (1961). *Human Conduct an Introduction to the Problems of Ethics*. California: Los Angeles.
- Hussin, W. S. W. (2001). *Nilai dan Etika Islam Dalam Perniagaan Amalan dan Tanggapan Masyarakat Malaysia* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation). Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya.
- Ibn Miskawayh. (1961). *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*. Beirut : Mansyuwwarat Dar Maktabah al-Hayah.
- Konting, M. M. (2005). *Kaedah Penyelidikan Pendidikan*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Latif, M. N. (2007). *Keberkesanan Penerapan Nilai dan Etika Kerja Islam Dalam Pertadbiran Awam: Kajian di Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam Malaysia* (Unpublished Master Dissertation). Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya.
- Mat, Z. H., & Basir, S. A. (2011). *Hubungkait Etika Profesional Dalam Pembangunan Organisasi Menurut Perspektif Islam*. Kertas Kerja WOCIHAC di Akademi Pengajian Islam, Universiti Malaya, 10-11 Oktober 2011.
- Mohamad, R. (2002). *Tahap Profesionalisme Pegawai Skim Perkhidmatan Penguasa Kastam. Satu Kajian di Jabatan Kastam Diraja Selangor* (Unpublished Master Dissertation). Sintok. Kedah: UUM.
- Negara, I. T. A. (1994). *Citra Karya Falsafah, Nilai dan Etika dalam Perkhidmatan Awam*. Kuala Lumpur: Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara (INTAN).
- Noah, S. M. (2002). *Reka Bentuk Penulisan Falsafah, Teori dan Praktis*. Serdang: Penerbit Universiti Putra Malaysia.
- Nor 'Azzah, K. (2007). *Pelaksanaan Kod Etika Islam Di Institusi Pembangunan Berteraskan Islam: Kajian Kes Di Lembaga Tabung Haji Malaysia* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation). Sintok. Kedah: Universiti Utara Malaysia.
- Piaw, C. Y. (2006a). *Kaedah dan Statistik Penyelidikan Asas Statistik Penyelidikan*. Buku Dua. Malaysia: McGraw-Hill Sdn. Bhd.
- Piaw, C. Y. (2006b). *Kaedah Penyelidikan*. Buku Satu. Malaysia: Mc-Graw Hill Sdn. Bhd.
- Pojman, L. P. (2002). *Ethics Discovering Right and Wrong* (4th ed.). Canada: Wadsworth Thomson Learning.
- Reamer, D. J. (2009). *Ethics, Professionalism, and the Service Course: Rhetorics Of (Re) Framing in Technical Communication* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation). United States: The University of Arizona.
- Shaw, W. H. (2002). *Social and Personal Ethics* (4th ed.). United Stated: Wadsworth Thomson Learning.
- Teoh, S. C. (2007). Continuing Development in Ethics and Professionalism by Malaysian Medical Association dalam. *JMAJ Japan Medical Association Journal*, 50(3), 230.
- Wiersma. (2009). *Research Methods in Education An Introduction* (9th ed.). USA: Pearson Education Company.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).