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Author(s):

Amir Hayat  
Muhammad Atif Aslam Rao

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# **An Analytical Discourse on Islamic Precept of Ihsān and Labour Productivity**

**Amir Hayat**

Department of Islamic Studies  
The University of Lahore: Sub Campus Sargodha, Pakistan

**Muhammad Atif Aslam Rao\***

Department of Islamic History and Civilization  
Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, Malaysia

## **Abstract**

Labour productivity is concerned with the total number of hours worked in a unit time to produce goods and services. It has become imperative for organisations to retain a competitive edge in the market. Labour productivity contributes to an organisation's total factor productivity, which ultimately leads towards growth in national income. Thus, the economic development of nations lies in the efficient use of labour. Recent studies have shown that human emotions, aspirations and feelings considerably influence productivity. Religion, as a domain of human beliefs and feelings, also affects labour productivity because people carry their work-related religious beliefs into the workplace. Islam stands for commitment, hard work, and sincerity in all spheres of life. It presents the concept of Ihsān, which motivates the highest form of excellence in performing all duties. The concept of Ihsān carries some essential attributes that positively impact work-related values. This study presents the concept of Ihsān in the context of the working environment in organisations, and its potential impact on labour productivity. In this study, a qualitative approach, based on an extensive review of the literature, has been taken to understand the concept of Ihsān and to determine its relationship with the labour productivity. The findings explicitly show that attributes of Islamic concept of Ihsān positively affect labour productivity. This discussion leads to some policy recommendations for organisations to create Ihsān-friendly working environments to improve productivity and for efficient use of labour resources.

**Keywords:** labour productivity, Islam, Ihsān, work-related values, organisations

## **Introduction**

After the industrial revolution, the world has progressed in all areas of life especially in the fields of technology, social set-up and economy. Public and private sectors, through

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\*Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Dr Atif Aslam Rao, Department of Islamic History and Civilization, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, Malaysia, at dratifrao@uok.edu.pk.

combined efforts, have played their role in the economic advancement of nations. As a major contributor to economic development, the corporate sector has become backbone of global economy. It provides goods and services to satisfy basic needs of the people. Traditionally, organisations in the private sector operate solely to achieve the basic objective of earning profit. In the competitive environment of twenty-first century, every organisation strives to enhance its productivity to retain an edge in the market. Evidently, productivity enhancement is an important objective of business organisations. The corporate sector uses a different set of resources such as land capital, machinery, and labour to achieve its basic business objectives. Among other factors of production, labour is the most important asset of an organisation. No organisation can reach its productivity targets without a knowledgeable, skilled and motivated workforce.<sup>1</sup>

Recent studies show that human behaviour is a key component of the productivity of organisations. And, it is also evident that religious practices refine human behaviour. Thus, religious beliefs and practices make a significant impact on productivity.<sup>2</sup> The religious practices give energy, enthusiasm, and vigour to the devotees and these can be used to enhance the productivity of people. For this reason, it is believed that ethics, quality and productivity together will define the management culture of the future.<sup>3</sup> The religion of Islam provides guidance in every sphere of life. Islam calls for just behaviour and performance excellence in daily routines. Therefore, the relationship between productivity and Islamic values has to be understood in the framework of Islamic teachings. The present study provides insight into the relationship between labour productivity and Islamic teachings related to human working-behaviour. Ihsān is an important value of Islam which describes one's state of excellence and highness, both in faith and practice. This study offers an alternative approach to basic Islamic work-related values and labour productivity enhancement.

### 1.1. Review of Literature

In the Western World, Corry Azzi et. al. and Ronald Ehrenberg in 1975 initiated, for the first time, studies on the prayer issue and its impact on political economy in the Western management literature.<sup>4</sup> They viewed individual and collective religious behaviour as a choice. According to them the motives behind religious activities include salvation in the hereafter, consumption for present satisfaction, and finally, social pressure to outshine in business and professional life. In 2001, Koh Hian Chye and El'Fred found a positive

<sup>1</sup>Angelo S. Denisi, and Ricky W. Griffin, *HRM: An Introduction* (New Delhi: Cengage Learning India Private Limited, 2005), 17.

<sup>2</sup>M Ashraf Al Haq et al., "Islamic Prayer, Spirituality and Productivity: An Exploratory Conceptual Analysis," *Al-Iqtishad: Journal of Islamic Economics* 8, No. 2 (2016): 271–86, <https://doi.org/10.15408/aiq.v8i2.3160>.

<sup>3</sup>Charles C. Manz, and Henry P. Sims, *Business without Bosses: How Self-Managing Teams are Building high-Performing Companies* (University of Texas Press, 1995), 230.

<sup>4</sup>Corry Azzi, and Ronald G. Ehrenberg, "Household Allocation of Time and Church Attendance," *Journal of Political Economy* 83, No. 1 (1975): 27-56.

correlation between morality and job satisfaction.<sup>5</sup> Turnipseed in 2002 found a positive relationship between ethics and productivity.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, research shows that there is a link between happiness and productivity.<sup>7</sup> It means human emotions can play a vital role in productivity enhancement.

Of course, religions play the most important role in the psychological composition of an individual. Therefore, there is a possibility that there might be a link between religious teachings and productivity. During the last three decades, the Muslim world is experiencing a resurgence in the academic fields. The heavy inflow of literature regarding the Islamic perspective has been observed in almost every field of study. In the perspective of labour-organisation relationship, Islamic teachings about financial reward such as quick payment of wages to workmen are highly discussed in the paradigm of Islam and economic issues. Abbas Ali *et. al.* in 2014 and many others have discussed financial worship may bring blessings to the business.<sup>8</sup> In 2016 Al-Haq *et al.* established a relationship between Islamic Prayer, Spirituality and Productivity.<sup>9</sup> But a collective doctrine consisting of all forms of worship and its relationship with performance excellence is still a neglected area of research. Research is due to find a relation between the Islamic concept of performance excellence and its impact on labour productivity.

### 1.2. Purpose of the Study

The present study is intended to fill the research gap regarding the Islamic concept of performance excellence through Ihsān and its relationship with labour productivity. It is an initial attempt that shall open new avenues of research. The research aims at providing a basic theoretical framework of the linkage between the value of Ihsān and productivity. The likely benefit of the study is an increase in labour productivity that shall improve corporate productivity which will ultimately add to the gross domestic product of the nation.

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<sup>5</sup>Hian Chye Koh, and El'fred H Y Boo, "The Link between Organizational Ethics and Job Satisfaction: A Study of Managers in Singapore," *Journal of Business Ethics* 29, No. 4 (2001): 309-324.

<sup>6</sup>Turnipseed David L. "Are Good Soldiers Good?: Exploring the Link between Organization Citizenship Behaviour and Personal Ethics," *Journal of Business Research* 55, No. 1 (2002): 1-15.

<sup>7</sup>Andrew J. Oswald, Eugenio Proto, and Daniel Sgroi, "Happiness and Productivity," *Journal of Labor Economics* 33, No. 4 (2015): 789–822, <https://doi.org/10.1086/681096>.

<sup>8</sup>Isahaque Ali, and Zulkarnain A. Hatta, "Zakat as a Poverty Reduction Mechanism among the Muslim Community: Case Study of Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia," *Asian Social Work and Policy Review* 8, No. 1 (2014): 59-70.

<sup>9</sup>M. Ashraf Al Haq, Norazlina Abd Wahab, Hj Abdullah Abd Ghani, and Nor Hayati Ahmad. "Islamic Prayer, Spirituality and Productivity: An Exploratory Conceptual Analysis," *Al-Iqtishad: Jurnal Ilmu Ekonomi Syariah* 8, No. 2 (2016): 271-286.

### 1.3. Methodology

The research work is based upon the qualitative approach consisting of a review of relevant literature. The paper is written through library research, and aims at providing a theoretical framework of Ihsān and its relationship with productivity. In this paper, arguments are based on relevant verses of the Qur'ān, Ahadīth, and other sources of Islamic knowledge. The paper is furnished with systematically organised discussion. The first section provides an initial introduction including a literature review, objectives of the study and the used methodology. The basics of labour productivity are outlined in the second section. In the third section, Islamic work-related values are provided followed by an introduction to the Islamic concept of Ihsān. The fifth section provides insight into the relationship between Ihsān and labour productivity. In the sixth section, some policy-related steps are suggested to promote Ihsān in the working environment. And finally, in the last section, a conclusion has been made.

Now we shall move forward to study the basics of labour productivity in the current organisational setup.

## 2. Basics of Labour Productivity

In the current competitive environment, every organisation strives to perform its possible best to achieve its objectives. To measure the performance of business organisations, productivity serves as an essential factor. Generally, productivity is seen as tantamount to effective use of labour, however, it is a multifaceted term and is viewed from different perspectives. In simple terms, productivity can be viewed as an input/output relationship where an organisation translates its resources (capital, land, machinery, labour) into goods and services. In this sense productivity is a measure of how specified resources are managed (in terms of quality and quantity) to accomplish timely objectives. Productivity may be improved by an economical use of inputs.

Among total inputs of the production process, most important inputs include labour. In the context of labour management, productivity is related to the positive contribution of an individual to his work.<sup>10</sup> Labour productivity describes efficient use of the workforce so as to minimise wastage of resource at the labour side. It is measured by calculating the total number of goods and services produced per hour worked.<sup>11</sup> In this relation, creative, constructive and imaginative actions have an effect on the productivity of an organisation.

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<sup>10</sup>Imas Soemaryani, "Model for Improving the Employee Productivity through Islamic Leadership and Internalization of Islamic Work Ethic in Sharia Tourism (Study on Sharia Hotels in Bandung)," *Jurnal Bisnis Dan Manajemen* 19, No. 2 (2018): 122–39, <https://doi.org/10.24198/jbm.v19i2.207>.

<sup>11</sup>Dean Parham, and Deepa Economics, "Definition, Importance and Determinants of Productivity," (2014), <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/20d4/d4657c1b5d437aff27040dff565363a45621.pdf>

Labour productivity represents the output (goods and services produced) per unit of labour during a given time reference period.<sup>12</sup>

Recognising the important role of labour in productivity, all organisations, be they public or private, consider their human capital as the most important asset. Among other factors of production, the capacities and capabilities of human beings are more flexible. Zeal, flair and enthusiasm of workmen act as a multiplier effect on productivity. For this reason, labour productivity can be improved to a greater extent than other aspects of productivity. Therefore, skilled, competent and motivated workmen are needed in every organisation.<sup>13</sup> To enhance their innate capabilities and capacities, organisations spend a lot of money.<sup>14</sup>

Studies on human organisational behaviour showed that among other things human physical (food, shelter, security) and psychological needs (acceptance, love, friendship, belongingness, self-respect, status, self-fulfilment and need for growth) play an important role in their productivity.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, it was also observed that human expectation of being treated fairly and reward for hard work are important determinants of productivity. It means labour productivity can be increased by calculating how much the labour can earn from hard work. Another important factor related to labour productivity is goal setting. It is believed that people are motivated by higher goals. Specific goal setting improves the output of workmen.<sup>16</sup> It is worthy to note that all aforementioned theories of human organisational behaviour are based on the hedonistic view of humans. Impact of religion on organisational behaviour of workers has been considered outside the focus of these theories; this is the reason economic issues are kept outside the realm of religion in the West.

However, the role of religion in shaping the minds of people cannot be denied. In the words of Israela Silberman: "*adhering to religious rules can also influence an individual's behaviour, emotions and thinking.*"<sup>17</sup> More specifically, in Islamic culture, it is not relevant to make watertight compartments of religious and worldly affairs. Islam stands for a way of life dealing with all affairs of life and does not maintain any distinction between religious

<sup>12</sup>Jan Sauermann, "Performance Measures and Worker Productivity," *IZA World of Labor*, No. May (2016): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.15185/izawol.260>.

<sup>13</sup>Payos Sison, and Zorilla, *Personnel Management in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Quezan City: Personnel Management Association of Philippines, Rex Printing Company, Inc., Philippines, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, 2003), 8.

<sup>14</sup>Micheal R. Carrell, Frank E. Kuzmits, and Norbert F. Elbert, *Personnel/Human Resource Management* (Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 2.

<sup>15</sup>A. H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper and Row, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 1970), 239.

<sup>16</sup>E. A. Locke, "Toward a Theory of Task Motivation and Incentives," *Organizational Behaviour and Human Performance* 3, No. 2 (1968): 157-189.

<sup>17</sup>Israela Silberman, "Spiritual Role Modeling: The Teaching of Meaning Systems," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 15, No. 3, (2005): 182.

and worldly matters.<sup>18</sup> The religious beliefs and practices are part and parcel of Muslim life. These Islamic values are carried into their workplace and significantly affect their work-related attitudes.<sup>19</sup> Islam provides important guidelines regarding work-related values. Islamic work-related values shape the working behaviour of Muslims. To study human behaviour and Islamic work-related attitudes to enhance their productivity is an important call of the day. In the next part, nature of work in Islam is discussed to establish the relationship between Islam, work-related attitudes and labour productivity.

### 3. Nature of Work in Islam

Human behaviour depends upon his/her philosophy of life. Unlike many other religions of the world, Islam does not insist on strengthening the relationship with God by living a secluded life.<sup>20</sup> Islam highly regards human efforts to be discharged for the betterment of social life. Islam supports every type of work satisfying a genuine need or bringing real benefit to the society.

فَإِذَا قُضِيَتِ الصَّلَاةُ فَانْتَشِرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَابْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ<sup>21</sup>

*"Then once the (Jummah/Friday) Salah is over, disperse in the land, and seek the grace of Allah, and remember Allah abundantly, so that you may be successful."*

This is the starting point in the study of human working-behaviour that earning one's livelihood is considered seeking the grace of Allah. All human efforts are highly appreciated in Islam provided these are performed in a proper manner and within the boundary of Islamic law. Work in Islam is a practical evidence of faith.<sup>22</sup> It is a source of attainment of the pleasure of Allah and thus, is a religious obligation.<sup>23</sup> In Islam, work as a mean to sustain social prestige is a highly admirable attribute of a human. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) has been reported to have said: "Narrated Al-Miqdam :*The Prophet (SAW) said, Nobody has ever eaten a better meal than that which one has earned by working with one's own hands. The Prophet of Allah, David used to eat from the earnings of his manual labour.*"<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Syed Abul Aa'la Mawdūdi, *Islami Nizam-e-Zindagi or us ke Bunyādi Tasawurāt* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1974), 132.

<sup>19</sup>Munīr Tayyeb, "Islamic Revival in Asia and Human Resource Management," *Employee Relations* 19, No. 4, (1997): 358.

<sup>20</sup>al- Hadīd 57:27.

<sup>21</sup>al-Jumu'a 62:10.

<sup>22</sup>Ibnomer Sharfuddin, "Toward an Islamic Administrative Theory," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Science* 4, No. 2 (1987): 232.

<sup>23</sup>Toseef Azid, Mehmet Asutay, and Umar Burki, "Theory of the Firm, Management and Stakeholders: An Islamic Perspective," *Islamic Economic Studies* 15, No. 1 (2007): 19.

<sup>24</sup>Abū 'Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Ismā'īl, Al-Bukharī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukharī*, Kitāb al-Tijārat, Hadīth No. 2072.

Islam insists on hard work not only for the hereafter but also for this world. The Qur'an states:

وَابْتَغِ فِيمَا آتَاكَ اللَّهُ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا <sup>25</sup>

*"And seek the (betterment of) the Ultimate Abode with what Allah has given to you, and do not neglect your share from this world."*

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has been reported to have said: *"Amr ibn Shuaib reported from his father from his grandfather who said: The Messenger of Allah said: "Indeed Allah loves to see the results of His favours upon His slave."* <sup>26</sup>

Thus, in Islam, work is not just a socio-economic necessity, but also a religious obligation. In Islam, it is obligatory upon a Muslim to work for sustenance of his family. Its importance can be seen in the following narration of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ: *"Narrated Sa'd bin Abi Waqqas: The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "It is better to leave your inheritors wealthy than to leave them (poor) begging others."* <sup>27</sup>

This signifies the importance of working for one's dependents. From the above discussion, the question of the nature of work in Islam can be spelt out. Unlike the Western concept of an economic human being, who engages in professional activities solely to fulfil his/her own psycho-biological desires, Islam presents the concept of a moral human who performs work as: a religious obligation, and a commitment to serve oneself and to the welfare of others. Love for one's own sustenance and commitment to serve others act as positive motivators not only to work but also to work with the best of his ability. In this context, it is enjoined in Islam to secure one's living through dedication, hard work, and sincerity. Many verses of Qur'an explicitly describe it, for example:

وَأَنْ لَيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى <sup>28</sup>

*"and that a man shall not deserve but (the reward of) his own effort,"*

Islam does not promote laziness and lethargic behaviour. Islam insists on living a social life where everyone is induced to strive for the welfare of oneself and others.

Another important dimension of the nature of work in Islam is concerned with the relationship between an individual and its working environment. In modern organisational context, work is seen as an economic relationship between an organisation and its employees, whereas, Islam views work as a relationship between an individual and Allah. It implies that the keystone of Islamic work-related attitudes is not the fulfilment of an individual's psychobiological needs but those work-related promises that originate from the employee's relationship with Allah. The work-related relationship between Allah and

<sup>25</sup>al-Qasas 28: 77.

<sup>26</sup>Abū 'Īsā Muhammad Ibn 'Īsā Al-Tirmadhī, *Sunan Al-Tirmadhī*, Kitāb Al- Ādāb, Hadīth No. 2819.

<sup>27</sup>Muhammad bin Ismail, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukharī*, Kitāb al-Wasaya, Hadīth No. 2742.

<sup>28</sup>al-Najam 53: 39.

workmen can be strengthened with the Islamic concept of Ihsān. Ihsān signifies the beautification or perfection of one's behaviour.<sup>29</sup> The concept of Ihsān has a significant impact on human personality. Ihsān helps to inculcate in individuals those personality traits that lead to the formulation of normative propositions on the commitment to work, the welfare of self, the welfare of others, and performance optimisation. The concept of Ihsān and its influence on work-related values is discussed in the following.

#### 4. Islamic Concept of Ihsān

Ihsān, like other Arabic words, is a multifaceted term. No English word can convey the complete meaning of the term Ihsān. In Islamic literature, it has been used in such a way that it carries a wide assortment of meanings depending upon the context. It has been used in a variety of meanings: beauty, excellence, gentleness, softness, harmony, equilibrium, balance, discipline, drive, improvement, and good character. It also carries attributes of other values such as just behaviour, generosity, kindness, tolerance, forgiveness and patience.<sup>30</sup> All these attributes are collectively added in one concept of Ihsān. All the meanings of Ihsān are derived from a state of excellence achieved by an individual through a special relationship with Allah. The basic relationship of an individual and his Lord is that of a servant and a Master:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ<sup>31</sup>

*"I did not create the Jinns and the human beings except for the purpose that they should worship Me."*

The main objective of the creation of man has been described as '*Ibadah*'. It is translated in English as worship. In Islamic parlance, the word '*Ibadah*' is used in more comprehensive meanings than the word worship. The Islamic concept of '*Ibadah*' means to pattern the whole life according to the will of Allah. In sum, the total submission before Allah is the objective of human existence. And, the highest manifestation of total submission to the will of Allah is the achievement of His pleasure.<sup>32</sup> It has been stated in the Holy Qur'ān:

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسْكِنٍ طَيِّبَةٍ فِي جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ  
وَرِضْوَانٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرَ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ<sup>33</sup>

*"Allah has promised the believing men and believing women gardens beneath which rivers flow. They shall abide in it. There are delightful dwelling places for them in the Gardens"*

<sup>29</sup>A. R. A. Rahman, "An Islamic Perspective on Organizational Motivation," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1995): 191.

<sup>30</sup>Rāghib Isfahānī, *Mufridāt-ul-Qur'ān* (Lahore: Sheikh Sahms-ul-Haq, 1987), 236. s.v. "*Ihsān*".

<sup>31</sup>al-Zariyaat 51:56.

<sup>32</sup>Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qādri, *Islamic Philosophy of Human Life* (Lahore: Minhaj-ul-Quran Publications, 1984), 46.

<sup>33</sup>al-Tauba 9: 72.

*of Eternity. They shall, above all, enjoy the good pleasure of Allah. That is the great achievement."*

With the complete submission to Allah, a human can achieve the highest goal of attainment of '*Gratification of Allah*' and final incentives of the '*Hereafter*'.<sup>34</sup> To achieve this objective close relationship with Allah is a precondition. Such a relationship is further strengthened by an individual's continuous consciousness of his Lord. It is indicated by a Hadīth known as Hadīth-e-Jibrīl. Narrated Abu Hurairah:

حَدَّثَنَا مُسَدَّدٌ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ بْنُ إِبرَاهِيمَ، أَخْبَرَنَا أَبُو حَيَّانَ التَّمِيمِيُّ، عَنْ أَبِي رُزْعَةَ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، قَالَ كَانَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ بَارِزًا يَوْمًا لِلنَّاسِ، فَأَتَاهُ جِبْرِيلُ فَقَالَ مَا الْإِيمَانُ قَالَ " الْإِيمَانُ أَنْ تُؤْمِنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَبِالْقَائِمَةِ وَرُسُلِهِ، وَتُؤْمِنَ بِالْبَعْثِ ". قَالَ مَا الْإِسْلَامُ قَالَ " الْإِسْلَامُ أَنْ تُعْبُدَ اللَّهَ وَلَا تُشْرِكَ بِهِ، وَتُقِيمَ الصَّلَاةَ، وَتُؤَدِّيَ الزَّكَاةَ الْمَقْرُوضَةَ، وَتُصُومَ رَمَضَانَ ". قَالَ مَا الْإِحْسَانُ قَالَ " أَنْ تُعْبُدَ اللَّهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ، فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ ".<sup>35</sup>

*"One day while the Prophet (ﷺ) was sitting in the company of some people, (The angel) Gabriel came and asked, "What is faith?" Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) replied, 'Faith is to believe in Allah, His angels, (the) meeting with Him, His Apostles, and to believe in Resurrection.' Then he further asked, "What is Islam?" Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) replied, "To worship Allah Alone and none else, to offer prayers perfectly to pay the compulsory charity (Zakat) and to observe fasts during the month of Ramadan." Then he further asked, "What is Ihsān (perfection)?" Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) replied, "To worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion then you must consider that He is looking at you."*

The hadīth mentioned above defines faith, Islam and Ihsān. The deep study of the hadīth makes it clear that these three concepts— faith, Islam and Ihsān— actually describe the three stages of human psychological development. Faith implies one's belief in Allah, His angels, (the) meeting with Him, His Apostles, and to believe in Resurrection. Islam is a practical manifestation of faith in which a man surrenders his independence before Allah and accepts His subservience. It denotes the obedience and submission before the commandments of Supreme Being (Allah). And finally, to perform worship with deep devotion is termed as Ihsān. It is noteworthy that in the Hadīth, words "*to worship Allah*" are used. As noted earlier, the Islamic concept of worship includes all the affairs of life including religious and worldly activities of human beings. In this sense, the hadīth denotes the performance of all affairs of life with the consciousness of being watched by Allah all the time. This creates a state of continuous consciousness of Allah among the devotee. The Islamic concept of Ihsān implies that the Muhsin achieves a state of recognition of Allah and that all his activities are being observed by Him. It is indicated by the following verse of the Glorious Qur'ān:

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup>*Islamic Philosophy of Human Life*, 46.

<sup>35</sup>*Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukharī*, Kitāb Al-Īmān, Hadīth No. 50.

<sup>36</sup>al-Ankabūt 29: 69.

*“As for those who strive in Our way, We will certainly take them onto Our paths, and indeed Allah is with those who are good in deeds.”*

In the above-quoted verse, the word *"ma'ā"* denotes the word *"is with"* that emphasise *"together with"* and *"in the company of"* indicating a unique type of relationship between Allah and the believers. This permanent apprehension of Allah promotes sincerity in the activities of devotees. Moreover, constant observance by Allah has a number of repercussions on the life of individuals. The Islamic concept of Ihsān guides humans towards humanity, good behaviour and prevents from bad behaviours. In this perspective, Ihsān shows the attainment of perfection and beautification of one's personality. On one side, it helps in possessing good moral values, and on the other, it facilitates in getting rid of bad behaviours. Ihsān motivates humans to be excellent, perfect and the best in each and every role of life. It creates such a personality that is knowledgeable, dynamic, and creative.<sup>37</sup> It is incumbent upon Muslims to perform not only their religious worships but also to perform their daily routines with sincerity, perfection and excellence. The Qur'ān states:

لِّلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا الْحُسْنَىٰ وَزِيَادَةٌ<sup>38</sup>

*“For those who do good there is the best, and something more.”*

Islam encourages its followers to take part in their worldly activities with full motivation and enjoy performing their different roles in life. They ought to discharge whatever their duties are, to do them in the best manner.<sup>39</sup> It is commended in Islamic teachings that Ihsān must be observed in every aspect of life. The Prophet said:

*"Allah has prescribed proficiency in all things."*<sup>40</sup>

Ihsān requires beautifying one's course of action and achieving performance excellence. Those who have a strong belief and are appropriate in religious as well as everyday activities can attain the level of Ihsān by continued effort and improvement. In this sense, it is a complete package. In all affairs of life, a Muhsin achieves the highest level of excellence.

In the context of the workplace environment, Ihsān describes those personality traits that enable a person to surrender fully to the will of Allah and to perform work-related obligations with perfection. Thus, Ihsān in the work-related behaviour denotes completion of the assigned task according to its worth, beauty, accuracy, and merit. The Islamic

<sup>37</sup>Ilhaamie Abdul Ghani Azmi, "Human Capital Development and Organizational Performance: a Focus on Islamic perspective," *Syariah Journal* 17, No. 2 (2009): 364.

<sup>38</sup>Yunus 10:26.

<sup>39</sup>Junaidah Hashim, "Islamic Revival in Human Resource Management Practices among Selected Islamic Organisations in Malaysia," *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management* 2, No. 3 (2009): 259.

<sup>40</sup>Muslim Ibn al-Hajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb Al Ṣaid wa Al Zibāi, Hadīth No. 5055.

concept of Ihsān is universal in the sense that it can be applied to any workplace. Ihsān carries several work-related attributes, such as commitment, sincerity, honesty, etc., that are essential to improve one's efficiency and productivity. These values are important in the pursuit of positive work-related values. Positive work-related values form the basis of labour productivity. The practical implications of Ihsān on labour productivity are discussed in the following part of the study.

### 5. Important Attributes of Ihsān and their Impact on Labour Productivity

In the Holy Qur'ān there are many verses which ordain Muslims to enjoin excellence in their affairs of life. Allah Almighty promises His love to those who observe Ihsān in their dealings. The Qur'ān states:

وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ<sup>41</sup>

*“and those who control anger and forgive people. And Allah loves those who are good in their deeds”*

Ihsān motivates Muslims to make serious efforts to actualise oneself as a true servant of Allah by remembrance of Allah and by using maximum ability. In this manner, one can excel in all fields of life and position himself as a member of the best society.<sup>42</sup> Some of the essential attributes of Ihsān and their impact on human productivity are discussed below.

#### 5.1. Realisation of Allah

Ihsān creates a sense of continuous consciousness of Allah, which is paramount to social dealings. It is a conviction that one's affairs are seen at all times and at all places by a supreme being, Allah the Almighty. No individual can deceive Him.<sup>43</sup> In the words of the Holy Qur'ān:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ<sup>44</sup>

*“Allah is watchful of what you do.”*

The constant realisation of being observed by someone psychologically patterns one's way of life. All the affairs of an individual become conscious of the permanent realisation of Allah. This consciousness may be strengthened by continued remembrance of Allah in the mind and heart of a person.<sup>45</sup> As a result of this remembrance, an individual's self

<sup>41</sup>aal-i-Imran 3:134; Al Baqara 2:112.

<sup>42</sup>Imas Soemaryani, “Model for Improving the Employee Productivity through Islamic Leadership and Internalization of Islamic Work Ethic in Sharia Tourism (Study on Sharia Hotels in Bandung),” *Jurnal Bisnis dan Manajemen* 19, No. 2 (2018): 131.

<sup>43</sup>Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Dastoor-e-Hayat* (Lucknow: Majlis-e-Tahqīqāt-o-Nashriāt), 224.

<sup>44</sup>al-Baqarah 2:110.

<sup>45</sup>aal-i-Imrān 3:191.

becomes devoted to Allah.<sup>46</sup> In the context of organisational behaviour, this leads to best performance. The consciousness of the supervision of Allah at all times makes humans more responsible that leads towards improvement in their performance.

### 5.2. The Concern of Hereafter

Practical benefits of the realisation of Allah can be achieved when the concern of Hereafter is added to it. The concern of the Hereafter completely changes the attitude of people. The concept of Hereafter is connected with the Final Judgment. The Holy Qur'ān states:

وَأَنَّ سَعْيَهُ سَوْفَ يُرَىٰ ۖ ثُمَّ يُجْزَاهُ الْجَزَاءَ الْأَوْفَىٰ <sup>47</sup>

*"and that his effort will soon be seen, then he will be recompensed for it in full",*

Any work performed with the realisation of Allah and accountability on the Day of Judgment is different from that performed without it. The concept of Final Judgment emphasises self-control and self-responsibility even in the absence of centralised control and strict supervision.

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَتَعَلَّمَ مَا تُوسَّوَسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ بِسِ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ إِذْ يَتَلَقَّى الْمُتَلَقِينَ عَنِ الْيَمِينِ  
وَعَنِ الشِّمَالِ قَعِيدًا مَا يَلْفِظُ مِنْ قَوْلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيْهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدٌ <sup>48</sup>

*"Indeed We have created man, and We know whatever thoughts his inner self develops, and We are closer to him than (his) jugular vein, when the two receiving angels receive (every human act to record it), seated (one) on the right and (one) on the left. Not a single word is uttered by one but there is a watcher near him, ready (to record)".*

If this consciousness persists in the minds of workers and that besides organisational supervision there is a setup of meta-physical observance, where all their records are safely compiled, they become responsible in their conduct. This conscientious attitude is helpful in increasing one's productivity.

### 5.3. Self-Accountability

Continuous consciousness of Allah and His continued observance creates a sense of responsibility in individuals. Sense of self-accountability and self-control motivates an individual from within and urges him/her to complete assigned tasks with responsibility and accuracy. This state of self-consciousness has been described in the Qur'ān as:

بَلِ الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةٌ <sup>49</sup>

*"Rather, man will be a witness against himself,"*

<sup>46</sup>al-Ra'ad 13:29.

<sup>47</sup>al-Najam 53:40-41.

<sup>48</sup>Qaaf 50:16-18.

<sup>49</sup>al-Qiyamah 75:14.

Principle of self-accountability encourages self-criticism that paves a way for the correctness and improvement of working behaviour. Such a state of mind serves as a type of check and balance for employees.<sup>50</sup> Self-appraisal means being harsh and strict to oneself. Islam views work performance and efficiency as a religious obligation rather than as an organisational requirement. The self-criticism provides opportunities for the correction and improvement of working behaviour and productivity. It is an ongoing process and must be conducted regularly to correctly practise according to the organisational goals.

#### 5.4. Sincerity

Self-accountability leads towards sincerity in dealings. Sincerity stands for a behaviour that shows the evidence of one's intention to please Allah Almighty alone. It results in full devotion to performing a task and completing assigned duties wholeheartedly and with full diligence. Sincerity is an attribute expected from every Muslim. The Qur'an ordains:

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءً<sup>51</sup>

*“while they were not ordered but to worship Allah, making their submission exclusive for him with no deviation.”*

In a working environment, honesty prohibits inferior working standards and accounts for accepting advice, suggestion and critique. All these positive work-related values help in productivity improvement. Honesty is a reflection of harmony between mind and body while performing a job. This paves the way towards performance excellence and positive work-related attitudes such as faithfulness, gratitude and love for the work of the organisation.<sup>52</sup> An individual's sincere endeavours to promote the productivity of an organisation increase the success rate of an organisation.<sup>53</sup>

#### 5.5. Love for Work

Sincerity in a working environment manifests in the attainment of love of work. According to the Glorious Qur'an, a Muslim love to do work and regards it a way to get nearness to Allah. The Qur'an states:

وَابْتَغِ فِيمَا آتَاكَ اللَّهُ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَأَحْسِنْ كَمَا أَحْسَنَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup>Gohar Zaman, Fahad Khan Afridi, and Maimoona Saleem, “Islam and Management Principles: Evidence from Literature,” *Journal of Managerial Sciences* VII, No 2, No. 208 (2013): 92.

<sup>51</sup>al-Bayyinah 98:5.

<sup>52</sup>Ziba Kazemian and Bahram Ghamgosar, “The Relationship between Islamic Management and Organizational Entrepreneurship,” *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences* 5, No. 10, (2011): 968.

<sup>53</sup>Abdus Sattar Abbasi, Kashif Ur Rehman, and Amna Bibi, “Islamic Management Model,” *African Journal of Business Management* 4, No. 9 (2010): 1875.

<sup>54</sup>al-Qasas 28:77; al-Baqara 2:201.

*"And seek the (betterment of) the Ultimate Abode with what Allah has given to you, and do not neglect your share from this world, and do good as Allah did good to you."*

To live a busy life and involve in worldly affairs is a distinguished attribute of Islam. A Muslim is motivated to involve in work not only because it is his/her physical requirement to live a sustainable life but also because it is a Divine Call. Work being a commandment of Allah and obligation upon a Muslim provides a sense of love for engaging in these activities. It encourages Muslims to do work and complete it in a better way.

### 5.6. Quality of Work

Love of work requires its completion with absolute beauty and accuracy. Islam insists on the pursuit of beauty in every walk of life. In the Qur'ānic parlance beauty means to strive for good. It is commended in all aspects of life. It has been stated in the Qur'ān:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْعَفُورُ<sup>55</sup>

*"the One who created death and life, so that He may test you as to which of you is better in his deeds. And He is the All-Mighty, the Most-Forgiving."*

Ihsān stands for performance excellence and beautification of one's work. The pursuit of beauty in every task is manifested in one's commitment for perfection regarding the job accomplishment. The Prophet said:

*"Allah has prescribed proficiency in all things."<sup>56</sup>*

The context of the hadīth makes it clear that proficiency in all dealings means the execution of assigned tasks with beautification and perfection resulting in quality improvement. Quality consciousness motivates Muslims to do every task in a complete, correct and profound manner. The quality improvement results in the productivity improvement which is the ultimate objective of organisations.<sup>57</sup>

## 6. Recommendations to Promote Ihsān in Organisations

The above-mentioned discussion makes it clear that Ihsān plays a vital role in promoting productivity in organisations. However, the benefits of attributes of Ihsān in a working environment can be achieved when Ihsān is practised in letter and spirit in organisations. To promote Ihsān, organisations need to reshape their policies. The Islamic

<sup>55</sup>al- Mulk 67:2.

<sup>56</sup>Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb Al Ṣaid wa al-Zibāi, Hadīth No. 5055.

<sup>57</sup>Al-Kahtanī, "An Application of Islamic Principles in Building a Robust Human Resource Management System (In Islamic countries)," *International Journal of Recent Advances in Organizational Behaviour and Decision Sciences* 1, No. 3, (2014): 187.

identity needs to be inculcated in the organisational objectives. Some of the proposed policy shifts to promote Ihsān in the organisations are described below.

### 6.1. Adjustments in Selection Process

To acquire a motivated workforce, which ought to be a pursuer of Ihsān, an organisation requires a clearly specified selection process. Human resource department must observe screening mechanisms for the selection of the right candidate for each job. Qur'ān describes honesty and strength to complete the job as preferred characteristics of a prospective employee.<sup>58</sup> The strength does not only include physical ability to perform a job, but knowledge, skill, experience, and motivation to complete the required duty as well. While honesty is the attribute that is closely related to Ihsān and is a result of piety. It is assumed that a pious person shall work according to the objectives of the organisation provided they are not against the teachings of Islam. Such a person exerts his/her possible best to do the job in the best of manners. To select an appropriate employee an organisation must clearly devise a selection process that ensures recruitment of honest, pious and God-fearing employee.

### 6.2. Training and Development

Once competent and true followers of the faith are recruited, their faith can be reinforced by the process of a continuous training program. Ihsān is an intrinsic psychological phenomenon that manifests in performance betterment. Workers must be oriented towards pursuance of Ihsān and acquiring the attributes that result from the core value of Ihsān. The organisations must arrange for job training programs, besides job arrangements to enhance their religious as well as working commitment. Continuous training programs are necessary in organisations to provide opportunities to workers to reinforce their work-related beliefs and commitments. To realise the significance of the economic impacts of Ihsān, organisations must arrange workshops to make it part of their employees' standard operating procedures.

### 6.3. Restructuring Organisation

A Muhsin worker (a worker who is a pursuer of Ihsān), completes his job with self-responsibility and sincerity. It implies that organisation shall be based upon those work structures that are based upon self-control and self-responsibility. For such a workforce there is no need for strict controls and close supervision. This also manifests in the decentralisation of administrative powers in the organisation.

### 6.4. Incentive Policies

A Muhsin employee is motivated by material as well as spiritual rewards. To satisfy physical needs of an employee, material rewards should be offered and to fulfil spiritual and moral necessities of employees, spiritual rewards such as facilitation in performance

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<sup>58</sup>al-Qasas 28:26.

of obligatory prayers, free of cost meals during Ramadhan, Umrah and Hajj opportunities for selected employees, payment of bonuses on both Eid's etc., can be made part of the reward management system. In other words, economic self-interest is not the only way of enhancing productivity among those employees who are pursuers of Ihsān.

### 6.5. Enjoining Good and Forbidding Wrong

To improve productivity, it is important to translate the theory of Ihsān into practice. For this, positive working environment is a necessary precondition. The working environment becomes pleasant with the practice of positive work-related attitudes. Positive work-related attitudes are instilled in the working environment with the Islamic principle of enjoining good and forbidding wrong. To promote the condition of Ihsān in organisations, working as per the Islamic law, opportunities to enjoin good and restrain from wrongdoings must be provided. Various training programs for enhancing the knowledge and skill and motivation of workers act as extrinsic means to make people more productive<sup>59</sup>. Whereas, the process of enjoining good and forbidding wrong may be used as an intrinsic motivator to motivate workers to become more determined and productive to carry out their assigned tasks with efficiency. Within the worker community, a group of people shall call towards performance excellence and better job accomplishment behaviour.

### 6.6. Worship

Status of Ihsān can be achieved by regular worships. By offering prayers five times a day and fasting in the month of Ramadhan, continuous state of communion with Allah can be achieved by revitalising His remembrance with love, realising His fear and reminding himself of His commands persistently. All these attributes prepare an individual to submit before Allah and be aware of His continuous observance; the ultimate objective of Ihsān. Through this realisation one's attitude towards work becomes more fruitful and productive. Similarly, other worships such as almsgiving, pilgrimage and jihad also prepare individuals to face hardships with ease. This attitude ultimately results in a better performance that leads to productivity improvement. Organisations must realise the impact of worship on human personality and provide their employees' proper atmosphere to perform it in a wholesome manner. For this, a suitable prayer place must be provided and workers should be relieved from work, for an appropriate time, to perform worship with ease and conviction. Moreover, the provision of Ramadhan meal on workplace and relieving some burden of work from employees creates a positive sense in the working environment. Such arrangements leave positive imprints on labour productivity.

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<sup>59</sup>aal-e-Imran 3:104.

## 7. Conclusion

Labour productivity is vital for organisations to compete in the market. Labour productivity can be enhanced by various means and methods. The Western concept of productivity is based upon secularist world view, especially in the business and management paradigm. The studies have proved that management in the West is failing due to a lack of ethics and morality in the workplace. As work is not only seen as a material necessity in Islam but also as a religious obligation and a form of worship in Islam, human efforts to improve labour productivity can be enhanced through positive work-related values derived from the concept of Ihsān. The Islamic concept of Ihsān carries some essential work-related values that can be useful to improve organisational productivity. Important attributes of Ihsān such as realisation of Allah, the concern of the Hereafter, self-appraisal, sincerity, love for work, quality of work, perfection in job accomplishment and determination positively affect labour productivity. All these attributes contribute to enhancement of intrinsic motivation and commitment to perform the job with the best of one's ability which ultimately leads towards improvement in organisational productivity. It is recommended to select those employees who are capable of practising work-related values derived from the status of Ihsān. Moreover, through continuous training and development, Ihsān related values can be inculcated in employees. In addition to it, they shall be rewarded by Islamic non-pecuniary incentives. The working environment must be created based on invoking self-responsibility and self-accountability.

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