

ETHICS OF ENGINEERING EDUCATION

Editors

**Abdi O. Shuriye
Ahmad Faris Ismail
Azweeda Bt. Dahalan @ Ghazali**



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PART THREE

THE CONCEPT OF ITQAN AND CULTURE IN MUSLIM PROFESSIONAL LIFE

THE CONCEPT OF ITQAN AND ITS ROLE IN MUSLIM PROFESSIONAL LIFE

Abdi O. Shuriye and Ibrahim A. Haji Adam

ABSTRACT

Professional Ethics which concern one's conduct of behavior and practice when carrying out professional work needs *Itqan*. The word *Itqan* is an Arabic word which has a close meaning to the English word *perfection*. Islam as a perfect and comprehensive religion set the bases for quality work. The order, discipline, accuracy, beautiful work, well thought out tasks and justice are all part of quality Islamic work and performance. Quran as the final divine revelation from Allah provides a code of conduct for every believer and is the commandment and warrant for him to be committed in his/her work and be sincere about it [5]. Adhering to the Quranic teachings on *itqan* equips the Muslim professional an effective approach to problem-solving preceded by steady and thorough examination before undertaking an activity and enables the Muslim to tackle problems in an orderly and disciplined manner. This prompts us to the institutionalization of Codes of Conduct and Codes of Practice which are common in many professional bodies for their members to observe. This paper attempts to investigate the importance of this concept and its role in the Muslim life.

Key terms: itqan; professional ethics; codes of conduct.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Arabic word *itqan* is a word used to indicate the level of quality work. The best English translation of *itqan* is to arrange and dispose of things in a scientific and artistic way in order to obtain the most perfect results. There are other Arabic words similar to *itqan*. A synonym for *itqan* is *ihkam* which means doing things with wisdom. The word "wisdom" (*hikmah*) and its derivatives are mentioned in the Holy Qur'an in no less than three hundred places implying the simplest and clearest indication of Islam's concern for doing quality work [5]. Before discussing *itqan* as concept, let us further elaborate the comprehensive meaning of this word. If we first compare this Islamic definition of quality work, *itqan*, with the common English language definition used today, we learn that the Islamic definition surpasses its English counterpart in several aspects. For example, the English word "precision" is used for sciences or crafts, whereas the word *itqan* can apply to work in all fields. Again, the English word "complete" as another example, we find that this word too is not equal to *itqan*. This is because things may be complete but not artistic or beautiful, which is implied in *itqan*. Furthermore, the words "precision" and "complete" are purely mechanical and do not have the spiritual connotations of *itqan* [5]. This fact is mentioned in the Holy Quran where Allah describes a scene in the Hereafter and says:

"And you see the mountains and think them firmly fixed, but they shall pass away as the clouds pass away. (Such is) the artistry of Allah, who disposes of all things in perfect order, for He is well acquainted with all that you do."

Clearly, this verse tells us that Allah's work is done with *itqan*.

The act of loving Allah, His qualities and attributes, is an essential part of Islam implying that the state of performance at the level of *itqan* is required by Islam and is the Sunnah of Prophet Mohamed (SAW). The Prophet said:

"Allah loves to see one's job done at the level of *itqan*."

Furthermore, Allah (SWT) says in the Holy Quran:

"Verily, We created man from a drop of mingled sperm, in order to try him, so We gave him (the gifts) of hearing and sight."

It is clear from this verse that life is merely a test, rather a race track upon which Muslims compete with one another to please Allah, build their faith, and construct the Islamic Ummah too. This implicitly raises the level of performance and quality of work to higher level standards.

With this as background information, the following sections discuss itqan as concept and how it is practiced in management in other Non-Muslim world. Itqan depicted as a healthy philosophy of management, best policies and practices has always been and throughout Islamic history widely embedded in Muslim organizational mindsets and holy textual oblique referentials [5]. Thus, order, discipline, accuracy, beautiful work, well thought out tasks and justice are all part of quality Islamic work and performance.

Similarly, the fundamental theories of western as well as for east ethics and morality, show clearly how these and a fuller consideration of these can lead to a much better practice of organizational social responsibility through a higher platform of quality consciousness. The business decision making and taking processes in most western and eastern societies might be driven by a systematic reflection of the prevailing globalized and globalizing external as well as internal Islamic Ummah [4]. The obvious implications of this state of affairs is in the legitimate re-extension and strengthening of the conceptual legacy of Islamic quality work, itqan, and its re-ownership and re-capturing by Muslim scholars for the benefit of Islamic Ummah organizations.

2. CRITERIA OF PROFESSIONALISM

To see how important the concept of itqan is to not only the Muslim professional but rather to the whole professional communities, we will consider what it takes to be a professional. Profession could have two different meaning facets, the first refers to a paid person for an activity performed, and the second refers to thoroughness and competence. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) profession refers to the pursuit of learned art in the spirit of public service. Profession without the guidance and regulation of ethical standards will not be able to secure merits; this necessitates the imperativeness of professional ethics; a set of standards adopted by professionals. It is diverse from personal ethics; the latter is the set of one's own ethical commitments [1].

Professionals are expected to establish a special relationship with the clients and patrons and avoid self-interest [1]. This expectation comes true if the professional fulfils several criteria. They are required to have substantial intellectual and practical training which involves the mastery of knowledge, systemized through a long-term studying and research in an academic institution and in the end certified with degree is considered the first criteria for the professionals. Professional autonomy and responsibility, the second criteria, implies a degree of acceptance by society of the legitimacy of the claim for control by the professional group and its level is related to the type of work. It involves their own definition of relationship with clients as well as power in the society [1]. The prophetic hadith reads:

"Allah Loves when you perform a deed to execute it with excellence"

That is to say that professionalism in Islamic perspective refers to the necessity of justice, fair play, goodness, kindness and forgiveness, or rather general directives on 'adl, qist, ihsan, taqwa.

3. *ITQAN* IN THE MUSLIM WORLD PAST AND PRESENT

In Islam, the division between the religious and the worldly is unrecognized. An act that is performed for the sake of Allah and the advancement in science and technology is not aimed only towards fulfilling the leading nations' desires for power, wealth and prestige. Rather it should be a base for the good and the well being of humankind [4]. In contrast to the Western civilization, in the Muslim civilization, the Quran and the Hadith are the sources of inspiration and moving factor for the Muslim civilization. This implies that the Muslim civilization is developed in the religious frame which is not the case in the Western civilization [4].

In addition to that, the greatest gift Muslims gave to the nations of the world is Islam. It is Islam's philosophy of utilizing the knowledge of the Qur'an, purity in the heart and clarity in the mind that was responsible for influencing the nations of the world to better serve Allah, raise the standards of living, and promote justice and brotherhood for all. It is the principles outlining the mission of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) that made a global change in world's scientific realm and world's social and spiritual culture that formed the Golden Age of Islam, 7th to 15th century. The point here is that, since its introduction, Islam had put strong bases for the establishment of its communities with enduring healthy and quality life. That is, itqan is among the concepts that Islam emphasizes for being adhered to. If we look at the Qur'anic verses about this issue, Allah says:

"A similar favour have you already received in that We have sent among you a Messenger (Muhammad) of your own, delivering to you Our Verses, and purifying you, and teaching you the Book (Qur'an) and the Wisdom." Qur'an, 2:151

It was the vehicle of Muslim achievements in combining reason and faith, accumulating useful knowledge and creating the experimental method with great perfection and to the level of itqan that subjected Europeans to get out of the Dark Ages and into the renaissance. Regarding this fact, Robert Briffault in his book, "The Making of Humanity" states [2]:

"It was under the influence of the Arabs and Moorish revival of culture and not in the 15th century, that a real renaissance took place. Spain, not Italy, was the cradle of the rebirth of Europe... Science is the most momentous contribution of Arab civilization to the modern world; but its fruits were slow in ripening. Not until long after Moorish culture had sunk back into darkness did the giant, which it had given birth to, rise in his might. It was not science only which brought Europe back to life. Other and manifold influence from the civilization of Islam communicated its first glow to European Life."

With the perfected work that led to Muslim civilization to change the lives of Europeans, it is clear to Muslims that reason and faith do not collide instead they integrate and yield fertile goodness. These points mentioned are clear-cut proof for the level of itqan in the Muslim communities in the early history and how, with this good scent of doing work, they influenced larger groups of societies who are not necessarily Muslims [6].

Today more than ever before, the concerned Muslim cannot afford setbacks or failure in his or her task. Today's Muslims are in dire need of state-of-the-art work and performance. To show how the Muslims are overridden now, the subsequent divisions will present the use of the Japanese society of the itqan concept and how they benefited from it as well as the Western societies.

3.1 JAPANESE MANAGEMENT STYLE AND ITS RELATION TO *ITQAN*

It is the culture of the Japanese people to strive for total professionalism in whatever they do. Any task is taken seriously, and is normally done with careful dedication. For example, in the Japanese organizations, employees at all levels are expected to seek perfection and most try to do so. This is true even of low grade workers, who often wear a simple uniform, such as a headband, to show

they are a dedicated, hardworking and supportive member of the group. The general attitude is that there is only one way of doing a job properly and it will be followed. And the training and retraining are highly valued, as befits the quest for professionalism and perfection [7].

Moreover, Companies expect their workers to voluntarily give up their evenings or part of the weekend to work or engage in work-related social activities. Hardly any staff members seem to take all of their allotted annual holidays. Lunch times are commonly restricted to half-an-hour. [7].

However, in the Muslim world, the labor is less concerned in time. The working hours are much less than the average of the Japanese and Western organizations. Over time jobs are not as usual as those countries. While people are focusing in industries and education, for examples, the Middle Eastern countries, where there are the majority of the Muslim countries, people rather depend on imports and are considered heavy consumers. The subsequent section will give suggestions in improving the situation, and increasing our level of quality work.

3.2 ITQAN AND THE MUSLIM LIFE

Increasing the level of itqan in our activities increases our level of taqwa because it is one of the things that our Prophet emphasized on us to inherit so that we adopt right and noble character. By the time we establish high level of itqan, we are also establishing good characters of striving for perfection. In this section, the Qur'anic verses and the Prophetic ahadith will be concentrated to show the paramount importance of itqan in the Muslim life [4].

The following hadith discussed in the previous section is repeated here so that one may infer from it the many dimensions of life that this hadith is applied to. This hadith shows that if we do our work with high degree of perfection, then Allah's love is guaranteed for us which is the place of the taqwa as well. The prophet says

إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى يُحِبُّ إِذَا عَمِلَ أَحَدُكُمْ عَمَلًا أَنْ يَتَّقِنَهُ
Which means: Allah likes those who when he/she does something, he/she does it with his/her best ability and is very thorough. [9]. Allah's love to Muslim is on top of above all. This motivates the Muslim to adhere to itqan in every life aspect so as to possess the criteria of Allah loves group.

In addition to that, one should consider our creation from the first place. We are not created without purpose; rather we are created to the best and perfect way. This itqan, or being thorough in doing something, is an obligation in Islam. Allah s.w.t incorporates this character when He creates man. This is clear from surah At-Tin, verse 4:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ
Which means: Verily, We created man of the best shape.

No doubt that Allah s.w.t has all the power to make us an ugly creature. Instead He perfected our creation. Not only that we humans only are created to the best way, rather Allah creates everything with perfection, as stated in surah As-Sajdah, verse 7:

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ
Which means: Allah perfected everything He has created.

As mentioned earlier, a professional should be sincere of all his actions and keep all his work to the highest perfect standards. This is life principle which we deduce from the Allah's creatures. We see that the vast sky is well laid above us which we see no cracks on them as we see on the buildings we make by ourselves as humans. Allah says in surah Al-Mulk, verse 3:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طَيِّبَاتٍ مَا تَرَى فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمَنِ مِنْ تَفَاطُوتٍ فَارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ هَلْ تَرَى مِنْ فُطُورٍ

Which means: Allah has created the seven heavens one above another, you can see no fault in the creation of the Most Beneficent. Then look again, “Can you see any rifts?” So, it is our obligation hence to do everything to the best of our effort in the level of itqan so that our Iman is kept top of all. We That is God’s work. Allah will not create something out of mere fancy. Instead He creates something with perfection [4]. In the creation of the earth and its spheres, Allah mentioned in surah Al-Anbiya, verse 16:

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لَاعِبِينَ
Which means: We did not create the heavens and the earth and all that is between them for a mere play.

Thus, Itqan, or diligence in doing something, is a pre-requisite in Islam. Regardless of the nature of job, be it an ibadah or mere relationship among mankind. That is, Muslims are obliged to practice Itqan even in their everyday work. The hadith just recited earlier does not differentiate between ibadah and worldly affairs. To generalize, Itqan is wajib, regardless of the nature of work. Through understanding and manifestation of Itqan, Muslims will be successful in this world and hereafter. If however, Itqan is missing in us, and we do our work carelessly and without commitment, we will not progress [4]. If we perform our prayers just to meet our responsibility, we will not be able to elevate ourselves in the eyes of Allah.

In almost all Muslim societies, in our work, if we just perform as to get the required income, our work will become mediocre. The quality of our work will not increase. Eventually we will be replaced.

In the academic life many students study just to pass exams. The result is that what we learn will disappear after the examination. This is because we do not have Itqan in our study. Our feeling is devoid of the quest to learn deeper into what we study. In the end, we end up being ordinary student and not an outstanding one.

Finally, in our quest to incorporate Itqan in our work, Muslims must not forget one basic principle which is our intention. If our intention is only for this world, then that is what we will achieve. If however, our intention is for Allah, and to help Islam, we will achieve happiness in this world and hereafter [4].

4. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

If we together increase our piety by doing good deeds, good deeds that benefit us, our families and society, and stay away from things that do not benefit us, we then remove the redundancy in our time rather concentrate only to the betterment of the Ummah and the human society as general.

In Islam, among the characteristics of God-fearing individuals are hard work, perseverance, and self-dependence. Allah says in Surah At-taubah, verse 105 which means: Say: Work away; God will see your labor, and so will His messenger and believers. You will be brought back to the Knower of the Unseen and the Visible, and He will notify you about how well you have been working. Such is the faith or iman that propels a person to work. Be it for welfare of the world or for the Afterlife [5].

We can now infer from this verse that working hard and staying on track of the righteous people is of paramount importance of not only for our existence but our well being as well. So, if a person is doing a timely work, what he/she thinks about, at all times, how to avoid missing the deadline. We normally as humans do the work last minutes which is considered backwardness. So, a Believer should continue to work even if he knows that the world would end tomorrow with all his efforts.

This is commanded by the Prophet himself when he said in a hadith recited by Imam Ahmad, which means: Should Qiyamat happen while you are holding a seed of a date in your hand, plant it if you are able to do so. Such is the working spirit and professionalism of Believers which we as contemporary Muslims should adhere to as well [5].

The point is that a Believer is always aware that when he works, he must be hardworking and efficient. This is the concept of Itqan or professionalism in Islam which has a high rank in Islam since it leads to the love of Allah to his servants. The Prophet also said which means: Verily Allah loves His servant who can do his work well (or the Itqan way).

From the verse, we infer that knowledge is the basis for doing sincere work since it needs high level of expertise to do it efficiently and effectively.

Let us take as an example how we do many things in this century; many matters need to be done by computer. Here of course the person needs the basic knowledge to operate the computer. The worker would find himself no longer relevant in this new work environment if he is competent in the operation of the computers. He would not be able to perform his job well and this would lead to unemployment. Both situations are against the spirit of Iman and Islam.

Nowadays, we work in an environment that demands a high level of skill. Not only in managing impressive machines but in practicing good work culture. We need to be good at managing our time, balancing our needs, prioritizing work, communication skills and others. Needs change, challenges increase, new skills must therefore be learnt. And all of us, as Muslims, we have show the spirit of constantly wanting and willing to learn and increase knowledge. Because of this they showed themselves capable of leading mankind in the most prosperous times known to civilization.

To show how important the concept of Itqan is in Islam, we are required that we strive for progress and improve our knowledge and skills. To convince ourselves, let us learn from Prophet Musa a.s. Even though he was a prophet and had already reached the peak of power, and had great knowledge that enabled him to defeat the Egyptian magicians, Allah still directed him to improve himself and to seek more knowledge. Allah commanded him to learn from a pious servant [5].

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the concept of Itqan or perfection in one's work in Islam and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead of the Muslim worker are presented. The practice of this concept in the Non-Muslim nations like Japan is also discussed. Suggestions and recommendations to the current problems related to the perfection of one's work in the set of technological and institutional challenges in the Muslim world which has a paramount importance in the contemporary Muslims has been discussed.

More importantly, the bases and foundations that Islam established for sincere duty performing for both the worldly and hereafter are clear proof for how important itqan is in Islam. The Qur'anic verses and the Ahadith from the prophet (s.a.w) which not only encourages the perfection in all our activities for betterment but rather inculcates the love of Allah (s.w.t) to the servants practicing itqan in their duties are numerous. This shows how both explicitly and implicitly itqan is related to our Iman. All these verses and ahadith encourage the Muslim professionals to strive for excelling the work so as to improve the situations at all times.

In conclusion, itqan has a very great role in the Muslim life which is proved by established foundations for this concept in Islam.

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