

Social Psychology: A Critical Analysis from Islamic and Scientific Perspectives and Application in Industrial/Organizational Psychology

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Abstract

The objective of this present theoretical paper is to provide an explanation on social psychology from Islamic perspective. The paper firstly discussed in general an overview of social affection, behaviour and cognition from Islamic point of view. Secondly, contemporary theories in social psychology were evaluated from both scientific and Islamic perspectives. Thirdly, the paper attempts to apply social psychology's principles and theories to explain issues in applied field of Industrial/ Organizational Psychology. Finally, to embrace the importance of the role of human soul, an integrated model was proposed. The paper had referred to both psychology and Islamic psychology's secondary sources. From Islamic perspective, whenever possible, explanation from *Quran*, *Sunnah*, *Fiqh*, *Aqidah* and *Akhlaq* perspectives were presented.

Keywords: *Islamic social psychology, fitrah, iman, biah solehah, abid, khalifah, impression formation, prejudice and discrimination, compliance, prosocial behaviour, perceived fairness, organizational change and development and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB).*

Introduction

Islam emphasizes the importance of environment as an effective element in social composition (Khalid, 2002; Najati, 2002). This emphasis in line with subjects studied in social psychology where social psychology has been defined as the scientific study of how a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviour are influenced by the real and imagined presence of others (Franzoi, 2006; Ciccarelli & White, 2009) and some has noted presence of others as others in social situation (Morris & Maisto, 2005). From both definitions offered, social psychology can be understood as the scientific study of how presence of others (direct and indirect) can affect human feeling, thinking and behaviour in social setting. Islam also acknowledges the influence of presence of others and social situation on human cognition, thought and affection (Mahudin, 2009) where it discusses the importance of *fitrah* (human nature)

and the influence of *biah solehah* (good social situation) and *iman* (one's soul) on one's behaviour and mental processes.

Human nature or *fitrah* refers to the inborn disposition of man, the pure state or pattern of man created by Allah (see Quran, 30:30). From this verse, *fitrah* here refers to nature of man where Allah has created man in the pure, true and free state and inclined to right virtue (Ali, 2005; Mohammed, 1998). *Sunnah* also has indicated the term *fitrah* as the inborn disposition of man, the condition by which all mankind was born in the same natural inclination. In Prophet's (pbuh) famous *hadith*, narrated by Abu Huraira r.a.: "Every newborn child was born in a state of *fitrah*. Then his parents make him a Jew, a Christian or a Magian". This *hadith* not just implies the *fitrah* inborn in men, but it also acknowledges the role of *aqidah* (i.e. the parents' religion) and the presence

of others (i.e. the parents) in shaping the child's behaviour and mental processes. With this innate potential, Islam promotes the creation of good social situation (*biah solehah*) in children upbringing. Inborn with *fitrah*, men are ought to fulfil his role as *abid* (servant of Allah) and *khalifah* (vicegerent of Allah; al-Attas, 1985). With this *fitrah*, one is potential to fulfil his obligation and responsibility at the most. However, Islam also acknowledges possible effect of psychological factor like presence of others, as Prophet (pbuh) said in his *hadith* narrated by Abu Hurairah r.a., "Man pursues his friend's religion. So, one should consider whom he makes his friend".

Sirah has illustrated how presence of others influences human behaviour, cognition and emotion. For example, caliph Umar r.a. who embraced Islam due to presence of others' behaviour which was his sister's recitation of Quran (Khan, 2001). However, Asiah (wife of Pharaoh) surrounded by non-believers still retained not just believer's behaviour and cognition but also a firm belief to oneness (*tawheed*) and mercifulness (*ar-Raheem*) of Allah. Asiah shows how soul (*iman*) overpowered the influence of presence of others. Nonetheless, in Umar's case his sister recitation of Quran has triggered his soul to accept the truth, but it is also because of readiness of his soul to accept the truth. Therefore, the influence of social situation on human behaviour is not a simple/ direct relationship where it depends on the soul as the moderator variable. In Asiah's case soul (*iman*) over powered the influence of presence of others. Therefore, with these ideas of *fitrah* and the influence of soul (*iman*), in line with the role of men as *abid* and *khalifah*, it will guide our next discussion on the contemporary theories in social psychology whereby: 1) social psychological theories will be evaluated from both scientific and Islamic perspectives, 2) social psychological

theories will be used to elucidate relevant issue in Industrial/Organisational (I/O) Psychology and 3) the role of soul (*iman*) and man's role as *abid* and *khalifah* will be highlighted in explaining relevant issues in I/O Psychology.

Social cognition: Impression formation

Common sense always noted that first impression matter. Why? One possible reason is primacy effect, proposed by Fiske and Taylor (as cited in Hill, 2009; Morris & Maisto, 2005), they theorized that early information about someone weighs more heavily than later information in affecting one's impression of a person. But how far is this true? Firstly, it is unclear whether primacy effect is due to later information being reinterpreted or less attended to and rejected (Hill, 2009). In contrast, Luchins (as cited in Hill, 2009) found that information presented last has a stronger influence, known as recency effect. Further, Kruganski and Freund (as cited in Hill, 2009) found that impression also influenced by the cognitive representation (i.e. stereotype) that one have on social group (e.g. Chinese teacher who thinks Malays are lazy will poorly rate his Malay student). Therefore, it can be concluded that, first impression can be altered by recency effect, reinterpretation and stereotype.

From Islamic perspective, *Sirah* has illustrated example of Quraish first impression to Prophet (pbuh). At first, it was positive due to Prophets' good character, to the extent he is known as the trustworthy (*al-Ameen*) among the Quraishs (Alias, 2005; Rahman, 1990). However, according to Alias (2005) the first impression changed after the Prophet's *nubuwwah* (prophethood) due to aqidah differences (i.e. *iman*). This example illustrated the vital role of *iman* in impression formation. Therefore, first impression may not last forever, as it is prone to reinterpretation and also

depends on one's iman (acceptance of the fact/truth).

One issue concerns in I/O Psychology is the impression formation during employment interview (Milward, 2007; Rynes, 1993). Interviewers' impression has an impact on hiring decision and applicants' impression on interviewers can also affect their intention to accept job offer (Rynes, Barber & Varma, 2000). The former can be explained as the influence of early and later information about applicant (primacy and recency effect) on hiring decision. It is also possibly affected by interviewer's stereotype on certain ethnic and reinterpretation of information received before the interview (i.e. applicant resume) resulted from the impression formed during the interview. Applicants also can reject the job offers due to recency effect, reinterpretation and stereotype. Applicant might have a good first impression on the organization prior interview but later altered after been interviewed (recency effect). The alteration might be a result of reinterpretation of prior information on the organization and also resulted from stereotype. For example, Chinese applicant might turn down job offer if they were interviewed by a group of Malay interviewers because the ethnicity of the interviewers influence the applicant impression (i.e. the company is dominated by Malays, its management must be very inefficient since Malays are lazy). Therefore, it can be concluded that primacy effect, recency effect, reinterpretation and stereotype can affect impression formation of both interviewer and job applicant.

However, it may not be the same case for Muslim job applicants and Muslim practitioners who acknowledge cultural diversity as proposed by Islam: "*I have created you into tribes and nations, so you may know each other*" (Quran, 49: 12). A true Muslim who holds this Quranic indication may

have different impression on the employment interview either they are in the shoe of applicant or interviewer. One may not be influence by the ethnicity of the former or the later because faith and soul (*iman*) plays an important role for impression formed as job applicant or interviewer. In addition, if the organization fosters a multinational diversity in its practice by appreciating differences and demoting bias, it conforms to the creation of *biah solehah* propagated in Islam. This workplace biah solehah can encourage more understanding on human diversity (employee as *abid*) and better organizational practice (employee as khalifah) and in turn, comply with *fitrah*. Therefore, it can be seen that, at individual level soul (*iman*) can moderate and/or overpower effect of negative interviewer/applicant impression formation, and at organizational level creation of *biah solehah* in organization can instigate positive interviewer/applicant impression formation.

Attitude: Prejudice and discrimination

Prejudice and discrimination do not necessarily occur together (Franzoi, 2006). One may be prejudiced against a particular group without openly behaving in discriminatory manner. A Chinese shop-owner may just smile at his Indian customer, disguising his opinions that could hurt his business. This shows that unlike discrimination (i.e. the action) prejudice reflects the unfavourable attitude on a group of people. But, why does this prejudice happen? Sherif (as cited in Hill, 2009) noted in his intergroup conflict theory, prejudice is a result of competition between groups to obtain limited resources. However, his theory has been severely criticized for its methodological flaws where he used boy scouts as sample that artificially reflects competition of limited resources. So, it

cannot explain the true sense of intergroup conflict and how it can have influence on prejudice.

In another theory, Adorno and his colleagues (as cited in Hill, 2009; Morris & Maisto, 2005) associated the personality with prejudice where individual with authoritarian personality (i.e. hostile, inflexible, contemptuous, conventional and prone to categorize people) sees minority group as less superior rely more on stereotypes and thus leads to greater prejudice to the minorities. However, this theory failed to explain the sudden increase of prejudice at certain time and place (Hill, 2009). For example, why suddenly prejudice on Muslims arose although Muslims are not the superior civilisation. Therefore, it can be concluded that, to some extent (although with some limitations) prejudice can be explained as a result of intergroup conflict and authoritarian personality.

Sirah had also showed how prejudice is not a mere result of limited intergroup conflicts and authoritarian personality. During *Hijrah*, the *Ansar* welcomes the *Muhajirin* (who comes with nothing) and share all it resources without having any prejudice, the fact that they themselves have limited resources (Alias, 2005; Rahman, 1990). This is because of their trust and soul (*iman*) to Allah and His apostle. In another example, Umar r.a. who is known for his authoritarian personality has never feel prejudiced on the minority. In one event, as he disguised himself to inspect the life condition of his people, he met a lady who boiled stones to soothe starving children and he was criticized by the woman as an ignorant leader (i.e. who neglected poor people; Khan, 2001). He accepted his weakness and cried for Allah's guidance and immediately ran home grabbed some food for the woman and the children. This shows that authoritarian personality may not necessarily leads to greater prejudice as Umar r.a. has a soul (*iman*) that enables him to *muhasabah* himself and

to have mercy on the minority. These two examples had showed the importance of soul (*iman*) in moderating the effect of social situation and personality on prejudice. Therefore, it can be seen that intergroup conflict and Adorno's theory of authoritarian personality cannot explain the non-judgemental attitude of the *Ansar* and Umar r.a. because soul (*iman*), as the most powerful factor has been neglected in their explanation.

One issue related to prejudice in I/O Psychology is perceived fairness in selection process. That is, when applicant perceived the selection process or the individuals involved (e.g. interviewers) as being unfair (Anderson, Born & Cunningham-Snell, 2000; Gilliland, 1993; Rynes et al., 2000). The perceived unfairness may be resulted from perceived authoritarian personality of the interviewers, which is believe to influence his judgement on applicant's personality and demographic characteristics (e.g. ethnicity). It can also be due to perceived intergroup conflict whereby if a good Indian applicant is interviewed by a Chinese majority company, he might turn down the job offer as a result of perceived unfair future competition of resources (e.g. promotion and career development). Therefore, it can be seen that intergroup conflict and authoritarian personality can have effect on applicant perceived fairness towards selection process.

However, Muslim practitioner who acknowledges the negative effect prejudice, he/she should be the last person to form prejudice as Allah has said in Quran: "*Oh ye who believe, shun much suspicion, some suspicion is a crime. Spy not, neither backbite one another. Would one of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Ye abhor that (so abhor the other). And keep your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is relenting, Merciful*" (49: 11). Understanding of this verse will make one understand (as *abid*) why Islam discouraged wrong

evaluation on others and one will less likely to have prejudice on job applicant (as *khalifah*) during selection even if the applicant is of different racial group.

Quran also has illustrated ways to deal with prejudice and discrimination: “*Oh ye who believe, let not a talk ridicule talk who may better than they are, nor let women ridicule women who better than they are, neither defame one another or insult one by nicknames*” (Quran, 49: 10). But, sometimes wrong evaluation can occur unintentionally. Nevertheless, Muslim practitioner (*khalifah*) who is guided by this verse will try finding ways to reduce the prejudice and discrimination. In other words, with correct understanding of the Quranic indications resulted from one’s soul (i.e. strong belief or *iman* toward *Quranic* indications), Muslim interviewer will neither let his bias nor would he ridicule job applicants. In turn, it creates *biah solehah* in selection process in turn fulfil the *fitrah* of man as *abid* and *khalifah*. Therefore, it can be seen that, at individual level, soul (*iman*) can overcome employee prejudice and discrimination as interviewer, and at organizational level, creation of *biah solehah* in selection process can ensure a less prejudice and less discriminative selection process.

Social influence: Compliance

Compliance can be understood as behavioural change in response to an explicit request from another person/group (Franzoi, 2006; Ciccarella & White, 2009; Morris & Maisto; 2005). But why people comply with other’s request? Firstly is because the presentation of smaller request has made people feel obligated for subsequent larger request resulted from foot-in-the-door (FITD) technique. Secondly, it can also be as a result from after effect of door-in-the-face (DITF) technique, that is one rejection to larger request

make oneself feel sorry/ guilty to reject the following small request.

However, research has showed that these two techniques are prone to cultural susceptibility. Cialdini, Petrova and their colleagues (as cited in Ciccarella & White, 2009) found that FITD only works in individualist culture and DITF only works in collectivist culture. In addition, meta-analyses results suggest that effectiveness of FITD was not due to the feeling obligated to comply as small request has been accepted, rather due to cooperative self-image (Franzoi, 2006). By accepting the small request a person has presented a cooperative self-image and thus will more likely to comply with bigger request in order to protect the cooperative self-image. Therefore, it can be concluded that the compliance techniques, although can be very effective, they are also susceptible to cultural context and individual self-image representation.

Prophet (pbuh) has long used the two techniques even before they were coined. He has spread Islam by small request of changing the *aqidah* before resulting to bigger request of changing the *akhlaq* and implementing the *shariah*. However, the Arabs *Jahiliyyah* compliance to *tawheed*, *akhlaq* and *shariah* was not merely due to feeling obligated/ indebted to fulfil bigger request, rather because of the readiness of their soul (*iman*) to accept the truth (i.e. Islam). For example, Abu Bakr r.a. who accepted without questions the true religion conveyed by Prophet (pbuh).

Nevertheless, changing one’s religion can be a large request due to differences in readiness of soul (e.g. Abu Lahab). Abu Lahab is known for his hostility against the spread of Islam. Embracing Islam is a huge demand for him. Thus, Prophet (pbuh) tried requesting smaller request by just inviting his uncle to have meal at his house, his uncle complied (Rahman, 1990). Prophet (pbuh)

offered the food and said, "Eat in the name of Allah". His uncle and others had the food, though the food was not much. They all became full and they were astonished at that fact. But Abu Lahab quickly said "We have not seen magic like this of today. Let us leave!" All of them parted, mocking and making fun of Prophet (pbuh). This shows how small/huge request was perceived differently due to differences in *iman*. These two examples demonstrate the vital role of soul (i.e. different level of *iman*). Therefore, it can be seen that, it is not just cultural differences and self-image that can impede the effectiveness of compliance techniques, but also differences in soul (i.e. *iman*). In turn, these different level of readiness of soul (*iman*) can have influence on one's perception on either the request asked is small or huge request.

Compliance techniques can be applied in I/O Psychology especially in organizational change and development that deals with managing employee acceptance to organizational changes (e.g. merging and downsizing). When changes take place, it can leads to many unwanted organizational outcomes such as turnover, low productivity, low job satisfaction and low commitment (Aamodt, 2007; Spector, 2005). This is because the changes are perceived as a huge request. But, some employees retained or complied as a result of smaller organization's requests. For example, introduction to new-technology in workplace can leads to employee resistance (rejection of huge request). But with small request such as attending workshop prior to the introduction to new-technology, employee will more likely to comply with the new policy. Therefore, which compliance techniques can effectively deal with employee resistance to changes actually depends on how employee perceived the changes (i.e. as small/huge request).

However, Muslim practitioner who understands (as *abid*) the role of individual differences (e.g. readiness) in compliance should be wise enough to select and apply either one of the techniques depending on context, especially in implementing organizational policy (as *khalifah*). This is because the effectiveness of each techniques in managing organizational changes not just depends on how would other perceived the cost of the request but it is also depends on one's readiness to deal with the changes. Further, understanding the process of managing the organizational changes in the light of *sirah* example (e.g. Abu Bakr's vs. Abu Lahab's acceptance of change) will make one see how soul (*iman*) influences one's acceptance to changes. In turn, this understanding will make Muslim employee and practitioner consider individual differences in facing changes and thus, will try to provide the best way of managing organizational changes that can foster employee's role as *abid* and *khalifah* (fulfilment of *fitrah*). Therefore, it can be seen that at individual level, soul (*iman*) will influence how employee will cope with changes and at organizational level, and an efficient management of changes (*biah solehah*) through understanding of employee acceptance and readiness can leads to better management of organizational changes.

Social Action: Prosocial behaviour

Why do people help? Is it because of self interest or personal gain? Psychologist has been trying to explain the reason for helping. Prosocial behaviour is also known as helping behaviour. But, when an act of helping is done with no expectation, it is known as altruism (Franzoi, 2006). Helping behaviour can be explained from several aspects like situational determinant and personal characteristics. Latane and Darley (as cited in Cicarelli & White, 2009; Hill, 2009) found that

people are more likely to help when they are alone rather than when they are with others, the phenomenon called bystander effect. This effect takes place as a result of diffusion of responsibility. However, it was argued that the findings have low generalizability due to artificiality of the experiment (Hill, 2009). So, it cannot depict the real picture on why people help.

Nonetheless, Pillavin and colleagues (as cited in Hill, 2009) has further examined bystander effect in field experiment and found an impressive helping behaviour especially with one's own race. But, if the emergency time prolonged, it will increase the likelihood of bystander effect. Further it was argued that the uncontrolled setting of the experiment can actually confounded the data. In other words, the conclusion that people will help in emergency situation may not be because they want to help. But, it is a result of rationalising the costs of not helping over helping. In other aspect of situational determinant, social norm theory proposed that helping behaviour is influence by the social norms/expectations (e.g. reciprocity). However, this theory cannot explain the behaviour of helping beggars as beggars will not have anything to be offered back (Hill, 2009).

Some even noted that helping also depends on personal characteristics. It is believe that person with altruistic personality, person's mood and motivation when help is required, empathy, person with fear of embarrassment and person with high need of approval are more likely to help (Morris & Maisto, 2005). However, this personal characteristics determinant of helping behaviour received a rather weak research support (Hill, 2009). In sum, it can be seen that whether to help or not actually depends on numbers of people available when help is needed, costs weighed, similarity in race, social norms and the least will be individual personal characteristics.

Helping behaviour is strongly urged in Islam and has been beautifully demonstrated by the Ansar people during *Hijrah* period. Unlike what has been propagated by past theories on bystander effect, Ansar's helping behaviour is more of the social norms and the environmental location (i.e. Medina) that foster the practice of prosocial behaviour (Alias, 2005), but cultivation of this prosocial behaviour is also due to the *tarbiyyah* (education) and *ukhuwwah* disseminated by Prophet (pbuh). In addition, Ansar's prosocial behaviour is a result of their soul (*iman*), that make them always ready to welcome and help their other Muslim brothers and sisters in need and also because of their love to Prophet (pbuh). This shows that Ansar's prosocial behaviour is not a mere result of social norm, where it is strongly powered by their level of *iman*. Therefore, one's helping behaviour may not simply results from social norms rather urged by one's state of soul (i.e. level of *iman*).

In I/O Psychology, prosocial behaviour in organization is known as organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB; Milward, 2007; Organ, Podaskoff & MacKenzie, 2006). It reflects the employee extra miles behaviour, where the employee performed jobs that is not required for the betterment of organization. This behaviour can be explained as a result of organizational norm/culture where organization encourages their employee to contribute some extra efforts (e.g. helping the newly employed employee). It can also be seen as a result of the employee motivation and willingness to help that may not necessarily be due to bystander effect. If the organization is dominated by one dominant race, it is possible the OCB in organization will be more encouraging as one are more likely to help one's own race. However, if the helping can be very costly to employee especially when workloads become burdening, it may lead to

bystander effect where the employee will expect other less burdening workload will do more extra miles behaviour. In addition, assuming that, the higher the job position, the more workloads one will have to bear. Thus, higher ranked workers would expect the lower ranked workers to the beneficial non-job related behaviours. Hence, it can be concluded that OCB may be a result from organizational culture and socialization (situational determinants), but it depends as well on employee motivation and job position (personal characteristics).

Islam encourages helping behaviour among its believers as Allah said in the Quran: “*Help you one another in righteousness and piety, but help you not one another in sin and rancour*” (5:3). Further, in another verse Allah said: “*See you one who denies the Judgement (to come)? That is he who repulses the orphan, and urgeth not the feeding of the needy. So woe to the worshippers who are heedless of their prayers, who would be seen at worship, but yet refuse some small kindness!*” (Quran, 107:1-7). A Muslim employee who understands (as *abid*) the former verse will embrace the message and performs OCB (as *khalifah*) in the spirit of righteousness and piety resulted from one’s state of soul (high level of *iman*) although it is not monetarily rewarded nor required by the organization. It can also triggered by one’s understanding of the effect of not helping indicated in the later verses. In other words, with correct understanding of the Quranic indications resulted from one’s soul (i.e. strong belief or *iman* toward *Quranic* indications), Muslim employee and practitioner will performs and promotes OCB. Neither presence of others (situational determinants) nor would his job position (personal characteristics) can impedes the performance of

OCB. In turn, it will create *biah solehah* in organizational culture that can possibly foster fulfilment of *fitrah* to be *abid* and *khalifah*. Therefore, it can be seen that, at individual level, soul (*iman*) can drive one’s motivation to perform OCB, and at organizational level, creation of *biah solehah* that cultivates the importance of OCB can ensure a keenness to perform OCB among employees.

Conclusion

The subject of social psychology focuses on how presence of others influences one’s thoughts, feelings and behaviour. It can be seen that presence of others does influence our first impression on others (impression formation), our judgement on others (prejudice and discrimination), why we comply with others’ requests (compliance) and also our decision to help others (prosocial behaviour). However, soul (*iman*) can moderate the influence of presence of others on our social behaviours and enables us to perform our role as *abid* and *khalifah* (see Appendix A).

Employing this idea in organizational context, with soul (*iman*) as moderator variable it governs our social cognition and behaviour at workplace. This governance enables us to be a good Muslim employee and practitioner who are capable of creating a good working atmosphere (*biah solehah*) that fosters our fulfilment of *fitrah* (i.e. to be the best *abid* and *khalifah* of Allah). In sum, it can be concluded that, with soul (*iman*) as moderator variable, it can help provide better explanation of the ideal and Islamic social cognition, perception influence and action, as well as offering better explanation of the ideal Muslim employee and Muslim practitioner’s affection, behaviour and cognition in work setting.

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Appendix A

Model of understanding Islamic social psychology

