

Repositioning the Service Worker: An Islamic Dawah Based Perspective

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Abstract- Dawah as a religious practice is well known. However, how it can help organizations to relay differentiate on the basis of their workforce is unknown to business and management scholars. This concept paper aims to contribute to management knowledge by proposing a Dawah based perspective to brand the workforce for service organizations, operating particularly in Muslim countries such as Indonesia and Pakistan. The Quranic verses are interpreted (in a much more focused way) to extract a few key elements which can be used by organizations to train their workforce. The article also highlights how Muslim countries can collaborate with each other to practice Dawah at the workplace.

Keywords: Dawah, ethics, Muslim, Islam.

1. Introduction

The Asian organizations are struggling hard to survive in the face of strong global players in the Asian territories. The competition is challenge comes mainly from two broader aspects – high quality products manufactured around customer needs and the strong corporate culture which advocates ethics and morality to be the leading forces driving the workforce (Kim and Choi, 2013). In an era dominated by services sector all across the globe, there is strong need felt to *brand* the workforce mainly to satisfy and delight the stakeholders – the customers in particular (Edwards, 2012). There are several organizational factors which contribute to the development of a branded workforce. However, before moving forward, there is a need to develop an argument as why a branded workforce is needed? What is the real loss if the employee branding or workforce branding is not stressed especially in the highly dominating services sector all across the globe?

There are several reasons which justify the logic of establishment of a branded workforce in the Asian region. The world economy is dominated by services sector and major investment in Asian region is mainly in sectors such as telecom, fast food, and banking which is a mix of hybrid and pure services. The research community highly understand that goods and services are perceived and marketed in a different way – there are many differences between the two forms of products (Lovelock, 2011). The services are co – created which signify the important role to be played by frontline employees to design and deliver the services alongside the customers (Wilder et al., 2014). This also permeates that there are two parties – customers and frontline employees as part of a larger, much broader social system which need to be managed well to attain desirable outcomes such as profits and long-term reputation. Both the parties are required to play their designated roles which otherwise can sabotage the service delivery process and co – destruction can occur (Kashif et al., 2015c). Hence, the highly engaged, committed, and loyal employees are pivotal for the success of service encounter between customer and employees. It is true that skilful employees are always demanded at the workplace, but since service encounter is co – created, the customers can really observe the *justice* and *fairness* as stressed by frontline service employees (Tax and Brown, 2012). Once the customers observe an unfair treatment, they not only switch to the other professional service providers, rather they also tend to switch the brand which is harmful for the organization, its survival in the long-run, and the reputation of its staff (Porath et al., 2011). The fair treatment of employees is usually attributed to a strong ethical culture – a culture which promotes ethicality at the workplace and advocates values such as fairness, morality, justice, harmony, fear of God, and the truthfulness.

However, in organizations, such a culture is yet to be a dream to come true (Ardichvili et al., 2009). The role of leadership, the members of top management in particular, is critical to establish an ethical workplace organization (Schaubroeck et al., 2012).

On the other side, workplace culture is not found to be something which really triggers an ethical conduct and induces employees to act in a certain (ethical) way. For instance, the incidents of unethical and immoral acts at the workplace are increasing day by day (Barsky, 2011) which is putting a dent to the organizational reputation and survival in the long-run. The global organizations are affected by this *profitability syndrome*. However, Asian workplace seem to be badly affected by the unethical workplace practices where employees working at various levels in an organization cheat – mainly in order to achieve their sales targets (Shahriar Ferdous and Polonsky, 2013). In an organization where customers also are part of a service delivery system, the observance of unethical conduct is really damaging the *spirit de corps*. The customers, in developing world do not have strong confidence in the service staff to be able to deliver excellent customer service – at par with the expected standards (Kashif et al., 2014). On the contrary, the global organizations operating in Asia have much better consumer perceptions of quality in the services sector and also have strong home country images (Kashif et al., 2015b) – another area where Asian organizations are lacking. These studies also show that customers in developing Asian countries perceive that frontline employees working in Global organizations operating in the services sector have much better service skills as compared with the home country nationals. All this can be fairly attributed to the management of workforce diversity (Choy, 2007) and a strong *Glocal* strategy which acknowledges the global brand spirit inspired by the local cultural values to devise a corporate strategy (Edgington and Hayter, 2013). Another hallmark of Global firms operating in Asia is the strong leadership which they possess in comparison to the leadership crisis as faced by Asian firms (Chung and Chan, 2012). As the role of leaders in infusion of a strong workplace culture to induce ethicality at the workplace is regarded highly, there is a need to Asian firms to come out of this crisis to grow in the face of global Asian firms.

The ethical theories to establish a workplace culture are embedded in the Western paradigms which promote hedonism among the members of organizations – the employees. Hedonism – a pleasure seeking intent is common among employees as the organizations where they are employed are looking after the sales, revenues, and profits instead of religion and welfare (Tang, 2010). I am not proposing that the frontline employees are the only *corrupt* people on earth as instead the values such as greed, love for money, and competition among peers are the facets of a specific leadership system (JACKSON and ONES, 2007). Leaders are also driven by the waves of materialism of the west where the sole purpose of an organization is considered to be highly profitable – benefiting the entrepreneur. The corporate values in Asian region are driven by the *profitability wave* of the West which instils a love of money (Tang and Chiu, 2003) – the root cause of all major types of unethical misconduct. This is common among almost all major religious people – Muslims, Hindus, and Christians living in Asia (Wong, 2008). Generally, the religiousness among consumers and frontline staff is decreasing which can be attributed to an increase in the unethical practices at the workplace (Kashif et al., 2015b). The spirit of materialism and modernism in Asian world are damaging the traditional spirit to live and can easily stray the younger populations residing in Asia by making them mentally violent (Zhang, 2012). The economic inequality considered as a hug to the dragon is also attributed to the classic thought as posed by the feminist and romanticist waves of the 17th and 18th century Europe that changed the way we look at the ways of doing business (Ramirez-Faria, 2011). There is also lack of appreciation to the religion as a guide to organizations to foster workplace ethics in the management theory literature (Weaver and Agle, 2002). Religion is foremost in the development of an ethical workplace (Parboteeah et al., 2008) and can solve all major problems discussed above facing the modern workplace today. There is not only dearth of studies which provoke management thinking based on post-colonial voices, instead, there is limited understanding of *Islam* as a religion by the management and ethics theorists to foster morality at the workplace (Possumah et al., 2013).

The employee based branding – focused around the management and development of creating an *identity* of the workforce which is valued by the stakeholders. The employees are the *brands* – as promulgated by management and marketing researchers. The customers do not expect service to be

delivered by the organizations instead they value people – the frontline staff (Morhart et al., 2009). Hence their loyalty and engagement *to serve* is a critical success factor for organizations – service organizations in particular. There is also a need to engage frontline employees which is product of an ethical workplace culture as moral disengagement is attributed to the unethical acts being performed at the workplace by the employees working at various levels (Barsky, 2011). The employees cannot be branded if they are not engaged with their work which is serious challenge to the fore – especially to Asian organizations in the face of tough global competitors. The western theories have failed to instil an ethical workplace which also highlights the need to establish an ethical culture based on Islamic tradition and thought (Sidani and Al Ariss) – a new hallmark of branding the workforce in Asian context. The workforce cannot be differentiated or branded based on the Western paradigms as new thinking is needed to establish a workplace culture which helps in employee based branding for Asian organizations to compete with global players.

To establish branding from within the organization, the role of leaders, corporate values, and internal communication is well highlighted (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Based on the challenges facing Asian organizations, the Islamic practice of *Dawah* is advocated in this concept paper to strongly address the ethical issues facing contemporary organizations.

2. Dawah – an Islamic Product

Dawah is about conveying the message of Allah to mankind which has remained a core task of almost all the messengers and prophets of Allah Almighty. The purpose of *Dawah* is to act as a reminder to all the humans living on earth and has the potential to transform the human spirit of living to act in a righteous way – eyeing on this world as well as the life after death. The Muslim scriptures focus on *oneness* of Allah Almighty. The significant objective of life is to do the righteous deeds. As Allah Almighty said in verse 2 of Chapter 67 of Quran;

“We created death and life so that we can see; who from you do the righteous things”

In addition to the Prophets and messengers of Allah, their followers also performed the act of *Dawah*. In the 18th century, Shah Wali Allah (1703-1762 CE) from India (Sub-continent); Muhammad ibn 'Abdal Wahab (1703-1792 CE) from Arabia; and Muhammad bin Ali al-Shawkani (1760-1834 CE) from Yemen are well-known who spend their lives to perform the act of *Dawah*. By the turn of 19th century, Iqbal, also known as the *philosopher of east* (1877-1938) contributed in the social, political and religious reforms by writing poetry. His called the Muslim community towards the real aim of life – to focus on religious thought and practice and become a conscious (of right and wrong) Muslim. In short, the practice of *Dawah* is acted upon by all the religious sects in Islam but the management researchers have not yet benefited truly with the advantages (Kashif et al., 2015a) that such a religious practice can bring to establish workplace peace and harmony.

Islam is a complete religion which offers guide on spending daily as well as to perform various commercial activities. The religion Islam is based on the Qura'anic teachings and Hadith (Practice and teachings of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W.W). The word *Islam* conceptualizes act of submission of will to the supremacy of Allah. Islam has five pillars – (1) Shahadah/Tawhid (acceptance and acknowledgement of oneness of Allah); (2) Zakat (helping the poor and needy through charity); (3) Hajj (pilgrimage to the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, at least once in a lifetime); (4) Fasting; (4) Salawat (saying prayers five times a day). Tawhid is the core of Islam – the acceptance of oneness of Allah Almighty and all the Muslims need to obey the Islamic teachings – prescribed in the Quran and interpreted by Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H).

Allah Almighty said in one of the Qura'anic verses;

“Invite (people) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good counsel, and argue with them in the best of manners” (Chapter 16: Al-Nahl, Verse, 125).

Dawah is such a **communication which instils wisdom, good counsel and manners.**

On the other side, practice of *Dawah* is not merely a *communication* in its scope rather it is a great source of learning to being **truthful, self-evaluation, and obeying the guides of Allah** Almighty. In one of Qura'anic verses, Allah says;

“O those who believe, why do you say what you do not do? It is severely hateful in Allah's sight that you say what you do not do” (Chapter 61; As-Saff, Verse 2—3).

The practice of Dawah is stressed in the form of group which is pivotal for social and organizational development. In a Qura'anic verses as Allah Says;

“And there has to be a group of people from among you who call towards the good, and bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair. And it is these who are successful” (Chapter 3: Al-Imran, Verse: 104).

The practice of Dawah is for people to guide them to **remain fair** in their lives.

Dawah (spreading the message of Allah) has various motives as one of the motives is to establish a society based on virtue. As it is stated in Qur'an;

“You are the best Ummah (nation) raised for mankind. You bid the fair and forbid the Unfair” (Al-Imran 3:110).

This verse promotes the **preaching to others** and by people who are then be regarded as **honourable** in a sense that they guide others to avoid from unfair acts. Furthermore, another motive behind Dawah is to develop a welfare state. As stated in Qur'an;

“And warn the nearest people of your clan” (Ash-Shu'ara 26:214).

Preach to those who are **near to you** – the family, friends, and relatives.

Performing an act of Dawah is also a **prideful** act as performed by Prophets and Messengers of Allah. As stated in Qur'an;

“We sent Nuh (one of the Prophets) to his people saying (to him), “Warn your people before there comes to them a painful torment” (Nuh 71:01).

Finally, the key to success in this life and thereafter is the persistence in the performance of act of Dawah. As stated in Qur'an,

“I swear by the Time, [1] man is in a state of loss indeed, [2] except those who believed and did righteous deeds, and advised each other for truth, and advised each other for patience [3]” (Al-Asr 1—3:103).

There are four types of people who are not at loss – the **believers** (in Allah); perform **righteous** deeds; **advise** each other for truth; and advising each other for **patience**.

3. Conclusion

From the analysis of these Quranic verses, we reach to the conclusion that Dawah is an act which can be regarded as a communication to instil wisdom, good counsel and manners among its practitioners. In an era where the incidents of unethical workplace activities and the incidents of mistreatment of the staff, this internal communication can make individuals more wise, mindful, and well mannered to deal with the day to day challenges. Beyond communication, Dawah is an act of obeying the guidelines of Allah (only) and remain critical about one, as well as truthful while making promises. Lack of customer trust in employees can easily be encountered if employees are truthful and fear only Allah Almighty while performing their jobs. Fairness, preaching to others about patience and performance of right acts can bring a change in the personality of an individual – an element of success in social encounters. In an era where employee patience is regarded as a determining factor to ensure the success of service encounter, patience and being on the right track can become the hallmark of success. Finally, Dawah is an act which can instil the feeling of being honoured and prideful among its performers.

The Asian organizations, operating in Indonesian and Pakistani (Muslim dominant countries) can really collaborate and become international in arranging such religious events where employees can be sent to other organizations to perform the act of Dawah. This can be the right time where Asian organizations operating in these countries can really gain benefit from this religious act – a hidden treasure. It can be a great source of collaboration among the Muslim community in particular.

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