



## The role Islamic work ethics in the employee engagement

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### Abstract

Islamic work ethics is an approach towards work that views work as a virtue in people's lives. This study was conducted to investigate The role Islamic Work Ethics in the Employee Engagement. This study was conducted based on a descriptive-correlational method. Findings showed that there was a significant positive relationship between Islamic work ethics, employee engagement, and three dimensions of work engagement. Moreover, findings indicated that Islamic work ethic scan serve as predictor of work engagement. The present study was conducted using a questionnaire and had the limitations of all studies conducted by a questionnaire, including the degree of confidence to responses of the participants. Since the target population and statistical sample (cluster random sampling) of this study were teachers of Khosf County, then generalization of the results to the rest of the population should be made with caution. Finally, it is recommended that managers in future studies examine this issue in different societies at national and regional levels. In practice, it is recommended that managers take appropriate measures and actions that lead to increased engagment in the work and dynamic activities at work. This will promote work engagement and consequently the organizational performance.

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## Introduction

In the recent years, too much attention has been paid to the topic of employee engagement. Many believe that employee engagement can predict employee outcomes, organizational success, and financial performance (Harter *et al.*, 2002; Macey W.H *et al.*, 2009; Richmn *et al.*, 2008). However, researches conducted by surveyers and consultant companies indicate that the rate of employee engagement in organizations is much lower and even decreasing (Federman, 2009). Most organizations suffer from lack of employees engagement, which led to incurring heavy costs (Leigh, 2005). In order to explain the organizational problem of the employee engagement, theorists used notions such as employee engagement gap, physical presence in the workplace, engagement in personal affairs, and invisible employees. On the other hand, the movement of the positive psychology requires organization positive researches encouraging positive organizational behaviors (Luthans, & Youssef, 2007). Experts in this field mentioned employee engagement as one of issues addressed in positive psychology (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008).

William Kahn was the first researcher who defined the area of employee engagement as using all aspects of one's self to perform the working role. In the case of employee engagement, employees use all physical, cognitive and emotional aspects to play their working roles. Lack of employee engagement is to isolate oneself from his/her working role. In lack of employee engagement, the physical, cognitive, and affective individual components are separated from working roles (Kahn, 1990). Work engagement is a positive mental process related to work performance that can be distinguished by three indices of vigor, dedication and absorption. Vigor refers to high energy, flexibility in working time, and effort and persistence at work, even when time presses. Dedication refers to an emotional-cognitive aspect in which individuals experience the sense of enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge. This level is strongly involved in working, directing the individual toward the identification of the level of work. Absorption

refers to the time when an individual is profoundly working, is fully focused on the job, and in such a situation, as time passes fast, it is difficult to separate the individual from hard working (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

Employees with high work engagement consider their work meaningful, interesting and challenging so that they tend to use knowledge, skills and resources to develop their work (Bakker & Demerouti, E, 2008; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Macey, *et al.* considered two dimensions of mental energy (inside or feel) behavioral energy (outside or look). Within the mental energy dimension (also called engagement feeling), there are four basic components of feeling: urgency, being focused, intensity, longings. Behavioral dimension also includes four components of persistence, initiative, role expansion, and coping with changes (Macy *et al.*, 2009). Work engagement is an approach to better understand teachers' work experience and is the opposite of job burnout. Work engagement is one of the basic concepts related to work, and findings suggest that employees with employee engagement features have these characteristic: (a) happiness, joy, enthusiasm; (b) better physical and mental health; (c) improved job performance; (d) increased ability of creativity in work and human resources; (e) ability to transfer their obligations to others (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2008). Creation of work engagement in employees brings about positive synergies between individual and organization that leads to positive outcomes for both groups. These outcomes may include: (a) positive job attitudes and strong identification with the work; (b) mental health including positive feelings and reduced atrophy; (c) better internal and external job performance; (d) increased intrinsic motivation, personal initiative and proactive behavior; (e) obtaining personal and job interests. High-level of employees engagement has the following positive outcomes: maintaining talented workforce, positive image of the company, business performance, financial performance, or service quality (Simon & Albrecht, 2010).

However, considering the role of education and great responsibility of teachers in this regard, understanding the characteristics and needs of employees and proper and timely response to these needs by authorities will increase teachers' motivation and efficiency. Issues such as work ethics, work engagement, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction must be considered when investing in education. It seems that Islamic work ethics is one of the factors that help predict employee engagement in an organization. Work ethics is a cultural norm that gives positive moral values to right and good work performance in a society. According to work ethics, the work itself has an intrinsic value (Tavassoli and Nahavandi, 2009). Islamic work ethics is also considered a set of moral and ethical principles in the Islamic context which distinguishes right from wrong (Rizk, 2008). Islamic work ethics is the tendency towards work and considering it a virtue in human life (Rokhman, 2010). In other words, it is an orientation that shapes and influences the involvement and participation of believers in the workplace and represents that work is a virtue in light of a person's needs (Ali & Al-Owaihian, 2008).

Actually Islamic work ethics cannot be divorced from the moral character of all acts Muslims should obey based on God's instructions and guidance in their lives in this world. Islamic work ethics is built on four primary concepts: effort, competition, transparency and morally responsible conduct (Ali & AL-Kazemi, 2007). Most of the researchers in this area have given increasing attention to work in the West focused on Protestant Work Ethics (PWE) based on the experiences of American and European countries (Youssef DA, 2001). On the contrary, the origin of Islamic work ethics is based on the sayings of Prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him and his household), Quran icscripture and Imams.

Islamic work ethics should be sought in the inevitable moral character and responsibility of all human beings. This responsibility is for human actions, whether male or female, not only towards employers

or workers, but also in relation to their ability to work as an agent or employee (Nasr, 2000). Islamic work ethics views virtue and integrity as ingredients of work. Islamic work ethics is considered a kind of worship. Islamic work ethics considers the creative work as a source of joy and integrity while viewing hard work as a virtue. Islamic work ethics believes that those who work hard are likely to be successful in life and make progress (Ali, 1988; Yousef, 2000). Value of work in Islam is derived from the intention to contribute rather than its results (Sheikh Toosi *et al.*, 2000; Rizk, 2008). Apparently, no research has been sufficiently conducted to investigate directly the relationship between Islamic work ethics and work engagement, but the following researches can be mentioned.

Ambert and Hougan (2009) in a private study in the Middle East found that work ethics had the greatest impact on job satisfaction (as cited by Yousef, 2001; Rokhman, 2010). They concluded that work ethics influences both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Moreover, Ali and al-Kazimi (2007) in an investigation showed that there was a strong correlation between Islamic work ethics and loyalty to the organization. Abdoullahi Chnzaneh & Nejat (2010) also found high a level of work ethics among teachers. They concluded that there was a significant relationship between work ethics and belief in religious, cultural, political and economic values. Other studies (Langford & Parks, 2008; Kandulapati & Manchala, 2011) showed that there was a negative relationship between work engagement, the intention to leave the job, and turnover intention while there is a positive relationship between work engagement, organizational commitment, and expected retention.

Islamic work ethic as one of important issues in today's organizations is influenced by various inter-organizational and intra-organizational factors. Identifying and controlling of these factors can help improve employees' ethics and consequently their productivity. Mean while, considering the fact that work engagement is considered effective and

determining in shaping employees' behaviors, and, with regard to religious and Islamic context of Iran, Islamic work ethics is derived from the Qur'an and the guidance of the Prophet (pbuh) Muhammad and Imams, this ethics is among important variables that determines work engagement. It is worthwhile to investigate relationship between Islamic work ethics and work engagement in teachers in order to develop and promote Islamic work ethics in teachers and increase productivity of human resources and consequently organization productivity. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the role Islamic Work Ethics in the Employee Engagement in teachers of Khosf county, Khowrasan, Iran. For this purpose, 120 teachers (60 female, 60 male) were selected by random cluster sampling. Next, questionnaires were distributed among teachers. After the completion of questionnaire, data were collected and analyzed.

### Material and methods

#### *Descriptive-correlational method*

This study was conducted using a descriptive-correlational method. Statistical population included all teachers in Khosf County in the academic year of 2013-2014. For this purpose, 120 teachers (60 female, 60 male) were selected through random cluster sampling. Data analysis was conducted using two descriptive and analytical methods. In the descriptive method, mean and standard deviation were conducted. In analytical method (performed in SPSS 18), correlation coefficient and *simultaneous regression was used*.

#### *Instruments and tools*

1 - Islamic work ethics questionnaire: Islamic work ethics questionnaire proposed by Ali (2001) was used for data collection. This questionnaire included 17 questions based on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from totally agree = 1 to totally disagree = 5). Validity and reliability of the questionnaire were as previously confirmed (see Rokhman, 2010; Ali, 2001; Yousef 2001, Yousef 2000; Rashidi, 2002). Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability which was found to be 0/87. 2 - Work engagement questionnaire: This

questionnaire was proposed by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) and it contains 17 items that measures work engagement at three sub-scales: vigor scale (questions 1, 4, 8, 12, 15, 17), dedication scale (questions 2, 5, 7, 10, 13) and absorption scale (Questions 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 16). These tools is used in a 7-point Likert-based scale where responses are classified as (0-6). Items range from almost (equal to zero) to always and every day (equivalent to 6). Validity of the questionnaire was approved by Abbaszadeh *et al.* (2013) and Esakhani *et al.* (2012). Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was 0/83.

### Results and discussion

Ambert and Hougan (2009) in a private study in the Middle East found that work ethics had the greatest impact on job satisfaction (as cited by Yousef, 2001; Rokhman, 2010). They concluded that work ethics influences both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Moreover, Ali and al-Kazimi (2007) in an investigation showed that there was a strong correlation between Islamic work ethics and loyalty to the organization. Abdoullahi Chnzanegh & Nejat (2010) also found high a level of work ethics among teachers. They concluded that there was a significant relationship between work ethics and belief in religious, cultural, political and economic values. Other studies (Langford & Parks, 2008; Kandulapati & Manchala, 2011) showed that there was a negative relationship between work engagement, the intention to leave the job, and turnover intention while there is a positive relationship between work engagement, organizational commitment, and expected retention.

Islamic work ethic as one of important issues in today's organizations is influenced by various inter-organizational and intra-organizational factors. Identifying and controlling of these factors can help improve employees' ethics and consequently their productivity. Meanwhile, considering the fact that work engagement is considered effective and determining in shaping employees' behaviors, and, with regard to religious and Islamic context of Iran, Islamic work ethics is derived from the Qur'an and

the guidance of the Prophet (pbuh) Muhammad and Imams, this ethics is among important variables that determines work engagement. It is worth while to investigate relationship between Islamic work ethics and work engagement in teachers in order to develop and promote Islamic work ethics in teachers and increase productivity of human resources and consequently organization productivity.

Descriptive analysis of respondents' demographic data showed that this population included 53.3% male and 46.7% females among whom 18.3% were

single and 81.7% were married. 25.3% held Associate's Degree, 57.3% Bachelor's Degree, and 17.4% Master's Degree.

**Table 1.** Descriptive findings of the variables.

Statistical indicators Scale	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
Islamic work ethics	120	46/24	17/59
Vigor	120	27/19	3/86
Dedication	120	16/87	2/59
Absorption	120	8/37	1/68

**Table 2.** Results of correlation test between Islamic work ethics and work engagement.

	N = 120	Islamic work ethics	Total work engagement	Vigor	Dedication	Absorption	
Islamic work ethics	Pearson correlation	1	0/312 0/000	0/315 0/000	0/228 0/000	0/212 0/000	r P
Total work engagement	Pearson correlation		1	0/821 0/000	0/745 0/000	0/752 0/000	r P
Vigor	Pearson correlation			1	0/589 0/000	0/685 0/000	r P
Dedication	Pearson correlation				1	0/435 0/000	r P
Absorption	Pearson correlation					1 0/000	r P

As shown in Table 2, there is a positive direct significant relationship between Islamic work ethics and work engagement (0.312). Moreover, there is a positive direct significant relationship between work ethics and three dimensions of work engagement that is vigor (0.315), dedication (0.228) and absorption (0.212). Yet, from among work engagement dimensions, *vigor* has the strongest relationship with work ethics while absorption has the lowest possible

relationship with Islamic work ethics. Therefore, there is a positive direct significant relationship between work ethics, total work engagement, and its three dimensions (P < 0/05). Also, the results of the regression analysis are represented in Table 3, which represents the relationship between Islamic work ethics and work engagement. It indicates that work ethics can predict work engagement and its changes up to 17%.

**Table 3.** Regression coefficients (indicators) based on simultaneous method.

Significance level	T-value	R-Chi Square	Fixed value	Standardbeta value	Prediction variable	Criterion variable
0/05	0/18	0/169	0/45	0/645	Islamic work ethics	Work engagement

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purpose, 120 teachers (60 female, 60 male) were selected by random cluster sampling. Next, questionnaires were distributed among teachers.

After the completion of questionnaire, data were collected and analyzed. The first finding of the present study was that there was a positive and significant relationship between Islamic work ethics and work engagement. According to this finding, it can be suggested that the more observation of Islamic work ethics and its principles might lead to increased work engagement. These findings are consistent with previous findings. For example, Ali and al-Kazimi's (2007) study showed that there was a strong correlation between Islamic work ethics and loyalty to the organization. Also Abdoullahi Chnzanegh and Nejat (2010) found a high level of work ethics among teachers. They concluded that there was a significant relationship between work ethics and belief in religious, cultural, political and economic values. Moreover, Miliman's (2003) study concerned with works pirituality indicated that meaningfulness leads to affective commitment and job satisfaction.

The most important finding of the present study is that work ethics can help predict work engagement. This finding is in line with other research findings (Yousef, 2001; Rokhman, 2010) which found that Islamic work ethics influences both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In explanation of the above findings, it can be said that in Islamic work ethics, life has no meaning without work and employment in economic activities is necessary and is considered as the duty of every Muslim. Rokhman also pointed out that the Islamic work ethics stands not for life denial, but for life fulfillment and considers business incentives most carefully (Rokhman, 2010; Yousef, 2000), while taking into account even its types and qualities (Ansari, 1995). Accordingly, it can be said that observing the Islamic work ethics increases work engagement and consequently loyalty to the job and organization can be increased.

### Conclusions

The present study was conducted using a questionnaire and had the limitations of all studies conducted by a questionnaire, including the degree of

confidence to responses of the participants. Since the target population and statistical sample (cluster random sampling) of this study were teachers of Khosf County, then generalization of the results to the rest of the population should be made with caution. Finally, it is recommended that managers in future studies examine this issue in different societies at national and regional levels. In practice, it is recommended that managers take appropriate measures and actions that lead to increased engagement in the work and dynamic activities at work. This will promote work engagement and consequently the organizational performance.

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