

Conferences/Seminars

Conference Report on the AMSS Seminar on “Islamic Principles of Organizational Behavior”

Ṣafar 12-14, 1409/September 23-25, 1988

One of the most successful seminars held jointly this year by the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) and the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) was the one on “Islamic Principles of Organizational Behavior” held in Herndon, Virginia, *Ṣafar 12-14, 1409/September 23-25, 1988*, and attended by 50 people. What contributed most to its success was the small manageable number of mostly specialized professionals, the shortness of the speeches (none more than 20 minutes) and the humane schedule that was “on schedule” including ample free time for general conversation.

The seminar was envisioned by Dr. ‘AbulḤamid AbūSulaymān, the President of AMSS, in his introductory remarks, as a step on the road to similar successive seminars worldwide. He viewed it as a way “to help Muslim social scientists acquire the ability and adopt the scientific attitude which would enable them to effectively communicate with the contemporary world,” and as a means to undertake a “renewed . . . search for our roots and ideals that have . . . been swept aside in many cases,” especially in the business community.

In the opening session, Dr. Tāhā Al Alwānī (President of IIIT), speaking in Arabic (rendered into English by Dr. Mona Abul Fadl), presented the framework for understanding the challenge that an “Islamic” Organizational Behavior Discipline poses. He delineated the relationship between culture, institutions, and civilization. “Culture,” he said, “provides the intangible matrix . . . which conditions the performance of institutions which, in turn, provide the scaffolding for civilization.” He warned against repeating the mistake of third world countries, and particularly Muslim countries, that still suffer from their “misreading or misconstruing the relationship between cultures and institutions.” He noted that Muslims do not need to look to Western experts for the “values deemed favorable for the performance of a model administration “ because “our cultural heritage” provides “the ideals and the values which are necessary for a competent and effective, as well as humane and ethical, administration.” He said, “our heritage provided the models for implementing these ideals and values in changing situations.” Dr. Al Alwānī offered the guidelines of the agenda of the Islamization of Knowledge developed by the IIIT as the environment in which they will develop scholarship and practical orientation in the field of organizational behavior.

This theme of rediscovering Islamic principles that relate to modern-day organizational behavior and business practices was the common thread connecting all the speeches at the seminar.

Dr. Ghouse Shareef (the seminar chairperson, Bellarmine College, KY) provided a conceptual outline for "Islamic Principles of Organizational Behavior" in which he gave suggestions on how Muslim organizations can achieve goal congruency (harmony of individual member's goals with those of the organization) and avoid dysfunction (conflicts between members' and organizations' goals). He pointed out that healthy organizations are careful to create a positive atmosphere where decision making and all the affective stimuli (external forces that play on the individual worker) which arouse emotion, feelings, and moods, are made to be congruent. This is accomplished by recognizing "Allah's Universal Authority and the universal human brotherhood." More specifically, Muslims being vicegerents on earth means looking at all socio-economic-political paradigms as sub-goals of that vicegerency. This thinking will prevent Muslim economic structures from producing, supplying, or helping to produce or supply "anything which is forbidden (e.g. intoxicants and gambling, exploitation, and hoarding of wealth)." Quoting from the Qur'an (5:2) as proof of this, he said this also means that both "Muslim managers and Muslim workers simultaneously report to two superiors—God and the human manager in that order. This will create a successful team approach."

Three speeches dealt with the larger perspective of management control and general business ethics. Dr. Abdalla Hanafy (Saint Cloud University, Minnesota) and Dr. Hamid Sallam (Mankata State University, Minnesota) presented a joint paper on "Business Ethics," in which they concurred with Shareef that a team approach was the only acceptable Islamic one, along with honesty and high ethical standards. They provided statistics of several Gallop and other polls proving the increasing lack of confidence the American public has in its business leaders. Drawing attention to the fact that the purview of Islamic morality includes decision making and habits of consumption, they went on to identify the Quran-based elements of Islamic ethics that may apply to business such as: "truthfulness, trust, sincerity, brotherhood, the seeking of science and knowledge for good purposes, and justice." The speakers noted the need to develop a universal Islamic code of business ethics.

Dr. Mahmoud Moursi (Central Michigan University), outlining "Some Principles of Management in Islam" also underscored the importance, not only of recognizing "Allah as the Supreme manager and organizer of all affairs" but also of continual contemplation of "God's commands and rules of conduct" in the process of conducting business. He said self management includes:

1. Not overtaxing one's physical or mental capacities.

2. Knowing that each human will directly and justly benefit or suffer from his own deeds.
3. Purifying the soul makes one a winner while corrupting it makes one a loser.
4. Morality, as a self-imposed inner force, is the source of righteousness.
5. "Man has the obligation to change evil when he sees it."

Dr. Moursi saw trust, fair trade, recording of business transactions, and not hoarding or dealing in usury, as the nexus of money management and trade. He also set out Islamic guidelines of labor relations including: negotiated contracts that are honored by both sides, employers responsibility for employees, fair wages and swift payment, and commitment to quality.

Ahmed Abo-Hebeish, MBA, in his "Introduction to Management Control," explained some basic Arabic terms like *idara* ("business is running in its cycle...in good condition") and *riqāba* (the witnessing of an event and changing it and/or offering a solution to it) pointing out that even the words that describe management control in the Qur'an imply positivism, ability to communicate, mutual responsibility, and solution orientation.

Speaking about "Employee and Employer" in a joint paper, Drs. Hamed Sallam and Abdalla Hanafy defined the Muslim work Ethic that operates optimally in an organizational atmosphere that is "decentralized and value driven...dedicated to human treatment of employees, innovation, experimentation, and customer satisfaction." They outlined the key elements of productive relationships including: brotherhood and equal opportunity, trust and responsibility; employment of the most qualified seeking excellence in work; minimum wage, fair pay, and reasonable work loads; spiritual motivation; employer consultation with employees, and continually seeking knowledge.

The theme of spiritual motivation as the force behind work, both for employers and employees, was the focus of four papers. Dr. Ibn omer Sharafeldin, speaking on "Motivation—The Cornerstone of Human Performance" compared various motivational theories aimed at providing the five essential human needs of physiology (bodily needs), safety, affection, esteem and self-actualization. These goals, he says, are provided in detail within formal Islamic ideology. "Such concepts," he said, "as a superior/subordinate relationship, overemphasized human relations, and the suppression of conflict are valued social norms in Islamic societies and are not comprehended by Western logic." Added to this is the unchangeable promise of Allah to His slaves to reward in the hereafter whatever good works are not rewarded "here-and-now," which effectively removes much organizational stress and frustration.

That same theme of relief of stress was the subject of Ola Abdelkawi's paper on "Islamic Beliefs as Moderators of Organizational Stress". In suggesting an Islamic model of stress control, she quoted Allen and Hyde who wrote: "some forms of stress control will actually alter slightly the way in which our senses organize and feed information to the brain". "The felt stress", she said, "is the final outcome of the individual's cognitive appraisal," which can cause "lack of satisfaction, lack of motivation, and decreased performance" if perceived as a constraint. To solve the stress problem she suggested, among other things, that immediately upon experiencing a stressful situation, a person should consciously make the event seem insignificant and should make oneself aware "of divine assistance." This, added to positive thinking and problem resolution makes for peace and ease of heart. (*Surah* 94:5-8) She called on Muslim executives to allow scientific investigation of them in order to systematically develop an "empirical research agenda."

The final two papers in this grouping explored Muslim attitudes towards work and presented a practical model of Islamic motivation. "Attitudes Towards Work and Achievement in Islam," jointly presented by Dr. Gaber El Enein and Dr. Hamed Sallam (both of Mankato State University, Minnesota) looked at the question which arises in the Western mind as to whether Islam is at fault for the low productivity of Muslims and explained Islamic understanding of work as an act of worship while recognizing the understandable human desire for personal wealth. Dr. Fayyaz Ahmad also spoke of work being seen as *ibādah* (worship) in his speech on "Work Motivation in an Organizational Setting," as long as the intentions were God-centered and with final *halal* (allowed) goals. He pointed to the need for "empirical research in the field of work motivation from the Islamic point of view," as well as the need to undertake "a detailed critical review of the existing theories of motivation from an Islamic point of view."

In fact, all the speakers concurred that the next phase of scholarship in the area of developing Islamic principles of organizational behavior requires first a survey of existing theories from an Islamic perspective followed by actual scientific surveys of Islamic organizations to discover if and how Islamic principles have been applied.

The Seminar ended with an upbeat atmosphere full of positive feelings and a shared sense that this was the beginning of a new field of research, study, and in the long run, usable results that could greatly benefit the whole Ummah.

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