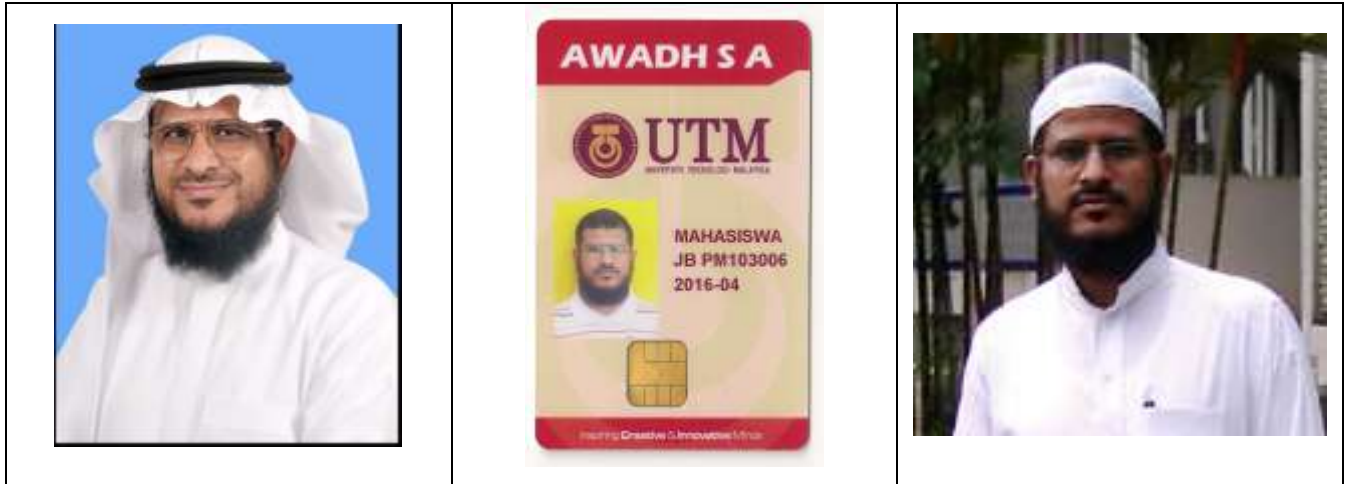


In the name of Allah, the most merciful
Quality “Perfection in Islam”



Dr. Awadh Salim Alharbi

UTM PhD Graduate

awadsefari@yahoo.com

In the nineteenth century, when human thought, especially in the west, began to perceive a special character for management as an independent phenomenon from the conventional business perspective. ‘Total Quality’ basically refers to those ‘best practices’ that permit highly satisfactory end-products and services from all sides, along with every available and variant phase.

However, true quality in the culture of Islam differs significantly in that it entails a more complete set of values; a system that goes well beyond the measurement of any deviation from given standards. The ultimate goal in the culture of Islam is to obtain the blessing and pleasure of Allah SWT, both in this world and in the Hereafter. Hence, in this expanded context, producing goods and providing services with the best characteristics should not only be done through the elimination or reduction of deviations from established norms, but mainly by targeting moral practices that avoid any sin; including even the offense of involuntarily wastage.

Be that as it may, when viewing the history of quality, one discovers that quality is a new child in the Western narrative, whereas quality has been incorporated as an essential component of Islamic civilization for nearly fifteen hundred years ago.

Excellent workmanship is therefore the road to success and prosperity in this world as well as in hereafter. Without perfection, work remains a far cry from the desired and is rejected. This is comparable to the man who did not give his prayer its due right, whereupon the Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him), said to him: “Go back and pray for you have not prayed.”

Excellent workmanship is also a primal cause of superiority in this world. When you look around, you will find many testimonies to this fact: how else could Japan have come out from a nuclear holocaust to become a nation with a strong economy and advanced scientific civilization? So also, was/is the case with Germany, and today, Malaysia testifies to the merits of excellent workmanship and overall quality.

Words like *Jawda*, *Ihsan*, *Itqan*, as used in Islamic literature, refer to quality, perfection and a passion for excellence, benevolence and continual self-evaluation and so forth. Furthermore, “*Itqan*” means goodness and stands for the level of quality work. It means, “to arrange and dispose of things in a scientific and artistic way in order to obtain the most perfect results”. *Ihsan* also connotes several other implications such as *muraqaba* (surveillance), which implies diligent control and inspection, as in: “Allah sees you” . . . “Worship Allah as if you see Him, if you could not see Him He sees you.” *Ihsan* also means doing ‘good’ for one’s self by abiding or eschewing what Almighty Allah commands or forbids. The word also means to be nice or perfected in relationships with fellow Muslims and other human beings. In other words, it means an inclination to do kind or charitable acts, or acts which intend or show kindness and good will; implying also to perform more than what is required. Above all, it means perfection in any undertaking or sphere of life’s journey.

Islam, as the last revelatory message, certainly highlights *Itqan* and invites man to ascend the ladder of perfection in several Quranic verses. The concept of Quality is, therefore, surely not a new thing to the Islamic narrative. We as Muslims are encouraged by our religion to perform our duties and undertakings in a most perfected manner and to continually strive improvement. Accordingly, all verses that speak of *Ihsan* are included in the perspective of ‘Quality Management’.

Allah Subhanho Wataala also rewards those who work for good as written in Surat Alkhaf, verse 30: "As to those who believe and work righteousness, verily we shall not suffer to perish the reward of any who do a single righteous deed"

Al’Quran indicates how perfectly Allah the Exalted has made everything, calling upon all men to perfect their work and further mentions how it is that Allah loves this from His slaves. Allah says: “The work of Allah, Who perfected all things” (An-Naml 27:88).

In his commentary, Ibn Abbas said: “He perfected everything.” While Mujahid said: “He perfected everything and made everything in the best way.” Almost the same explanation is attributed to Qatadda. Also, Ibn Kathir said: “Perfected every time He created and placed in it the necessary wisdom.”

The harmony between Allah’s legislation and His creation signifies the act of creation with ‘complete perfection’ and legislation with ‘complete wisdom’. On this, Ibn Al-Qayyim said: “Allah, Who legislated

such punishments and linked them with causes, is the knower of the unseen and the seen, the most wise of judges. He is the Omniscient, Who encompasses everything in His knowledge; He knows what happened, what and how something will be, and what didn't happen. Allah is the most knowledgeable of every single detail, hidden and apparent, which people's knowledge can seldom encompass. Allah wisely manages the entire universe, and He made His creation in perfection and measured everything exactly according to its due measurement, giving us eyes with which to see, ears with which to listen, a nose with which to smell, a tongue and lips with which to speak, hands with which to strike, and legs with which to walk. He also created animals in due proportion, giving each of them what it needs based on its characteristics, body parts and stature, for His perfection and precision encompass everything. As He, the Exalted says: 'The work of Allah, Who perfected all things,' (An-Naml 27:88). Understanding that Allah has made His creation in complete perfection, it is more fitting for His management and command to be even more perfect. Even if we were unable to know every single detail of His knowledge and management, we can't deny it all."

Should not Islam be the pioneer and initiator of the call for quality and creativity? — Most especially when God, The Exalted says in surat Al-Mulk 67:3: "You will not see any fault in the creation of the Merciful. Turn up your eyes: do you see any flaw anywhere?" Since the Holy Qur'an emphatically commends quality and excellence in workmanship, and further commands believers to attain unto both, it is no small wonder then that the sayings and doings of the Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him) oblige Muslims to commit themselves to excellence in their crafts, trade, professionalism and in every action taken in every aspect of living.

The Prophet (SAW) always called upon people to perfect their work. On the authority of Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), the Prophet of Allah (SAW) said: When he saw a little gap between bricks in a grave, the Prophet (SAW) immediately ordered his companions to fill it, saying: "Allah loves that whenever any of you does something, you should perfect it." This matter concerned only a 'gap' that caused neither harm nor benefit to the dead, yet the Prophet did not permit it to remain in that condition, and so ordered that it also should get its share of perfection. When asked by the companions if it can harm or benefit the dead, he replied with what was quoted above.

In his commentary, Al Manawi said: "Regarding the hadith Allah loves that whenever any of you do something, you should perfect it.' This means perfecting your work. Therefore, every worker has to master his job. Regardless of the amount of recompense, he has to do his work to perfection as prescribed." He then mentioned the story of a worker who finished some work and gave it to his customer. Upon returning home at night, he thought that he didn't do his job well, so he didn't go to sleep. Instead, he returned to working on it again, but this time he did his work to perfection. He returned to the customer in the morning, giving him the second version instead. The customer thanked him, and then the worker

explained that he didn't make it again for the customer's sake but he became worried that there could be something wrong with his work. So, to be fair, he had to do it once again.

In fact, people's love for others is an implicit indication of their love for Allah, since everything is made in perfection, so also every knowledge and ability in this life originally attributes to our Creator. All there is in both seen and unseen worlds, including all things made in perfection, amount to nothing when compared to Allah's all embracing knowledge and perfection. So our love for Allah should be a top priority. Allah says: "But those who believe love Allah more (than anything else) . . ." (Al-Baqarah 2:165). They are the believers whose hearts are full of overwhelming love for their own beloved Creator, towards whom they feel humility and fear, in whom they seek refuge during times of hardship, and in whom they put their trust and feel assurance and serenity when they remember him.

Moreover, Prophet Mohammad asked us to act responsibly when holding any position and when performing our work or attending to our obligations. In his saying 'All of you are providers of care and everybody is responsible to do it right for his subordinates and dependents' (Saheeh Bukhari and Muslim); he explains that we all have responsibilities, whether in family, workplace or society as a whole. These responsibilities towards ourselves and others clearly mean that we should be honest, transparent and just by attending to the following approaches (Al-Sheikh, 2000):

1. To draw from the perfection of Allah's work: "*And be good, as God has been good to you. And do not seek corruption on earth, for God does not love the corrupt.*" (Sura Alqasas, aya 77)
2. To follow the best standards: "*And follow the best of what has been revealed to you from your God.*" (Sura Alzumor, aya 55).
3. To uphold ethics within the value system that governs society.
4. To have excellence: Prophet Mohammad said, "*Do the best as if you see Allah, if not, Allah sees you.*" (Saheeh Bukhari).
5. To ensure integration in any task and behavior.

The meaning of *Itqan* further implies the artful arrangement or organization of things so as to obtain the most perfect result. This extension of inference more inclusively embraces Islamic principles and values related to quality:

1. Loving the work and completing it in good order.
2. *Al'Showra*, which opens discussions and consultations.
3. Auditing, assessment, evaluation and accountability (self monitoring).
4. Team work and incorporation with others.
5. Commitment and effectiveness.

6. Continual improvement.

Furthermore, the value of Quality in all aspects of life, including business and its management, has been strongly emphasized in Islam. For example, the Prophet of Islam encouraged his followers that 'today' must be better than 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow' should be better than 'today'. This is a clear message that enjoins the concept of continual improvement; exactly what quality gurus are preaching.

In conclusion, Quality doesn't only inside organization; quality includes all terms of values, ethics, and excellence and high standards of workmanship in the organization, home and in all aspects of life.