

EFFECT OF *ULŪ AL-ALBĀB* ON LIFE-LONG PHILANTHROPY AMONG KNOWLEDGE WORKERS

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ABSTRACT

Lifelong philanthropy is essential in knowledge-based organizations. Satisfaction to subscribe to the lifelong volunteerism is highly spiritual and religious driven. This paper explores knowledge management related spiritual and religious concept, that is *Ulū al-Albāb* approach in creating, nurturing, and building conducive environment for philanthropy spirit among knowledge workers in Malaysia. The *Ulū al-Albāb* approach is spiritual-based knowledge management that offers an integrative framework to achieve sustainable knowledge management and organizational learning. The existing working environment in technology-based firms lacks of spiritual foundation to sustain the motivation for philanthropy spirit among knowledge workers in technology-based firms. This study interviewed knowledge workers to solicit their views on how the *Ulū al-Albāb* approach in creating, nurturing, and building conducive environment for philanthropy spirit among knowledge workers in technology-based. The feedback from the informants argued that the philanthropy spirit has been in line with knowledge workers' own thinking, attitude and action without realizing that they have been making endowment, charity and giving in material, kind and contribution of *Ulū al-Albāb* contents. The current stage of the *Ulū al-Albāb* approach has to be operationalized to fit into the contemporary business models and processes. However, the views of the knowledge workers are not comprehensive and rigorous without the views from other stakeholders. Nevertheless, managers can apply the *Ulū al-Albāb* approach into its communities of practice and social network. The *Ulū al-Albāb* approach contributes to the theoretical and practical understanding of knowledge management development.

Keywords: *Philanthropy, organizational learning, the Ulū al-Albāb approach.*

INTRODUCTION

Philanthropy allows for intensification of spreading mercy, love, caring, and kindness among people and the world. This idea is commendable in any situation and everyone loves to practice it (Vergragt, 2012; Bapuji et al., 2018). The question is how to create, nurture and build conducive environment for philanthropy to be intensified among knowledge workers who use a lot of intellectual and thinking. The traditional approach is not comprehensive because it emphasized on skill, knowledge, ability and habit only which is imbalance.

The imbalanced approach is not strategic to face the competitive, dynamic and fluid world. The world is changing very fast in all aspects of life. Individuals, groups, teams and organizations are not spared from the effects of the fast changing world. In today's world, everyone needs to be skillful, competent, and competitive in order to survive. If one decided to stay on status quo, the person has no room to have a life in this world. Competition is getting intensive and difficult, but that is the order of the day (Ismail, 1991; Ismail, 1996; Vergragt, 2012; Bapuji et al., 2018).

Everyone is aiming to be competitive, but how to be competitive is another big question mark that needs immediate answers. There is no short cut for being unique and competitive if without having knowledge and ability to innovate. These two items are essential means to be competitive and dynamic (Karim & Hussein, 2008; Porter & Kramer, 2002). Physically, spiritually and all aspects of human must be capitalized, manipulated and optimized to develop competitiveness. According to Lewis (2006), in today's competition, individuals and enterprises must use all aspects of life to create, use, and sell knowledge in order to be attractive and competitive. Osman-Gani and Sarif (2011) argued that the excellence in spirituality leads to better worldview, far sighted and continuous improvement that are guided by commendable values.

In responding to the need of philanthropy life, most people have practiced philanthropy as part of lifelong learning concept which is a step to follow the global trends so that they will be in line with the rest of the world (Han, 2001; Kuman, 2004; Porter & Kramer, 2002; Han, 2007). While these countries are excited about practicing lifelong learning, they might overlook to create, nurture and build environment for lifelong learning philanthropy. A lifelong learning environment for philanthropy should be practical and realistic (Kumar, 2004). The ultimate aim of lifelong learning is to give the dynamism to acquire skill, knowledge, ability and habit and translate these into sustainable profitability and global competitiveness.

Both business decision makers and public policy makers are keen to subscribe this idea because of its promises in the future (Han, 2001; Han, 2007; Osman-Gani & Sarif, 2011). As for public policy makers, the only reason is to ensure sustainable prosperity and full employment. Therefore, the novelty of lifelong learning is an essential agenda for everyone. Han (2007) argued that Asian's motivation for lifelong learning to address economic problem, to meet global standard, and to be competitive at par with other developed countries. If this is the aim, then the approach has to be sustainable too.

The discussion of this paper is organised into a few sections. Firstly, it provides the introductory remarks of the study. Secondly, it discusses key literature into the topic of the study. Thirdly, it explains the research design of the study. Fourthly, it presents the findings and discussion of the study. Finally, the study makes its concluding remarks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The *Ulū al-Albāb* approach applies *Tawhidic*-based lifelong learning paradigm in philanthropy. *Tawhidic*-based lifelong learning is based on Islamic monotheism worldview that the dynamism is actually part of the process to attain ultimate victory in this worldly and the hereafter life. According to Al-Faruqi (1992, p.5), the subscription to *Tawhidic* paradigm manifests the readiness and willingness to fulfill the Divine trust (*al amānah*) and obligatory duties (*al farā'id*) that are accompanied by the Divine guidance and human unique capability (Qur'ān, Surah Hud, 11: 6 and *Sura Az Zumar* 39: 41). Based on that notion, Hassan (2010, p.187) defines *Tawhidic* paradigm as Islamic monotheism thinking on how to live in this world as the true servants of Allah (*'ibād al-Rahmān*), vicegerents (*khulafā' fī al-ard*), true believers (*al-mu'minūn*) for the sake of betterment of mankind (*khayra ummatin ukhrijat lil-Nās*) (Qur'ān, 3:110) and 'balanced community' (*ummatan wasatan li-takūnū shuhadā' alā al-nās*) (Qur'ān, 2:143).

Lifelong learning is dynamic. Physical space for learning is different from meta physical space for learning. Zarkasyi (2010) argued that the Al-Ghazālī's approach of learning and development provides the dynamism in learning when both physical and meta physical spaces are included as religious and rational knowledge. Religious knowledge includes the science of the practical religion (*'ilm al-mu'amālah*), God's guided knowledge on how the religion can be executed (*'ilm al-shar'iyy*), and knowledge that derived from human intellect (*'ilm al-aqliyy*). The scope of the practical religion (*'ilm al-mu'amālah*) is available in two forms, exoteric (*zāhir*) and esoteric (*bātin*) sciences.

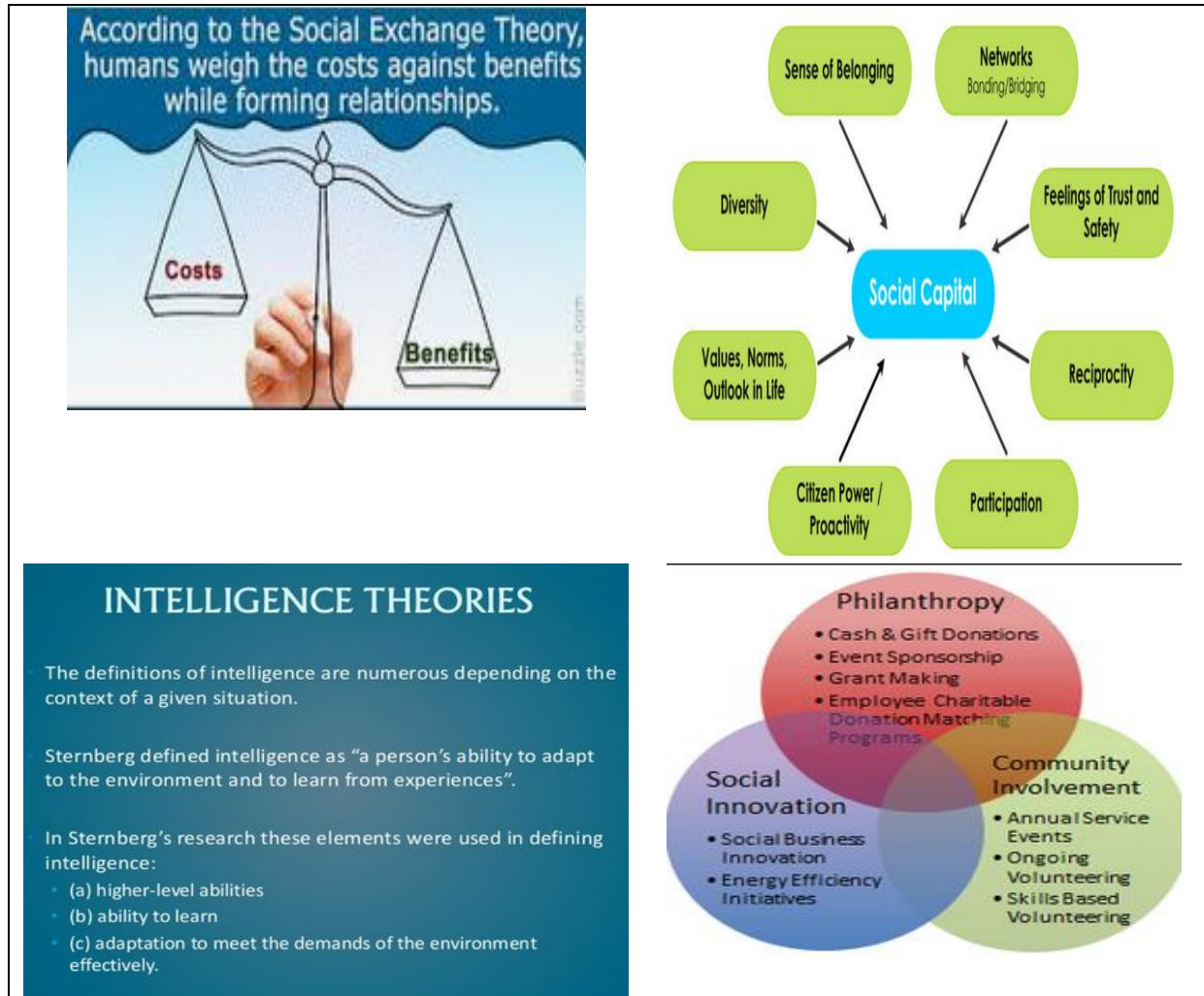
The effect of dynamic learning through *Ulū al-Albāb* is comprehensive as well as complete. The exoteric (*zāhir*) sciences include the act of worship (*'ibādat*), social ethics (*'ādat*), and matters pertaining to dangerous act (*muhlikāt*). As for esoteric (*bātin*) sciences, it is about spirituality dimension. The second category of knowledge is the rational knowledge (*'ulūm al-aqliyyah/'ulūm ghayr shar'iyyah*). This type of knowledge can be divided into fundamental (*usūl*) and subsidiary (*furū'*). The fundamental knowledge includes mathematics/logic, natural science (observation and experiment), and investigation science of existence.

The theoretical classification of knowledge allows organizations to identify priorities, resources, and efforts to convert the knowledge into absorptive capability. Zarkasyi (2010, pp.162-164) argued that there are two ways knowledge can be acquired by individuals, namely through human teaching (*al-ta'lim al insaniyy*) and Divine teaching (*al-ta'lim al rabbāniyy*). People learn from other people via face-to-face and other instructional ways (Zabeda, 2004, 2008) with monetary or non-monetary rewards (Zabeda, 2008). However, the Divine teaching is highly spiritual when the learners acquiring knowledge based on Divine revelation (*al-wahy*), inspiration (*ilhām*), reflection and contemplation (*al-ishtighal bi al-tafakkur*).

There are a few underpinning theories to relate *Ulū al-Albāb* approach to *Tawhidic*-based lifelong philanthropy. Firstly, the social exchange theory (SET) rationalizes the cost and benefit analysis in human mind before they decided to give in contribution whether directly to him or her or indirectly in the form of benefit to the community. Secondly, *Ulū al-Albāb* approach is related to the social capital theory that is related to human aspects such as networks, feeling of trust and safety, reciprocity, participation, diversity and so forth. Thirdly, the intelligence theories related to learning ability to adapt to various situations and learn from different situations and experiences. Finally, the social innovation theory related to

improvement and development of intelligence, feeling and maturity. Figure 1 depicts the underpinning theories related to *Ulū al-Albāb* approach.

Figure 1: Underpinning Theories related to *Ulū al-Albāb* approach

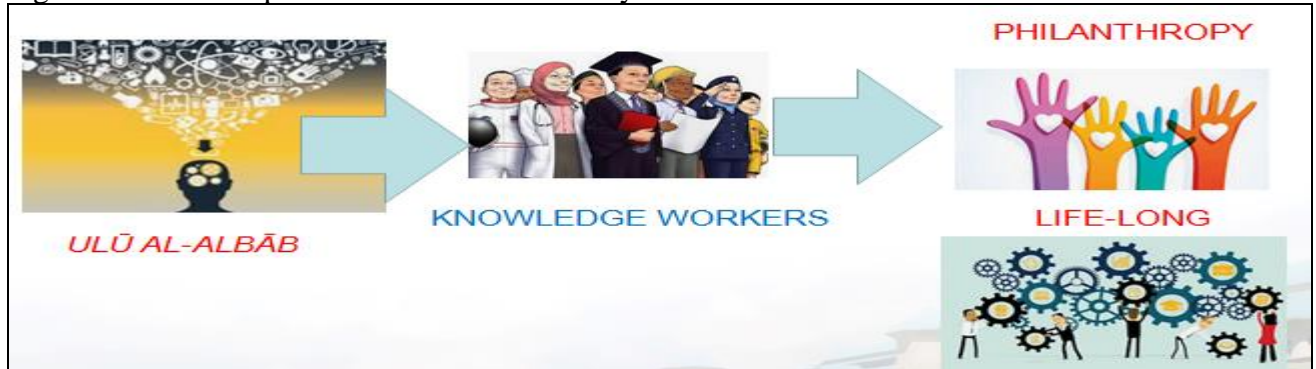


Zarkasyi (2010, pp.162-164) contended that the absorptive capacity to acquire human and divine teaching (*al tarbīyyah al-wahy*) is through five capabilities (power), namely common sense (*al-hiss al-mushtarak*), representative power (*al-quwwah al-khayāliyyah*), estimate power (*al-quwwah al-wahmiyyah*), retentive power (*al-quwwah al-hāfidah wa al-dhakirah*), imaginative power (*al-quwwah al-mutakhayyilah/ al-quwwah al mutafakirrah*).

Tawhidic paradigm can be integrated with lifelong learning because Islamic knowledge and learning is built upon the foundation of Islamic faith (*al-iman al-Islamiyyah*). The Islamic faith is based on *kalima shahaada*, which is to recognize Allah as the only universal God and Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) as the messenger of Allah (Ismail, 1991; Ismail, 1996). With this foundation, the ultimate aim of Islamic management system is to gain the pleasure of Allah by executing all of the duties prescribed by Him (Ismail, 1996; Haneef, 1997; Hamid, 1999). The discussion of this paper begins with the explanation on the major components of *Tawhidic* paradigm.

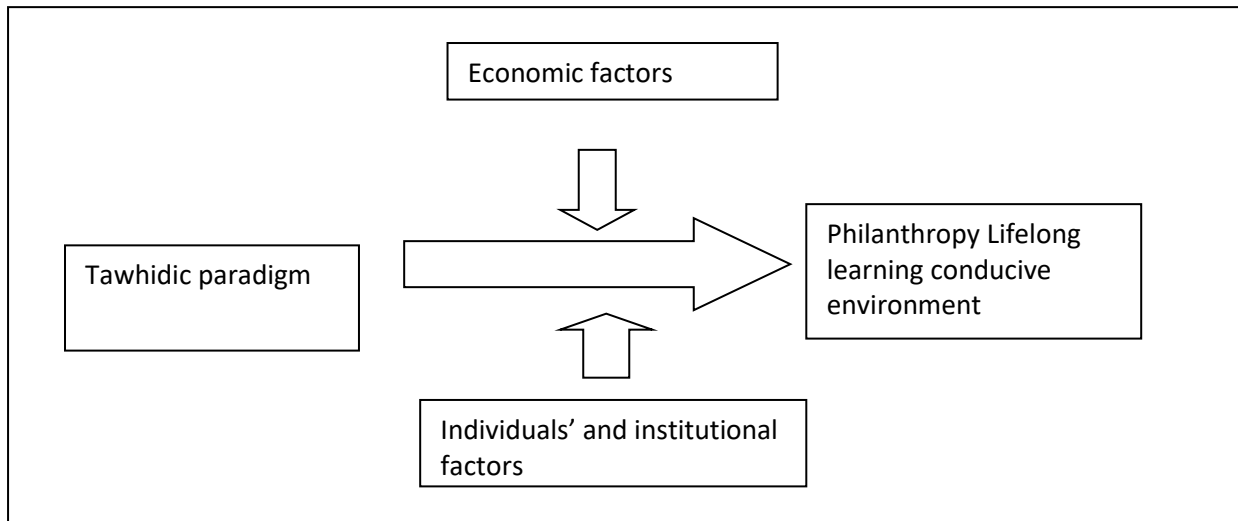
According to *Tawhidic* paradigm, man's multiple relationships revolve around *Tawhid*. The Islamic worldview links the prerequisites to *Tawhid* and the roles of the believers of the paradigm (Mawdudi, 1992; Ismail, 1996; Osman-Gani & Sarif, 2011). Figure 1 depicts the integrative linking role of *Tawhid* with worship (*'ibadat*), submission of mankind to Allah for the sake of securing His Pleasure vis-à-vis the roles of mankind as servant (*'abd*) and vicegerent (*khalifa*) of Allah. Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual framework of the study.

Figure 2: The conceptual framework of the study



Thus, this study proposes that three main factors contribute to philanthropy lifelong learning at workplace of business organizations: requirement of the job market, new source of employment and social/workplace order. Figure 3 illustrates the research framework of the study.

Figure 3: Research Framework of the study

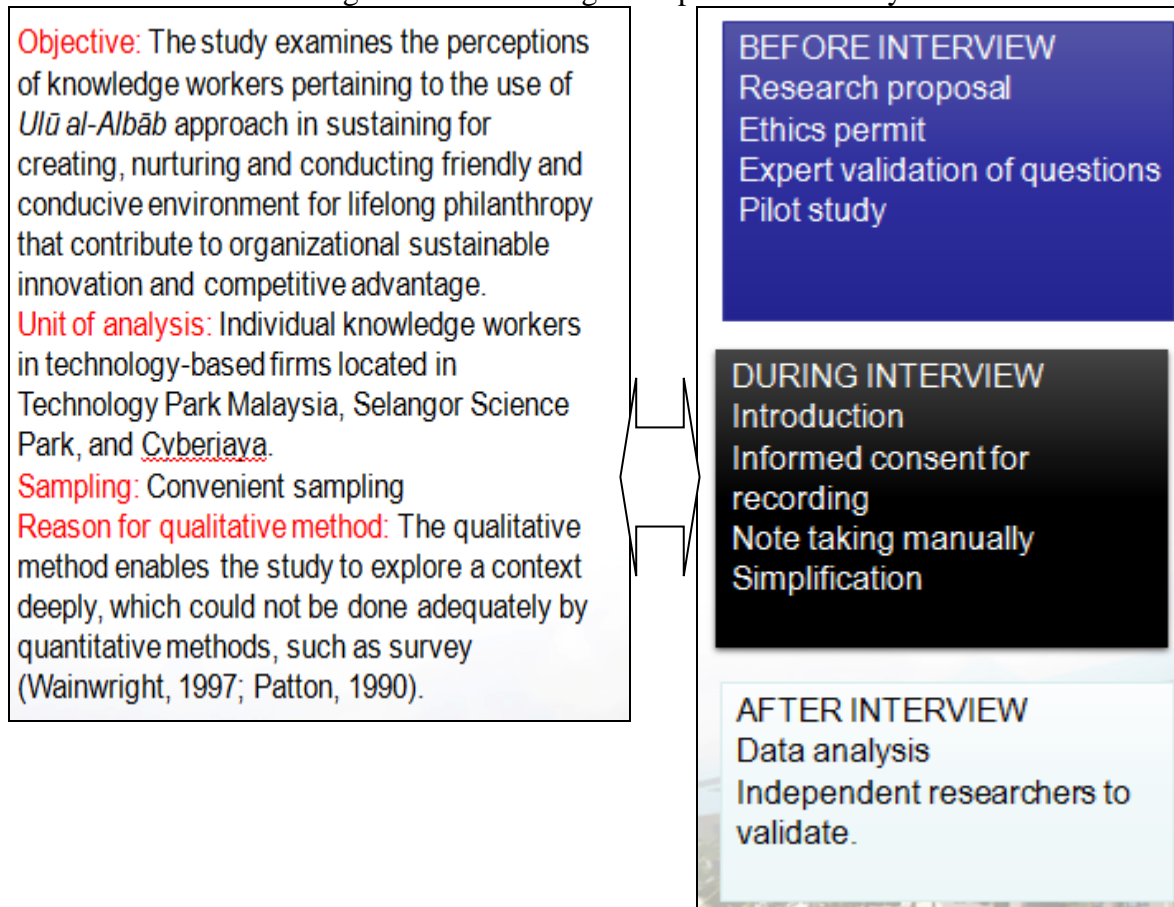


RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study examines the perceptions of knowledge workers pertaining to the use of *Ulū al-Albāb* approach in creating, nurturing and conducting friendly and conducive environment for philanthropy lifelong learning that contributes to organizational sustainable innovation and competitive advantage. The study approached technology-based firms located in Technology

Park Malaysia, Selangor Science Park, and Cyberjaya. Figure 4 summarises the methodological aspect of this study.

Figure 4: Methodological aspects of the study



The data collection method is a qualitative research method. The qualitative method enables the study to explore a context deeply, which could not be done adequately by quantitative methods, such as survey (Wainwright, 1997; Patton, 1990).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study interviewed 10 informants, three (3) managers and seven (7) knowledge workers executives of technology-based firms in Malaysian technology parks. Table 1 summarises the brief profile of the informants.

Table 1: Profile of informants of the study

Code	Position	Location
M1	Senior Manager	Technology Park Malaysia
M2	Marketing Manager	Cyberjaya
M3	Business Development Manager	Selangor Science Park
K1	Senior Programmer	Technology Park Malaysia
K2	Content Development	Cyberjaya

K3	Executive Cyber Security	Technology Park Malaysia
K4	Executive Senior Executive	Cyberjaya
K5	Senior Production Executive	Technology Park Malaysia
K6	Technical Executive	Selangor Science Park
K7	Marketing Executive	Selangor Science Park

Initially, all informants were not familiar with the term *Ulū al-Albāb* as it is not widely used. They used to hear some educational initiatives that used the term *Ulū al-Albāb* such as *Ulū al-Albāb* School, *Ulū al-Albāb* Generation by Terengganu State Government. When they were informed that *Ulū al-Albāb* refers to people who always use brain when reflecting and doing something in daily activities and are always trying the best level to seek the Pleasure of Allah, they were comfortable. However, when the informants were asked on how they sustain work that requires exchange of ideas, information and knowledge, they could provide good feedback. When they were asked again in terms of faith or feeling towards exchange ideas or knowledge, they pointed that to the friendship, collegiate, sense of togetherness, and sense of wanting to help others. They did recognize that the religious teaching has shaped their commitment towards sharing and exchanging knowledge beyond the requirement of the job.

According to M1, the use of *Ulū al-Albāb* approach in creating and encouraging lifelong learning is meaningful because it is in line with the teachings of Islam. However, M2 had some reservation on the implementation part due to the diversity of faith and races in the workplace. M2 said: “In the ‘Islamophobia’ situation, any use of Islamic term could be perceived as an attempt to impose Islam to the followers of other faiths.

The appropriate approach is not to use any term or symbol that could relate to any religion. It is kind of workplace free from any religious influences. Just like the Japanese and Chinese terms, even though they originated from the Taoism and Buddhism, but the terms are not based on religious faith.” As for M3, any good framework of practice should be given a trial. K1 welcome the initiative at technology-based companies because to K1, technology is just a tool or device. K1 mentioned: “As a Muslim, any concept from Islam is good for us. I think the use of Islamic concept in technology has no religious or spiritual effects on the users.” K2’s response is in line with M1 and M3 and K1 that *Ulū al-Albāb* approach is just an approach offers by Islam. It should be commendable to be practiced. M1 and M2 used to attend training on Islamic management at their own initiatives and are actually applying the concepts into their work. As for K3, K5 and K7, they supported the effort to use of *Ulū al-Albāb* approach in creating and nurturing philanthropy lifelong learning environment. M3, K1, K2, K4, and K6 had positive perception about the approach, but need to attend more training in order to understand them.

This part discusses lifelong learning of *Ulū al-Albāb* approach provides the philosophy or purpose of doing things that is solely for Allah; to secure His Pleasure. In the context of workplace, daily routines and managerial tasks can create the environment for lifelong learning through *Ulū al-Albāb* approach. The tasks are related to the specific activities and roles that managers and workers perform to achieve the goals of their organization effectively and efficiently. The lifelong learning of *Ulū al-Albāb* approach lays down the guiding

principles for mankind so that they perform the duties as servant and vicegerent of Allah. As for MF, it can be guided by any principles, as long as it is able to satisfy the owners or shareholders of company.

Thus, *Ulū al-Albāb* approach stresses that that it is Divine duty of mankind to serve Allah. Besides human beings, other creatures are also the servants of Allah and are created to worship Him. Allah says in *Sura Adh Dhariyat* 51: 56:

We (Allah) have not created jinns and mankind except to worship Me (Allah).

A person becomes more resourceful and humble by worshipping Allah. These two qualities are essential to balance human's physical and spiritual aspects in facing the challenges of life (Mawdudi, 1992; Qutb, 1994; Rahman, 1995; Hamid, 1999). In contrast, one who does not worship Allah will be punished in the form of distracting affairs and timidity (Ismail, 1996; Osman-Gani & Sarif, 2011). It is the power of *Tawhid* that motivates man to worship (perform '*ibadat*'), submitting himself to the Commandments of Allah in order to secure His Pleasure. He accepts the dual role specified by Allah, i.e. to be servant ('*abd*') and vicegerent (*khalifa*) of Allah. The execution of these roles requires man to uphold certain principles: (a) *Tawhidic* paradigm, (b) vicegerency (*khilafah*), (c) servant ('*abd*'), (d) trust (*amanah*) and (e) justice ('*adalah*') (Haneef, 1997, pp.44-49; Hamid, 1999). As servant and vicegerent of Allah, man is commanded to establish *ma'aruf* and forbid *munkar*, as reflected in the following verse (*Sura Ali Imran* 3: 110):

*You are the best nation which has ever been raised for guidance of mankind.
You enjoin good, forbid evil, and believe in Allah.*

"The best nation," according to Ibn Kathir (2003), refers to the best of peoples for the people. With the best qualities, "the best of peoples" are able them to encourage fellow men to do good deeds and to prevent them from committing sins. This can be interpreted as a collective responsibility towards worshipping Allah. In fact, one's level of faith, whether increasing or decreasing, is very much dependant on the individual's initiatives in enjoining goodness and forbidding evil.

Ulū al-Albāb approach must permeate the entire management functions. Daft (2010) identified four management functions, namely planning, organizing, leading and controlling to achieve goals of organization that can please Allah and satisfy the shareholders. Planning is defined as the process to formulate goals for future performance together with the resources required. Organizing refers to the arrangement of tasks, responsibilities, accountability, and resources allocation to enable the organization to execute activities to attain the goals. Leading is about the use of influence on employees so that they are motivated, willing and ready to perform the tasks assigned to them. As for controlling, it is about monitoring employees and resources so that they are on the right track to achieve the goals of the organization.

The linkages between *Ulū al-Albāb* approach and organizational routines are workable for lifelong learning environment because both are not conflicting and could be complementing (Bapuji et al, 2018; Ricks & Williams, 2005; Porter & Kramer, 2002). In fact, *Ulū al-Albāb* approach serves as the 'software,' whereby organizational routines provide the platform or

‘hardware’ for *Ulū al-Albāb* approach to activate lifelong learning. Figure 5 summarises the discussion of the study.

Figure 5: Discussion of the study



CONCLUSION

Lifelong learning environment for philanthropy from the *Ulū al-Albāb* approach is appropriate with the new managerial paradigm to achieve organizational sustainable innovation and competitive advantage. The *Ulū al-Albāb* approach is spiritual-based knowledge management that offers an integrative framework to achieve sustainable knowledge management and organizational learning. The existing lifelong learning approach lacks of spirituality foundation to sustain the motivation for continuous learning and development among knowledge workers. The interview with knowledge workers perceived that the *Ulū al-Albāb* approach is commendable insights into dynamism, uncertainty and complex business contexts. Nevertheless, managers can apply the *Ulū al-Albāb* approach into their communities of practice and social network. The *Ulū al-Albāb* approach contributes to the theoretical and practical understanding of knowledge management development. However, the results of the study are not conclusive and cannot be generalized. The study proposes future studies to use case studies method and to include key business stakeholders into the focus group discussion.

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