# WISDOM OF *ULŪ AL-ALBĀB* IN SUSTAINING HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN MUSLIM WORLD

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## ABSTRACT

The wisdom of men that endowed with understanding (*ulū al-albāb*) sustains human resource development in Muslim world for many centuries despite the presence of colonization and dominance of super power from non-Muslim world. The essence of *ulū al-albāb* lies with the *Tawhīdic* paradigm, an Islamic monotheism that guides men and women to execute dual tasks as servant and vicegerent of Allah. This study argues that wisdom of *ulū al-albāb* provides comprehensive elements of sustainability in the human resource development. Based on interviews with selected Muslim business owners and managers from various nationalities operated their business in Klang Valley, most of the wisdom lies in the struggle to survive within the free market systems and reduces the wisdom of *ulū al-albāb* to certain routines and innovation instead of survival of the Muslim nation and civilization. The study provides contingency views on human resource development from the *ulū al-albāb* dimension. Public policy makers and business decision makers would develop *ulū al-albāb* HRD system to acquire, transfer and nurture wisdom to sustain organization. The future research suggest the study to use triangulation case study method for more rigorous and comprehensive results.

**Keywords:** *Ulū al-albāb*, wisdom, sustainability, Muslim world

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The wisdom of men that endowed with understanding or known as *ulū al-albāb* is the comprehensive, rigorous, and analytical capability possessed by ordinary human being after going through physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual training on a certain period of time. This capability can be acquired, maintained, and transferred provided one follows the discipline and routines required. Everyone is required to have such capability, which is in line with the needs of the humanity. The main

outcome of the capability is peace, harmonious, and just society.

The discussion of the paper is divided into a few parts. Firstly, it discusses the literature of *ulū al-albāb* in a few areas, namely, in the context of human lifelong learning, its foundation for human resource development, and economic objectives of lifelong learning. Secondly, the methodology section.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 *Ulū Al-Albāb* in the Context of Human Lifelong Learning

Human resource development in Islam is based on Tawhidic paradigm. The *Ulū al-albāb* facilitates the process of human development in line with *Tawhidic*-based lifelong learning paradigm. *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. Al-Faruqi (1992, p.5) argues that human resource development based on *Tawhidic* paradigm manifests the readiness and willingness to fulfil 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). The main argument here is that human resource development can be done with other paradigms for the sake of developing human potentials for the benefit of the humanity, but such aim will not fulfilling the purpose of human creation together with the universe.

In a contemporary context of human resource development with all the economic and materialism driven, Mohd Kamal Hassan (2010, p.187) argues that the *ulū al-albāb* approach to human resource development based on Tawhidic paradigm will serve partially of the required human potential. According to Mohd Kamal Hassan (2010), *ulū al-albāb* approach to human resource development provides the Islamic monotheism thinking on how to live and being developed in this world as the (i) true servants of Allah (*'ibād al-Rahmān*), (ii) vicegerents (*khulafā' fī al-ard*), (iii) true believers (*al-mu'minūn*) for the sake of betterment of mankind (*khayra ummatin ukhrijat lil-Nās*) (Qur'ān, 3:110) and (iv) 'balanced community' (*ummatan wasatan li-takūnū shuhadā' 'alā al-nās*) (Qur'ān, 2:143). Indeed, the *ulū al-albāb* approach to human resource development is not to develop human potential for the sake of economic well-being, but also the

individual, collective, and the nation well-being.

According to Zarkasyi (2010), based on Al-Ghazālī's approach of human learning and development, the development of human knowledge can be divided into 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 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*).

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*).

## 2.2 *Ulū Al-Albāb* as the Foundation of Human Resource Development

This section elaborates *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.
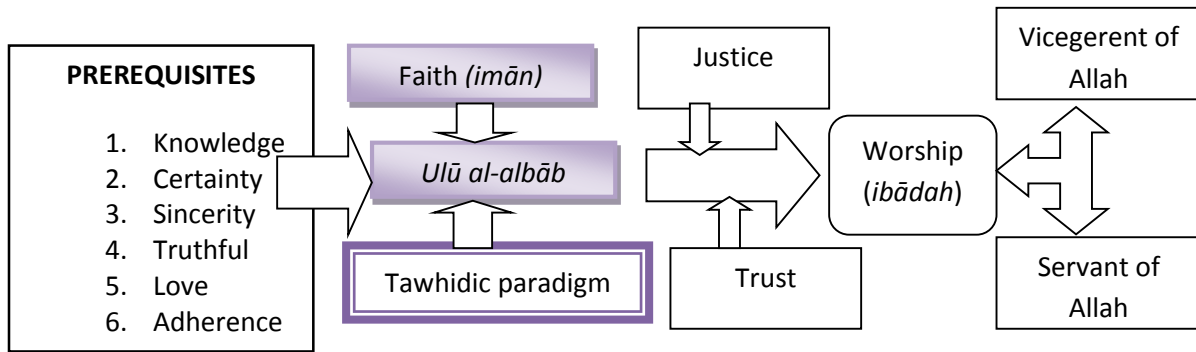


**Fig. 1-** *Ulū al-albāb* **human resource development based on Tawhidic paradigm.**

*Ulū al-albāb* human resource development in the context of lifelong learning environment must be created, nurtured, and built in line with the main reason the creation of man, which is to worship

(*'ibadat*) Allah, in which it has to be performed with trust and justice is depicted in Figure 2 to be consistent with the job description of vicegerent (*khalifa*) as stated in *Sura al Baqarah* 2: 30. This assignment is

in line with the purpose that Allah has created mankind to be His servant and also
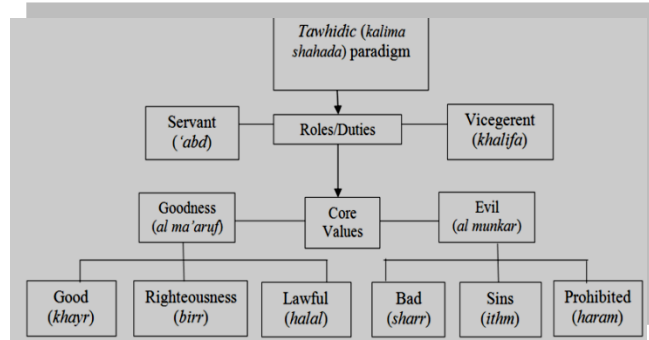
His vicegerent on earth.



**Fig 2- Fundamental Principles of *Duniawi-Ukhrawi* View for Ulu al-albab Human Resource Development**

## 2.3 *Ulū Al-Albāb* and Economic Objectives in Human Lifelong Learning

The fast changing pace of the economy has resulted many of the traditional jobs are slowly disappearing from the job market. This is also a contribution to the long term unemployment and slow economic growth. Cully and Curtain (2001) contended lifelong learning in the forms of apprenticeships, industrial training and so forth becomes essential. Meyers, Billet, and Kelly (2010) argued that mature workers will participate in lifelong learning if they see potential personal and institutional benefits. Thus, lifelong learning becomes an essential requirement of the contemporary job market.

New requirement for the job market as contended by Cully and Curtain (2001), and Meyers *et.al.* (2010), lifelong learning is also contributed by the need to find for a new source of employment. Hancock (2006) argued that traditional jobs are getting no space in the contemporary business world. New source of employment is essential to buffer the increase of unemployment in the society. Stenberg and Westerlund (2008) argued that the long term unemployment becomes the essential factor to encourage for lifelong learning so that with new knowledge and skill, new employment or entrepreneurial opportunities can be offered to the job market. Hence, the unemployment can be addressed gradually. According to Hancock (2006), the mature workers should be given encouragement in lifelong learning practices to enable them relevant in the current job market so that they will not be

phased out from the job market before their retirement age.

As a result of changes in the new job requirement, lifelong learning occurs in all spectrum of life. Cornford (2009) argued that the current workplace and social life requires workers to be updated with the latest news, lifestyle, and social events. The advancement of technology has accelerated the transfer of information, which has substantial influence on work and social life. However, some practices are not serious in supporting lifelong learning efforts, merely superficial. In the meantime, Jenkins, Vignoles, Wolf and Galindo-Rueda (2003) argued that lifelong learning becomes social

and workplace order of the day. Workers are eager to participate as mean in securing individuals' economic outcomes, namely wages and job security. Feinstein and Hammonda (2004) argued that lifelong learning is determined by the ability of adult learning. Active adult learning enhances lifelong learning.

Thus, this study proposes that three main factors contribute to human resource development through lifelong learning at workplace of business organizations based on the *ulū al-albāb* approach: requirement of the job market, new source of employment and social/workplace order. Figure 1 illustrates the framework of the study.
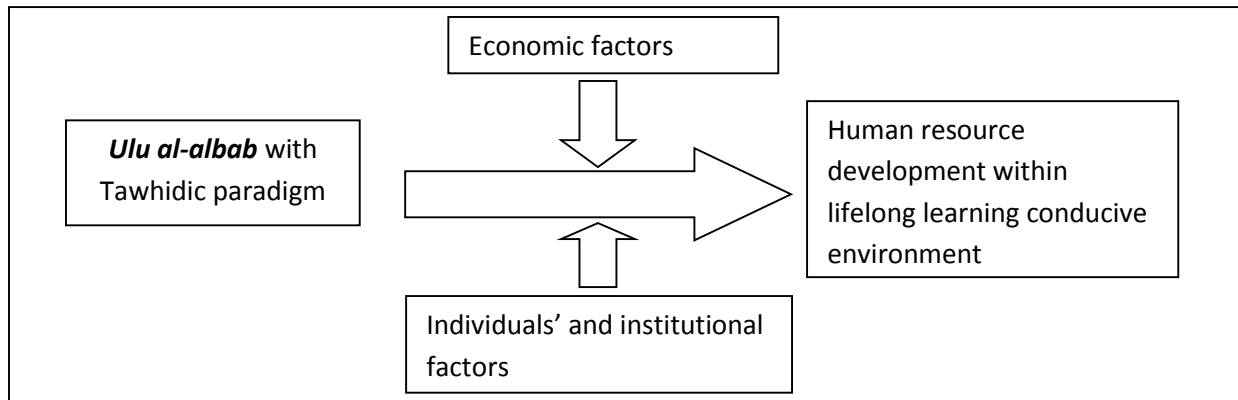


**Fig 3- Framework of the study**

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The study aims to explore the wisdom of examines *ulū al-albāb* through the feedback selected business owners and managers in Klang Valley on how they managed their business and managed wisdom of *ulū al-*

*albāb* in creating, nurturing and conducting friendly and conducive environment for lifelong learning that contribute to organizational sustainable innovation and competitive advantage.

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). This method allows the study to explore and solicit the views of the informants on the issues of managing business and wisdom of *ulū al-albāb.*

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Profile of Informants

The study interviewed 10 informants, three (3) managers and seven (7) business owners from various Muslim countries, namely Turkey, Palestine, Syria, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kuwait, Indonesia, Brunei of various companies in Klang Valley. For owners, the official titles are managing director, executive director and president. As for managers, there are senior manager, marketing manager and business development manager. Table 1 summarizes the brief profile of the informants.

**Table 1- Profile of informants of the study.**

| Code | Position | Location |
|------|----------|----------|
| UK1 | Managing Director (Turkey) | Bukit Jalil |
| UK2 | Executive Director (Palestine) | Cyberjaya |
| UK3 | Executive Director (Syria) | Bukit Jalil |
| UK4 | President (Bangladesh) | Cyberjaya |
| UK5 | Managing Director (Saudi) | Bukit Jalil |
| UK6 | Managing Director (Yemen) | Shah Alam |
| UK7 | Managing Director (Kuwait) | Subang Jaya |
| UM1 | Senior Manager (Indonesia) | Bukit Jalil |
| UM2 | Marketing Manager (Brunei) | Cyberjaya |
| UM3 | Business Development Manager (Saudi) | Shah Alam |

Note: UK = *Ulū al-albāb* owner  UM= *Ulū al-albāb* manager

### 4.2 Analysis

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 men and women that endowed with understanding, or in other words, people that always use brain when reflecting and doing something in daily

activities and always trying the best level to seek the Pleasure of Allah, they were comfortable. According to UM1, the company uses *ulū al-albāb* approach in human resource development through the lifelong learning is meaningful because it is in line with the teachings of Islam. However, UM2 has some reservation on the implementation part due to the diversity of faith and races in the workplace. UM2 said: "In the 'Islamiphobia' situation, any use of Islamic term could be perceived as an attempt to impose Islam to the followers of other faith. Unlike 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 UM3, any good framework of practice should be given a trial. UK1 welcomes the initiative at knowledge-based companies because to UK1, knowledge driven technology is just a tool or device. UK1 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." UK2's response is in line with UM1 and UM3 and UK1 that *ulū al-albāb* approach is just an approach offers by Islam. It should be commendable to be practiced.

The views of three managers (UM1, UM2 and UM3) and seven owners of companies (UK1-UK7) pertaining the incorporation of *ulū al-albāb* approach human resource development to create and nurture lifelong learning through organizational tasks, namely interpersonal, information and decisional roles (Mintzberg, 1980). According to Mintzberg (1980), interpersonal roles include figurehead, leadership, and liaison activities. As figureheads, managers perform ceremonial and symbolic duties, such as presenting a letter of appreciation at the company's dinner. In leadership, managers are involved in the hiring process, appraisal, motivation, and training. Finally, managers provide a bridge for contacting external sources (i.e. individuals or groups) to obtain information for the organisation. UM1 and UM2 used to attend training on Islamic management at their own initiatives and are actually applying the concepts into their work.

As for UK3, UK5 and UK7, they supported the effort to use of *ulū al-albāb* approach in creating and nurturing lifelong learning environment. UM3, UK1, UK2, UK4, and UK6 have positive perception about the approach, but need to attend more training in order to understand them.

The findings of the study can be enhanced with a few aspects. Firstly, the *ulū al-albāb* HRD can be nurtured with the positive perceptions and organizational learning process. Secondly, the process of *ulū al-albāb* HRD life long learning can be monitored and controlled with the four elements, namely (i) the duty as servants of Allah (*'ibad*), (ii) the trust as vicegerent of Allah (*khalīfah*), (iii) the rewards of work as devotion or worship (*'ibādah*), and (iv) the achievement of task as fulfilling the trust (*amānah*). Finally, the sense of fear and hope on Allah (*taqwā*) can contribute to the sense of establishing a sense to work in congregation (*jama'ah*) with quality work. Figure 4 provides the illustration.
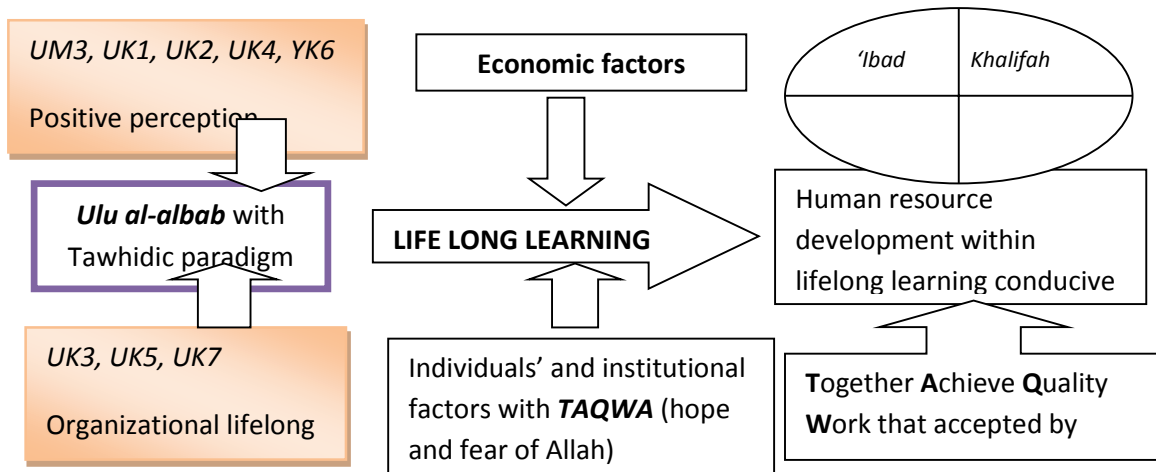


**Fig 4- Enhanced framework of the study**

## 5.    DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Human resource development through lifelong learning of *ulū al-albāb* lays down the guiding principles for mankind in the organizations to perform their tasks and routines together with the duties as servant and vicegerent of Allah. Hence, the *ulū al-albāb* approach of human resource development 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 that attaining 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. 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.

In conclusion, based on interviews with selected business owners and managers from various nationalities operated their business in Klang Valley, most of the wisdom lies in the struggle to survive within the free market systems and reduces the wisdom of *ulū al-albāb* to certain routines and innovation instead of survival of the Muslim nation and civilization. The study provides contingency views on human resource development from the *ulū al-albāb* dimension. Public policy makers and business decision makers would develop *ulū al-albāb* HRD system to acquire, transfer and nurture wisdom to sustain organization. The future research suggests the study to use triangulation case study method for more rigorous and comprehensive results.

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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