The Covid-19 Pandemic: Integrity among Civil Servants

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ABSTRACT

The concerning situation of the COVID-19 epidemic forced the government to notarize Movement Control Order (MCO). The act caused lots of civil servants to be forced to execute the concept of Working From Home (WFH). There are many responses received; there were some who received the news well and there were some who rejected the idea. The discussion regarding WFH had caused some civil servants to take advantage of the leniency of working from home. Previously at the workplace, the employers were able to supervise organizational operations conduct almost entirely; but with the execution of WFH, there is difficulty in supervising the workers' activities in ensuring their values of integrity, trust, and responsibility are preserved, supervised, and well-executed. Integrity problems like being indecent in conducting tasks, accuracy of work time, difficulty in communicating, not executing their actual tasks, and treachery have been the topics of discussion. The objective of this research is to discuss integrity problems among civil servants in WFH and to observe the effectiveness of Islamic management model in achieving organizational goals. Qualitative research method was chosen to analyze the integrity problems by gathering data and analyzing relevant documents in a descriptive manner. The research findings show that the concept of WFH is not the main factor of the integrity problem, instead, it is the individual appreciation of faith value that becomes the foundation of organizational success. Through this paperwork, researchers will analyze how Islamic management model is used to overcome the integrity problems in the WFH period.

Keywords: Covid-19, MCO, WFH, integrity value, Islamic management

INTRODUCTION

Because of the uncontrollable impact of Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), the Malaysian government had declared a Movement Control Order (MCO). Under Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 and Police Act 1967, six sub restrictions had been enforced. It involves the prohibition of mass assembly in any form, overall restriction of tourism activities, Malaysian travel in and out of the country, closure of all learning institutions from the lower level to the private or public institute of higher education (IPT), and closure of all private and government premises. Based on the restrictions, the government and private premises are forced to temporarily shut their operations down. That would mean the workers are unallowed to be present in their everyday workplace. However, the government had given an initiative to the highest management to conduct their daily operations at home, which is known as Work From Home (WFH). In this period, the workers did not have to be present at their premises, instead, they had to execute their tasks from home online or manually if it is taken to their homes.

But the rising questions are, is the new norm fun, and, are the integrity values obeyed in the WFH period. Previously, the employers were able to supervise their employees, but in the WFH period, the supervision

process had become harder. Such difficulties are becoming the concern of the highest management in valuing the honesty and the trustworthiness of the employees.

Objective

Among the objectives of this study are to:

1. What is meant by Work From Home (BDR) and its relation to integrity.
2. Identify the integrity challenges faced by civil servants during the Covid-19 pandemic.
3. To study the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on integrity practices among civil servants.
4. Analyze the Islamic management module as the best solution to integrity issues

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach by focusing on an in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions and challenges faced by civil servants related to integrity during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, the researcher also used phenomenological studies as the study design, to understand the subjective experience and interpretation of civil servants about integrity during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as using data collection methods.

Civil Servants, Integrity, And Ethics

According to Article 132(1) and Article 132(2) of the Federal Constitution, civil servants are referred to as 'individuals that hold the position as long as they are approved' by His Majesty the King. Every civil servant enjoys permanent positions with secured and stable income (Mokthar, 2019). Civil servants function as the executioners of national development efforts, pillars of organizational success by providing an effective, competent, productive, and sufficient service. A speech by the State Secretary, Mohd Zahari Md Azahar in a bulletin entitled, 'Civil Servants Need to Apply Islamic Values in Work', states:

"Civil servants have to always focus on work ethics based on Islamic values so that the work will be blessed and pleased by Allah SWT. Considering that most people in the state are Malay Muslim, Islamic values such as trust, dedication, discipline, responsibility, diligence, and others should be the guide while working". (Chee, 2005)

The appointed civil servants must execute their tasks with responsibility, trust, and discipline as it aligns with Islamic teachings that emphasizes the importance of pure values in executing tasks. Intention of working should be simply for Allah SWT and it will be the primary guidance of Muslims to be aware that the main focus of working is to get blessings.

Civil servants act as the operational activator that is known as human resources. In forming an organization, the combination of two resources are required which are human resources and non-human resources. Human resource is the most important asset in organizational leadership in producing goods and services. At the marketing stage, human resources play an important role in fulfilling customers' needs. (Muhamed, 2020). In an operational base, both sources must be well-mobilized so that no flaws would occur in achieving mission and vision that have been highlighted by the organization.

Therefore as a top manager, employers and employees need to execute their responsibility and trust that have been given to them. Both units must be cooperative so that their targets are possible to be achieved, benefiting every party. However, in the reality of a civil servant, integrity and ethical issues have always been the benchmark to an organizational success. There are many determinant factors to success and failures in developing an organization. Among integrity issues that are always associated with organizational

management are money, time, work, and communication. These issues are becoming poison in the national economic developments and if they are not contained, it will protract and ruin the credibility of a civil servant.

Integrity is a key element in a civil servant's well-being. Integrity shapes an employee to have a good attitude and free from negative behaviors. Integrity weakness would lead to the collapse of moral values and a work profession. Besides, integrity would also affect the success of a career, financial, work, relationships, emotion, and physical. By understanding the meaning of integrity, Muhamed (2020) explains that integrity can be defined as the attitude of honesty, trustworthy, and high moral practice in an individual. Integrity values start individually and it would be interpreted into physical behaviors. The strength of an organization or a country depends on integrity values on individuals in organizations and society.

Every individual needs to be responsible in ensuring integrity formation happens in them, have the courage to defend oneself from the matters that damage them from their positive attributes, consistently doing the right things, not to obsessed with their personal matter, and listening to other people's opinions so that their behavior could be one with themselves in generating self-integrity. Besides, a community and an organization play an important role in affecting integrity and development. Application through education could also contribute to integrity formation where it becomes part of one's identity. Integrity problems happen in a personal or an organizational context, which is caused by lack of religious beliefs, faith, and honorable behaviors. As for the organizational aspect, an organization must abide by the ethical code of Public Service Integrity Pledge that holds firmly on the principle of justice.

According to the reports by the Regulatory Agency Integrity Commission that was published in the Sinar Harian paper, 9 March 2017, integrity problems among civil servants are getting serious. Deputy Head of Commission (Operations) Anti-Corruption Commission (SPRM), Azam Baki stated that according to a released statistic by Records Management and Information Technology Division of SPRM, from 2016 until February 2017, there had been 665 investigation papers that are related with the national civil servants. From the numbers, 548 civil servants were arrested at that period while 63 cases were charged in courts. This proves that integrity problems involving bribery among the civil servants are concerning. (Hassan, et. al 2009)

Other than integrity, this problem is related to etiquette. Etiquette means characters and personality. Work ethic can be defined as a guide for attitudes that is followed by people that are relevant to lifes. Good attitudes and behaviors lead to good morals and ethics. The relationship between work ethic and human life is used to control one's behavior comprehensively to do or leave wrongdoings, either legally or as a professional status holder. Therefore, work ethics is a way for the society to control their own behaviors and it also enables them to watch and evaluate their every move from time to time. Etiquette must be learned and practiced in daily life in every action because the effectiveness of its principle depends on the individual itself. Therefore, if one does not have self-discipline like not having a high mental strength, they would not achieve the level of ethics as they should.

A relevant issue with etiquette has been part of an organizational core. According to Hassan, et. al (2009), in an organizational background, ethical behavior is a part of religious beliefs and practice that are done voluntarily without expecting any return. However, still referencing them, such assumption will cause ethical matters to be given less serious attention and eventually, it will give a huge impact to an organizational performance. Issues like involvement in bribery, financial mismanagement, treachery, manipulation, workforce mismanagement, exploitation of other resources for personal gain, being inconsistent, invoke and support wrongdoings, lowering service quality to internal and external clients, being too controlling and prohibit employees' creativity and freedom, being stingy in shaping and executing tasks involving workers' welfare and life quality, self-centered, and using positions for one's benefit have been the poison in shaping an ultimate organization. To overcome this problem, the Integrity Unit is formed

in line with the mission to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate the execution of the National Integrity Plan and to help Malaysia achieve its status as a high integrity country, resilient, and practices universal positive attitudes.

The Concept of Working From Home (WFH)

It is known as Work From Home (WFH). According to Malaysian Public Service Department's circular letter, 17 March 2020, work from home refers to the residence of the employers, including the ones in their hometown (if they are in their hometown during the MCO) and is considered as executing work order from home in their service duration. (Zuraimi, 2020) Therefore, based on the circular letter, all of organizational and operational management must be taken care of from home during the MCO in their own home so that COVID-19 could be contained. Meanwhile, for the workers who were stranded in a location, like in their hometown, they were also categorized as the receivers of WFH orders and must be ready to be contacted from time to time for their official tasks.

Therefore, the WFH concept can be defined as task executions in one's residence without having to be present at their workplace, putting on neat suits, and still bounded to eight hours of work time a day. Regardless, the concept of WFH does not mean a vacation, but the workers still need to 'enter the office' at the same time as their employee set it to be. However, the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) given by the employees are still vague and there were some rule violations done by the workers.

The Director General of Public Services' circular also informed that every officer was ordered to work from home. However, the Head of Department can decide the essential services in their Ministry/Department and order the involved officers to be present in the office. For the officers who were ordered to work from home, the following matters have to be obeyed; a) always be ready at home during the office hours as set by the government; b) must be ready if one is ordered by the Head of Department to be present in the office or other locations; and c) must always be ready to be contacted in working hours.

Regarding the execution of the SOP, there is a lot of research that must be done. There are many factors to the success of WFH execution. Adaptability to a new norm, IT equipment with Internet access, hardware accommodations, work space, and communication are also part of the success. According to Mohd Sharulnizam Zuraimi, Deputy Chief Librarian, there are a few factors to the WFH success. Among them:

a. **Responsibility:** the execution of the given tasks must be completed by the time set by the employers. The failure of completing the task, shows irresponsibility against the trust that has been given to the employees.
b. **Trust:** this value is a benchmark for an employee in retrieving the blessings of income.
c. **Discipline:** it must be fostered in executing work from home. Work time compliance and lazy attitude must be avoided because it will be the catalyst in forming a firm, disciplined, and trustworthy attitude.
d. **Work target:** targets must be realistic and easy to be executed in a limited resource. These targets determine employees' capabilities to execute their task in a minimum surveillance by the employers. Every task must be recorded as proof of work during the MCO.
e. **Skills:** adaptability at home, types of work, and equipment used influence work from home feasibility. Lack of equipment like computers and internet access makes typing tasks and document distribution difficult.
f. **Internet access:** it has been a primary need in networking or information findings. Insufficient data access influences workers' capabilities and mood. The failure to interact will compromise the tasks that need to be done.
g. **Communication:** it is important to be reachable from time to time. It is an activator in delivering information from employers to employees. Lack of information or undelivered information will cause misunderstandings between employees and employers. Besides, teamwork will not be able to be

successfully executed.

h. **Workspace:** preparation to face WFH requires a specific workspace to have a conducive and comfortable working environment. Equipment such as desks, chairs, lighting, and privacy affect the employees' mood.

He also adds that before executing WFH, employers must do a survey in identifying workers' ability and resources that can help the workers to work from home. The purpose of the survey is to know the commitment, equipment, access, and information that are accessible to the workers during the MCO. The survey helps in determining suitable work for a worker with specific restraints at home. Employers are recommended to prepare a guideline as a reference in determining the task method of execution that must be done. On the employees' side, after receiving their tasks, they need to give attention to the desire to learn, open mindedness to accept new technologies and preparation to work from home.

In strengthening integrity, MARA University of Technology (UiTM) had advertised the SOP that must be obeyed by every worker of administration and academic. Among the guides to supervise the execution of WFH are as follows:

a. The Heads of Department are encouraged to prepare mechanisms in determining workers' presence that work from home, such as Mobile Attendance CheckIn (MAC), using phone to call them, and others. However, for the workers that are ordered to be in the office, the clock-in and clock-out timestamps must be recorded to claim overtime, substitute leaves, and other administrative purposes.

b. In preparation for work, the heads of PTJ/assessing officers/supervisors are encouraged to have a control mechanism such as the usage of Google Doc in making the daily report of employees' work results.

c. WFH must fit with existing facilities and must be executed through these examples;

1. Continuing researching efforts, writings, and updating publication data in the PRISMA system and other data in the UiTM system.

2. Reading circular or guides, work-related books or articles, preparing manuals/work processes especially if it's quality-related, skill or knowledge enhancement to strengthen work competencies.

3. Examining and revising tasks to prepare or update/complete data in MyATP or MyPortfolio system according to UiTM's need.

4. Executing postponed tasks, updating information, preparing reports, or making plans according to the strategy of the university/PTJ.

5. Innovating or being creative through brainstorming sessions or idea generations through phones, video call or skype, creative writings especially when it is relevant with the work field, improving processes and other leadership aspects, skill sets or self potential (including English proficiency).

6. Keep communicating with the heads of PTJ/assessing officers/supervisors and colleagues through phone, emails, and other social media to get help, advice, and other.

Generally, every worker that is involved with WFH must always be fully ready to work everyday for eight hours, limiting a specific space at home during work, must be reachable by friends and employers, retaining office work time momentum, always focus, preparing a clear work and rest schedule, avoiding any distractions, and always be positive in facing obstacles.

Islamic Management Model

Islam and management are two components that must be applied together. There are many discussions regarding work concepts in Islam that have been stressed to Muslims. There are a few work rules that must be obeyed by the workers. Among them are we need to work for Allah SWT, work must be considered as a

worship, as a source of halal income (Ishak, 2021) and working is an honorable factor to a human's life. Islam also stresses the importance of preserving integrity such as trust and responsibility in performing daily tasks. Besides, in Islamic management, it is stated that workers are responsibilities that must be treated well and employers are leaders that must be obeyed by the workers. Unlike work ethic in the West, they hold to the principles of 'workers are workers' where employers or an organization holds the absolute right to the workers and need to supervise them with strict control with the purpose of getting profit only. This strict control is done because it is feared that the workers will break integrity and not perform their task as much as they are paid. In addition, with the execution of WFH, prejudice might happen among employers, making surveillance tasks difficult for the management.

According to a research by an online consumer research firm Vase.ai, they took samples from 1100 Malaysian respondents on the issue of WFH during the MCO. The study finds 77% are facing difficulties in WFH. Among those difficulties are unstable Internet connection, lack of proper working space, difficulties in finding work balance, distractions from family members at home, difficulties to communicate with colleagues, unable to concentrate on non-office environment, receiving too many calls or video conferencing, and difficulties in accessing data from the office's database. Therefore, these obstacles are becoming the reasons why a task can not be completed successfully.

However, Islamic management model is the best recommendation in overcoming this problem. There are many discussions on integrity. Integrity in Islam can be seen in Islamic management principles where Islam stresses on the *ubudiyyah* principle which means the preservation of humans and the Creator. In preserving the relationship between humans and their Creator, the *ubudiyyah* concept stresses the relationship between humans and their Creator, which is Allah SWT. In preserving this relationship, it involves how a person would ensure its life is always holding on to Allah's laws and avoiding His prohibitions. Through this principle, it gives an awareness that every person's act will be compensated accordingly. Submission to Allah SWT makes the workers understand their responsibilities. Besides, self submission will form *mahmudah* attitude because it encourages humans to be more responsible, diligent, trustworthy, patient, not giving up, charitable, and always strive to free oneself from negative activities that are unconsidered as untrustworthy and irresponsible such as treachery, abuse of power, deviation, and bribery.

Other than *ubudiyyah*, the principle of *al-mas'uliyyah* (responsibility) also makes integrity possible in every worker. This principle stresses responsibility on tasks that have been ordered by the employers to be settled promptly. Besides, this principle is not only to be devoted to Allah SWT but it must be applied to the workers to always follow every rule from an organization. Every worker should feel responsible as it will encourage them to always be vigilant in executing their responsibilities. The principle of *mas'uliyyah* will generate workers with a positive attitude, high conscientiousness, and always avoiding negative manners. Responsibility will prohibit oneself from treachery, slacking off, dishonesty, bribery, carelessness, and realizing that responsibility held by them will be questioned and judged, not only by the management for promotion and salary, but also by Allah SWT on the trust given by an organization.

According to Islamic management model, it also stresses on integrity that must be obeyed by every worker and employer. Integrity problems usually involve the abuse of power, financial, time, and communication. This problem involves three categories which are integrity of individuals, organizations, and civil servants. For individual integrity, the justice concept in speech and behaviors must be put into consideration in determining every decision. This consideration must be aligned with moral principles, etiquette, and laws so that decisions made will be a weightage in determining the individual priorities or for the collective benefits.

The second category involves organizational management. Integrity is a wide term, not only involving the higher-ups, but the whole organization in applying ethic codes, charters, work processes and practicing the best policy. Organizational ethic code is usually delivered in a monthly assembly so that it can be heard, stressed, repeated, understood by every organizational member until it becomes a norm and culture.

Meanwhile, the third form is more directed towards the civil servant's judgment themselves. They are categorized as the trustee and power holder in fulfilling the public's interest. A civil servant must not abuse their power for their personal, family, and kinsfolk's interests by setting their faith aside. However, when there is a conflict based on this interest, it must be solved by giving priorities to the public interest. With that, a civil servant has to be transparent and sincere, carry the responsibility on their employers, their subordinates, and other parties.

UiTM itself has stressed the importance of preserving integrity. Institution Core Value was introduced by bringing up ESI (Excellence, Synergy, Integrity) and the concept of I-DART (knowledge, discipline, trust, hardworking, responsibility) as self-control for every worker. Through ESI, it gives encouragement to the staff to always improve their service quality and make *al-falah* as a standard that has to be achieved. Besides, integrity is stressed to nurture corporations, loyalty, trust, bravery, responsibility, justice, punctuality, thrift, positive attitude, and creativity. This shows that UiTM staff are bound to integrity.

A survey done on government departments in the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) shows that it gives a guideline to their workers in an effort to avoid having careless, forgetful, and neglectful workers. According to it, to avoid being part of careless and neglectful circle, the workers need to put themselves as a leader that was trusted with responsibilities by Allah SWT to properly administer and be resourceful toward this world. Realizing the fact that one is a slave and a leader, an employee must first understand the theory by preparing themselves with noble attitudes, improving personalities, doing good deeds, being polite, watching their languages, having a sincere intention, having courtesy in working, inviting others in doing good deeds, and creating a good environment. This is a concept known as *'hablu minallah'* and *'wahablu minan nas'*.

Through JAKIM's Integrity Plan, two main approaches will be used in containing this integrity breach problem among JAKIM's people. The first approach is through preventive control which is to curb any factors that could breach integrity among the workers. The second approach is through conservation activities of the workers which have already been involved with integrity breach.

LIMITATION

This study faced challenges when there were several constraints in finding data, especially involving respondents who were not ready for interviews due to time issues and the need to implement the SOPs. In addition, this limitation also occurs due to the difficulty of moving from one destination to another to obtain data.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, this matter must be refined from time to time as its effectiveness in achieving organizational goals. Even though SOP has been advertised to the public, the more important matter is the understanding of the concept of monotheism. Positive attributes in monotheism will be a fortress of honesty, trust, responsibility, and understanding the retrieval of blessed resources. If these values are obeyed, there will be no issue whether one is working from home or in an office. What's important is the successful execution of the tasks. The employers must also have a good presumption on their workers. When integrity is in oneself, a worker is not dependent on a specific supervision from the employers anymore and the employers will not have doubts that their workers would slack off. Islam teaches Muslims to be honest and trustworthy in every work.

Also, to avoid this problem, it is important for the management to be considered and aware of values, etiquette, and integrity. It is important to apply integrity value as a policy and a way of life, and giving

recognitions to outstanding staff with Best Employee Award as a support and recognition to the workers who are committed in performing their tasks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is hoped that this study will provide some guidance to civil servants during the pandemic if this matter is repeated. There are several other studies that can be conducted by the government or the private sector by comparing the appreciation of the value of integrity possessed by their respective employees. These comparisons can provide deeper insights into the different approaches to addressing integrity challenges in crisis. In addition, a long-term study can also be conducted on the impact of the pandemic on the integrity of civil servants by looking at the changes in integrity behaviour that occurred during the pandemic to remain relevant in the post-pandemic period, or whether civil servants return to their usual practices.

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