Abstract

Time is a precious commodity and extremely important *amanah* from Allah (swt). Proper utilization of time leads to success in this mundane world and eternal bliss in the hereafter. Since time is limited in our life, we must utilize it in the best possible manner so that we can attain eternal success. Most of the existing guidelines on time management are developed by Western scholars some of which may not be consistent with teachings of Islam. The main purpose of the present research is to develop some guidelines on time management from Islamic perspective. In this study, a qualitative interview method was applied to know the Islamic time management practices. Research data were collected through face to face interviews at IIUM. In this study, mainly three important issues were considered regarding the Muslims perceptions on time management from Islamic perspectives: (1) personal views on time management from Islamic perspective; (2) managing time in the daily life; and (3) identifying the time wasters based on experiences. These three key issues were analyzed based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) process.

Keywords: Time management, Islamic perspective, Qualitative research method

Introduction

Managing time has got many benefits to the individual and to the organization where he/she works. The reason many of us feel stressed in our daily lives is that we have too much to do in a shorter period of time. Being overwhelmed with activities, assignments and work can lead a person to be “stressed out.” Time management is helpful and necessary in our busy lives. In order to balance our schedule we need to be able to organize and utilize our time
wisely. Without good time management skills we can easily fall behind in responsibilities and feel like we do not have enough time.

According to Al-Jeraisy (2008), time is the scarcest resource. If it is not managed properly, nothing else will be managed. Good management of time is important both for economizing on costs and for proper utilization of other resources. In spite of its greater importance, time is the most wasted and the least concerned element at both the organizational and the individual levels. In Islam, time is one of the most valuable resources for the Muslim wellbeing. According to Al-Jeraisy (2008), every Muslim has certain duties and responsibilities towards the Almighty Allah (s.w.t), and for the society. These responsibilities involve knowledge, work and their proper discharge necessitates that each of them be allocated its due amount of time. Al-Jeraisy (2008) also mentioned that a Muslim’s life involves two elements: worship and earning a living. Allah (s.w.t) says in the Qur’an: *I have only created Jinns and men, that they may serve Me; No Sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me.; For Allah is He Who gives (all) Sustenance, - Lord of Power - steadfast (forever) {Al-Thariyat, 56-58}*\(^1\). Whatever Muslims do, if those are done in accordance with the Qur’an and the Sunnah, then those will be considered as acts of worship. Such worship must be done sincerely to seek the pleasure of Almighty Allah alone. Everyone should use his/her own time (which includes “free time”) in doing beneficial things, especially those that will take them closer to Allah and earn His mercy and forgiveness.

\(^1\) It is to be noted that all Qur’a’nic verses will be referred to the Surah Name and followed by the number of the verse(s).
Muslims have to use their time wisely by knowing more on the Qur’an and the Sunnah. They must have right knowledge of what Allah and His Messenger have commanded them to do and at the same time to refrain from forbidden things. This is imperative so that Muslim can earn Allah’s pleasure and consequently great rewards. Allah, the Exalted makes it very clear, when He says:

*O you who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger (Muhammad) and render not vain your deeds {Muhammad, 33}.*

Contrary to the above divine commandment, Muslims must ask themselves: are they obeying Almighty Allah and His Messenger? To what extent they are using their time to learn the Qur’an and the Sunnah in order to have strong *Imân* (Faith). As time passes by, are Muslims sure enough that they are devoting their time for worship and seeking pleasure of the Almighty Allah? Are they following the guidance of the Qur’an and the Sunnah which is commanded by Allah and His Messenger?

Allah (s.w.t) says:

*By the time, verily man is in loss, except such as have Faith, and does righteous deeds, and joins (together) in the mutual enjoining of Truth, and of patience and constancy {Al-Asr, 1-3}.*

Every Muslim needs to understand the concept of Time Management in respect to both views: conventional as well as Islamic in order to have some level of motivation so as to complete duties in very effective and efficient manner. Unfortunately, many Muslim managers lack the skills of managing their time and that results in reduction in work quality and falling short of meeting organization’s objectives. Why Muslim managers are facing these problems? To know the answers, we interviewed a number of Muslims scholars to find
out their views and experiences on time management from Islamic perspective. Therefore, objectives of the present research are as follows:

- To know the personal views on time management from Islamic perspective
- To know how the Muslims manage their own time in their daily life, and
- To identify the reasons of time wasters based on the experiences

**Literature review**

**What is time?**

According to the definition of The New Encyclopedia Britannica, time is a continuum that lacks spatial dimension. Time is of philosophical interest and is also the subject of mathematical and scientific investigation. It is perhaps a common sense that, even in the absence of consciousness, events would still occur in an order that could be described using the relations of before and after. The measurement of time involves establishing a precise system of reference for specifying when an event occur (i.e. specifying the epoch and establishing a standard interval of time). According to Webster’s New World College Dictionary, time is “the specific, usual or allotted period during which something is done”.

Time management expert Al- Jeraisy (2008) explains that, the issue of time is a permanent matter of discussion. Its conceptualization varies according to motives and the nature of the required functions and activities. Also, the wider cultural context directly and indirectly determines the relationship between man and time.

**What is time management?**

According to Clegg (1999), time management is the art of arranging, organizing, scheduling, and budgeting one’s time for the purpose of generating more effective work and productivity.
There are numerous books, courses, workshops, day-planners, and seminars on time management, which teach individuals and corporations how to be more organized and more productive. Time management has become crucial in recent years, thanks to the 24/7, and busy world wherein people live.

An important aspect of time management is planning for the future. Sometimes, successful time management involves putting more time at the outset in order to reorganize one’s life. Though many time management books and teachings differ in their approaches, most agree that the first step in efficient time management is to organize the workplace or home. Even if one’s schedule is well-ordered, but the office and filing system are not so, time will be wasted while trying to work efficiently in a disorderly place.

The concept of time management is an integrated one, inclusive of all times, places and people. Its application is not limited to certain administrators or places. Furthermore, the concept of time has been widely associated with administrative works, for it involves a continuous process of planning, analysis and evaluation of all the people’s activities within their daily working hours so as to achieve effectiveness in investing available time for the sake of reaching the desired goals.

**Islamic Perspectives**

Time has been mentioned in different forms in the Qur’an; Allah (s.w.t) says: *The number of months with Allah is twelve months in accordance with His law since the day He created the heavens and the earth, of them four are sacred (holy)*  {Al-Touba, 35}. One Hadith explains this as narrated by Abu Bakr (r.a):
The Prophet (s.a.w) said, "Time has come back to its original state which it had when Allah created the Heavens and the Earth; the year is of twelve months, four of which are sacred. Three of them are in succession; Dhul-Qa’d, Dhul-Hijja and Al-Muharram, and (the fourth being) Rajab Mudar (named after the tribe of Mudar as they used to respect this month) which stands between Jumad (ath-thani) and Sha’ban" (Bukhari, Volume 6, Book 60, Number 184).

From Al-Qur’an, it is also found that many acts of worships are related with time, for example; Allah (s.w.t) says in the Qur’an about starting the month of fasting (Ramadan): The month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Qur’an, a guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of the guidance, and the Criterion (of right and wrong). And whosoever of you is present and witness the month (moon), let him fast in the month {Al-Baqrah, 185}.

Qur’an has emphasized on managing time, by relating it to the movement of the day and the night. Allah (s.w.t) says in the Qur’an: Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of Night and Day, there are indeed Signs for men of understanding{Al-Imran, 190}. Also He said; Verily, in the alternation of the Night and the Day, and in all that Allah hath created, in the heavens and the earth, are Signs for those who fear Him {Yunus, 6}.

In other Surah, Allah (s.w.t) described this concept of day and night as:

Among His Signs are the Night and the Day, and the Sun and the Moon. Adore not the sun and the moon, but adore Allah, Who created them, if it is Him ye wish to serve{ Fusilat, 37}

HE also said: And a Sign for them is the Night: We withdraw there from the Day, and behold they are plunged in darkness {Yaseen, 38}. Allah (s.w.t) also says: And it is He Who made
the Night and the Day to follow each other: for such as have the will to make remembrance for His praises or to show their gratitude {Al-Furqan, 62}.

Allah (s.w.t) also says: See they note that We have made the Night for them to rest in and the Day to give them light? Verily in this are signs for any people that believe! {Al-Naml, 86}

Also: And made the night as a covering, and made the day as a means of subsistence {Al-Nab’a, 10-11}.

Again, Allah (s.w.t) is saying in the Qur’an: By the declining day (Asr), Lo! Man is a state of loss, save those who believe and do good works, and exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to endurance {Al-Asr, 1-3}.

In the above Surah, Allah (s.w.t) is making an oath by al-‘Asr. Allah can swear by anything He wants, as He can use anything to be His witness. However, we as Muslims are not allowed to swear by anything or anyone except by Allah, His Names or His Attributes. For all what Allah use to swear on have got a significant meaning and valuable consideration. Like in Surah Al-Asr, He used the time to swear on, which means time is very important.

The Creator is guiding humankind in this Surah by showing the necessary principles that Muslims must live by and their necessary application for achieving success. It shows the minimum or foundational integrity that must be firmly established in the life of Muslims for subsequent higher development and salvation.

Everyone must understand the wisdom and the purpose of time and to learn how they can use it effectively for their progress, growth and development and not to fall prey to its negative characteristics of either wasting or spending it in vain. The word “Asr” is mostly referred to the middle and afternoon prayer when Muslims are caught up in the material world and become heedless in prioritizing their commitment to the Creator for spiritual development.
and growth. Muslims become oblivious regarding their time which is detrimental to the innate value and nature of themselves (Karolia, 2007).

Islam is a comprehensive way of life that enables Muslims to believe in Tawheed, performing not only the ritual Ibadat, but also practise correct Islamic living (muasharat), conduct transactions according to Islam (muamalat), and demonstrate good Akhlaq (Islamic ethics and moral) (Ahmad, 2007).

Muslims are expected to have a serious concern on time; it is their duty to monitor the proper use of time. A Muslim employee can neither embezzle the time of work in the organization, nor use the time for performing activities not related to the work (Beekun, 1997).

Allah (s.w.t) says in the Qur’an:

When you have finished As-Salah (the congregational prayer), remember Allah standing, sitting down, and (lying down) on your side, but when you feel secure, perform As-Salah (Iqamat-as-salah). Verily, As-Salah (the prayer) is enjoyed on the believers at a fixed time {An-Nisa, 103}.

And He also says: We did send Messengers before thee, and appointed for them wives and children; and it was never the part of a Messenger to bring a sign except as Allah permitted (or commanded). For each period is a Book (revealed) {Ar-Ra’ad, 38}.

**Methodology**

The general objective of this study was to investigate the phenomena of Muslims perception on time management from Islamic perspectives based on qualitative research method, particularly, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis . According to Giorgi (1989 and 1997),
phenomenology refers to the totality of life experiences that belong to a single person. He also mentioned that there are four characteristics of psychological phenomenological approaches which hold across all variations: (1) research is rigorously descriptive, (2) phenomenological reductions, (3) explore the internal relationship between persons and situation, and (4) search for essence in human experiences through the use of imaginative variation. Basically, as mentioned before, this research was mainly focused on Muslim perception on time management from Islamic perspective such as personal views on Islamic time management, experiences on time management in the daily life, and identifies the reasons for time wasters.

**Sampling**

This research method was derived from the phenomenological assumptions that means the phenomena was explored by asking an individual respondent who has experienced the phenomena to describe his/her experiences (Sale, 2007). Sampling is therefore, purposeful in that individual who has experienced the phenomena and be able to describe his/her perception or experiences about the time management from Islamic perspective. Altogether, seven respondents were comprehensively interviewed.

**Data Collection**

In this research, semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with respondents about their perception on time management from Islamic perspective. Interviewees were given the option of meeting at department, faculty office, or at another location that was convenient for them. The interviews lasted approximately 20 - 30 minutes.
An interview guide was prepared on various subjects: What is your view on Time Management from an Islamic perspective? How do you manage your time? Please tell us your own experience. There are some activities we call them time wasters, can you please name some items that you consider as time wasters through your personal experience? Participants were encouraged to discuss anything in relation to the survey objectives. Notes were taken during the interviews.

Five demography related information were noted at the beginning of the interview: gender, age, nationality, marital status, and types of employment. At the end of the interview, the interviewee was requested for contact in the future to review the transcript of their interview. During the interviews, the interviewer used pen and papers to make notes about the interviews. Interviewer also used an electronic recorder to record all the conversations of interviews (at the beginning of the interview, the interviewer asked permission from the participant to record his/her interview conversations). Therefore, when interview was finished the interviewer read through the notes and added details from the recorded conversation.

The recorded interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word 2010. Sale (2007) recommended that the transcripts should be verified against the voice recording. This process of transcript was continued until the authors were satisfied with the quality of the transcriptions. The verified transcripts were sent to the participants who were given a couple of days to respond with comments and/or amendments.

Out of seven respondents, six were from International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and one was from a private company in Malaysia. Among these seven respondents, two were lectures; one was Deputy Rector (International and Innovation); Director of IIUM Graduate
School of Management; Coordinator (IIUM Research & Publication); Liaison Officer at Kulliyyah of Law; and CEO of SRM Bhd. All seven participants responded with some comments and corrections after reading their transcripts. They also confirmed that the transcript was satisfactory. However, they did not change the content or meaning of the transcripts. The results of this exploratory study has been described in the following section:

**Results**

The respondents were mainly asked three questions regarding their time management from an Islamic perspective. All the seven participants commented on these three questions, respectively and their responses are provided below.

Question 1: What is your view on Time Management from an Islamic perspective?

“It is an essential one, time is important in Islam, even God made oath on it (Surah Al-Asr). It is not only the prayer times as people refer to it, it is also the time over the generation; the difference between two generations is the time factor. All activities, like five daily prayers been touched to the time. So more you manage you time efficiently the more success you will get.”

“I think time management from Islamic perspective is a vital issue, because Islam emphasizes of being punctual in doing every day activities. If someone is not, then he cannot achieve the goals of his life, and unable to fulfill his obligations, commitments, and responsibility toward himself, his family, his society as a whole. There is one Hadith the Prophet S.A.W says “you have to do your work continuously, even though it is a small task”. That is because to gain Barakah (blessings), and be able to fulfill your mission, otherwise half of the way stop your mission then be unable to achieve your goals.”
“I think one thing related to this is the punctuality, for example if they call for prayers you go and answer it on time, but if you keep on postponing it, postponing in meeting God, that lead to have the same attitude in postponing your work.”

“Actually time is very important, because once time is gone it never comes back, and Islam emphasizes the proper use of time so it cannot be wasted anyhow, if not at least should not be abused, every minute or second can be rewarded in the hereafter.”

“Time is a resource in Islam as mentioned by many Hadiths of the Prophet (S.A.W), one of it says: there are two bounties people should take care, one of them is free time. So if you don’t manage your time properly you will be totally in loss. That is why I find time management is very important. The second concept on importance of time management is in other Hadith: every day comes to us is a new day, the same day does not come until the day of Al-Qiyamah (hereafter). This means whatever Muslim does should be day to day basis, not in week or month basis. As in the day of Al-Qiyamah you will be asked about your time as in one Hadith says: no one take further steps until he answers 5 questions: one of it is how you did spend your time? It is how you invest your time.”

“Time in Islam is very important, it is very important to all Muslims in order to succeed in this life and hereafter. If we look at how Islam takes concern on keeping the daily five prayers this shows a good sign of how we can make good time management by learning from such thing.”

“It is very difficult question, I do not know the difference between Muslim and non-Muslim, but to my training I go through things from an Islamic side which shows the importance of time, one thing which help as a Muslim is looking at the day how is structured, using the prayers, five times a days, so we plan doing things between that time. Apart from that, as I observed some religious people are much concerned finishing task on daily basis, because you do not know what will happen tomorrow as the teaching of the prophet (s.a.w) that make perfect use of time, there is no idle time no playing around, try to do as much as possible.”

All respondents agreed that time management is very important in all aspects of life, and Islam is one of the religions that emphasizes on keeping time and utilizing it in beneficial
ways to the society in order to achieve goals and obtain successes. As some has stated that
time is important in Islam, even God made oath on it, (Surah Al-Asr). Moreover, majority of
the respondents have made a strong link between five daily prayers (as one of the great pillars
of Islam which need to be performed on time) and time management as they help the person
to learn how to divide his/her day and his/her activities throughout the day. This can be done
by looking at the day on how it is structured using these prayers, five times a day, so we plan
to do things between that time. They also mentioned that the concept of time management as
it is in the Sunnah. Every day comes to us as a new day. This means whatever Muslim does
should be on day-by-day basis, not in week or month basis. As in the day of Al-Qiyamah,
people will be asked about their time. One Hadith says: no one will take further steps until
they answer five questions, one of them is how the person spent his/her worldly time.

Question 2: How do you manage your time? Please share us your own experiences.

“To me regarding management of time, I take it seriously because of technical aspect of it. Meaning to
say that any single minute or hour you spend should have value in your life. Time management to me is
an essential to any kind of success or any failure. Managing time comes to all activities, obligations,
options, all what we do in life.”

“I can say that, as a Muslim lecturer, I have things to fulfill in category, first the prayers, then send my
kids to school, then go to the university teach until afternoon, then take my kids back home, after that is
time for research, and also give time to students for any consultancy until evening, then go back home,
at night try to teach my children, in between if there is any assignment or obligation I spend time
accordingly.”

“Managing time for me is either the rotten work at the department or job been assigned to me, usually
I prioritize all what I do, what requires most attention is to be done first.”
“As it’s known we have 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, so someone should be alert, how to use it and knowing the priorities in the agenda that to be done first. Then we should have a written agenda or dairy of how to manage time. Secondly, we should divide our time to the work, to the family, to the physical fitness, and also enough time to rest, to make sure to balance in the expectations of those different of activities and people in the society.”

“I give time to my family, this is usually a priority, as here I am talking about quality time, usually I advise them, train them, memorize Quran with them, home work at home, these are considered as very important. Second thing is I give some time to myself in terms of sports, and other activities. Third thing is Tahajjud at night (night prayers), it is very useful especially in releasing stress and bringing humility and be near to Allah. Other thing readings, I like readings, and then counseling students; also usually I give public talks about topics on Islam.”

“Yes I like to visit my relatives so much when I was younger, now because a lot of work to be done, but I like spend time with my wife and grandchildren. Also do exercise every morning it helps a lot, I have my own dairy, every activity I want to do, I carry it with me everywhere so I cannot miss anything or forget something could be important.”

“One thing I find it in myself maybe because of the nature of my work, my time is not strictly structured, for example when I am doing something many people come in to see me, many students come to consult me, namely interruptions, but I try to help people when I get the ability to do that. The only structured time when I have classes that one I cannot miss up with them, also of course I have family, when I am at home do not bring work at home, it is time to be with children.”

Based on the interviews it was observed that each person has got a unique way of managing his/her time, as everyone has his/her own goals and objectives that make this time management different. However, majority of the respondents divide their time for families and their responsibilities outside whether in classes or offices. Each of them divides his/her time according to the need of others, at home they divide time among family members, at working place they divide time among tasks required to be
completed according to their priorities. This leads to the issue of prioritization of different tasks and activities. As it is known, we have 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, so someone should be alert on how to use it and knowing the priorities in the agenda list is important. Then we should have a written agenda or dairy on how to manage the time; this will help future plans more clearly.

Question 3: There are some activities we call them time wasters, can you please name some items that you consider as time wasters through your personal experience?

“First I can say spending time talking about others negatively. Spending time in unhealthy discussion, spending time on oversleeping, spending time focusing on small matters, spending time thinking so much on impossible, and spending time on recalling and living in history.”

“Personally, I think as a lecturer, gossiping, unnecessary discussions and secondly, laziness. Thirdly, when a person is not sincere, and also being not punctual, also to me other aspect like being with poor plan, and not following according to the plan, they will not be able to achieve the goals. And then not having the evaluation of the work done.”

“I think, things like unprepared personnel, for example if a project to be done in this time, but one person involved delayed to submit his part, which makes us to hold it to other date. Other like absence from doing tasks, even people to it purposely because they are not prepared or something like that. Also not being punctual it is major waste of time.”

“In academic I found number one time waster is with friends, when you sit down and have unnecessary discussions like backbiting and talking on things not related to anything good. Secondly, sometimes we think that we don’t have appointments, and then punctuality becomes an issue. Third, when we forget our promises. And also putting many things at a time becomes a problem.”

“You waste time when you involve in useless activities; people like to talk on unnecessary things that don’t benefit them. Second thing, people like to waste time in sleeping, especially young people. Third
thing in our days also is the media. Fourth thing I can consider in the university is meetings, as some of the meetings are not necessary, there are decisions can be taken without meetings.”

“Yes there are things that can waste your time, like useless chatting, taking long time on the computer and internet; also not having clear plan can disturb your time management.”

“As I told you the nature of my work, I don’t feel bad to handle people’s problems, but sometimes take a lot of time. Also unplanned meetings and I try to be friendly with people. Also another thing that relates to our organization, the university has got a lot of meetings, some of them have stated time, but it happen to have uncertain meetings as well, surprisingly in the morning you get a call that you should attend certain meeting and like that, and those meeting keep on dragging on and on, sometimes we have meetings from Monday to Friday, too many and unnecessarily long. I think that it is because of lack of planning.”

According to the interviewees’ opinions, there are several activities contributing time wasters in their personal life. Firstly, gossiping, spending time talking about others negatively, and spending time in unhealthy discussions are the main reasons for the time wasters in their personal life. Secondly, they mentioned that oversleeping and laziness, sleeping more than average can contribute to waste of a lot of time that can be used to do some productive activities. Thirdly, lack of personal plan or having poor plan contribute a huge waste of time, as the person will be stuck in the middle of the road and he may not know where to go. Not only that, not following the itinerary of the plans also is a waste of time as the person will be unable to achieve his/her personal goals. Finally, interruptions, it is one of the big time wasters. Interruption can come in different forms. It can come in the form of unscheduled meetings, telephone calls, interruption from colleague at works, from friends.
Conclusions

It is beyond any deliberation that we need to manage our time carefully and meticulously. This is because our success in both worlds depends on how we utilize our time. As a natural instinct of a human being, we should be spending our time for optimal gain. The respondents, through seven in number, have given useful insights on time management. All of them have unanimously agreed that time is an essence in our life, we must manage it properly. The details of their answers of the three questions are provided in the previous section. It is expected that the findings of the work can help manage our time better.

References


