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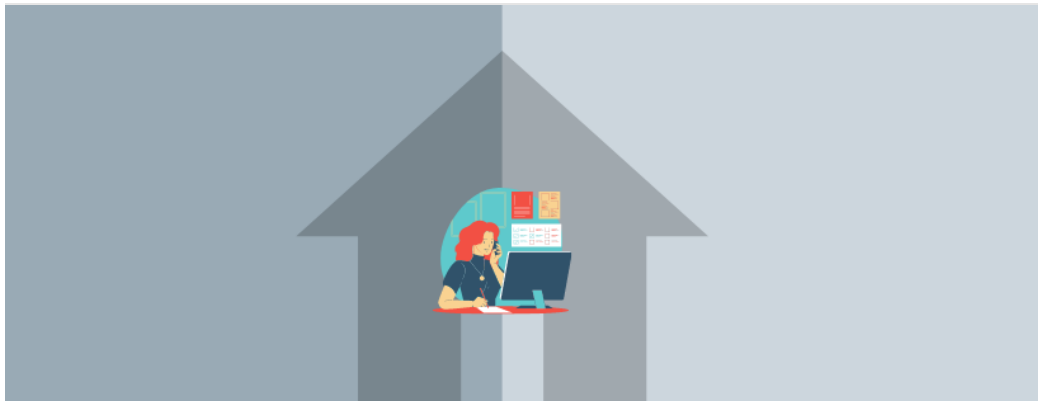
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## Upholding the Right Work Ethic when Working From Home During COVID-19 Pandemic

🕒 7 months ago lihana (<https://flagship.iium.edu.my/eps/author/lihana/>)



**BY: Dr. Aini Maznina A. Manaf**

In early January 2020, World Health Organisation (WHO) has officially declared the outbreak of COVID-19 as pandemic, when the infection has accelerated to multiple countries concomitantly. As of 16th June 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported 7, 941, 791 confirmed cases, 434, 796 confirmed death, and 216 countries or areas are affected by COVID-19.

The contagious nature of coronavirus pandemic has rapidly altered people's working style around the world. As the positive cases have been swiftly increasing, it is common to see organisations restraining their activities or closing down their offices. The pandemic has forced many countries to instruct their employees to work from home, a quick measure to curb the infection, and in turn, flatten the curve of the virus spread. In Malaysia, upon an announcement made by the Prime Minister that Movement Control Order (MCO) is imposed on the public beginning March 18, 2020, many organisations have been asked to temporarily cease their



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operation except for those which provide essential services. While the latter is allowed to operate with a very minimal workforce, employees in other organisations have been required to work from home since then.

Work from home is not something new to some employees as it used to be a privilege offered by a handful of companies in the country. Nonetheless, with the MCO in place, it has become a norm to the majority of Malaysian workforce. Obviously, work from home requires employees to alter their traditional work norms and practices with the aim to accomplish work as expected of them. Nevertheless, the question on whether employees have been successfully fulfilling their responsibilities when working from home arises. Do they really perform their tasks or carry out their duties at home? Do they fully utilise the working hours to carry out their job responsibilities? Do they care about goal accomplishments of their job? Surprisingly, many have misunderstood the concept of work from home but simply treat it as leave from work. In effect, they spend very little time for work accomplishment, or worse case, did not perform any task at all during the MCO time although the fact is they earn the same amount of salary at the end of the month.

Despite encountering various challenges in the newly ventured work-from-home (WFH) norm, many employees manage to smoothly deal with the transition from regular office work to WFH. Such experience have been attributed to three main work values, as enshrined in the Quran and Sunnah, *amanah*, (trustworthiness), *mas'uliyah* (responsibility), and *Ihsan* (excellence or perfection). The inculcation of these three important Islamic values among employees provide them with strong drivers towards excellent performance although working from home.

#### *Amanah* (Trustworthiness )

Islam teaches its followers to hold *amanah* (trustworthiness) when performing their job, and to be fully cognizant of their responsibilities wherever they are. In a hadith narrated by Imam Ahmad, the Prophet S.A.W said: "There is no faith for the one who has no trust" (Sahih Muslim). In this regard, it is essential for Muslim employees to clearly comprehend that working from home does not mean they are given special or annual leave. Hence, working from home is not a license for them to freely do any non-work related activities such as shopping during working hours. Employees are expected to be at their home 'workstation' during the official working hours. Nonetheless, the nature of work from home which allows for flexibility does not require employees to restrict themselves to work from 8.00 am to 5.00 pm, but to complete their tasks within the given timeframe. Allah says in the Quran, And say, "Work (righteousness): Soon will Allah observe your work, and His Messenger, and the Believers: Soon will ye be brought back to the knower of what is hidden and what is open: then will He show you the truth of all that ye did" (Al-Taubah :105).

During MCO, employees who work away from their office should have clear mindset of their roles as employees to their organisation, and hence feel entrusted to accomplish their tasks at home. They should be able to provide

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prompt response to superiors, subordinates and coworkers whenever needed. In fact, within this period, it is incumbent upon the employees to continue discharging the tasks, duties and responsibilities entrusted upon them. Allah says in the Quran, “Verily! Allah commands that you should render back the trusts to those, to whom they are due; and that when you judge between men, you judge with justice. Verily, how excellent is the teaching which He (Allah) gives you! Truly, Allah is Ever All-Hearer, All-Seer” (An-Nisa: 58).

#### *Mas’uliyah* (Responsible)

In Islam, individuals are autonomously responsible for their own actions and will be questioned by Allah in the Hereafter for all they have done, and did not do, throughout their life. The Qur’an says, “And you shall certainly be called to account for all your actions” (An-Nahl :93). In a similar vein, Ibn Kathir, a famous Quranic commentator (*Mufasssir*) asserted that all individual actions will be questioned by Allah in the Hereafter. In this sense, *mas’uliyah* is a trust that needs to be fulfilled with an absolute commitment by employees when working from home. The fulfillment of trust is reflected in their work performance. Employees who fail to perform their responsibilities when allowed working from home may be breaching the duty calls entrusted upon them. Slacking in work performance could be associated with the act of cheating so much so it is afraid that the earnings from such situation may fall under the category of *haram* income (forbidden).

Ibn ‘Umar said, I heard the Messenger of Allah S.A.W says: “All of you are shepherds and each of you is responsible (*mas’ul*) for his flock. An Imam is a shepherd and he is responsible for those in his care. A man is a shepherd in respect of his family and is responsible for those under his care. The woman is a shepherd in respect of her husband’s house and is responsible for those under her care. The servant is a shepherd in respect of his master’s property and is responsible for what is in his care. All of you are shepherds and each of you is responsible for his flock.” (Sahih Al-Bukhari). The word “*mas’ul*” in this hadith means responsible. Hence, in order to be productive while working remotely, it is important for an employee to fulfill several requirements.

Essentially, work from home requires the remote employees to possess, namely computer/laptop; good Internet connection; digital chatting and conferencing applications; dedicated workspace (preferred); Smart phone; Self-motivation and discipline; and a strict routine. Hence, employees who uphold *mas’uliyah* value will always try their best to fulfill these requirements in order to gain Allah’s pleasure.

#### *Ihsan* (Excellence or Perfection)

*Ihsan* is a concept which come together with excellence in belief, the highest level in faith of a Muslim. Importantly, the concept of *ihsan* is not only confined to *ibadah khusus* (sacred ritual) such as prayer or fasting only, nevertheless it covers all aspects of life. While working from home, *ihsan* value governs the employees’

performance. Islam emphasizes its followers to strive for excellence in whatever they are doing, hence *ihsan* drives them to work with passionate and diligent. 'Be the best at what we do, as it is the command of Allah SWT'. At this juncture, employees with *ihsan* value will definitely perform to the utmost of their abilities in carrying out their job responsibilities wherever they are though they are working at home.

Employees with *ihsan* value prioritise job quality when working at home. They create high commitment to job due to their realization that Allah is watching and evaluating their work. Despite the absence of close supervision by their superiors, the employees exercise self-directed performance. They strive to increase their knowledge and skills so as to work optimally, hence stay true to the concept of *Ihsan*. In fact, the teachings of Quran and Sunnah require men to carry out their job obligations and make additional efforts to attain excellence. Allah says in the Qur'an "And ye do well (to others) as Allah has done well to you" (Al-Qasas :77). In addition, the Prophet says, "that in fact you worship Allah as if you see Him. But if you can not, rest assured that Allah always look at you" (Sahih Al-Bukhari).

In conclusion, working from home during Covid-19 pandemic is not an obstacle to attain high job performance if the employees uphold the right work ethics.

Employees who uphold the values of *amanah*, *mas'uliyah* and *ihsan* when working at home will rightly perform their job. Hence, the three values should be instilled in employees so as to enable them to self-regulate their job performance when working from home.

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