

# Organizational development in the Arab world

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## Introduction

Solving societal and organizational problems has always been a goal that fascinated philosophers and ordinary people. They challenge philosophers to probe the unknown and speculate endlessly. They provide them with vision and foresight. Ordinary people, on the other hand, dream of a future where their needs are met. Consequently, they have a reason to be involved and to work with others. With each new generation, both philosophers and ordinary people face new problems and challenges, thus making human life a fascinating journey.

After the Second World War, more precisely in the 1950s and 1960s, two linked developments took place: an advancement in the material world and a rapid improvement in the behavioural sciences. The first made prosperity, especially in the western world, a reachable goal. The second allowed scholars to develop new methodologies and tools not only to explain the world but also to change it. It was during these two decades that change and growth managed to capture the minds of social scientists and practitioners. It is no wonder that organizational development (OD) became a familiar term in business and education circles.

Since OD as a management discipline was born in the USA and since the USA became the dominant global economic power, OD theories and techniques have found a receptive audience all over the world. In addition, the demand for other "American-made" theories became global in extent. For almost 50 years now, management experts and consultants have roamed the globe advising government personnel and business executives on ways to apply specific US management techniques and theories. OD, management by objectives (MBO) and participative management have become common appellations in the global business literature. OD in particular has assumed a prominent place in the business world and in scholarly efforts in the USA and abroad.

The phenomenal demand for US management theories has, of course, helped to satisfy the curiosity of scholars and practitioners abroad. Serious questions, however, are raised regarding the applicability of these theories to foreign cultures. Many theorists argue that management theory is influenced by specific societal values, beliefs, norms, and work and social experiences. Hofstede[1], for example, argues that the "export of Western – mostly American

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– management practices and theories to poor countries has contributed little or nothing to their development”. He attributes such failure to the fact that local management practice is part of the cultural infrastructure and therefore cannot be imported in packaged form. It is true that the debate over the transferability of western theories to non-western civilizations is far from over. Nevertheless, Hofstede’s statement is supported by empirical research[2,3]. Additional research projects in various countries lend support to his observation[4-7].

In the context of OD, Jaeger[8] concludes that there are “a large number of cultural configurations, particularly in the developing world, that conflict with OD in general and with the values underlying most interventions in particular”. He recommends a broader repertoire of interventions that can bring about necessary planned organizational changes without violating societal values and norms. Golembiewski[9] suggests that OD designs/approaches are not homogeneous; nor are organizations and even nations applying them. Therefore, he argues that OD can be successfully applied in foreign cultures. That is, OD is a flexible approach for organizational change. He suggests that OD practitioners should become sensitive to different cultural settings and thereby improve their judgements about the advisability of making OD interventions. Srinivas[10], on the other hand, concludes that OD has fallen short of the promise for positive change in respect of national development. He analyses 100 OD cases across 35 countries and indicates that the results cast a shadow of doubt on the applicability of OD.

This paper seeks to address issues related to the application of OD in the Arab world. In particular, the paper argues that OD, in theory and practice, should be moulded to fit the Islamic-Arab tradition as a frame of reference. This does not mean that OD should be Arabized. Rather, it calls for developing an OD perspective that is relevant and effective in dealing with particular and peculiar cultural aspirations and problems.

This paper is organized into three parts. First, it examines the Islamic influence *vis-à-vis* organization development. That is, it clarifies the impact of the Islamic work ethic (IWE) on Arab organizations and their development. Second, it identifies cultural elements and their OD implications. Finally, the paper identifies major assumptions about organizational change prevalent in Arab culture.

### **Islamic thoughts and OD implications**

Scholars have long recognized that OD is a value-based process. French *et al.*[11] note that OD theory and practice focus primarily on the human and social aspects of organizations. Likewise, Bennis[12] argues that OD “almost always concentrates on the values, attitudes, leadership, organizations’ climate – the ‘people variables’”.

Golembiewski[9] and Srinivas[13] argue that OD focuses on feelings and emotions, ideas and concepts, placing considerable importance on the individual’s involvement and participation. Earlier Burke[14] had indicated that the values on which OD is based are:

- a humanistic orientation;
- the belief that feelings are important and need to be treated as data; and
- the belief that conflict needs to be surfaced and dealt with directly rather than ignored.

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OD almost always focuses on “people variables” to advance organizational goals and induce positive change towards the achievement of these goals.

Thus, OD approaches and their content are necessarily linked to forces in societies that shape and influence value orientations and attitudes. One of the most influential forces in the Arab world that moulds and regulates individual and group behaviour and outlooks is Islam. Religion is an influential force in the Arab world because:

- Arab society is still traditional in the sense that commitments to honour, honesty, respect for parents and older persons, loyalty to one’s primary group, hospitality and generosity are held deeply by a majority of the population.
- Islam was founded in Arabia. Arabs were the carriers of the Islamic message. Thus, they believe that they are blessed by God.
- The family and other social institutions still command the respect of almost all individuals regardless of their social backgrounds. These institutions utilize Islam to sustain their endurance and influence.
- Arabic is the language of the *Quran* and people recite/listen to quranic verses more than once a day. The Arabic language, with its phonetic beauty, richness of synonym, imagery and majesty, arouses people’s passion and produces an intense and emotional impact[15,16].
- Islam is a comprehensive religion that regulates not only the ascetic but also the worldly tendencies. Almost all social, political, and military precepts are covered in the *Quran* along with the piety of the soul and moral aspects of individual behaviour.

Quranic principles and prophets’ prescriptions serve as a guide for Muslims in conducting their business and family affairs. During the golden age of the Arab/Islamic empire – the first six centuries of Islam – knowledge, trade, industry, agriculture and the construction of complex organizations flourished. It was during that time that various schools of thought were developed. Ali[17] identifies these schools as *Jabria*, *Tafwiz*, *Ikhtiar*, *Mutazilas*, *Ibn-Rushd* (*Averroes*) and *Ikhwan-us-Safa* (Brothers of Purity). These schools have had a profound influence on various political and economic structures in Islamic and Arab states (for more details, see [18]).

There is a need to clarify the implications of OD under each Islamic school (see Table I).

Ali[15] argues that after the Arabs gained their independence in the twentieth century, they established authoritarian regimes in the new nation-states (e.g. Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria). Thus, independent thinking,

OD element	Jabria	Tafwiz	Ikhtiar	Mutazilas	Ibn-Rushd	Ikhwan-us-Safa
Initiator of change	A leader who has answers to all questions	An individual but collective responsibility for implementation is seen as a virtue	An individual in consultation with the agreed leader	Any person regardless of position in the organization	Collective responsibility	Any person regardless of position in the organization
Self-reliance	Is not regarded as a virtue because it may open the door for chaos	Characterizes an individual who is capable of assuming responsibility	Is seen as a virtue as it facilitates continuity of community values	Is a necessary quality for growth – a virtue	Is a quality that everyone has regardless of gender	Is necessary to ensure liberty and growth
Potential for self-development	Individual development and growth are predestined	No limit for self-development	No limit for self-development	Man is capable of growth and development	External environment may constrain individuals from achieving their full potential	Man is able to make progress and control environment
Organizational change	Results only from crises or the wish of the leader	Is normal in the course of serving people's interests	Is a normal process that should be encouraged by the leader	Everything is liable to change or annihilation	Is a contingent process	Is a healthy trend towards growth and continuity
Training	Is not useful unless it is initiated by the leader and to cope with a crisis	Is essential to reduce uncertainty and to allow a person to develop various kinds of expertise	Is essential to achieve the group's goals in a harmonious and cooperative environment	Is a prerequisite for improving performance and achieving goals	Essential to achieve perfection in life	Is essential to do the right work in the right way
Conflict	Is characteristic of an unhealthy situation as it is a threat to cohesiveness and conformity	May be reduced by openness in dealing with issues	Is avoidable by voicing concerns through spirited debate, thus reinforcing consensus	Debating issues over which there is conflict is essential for societal welfare; difference in ideas should be appreciated	Can become a source for positive change	Can lead to the voicing of concerns to increase awareness, which is essential to prevent stagnation
Systematic planning	Is not seen as a virtue as it is in conflict with predestination	Is regarded as a virtue if it corrects wrongdoing	Is a virtue if used to maximize growth and to enhance responsibility	Is a positive exercise of reason and knowledge	Is essential to deal with unexpected events	Is essential to prevent chaos and authoritarian tendency

**Table I.**  
OD applications under various Islamic schools of thought

concepts of liberty and power of mind were condemned, and *Jabria* principles were sanctioned in every aspect of life. The *Jabria* is, therefore, the dominant school in the contemporary Arab world. The other schools, with the exception of *Ikhtiar* and *Mutazilas* have no influence on daily life. The *Mutazilas* appeal to highly intellectual individuals and to think-tank institutions (e.g. the Arab Thought Forum, the Centre for Arab Unity Studies, the National Board for Arab Culture), while *Ikhtiar* still commands respect among some religious figures and some enlightened merchant classes such as those found in Bahrain, Lebanon and Iraq.

### **Islamic work ethic and Arab organizations**

In the Arab world, any approach to organizational change is assumed to be influenced by existing work ethics and norms. For example, advances in psychology and a general improvement in living standards in the western nations, especially in the USA and Britain, have given rise to various organizational approaches – including OD, that are clearly influenced by the so-called Protestant work ethic (PWE). These approaches attempt to induce commitment and a drive to excel among members of business organizations. Consequently, they appeal to organizations in various economic sectors and make it possible for them to adopt various forms of organizational change.

Certainly, in the Arab world, any approach to organizational change is assumed to be influenced by existing work ethics and norms. The Islamic work ethic (IWE) is an orientation that has tremendous influence on people and organizations. It stands not for life denial but for life fulfilment and holds business motives in the highest regard[19,20]. The concept has its origin in the *Quran*, the sayings and practice of Prophet Mohammed. The *Quran* instructs the Muslim to pursue work persistently in whatever form, whenever it is available. “[God] has also made subservient to you all that is in the heavens and the earth”[21, 45:13]. Prophet Mohammed preached that hard work caused sins to be absolved and that “no one eats better food than that which he eats out of his work”. Similarly, Imam Ali[22], the fourth successor of Prophet Mohammed, (AD 598-661) stated, “Persist in your action with a noble end in mind... Failure to perfect your work while you are sure of the reward is injustice to yourself”, and that “poverty almost amounts to impiety”.

The IWE flourished during the golden age of Islam. The defeat of Arab Caliph and the ascendancy of the non-Arab Ottoman Empire (1412-1918), however, helped to institutionalize autocracy and further the demise of trade associations and freely-organized business activities in Arab lands[15,16]. Turner[23] argues that Islamic stagnation through the servile imitation of traditions was the inevitable consequence of Turkish military absolutism; and that in order to maximize their control over the Islamic *umma* [nation], the Turks had encouraged a conservative theology of mere obedience to authority. Knowledge and formal schooling were prohibited and *Jabria* principles were advanced. The absence of written communication and the isolation of Arabs in different parts of the Arab lands induced the people to treat many foreign

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rituals and legends as original. With no knowledge of general Islamic principles, each generation came to treat foreign habits and customs as their own. The supremacy of western colonial powers over the Arab lands after the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire further reinforced cultural discontinuity and alienation. For example, even though the western powers allowed schools to open in various Arab states in the first decades of this century, they established authoritarian regimes and attempted to replace Arabic with French or English. In fact, in Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, the French colonial authorities forced their language on the indigenous people. After independence, the new governments did not make serious attempts to revise the colonial legacy and the French language is still used for instruction at university level and often used in the workplace in these North African countries.

It is important to note that the dominant features of the IWE are contained in all Islamic schools of thought except in the *Jabria* school. In its spirit and meaning, therefore, the IWE stands in contrast to the teaching of the *Jabria* school, which is currently sanctioned by existing Arab governments. Since the 1960s, however, a cultural awakening has spread through the Arab lands and many groups and associations have been established to advocate cultural revivalism. The IWE thus appears to attract many segments of the population, not only for cultural reasons but because the IWE encourages the individual to better himself and to strive for economic prosperity. In a survey regarding the IWE in Arabia and in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Ali1[24] and Ali and Azim[25] found that Arab managers scored high on IWE: the overall mean of IWE in Arabia is 4.16 (on a 5-point scale) and in the UAE is 4.26. Both are relatively high.

#### *Implications*

The strong commitment to the IWE has several implications for OD practitioners and consultants. First, the emphasis on hard work, meeting deadlines and persistence in securing work means that the establishment of a time-table and the clarification of goals and responsibilities are essential for carrying out successful change interventions. In a culture where “saving face” is important, meeting OD goals takes on an added value.

Second, work is viewed not as an end in itself but as a means of fostering personal growth and social relationships. In this context, group interactions and team activities, if designed appropriately, could result in the optimal facilitation of intended changes.

Third, dedication to work and work creativity are seen as virtues. OD practitioners should focus their design process on the new method of change and on producing results that reinforce existing commitment and enthusiasm.

Fourth, justice and generosity in the workplace are necessary conditions for society’s welfare. This has three implications:

- (1) The OD practitioner/consultant must show that he/she is attentive to and is concerned about human needs.

- (2) Social skills and effective public relations are essential to the success of a change intervention. In Arab society, once a commitment is obtained there will be smooth implementations.
- (3) Goals for change should be directed towards serving the community or the society as a whole. This means that the OD practitioner/consultant should demonstrate the fruits of the results to both the organization and the society.

Finally, unlike Judaic-Christian ethic, the IWE places more emphasis on the intention than on the results. Prophet Mohammed stated, "Actions are recorded according to intention, and man will be rewarded or punished accordingly". That is: unlawful work that results in accumulation of wealth (e.g. gambling, prostitution, drug trafficking, fraud, extortion, hoarding, monopoly) is condemned and those who engage in it are looked at with contempt. Thus, the OD practitioner/consultant should articulate change goals and make sure that no personal interests are pursued at the expense of the group or community.

The IWE survey results[24] convey a very important message for the OD practitioner/consultant. It is that Arab managers look favourably on change and are receptive to changes that improve organizational effectiveness and enhance employees' welfare. As such, organizational renewal efforts would be viewed positively. In this context two questions should be raised:

- (1) *Will an OD intervention lead to the realization of its goals?* The answer, of course, depends on the situation and especially on whether or not western methods are employed. There needs to be an awareness of and a sensitivity to prevailing cultural values. In today's society a large segment of Arab people are attempting to return to Islamic principles, and many of them are suspicious of western methods. To achieve planned goals, the practitioner/consultant must not be aggressive in his/her approach and needs to play a low-profile role outside the organization while acting as a facilitator/team player in any organizational group setting. Furthermore, the practitioner/consultant should focus on the positive side of any organizational story when linking it to Arab/Islamic history. While many OD changes in the USA were undertaken without having specific defined purposes[26], in the Arab world, change must have a meaningful purpose for the organization and its members, otherwise, the practitioner/consultant will be discredited. The reason is this: in Arab society, people often socialize intensively after working hours. Members of organizations or a community develop close personal relationships and a strong knowledge of each other. But while training or OD sessions are taken seriously as a means for improving such knowledge, socializing during these sessions is of secondary importance. In the USA, social interaction is a goal in almost all OD sessions. In addition, the current quest for Islamic revival or "back to basics" tendency among educated Arabs may induce many people to search for alternatives and be aware of changes around them.

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This may be appropriate/beneficial because it forces people to reflect on their situation and broaden their horizons. Thus, it may be important for the practitioner/consultant to play a major role in sensitizing people to the difference between aspirations and reality, between principles and common – but unethical – practices.

- (2) *Do the results of the survey reflect real attitudes and values or a mere infatuation with idealism?* Again, there is almost always a tendency among individual Arabs, because of their language and upbringing, towards idealized forms. For example, Kuroda and Suzik[27] find that relative to American and Japanese students, Arabs view organizations as places where everything should be handled rationally without establishing primacy in relationships among group members. Thus, the authors concluded that favouritism, “give-and-take”, paternalism and the like have no place in the Arab workplace. The reality of Arab organizations, however, indicates that this is not the case. That is, favouritism and paternalism are common in Arab organizations. International researchers should be cautious in making such a hasty generalization.

In the work environment, however, there does appear to be a gradual but real change among educated groups, including managers. Unlike the less educated, members of the more educated groups are seriously debating societal ills and advocating changes. The rank and file, to a large extent, are still passive or at best spectators with regard to societal attitudes and orientations. The OD practitioner/consultant, therefore, should identify carefully, as the initial “agents” for change, individuals who are receptive to change and able to influence the rank and file. Once such individuals agree on change targets, other workers are expected to follow. Nevertheless, the OD practitioner/consultant should maintain focus on the change direction and targets while showing sensitivity to a possible conformity of the rank and file to suggestions made by such “agents”.

### **Assumptions about organizational change in Arab culture**

In Islam man is master of the universe and is endowed with free will:

It is He [God] who created everything on earth for you[21, 2:29].

We have made you inhabit the land and provided you with the means of sustenance[21, 7:10]

...certainly no one will bear the responsibility of the sins of another, nor can man achieve anything without hard labor[21, 53:39-40].

In addition, man and his society are in a state of dynamic change, but also in complete harmony. The responsibility for change is left to man. The *Quran*[21, 13:11] states: “God does not change the condition of a nation unless it changes what is in its heart”. Thus the issue of change is the sole responsibility of man, preferably a collectively assumed responsibility. In addition, Arab traditions highlight the importance of future commitments and orientations. Imam Ali



(598-661 AD) states: "Do not fill your heart with past sorrow; for this prevents you from making preparation for the future".

The question then is: "What is the nature of change for the Arab culture?" To answer this question, it is necessary to identify the basic assumptions on which change is predicated. Marshak[28] identifies the basic assumptions of the Lewinian-based model underlying OD. Thus, an attempt is made here to highlight the nature of change for Arab/Islamic culture by contrasting their key features with elements used by Marshak[28].

A word of caution is in order here. The following model is not based on current mind-sets in the Arab world, but has been drawn from ideas and thoughts contained in the *Quran*. Six aspects of Quaranic thought are reflected:

- (1) Change is neither cyclical nor linear; rather change flows in a *zig-zag pattern*. During the prophet Mohammed's time change was a continuous process that often entailed going back to the initial stage all over again. He started with the emphasis on qualities from the pre-Islamic Arab culture (*sensitizing stage*) and incorporated these in his teaching. In the second stage (*transitional*), he refined some instructions, gave the good and bad aspects of some qualities, forgave faults but always reminded the Arabs of their pre-Islamic situation. In the third phase, he sought to establish a *desired* state. He was precise in his instruction clarifying what is *halal* or right and what is *mahram* or prohibited. However, change was frozen at certain points when he faced formidable resistance. In addition, there were many segments of Arabian society that initially subscribed to Islamic teaching but had doubt about some of its aspects. Mohammed relied on reintervention through reinforcement and group teaching methods. When the sermons and reminders failed, he resorted to forceful methods as a last attempt. Just after his death, many Arabs renounced Islam, thus his first successor had to intervene to reinstate Islamic principles. The *progression-regression-progression* aspect of change in Arab/Islamic culture has its roots in Islamic understanding of motivation. In Islamic thought, unlike some western and especially US motivation models, human needs are not hierarchically arranged. For example, the spiritual need – an essential need in the Islamic system of motivation represents a cushion that helps to absorb frustration, crisis, failure, etc. Theoretically, it is supposed to provide a balance among the other existing needs. There are, however, three levels of the human psyche[29,30] that are specified in the *Quran*[21,12:53; 75:2; 89:27-30]. First, *ammara* (the prone-to-evil level): this is a primitive stage that man shares with animals. Second, *lawama* (self-reproaching level): at this level man is conscious of evil. There is a struggle between good and evil and man seeks to repent to achieve salvation. Third, *mutmainna* (the righteous level): the mind is perfectly in tune with good deeds and the individual realizes complete satisfaction and self-actualization. The dominance of a particular level of the psyche determines human needs

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and behaviour. The three levels of psyche, however, are in a state of dynamism. The three levels of psyche are descriptive of personal values and lifestyles. At the first level (*ammara*) a person is motivated by the urge to do things without regard to the consequences and harm that might be inflicted on others. Here a person is motivated by only selfish needs. That is, spiritual needs are not internalized. Thus a reorientation strategy is essential to focus attention on the benefits of change. At the second level (*lawama*), a person is clear about the advantages of change but is influenced by selfish desire. Thus, the benefits of good deeds must be reinforced by persistent reminders and examples. The third level (*mutmainna*) represents perfection and happiness in doing one's job and realizing one's goals. It is the ideal level, where change that maximizes societal welfare and organizational goals is undertaken.

- (2) *Change is processional*. One moves from one state to another. In the process, however, a balance must be maintained; otherwise disharmony prevails. Mental states, however, are not mutually exclusive; rather there is a mix of states, with a tendency to lean towards one or another until a state of equilibrium is reached. The *Quran*[21, 76:2-3] states: "We created man from the union of sperm and egg to test him. We gave him hearing and vision. We showed him the right path whether he should be grateful or ungrateful". Al-Sadr[31] argues: "A Muslim's preoccupation with spirituality may sometimes create in him a negative attitude in regard to the worldly affairs and may lead him to renunciation, contentment or lethargy".
- (3) Change is *goal-oriented* and is a *continuous* or *open-ended process*. Al-Sadr[31] indicates that in the West, wealth and property have played a big role in "stirring up [man's] potential to organize developmental activity in a particular manner". There is an ever-increasing urge to exploit and accumulate wealth. In Islam, however, a balance must be achieved between the material and spiritual quests. In life a man has the capacity to pursue various enjoyments. It is in the hereafter, however, that unlimited enjoyments will be bestowed on him. The *Quran* states: "And verily the end is better for thee than the beginning".
- (4) Change is aimed at *maintaining equilibrium*. In the Islamic faith man is a two-dimensional creature. Thus man needs religion to protect him from swinging either to ascentricism or to worldliness[32]. Prophet Mohammed says: "The believers in their mutual love, sympathy and cooperation, are like the [interacting] parts of the human body: when one part complains, the other parts call each other to hasten to its rescue, each sharing its pain and sleeplessness".
- (5) Change is *planned and managed by people*. The *Quran* not only gave the responsibility for change to human beings but also appointed man as His deputy on earth[21, 2:31]: "It is He who created everything on earth for

[man]”. Thus man has to master the universe and to have a purpose in life. “Everyone pursues his goal. Compete with each other in performing good deeds”[21, 2:29; 2:148].

- (6) Change is *normal*. In the Islamic religion change is a natural process. There are various forces that induce change and once conditions are ripe for change it is time for man to act. Man, however, is not a passive actor; rather man is proactive in directing change in a way that serves his own and the community’s interests. Salvation comes from within through knowledge and good deeds. Regression in life is a possibility. Nevertheless, it is an exception not the norm.

The assumptions outlined above appear to have similarities to both Lewin’s (e.g. change is managed by people) and Confucius’s (change is a continuous process, through which one must maintain equilibrium) models of change[28] (see Table II). In addition, the Arabic/Islamic assumptions about change have similarities to those of western OD models. That is, there is a common emphasis on making the organization more competitive and more human.

They differ, however, in many aspects (change being neither cyclical nor linear, but rather a normal process in Islamic culture). This suggests that in the Arab/Islamic world different change approaches may be needed. It is necessary to note that some western OD practitioners have reported successful change

Western (Lewinian) OD/change is <sup>a</sup> :	East Asian (Confucian) change is <sup>a</sup> :	Arab/Islamic change is:
Linear	Cyclical	Movement in a zig-zag pattern
Progressive	Processional	Processional
Destination-oriented	Journey-oriented	Goal-oriented and continuous
Based on creating disequilibrium	Based on restoring/maintaining equilibrium	Aimed at maintaining equilibrium
Planned and managed by people who are external to and independent of the objects or processes on why they act to achieve the desired goals	Observed and followed by people who are at one with everything and must act correctly to maintain harmony in the universe	Planned and managed by people who must act according to specific goals
Unusual, because everything is normally in a quasi-stationary or static state	Usual because everything is normally in a continually changing dynamic state	Normal because everything is subject to change and man is proactive in directing change in ways that serve his and the community’s interests

Source: <sup>a</sup> [28]

**Table II.**  
Assumptions about  
change in different  
cultures

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implementation in selected Arab states[33-36]. These practitioners were able to observe non-western phenomena and react to them in a responsive way. Nevertheless, caution is in order for two reasons:

- (1) Arab individuals are infatuated with ideal forms, even when they know these forms are contradicted by reality. For the Arabs, the ideal is carried out in conduct and is identical with practice rather than merely constituting the criterion by which practice is to be judged[37-39]. Thus, there may be a tendency to inflate any feedback (especially survey feedback). For example, Ali[22] compared the results of the same survey on the work ethic conducted in the USA and Scotland to those in the Arab world and noticed that Arab managers scored higher than did American and Scottish managers on the work ethic. However, this does not mean that Arab managers are more productive than western managers. Endorsement of the work ethic by Arab managers may not mirror that of Arab society as a whole. In addition, Islam has an innately positive view of hard work, but the endorsement of the work ethic reflects a commitment to rather than a practice of principles.
- (2) The assumptions outlined in the preceding paragraphs are based on Islamic principles and early Islamic practices. The majority of the population, however, are unaware of the genuine aspects of their culture due to cultural discontinuity[40-43]. For example, issues of equity and justice, consultation and fairness, hard work and discipline, honesty and faithfulness, cleanliness and prohibition of bribes are detailed in the scriptures. A large segment of the Islamic people, including Arabs, are not familiar with these precepts and often tend to violate them in practice.

So many parts of Islamic society have come to treat foreign practices and rituals as their own that illusion is confused with reality[4-7,44,45]. Despite this fact, there are some cultural qualities that Arabs have been able to preserve generation after generation. These societal qualities have been identified in the literature[4-7,15,16,37-45]. These qualities range from infatuation with ideal forms and a willingness to change to strong social solidarity. Table III specifies some of these qualities and their implications for organizational change.

Familiarity with cultural qualities accentuates cultural peculiarities and so can often prevent social blunders and improve OD practitioners' judgements about the feasibility of some OD approaches. But, most importantly, identifying societal qualities facilitates productive interaction and involvement between OD practitioners and Arab participants.

Huse[46] grouped OD interventions into ten basic classifications:

- (1) individual consultation activities;
- (2) unstructured group training activities;
- (3) structured group training;

Qualities	Implications for OD strategies
Displays flexibility in incorporating new elements into traditional structures	Highlight the advantages of new methods in facilitating growth and achieving goals
Adapts to an ever-changing environment	Facilitate adaptation of new techniques
Infatuation with idealized forms	Relate intended changes to the experience of idealized Arab leaders to emphasize that these leaders were gifted and were agents of change
Love of normative and philosophical arguments	Discuss the philosophical dimensions of the new approaches/techniques
Politeness and enthusiasm	Encourage participants to be involved in the change process and identify possible avenues for productive conduct
Optimistic outlook	Identify the benefits of changes in the long term and encourage participation in designing programmes after a short period of orientation
Belief in self-development	Encourage participation in the change process after a feeling of trust is established
Consultative tendency	Consult with subordinates and participants on matters that affect them
Tendency to emulate and identify with the hero image	Consultant/practitioner should display the image of protector who has courage in making decisions and is firm and responsible
Deep sense of family and primary group loyalty	Foster social relationships among groups, meet group needs and emphasize that commitment to organizational goals benefits everyone
Self-awareness (social and individual)	Highlight the importance of involvement in organizational analysis by identifying weaknesses and recognizing outstanding performance; place emphasis on the familial aspects of the group and that involvement in the process of change fosters professional growth and development
Respect for personal dignity	Emphasize personal relationships and the value of identifying with others in need of help and assistance
Avoids displays of public conflict	Encourage intensive discussion of the problems to be solved and highlight the importance of an open agreement/disagreement and that the goal is to recognize group cohesiveness

**Table III.**  
Societal qualities and their implications for organizational development strategies

(Continued)

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Qualities	Implications for OD strategies
Believes that problem solving is best achieved through immediate and integrated action	Commit urgent attention to the problems at hand and provide a comprehensive solution on a timely basis
Respectful of mediating approaches to conflict resolution	Play the role of a mediator who is interested in avoiding/reducing conflict and in ensuring smooth operations
Intellectual inquisitiveness	Highlight how curiosity helps advance personal and professional growth and emphasize that seeking knowledge is a virtue that was accentuated in the <i>Quran</i> and in Prophet Mohammed's practice
Contempt for rigid rules and strict orders	Highlight the need to reduce rules and organizational constraints; encourage openness and input from participants
Esteem for equality and social justice	Keep open channels of communication; show kindness and identify with participants' needs
Focus on intentions	Clarify in advance the expected benefits of new approaches to the organization and the community
Results-oriented focus	Clarify goals and expected benefits for participants and organizations

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**Table III.**

- (4) process consultation;
- (5) survey-guided development efforts;
- (6) job redesign;
- (7) personnel system methods;
- (8) management information and financial control systems;
- (9) organizational design; and
- (10) integrated approaches.

Many of these methods have been used in the Arab world. In fact, personnel system methods, management information and financial control systems, and survey-guided development efforts have been used intensively by public and private organizations. Unstructured group training approaches, along with process and individual consultations, however, may not be as adequate in achieving serious planned changes. One method that appears to be useful is structured group training. Under this approach, various types of intervention are possible. The most common are: lectures, group exercises, group problem solving, story telling and case studies. Table IV provides a comparison of these intervention methods across specific criteria. It is important to note that

**Table IV.**  
Comparison of various  
intervention methods  
across specific criteria

Criterion	Lecture	Group exercise	Group problem solving	Cases	Story telling
Acceptability	Medium to high	Fairly high	Fairly high	High	Very high
Feasibility	Very high	High	High	Very high	Easy
Motivational potential	It depends on the content and personality of the OD practitioner/consultant. Arabs are infatuated with the figure of a prophetic leader who is visionary and confident	If status differences are avoided and the physical setting arranged carefully, it could stimulate and motivate participants to achieve a higher goal	Selecting a problem that relates to organization and its competitors could produce a desired effect	Cases that are new and challenging could produce a desired impact	Story telling can be highly motivating especially if focus is on real foreign and domestic issues, and if the stories provided are meaningful
Consistency with cultural norms	Very high	Medium to high	Medium to high	High to very high	Highly consistent
Achieving the desired change	Possibly high if the presenter manages to keep participants emotionally involved and sensitizes them to common problems	Possibly only medium – role playing tends to have immediate impact on an individual's orientations, unless it is reinforced through a variety of situations over a longer period	Possibly medium to high – to meet the desired goal, practical and challenging problems must be provided	Possibly high – Arab participants prefer to identify with practical issues	Possibly very high provided that stories are connected to organizational life and explained in the context of the society's culture and values

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methods of intervention are useful, especially if trainers avoid the trap of “playing the expert” and strive to motivate participants and clients to tackle organizational issues in an environment of trust. Since Arabs often rely on common sense, trainers should focus their attention on building trust by dealing with issues patiently, competently, and confidentially. This implies that trainers should avoid condemnation and confrontation, and utilize dialogue instead in directing intervention methods. Furthermore, trainers should use traditional methods in facilitating change in terms of the above types of intervention.

Three traditional methods stand out. The first is *mudarasa* or spirited debate. This is a means to stimulate discussion, generate better ideas and develop new perspectives. The role of the leader is to identify the specific issue for discussion, direct the meeting and provide various options for tackling the problem. The second is *muthakrha* or specific goal-oriented assignments that will be the subject of intensive *mudarasa*. The third is *munatharah* or theory building: an individual introduces his/her theory and others comment on its strengths and deficiencies. These traditional methods have been used in Arab culture and have helped, to some extent, in maintaining cultural identity through transition. Their utility to OD should not be underestimated. They may call attention, however, to the need for a different mind-set on the part of the facilitator.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has sought to identify cultural attributes prevalent in the Arab world and their OD implications. In addition, the paper has reviewed major Islamic schools of thought and the application of OD under each school. Several aspects of the Islamic work ethic have been highlighted and the possibility of organizational change addressed.

The paper concludes that Islamic values and culture, if correctly identified and understood, would facilitate organizational change and development. The issue of OD in Arab culture has seldom been addressed adequately in the literature. In this paper several questions have been raised and attempts made to specify cultural assumptions and to identify societal qualities required for OD change. Future research should focus on the development of OD models that are relevant to Arab and Islamic cultures. In particular, the paper has suggested issues of which OD consultants should be aware. Furthermore, it has raised the question: should OD consultants, in their work processes, advocate ideal principles in spite of the current prevalence of unethical practices? This question needs to be answered by future research. There is a need to challenge the traditional role of OD consultants and to persuade them to broaden their societal perspective, instead of confining their attention within the boundaries of organizations and the limits set by their clients. This is especially pertinent, as more and more OD consultants engage in international or cross-cultural assignments.



Finally, the paper advocates that the role of the prophetic "Great Man" in Arab culture needs to be examined in the context of the OD process and organizational change.

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