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Knowledge Workers and 'Ilm' – A Retrospective on Islamic Philosophy and Epistemology for Learning Organizations

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Abstract

The current paper is intended to introduce knowledge workers and managers to a unique paradigm on virtue epistemology, that is, reflective knowledge, based on the doctrines of Islamic philosophy as '*Ilm*.' The study proposed a holistic framework to acquire reflective knowledge, the epistemic attributes of knowledge workers, and the significance of reflective knowledge in the dynamic knowledge economy. Theoretical framework proposed in the current paper is based on the theories proposed by Muslim philosophers. Books on the epistemological aspect of Islamic philosophy and web-based articles on *Ilm* as reflective knowledge were taken as references. Islamic philosophy helps to put forth a holistic paradigm on the virtues of knowledge workers and the attributes that help learning organizations acquire reflective knowledge. The propositions made in this paper may be tested for empirical evidence in future research. Moreover, the framework to acquire reflective knowledge and instilling epistemic virtues in knowledge workers may be a powerful tool for knowledge managers. Islamic philosophy is based on theological grounds; however, this paper intends to introduce the doctrines based on logic and rationale, proposed by noted scholars. The current study is also unique in constructing a holistic framework that may assist organizations to acquire reflective knowledge and train knowledge workers to acquire prescribed epistemic attributes.

Keywords: epistemology, Islamic philosophy, knowledge workers, knowledge managers, knowledge-based firms, reflective knowledge, virtue epistemology

Introduction

Acquisition (Casillas et al., [2015](#)), transformation (Nonaka et al., [2014](#)), dissemination (Pinch et al., [2003](#)), and exploitation (Mom et al., [2007](#)) of

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knowledge is yet a challenge for knowledge-based firms (Galliers & Leidner, [2014](#)). They strive to find new ways to unearth the untapped knowledge repositories in order to gain sustainable competitive advantages (Urbancova, [2013](#)). Companies like Google, Apple, and Toyota are investing in training and workshops for capacity building of knowledge workers (hereafter KW) through practices, such as meditation and contemplation to increase mindfulness at work (Glomb et al., [2011](#); Dane & Brummel, [2014](#); Petchsawang & McLean, [2017](#)). Such novel initiatives are taken in order to open the gateway to a higher level of knowledge on the path to become not only a learning; however, a knowledge-creating organization (Nonaka, [2008](#)). This higher level of knowledge is attained based on the intrinsic worth of KWs as proposed by the theory of reflective knowledge (Sosa, [2009](#)).

Reflective knowledge is regarded as the superior knowledge attained after a KW fulfills the specific virtue-based criteria. The narrative on reflective knowledge is ingrained in virtue epistemology, which focuses on the vices of agents and communities that initiates epistemic evolution (Baehr, [2017](#)). The contemporary theory of virtue epistemology is entailed by two central tendencies, that is, normative discipline and focus on intellectual agents/communities as the primary source of epistemic evaluation based on cognitive traits (Greco & Turri, [2011](#)). KWs are pivotal for the success of learning organizations (Senge, [2006](#)). They act as capacity builders, change agents, information carriers, and knowledge dissemination delegators. The current paper interprets the idiosyncratic calibration of the paradigm of *Ilm*, that is, reflective knowledge as proposed by Islamic philosophy from the perspective of a learning organization. The comprehension of this phenomenon from a distinctive paradigm may assist knowledge managers in learning organizations to instigate core competencies based on expertise to acquire knowledge, the capacity to transform, and the ability to exploit it.

Islamic philosophy on epistemology gave worthwhile recognition to the intrinsic worth of KWs and distinctive dimensions of knowledge in the construct known as '*Ilm*' in the Arabic lexicon (Fakhry, [2004](#); Leaman, [2013](#); Nasr, [2006](#)). *Ilm* is a multifaceted variable that allows knowledge seekers to attain a multidimensional perspective of the abstract notion, thus making it more apprehensible. Similar to the theory of virtue epistemology, *Ilm* advocates certain virtues and cognitive skills of the KW that enable him

to acquire reflective knowledge. The connotation of *Ilm* encapsulates theory, action, and education in an over-arching framework, thus depicting virtue epistemology and reflective knowledge at the same time. The current paper proposed the idiosyncratic pursuit of superior knowledge, that is, *Ilm*, as proposed by Islamic philosophy, in the perspective of KWs. Insight into this phenomenon from a distinctive paradigm may assist knowledge workers and managers, in learning organizations, to inculcate core competencies based on expertise to acquire superior knowledge, the capacity to transform, and the ability to exploit and disseminate it. The ubiquity and accessibility of knowledge in industry 4.0 would soon bring knowledge levels of learning organizations to equilibrium. It is therefore reckoned that soon only the companies that would realize the most authentic version of knowledge would survive.

This paper aims to provide knowledge workers and managers with an alternative theory on knowledge management along with a unique insight from Islamic epistemology. *Ilm* differs from traditional theories of knowledge in that it offers what may be said to as a holistic viewpoint. It is proposed that learning organizations must strive to acquire *Ilm*, that is, reflective knowledge, through knowledge workers, rather than only concentrating on the knowledge acquisition, transformation, dissemination, and exploitation of knowledge. Knowledge-based organizations must demonstrate reflective knowledge at all organizational levels to the extent that it affects outside factors during their initial interactions with the business. The theoretical framework outlined in this paper is based on the theories advanced by renowned Muslim philosophers. References include books on the epistemological side of Islamic philosophy and research articles on *Ilm* and knowledge in Islam.

Research Problem

It is deemed that the organizations would soon compete on intellectual capital, following the current advancement in technological arenas. The most significant form of intellectual capital is the KWs. However, the existing knowledge management theories only provide one aspect of KWs' intellectual capacity. The current paper, therefore, advocates Islamic philosophy on epistemology in order to provide knowledge workers and managers with a unique paradigm on their quest to attain reflective knowledge. The framework is based on established theories by accredited Muslim philosophers who studied knowledge in the light of Islamic

doctrines. In order to substantiate the proposed framework, abstract notion of *Ilm* would be grounded in the prominent Western theories on epistemology. It is believed that a unique paradigm on epistemology, proposed by the present study, would be beneficial for knowledge workers, managers, academicians, and scholars trying to stay at pace with the dynamic knowledge-based economy. It would prove to be a valuable addition to the existing literature. The problem statement for the current study was: *How can knowledge managers in learning organizations identify epistemic attributes of knowledge workers and instill values based on Islamic philosophy to enhance their intellectual capacity?*

The first section of the current paper explains the methodology used to build the theoretical framework. The following section would precisely describe the significance of *Ilm* for KWs based on contemporary and conventional theories of epistemology. Afterwards, the definitions proposed by several Muslim philosophers would be outlined as a foundation for the theoretical framework on *Ilm* (Khaldūn, [1969](#); Swinburne, [1986](#); Netton, [1999](#); Al-Ghazzali, [2007](#); Kalin, [2010](#); Iqbal, [2013](#)). Later on, these definitions would be analyzed to operationalize the concept of *Ilm* so that KWs and managers may have practical tools. These tools would help to initiate the acquisition of reflective knowledge among knowledge workers; however, scholars may have empirical evidence to analyze the implications of reflective knowledge in a learning organization. Subsequently, a discussion of the findings would be put forward along with the implications leading to the conclusion.

Methodology

Rosenthal ([1970](#)) represented a masterpiece by summarizing numerous definitions of knowledge proposed by Muslim philosophers in a single book. Since it was challenging to access the original manuscripts, therefore, Rosenthal ([1970](#)) was taken as an authority to comprehend the various definitions of *Ilm*. Moreover, books on the history of Islamic philosophy and knowledge conceptualization in Islam were taken as references for the current article. Online journal repositories, web-based articles, and reports were tapped in by searching for keywords, such as virtue epistemology, reflective knowledge, knowledge in Islam, and Islamic philosophy on knowledge. The information collected was then analyzed and rationalized from the perspective of established theories on epistemology. Thus, an overarching framework was developed that could be used in theoretical and

practical means to achieve the ends, that is, acquisition, transformation, dissemination, and exploitation of knowledge.

Background

Knowledge was distinguished as a separate field of study during the times of Socrates (470 BCE) and Plato (428 BCE). Plato presented the first known definition of knowledge as an ontological category in his book *Theaetetus*. He believed that knowledge may be obtained by looking inside oneself because that is where true knowledge resides. This notion was common among philosophers till skeptics, empiricists, and rationalists took over and separated epistemology from ontology. Philosophers for instance, Descartes (1984), Hume (1975), Russell (1914), Popper (1965), and Kant (1998) laid the foundations of modern philosophy, which emphasized the use of scientific methods for knowledge acquisition. Therefore, knowledge was integrated with the prevailing practices and processes to achieve higher efficiency and efficacy rather than satisfy metaphysical curiosities.

Discrete epistemological explorations led to multiple disciplines, categories, definitions, and forms of knowledge (Hayek, 1945; Gettier, 1963). However, knowledge gained its most pragmatic recognition in the contemporary world when it was integrated with economics (Machlup, 1962; Drucker, 1988; Burton-Jones, 2001). This era signified knowledge as the ultimate form to gain competitive advantage or economic stability in a dynamic market (Langlois, 1985; Teece et al., 1997). Today, knowledge-based firms are eager to obtain the indispensable knowledge which may assist to acquire an edge over their competitors (Grant, 1996). New and revised theories are being proposed to assist companies in order to acquire, create, transform, disseminate, and exploit knowledge (Ipe, 2003; Blome et al., 2014; Nonaka et al., 2014; Casillas et al., 2015).

Al-Kindi, Ibn-Rushd, Ibn-Sina, Ghazali, Mulla Sadra, Ibn Khaldun, Al Farabi, and Iqbal are a few Muslim philosophers who went to great lengths in order to define knowledge (Rosenthal, 2007). However, Islamic philosophy theories, particularly epistemology remained dormant. The difference between theories by Muslim philosophers and post-modern Westerners is that the Muslim philosophers tend to define knowledge ontologically for instance, Platonic and pre-Socratic philosophy concerning their unique theological grounds. However, contemporary philosophy

disregards theology while emphasizing the philosophies based on logic and empirical grounds (Russell, [1914](#)).

In Islamic philosophy, epistemology and ontology are not isolated. Muslim philosophers gave an in-depth realization of the boundless concept of knowledge in the light of Islamic dogmas (Rosenthal, [1970](#)). Moreover, as per Islamic teachings, acquisition of *Ilm* has been made compulsory for every individual (Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 74). It may be why knowledge was pursued as an eminent field of study from the early Islamic period.

The rhetoric on KWs gained momentum in the early '90s through seminal works of Drucker ([2006](#)), Nahapiet and Ghoshal ([1998](#)), and Stewart and Ruckdeschel ([1998](#)), specifically on intellectual capital, social capital, and their influence on firm performance. Significant theories suggested the importance of the capacity building of KWs so that they may act as procurement agents of knowledge (Drucker, [1988](#)). It was further hypothesized that such practices would assist knowledge-based firms to achieve sustainable competitive advantage through enhanced ROI (Bontis & Fitz-Enz, [2002](#)), innovativeness (Subramaniam & Youndt, [2005](#)), economic value realization (Edvinsson & Malone, [1997](#)), and value creation (Kianto et al., [2014](#)). Additionally, arguments were presented about the importance of tacit knowledge over explicit knowledge leading to the theories on learning and transferring tacit knowledge (Reber, [1989](#)). Studies were also presented concerning the diffusion of knowledge within the firm boundaries (Osterloh & Frey, [2000](#)). Finally, researchers suggested KWs to be the essential elements of the knowledge management model (Hedlund, [1994](#)).

Islamic philosophy has given noteworthy recognition to KWs, acting as knowledge repositories. A sound mind and character were identified as prerequisites on the quest to *Ilm*. Furthermore, epistemic virtues of KWs were identified, such as reason, memory, vision, open-mindedness, attentiveness, intellectual tenancy, and inquisitiveness. The emphasis on the virtue-based intrinsic worth of the knowledge seeker makes Islamic philosophy on epistemology similar to virtue epistemology. Additionally, the emphasis on a superior form of all-embracing theory on knowledge makes it similar to reflective knowledge.

A review of the existing literature on epistemology suggested the significance of reflective knowledge and virtue epistemology for

developing sustainable competitive advantages of a learning organization in terms of innovativeness and value creation. KWs act as the building block of the knowledge management framework. KWs working individually as front-line workers, mid-level managers, and higher management or in cross-functional teams and departments act as knowledge repositories. It is thus essential to consider the pivotal role KWs play to make a knowledge-based firm successful. The paradigm of *Ilm* puts great emphasis on the capacity building of KWs. The theory suggests that the enhancement of virtue-based cognitive abilities may further add to the efficiency of a KW which in turn becomes the core competency of a learning organization.

There has been a lot of research in the fields of knowledge management and spirituality recently. In order to increase the firm's intellectual capacity, researchers are attempting to identify the sustainable business methods (Rocha, [2021](#)). Increasing organizational spirituality is one method to put this humanized strategy into practice. Whereas, knowledge management is a powerful tool to ensure that companywide core values are upheld. It is essential to incorporate spirituality into organizational philosophy and practice. However, it also places a great deal of strain on professionals (Rahman et al., [2015](#)). Organizational spirituality is defined as an organizational culture characterized by higher-order values that prioritize the well-being and welfare of others Khari & Sinha, 2018. Studies indicate that "workplace spirituality is being misunderstood as a panacea and is colonized by the system as a protective mechanism". Moreover, "the spiritual turn in capitalist-inspired organizations is simply a discursive variation to obscure the underlying meaninglessness of the soul-less work" (Ul-Haq, [2020](#)). It was also proposed that the three fields of knowledge influence the decision-making process namely rational, emotional, and spiritual (Bratianu et al., [2020](#)).

Building the argument on the evidence provided above, the current paper proposes a theoretical framework based on Islamic philosophy for KWs and managers working in learning organizations. The proposed framework assisted to identify the several epistemic traits that are essential for the training and development of knowledge workers in order to engage them in a multidimensional arena of knowledge management in the form of 'Ilm'.

Theoretical Framework of *Ilm*

The significance of reflective knowledge was acknowledged by Western philosophers in the domains of virtue epistemology which holds an affirmative place in the theories on knowledge (Sosa, [2009](#); Greco & Turri, [2011](#); Baehr, [2015](#); Turri et al., [2017](#)). Virtue epistemology, as discussed earlier, is a contemporary approach that emphasizes the significance of a knower's intellectual virtues and character traits rather than what is known. Reflective knowledge is higher than basic/animal knowledge, which comes from an agent possessing particular epistemic virtues (Baehr, [2017](#)).

In order to understand the utilitarian concept of *Ilm*, one has to be accustomed to specific Arabic terms that lay the foundation for Islamic philosophy on knowledge. Diverse vocabulary, with multiple connotations in Arabic makes theories proposed by Muslim philosophers richer, denser, and sublime. One definition may embrace numerous dimensions and elements. This paper aimed to highlight the significance of *Ilm* as reflective knowledge and operationalizes this concept in various dimensions in the light of prominent theories. Table 1 provides a synopsis of various forms of *Ilm* and definitions, along with the attributed authors.

Table 1

Definitions of 'Ilm'. Adapted from Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam by Rosenthal (1970)

Form of <i>Ilm</i>	Definition	Attributed Philosophers
As a process	The process of knowing and identical with the knower and the known, or it is an attribute enabling the knower to know.	Ghazali (Saparovich, 2021)
As cognition	It is the cognition of things and their realities without mistake or error	Ibn Farighun (Alam, 2009)
As mental perception	The perception of a thing as it is or of a thing in its reality	Isfahani (Cahyana & Muhajir, 2021)
As a process of clarification, assertion, and decision	Is that which clarifies the truth and gives information, without leaving the need for anything to be investigated.	Ibn Sabin (Akasoy, 2007)

Form of <i>Ilm</i>	Definition	Attributed Philosophers
As a form (surah)	<i>Ilm</i> means that the mind obtains through it a form that conforms to the external object known	Fakhr-ad-dîn ar-Râzi (Rosenthal, 2007)
As a belief	Knowledge is a definitive and firm belief that conforms to actuality	At-Tahanawi, al-Ghazzali
As a reflection	It is remembrance, imagination, an image, a vision, and an opinion.	Ibn Arabi, Al Ghazzali, al- Iji, As-Sabuni (Rosenthal, 2007)
As motion	Is a motion of the heart.	An- Nazzam (Rudavsky, 2013)
As a relative term	A truth-related attribute that is characterized by interdependence	Al Farabi (Fakhry, 1965)
As action	Knowledge is the attribute that enables him who possesses this attribute to act in an orderly fashion.	Abd-al Qahir (Fayazi et al., 2022)
As introspection	Knowledge is intuition as well as acquisition	Ibn-Sabin (Akasoy, 2007)

Facets of *Ilm* and Knowledge Workers in Learning Organizations

This section would help to build propositions for KWs in a learning organization based on the holistic framework of *Ilm* by Muslim philosophers mentioned earlier. The definitions of *Ilm* would be operationalized further into various dimensions in the context of established theories on epistemology, knowledge-based firms, and learning organizations. It would be done to substantiate the proposed paradigm on epistemology in the light of authentic frameworks, thus enhancing the practical implication of the study.

Ilm as a Process

Ilm is the process of knowing and being identical with the knower and the known, or it is an attribute enabling the knower to know. The consideration of *Ilm* as a process brings theories of knowledge management into perspective. These theories suggest that knowledge management is a process through which knowledge is created, captured, shared, and

leveraged (Alavi & Leidner, [2001](#); Rumizen, [2002](#)). Thus, transforming the abstract concept of knowledge into a pragmatic process that may be used to acquire, transform, and exploit knowledge. However, the steps in this process are still debatable, just like the true meaning of knowledge.

During the process of *Ilm*, the insinuation of cognitive skills of knowledge workers in an organization is reflected at the macro and micro level (Levine et al., [2013](#)). It brings the ability-based view of firms in perspective which argues that cognition is the critical factor to achieve core competencies and sustainable competitive advantages for a firm (Hodgkinson & Healey, [2008](#); Nobre & Walker, [2011](#)), making knowledge workers as building blocks in learning or thinking organization (Yigitcanlar et al., [2007](#)). These organizations with essential capacity-building skills of RK at the micro and macro level are the ultimate survivors in today's dynamic market. In perspective of *Ilm* as a process, organizations cogitate a culture of knowledge acquisition, transformation, exploitation, and dissemination to the extent that it becomes a part of the processes and systems at large (Nonaka et al., [2000](#)). Islamic philosophy on knowledge manifests the stature of knowledge workers in learning organizations as gatekeepers to the indispensable asset of an organization. As per this stance, every person in the organization is a KW who may be fostered to reflect the retained knowledge while on the path of *Ilm*.

Another facet of the definition asserts that knowledge is an attribute which enables a knower to know, aka *Aql*. The virtue of *Aql* in a KW may be regarded as intelligence, intellect, IQ, and common sense. As maintained by Islamic *Philosophy*, *Aql* is considered as the prerequisite to pursue *Ilm*. In order to succeed in this pursuit, learning organizations must elicit the process from the point of hiring and recruiting KWs (Horwitz et al., [2003](#)).

Aql may be regarded as an intrinsic virtue of KWs, pursuing *Ilm* as a process. Ibn Sina distinguished between several stages of *Aql* that may be achieved as the human soul and is cultivated by observation, contemplation, and understanding. Knowledge managers must assert that each KW is at a certain level of *Aql*. However, this level may not be constant. It may be augmented through apt sustenance and encouragement or diminished due to environmental and cultural constraints.

Proposition 1: Aql is the prerequisite for knowledge workers which may be accentuated or diminished.

Ilm as Cognition and Mental Perception

The dissemination of knowledge continuously at all levels is a crucial feature of learning organizations (Levine et al., [2013](#)). Although *Ilm* is in a fluid state within the organizational setting, adding value to the existing knowledge repository recurrently, KWs articulate assimilated knowledge without any constraints or boundary walls. However, cognition of veracities without mistake or error is an intricate task. Since one can never be sure if the knowledge he believes to have acquired may be deliberated as *Ilm*.

The discussion above leads to the notion of *Wujud*, which means existence or to exist. *Wujud*, as a construct, avers the virtue through which one may claim knowledge regarding a phenomenon. It is decreed to be the source of all-knowing. 'I think therefore I am' is the phrase by Descartes ([1984](#)) that encapsulates the philosophy of *Wujud*. The progression of thinking starts with one doubting the mere existence of one's self and then everything around him, which is also known as skepticism. Initiation of this process leads to distinctive ideas and methodologies. The exclusivity may be prescribed to the assumption that no preconceived notion is there to hinder the arrival of fresh thoughts. Thus, a KW knows that what he knows is not *Ilm*, that is, perfect knowledge.

In a learning organization, employees question everything from the organization's existence to the core competencies, strategic plans, and performance measures. While bearing in mind the postulation that what they know right now is not *Ilm*, KWs with *Aql* keep striving to attain a higher level of knowledge, eventually reaching *Hikma*, the higher level of *Aql*. *Hikma* is the means through which man may be transformed into a reflection of the objective world, leading to the similarity of universal existence. Once one complies with the universe, attained knowledge becomes *Ilm* that does not require a need to be investigated any further. *Ilm* in this state may be reciprocated to clarify confusions, find solutions, and make decisions.

What is reality has been, and still is, an allegory in the philosophical domain. Western philosophers regarded this phenomenon as quiddity (Nasr, [1989](#)). *Mahiyyah* is a notion in Islamic philosophy that denotes the question of 'what is it'? *Mahiyyah* in general, also means 'something is what it is'. Islamic philosophy provides a peculiarity between existence and reality regarding reality and the ultimate truth. *Wujud* is a construct with

undertones similar to the theory of existence, whereas *Mahiyah* connotes the question of what is it once the mind realizes it is there.

According to Mullah Sadra (Rahman, [1975](#)), reality is nothing; however, the intellectual capacity of existence. Whereas, quiddity is only an abstraction of the mind determined by its existence. In Islamic philosophy, *Idrak* is coined for insight, encapsulating features, such as intellect, achievement, and attainment. It is the criterion to extricate the concepts of existence and quiddity. *Idrak* may also mean to attain knowledge through senses and to take cognizance of the existence of a notion widely known as empiricism (Quine, [1951](#)).

Learning organizations emphasize the integration of *Idrak* in strategic planning, thus relying on empirical evidence. KWs in such organizations are explorers and thinkers in the knowledge realm, using a pragmatist approach to attain *Ilm*. *Idrak* is intensely cultivated in the thinking processes enabling knowledge-based firms to acquire higher knowledge.

Proposition 2: Cultivation of Wujud, Mahiyah, and Idrak in KWs enable them to acquire Hikma which leads to Ilm.

Ilm as a Form (Surah)

Ilm may be regarded as a form, compatible with the known external object rather than an abstract concept of the mind. In this perspective, *Ilm* is transmuted as a material entity and becomes part of the learning organization rather than the KW. This part is also known as explicit knowledge, which is easier to articulate, comprehend and store (Nonaka & Takeuchi, [1995](#)). Company manuals, annual reports, feasibility reports, trend analyses, SOPs, and TORs are some significant examples. *Surah* is the word for explicit knowledge. This attribute of knowledge workers, who transform tacit knowledge into explicit, has been regarded highly in literature to avoid knowledge inertia in organizations (Smith, [2001](#); Wah, [1999](#)).

Proposition 3: Knowledge workers must be able to give a Surah to their Ilm to transform tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge.

Ilm as a Belief

Nozick ([1994](#)), in his highly acknowledged work, regarded knowledge as a belief that is sensitive to the truth. The definition of *Ilm* put forth by

Islamic philosophers in the 11th century gave the same perspective of knowledge which is grounded in belief; however, at the same time it is subtle concerning its conformity with actuality. The definition requires a KW to remove any doubt ascribed to the knowledge he has acquired, and that is only possible when the knowledge goes through validity tests, making it reliable and sustainable.

Ilm attained after removing doubts conforms to reality, making it a belief that the KW has and must have. This notion enables a KW to be *Thabit* (definitive) regarding one's knowledge so that he/she is confident in what he knows and does. Only then a KW may reflect *Ilm* to others in the learning organization.

Proposition 4: When a knowledge worker attains Ilm as a belief, he may be more confident and efficient about what he knows and does in the organization and in a better position to reflect Ilm to others.

Ilm as a Reflection

It refers to remembrance, imagination, an image, a vision, and an opinion. Reflection, as per Al-Ghazali, is the arrival of the image in the mirror or the arrival of an image that imitates the reality of the object known in the soul. Since Muslim philosophers believed in the preexistence of *Ilm*, therefore, it is regarded as an entity that may be attained, acquired, revealed, or that arrives. *Ilm* is of no significance if one cannot recall or memorize it. It is like learning programming sequences or statistical formulas. Once you have the basics in your memory you may reflect it when required, produce answers, give an opinion, and make empirical decisions. This self-knowledge derived from *Ilm* as a reflection leads to the self-efficacy of a knowledge worker and translates into higher learning rates (Di Stefano et al., [2014](#)).

Proposition 5: Ilm as a reflective knowledge enhances self-efficacy and learning in a knowledge worker

Ilm as Motion (Harakah)

Ilm is a motion of the heart. The most significant and beautiful form of *Ilm* is when it is in motion. All theologies emphasize some specific motions that complement the fundamental teachings. While defining the knowledge using metaphors, researchers signified explicit knowledge as kinetic energy due to an object's motion (Bratianu & Andriessen, [2008](#)). There is

knowledge of how a dancer moves, the delicacy with which a ballet girl lifts her hands, the skillful movement of an ice skater, the motion of a machine operator, and how a front-line worker packs the final product. *Ilm*, therefore, takes the form of motion when enticed by the expertise of a KW. Now, this knowledge is implicit and explicit at the same time. The front-line KW puts his expertise, skills, and experience into working on the assembly line. *Ilm*, in this form, is the purest. Thus, much emphasis is given to learning by doing. A person who wishes to learn pottery may better attain this *Ilm* while looking at the knowledge in motion of a pot maker. New KWs may be trained under the apprenticeship of the organization. This learning by watching could trigger a flow of knowledge in the organization and result in an infinite spiral of knowledge acquisition, transformation, dissemination, and exploitation (Nonaka, [2008](#)).

Proposition 6: Apprenticeship can enhance the diffusion of knowledge through Harakah among knowledge workers and enable a knowledge-sharing culture.

Ilm as a Relative Term

Ilm as a Haqiqah (truth-related) attribute that is characterized by interdependence. Another idea that may be referred back to Aristotle in *The Organon*, refers to knowledge as existing in the relation between the object known and the knower. A deeper meaning to this relativeness of knowledge is characterized by its interdependence. As quoted by Covey ([1989](#)), interdependence is far superior to independence, since it ensures efficacy and productive teamwork. This interdependence attribute of *Ilm* may enable a flow of knowledge among KWs as they create synergies. *Ilm*, as a relative term means that it cannot exist independently and it would need to form relations with other domains of knowledge and knowers to grow. Therefore, it is advised that in order to acquire *Ilm*, workers must work in cooperation with others and form networks of interrelated knowledge and knowers for continuous innovativeness.

Proposition 7: Interdependence among KWs through attaining Ilm as a Haqiqah will augment knowledge sharing in learning organizations

Ilm as Action

Knowledge is the attribute that enables him who possesses this attribute to act in an orderly fashion. In Islamic doctrine, action and knowledge are

inseparable. The difference between someone who knows and someone who does not lies in their actions. Managers of a learning organization devise a strategic action plan based on their knowledge. Therefore, the attribute that makes *Ilm* as an action is when a knowledge worker possesses specific attributes that assist him to act well. Now acting well would mean acting efficiently and effectively. *Ilm* as strategy is regarded in the Western literature on management as knowledge strategy, which should encompass actions intended to result in anticipated business outcomes and actions that emerge as complex organizational activities (Zack, 1999; Callahan, 2002).

Proposition 8: Ilm acquired at the knowledge workers level must be included in strategy formulation using the bottom-up approach for efficient knowledge transfer within organizational boundaries

Ilm as Intuition/Introspection

Knowledge is intuition as well as acquisition. Last but not the least, introspection is the key to learning and growing. Thinking about one's state is analyzing where one stands, what he knows, and most importantly, what he does not know. Renowned philosophers for instance, Plato and Descartes were the proponents of introspective knowledge and claimed it to be the only true form of knowledge. KWs need to develop the contemplative approach in *Ilm*, which allows one to question one's knowledge. Individuals having privileged access to their mental state are in a better position to acquire *Ilm*. The inner sense view in philosophy advocates this phenomenon whereby a person has a self-scanning capability (Armstrong, 1963).

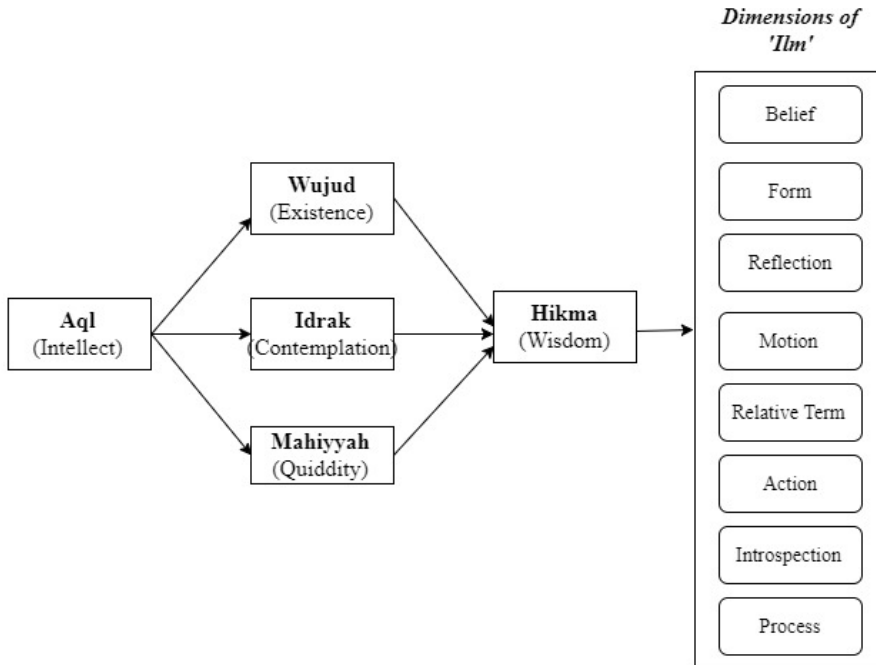
Proposition 9: Knowledge workers with the ability to contemplate may attain introspective knowledge, thus resulting in self-accountability

The distinctive feature of the paradigm of knowledge proposed in Islamic philosophy lies in its holistic approach. *Ilm* itself is an all-embracing word with undertones of theory and practical implications. The overarching framework established in the current paper not only suggested a new perspective to understand the notion of knowledge; however, it also provided empirical tools to enhance the epistemic capabilities of KWs. Attributes, such as *Aql* and *Hikma*, function as prerequisites for a higher level of knowledge. Concepts, such as *Idrak*, *Mahiyyah*, and *Wujud* instill a capacity-building approach to enhance the abilities of KWs (see Figure 1). Emphasis on the training and development of KWs is the main sentiment of Islamic philosophy on epistemology. The philosophy states that the

inherent vices of KWs signify or undermine the success of a knowledge-based firm. The proposed over-arching framework also suggests traits, such as knowledge sharing and networking in the organizational boundaries to enhance the capacity of KWs further.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework on 'Ilm'



Discussion and Implications

In this world, technology becomes obsolete in a few days and consumer preferences change with each trending hashtag. Stakeholders want more profound relationships with organizations and customers have ubiquitous information about companies and offerings. Customers in such markets are savvy and companies need continuously innovative strategies to reach them. Today, these strategies are developed, based on the organization's dynamic capabilities (Eisenhardt & Martin, [2000](#)). A core element of the dynamic capabilities of a firm is the difficult-to-trade-knowledge assets which are domains of KWs (Teece et al., [1997](#); Drucker, [1988](#); Davenport, [2005](#)).

Therefore, organizations need to know how they may accumulate this knowledge asset called *Ilm* in the current paper and turn it into their critical core competency (Prahalad & Hamel, [2009](#)).

For companies to succeed, knowledge must be developed continuously at each level of the organization. In case no knowledge is acquired, transferred, disseminated, or exploited, the company may fall into knowledge inertia. Therefore, it is when companies depend on prior knowledge and experiences for strategy formulation. To avoid this knowledge inertia, companies need to rethink about the sources and reengineer the processes of knowledge management. The current paper intended to outline a nonconventional approach to the knowledge management paradigm from the perspective of *Ilm*, that is, reflective knowledge proposed by Islamic philosophy. This enlightened version of knowledge is what companies in today's knowledge-based economy look for.

Ilm, as per Islamic philosophy, is regarded as a superior knowledge and adheres to specific virtue-based criteria of the knowledge worker (KW). The paradigm of *Ilm* revolves around the attainment of superior knowledge that is an outcome of reflection, wisdom, contemplation, reality, cognition, perceptions, beliefs, and introspection. The theoretical framework of *Ilm* demands that the managers of learning organizations foster immanent virtues in KWs that enable them to acquire a higher precision of knowledge. *Ilm* as a superior knowledge is critical for the survival of a knowledge-based firm, since it provides a sustainable competitive advantage. This sustainable advantage may be in the form of innovativeness, value creation, customization, and personalization. It is deemed as a critical success factor in a fast-paced knowledge economy where information symmetry is inevitable. It is needless to say that to rise above the competitors, a learning organization needs to have superior knowledge and for that knowledge, workers act as repositories. Eventually, the burden of attaining *Ilm* falls on the shoulders of KWs, making them fundamental building blocks of a learning organization.

The author is of the view that what is currently known of KWs and knowledge is superficial. Knowledge runs deeper than the buying patterns, number of sales, stock values, or performance scorecards. The current paper thus advocates the training and development of KWs at all levels of the organization in the arena of *Ilm* to acquire, exploit, and disseminate superior

knowledge through virtues, such as *Idrak*, *Mahiyyah*, and *Wujud*. The knowledge acquired by a KW may fulfill one or more dimensions of *Ilm* and still be considered as *Ilm*. However, when the knowledge constitutes all the dimensions of *Ilm* it becomes traceable, tradeable, and nearest to truth. It may be utilized in strategy formulation which should be the ultimate goal of a learning organization.

Conclusion

The current paper aimed not to propagate a better theory on knowledge; however, to provide knowledge managers with a different viewpoint. What distinguishes *Ilm* from conventional theories on knowledge is that the former may be considered a comprehensive perspective. Companies do not only need to focus on the knowledge acquisition, transformation, dissemination, and exploitation of knowledge; instead, they should emphasize the acquisition of *Ilm*, reflective knowledge, which is only possible through knowledge workers. Knowledge-based firms must portray reflective knowledge at all levels of the organization to the extent that it influences external elements in their first encounter with the firm. It is essential to form long-lasting and robust relationships with key stakeholders of the firm. Learning organizations must tap into the world of prediction, unknown, and extrapolation to stay one step ahead of their competitors. They do not have to exhibit the knowledge they gained from prevailing market trends. Instead, they have to forecast and create the next market trend, which is only possible through the attainment of *Ilm*. Knowledge managers should know that every knowledge worker may be at a certain level of *Ilm*, based on his *Aql* through which he comprehends the *Wujud* of the organization and its processes, thus attaining *Hikma* as an outcome. The company may either use the *Ilm* at a particular level in its primitive form or transform it into more complex structures to make high-end decisions. It is important to note that the acquisition, transformation, dissemination, and exploitation of *Ilm* is a never-ending process that starts with knowledge workers. Therefore, a holistic approach to reflective knowledge may assist learning organizations to gain sustainable competitive advantage in today's fast-paced economy.

Limitations

Arabic lexicon is a vast domain which entails numerous definitions of a single term. Therefore, the author takes responsibility for any discrepancy

in the given definition or meaning owing to a lack of complete knowledge of Arabic. Moreover, the framework developed in the current study is aimed to be a pioneer contribution in the literature of knowledge-based firms and knowledge workers. Therefore, many aspects may be overlooked or not explained in their entirety. The concepts are rationalized in the context of prominent Western theories to make the new paradigm comprehensible. However, no existing theory may portray the utilitarian connotations of terms, such as *Aql*, *Hikma*, or *Wujud* due to their profundity.

Future Research Prospects

As per the research findings, it is suggested that researchers build a holistic knowledge management model based on the proposed framework. The distinctive paradigm of the knowledge presented in the current study may be used as a foundation to develop a manual for knowledge managers. The manual would act as a guide map for the strategic pursuit of knowledge, emphasizing inherent virtues in KWs. The framework of *Ilm* advocates critical aspects of KWs in a learning organization. Thus, the capacity building of KWs would enhance their efficiency as procurement agents of knowledge and assist them in becoming a building block of sustainable competitive advantage. Future researchers may analyze the efficacy of the proposed framework by testing the propositions. It may not only substantiate the research findings; however, also identify loopholes in the framework.

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