
EFFECT OF *UKHUWWAH* DRIVEN SOCIAL COHESIVENESS IN GOVERNING QUALITY INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Suhaimi Mhd Sarif
International Islamic University Malaysia
Email: albanjari@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Social cohesiveness enables organizations to respond the dynamism of the environment through the strength of the human resources, capability and intellectualism so that organizations continue to sustain competitive advantage and performance. The existing practice of social cohesiveness in organizations is through strategic cooperation, bonding among workers, and socialization without much emphasized on spirituality and soul enhancement. Islamic approach to social cohesiveness is through *ta'awun* and *ukhuwwah*. While *ta'awun* denotes strategic cooperation among members of organizations and stakeholders, *ukhuwwah* manifests strategic bonding (*ukhuwwah*). When *ukhuwwah* drives social cohesiveness, it is also in the business of governing quality innovation for sustainable development goals. Thus, *ukhuwwah* enables cohesiveness among innovation workers in ensuring the governance of quality innovation. In the rigid rules and procedures situation, which is essential, *ukhuwwah* reinforces qualitatively with soul, spirituality and consciousness. Social equity theory deliberates the weight of the rewards. Thus, this study aims to explore the effect of *ukhuwwah* in governing quality innovation for sustainable development goals, specifically in Malaysia. This study uses personal interview with 10 innovation workers in Malaysia. The feedback from the informants argued that *ukhuwwah* combines cohesiveness and weight of rewards to sustain development goals with more governance and innovation framework. Future studies should use case study method to deliberate the proposition in more integrated, comprehensive and rigorous.

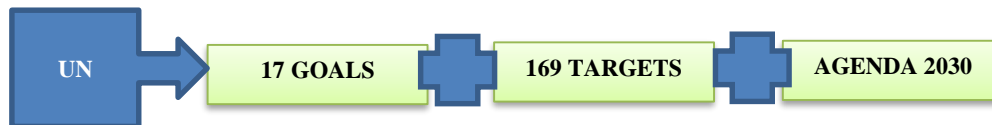
Keywords: Sustainable development goals, *ukhuwwah*, innovation.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, sustainability has been the primary concern of organizations. Every organizational policy and strategy has some components of sustainability on top of the concern on the bottom line. In fact, the bottom line has been expanded beyond profitability or financial perspective (Braccini & Margherita, 2019; Hussain, Rigoni, & Orij, 2018). The Triple Bottom Line has been used together with social responsibility concern.

At the market level, there has been concern of many governments for the market players to be part of the sustainability agenda. United Nations has 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 targets to be attained by 2030 by all stakeholders, not just the government (SDGs UN, 2015). All sectors have to work together to attain these goals and targets. In lieu of that, there is a need of unity, shared values and togetherness. Figure 1 illustrates the sustainable development agenda.

Figure 1. The sustainable development agenda



Innovation provides rooms for improvement in any sector. Innovation in manufacturing allows for value added process in terms of cost as well as the quality of products. Likewise, innovation in services allows for cooperation and collaboration between the producers and the consumers (Hussinger & Pacher, 2019; Rajapathirana & Hui, 2018). Indeed, innovation allows for sustainability.

Unity allows for innovation widespread at mass level. In unity, togetherness is not just physical, but also soul, mind and heart. The combination of physical and non-physical of human faculty allows for cohesiveness (Hussinger & Pacher, 2019; Assouad & Parboteeah, 2018). *Ukhuwwah* allows for the togetherness, unity and cohesiveness. Body, soul, mind and heart work together to spark innovation and continue to do it for the sake of goodness.

People love to make goodness. They are willing to collaborate with other people when the collaboration brings goodness to them as well as others. The spirit of give and take happens in one way as well as reciprocal (Hussinger & Pacher, 2019; Assouad & Parboteeah, 2018). One will have more motivation to give or to render help when one could ease others or one could gain satisfaction by making others free from hardship. This common sense is common and rational. The exchange comes with give and take to produce goodness.

Ukhuwwah comes with checks and balances. The main components of *ukhuwwah* includes *ta'aruf* (knowing), *tafahum* (understanding), *ta'awun* (cooperation) and *takaful* (protection), provides good quality governance for innovation. In other words, the presence of *ukhuwwah* in innovation at any level, will not allow for sub-standard, fraud, mismanagement to exist.

This study explores the effect of *ukhuwwah* in governing quality innovation for sustainable development goals, specifically to the innovation-based firms in Malaysia. The meaning of exploratory design in qualitative research is to investigate the lack of understood phenomena in the context of *ukhuwwah* in governing qualitative innovation for sustainable development goals. The independent variable is *ukhuwwah* and the dependent variable is sustainable development goal.

The organization of the study is divided into a few sections. Firstly, the literature review provides the critical discussion pertaining to the key variables of the study. It is very important to know the key variables on the existing theory, practice and policy before the study could show the gap or contribution could be propose as contingency or alternative views. Secondly, the methodology explains on how the proposition of contingency perspective could be obtained through the appropriate methods. Thirdly, presents the presentation of findings and the discussion of the findings in light with the literature on the new or contingency views. Finally, the study provides the conclusion and direction for future studies.

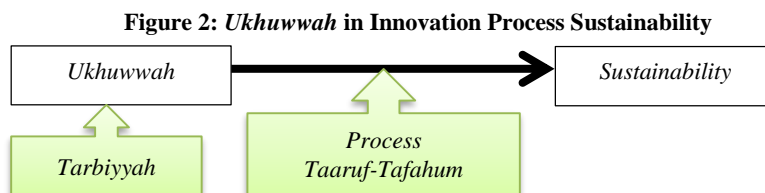
LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides critical discussion on the key variables used in this study. The variables are discussed as topics and sub topics. The variables are *ukhuwwah*, social cohesiveness, innovation, governance for innovation, and sustainable development goals.

UKHUWWAH

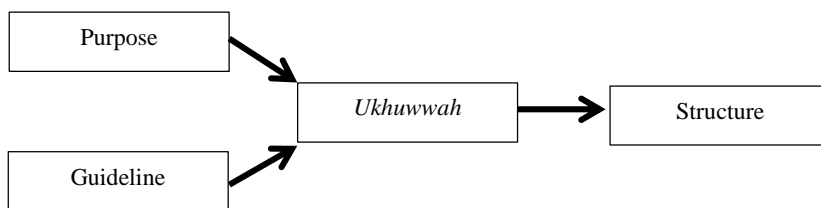
Ukhuwwah is way of life in line with Islamic teaching. There are three components in Islam, namely faith (*aqidah*), worship and the rules (*ibadah & shariah*), and ethics (*akhlak*). *Ukhuwwah* is the manifestation of Islam. This concept has three components. The faith is paramount. Without faith or trust, the bonding will not spark at the start. With the faith in place, then it follows the routines and rules required to continue to practice the relationship.

Besides the rules in the relationship, there is a need to have ethics or respect in the relationship. According to Kilani (1998), *ukhuwwah* is not happened instantaneously or impromptu or by accident. It is by design with the process of education (*al-Tarbiyyah*). The manifestation of Islamic education (*al-Tarbiyah al-Islāmiyyah*), which is compulsory (*fi Tarbiyah al-Fard*) and humanizing people with education (*Tanmiyah al-Ukhuwwah al-Insāniyyah*) is in the *ukhuwwah*. The main components of *ukhuwwah* includes *ta'aruf* (knowing), *tafahum* (understanding), *ta'awun* (cooperation) and *takaful* (protection), provides good quality governance for innovation. In other words, the presence of *ukhuwwah* in innovation at any level, will not allow for sub-standard, fraud, mismanagement to exist. Figure 2 depicts the presence of *ukhuwwah* in attaining innovation on sustainable basis.



Ukhuwwah manifests relationship with purpose and guideline. When managing organisations with objectives, rules and support, together with bonding in relationships among people, it leads to sustainability (Sarif, 2016). Definitely no short cut to establish, maintain and sustain *ukhuwwah*. When *ukhuwwah* is transformed into educational structure with tasks and rules, it provides the synergy into the process (Thoha, 2018). This approach is pragmatic and sustainable at any context and situation (Azhar, 2017). The value system that is being preached, educated and molded is able to internalize and manifest into conviction, trust, action oriented and discipline of life (Rahmi, 2018). Thus, objective relationship enables sustainability. Figure 3 illustrates the manifestation of *ukhuwwah* into relationship with purpose and guidelines.

Figure 3. Manifestation of *ukhuwwah* into relationship with purpose and guidelines



Ukhuwwah or strategic bonding among people occurs across borders. The nature of *ukhuwwah* includes global concern (*ummatic*), justice (*‘adl*), and accountability (*taklif*). The foundation for *ukhuwwah* is on human relationship with social interaction and exchange. It begins with *ta'aruf* (knowing), then into *tafahum* (understanding). Eventually, the relationship develops into *ta'awun* (cooperation) and *takaful* (protection). The process consumes lengthy time and sacrifices. The dimensions of *ukhuwwah* in Islamic perspectives and conventional management perspectives are similar in terms of orientation, objectives, process, functions and roles. The only different is the spiritual dimension. Islamic bonding or *ukhuwwah* is based on the Divine commandment (Kilani, 1998; Sarif, 2016; Azhar, 2017; Rahmi, 2018). The execution of duties as vicegerents and servants of Allah is based on congregation that requires *ukhuwwah*.

Ukhuwwah in international setting refers to the *ummatic* or global thinking of individuals and groups in the work process, culture and performance. Diversity in workplace manifests the global situation and thinking. Priority in relationship refers to the integrity, piety and resilience. In conventional thinking of diversity refers to differences in terms of gender, age, religion, preference, disabilities, marriage status and work orientation. There is not much of difference between conventional and Islamic concept of bonding or *ukhuwwah*. The emphasis of Islamic bonding or *ukhuwwah* is on soul and mind that surrendered to the will of Allah.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Sustainable development is necessary for humanity. In doing so, United Nations has introduced sustainable development agenda 2030 for the whole world community to play proactive role in making the world is sustainable (SDGs UN, 2015). Strategic cooperation among world community is executed through shared platform with the spirit of togetherness, unity, partnership and collective.

There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals presented by United Nations to the world. Firstly, is to have the world without poverty. Secondly, a zero hunger world that free from famine. Thirdly, is to attain good health and well-being of the world. Fourthly, is to achieve quality education that gives meaning to the life. Fifthly, is to achieve gender equality. Sixthly, is to consume clean water and to have good sanitation in the society. Seventhly is to provide affordable and clean energy. The first seven goals are very basic to the basic need with integrity (Joseph et al, 2019) and fair (Ulbrich et al, 2019).

The next seven goals are on providing the world with decent environment with meaning and protection. The eighth goal is to achieve decent work and economic growth. This will be related also to the Ninth goal which is to have good industry, innovation and infrastructure. In this study, *ukhuwwah* or strategic bonding enables for people to be innovative in sustaining the longevity of the industry for the sake of people and the environment (Sims et al, 2019).

The manifestation of *ukhuwwah* at international level appears in the 10th goal in reducing inequalities. Since nobody is above the law or is superior in controlling resources, no one should monopolise resources. Thus, this will lead to 11th goal in attaining sustainable cities and communities, and 12th goal in responsible consumption and production. The whole objective of life is not just about human, but also other creatures and surrounding. This will lead to 13th goal of climate action, 14th goal life below water and 15th goal for life on land, 16th goal of keeping peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17th goal to work in partnership for the goals. Figure 4 summaries the 17 sustainable development goals.

Figure 4: Summary of 17 sustainable development goals

1 No poverty	2 Zero hunger	3 Good health and well-being	4 Quality education	5 Gender equality	6 Clean water and sanitation
7 Affordable and clean energy	8 Decent work and economic growth	9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure	10 Reduced inequalities	11 Sustainable cities and communities	12 Responsible consumption and production
13 Climate action	14 Life below water	15 Life on land	16 Peace, justice and strong institutions	17 Partnerships for the goals	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Source: SDGs UN (2015).

SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

Innovation is not happened in vacuum. There are social participants involved in the process to innovation (Zhang et al, 2018). Everyone is willing to exchange for the benefit of individual or the society. More importantly, there must be trust among employees and participants (Yu et al 2018) for cooperation and collaboration (Hussinger & Pacher, 2019; Rajapathirana & Hui, 2018).

In addition, there should be no gap among the participants such inequalities (Ionescu et al, 2018). This will encourage trust among employees (Dzimiska et al 2018) when they understand the employees and their expectations (Riaz, Xu & Hussain, 2018). According to Zhang et al (2018), innovation is also influenced by the leadership of institutions. Learning may take place with such encouragement. The trust from leadership is organizational trust in which the exchange takes place at the workplace (Yu et al, 2018).

INNOVATION GOVERNANCE

Innovation involves learning on collective basis with many players and stakeholders. The interactions and exchange in the learning need governance so that everyone is protected on the interest of the individual as well as stakeholders (Hussinger & Pacher, 2019; Rajapathirana & Hui, 2018). The whole collaboration in learning needs proper governance for integrity and sustainability.

In the contexts of multiple learning, there has been Triple Helix situation in which universities, governments and industry players collaborates for mutual benefit. However, the existing economic orientation requires them to work beyond the Triple Helix (Etzkowitz, 2018). Under the Sustainable Development Goals, there is a need for more responsible, accountable and transparent (Ferri et al, 2018).

Innovation governance for sustainability requires trust, support and creativity. In doing so, one has to sustain trust by providing dynamic structure, trust and good relationships among innovation personnel (Kay & Willman, 2018). Everyone should have similar standing and principles. Under dynamic situation, one must be ready to work with anyone and ready for collaboration (Del Vecchio et al 2018).

COHESIVENESS

Group cohesiveness allows for employees to work together at any time and any situation. The emphasis at organizational level is the team work (Thompson et al, 2015). Team work is not just the quantity of the members, but the quality. In doing so, the membership must meet the person-group fit (Seong et al, 2015; Anand et al 2018). Without the fit, there will be mismatch, and the situation will escalate into conflicts.

Members of team work could come from anywhere. In the light of globalization, collaboration and group cohesiveness may occur globally (Oh et al 2014). More importantly, group cohesiveness needs an eco-system that is friendly to the group binding, group cohesiveness, loyalty, and trust among them (Cole, Carter & Zhang, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

This section explain the methodology of the study in terms of research design, validation of instrument, ethical requirement, procedures in collecting data, protection of data, confidentiality and transferability of research.

The primary objectives of the study are to explore the effect of *ukhuwwah* in governing quality innovation for sustainable development goals, specifically to the innovation-based firms in Malaysia, to investigate the link between the lacks of *ukhuwwah* in governing quality innovation, and to examine the role of innovation in sustaining goals. The research questions are firstly, what are the factors contribute to the effect of *ukhuwwah* in governing quality innovation for sustainable development goals; secondly, in what ways *ukhuwwah* could influence the governance of innovation, and thirdly, how would quality innovation lead to sustainable development goals. The informants of the study are 10 innovation workers. The sampling of the informants is based on convenient sampling. The study needs in-depth feedback from the informants.

The study uses personal interview method with the 10 innovation workers in Klang Valley. This personal interview is extensive and allows for detailed answer (Waisbord, 2018), which enable to answer the why, how and why not questions (Bolzani & Der Foo, 2018). Numbers could not tell everything (Gaber & Gaber, 2018). The informants were selected in convenient basis after contacting colleagues who used to work with innovation workers from companies located at Technology Park Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.

The interview question is simply asking them in what ways they drive good bonding among them as innovation workers to produce quality innovation as expected by the companies on long term basis. This question has been validated by two academics, three practitioners and two policy makers who were university mates of the researcher. In terms of ethics, the study obtained ethics permission from the employers, sponsors of the study and authority of the industrial place. The informants were explained the purpose of the study and obtained voluntary informed consent.

During the interview, the researcher used manual note taking to comply the requirement of the companies as well as the consent given by the informants. Each interview was conducted at the workplace within 20 to 30 minutes. A snow balling is used in the interview. The transcripts were then verified by the informants before sending for professional verification.

Qualitative research emphasizes on the detailed of the context instead of generalization. According to Smith and Smith (2018), human aspect has been a great concern. There has been development on qualitative research methods. Smith and Smith (2018) argued that the qualitative research situation keeps emphasizing on searching funding from external as well as internal parties. The same situation applies to the business context (Randall & Gibson, 1990; King, Horrocks & Brooks, 2018).

Interview method allows collection of data with rich and detailed answer. It allows contextual answers within the values and conviction (Bolzani & Der Foo, 2018). Gaber & Gaber (2018) argued that qualitative research also enables systematic analysis and planning. The detailed answers are close to the actual context and reality (Conger et al, 2018).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and relates the findings with relevant literature. Firstly, the informants responded to the factors contribute to the effect of *ukhuwwah* in governing quality innovation for sustainable development goals. Secondly, the informants argued on the ways *ukhuwwah* could influence the governance of innovation. Finally, the informants responded on how quality innovation would lead to sustainable development goals.

The respond from the informants is to answer the following research questions, namely, (a) what are the factors contribute to the effect of *ukhuwwah* in governing quality innovation for sustainable development goals?, (b) in what ways *ukhuwwah* could influence the governance of innovation?, and finally, (c) how would quality innovation lead to sustainable development goals?

FACTORS OF UKHUWWAH

There are two factors effect *Ukhuwwah* in governing quality innovation for sustainable goals. Firstly, *ukhuwwah* is a result of socialization and group binding process. Informant 1 argued that there is group binding among innovation employees at workplace, but the process is not continuous.

“When we organize activities, then we will meet, mingle around, get to know our colleagues, and having time to chat and listen to everyone. We seldom chat during office hours. I supposed a continuous one, but it is not taking off!”

Informant 2 argued that group binding is a long process, which is part of the employment process.

“Our group binding is part of our innovation journey. It is not short term things. It requires a long time process. Actually, innovation allows socializing in more creative manner. iWe maintain our good relationship. We are actually family even though not biological family.”

Informant 1, 2 and 3 argued that effect of *ukhuwwah* to drive social cohesiveness in governing quality innovation for sustainable development goals limited to group binding, quality objective, and compliance requirements. These informants argued that the governance of quality innovation is within the rules, procedures and policies of the companies.

Secondly, *ukhuwwah* is a result of workplace requirement for innovation. According to Informant 1, 2 and 3, socialization at workplace is triggered by the requirement of work for performance. However, Informants 4 and 5 had different views. They attributed that *Ukhuwwah* is a result of workplace environment for innovation.

Informant 4 argued that workplace environment enables for innovation. The environment stimulates for innovation on voluntarily basis.

“Organic work environment provides free flow communication among people. When socialization among people being operationalized with some targets, people will do the tasks and will work with their colleagues.”

Informant 5 has similar concern about the environment of innovation. Informant 5 said:

“Innovation is not driven by policy. You do not impose people to be innovative. It is about mind. The harder you tried, the best it will be!”

Every employee is subjected to the same rules and requirements. The situation is simply mechanistic and rule-based. However, such situation is merely compliance-based in which employees are expected to be productive by producing more work output as well as work quality. In such situation, more work is not productive; unless the companies emphasized more on teamwork (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010) which could lead to more group and social cohesiveness and loyalty (Smith & Rupp, 2002).

UKHUWWAH COULD INFLUENCE THE GOVERNANCE OF INNOVATION

Ukhuwwah has influence on the governance for innovation. According to Informant 1 and 2, the governance of innovation is about integrity and transparency. It is also the value of individual or self-image.

Informant 2 contended that quality innovation is governed as part of employment laws.

“Innovation is our way of doing things. It is quality innovation. We maintain our good relationship. We are actually family even though not biological family. We do have policies, guidelines and regulations, but not specific to innovation and social cohesiveness.”

However, Informant 3 contended that *ukhuwwah* itself is a quality innovation instead of merely self-image. Informant 3 said:

“We believe in quality relationship. When our managers wanted creativity and innovation, they are talking about our relationship and bonding.”

In addition, Informant 3 argued that sustainable development goals are superficial at a glance, but they are very comprehensive.

“We have heard about the sustainable development goals. Our Prime Minister also addressed this matter at the historic nation address at the United Nations General Assembly. Something like to have no poverty, quality education, clean environment and so on. We have been doing that, at small scale, not at the massive level. “

Informant 4 argued that the governance of workplace environment enables for innovation. The environment stimulates for innovation on voluntarily basis. Informant 4 mentioned:

“Organic work environment provides free flow communication among people. When socialization among people being operationalized with some targets, people will do the tasks and will work with their colleagues.”

Informant 5 has similar concern about the governance of innovation into the environment of innovation. Informant 5 said:

“Innovation is not driven by policy. You do not impose people to be innovative. It is about mind. The harder you tried the best it will be!”

Informant 6 contended that good governance with workplace environment is not operational on the expectation of the stakeholders only, but reflection of all members in organizations. Likewise, Informants 7, 8, 9, and 10 argued on the influence of *ukhuwwah* into workplace process and environment for quality innovation.

QUALITY INNOVATION LEAD TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Informants also contended that *ukhuwwah* influences the workplace environment with the systematic with compliance-approach. Everyone is expected to perform with the requirements and guidelines.

Informant 1 argued that quality innovation with strong *ukhuwwah* enable organizations to sustainable development goals. Informant 1 said:

“When we organize activities, then we will meet, mingle around, get to know our colleagues, and having time to chat and listen to everyone. We seldom chat during office hours. I supposed a continuous one, but it is not taking off!”

Informant 2 argued that quality innovation that resulted from group binding derived from employment process will lead to sustainable development goals.

“Sustainable is about being consistent and continuous. When our group binding is strong, it gives us the resilience to be together is doing things. We maintain our good relationship. We are actually family even though not biological family.”

This situation stimulates quality innovation within the expectation (Garcia-Pozo et al, 2018) in the forms of *ukhuwwah* for sustainable development goals. There is still trust among the employees when the work is guided by the objectives, policies, procedures and key performance indicators (Triplett & Loh, 2018). Informants described the *ukhuwwah* as the ‘forcing’ *ukhuwwah* instead of reinforcing *ukhuwwah*, which is workable. When everyone respects everyone, communication becomes easy and eventually led to productivity and loyalty (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010; Garcia-Pozo et al, 2018).

Informants regarded trust as delegation of authority or empowerment to the employees. The presence of trust on both sides, employers and employees, they will reach amicable consensus and agreement (Triplett & Loh, 2018). In the meantime, employers should provide contextual support for employees to show loyalty, productive and innovative (Smith & Rupp, 2002).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant to the academia, industry, government and society. Firstly, the factors contribute to the effect of *ukhuwwah* in governing quality innovation for sustainable development goals into the socialization and employment process. Secondly, the ways *ukhuwwah* influence the governance of innovation. Finally, the quality innovation factors enable sustainable development goals.

For academia, the results from the study provide the insights into the ontological aspect of understanding the reality of *ukhuwwah* and governing innovation for sustainable development. As for the industry, it is about the industry and business policy is encouraging employment with *Ukhuwwah* so that they could sustain innovation with integrity for sustainable development. In the context of the government, they need to formulate policy or integrate *ukhuwwah* into innovation policies. The main players of innovation are equally important to subscribe *ukhuwwah* as way of life.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the effect of *ukhuwwah* driven social cohesiveness in governing quality innovation for sustainable development goals. The effect of *Ukhuwwah* are explained into three aspects, namely, the factors contribute to the effect of *ukhuwwah* in governing quality innovation for sustainable development goals into the socialization and employment process; the ways *ukhuwwah* influence the governance of innovation and, the quality innovation factors enable sustainable development goals. The operative of *ukhuwwah* enables cohesiveness among innovation workers in ensuring the governance of quality innovation. Social exchange theory (SET) explains the cohesiveness of people triggered by the rewards to sustain development of the world. Social equity theory deliberates the weight of the rewards. The feedback from the informants argued that two factors of *ukhuwwah* into innovation governance. Firstly, *ukhuwwah* is a result of socialization and group binding process. Secondly, *ukhuwwah* is a result of workplace requirement for innovation. These factors of *ukhuwwah* combine with cohesiveness and weight of rewards to sustain development goals with more governance and innovation framework. *Ukhuwwah* requires trust as delegation of authority or empowerment to the employees to drive innovation. The presence of trust on both sides, employers and employees, they will reach amicable consensus and agreement. Future studies should use case study method to deliberate the proposition in more integrated, comprehensive and rigorous.

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