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## The Concept of Altruism and *Ihsan* as an Approach towards Achieving Psychological Well-Being at The Workplace: An Observation at The Islamic University College of Melaka

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### Abstract

KUIM is a higher learning institute that is aggressive in developing its physical and academic aspects towards becoming a full university. KUIM is a hub at the state of Melaka which is responsible for the development of knowledge for the present and the afterlife. Therefore, it is important for KUIM to have academic staffs and lecturers who are highly capable in several aspects. This study utilizes a total of 55 respondents who are lecturers of KUIM. The OCB (Organizational Citizen Behaviour) a research instrument designed by Podsakoff et. al. (1990) was utilized through purposive sampling technique. There are 4 items in the questionnaire that touches on the topic of Altruism. The findings suggest that the level of Altruism among the respondents is high. Hence, the human resource management of KUIM must ensure that all lecturers remain committed with high level of altruism to ensure both continue to drive the institution towards a better future.

**Keywords:** Altruism, Ihsan.

### Introduction

In the context of working environment of today whether it is of private or government or even self-employed, each individual is required to give high commitment towards the work given (Zulkiflee, 2014). Work is part of human life and each of us has to work in order to live and working itself can also be viewed as a form of worship to Allah S.W.T. Our worship is fully seen by Allah the almighty and He will always watch over us no matter where we are. The prophet Rasulullah S.W.T reminded us that “verily Allah makes it compulsory for us to do good in anything” (Hadith Riwayat Muslim) Nawawi, Mahyu (1981), *Sahih Muslim, Syarh Imam Nawawi* (Minhaj). Damaskas: Dar al-Fikr.

In Islam, *ihsan* carries an important meaning. It is the firm believe that Allah sees whatever we do and is with us in every space and time. Islam encourages us to have *ihsan* in all that we do and this applies to more than just worship but also in our work and socialization. As a Muslim, this characteristic of *ihsan* must be nurtured in ourselves similar to all the other morals of Islam throughout or work and worship. *Ihsan* is also relevant and related to a dimension that is part of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) which is Altruism. Simply put Altruism refers to the characteristics of kindness. OCB refers to behaviours that are not formally requested yet shown and gave positive effects to the organization (Smith, Organ & Near, 1983). An organization will not grow and develop well without support and positive behaviours exhibited by the staff of that organization itself. Since OCB is seen as an important element in organizational development, studies on it have been conducted and given priority by analysts (Organ, 1988). Several studies found that OCB can give positive impact towards the organization through an increase in production, better management of resources, coordination of team activities, development and sustaining of performance, recruitment of workers and ability to adapt with the environment.

OCB is also connected to the purpose of finding the meaning of life and building potential in improving our livelihood towards happiness and well-being (Seligman, 1998). Sharif (2016) highlighted that Seligman (1998) mentioned an article entitled *Human Strength: Psychology's Forgotten Mission* where it is said that "psychology is not just a study of weakness and damages; it is also a study of strength, glory and good. Treatment in psychology is not just meant to repair what was broken; it is also to develop our best self. In other words, psychology will help to nurture the potential that is in every worker so that everyone in the organization can strive for the best.

Each of us has is at work for at least 8 hours a day and on average that means we spend two thirds of our life at work. In this context, there are certain behaviours that are expected of each worker based on the rules and regulation of the organization. In essence, the workers of the organization must show positive behaviour that is above the set-requirement. Such behaviour that goes above and beyond the requirement is as mentioned earlier is known as OCB. In carrying the goal of an organization towards excellence, all workers are hoped to show not just high commitment but also positive attitude. OCB is considered a significant predictor in psychology. Since the 1990s, psychologists have studied human behaviour and realized the value of psychology in the working environment. Psychology at its core is holistic which emphasizes every aspect of human capital development. Due to this, the president of American Psychological Association (APA), Martin Seligman urged and supported every effort that was done by psychological scholars in studying the role of Psychology in improving humanity. This is not just to correct but also study psychology from all sides.

### **Problem Statement**

Hassan, Saad & Maridzor (2017) found in his study that 90.4% government staffs face stress and it is mostly caused by their co-workers or environment. He added that when it comes to the environment, it refers to the political play in the organization, leadership, workplace security, unconducive environment and wages. These are all examples of influence from the environment that may exist in an organization that can affect the potential and productivity of a worker either in short or long term. When it comes to wages, it can become unpredictable. At present, the wages of a post-graduate may not be enough to support his or her livelihood. Because of this unbalanced between wages and living

cost it can cause certain workers to face issue which affect their daily work. Our workplace is somewhat like a second home since we spend a minimum of 8 hours there. Thus, all workers must maintain their workplace environment to the best of their ability. Our workplace is a reflection on us; thus, there is no wrong in ensuring it is harmonious and conducive. Therefore, different parties and even the Deputy Vice Chancellor of Student and Alumni Affairs of The National University of Malaysia (UKM), Profesor Datin Dr. Noor Aziah Mohd Awal stressed the importance of a conducive and healthy environment at the workplace as a catalyst for productivity (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2015).

In sum, psychological well-being at the workplace can be improved and maintained starting from the workers of that particular organization. From the perspective of psychology, altruism is a good character trait which should be present in all individual. As stated before at its foundation, altruism shares the same definition with the concept of *ihsan* in Islam where we do not expect anything of our good deeds as Allah watches everything. With altruism and *ihsan* at heart, our working environment should be free from conflict.

### Research Objective

- To identify the level of altruism among the lecturers at the Islamic University College of Melaka.

### Definition for the Concept of *Ihsan*

*Ihsan* from the perspective of language means goodness, devotion, sincerity and welfare. In other words it refers to something that is pleasant and commendable. From the perspective of Islamic teachings, it means that an individual must perform his prayers as if Allah is watching and if he does not feel that way, he must be aware that it is happening. There are three components to *ihsan* which are connected to one another (Endot, Zin & Mamat, 1998). The first component discusses how *ihsan* results in the right action, behaviour, sincerity and kindness, and emphasizing the welfare of others. The second component talks about how *ihsan* leads us to complete a task in the right and proficient manner. The third component is that *ihsan* gives us the feeling that Allah is present and is watching out actions (Ghozali & Kamri, 2015).

The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of Kamus Dewan define *Ihsan* by using Hadi Jibril as one of its definition which is to pray to Allah as if Allah is in front of us (Kamus Dewan Edisi Keempat, 2005)

*“What is ihsan? Rasulallah answered: Ihsan is when you pray to Allah as if he is watching you. If you cannot see him, then remember that he can see you”* (Al-Bukhari, t.t) Bukhari, Abi ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. Isma’il al-Mughirah Ibn Bardazbah (t.t), *Sahih al-Bukhari*,j.3. Beirut: Maktabah Thaqafiyah.

According to Hasan Al- Banna, it was inferred from this hadis that it is referring to two important definitions which are: *ihsan* means ‘something that is good and best’ and ‘to do every task well and with quality and awareness that our actions are watched and judged by Allah S.W.T’ (Mohamed, Abd Ghani, & Basir, 2011). Further Hasan Al-Banna discusses the definition of *ihsan* from the perspective of Syed Othman Al- Habshi which is that *ihsan* comprises of three vital components which are (i) *ihsan* means good, nice, humanistic and emphatic behaviour. (ii) *Ihsan* from the hadith of Rasulallah S.A.W refers to the fear that manifests in us and the feeling of being watched by Allah S.W.T. (iii) *Ihsan* means to do a job well.

*Ihsan* is very much relevant to achieving excellence in our work as it leads us to do well (Mohamed, Ab. Ghani, & Basir, 2011). Ibnu 'Allan Al- Siddiqi interpreted the same hadith and are of the opinion that *ihsan* is similar to *itqan* which means to do our best in any work and action (Omar, 2003).

Al-Zuhaili interpreted the term *ihsan* in surah al-Nisa' verse 36:

﴿وَأَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَلَا تُشْرِكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَبِذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْجَارِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْجَارِ  
الْجُنُبِ وَالصَّاحِبِ بِالْجَنبِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ وَمَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ مَن كَانَ مُخْتَالًا فَخُورًا ۝ ٣٦﴾  
“and do good to your parents, family members, orphans, the poor, people who are near and far, colleagues, and slaves” (al-Nisa' 4:36)

What is being referred to in the verse is that we should show *ihsan* to our parents by following them in doing good things, serve them, grant their wish and not hurt them. *Ihsan* to family members is by maintaining our relationship. For orphans, *ihsan* is through educating and giving them love. When it comes to the poor *ihsan* means that we should donate and approach them. We should build lasting relationship with our neighbours and friends as inferred from *ihsan*. Finally, *ihsan* to slaves is by giving them food, clothes and granting them freedom (Al-Zuhaili, 2011).

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ۝ ٩٠﴾  
90. And when people who perform evil acts (through denial of Allah S.W.T) see torment, the severity of the torment will not be lightened and no indication of time is given (An-Nahl, 16:90)

Allah directs all his followers to be fair and be good. Sufyan bin 'Uyainah said that the word fair in this statement means that an individual will do the same in all his actions whether seen or unseen. *Ihsan* thus also means an individual's spiritual essence is better than that of his physique.

Al-Zuhaili (2011) inferred the verse above by dividing it into three parts which are *ihsan* in prayer, *ihsan* in granting a wish or paying back a due, and *ihsan* in serving a sentence. What is meant by the first is to pray as if Allah is watching us pray. The second part refers to quickly paying off a debt. The third and final part is to give and serve a sentence suited to the severity of the crime and granting the rights of victims through *qisas*. The noblest type of *ihsan* is to do good to someone who is being unfair or performing hateful acts to us.

“Verily Allah 'Azza Wa Jal is pleased when one of you perform an action with focus”  
(al-Baihaqi, t.t)

According to Sidi Gazalba, *ihsan* means “being good” or “improvement”. *Ihsan* also can be defined as “perfect actions” or “perfections” (Gazalba, 1975). If the concept of *ihsan* is implemented to our work, individuals with *ihsan* will strive for perfections with every service to their organization of work. *Ihsan* in occupation can be interpreted as doing work with professionalism and punctuality

### Review of Past Literatures

According to Organ (1988), altruism is seen as the readiness of a worker in helping other worker and leaving being personal importance and issues. This was also discussed by Eisenberg & Mussen (1989), where altruism is seen as a sincere actions motivated intrinsically more than extrinsically. Past studies also showed how altruism affects the readiness of an individual to exhibit OCB (Tepper & Taylor, 2003).

Todd (2003) sees altruism as a reflection of the willingness of a worker to help their colleague with selflessness in order to serve the organization. In a similar aspect, altruistic behaviour involves doing work that is not limited to personal task but also to those that help others (Organ et al., 2006).

At the same time, Ryan (2001) found that the moral of a worker is a significant predictor of altruistic behaviour. Furthermore, Podsakoff et al. (2000) explained that altruism is significantly correlated to evaluation of performance and affection. Overall, altruism refers to behaviour which gives benefits to certain individuals of an organization which contributes to the effectiveness of the organization (Lee & Allen, 2002). This is further proven by several empirical studies of OCB which shows how altruism is relevant to moral, work satisfaction, and commitment to the organization. (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Fahr et al, 1990; Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985; Lui & Cohen, 2010; Organ & Ryan, 1995; Podsakoff et al, 2000; Puffer, 1987; Smith, Organ & Near, 1983).

Several studies have shown that altruistic behaviour observed in OCB gives positive impact to the success of an organization by increasing productivity, better use of resources, coordination of group work, development and stability of performance, recruitment and adaptability of workers. OCB can be seen as a significant contributor in achieving psychological well-being at the workplace. Just imagine if all workers practice sincere and voluntary behaviour it may result in a cheerful and harmonious workplace. Thus, if workers are in a good state, it is not impossible that they can improve on their performance. No worker is willing to work under pressure as it will decrease productivity and cause losses to the organization. Such situations must be avoided and with OCB it can breathe new life to the environment at the workplace.

At higher learning institutes, according to Somech and Bogler (2002), voluntary behaviour can increase performance related to the need of students, increase in discipline and class performance. These are supported by the findings from a study by Oplatka (2009) which showed that the behaviour of an organization is connected to positive emotions not just from students but also colleagues. Oplatka (2009) also suggested the findings of her study are significantly relevant and applicable to other studies of student achievement, teacher satisfaction, self-satisfaction, school reputation, image and discipline.

A study by Waheed and Shah (2014) stated that universities should encourage lecturers to be more spontaneous and ready in receiving roles that extend beyond their main job descriptions. This will indirectly change the functions of universities as a whole to be more efficient, effective and competitive. In other words, OCB which is rooted in altruism and *ihsan* is suitable in driving productivity of an organization.

## Methodology

The respondents of this study were the lecturers of KUIM which were 55 in total. The study was conducted using the purposive sampling technique. The instrument used to measure OCB was created by Podsakoff et al. (1990) and it contains 4 items which concern altruism.

Table 1: Items on altruism dimensions

Dimension	No of positive items	No of negative items	Total items
Altruism	1,2,3,4,	-	4

## Findings

### Demographic of Respondents

Table 3 shows the descriptive analyses of the respondents' demographic. For age, the respondents who were between 22 to 30 years old are 9 in total; those from 31 to 40 years old are 36 overall.

There were 9 respondents aged 41 to 50 years old; and 1 respondent who were aged between 51 to 60 years old. When it comes to grades, DG41 records the highest number of respondents with 43. Whereas there were 12 respondents who are in grade DS45 and one individual who is of grade DS51/52. When it comes to years of service, there were 8 respondents who have served less than 3 years. 23 respondents have served from 4 to 7 years and 13 respondents who have served 8 to 10 years. For those who have served 11 to 13 years there were 2 respondents and for 14 to 17 years there were 3 respondents. Finally, there were 3 respondents who have served 18 years and above.

Table 2: Respondents' demographic

Type	Total
<b>Age</b>	
22-30 years old	9
31-40 years old	36
41-50 years old	9
51-60 years old	1
Total	55
<b>Grade</b>	
DS 41	43
DS 45	12
DS 51/52	1
Total	55
<b>Years of service</b>	
0-3 years	8
4-7 years	23
8-10 years	13
11-13 years	2
14-17 years	3
18 years and above	3
Total	55

### Analysis of Mean

Table 3 below shows how mean scores are interpreted which is based on Davis interpretation of mean scores (1971)

Table 3: Interpretation of mean scores (Davis, 1971)

Category	Mean score
High	3.68 – 5.00
Average	2.34 – 3.67
Low	1.00 – 2.33

Table 4: Min Details For Each Item

		SD	D	U	A	SA
B1	I help other staffs who have heavy workloads	3.6	10.9	10.9	<b>50.9</b>	23.6
B2	I help other staffs who are on leave	5.5	23.6	<b>34.5</b>	30.9	5.5
B3	I am ready to spend time to help other staffs who have work problem	2.7	16.4	25.5	<b>38.2</b>	12.7
B4	I provide orientation to new staffs even though it is not required	9.1	10.9	25.5	<b>45.5</b>	9.1

Strongly disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Unsure (U), Agree (A) and Strongly agree (SA)

Findings show that the level of altruism among the lecturers at KUIM overall is at M=3.91. Items B1 (50.9%), B3 (38.2%), and B4 (45.4%) received the highest percentage of agreement from the respondents. Item B2 is the only item where the highest number of percentage (34.5%) is recorded for unsure (U). In conclusion, the findings on the level of Altruism among the staff of KUIM are at the highest level.

Table 5 : Mean level of OCB

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Altruism	3.91	0.58	High

## Discussions

Ariffin (2014) quoted Bommer et al. (2003) in his study in which it was found that excellent staffs leave an organization because of a phenomenon known as *downward spiral*. This is where the staffs lost their spirit to exhibit OCB due to the lack of dynamics group members. In other words, a lecturer with high level of OCB will become a role model to his colleagues. Therefore, it will lift the spirit of the others in the organization. It is such a waste if the human resource management does not care about the existence of such workers that could improve KUIM in the future. The human resource management must be aware and aggressive in finding the best solution towards increasing the motivations of fellow lecturers; so that they will continue to collaborate towards improving KUIM.

Practicing the values of OCG among lecturers is definitely a good behaviour. Nowadays, lecturers are burdened with their work; and in order to reduce the stress, adapting the values of OCG in themselves can prepare them for any challenges such as burnout.

In an organization, the productivity and excellence are not individually driven but achieved through working as a group. Adapting the values of OCG is expected to help in striving for organizational excellence in the world of today. Exhibition of good behaviours can cause a group to work together in ensuring that the organization achieves its goals. Therefore, the result of a close relationship between colleagues translates to a new dimension of collaboration which is necessary in the current environment of work. This is explained by a study conducted by Amin, Ismail, Rasid, & Andrew (2013) that found OCG as the main component that contributed towards performance. This is supported by another study conducted by Mokhtar (2016) who stated that there is a correlation between OCG and adaptive work performance.



In explaining the concept of *ihсан* in work, we cannot deviate from the three things that shape our personality as a worker.

#### 1. Intention

OCG is an action of a worker and it starts with intention. What is meant by this is that in doing work the intention should be because of Allah S.W.T. Nabi S.A.W mentioned:

*Verily all of our actions depend on our intention, and every person will receive whatever is suitable with the intention (Wish). Those with the intention of doing something because of Allah and his Messenger, his actions are for Allah and his Prophet (Dawud, 2009)*

Interpretations of this hadith is that all our actions will start with the intention of doing. This means that whether or not our actions are received or validated will depend on our intention. This hadith on the concept of intention is among those that become an essence in Islamic teachings. Imam As-Syafi'i believed that this hadith covered seventy chapters in fiqh and a substantial amount of ulama' believes that it covers two thirds of the knowledge of Islam (Rosidi, 2017).

The proof of how important the component of intention in Islam is where Imam Nawawi placed it in the beginning of his book *Hadis Arba'in*. Imam As Sayuthi translated the meaning of intention as "the desire shown towards an action that will acquire the acceptance of Allah" (Al-Suyuthi, 1995). A good, correct and sincere intention can help to improve professionalism from the aspects of motives, directions, aim and others (Ghozali & Kamri, 2015)

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the behaviour of an individual is influenced by their intention to behave. Intention is the manifestation of competence of an individual based on their desire. If an individual desires to perform an action, he tends towards doing it (Ajzen, 1991). It can be concluded here that intention is the desire or the need which is then followed by an action or behaviour. Therefore intention is vital towards work (Hidayah, 2012).

#### 1. Thorough when working (*Itqan*)

*"Verily Allah likes when a person does his work with Itqan."* (al-'Ummal, t.t)

The interpretation of this hadith is that there are demands in Islam for its followers to do their work with *itqan* which translates to thorough and meticulous. This behavior is associated with quality work. Values such as perseverance and focus in working will give positive impacts (Idris, 2018)

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَشْرِي نَفْسَهُ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ رَءُوفٌ بِالْعِبَادِ ٢٠٧

*207. There are humans who sacrificed themselves to find the acceptance of Allah; and Allah is the closest to his servants*

According to Syed Qutb, this ayat (Al-Baqarah: 2) explains how human is willing to give all of his soul and body to Allah without hoping for anything in return other than His acceptance. Islam characterized work as one of the instruments that is used to acquire his acceptance and it is demanded continuously. Three important factors in acquiring the acceptance of Allah is tauhid which is believing in the unity of Allah, syaria: following the rules of Allah and finally akhlak which is behaviour that is kept good and practiced by all workers of an organization towards ensuring quality of work (Hayaati, 2010)

A skilled worker will continue to do detailed work. Being meticulous while working covers all aspects from time-keeping, problem solving and others. This matches the sayings of Allah in surat Al-Qasas:26:

قَالَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا يَا أَبَتِ اسْتَجِرْهُ إِنَّ خَيْرَ مَن اسْتَجَرْتَ الْقَوِيُّ الْأَمِينُ ٢٦

*One of the two women said: "O father, take him as a worker (herding sheep), verily the best worker you can hire is someone who works hard and is honest"*

## 2. The concept of Mas'uliyah (Responsible)

This concept is closely linked to trust and integrity. This is because when trust is given, responsibility and integrity have to be exercised in addition to the trust that was given. Mas'uliyah refers to the sense of responsibility. Everyone will be held accountable for their actions when working. In other words, this concept carries with it the responsibility of carrying out each of the tasks and duties entrusted to it. A professional will assume that any given work or assignment is not only a responsibility to the chairman but also to Allah s.w.t

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا

*"Allah has commanded you to give all kinds of trust to his members(those who are deserving), and when you execute justice among men, He will justly judge you. Verily, Allah (His message) has given you the best instruction. Verily, Allah is always listening and seeing. " (al-Nisa,' 4:58)*

It can be concluded that the concept of mas'uliyah refers to something that is given to a person to be performed or taken care and that he will be held responsible if there is a mistake. This means that if something bad happens to the trust that has been given, then one has to take responsibility.

The above is directly linked to integrity. In short, integrity is divided into two main principles (i) individuals and (ii) organizations. But integrity refers to the superior quality of society that exists in individuals and this quality is based on the principle of honesty and high morality (Ariffin & Ahmad, 2016). Generally, integrity is a code of behaviour at the individual and organizational level. Therefore, working in good faith can be done and will be rewarded by Allah S.W.T. Not only are we rewarded, but we can also ensure good relationships between our colleagues and employers. Indirectly, our workplace is always harmonious and upbeat and helps us to increase our day-to-day productivity.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Altruism is an additional element that must be present among all lecturers at a higher learning institute. In a sufficiently complex working environment, each lecturer requires voluntary behaviour in order to maintain a good working environment and quality. Having the characteristics of altruism and superior courtesy is not an obligation but a necessity today.

By instilling a high degree of altruism and *ihsan* among workers, it enhances accountability and in turn contributes to a good social exchange within an organization. The value of altruism and *ihsan* should also be viewed by human resource management as an important predictor in planning all training activities and modules meant for strengthening holistic human capital. Human resource management should be aware of and play a clear role in ensuring that lecturers are competent in their work. Human resource management should also play a key role in raising the quality of holistic human capital among lecturers to create a comprehensive work climate. In other words, Altruism and *ihsan* are one of the best ways to ensure that the psychological well-being in the workplace is in balance.

The study has explained the concept behind altruism through the perspective of work. Similarity between altruism as a concept and altruism at work can bring significant contribution to human resource in an institution; specifically in ensuring that all workers are at their best. It is hoped that this

study becomes the starting point for future studies which compare and contrast the concepts of altruism when working from the views of the west and that of Islam. Findings from such studies will definitely help to develop human capital and improve productivity. In essence, this study shows how altruism helps significantly in developing competent human capital. Furthermore, it also elaborates on how theoretically similar the concept of altruism and *ihsan* where both concepts emphasize on helpful behavior. Such behavior has been exhibited since the time of the prophet Rasulullah S.A.W from the people of Ansar during the pilgrimage (Alias, 2020). Nevertheless, naturally we are born as khalifah and one of the tasks of a khalifah is to help others in any given situation. We believe that this article will become a valuable source of reading material towards developing future studies which are more comprehensive by scholars in the field.

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