

# Positioning Design Profession in a Belief System: An Approach to Integrate Tawhidic Principles in Design Learning and Practice

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## Abstract

Tawhidic principles are concepts of al-iman (belief), al-ilm (knowledge) and al-amal (pious acts and efforts). Al-iman is the belief in the existence of one God and creator, with a commitment to his teachings and revelations. Therefore, design which is believed to be value based requires a holistic approach as this will help in observing the built and natural environment using critical eyes and mind; and also build highly effective habits in designers as a local player to address local issues and as a global player for the betterment of the world. In the light of this, this paper seeks the knowledge regarding belief system, gives the general overview of tawhidic principles, illuminates on design learning and finally tried to integrate tawhidic principles in design learning and practice by proposing five approaches that can be used in design practice.

**Keywords:** Design learning, Formal and informal education, Tacit knowledge, Tawhidic, Belief system

## 1. Belief System

A belief system is a set of mutually supportive beliefs. The beliefs may be religious, philosophical, ideological or a combination of these (Wikipedia, 2012). According to Glover (2011), beliefs are always a part of a belief system and belief systems are difficult to completely revise. Therefore, he suggested that beliefs have to be considered holistically because; no belief exists in isolation in the mind of the believer. They always implicate and relate to other beliefs. Fringe (1997) stated that there are two types of belief system; personal and global belief system. He explained personal belief system as the actual set of precepts from which we live our daily life, those which govern our thoughts, words and actions. However, when talking about a global belief system, the personal beliefs of most of us only play a small part. To determine the global belief system, we need to look at those who exert great influences in the day-to-day workings of our world. That is, it is the dominant drives of the dominant

people in the world government, business and religion. There are two main components that constitute a belief system; religion and materialism.

### *1.1 Religion*

Religion is the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods. According to Wikipedia (2012), is a collection of beliefs system, cultural system, and world views that relate humanity to spirituality and sometimes to moral values. Religion is sometimes used interchangeably with faith or belief system; however, according to Durkheim (1915), religion differs from private belief in that it is something eminently social. Religion can be sub-grouped into two, which are monotheism and polytheism. Monotheism is the belief in the existence of one God or in the oneness of God (Britannica, 1986). They are also known as “people of the book” because they follow the revealed guidance. Examples of monotheism are Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Polytheism is the worship or belief in multiple deities usually assembled into a pantheon of gods and goddesses, along with their own religions and rituals. They are also called animism. Examples of polytheism are; Buddhism, Hinduism etc.

### *1.2 Materialism*

This is the tendency to consider material possession and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values. Materialism results in some ideologies formulated by man which constitute their belief systems. These include; capitalism, socialism, communism, nationalism, racism and atheism.

## **2. Design in the Belief System**

Design is that area of human experience, skill, and knowledge which is concerned with man’s ability to mould his environment to suit his material and spiritual needs (Archer, 1973). Therefore, since the two main components of belief system are religion (spiritual needs) and materialism (material needs), this implies that design can be successfully used to mould our environment to suit this two components. Thereby integrating design into the belief system.

In religious aspect, design should be seen as a tools and means to propagate religious belief. This can be achieved by using design as a local player to address local issues to meet the spiritual needs. Jones (1970) explained that design can be used to initiate change in man-made things; therefore, it can serve as an agent of change for the betterment of the world. However, materialism has come to stay and the process cannot be reversed. But we can turn the face of materialism in the right direction through the integration of design into the belief system.

## **3. The Influence of Belief System on the Value Circle**

The value circle comprise of the things we value, relate with or things that controls our way of life. The influence of belief system on the value circle results in the way we see and value things. From Figure 1, some of the components of the value circle are; Natural environment, built environment and cultural system.



Figure 1: The value circle

### 3.1 *Natural Environment*

This encompasses all living and non-living things occurring naturally on earth or some region thereof. According to Johnson et al. (1997), it encompasses the interaction of all living species. Natural environment is often used as a synonym for habitat. Therefore, our religious belief and formulated ideologies (which are the two main components that constitute belief system) greatly influence the way we see and value our natural environment.

### 3.2 *Built Environment*

Built environment refer to the human-made surroundings that provides the setting for human activity; ranging in scale from buildings and parks or green space to neighbourhoods and cities that can often include their supporting infrastructure such as water supply or energy network (Wikipedia, 2012). According to Roof & Oleru (2008), is the human-made space in which people live, work and recreate on a day-to-day basis. In recent years, public health research has explained the definition of built environment to include healthy food access, community gardens and workability (Lee et al., 2012). Crossly (2003, p38) said that the environments that people craft round themselves are rich with information, about personalities, values and lifestyles. Norman (2004, p225) also stated that our possessions reflect our personalities. Therefore, since built environment is a material, spatial and cultural product of human labour that combines physical elements and energy in forms for living, working and playing; then, belief system strongly has great influence on the nature of environment people built around them.

### 3.3 *Cultural System*

Cultural system is the interaction of different elements of culture. Cultural system is quite different from social system; however, sometimes both are referred to as the socio-cultural system. We both live our lives in social systems of relationships and exchange and cultural systems of beliefs and ideologies. The social theory of cultural system is based on action system which is build up around a general theory of society, this is codified within a cybernetic model featuring four functional imperatives: adaptation, goal-attainment, integration, and pattern maintenance. Ritzer & Goodman (2004) saw these action systems acting at different levels of analysis, starting with the behavioural organism and building to the cultural system.

According to Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology (2003), cultural system is a perspective that thinks of culture and its environment as a number of linked systems in which change occurs through a series of minor, linked variations in one or more of these systems. Some areas where cultural system exists are in politics, economy, science and technology, art etc.

#### **4. The Tawhidic Principles**

Tawhidic is the Islamic way of life, the fundamental of all Islamic civilization, which is process, means and end together (Murray, 2007). It is acceptance of one creator and His divine guidance of humanity (Al-Qur'an 2:170; 43:22-24; 7:28-29). Tawhid implies both the mission and morality of humankind in both social and spiritual contexts. The mankind's responsibilities under tawhid fall into two categories; fard'ain which is an individual's obligation to perform his or her religious duties and fard kifayah, which is an obligation for man to serve the entire community, through services to each other, which is necessary for the community to live safely and comfortably. Thus, as designers, the obligation is to improve the community through innovation and creative skills.

Tawhidic principles are concepts of al-iman (belief), al-ilm (knowledge) and al-amal (pious acts and efforts). Al-iman is the belief in the existence of one God and creator, with a commitment to his teachings and revelations. However, Al-iman is deepened by al-ilm (Al-Qur'an 17:36), which is the responsibility of all muslims to seek (Al-Qur'an 92:4; 29:69) in order to fulfill and perform al-amal. Knowledge (spiritual, wisdom and scientific) is the foundation of all acts of al-amal which would be futile and unproductive without the search for further knowledge to enhance the wellbeing of society (Al-Qur'an 31:20). Islam places great importance on scientific discovery, knowledge and wisdom to develop civilization (Al-Qur'an 35:28). Al-iman and al-ilm manifested through al-amal is the basis of the advancement of civilization for the benefit of humankind. Therefore, in Islam, a person who of faith, knowledge and pious devotion, manifested in effort and acts, using reason and experience and adheres to the teachings of Al-Qur'an and Prophets is a person of Taqwa, adhering to the philosophy of Tawhid.

#### **5. Design Learning**

Learning is the acquisition of knowledge or skills through experience, practice or study or by being taught. Wikipedia (2012) also define learning as a process of acquiring new, or modifying existing knowledge, behaviours, skills, values or preferences and may involve synthesizing different types of information. Design, an area of human experience, skill and knowledge which is concerned with man's ability to mould his environment to suit his material and spiritual need (Archer, 1973) requires learning process which can either be through formal education or informal education

Formal education is a process of training and developing people in knowledge, skills, mind and character in a structured and certified program. Formal education is always within a specific time frame and regulations. The outcome of formal education is paper qualification.

Informal education is education outside of a standard school setting. The outcome of informal education is tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is integral to the entirety of a person's consciousness, is acquired largely through association with other people and requires joint or shared activities to be imparted from one to another. According to Business Dictionary (2012), it is unwritten, unspoken and hidden vast storehouse of knowledge held by practically every normal human being, based on his or her emotions, experiences, insights, intuition, observations and internalized information.

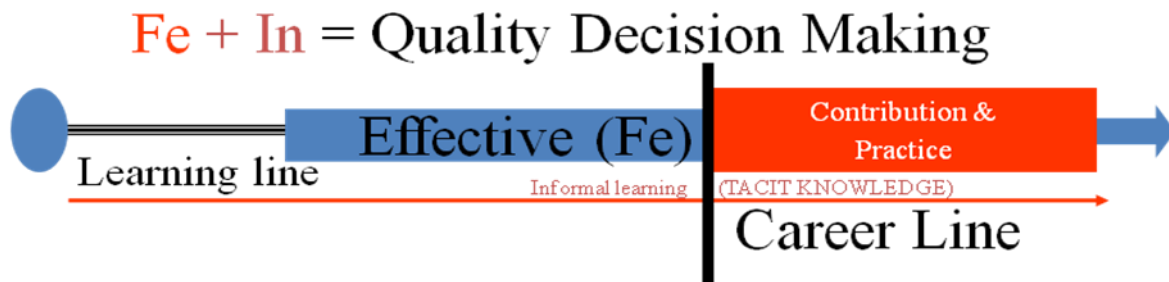


Figure 2: The learning and career line

The combination of formal education (Fe) and informal education (In) result in quality decision making in design practice. From Figure 2, formal education is more effective at the learning line while career line involves more of informal education and tacit knowledge. Learning process is value free while reasons for learning are value based. Furthermore, from the tawhidic principles, design is seen to be value based, therefore it is important to understand and practice the “Akidah” in all aspects of life, identify basic design elements that conform to Islamic principle and also observe built and natural environment with critical eyes and mind (Subhan Allah). These will built highly effective habits in designers as a local player to address local issues and as a global player for the betterment of the world. Some of these habits are that, designers will;

- i. Be proactive as this will develop the ability to control one’s environment, rather than be controlled by it.
- ii. Begin tasks with the end results in mind, avoid distractions and concentrate only on relevant activities.
- iii. Organise correctly and undertake the most important tasks first in a step by step approach.
- iv. Look for win-win strategies so that all benefits.
- v. Listen to people first and understand them before trying to make them understand you. This will help to maintain positive relationships with people.
- vi. Look to develop synergy between people which will develop a better outcome, greater than what individuals can achieve working by themselves.
- vii. Continually seek self renewal, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, socially and physically.

## 6. Five Tawhidic Approaches in Design Practice

- i. System Thinking: This is an approach of seeing the world and events as a whole, where forces behind them are related. This will help to see relationships and also how to change things effectively with minimum effort, i.e., to find leverage points in the system.
- ii. Personal Mastery: This is the process of continually deepening and enriching our personal visions, the focusing of energies, developing patience and seeing reality objectively.
- iii. Mental Models: These are unconscious metaphors of how we see things, which influence how we act. If we can understand how we see things, we are in a better position to see reality more objectively.
- iv. Building Shared Vision: This involves developing a shared picture which will create commitment, rather than just compliance by individuals
- v. Team building: is the ability of the group to rid themselves of their assumptions and begin to think together. This must be done openly without anyone trying to win.

## 7. Conclusion



According to Senge (1990), design learning and practice can be explained as where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspirations are set free and where people are continually learning to see the whole together. Therefore, tawhidic approaches can be focused towards seeing wholes, rather than parts; seeing people as active participants, rather than helpless reactors; and creating the future, rather than reacting to the past.

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