

# VALUE FREE AND VALUE LADEN IN ISLAMIC VALUE-BASED MANAGEMENT RESEARCH: AN INTEGRATIVE STUDY OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE AND RESEARCH ETHICS

**Anton Prasetyo<sup>1)</sup>, Ahmed Hassan Ebed Elsalam Albawab<sup>2)</sup>, Rizqi Adhyka Kusumawati<sup>3\*</sup>**

<sup>1, 2, 3)</sup> Universitas Islam Indonesia

\*) Corresponding Author

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## Abstract

The long-standing debate about whether science should be value-free *or* value-laden *has* resurfaced as scientific research is used as a basis for public decision-making and organizational policy. On the one hand, the positivist tradition envisions science as devoid of moral, political, and religious considerations. On the other hand, recent studies in the philosophy of science suggest that this image is too naive. Heather Douglas, for example, argues that the ideal of value-free science is inadequate and undesirable because scientific decisions always involve inductive risks and moral consequences that cannot be ignored, so non-epistemic values inevitably come into play at various stages of research (Douglas, 2000; Douglas, 2009). Helen Longino adds that scientific theories are underpinned by background assumptions imbued with values and ideologies, so objectivity is better understood as the result of critical practices within the scientific community rather than as the complete absence of values (Longino, 1996). In management research, particularly when it touches on business ethics, social responsibility, and sustainability, this value dimension is increasingly evident, while the literature on Islamic business ethics and *Islamic work ethics* (IWE) explicitly places monotheism, justice, trustworthiness, and maslahah as guiding principles for organizational behavior (Sofyan et al., 2024; Zaroni & Lestari, 2025; Sudirman et al., 2024). This article compiles an integrative literature review of these writings to propose a framework for responsible objectivity in Islamic value-based management research, namely scientific practices that maintain methodological rigor while honestly acknowledging and managing the role of Islamic values in an explicit and accountable manner.

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**Keywords:** *value free, value laden, Islamic value-based management, Islamic work ethic*

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background

The idea that scientists ideally operate in a value-free space was once dominant in the philosophy of science. Science was imagined as a purely factual activity: scientists observed, measured, and concluded without any intrusion of their moral preferences or worldviews. This view was later formulated as *the value-free ideal*, the belief that non-epistemic values should be kept out of the scientific process to maintain objectivity. However, as science increasingly served as the basis for environmental regulation, health policy, and risk management, philosophers of science began to recognize that this sterile image was not realistic. Douglas points out that whenever scientists must decide how strong evidence is sufficient to issue a warning, they cannot avoid considering the moral consequences of being wrong, and it is at this point that non-epistemic values inevitably come into play (Douglas, 2000; Douglas, 2009). When this debate is placed in the context of management research, the issue becomes both more complex and more concrete. Research on layoffs, compensation policies, corporate governance, digital marketing practices, and sustainability strategies clearly deals with more than just numbers and models; it directly touches on how organizations treat people and the environment. Zyphur and Pierides even trace the history of quantitative methods in business research to show that statistics and probability themselves are shaped by values, including choices about what to measure and how to interpret those numbers, making the claim that quantitative methods are neutral difficult to maintain (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020). From a risk assessment perspective, they add that value- *laden decisions* arise when scientists and policymakers must determine

acceptable levels of risk to society, so their task is not to expel values but to manage them transparently and responsibly (Elliott, 2019). From an Islamic perspective, management studies cannot be separated from a much more explicit value framework. Islamic business ethics does not simply add religious nuances to modern economic practices, but offers a set of binding normative principles, such as the prohibition of usury, the obligation of honesty, trustworthiness in managing deposits, and the obligation to pay attention to the rights of workers and consumers. Sofyan et al. (2024) demonstrated through bibliometric analysis that research on Islamic business ethics focuses on justice, social responsibility, and sharia governance, making Islamic values the primary framework for scientific discussion. Meanwhile, the research map on *Islamic work ethics* presented by Zaroni and Lestari confirms that IWE is widely studied in relation to motivation, commitment, and performance, so that Islamic work values are not only a normative discourse but also an empirically measured variable linked to organizational outcomes (Zaroni & Lestari, 2025). It is at this point that questions about the possibility and desire to be *value-free* become unfamiliar to researchers and management practitioners who depart from Islamic values, whose research is intended from the outset to bring benefits and avoid injustice.

### Research purposes

Departing from the tension between the ideal of value-free science and the reality of value-laden research, this paper aims to do three things in a targeted manner. First, it seeks to re-explain key debates in the philosophy of science regarding the role of values in science, highlighting in particular Douglas's arguments about inductive risk and his critique of *the value-free ideal*, as well as Longino's ideas about how cognitive and non-cognitive values are intertwined in the formation and evaluation of scientific theories (Douglas, 2000; Douglas, 2009; Longino, 1996). Second, it aims to connect these philosophical debates with contemporary management research practices, which rely heavily on quantitative methods and are increasingly saturated with ethical topics such as CSR, sustainability, and governance, making claims of complete neutrality problematic and in need of reexamination, as Zyphur and Pierides point out when tracing the roots of values in the history of management statistics (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020). Third, and this is the core contribution, this study aims to formulate a framework for responsible objectivity in Islamic value-based management research by utilizing findings in the literature on Islamic business ethics and IWE, such as the theme map revealed by Sofyan et al. and empirical evidence of the influence of IWE on performance, welfare, and family welfare demonstrated by Sudirman and colleagues (Sofyan et al., 2024; Sudirman et al., 2024).

### Formulation of the problem

To keep the discussion focused, this study focuses on three interrelated main questions. The first question touches on the realm of philosophy of science: to what extent do the recent arguments put forward by Douglas and Longino shift the way we understand the relationship between facts and values, and what are the implications for the claim that science can or should be value-free (Douglas, 2000; Douglas, 2009; Longino, 1996)? The second question addresses the practice of management research: when the quantitative methods used are found to have a history of being *value-laden* as Zyphur and Pierides describe, and when regulatory decisions based on science are recognized as containing many value considerations as Elliott points out, to what extent can management research still claim to be neutral, and how should values be managed within it (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020; Elliott, 2019)? The third question touches on the core of Islamic value-based management: how the research map of Islamic business ethics and IWE as proposed by Sofyan et al., Zaroni and Lestari, and Sudirman et al. can help us see that Islamic management research has been *value-laden from the start*, and how from there can be formulated a model of objectivity that does not eliminate values, but instead acknowledges them and is accountable for them under the framework of monotheism, justice, trust, and maslahah (Sofyan et al., 2024; Zaroni & Lestari, 2025; Sudirman et al., 2024).

### Framework

The thinking in this paper can be understood as three interrelated and reinforcing layers. The first layer rests on the philosophy of science, which critiques *the value-free* ideal. In this section, Douglas's thinking on *inductive risk* serves as an important entry point because every decision regarding the standard of evidence and the level of caution in drawing conclusions always has moral implications when it turns out to be wrong, so that non-epistemic values are actually impossible to completely eliminate from science (Douglas, 2000; Douglas, 2009). The second layer refers to Longino's view that science is a social practice governed by the rules of scientific discussion; objectivity does not arise from the elimination of values, but from a process of mutual criticism within the scientific community that allows for a diversity

of perspectives and openness to assumptions (Longino, 1996; Vacura, 2021). The third layer integrates this perspective with the Islamic management paradigm, which views knowledge and the activity of managing an organization as a trust and a form of worship. Within this framework, the values of monotheism, justice, trustworthiness, and welfare serve as a lens for assessing the merits of business practices and assessing research examining these practices, as evident in various bibliometric and empirical studies on Islamic business ethics and IWE (Sofyan et al., 2024; Zaroni & Lestari, 2025; Sudirman et al., 2024; Setiabudi, 2024). Based on these three layers, this paper proposes the concept of responsible objectivity, a form of objectivity that does not pretend to be value-free, but instead consciously submits to honest scientific procedures and to Islamic values as a moral compass.

### Theoretical basis

The first theoretical foundation rests on a classic discussion in the philosophy of science regarding the place of values in science. Douglas revives the issue of *inductive risk* to demonstrate that scientific decisions are judged not only by logical accuracy but also by the risk of error and its attendant social consequences. When a scientist determines how strong evidence is sufficient before making a policy recommendation, he or she is simultaneously making a moral judgment about the type and level of risk that is acceptable (Douglas, 2000). In his monograph, *Science, Policy, and the Value-Free Ideal*, Douglas (2009) then develops a more systematic critique of the notion that science should be value-free. He proposes a new ideal that recognizes that values may and even need to be involved throughout the scientific process, but their role must be placed in a measured manner at certain points to maintain epistemic integrity. Longino complements this critique by showing that the rigid separation between cognitive values such as the simplicity and explanatory power of theories and noncognitive values no longer holds when we examine how theories are actually selected and defended in scientific practice. Background assumptions imbued with social and political values contribute to shaping which theories are considered reasonable and acceptable (Longino, 1996). Vacura (2021), through a rereading of Longino's ideas, asserts that scientific objectivity fundamentally depends on a process of social criticism conducted with norms of openness, fairness, and respect for diverse perspectives within the scientific community.

The second foundation relates to management research methodology, which is often perceived as objective, yet in fact contains various value judgments. Zyphur and Pierides' article in the *Journal of Business Ethics* provides a historical overview of how statistics and probability were adopted into management and organizational research. They show that the choice of analytical techniques, the formulation of variables, and the interpretation of numbers are never truly neutral, but are influenced by certain value assumptions, such as an orientation toward controlling and predicting human behavior (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020). Elliott (2019), through his study of regulatory science and risk assessment, asserts that value-laden assessments are unavoidable. Therefore, the primary challenge is no longer how to eliminate values, but rather how to design mechanisms to manage them in a transparent and auditable manner, for example by clarifying which stakeholders are affected and how risks are distributed among them. The third foundation draws from the literature on Islamic business ethics and *Islamic Work Ethics* (IWE). Sofyan and colleagues, through a bibliometric analysis of international publications, found that research on Islamic business ethics focuses on themes such as fairness in transactions, sharia governance, social responsibility, and sustainability. All of these themes stem from the values of the Qur'an and Sunnah as the primary normative references (Sofyan et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Zaroni and Lestari (2025) mapped the development of Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) research and demonstrated that Islamic work ethics is closely linked to performance, job satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational culture. Thus, Islamic work values are treated as psychological and organizational constructs whose effects can be measured and tested. Studies by Sudirman et al. (2024) and Setiabudi (2024) confirmed that Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) positively influences maslahah-oriented performance, family well-being, and knowledge-sharing behavior. This demonstrates that the integration of Islamic values in the workplace is not merely a normative ideal but has a strong empirical basis and is relevant for the development of management theory and practice.

### Previous Research

In retrospect, the study of values in science and management has developed along initially separate paths, then gradually converged. In the philosophy of science, Douglas became one of the figures who rekindled the debate by demonstrating that claims of value neutrality collapse when we examine methodological decisions that carry the risk of error and moral consequences. Through a series of writings from the early 2000s through his 2009 monograph, he consistently rejected the *value-free* ideal and urged the explicit recognition of the role of values in science, particularly

when science is used as a basis for public policy (Douglas, 2000; Douglas, 2009). Longino and his commentators, such as Vacura, reinforced this view by situating science within a social context, where values and power relations shape which theories are considered legitimate. Within this framework, objectivity is understood as the result of a fair and open critical process, not as the result of a total elimination of values (Longino, 1996; Vacura, 2021). On the other hand, in the business and management research landscape, Zyphur and Pierides' article marks a crucial point by demonstrating that quantitative methods, often considered neutral, are actually born from a history steeped in specific objectives, particularly the desire to control and predict organizational behavior. Consequently, these seemingly cold and objective numbers actually harbor traces of values and interests (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020).

Meanwhile, in the realm of Islamic economics and management, research directly linking Islamic ethics to business practices and work behavior is growing rapidly. A study by Sofyan and colleagues in *the International Journal of Ethics and Systems* documents how Islamic themes in business ethics research encompass issues such as management quality, Islamic social finance, and corporate social responsibility, while highlighting under-explored areas and opening up opportunities for future research (Sofyan et al., 2024). A bibliometric study conducted by *Westscience Press* shows that, in the context of the global economy, publications on Islamic business ethics are increasingly concentrating on topics such as fairness, sustainability, and sharia governance, all of which illustrate ethics as a framework for evaluating business performance that cannot be separated from values (Westscience, 2024). On the IWE side, Zaroni and Lestari identify trends and future directions for Islamic work ethics research and demonstrate its link to organizational performance (Zaroni & Lestari, 2025). These findings are reinforced by studies by Sudirman et al., Setiabudi, and Saban, which empirically demonstrate that IWE impacts employee performance, well-being, and even counterproductive behavior (Sudirman et al., 2024; Setiabudi, 2024; Saban et al., 2020). However, studies that explicitly reconcile the philosophical debate on *value-free* and *value-laden* with an Islamic values-based management framework are still relatively rare, creating a theoretical gap that this paper aims to fill.

## Research methodology

This research uses an integrative literature review approach. This approach does not stop at compiling article summaries, but seeks to unify and reconcile several clusters of discourse that have developed in relatively different areas, namely the philosophy of science, management research methodology, and Islamic value-based management. Literature searches were conducted through reputable databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and several relevant international journal portals. Keywords used include *value-free* ideal, *values in science*, *inductive risk*, *value-laden science*, *Islamic business ethics*, and *Islamic work ethic*, which were then combined with the terms *management* and *organizational performance* to narrow the search results to the management context. The inclusion criteria were strictly structured to include only journal articles and academic books that explicitly discuss the role of values in science, review the implications of the *value-laden nature* of management research methodology, or examine Islamic business ethics and IWE with a clear data base included in the analysis (Douglas, 2009; Zyphur & Pierides, 2020; Sofyan et al., 2024; Zaroni & Lestari, 2025).

## Discussion

When arguments from the philosophy of science cluster are placed alongside management research practices and Islamic management literature, the strong impression that emerges is that the *value-free* ideal appears more as a normative ideal born of a specific historical context, rather than an accurate depiction of how science actually works. Douglas points out that even in the hard sciences, decisions about when evidence is sufficient are inextricably linked to assessments of the moral consequences of errors, especially when science is used as a basis for public policy (Douglas, 2000; Douglas, 2009). Longino adds that scientific theories never exist in a vacuum; they are shaped by scientific communities that carry specific values, interests, and power structures. In such situations, objectivity demands a critical procedure that allows these values to be openly tested, challenged, and negotiated within the scientific community (Longino, 1996; Vacura, 2021). When this perspective is transferred to the realm of management research, claims of complete neutrality become problematic, as they have the potential to obscure the true values at work, for example when financial efficiency is tacitly held to be the highest value without considering the impact of policies on workers and the environment. Zyphur and Pierides' contribution reinforces this position from a methodological perspective. By tracing the history of the use of statistics and probability in management research, they show that quantitative techniques have never been simply neutral tools, but have always been adopted within the framework of specific objectives, such as controlling employee behavior,

predicting production output, or even justifying layoff decisions (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020). Elliott, in his study of risk science, asserts that ultimately there is always a decision about how much risk society deems acceptable, and that such a decision is clearly value-laden and unavoidable (Elliott, 2019). If this is the case, then management research, which directly addresses human work, resource distribution, and social impact, is almost impossible to imagine as a value-free activity. Precisely for this reason, the need for an ethical and normative framework becomes crucial, not as an afterthought, but as part of the research design from the outset. At this point, the literature on Islamic business ethics and *Islamic Work Ethics* (IWE) offers a different yet highly relevant perspective. Sofyan and colleagues demonstrate that international research on Islamic business ethics revolves around themes of justice, social responsibility, sharia governance, and sustainability, all of which stem from the values of the Qur'an and Sunnah, not simply from social agreements or positive regulations (Sofyan et al., 2024). A *Westscience bibliometric study* reveals a similar pattern in the global economic context: publications on Islamic business ethics emphasize the importance of maintaining integrity, avoiding exploitation, and ensuring long-term benefits for society (Westscience, 2024). In the realm of Islamic Work Ethics (IWE), Zaroni and Lestari summarized research developments linking Islamic work ethics to various organizational achievements, while empirical studies conducted by Sudirman et al., Setiabudi, and Saban showed that internalization of Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) correlates with increased performance, intrinsic motivation, and constructive behavior in the workplace (Zaroni & Lestari, 2025; Sudirman et al., 2024; Setiabudi, 2024; Saban et al., 2020). In other words, management from an Islamic perspective is not only conceptually value-laden, but the values in question have also been formulated into constructs that can be measured, tested, and linked to indicators of organizational success.

Based on this description, upholding the ideal of value-free science not only seems unrealistic but also inconsistent with the orientation of Muslim researchers who want to make research part of a trust and worship. It makes more sense to speak of responsible objectivity. Within this framework, researchers are not asked to eliminate Islamic values from their work, but rather are encouraged to honestly acknowledge foundational values such as monotheism, justice, trustworthiness, ihsan, and benefit, and explain how these values influence topic selection, variable formulation, and the interpretation of findings. At the same time, researchers remain obligated to maintain methodological rigor, honesty in data reporting, and openness to criticism, as Douglas emphasized when discussing the need to limit the role of values to avoid compromising epistemic integrity (Douglas, 2009). In this perspective, objectivity does not mean being valueless, but rather refraining from manipulating facts to defend certain values and being willing to be accountable for those values. For Islamic value-based management research, this approach opens up space for conducting research that is both scientifically valid and in line with sharia ideals. All selected articles were then grouped into three thematic clusters. The first cluster contains writings on the philosophy of science and value studies in science that represent a critical position on the *value-free* ideal (Douglas, 2000; Douglas, 2009; Longino, 1996; Vacura, 2021). The second cluster contains literature that directly addresses business and management research methodology, with a focus on how statistics and probability contain value and how values are present in the risk assessment process (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020; Elliott, 2019). The third cluster includes literature on Islamic business ethics and IWE, both in the form of bibliometric studies and empirical research examining the influence of IWE on performance, well-being, and the dynamics of work behavior (Sofyan et al., 2024; Westscience, 2024; Zaroni & Lestari, 2025; Sudirman et al., 2024; Setiabudi, 2024). Following this mapping, the analysis proceeded thematically, exploring the intersections and tensions between the three clusters. The results were then synthesized into a conceptual model called "Responsible Objectivity in Islamic Values-Based Management Research," a framework that seeks to combine methodological rigor with explicit recognition of the role of Islamic values in the research process.

## Conclusion

From the series of studies presented, it is clear that the debate over *value-free* and *value-laden* can no longer be viewed as a theoretical discourse relevant only to philosophers of science, but rather has direct consequences for how we design, conduct, and interpret management research, especially when such research is consciously framed within Islamic values. Douglas's argument about *inductive risk* and his critique of the *value-free* ideal, along with Longino's analysis of the role of values in scientific theory formation and evaluation, challenge the notion that good science must be free of values. Instead, both assert that values need to be recognized, acknowledged, and responsibly managed throughout the research process (Douglas, 2000; Douglas, 2009; Longino, 1996). At the same time, contributions by Zyphur, Pierides, and Elliott demonstrate that statistics and risk assessment in management research and regulatory science are also fraught

with normative considerations, making claims of complete neutrality in the field of management increasingly difficult to maintain (Zyphur & Pierides, 2020; Elliott, 2019). On the other hand, the literature on Islamic business ethics and *Islamic Work Ethics* (IWE) emphasizes that management, from an Islamic perspective, has been understood from the outset as an activity oriented toward monotheism, justice, trustworthiness, and maslahah (benefit). These values are not merely normative principles but have been translated into operational concepts that can be tested for their impact on organizational performance, well-being, and behavior (Sofyan et al., 2024; Zaroni & Lestari, 2025; Sudirman et al., 2024; Setiabudi, 2024). Therefore, Islamic values-based management research need not, and should not, pursue a pseudo-ideal of value-freedom. A more pressing challenge is to build a culture of responsible objectivity that requires researchers to honestly acknowledge the underlying values, explain how these values shape research design and analysis, while maintaining methodological rigor and openness to criticism. Going forward, this idea can be tested and enriched through empirical research, for example by examining how Muslim researchers at various institutions understand and practice the relationship between neutrality and values in their daily research practices, or by developing instruments that measure the extent to which Islamic value orientations influence the quality and social impact of management research. In this way, it is hoped that science will not only develop technically but also move closer to the ideals of justice and welfare mandated by Islamic teachings.

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