IHSAN AGILE

The Ihsan Agile™ Guide

Embedding Islamic Values in Agile Delivery

Version 1.0

About This Guide

Version: Version 1.0 (2025)
License: Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0)
Author: Dr. David Wallace-Hare
Website: **ihsanagile.org**

Translations & Sources

Quranic Translations

Unless otherwise noted, Quranic verses throughout this guide are from ***The Clear Quran*®** by Dr. Mustafa Khattab (© 2015-2024), accessed via **Quran.com**. Used for noncommercial, educational purposes.

Citation format: (*Qur'an* [Surah]:[Ayah], transl., Mustafa Khattab, *The Clear Quran*®)

Hadith Collections

Hadith citations reference the following collections, accessed via Sunnah.com:

- *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*
- *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*
- *Sunan Ibn Mājah*
- *Musnad Aḥmad*
- *Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī*

Full hadith references include collection name and number (e.g., *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 1). Hadith are reproduced for teaching purposes as permitted by **Sunnah.com**.

Citation format: (*Collection Name* [Number])

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to **Quran.com** (Quran Foundation, Inc.) and **Dr. Mustafa Khattab** for making The Clear Quran® accessible, and to **Sunnah.com** for providing authenticated hadith collections to Muslims worldwide. May Allah ﷻ reward all those involved in these noble efforts.

Framework References & Licensing

Ihsan Agile references existing Agile frameworks. Full attribution details:

- **The Scrum Guide™** (2020) by Ken Schwaber & Jeff Sutherland, licensed CC BY-SA 4.0. No endorsement implied.
- **The Kanban Guide©** by Mauvius Group Inc. 2022. All rights reserved. No endorsement implied.
- **SAFe® and Scaled Agile Framework®** are registered trademarks of Scaled Agile, Inc. Not affiliated or endorsed.

See Appendix A for complete attribution and licensing details.

Introduction

What is Ihsan Agile?

Ihsan Agile overlays existing Agile methods such as Scrum, Kanban, Scrumban, and SAFe with principles drawn from the Qur'an and Sunnah.

It seeks to turn everyday work into a form of ʿ*ibādah* (worship) by embedding *niyyah* (intention), *iḥsān* (excellence with God-consciousness), and *shūrā* (consultation) into the rhythms of teams and organisations.

It is intended for:

- **Muslim workplaces and enterprises** (*sharikāt*, startups, social ventures) seeking to align delivery with *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law).
- **Islamic institutions** (*masājid* (mosques), *madāris* (schools), charities, and NGOs) that carry an **amānah** (trust) to serve the *ummah* with transparency and justice.
- **Islamic fintech and tech companies** building products for Muslim communities and needing to bridge Shariah compliance with ethical product development.
- **Muslim software development teams** within larger organisations who want their daily work to reflect Islamic values.
- **Professionals in wider industries** who wish to practice Agile as a form of *tazkiyah* (purification and growth), so that even commercial delivery becomes a path of ethical excellence.

Ihsan Agile does not replace established Agile frameworks. Instead, it refines and purifies (*tazkiyah*) them, aligning work with the ultimate aim of *falāḥ* (true success in this world and the next).

Why Ihsan Agile? Bridging the Implementation Gap

We are witnessing an exciting moment in Muslim tech and Islamic enterprise. Organisations articulate what Islamic values should mean for their work. **The Muslim Tech Manifesto** (https://muslimtechmanifesto.substack.com/p/muslim-tech-manifesto-v10) inspires developers to ask: what does it mean to build halal tech? Islamic fintech startups are multiplying. Islamic charities are adopting modern delivery methods. There is energy, conviction, and vision.

But there is also a gap, what we call **the implementation gap**.

It is one thing to declare, "We build with Islamic values." It is another to live those values on a Tuesday afternoon when the sprint is behind schedule, the product owner is pushing hard, and the team is debating whether to skip accessibility testing to ship faster.

Some sectors, such as Islamic finance, halal certification, and certain charitable or religious institutions, have established forms of Shariah governance. These may include Shariah supervisory boards, ethics committees, or advisory processes that guide high-level policies, product structures, or organisational principles. But even where such structures exist, they

rarely extend into the operational layer where software teams, product teams, and delivery teams make hundreds of micro-decisions every day.

And in many other sectors, especially technology, software, and general commercial enterprises, there may be no Shariah governance structure at all, despite Muslim founders, Muslim user bases, or value-driven aspirations. Ethical intent exists, but operational guidance is absent.

- A development team deciding whether to cut corners on testing to meet a deadline.

- A product owner weighing feature priorities: do we optimise for conversion or for user wellbeing?

- A team debating whether to defer technical debt: who will bear the future cost?

- A designer choosing between dark-pattern engagement tactics or transparent interactions that honour user agency.

None of these are "Shariah decisions" in the formal governance sense. Yet they carry significant ethical weight, touching on justice (ʿ*adl*), trust and stewardship (*amānah*), transparency, and care for stakeholders. The disconnect between high-level values and everyday operational decisions is precisely what the Ihsan Agile Framework seeks to address.

The question is: **who ensures these everyday decisions actively express Islamic values rather than merely avoiding obvious prohibitions?** Who helps Muslim organisations move from manifesto to mechanism, from principles to practice?

This is where Ihsan Agile provides a structural response to a structural problem.

How Ihsan Agile Works

Ihsan Agile does not replace established Agile frameworks. Instead, it refines and purifies (**tazkiyah**) them, through:

1. **A framework of Core Principles** rooted in *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*
2. **Practical overlays** that embed into existing Agile ceremonies and artifacts
3. **The Ihsan Agile Facilitator role:** a companion-coach who helps teams operationalise Islamic values in daily work

The foundation is expressed through Three Pillars and Five Principles (detailed in Chapters 1-3), which act as the ethical and spiritual compass of this approach.

Chapter 1: The Essence of Ihsan Agile

Definition

In Islamic tradition, *iḥsān* means "to do what is beautiful," to strive for excellence and act with consciousness of accountability before Allah and toward humanity.

> *"What is Ihsan (perfection)?" Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) replied, "To worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion then you must consider that He is looking at you." Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 50*[1]

This hadith transforms how we understand work. Ethics becomes not periodic audit but **continuous presence**. God-consciousness (*taqwā*) becomes embedded in every task, every interaction, every decision, not just in prayer, but in how we code, how we plan sprints, how we treat our colleagues, how we serve our users.

When we bring *iḥsān* to our work, we recognise that:

- Every line of code is written in the sight of Allah
- Every sprint planning decision affects real people and communities
- Every corner we cut or uphold is an ethical choice with consequences
- Every interaction with a teammate or stakeholder is an opportunity for excellence

Work as Khidmah (Service-Worship)

Ihsan Agile reconceptualises work itself as **khidmah**, service to others as worship of Allah. This is not metaphorical. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught us the profound connection between serving others and receiving Allah's mercy: "Whoever relieves a Muslim of some worldly distress, Allah will relieve him of some of the distress of the Day of Resurrection... Allah will help His servant so long as His servant helps his brother." (*Sunan Ibn Mājah* 225, adapted).

When a Muslim developer writes accessible code, they relieve users with disabilities from distress, and Allah relieves them in return. When a product owner prioritises features that genuinely help vulnerable communities, they engage in ʿ*ibādah* through easing others' burdens. When a team holds a retrospective that includes ethical reflection, they practice **muhāsabah** (spiritual accounting) as part of their delivery rhythm. When a team ensures their work serves genuine public benefit, they fulfil their responsibility towards **maṣlaḥah**.

This transforms the meaning of "customer-centricity" and "value delivery." We are not merely optimising for user satisfaction or business metrics. We are asking: does this work relieve distress? Does it ease burdens? Does it serve **maṣlaḥah** (public good)? Does it create **barakah** (blessing) in the world?

---

[1]   All translations from the *Quran* and *Sunnah* come from https://quran.com (transl. Mustafa Khattab, *The Clear Quran*®) or https://sunnah.com (various translators) unless otherwise noted.

Ihsan Agile is Founded on Three Pillars

The Three Pillars represent three inseparable dimensions of ethical, God-conscious work:

1. Niyyah (Intention)

Clarify the purpose and higher aim of every sprint, flow, or initiative.

Work begins with conscious intention directed towards Allah and service to His creation. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught: "The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended." (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 1)

In practice:

Every planning cycle begins with a Niyyah check-in, not just "what are we building?" but "***why*** are we building this? ***Who*** benefits? ***How*** does this serve a higher purpose?"

Without *Niyyah*:

Work becomes mechanical output disconnected from meaning. Teams lose sight of who they serve and why their work matters.

With *Niyyah*:

Every sprint, every feature, every task is consciously connected to purpose, as service to Allah through benefit to His creation.

2. *Iḥsān* (Excellence with God-consciousness)

Strive for beauty, quality, and meaningful impact in all deliverables and interactions, as though Allah sees every detail.

> *"What is Ihsan (perfection)?" Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) replied, "To worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion then you must consider that He is looking at you." Sahih al-Bukhari 50*

This is not mere technical excellence or quality assurance. Iḥsān is **excellence infused with consciousness,** the awareness that every action, every interaction, every decision is witnessed by Allah and has consequences for His creation.

In practice:

- Code is written with care for future maintainers
- Retrospectives examine ethical and spiritual growth, not just process improvements
- Definition of Done includes justice, transparency, and stewardship, not just functionality
- Teammates treat each other with dignity and respect, recognising work as worship

Without *Iḥsān*:

Work becomes transactional, corners get cut under pressure, teams optimise for metrics whilst losing sight of impact on real people.

With *Iḥsān*:

Every interaction becomes an opportunity for excellence, every deliverable reflects care and consciousness, teams work at sustainable pace because human dignity matters.

3. *Maṣlaḥah* (Public Good)

Orient all work towards genuine benefit, not output for its own sake, but service that uplifts people and communities.

Maṣlaḥah is a core concept in Islamic legal theory (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*), the principle that laws and actions should serve the welfare and benefit of people. In Ihsan Agile, *maṣlaḥah* becomes a sort of *qibla*: **does this work create genuine benefit?**

> *"The companion who is the best to Allah is the one who is best to his companion. And the neighbor that is the best to Allah is the one that is best to his neighbor." Jami` at-Tirmidhi 1944*

Critical insight: *Maṣlaḥah* cannot be assumed or determined top-down. It must be **discovered through consultation** (Principle 3: *Shūrā*, below) and **validated through impact** (Stakeholder Barakah Reviews).

We cannot claim to serve *maṣlaḥah* if we:

- Build without consulting those affected

- Optimise for our convenience rather than users' genuine needs

- Ignore unintended harms

- Measure success by output rather than uplift

In practice:

- Niyyah check-ins (below) explicitly ask: "Who benefits? Who might be harmed?"

- Backlog prioritisation considers genuine benefit, not just business value or ease of implementation

- Stakeholder Barakah Reviews assess: "Did this create uplift? Was it just? What harms need addressing?"

- Teams are empowered to push back on work that doesn't serve genuine benefit

Without *Maṣlaḥah*:

Teams can work with good intentions (*niyyah*) and high quality but still build the wrong things, features that don't help anyone, products that exploit users, solutions that serve organisational ego rather than real needs.

With *Maṣlaḥah*:

Every sprint, every feature is evaluated against the standard: does this genuinely benefit people? Does it serve justice? Does it create *barakah* in the world?

How the Three Pillars Work Together

The Three Pillars are interdependent (Figure 1):

Niyyah without *Maṣlaḥah* is intention without direction; you know you want to serve Allah, but you're not clear on how your work serves His creation.

***Iḥsān* without Niyyah** is excellence without purpose; beautiful work that may serve no one, or worse, serve exploitation.

Maṣlaḥah* without *Iḥsān is good intentions implemented poorly; the right goals but compromised by shortcuts, burnt-out teams, or technical debt.

All three without *Shūrā* (Principle 3) risk becoming paternalistic, deciding what's good for people without asking them, determining *maṣlaḥah* from our limited perspective rather than collective wisdom.

Together, the Three Pillars create:

- Work that begins with conscious intention (**Niyyah**)

- Executed with excellence and God-consciousness (***Iḥsān***)

- Oriented towards genuine public benefit (***Maṣlaḥah***)

- Discovered and validated through consultation (**Shūrā** - Principle 3)

This is how everyday delivery becomes ʿ*ibādah,* worship through service to Allah's creation.
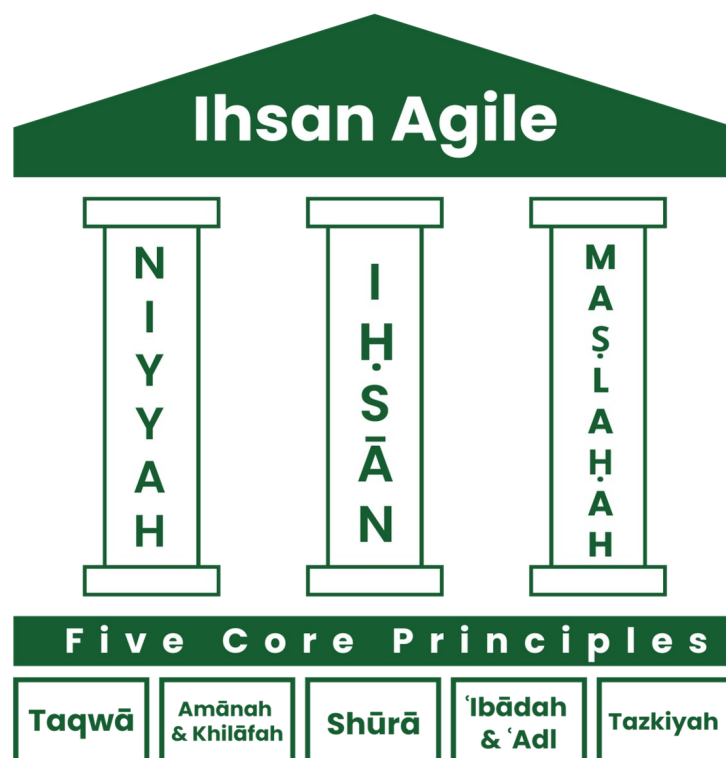
Figure 1

Chapter 2: Five Core Principles of Ihsan Agile

The Five Principles operationalise the Three Pillars in daily Agile practice. They provide concrete guidance for how teams embody *Niyyah*, *Iḥsān*, and *Maṣlaḥah* in their workflows.

Principle 1: Taqwā – God-Consciousness in All Actions

"O believers! Be mindful of Allah and let every soul look to what deeds it has sent forth for tomorrow. And fear Allah, for certainly Allah is All-Aware of what you do." (Qur'an 59:18)

Taqwā is continuous consciousness of Allah, the awareness that we are accountable before our Creator for every action, every decision, every interaction. *Taqwā* is the foundation that enables *Iḥsān* (Pillar 2).

What Taqwā Means for Teams

When we work with t*aqwā,* we recognise:

- Every decision is witnessed by Allah, not just big ethical dilemmas, but small choices
- Every interaction matters, how we treat colleagues, respond under pressure, listen with attention
- We will be accountable to Allah for how we used our time, talents, and opportunities

Agile Application

In practice:

- Before decisions: "If Allah was watching this unfold, would I choose differently?"
- Code reviews: Reviewing for care, clarity, consideration of future maintainers
- Retrospectives: Examining where we fell short ethically or spiritually
- Daily standups: Honesty about capacity and when we need help
- Stakeholder interactions: Truthfulness even when difficult

What *Taqwā* prevents:

- Ethical drift under pressure
- Hidden shortcuts we hope no one notices
- Dishonesty in standups or reports
- Mistreatment of colleagues

What *Taqwā* enables:

- Moral courage to speak truth to power
- Sustainable excellence because it matters before Allah
- Spiritual growth through work

Principle 2: Stewardship (Amānah & Khilāfah)

"He is the One Who has placed you as successors on earth and elevated some of you in rank over others, so He may test you with what He has given you..." (Qur'an 6:165)

"O Children of Adam! Dress properly whenever you are at worship. Eat and drink, but do not waste. Surely He does not like the wasteful." (Qur'an 7:31)

We are *khulafāʾ al-arḍ,* vicegerents, stewards, trustees accountable to Allah for how we steward time, talent, resources, and the environment.

The Spiritual Dimension of Waste

In Ihsan Agile, waste takes on a spiritual dimension; it creates adverse effects for the environment and the ummah.

Consider:

- That meeting that didn't need to happen? Wasted human potential that could have served a higher purpose
- That technical debt we're deferring? A burden on future developers and communities
- That feature built for vanity metrics? Energy and attention diverted from genuine needs
- That accessible feature we skipped? Exclusion of people with disabilities

Agile Application

In practice:

- Sprint planning asks: "What can we not build that would still serve the need?"
- Retrospectives: "What did we waste that could have served better purpose?"
- Definition of Done: "Technical debt documented with mitigation plan"
- Environmental consciousness: Energy-efficient code, sustainable hosting

Principle 3: Shūrā – Consultation and Collective Wisdom

*"Whatever pleasure you have been given is no more than a fleeting enjoyment of this worldly life. But what is with Allah is far better and more lasting for those who believe and put their trust in their Lord; who avoid major sins and shameful deeds, and forgive when angered; who respond to their Lord, establish prayer, **conduct their affairs by mutual consultation**, and donate from what We have provided for them; and who enforce justice when wronged." (Qur'an 42:36-39)*

Notice where **shūrā** appears, right between establishing prayer and giving charity. Mutual consultation is not just good practice; it is an act of worship, ʿ**ibādah**.

Shūrā is Essential for Both *Iḥsān* and *Maṣlaḥah*

***Shūrā* enables *Iḥsān*:** Excellence emerges from collective wisdom, not individual heroics.
***Shūrā* enables *Maṣlaḥah*:** We cannot know what truly serves public good without consulting those affected.

The Full Scope of Shūrā in Agile

***Shūrā* encompasses five dimensions:**

- Internal team consultation: Developers, designers, testers deciding together
- Cross-functional collaboration: Breaking down silos, bringing diverse expertise together
- Collegiality: Treating teammates as equals worthy of consultation
- Team autonomy with collective responsibility: Empowered teams deciding together
- Stakeholder consultation: Including those affected (users, communities, customers)

***Shūrā* is Not...**

Not consensus: Everyone must be heard, but not everyone must agree.

Not design by committee: Affected voices inform decisions, but don't dictate every detail.

Not slow bureaucracy: A 5-minute round-robin is ***shūrā***.

Critical Questions *Shūrā* Asks:

- Whose input do we need before committing?
- Who will be affected but isn't in the room?
- Have we consulted across functions?
- Did we genuinely consult, or did loud voices dominate?

What *Shūrā* Prevents

- Paternalism: Assuming we know what's best without asking
- Siloing: Departments building in isolation
- Groupthink: Dominant voices suppressing alternatives
- Technical arrogance: Experts deciding without input

What *Shūrā* Enables

- Better solutions from diverse perspectives
- Shared ownership and commitment
- Discovery of blind spots before they become harms
- Genuine *maṣlaḥah* grounded in real needs

Principle 4: Service (ʿIbādah) and Justice (ʿAdl)

"As for those who struggle in Our cause, We will surely guide them along Our Way. And Allah is certainly with the good-doers." (Qur'an 29:69)

This principle brings together service and justice, inseparable concepts in Islam.

Critical questions:

- Are we being just to our users? (Transparent? Respecting dignity and agency?)
- Are we being just to team members? (Sustainable pace? Fair distribution of work?)
- Are we being just to future maintainers? (Clear documentation? Manageable debt?)
- Are we being just to vulnerable groups? (Accessibility? Avoiding bias?)

This Transforms Customer-Centricity

In conventional Agile, we talk about delighting customers. In Ihsan Agile, we ask: Is our service rooted in compassion and fairness? Are we measuring success by uplift (genuine benefit), not just output?

The Service-Justice Link:

When teams are stretched thin, burnt out, or rushed, that's when ethical corners get cut. The IAF helps create environments where people can thrive, even under pressure.

Agile Application

- Sprint goals framed in terms of benefit to specific communities
- Product decisions prioritise uplift over conversion optimisation
- Sustainable pace is non-negotiable
- User stories consider dignity: without feeling shame/coercion/confusion

Principle 5: Continuous Growth (Tazkiyah)

> *"Successful indeed are those who purify themselves,"* *(Qur'an 87:14-15)*

> *"Take on only as much as you can do of good deeds, for the best of deeds is that which is done consistently, even if it is little."* *(Sunan Ibn Mājah 4240)*

Tazkiyah means purification and growth, the gradual refinement of both our skills and our character. In Islamic tradition, *tazkiyah* is achieved through *muhāsabah* (self-accounting).

The Tazkiyah-Muhāsabah Connection

As ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (RA) taught: "Reckon with yourselves before you are reckoned with... The reckoning of the Day of Judgement is only light for the one who reckoned with himself in the world." (*Jāmiʿ al-Tirmidhī* 2459)

Muhāsabah is how teams practise *tazkiyah,* through regular reflection on where we embodied our values and where we fell short, through honest examination of our habits and patterns, through identifying what to start and stop. Without *muhāsabah*, there can be no genuine *tazkiyah*.

The Cycle

In Islamic spirituality, purification happens through a continuous cycle:

- *Muhāsabah*: Self-examination and accounting
- Recognition: Honest acknowledgement
- *Tawbah*: Repentance and commitment to change
- Correction: Forming new habits
- *Tazkiyah*: Gradual purification over time

Then the cycle repeats. This is why consistent small deeds are best. In Ihsan Agile, retrospectives embody this cycle at team level, as regular *muhāsabah* leading to collective *tazkiyah*.

Agile Application

- Retrospectives include: "Where did we embody *iḥsān*? Where did we fall short? What habit to start/stop?"
- Teams set beneficial WIP limits (not just to maximise throughput, but for reflection and quality)
- Sprint commitments respect human capacity
- Teams celebrate ethical growth, not just velocity

Chapter 3: Roles in Ihsan Agile

The Ihsan Agile Facilitator (IAF)

Mission

To embed *iḥsān* (excellence with God-consciousness) into Agile practices, ensuring teams act with sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*), justice (*ʿadl*), and stewardship (*amānah*) in their daily work.

The IAF is a companion-coach who helps bridge the implementation gap. They answer the question: "Who ensures everyday decisions actively express Islamic values?"

Core Responsibilities

The IAF has five core responsibilities:

1. Facilitate Niyyah Check-ins

At the beginning of planning cycles, the IAF guides a brief (2-3 minute) reflection: Not just "What are we building?" but "Why are we building this? Who benefits? Who might be harmed? How does this serve *maṣlaḥah*?"

Output: One line of intention captured alongside the Sprint Goal.

2. Transform Retrospectives into Muhāsabah Sessions

The IAF anchors 5-10 minutes of ethical self-reflection before discussing process improvements: "Where did we act with *iḥsān*? Where did we fall short? What habits should we start or stop?"

This is not extra work. This IS the work, developing teams that can recognise and respond to ethical dimensions.

3. Ensure Definition of Done Includes Justice and Stewardship

The IAF helps teams expand quality criteria beyond functional correctness: Is this transparent? Have we considered environmental impact? Are we creating technical debt? Have we assessed impact on vulnerable groups?

Example DoD criteria:

- Shariah compliance reviewed (for financial products)
- Accessible to users with disabilities
- Privacy honoured; no unnecessary data collection
- Product aligns with our ethical values

4. Conduct Stakeholder Barakah Reviews

After delivery, the IAF facilitates assessment with stakeholders: Did this create uplift? Was it fair? Were there unintended harms? What did we learn about genuine benefit vs. intended benefit?

5. Support *Shūrā*

The IAF ensures decisions include affected voices: Whose voices are missing? Who will be affected but hasn't been consulted? Creating space for dissent and alternative perspectives.

How the IAF Complements Existing Roles

This is crucial: The IAF <u>does not replace existing Agile roles</u>. It *overlays* or *complements* the roles <u>already in your organisation</u>.

In Scrum

The IAF works alongside the Scrum Master, not instead of (the Scrum Master can also embed this role).

Scrum Master:

- Facilitates the process
- Removes impediments
- Coaches team on Agile practices

IAF adds:

- Ethical layer to existing ceremonies
- *Niyyah* check-ins at Sprint Planning
- *Muhāsabah* segments in Retrospectives
- Partnership with Product Owner on ethical backlog prioritisation

Partnership with Product Owner

The IAF, much like a Scrum Master, partners with the Product Owner to embed Core Principles into backlog creation and ordering: Are we prioritising features that serve *maṣlaḥah*?

Are we balancing conversion optimisation with user dignity? What voices are missing?

IAF Relationship to Shariah Boards

Critical distinction:

- Shariah Board: Governance level, periodic review, financial instruments & contracts, approves/rejects based on Shariah compliance

- IAF: Operational level, daily/weekly practice, product design and team interactions, prompts ethical reflection

The IAF and Shariah Board are complementary. Shariah Board ensures instruments are halal. IAF ensures the process of building products and services embodies Islamic values.

Practical Considerations

For Small Organisations

"We can't afford another role"

The IAF can be: Part-time (10-20% of someone's time), Combined with Scrum Master role initially, Rotating responsibility amongst team members, Volunteer from within the team who feels called to this service.

Start with whoever has:

- Grounding in Islamic ethics (doesn't need to be a scholar)
- Ability to ask good questions with humility
- Respect from the team
- Commitment to embedding values in daily work

For Teams with Non-Muslim Members

The Core Principles express universal ethical values. Frame the IAF role and practices as values-based work. Non-Muslim team members often find these practices enriching because they address universal human needs for meaningful work.

Avoiding Tokenism

How to avoid tokenism:

- Integrate into ceremonies (not separate add-on)
- Enforce Definition of Done (work isn't done until ethical criteria met)
- Make visible (*niyyah* displayed, concerns tracked)
- Respond to concerns raised (if *muhāsabah* surfaces ethical issue, it becomes action item)
- Leadership models taking IAF seriously
- Track impact (not just "did we do the practice" but "what changed because of it")
- IAF has real voice (can pause planning, escalate concerns)

Chapter 4: Getting Started with Ihsan Agile

The Phased Approach

Ihsan Agile is designed for gradual, sustainable adoption. As the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught us: "Take on only as much as you can do of good deeds, for the best of deeds is that which is done consistently, even if it is little." (*Sunan Ibn Mājah* 4240)

We recommend a three-phase approach:

Phase 1: Foundation (Sprints 1-2)

Goal: Introduce basic awareness without overwhelming the team

Actions:

- Appoint or designate someone to pilot the Ihsan Agile Facilitator (IAF) role (can be part-time, can be combined with Scrum Master initially)
- Introduce *Niyyah* check-ins at the start of planning sessions (2-3 minutes)
- Add one ethical criterion to your Definition of Done
- Share the Three Pillars and Five Principles with the team (brief explanation, not training)

What success looks like:

- Team members understand why you're introducing Ihsan Agile
- *Niyyah* check-ins happen consistently, even if awkward at first
- At least one piece of work is evaluated against the new ethical DoD criterion

Phase 2: Deepen (Sprints 3-4)

Goal: Expand ethical consciousness into reflection and stakeholder engagement

Actions:

- Add *muhāsabah* (ethical reflection) to retrospectives (5-10 minutes)
- Introduce Stakeholder Barakah Review at sprint review or after key releases
- Expand Definition of Done to include 2-3 ethical criteria
- IAF begins asking gentle prompting questions throughout ceremonies

What success looks like:

- Team identifies at least one ethical insight or concern in retrospectives
- Stakeholders are asked about uplift and potential harms, not just satisfaction
- Team members begin raising ethical considerations without prompting

Phase 3: Embed (Sprint 5+)

Goal: Ihsan Agile becomes natural part of team rhythm

Actions:

- Full IAF role active with clear responsibilities
- All relevant overlays functioning across ceremonies
- Team develops its own ethical habits and language
- Consider expanding to additional teams or scaling practices

What success looks like:

- Ethical considerations are naturally woven into daily work
- Team can articulate how their work serves *maṣlaḥah*
- Retrospectives regularly surface both technical and ethical growth areas
- Stakeholders notice a different quality to consultation and delivery

Starting Small: The Minimum Viable Practice

If you can only start with one practice, choose Niyyah check-ins at planning sessions.

This single practice:

- Requires minimal time (2-3 minutes)
- Sets intention before work begins
- Creates space for ethical questions to surface
- Establishes the rhythm of "why" before "what"

For Different Team Sizes

Small teams (3-7 people)

- Perfect for experimentation
- IAF role can rotate amongst team members
- Can move through phases quickly (1-2 sprints each)
- More intimate space for *muhāsabah*

Medium teams (8-15 people)

- Designate one person as IAF (can be part-time)
- May need 2 sprints per phase to build habits
- Consider breaking into smaller groups for *muhāsabah*

Large organisations (multiple teams)

- Pilot with one team first
- Document lessons learnt
- Expand gradually to other teams
- Consider dedicated IAF role(s) as practice matures. See **Chapter 9: Scaling Ihsan Agile**

Chapter 5: Core Practices

These are the concrete practices the IAF facilitates and the team adopts. Each practice embeds one or more Core Principles into your workflow.

Practice 1: Niyyah Check-ins

Embeds: Principle 1 (*Taqwā*), Principle 4 (Service & Justice)

When: Beginning of planning cycles

Time: 2-3 minutes

How it works:
- IAF prompts: "Why are we building this? Who benefits? Who might be harmed? How does this serve *maṣlaḥah*?"
- Team discusses briefly
- Capture one line of intention alongside Sprint Goal

Example output:
"Building this accessibility feature to ensure blind users can access zakat calculation with dignity"

Practice 2: Ethical Completeness

When: Defined during team formation; reviewed in retrospectives; applied when marking work Done

Sample ethical criteria to add:
- Transparent and truthful to users/stakeholders
- No foreseeable harm; mitigations documented
- Stewardship respected (sustainable pace, waste reduced)
- Privacy honoured; no unnecessary data collection
- Accessible to users with disabilities
- Shariah compliance reviewed (for financial products)
- Impact on vulnerable groups assessed

Practice 3: Shūrā as Decision Practice

When: Major decisions, Sprint Planning, Replenishment, Retrospectives

How it works:
- Identify who is affected by this decision
- Ensure their voices are heard
- Create space for dissent
- Document decision and reasoning

Practical techniques:
- Silent brainstorming before discussion
- Round-robin input (everyone speaks once before anyone speaks twice)
- Explicit invitation to dissent: "What concerns should we consider?"

Practice 4: Stewardship & Mīzān

When: Sprint Planning, Daily Standups, Retrospectives
- Set WIP limits that allow quality and reflection
- Respect sustainable pace (no heroics as standard)
- Identify waste experimentally
- Consider environmental stewardship

Practice 5: Muhāsabah Retrospectives

When: Sprint Retrospectives, periodic reviews

Time: Add 5-10 minutes of ethical reflection

Core questions:
- Where did we embody *iḥsān*? Where did we fall short?
- Where did pressure cause us to compromise values?
- What habit should we start or stop?

After reflection, identify 1-2 habits to start or stop (small, sustainable changes).

Practice 6: Stakeholder Barakah Review

When: Sprint Review, after releases

Questions for stakeholders:
- Did this create genuine benefit? For whom specifically?
- Was this just and fair?
- What unintended harms should we address?
- What should we measure next to learn if we're serving *maṣlaḥah*?

Practice 7: Continuous Niyyah Alignment

When: Regular check-ins (monthly, quarterly, or when direction shifts)

Questions:
- Why does this work matter? What would be lost if we stopped?
- Who are we serving? Is that still who we intend to serve?
- Is our stated intention still alive in our daily work, or have we drifted?

Chapter 6: How the IAF Works in Practice

In Scrum

Sprint Planning:

- After Product Owner presents Sprint Goal, IAF adds 2-3 minute Niyyah check-in
- Team captures one line of intention alongside Sprint Goal
- IAF prompts: "How does this align with our Definition of Done's ethical criteria?"

Daily Scrum:

- IAF observes more than speaks
- Watches for signs of imbalance (overburdening, unsustainable pace)
- Intervenes when needed: "I'm noticing [person] has taken on a lot. How can we rebalance?"

Sprint Review:

- After demo, IAF facilitates 5-10 minute Stakeholder Barakah Review
- Invites real users when possible
- Asks: Did this create uplift? Was it fair? Unintended harms?

Sprint Retrospective:

- IAF opens with 5-10 minutes of **muhāsabah**
- Team identifies where they embodied values, where they fell short
- Identify 1-2 habits to start/stop
- Then Scrum Master continues with process improvement

In Kanban

Board & Policies:

- Display purpose/**niyyah** policy on or near board
- Add ethical pull criteria (displayed visibly)
- Set WIP limits as **mīzān** (balance)
- Consider "Community Impact" class of service
- Make waste visible with tags/lanes

Replenishment Meeting:

- Begin with brief Niyyah check-in (2 minutes)
- As team pulls work: "Does this serve our purpose? Do we have capacity?"

Kanban/Flow Review:

- Review metrics plus ethical dimension
- "Are we maintaining sustainable pace? What waste have we removed?"

Operations/Strategy Review:

- Include Stakeholder Barakah Review items
- Review and update policies

In SAFe

Portfolio / LPM Level:

- Add *niyyah* to portfolio vision/themes
- Portfolio Kanban policies include ethical acceptance criteria
- OKRs include service/impact metrics, not just output

ART / Programme Level:

- PI Planning opens with brief niyyah for the value stream
- PI Objectives reflect *maṣlaḥah* and ethical constraints
- System Demo includes Stakeholder Barakah Review segment
- Inspect & Adapt runs *muhāsabah* before problem-solving workshop
- Built-in Quality extends to include Ethical Completeness

Chapter 7: Concrete Worked Scenarios

Scenario 1: Micro-Lending App for Underbanked Muslims

Context:

Team building Shariah-compliant micro-lending app. Shariah board has approved financial instruments. Team operating like any fintech startup: focused on speed-to-market, conversion metrics, user acquisition.

Without IAF, product decisions:

- Defaults encourage maximum borrowing
- UI makes declining offers difficult (large "Accept", small "Decline")
- Push notifications timed for financial stress
- Generous affordability algorithm prioritising approval rates
- No educational content

None violates Shariah narrowly. But does it embody *iḥsān*? Serve *maṣlaḥah*? Is it just?

With IAF - Sprint Planning Niyyah Check-in:

"Who benefits? Who might be harmed? How do we know?" Team realises: If these were our family, would we want them using this as designed?

Team then:

- Adds clearer explanations in plain language
- Makes declining as easy as accepting
- Builds genuine affordability checks
- Redesigns notifications to inform, not manipulate
- Adds educational content about financial planning

Result:

Takes two extra sprints. Velocity drops. But product actively expresses Islamic values, halal in spirit, not just letter. Team culture shifts and starts asking these questions themselves.

Scenario 2: Zakat Calculator for Diverse Muslims

Without IAF:

- Fiqh position not clearly stated
- Designed only by developers (not tested with diverse users)
- Interface feels transactional
- Optimised for donations to the charity building the app

With IAF - Sprint Planning with Shūrā:

"Who might we overlook?" Team involves: Islamic scholars (different schools), Muslims across income levels, elders and youth.

Definition of Done includes:

- Fiqh position clearly documented and explained
- Tested with users in various financial situations
- Interface feels dignified and supportive

Sprint Review - Stakeholder Barakah Review:

Invites users who've given zakat, users who've received zakat, scholars, charity administrators. Feedback: Calculator accurate but cold, fiqh unclear. Team adds: Fiqh position selector, spiritual content, stories of impact, compassionate language.

Result:

App serves diverse ummah, not just one demographic. Team learnt the value of *shūrā* in practice.

Chapter 8: Frequently Asked Questions

Won't this slow us down?

Not in the long run. Ihsan Agile practices may add time upfront (2-3 min for *niyyah*, 5-10 for *muhāsabah*) but prevent ethical debt (not just technical debt), costly rework and user harm. Catching manipulative UX in DoD takes 10 minutes. Rebuilding after user backlash takes weeks. Furthermore, Ihsan Agile often increases meaningful velocity: less waste, sustainable pace prevents burnout, clear *niyyah* reduces rework.

What about non-Muslim team members?

Ihsan Agile principles express universal ethics in Islamic language: excellence with consciousness, stewardship, genuine consultation, fairness, continuous growth. Frame as values-based work. Non-Muslim members often find practices enriching because they address universal needs for meaningful work.

We're a small startup. We can't afford another role.

The IAF can be: Part-time (10-20%), combined with Scrum Master initially, rotating amongst team members, volunteer from within. Start with whoever has grounding in Islamic ethics, ability to ask questions, respect from team.

How is this different from having Muslim leadership?

Leadership provides vision and commitment. IAF provides daily operational embedding. Leadership creates space; IAF ensures that space is used in daily delivery. Both are needed.

Isn't this just adding bureaucracy?

No. Embedded in existing ceremonies (adds minutes, not hours), integrated into Definition of Done, prevents rework and ethical debt. Ihsan Agile prevents: shipping features that violate values, burnout, user backlash, technical debt undermining future work.

Do you need to be a scholar to be an IAF?

No. You need: grounding in Islamic ethics (the Five Principles), familiarity with Qur'anic values, ability to ask questions, humility to consult scholars when needed, respect from team. IAF is not a mufti. IAF is a coach who helps teams clarify intention, reflect on alignment, consult affected voices, apply ethical criteria.

How is this different from standard ethical AI principles?

Adds specifically Islamic lens and treats ethics as spiritual practice, not just best practice. Ethics is consciousness of accountability before Allah. Work becomes path to spiritual growth. Rooted in Qur'an and Sunnah. Emphasis on consultation (**shūrā**) as worship. Focus on intention (**niyyah**). For Muslim teams, ethics becomes not just avoiding lawsuits, but form of *ʿibādah,* worshipping Allah through excellent, just, compassionate work.

Chapter 9: Scaling Ihsan Agile

Scaling means extending *iḥsān* and *shūrā* across multiple teams and organisational levels. Success is measured not by throughput alone but by *falāḥ* (prosperity through justice, service, and spiritual growth).

Team Level: Where It Starts

- IAF embeds practices at team level
- Team can articulate how their work serves *maṣlaḥah*
- Ethical concerns surface naturally
- Sustainable pace maintained

Programme / Multi-Team Level

Approaches:

- Shared Definition of Done across teams
- IAF coordination: IAFs from different teams meet regularly, share insights
- Programme-level Barakah Review: periodic review of programme impact
- *Shūrā* at programme decisions: major decisions include consultation

Portfolio / Organisational Level

- Niyyah at portfolio vision: explicit purpose beyond profit
- Portfolio Kanban with ethical acceptance criteria
- Strategic decisions use *Shūrā*
- Impact metrics alongside financial metrics
- Leadership models Ihsan Agile practices

Measuring Success at Scale

Not just velocity, features shipped, revenue. But also:

- Ethical incidents: How many caught before shipping vs. after?
- Stakeholder uplift: Do beneficiaries report genuine benefit and dignity?
- Team sustainability: Burnout rates, turnover, work-life balance
- Waste reduction: Meetings eliminated, unnecessary features not built
- Consultation quality: Do stakeholders feel genuinely heard?

Chapter 10: Attribution & Licensing

Attribution

Ihsan Agile builds on widely adopted Agile practices, reinterpreted through Islamic values. Not affiliated with Scrum.org, Scrum Alliance, Kanban University, or Scaled Agile, Inc.

This guide references: *The Scrum Guide™* (2020) © Ken Schwaber & Jeff Sutherland, CC BY-SA 4.0; *The Kanban Guide*© by Mauvius Group Inc. 2022; SAFe® (Scaled Agile Framework®), registered trademarks of Scaled Agile, Inc. No endorsement implied.

Licensing

The Ihsan Agile Guide is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0). You are free to share, adapt, and use commercially, under these terms: Attribution (give credit), ShareAlike (distribute under same license).

Full license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/

Collaboration

Collaboration is welcomed as *shirkah fī al-khayr* (partnership in good). Teams are invited to: adapt for your context, translate into other languages, share experiences, contribute improvements, create training materials.

Chapter 11: Getting Involved in Ihsan Agile

We Need Your Participation

Ihsan Agile is a developing framework. Core Principles are grounded in Islamic sources. Practices are designed based on consultancy experience. But we have not yet piloted the IAF role comprehensively in live organisations. This is where we need you.

What We're Looking For: Early Adopter Organisations

Ideal pilot organisations:

- Islamic fintech startups building products for Muslim communities
- Muslim software development teams within larger organisations
- Islamic charities and NGOs using Agile for campaigns or service delivery
- Muslim tech companies committed to values-based development
- Community organisations managing projects with volunteer teams

What We're Offering

- Facilitation support as you pilot the IAF role
- Adaptation of framework to your specific context
- Documentation support
- Contribution to building a body of practice
- Ongoing connection to Ihsan Agile community

What We're Asking From You

- Willingness to experiment and iterate
- Openness to making values and ethics explicit in workflow
- Commitment to at least 2-3 sprint cycles
- Feedback to help refine the framework
- At least one person who can dedicate time to IAF role

How to Express Interest

Email: getinvolved@ihsanagile.org

Include:

- Brief description of your organisation
- What you build/deliver and for whom
- Current team size and Agile method
- Why Ihsan Agile resonates with you
- What you hope to gain from piloting

Appendices

Appendix A: Ihsan Agile Kernel (method-agnostic overlays)

1. **Niyyah Check-in (intention setting)**
- A 2–3 minute opening to align on higher purpose (*maṣlaḥah*) and who benefits/hurts.
- Output: one line of intent visible to the team.

2. **Ethical Completeness (Definition of Done / Explicit Policies)**
- Add justice/stewardship checks to completion criteria or board policies.
- Output: a short checklist used before moving work to "done."

3. **Shūrā (consultation) as decision practice**
- Use formal cadences to hear affected voices and surface trade-offs.
- Output: a visible decision log with reasons.

4. **Stewardship & Mīzān (balance)**
- Treat WIP limits, sustainable pace, and waste reduction as acts of *amānah*.
- Output: limits and waste experiments recorded and reviewed.

5. **Muhāsabah Retrospectives (reflective learning)**
- Add a short ethical/spiritual reflection to continuous improvement.
- Output: 1–2 conscious habits to start/stop next cycle.

6. **Stakeholder Barakah Review**
- Inspect outcomes with stakeholders for uplift, fairness, and unintended harms.
- Output: outcome notes and mitigations alongside delivery notes.

7. **Role: Ihsan Agile Facilitator (IAF)**
- Companion-coach who weaves *niyyah*, *shūrā*, stewardship, and *tazkiyah* into normal work.
- Output: light agendas, prompts, and gentle governance of the overlays.

How to pilot (any method): Pick 3 overlays (*Niyyah*, Ethical Completeness, *Muhāsabah*). Run them for 2–3 cycles, then add Barakah Review.

Appendix B: Scrum Event & Artifact Map

Events

- **Sprint Planning → Niyyah Check-in** (2–3 minutes). Capture a one-line intention that complements the Sprint Goal. Add any ethical constraints to the plan.
- **Daily Scrum → Stewardship & Mīzān**. Keep to sustainable pace; call out overburdening and blocked work first.
- **Sprint Review → Stakeholder Barakah Review**. Invite relevant stakeholders; check for uplift/harms and adjust Product Backlog accordingly.
- **Sprint Retrospective → Muhāsabah**. 5–10 minutes of ethical reflection before improvement items.

Artifacts & Commitments

- **Definition of Done** → **Ethical Completeness**. Add justice/stewardship checks to DoD.
- **Product/Sprint Goals** → **Niyyah alignment**. Ensure the Sprint Goal's "why" reflects *maṣlaḥah*.

IAF pairing: Partners with Scrum Master and Product Owner to seed prompts, keep overlays light, and guard against tokenism.

Appendix C: Kanban Policy & Cadence Map

Board & Policies (make them explicit on/near the board):

- **Purpose/Niyyah policy**: one-line purpose and primary stakeholders we serve.
- **Ethical pull criteria**: add a short checklist to move a card right.
- **WIP as Mīzān**: set pragmatic WIP limits to avoid overburdening; adjust experimentally.
- **Classes of Service**: include a "Community Impact / Duty of Care" class where relevant.
- **Waste-reduction lane or tag**: visualise and remove systemic waste/harms.

Cadences (feedback loops)

- **Replenishment**: begin with *Niyyah*; consider duty-of-care and urgency.
- **Kanban/Flow Review**: steward metrics (lead time, WIP, blockers) and ethical exceptions; agree next experiments.
- **Operations/Strategy Review**: include Stakeholder Barakah Review items and policy updates.

IAF pairing: Co-design policies with the team, keep them sparse, visible, and changeable.

Appendix D: SAFe Placement Map (Portfolio → ART → Team)

Portfolio / LPM

- Add *Niyyah* to portfolio vision/themes; include public-good outcomes in OKRs.
- **Portfolio Kanban policies**: ethical acceptance criteria before moving epics.

ART / Program

- **PI Planning**: short *Niyyah* for the value stream; ensure PI Objectives reflect *maṣlaḥah* and constraints.
- **System Demos**: include a Stakeholder Barakah Review segment (uplift, fairness, unintended harms).
- **Inspect & Adapt**: run a *Muḥāsabah* segment before problem-solving workshop items.
- **Built-in Quality**: extend "quality" to include Ethical Completeness at definition/use of done across teams.

Roles

- **IAF with RTE/Product Management/System Architect & Business Owners**: advise on overlay placement, ethics-in-flow, and gentle governance; keep it lightweight and outcome-focused.

Appendix E: Scrumban Quick Map

- Keep **Scrum's light cadences** (Planning, Review, Retro) but run work by **Kanban policies** and **WIP limits**.
- Place *Niyyah* in planning/replenishment, **Ethical Completeness** in DoD/pull criteria, **Barakah Review** at release/review, and *Muhāsabah* in retrospectives.
- IAF partners with the team coach (or Scrum Master) to balance cadence with flow.

Appendix F: Starter Checklists

1) Planning with Niyyah (read aloud, 2–3 min)

- Who benefits, who might be harmed, and how will we know?
- What one constraint preserves justice/stewardship this cycle?
- What outcome signals "*barakah*," beyond throughput?

2) Ethical Completeness (attach to DoD / pull criteria)

- Transparent & truthful to users/stakeholders
- No foreseeable harm; mitigations documented
- Stewardship respected (sustainable pace, waste reduced)
- Data/consent handled justly; privacy honoured
- Review notes captured for future learning

3) Muhāsabah Retrospective (add 5–10 min)

- Where did we act with *iḥsān*? Where did we fall short and why?
- Which habit will we start/stop to reduce harm or waste?
- What support or boundary do we need from leadership?

4) Stakeholder Barakah Review (add to Review/System Demo/Ops Review)

- Did outcomes uplift the intended group? Any negative spillovers?
- What fairness or duty-of-care adjustments are required before scale/release?
- What will we measure next cycle to learn responsibly?

Appendix G: Glossary of Key Terms

Note: Arabic terms are provided with full vowel pointing (*tashkīl*) to support accurate pronunciation and learning.

- **ʿAdl (عَدْل)**: Justice, fairness, equity
- **Amānah (أَمَانَة)**: Trust, trusteeship, responsibility
- **Barakah (بَرَكَة)**: Blessing, divine grace
- **Falāḥ (فَلَاح)**: Ultimate success and prosperity
- **ʿIbādah (عِبَادَة)**: Worship, acts of devotion
- **Iḥsān (إِحْسَان)**: Excellence with God-consciousness
- **Ikhlāṣ (إِخْلَاص)**: Sincerity, purity of intention
- **Khidmah (خِدْمَة)**: Service

- **Khilāfah (خِلَافَة)**: Vicegerency, stewardship
- **Maṣlaḥah (مَصْلَحَة)**: Public good, benefit
- **Mīzān (مِيزَان)**: Balance, equilibrium
- **Muhāsabah (مُحَاسَبَة)**: Self-accounting, ethical reflection
- **Niyyah (نِيَّة)**: Intention, purpose
- **Shūrā (شُورَىٰ)**: Consultation, mutual decision-making
- **Taqwā (تَقْوَىٰ)**: God-consciousness, mindfulness of Allah, awareness of accountability before the Creator
- **Tawbah (تَوْبَة)**: Repentance and commitment to change
- **Tazkiyah (تَزْكِيَة)**: Purification, growth, refinement
- **Ummah (أُمَّة)**: The global Muslim community

Acknowledgements

Alhamdulillah for the ability to develop this framework and for the guidance found in the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*.

This guide is built on: The wisdom of Islamic scholarship across centuries, practical experience of Muslim organisations seeking to align work with Islamic values, foundation of Agile frameworks, pioneering work of the Muslim Tech Manifesto, heart-centred design work of thinkers like Peter Gould, conversations with Muslim developers, product owners, founders, and teams.

Special thanks to:

- Muslim organisations who have been early conversation partners
- Scholars who have provided guidance on Islamic ethics
- The Agile community for creating frameworks that can be enriched
- Future pilot organisations who will help refine through practice

This is participatory development. Ihsan Agile will be improved by your practice, feedback, insights, and commitment to working with *iḥsān*.

May this work be a source of benefit for the ummah and all who seek to align their daily work with higher purpose.

May Allah accept this effort and forgive its shortcomings.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥīm

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

May your work be a means of drawing closer to Allah, serving His creation with excellence, and achieving true success (*falāḥ*) in this world and the next.

Āmīn.