

Cultural Dimensions Among Malaysian Employees

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the similarities and differences of cultural values among the Malay, Chinese, and Indian management employees in Malaysia, mainly via a case study of Nestlé in Malaysia, one of the major multinational organisations in the country. Qualitative approach was taken where 13 management employees were interviewed. This study shows several new patterns of cultural values emerging among the employees of Nestlé in Malaysia. Primarily, it extends the literature, by providing further understanding on the issues of cultural values on the Malaysian society.

Keywords: Cultural values, Malaysia, Nestlé, Qualitative approach.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of culture has gained its popularity and strength for several reasons. Tayeb cites these strengths as relating to ‘(1) the fact that cultural values and attitudes are different in degree at least, if not in absolute terms, in some cases from one society to another, (2) the fact that different cultural groups behave differently under similar circumstances because of the differences in their underlying values and attitudes, and (3) the important role that culture plays in shaping work organisations and other social institutions’ (Tayeb, 1994, p.429). In reality, culture

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actually encompasses a very general and broad concept which will require years to study. As a result, many researchers study culture according to its many layers.

The lengthy definition of culture has continued to be applied until today, either partly or wholly, by researchers. All these ideas of culture are combined into the definition proposed by Rijamampianina saying that, 'culture is created, acquired, and/or learned, developed and passed on by a group of people, consciously or unconsciously, to subsequent generations. It includes everything that a group thinks, says, does, and makes – its customs, ideas, mores, habits, traditions, language, and shared systems of attitudes and feelings – that help to create standards for people to co-exist' (Rijamampianina, 1996, p.124). When used in comparison, culture is usually considered as an independent environmental factor specific to one country (Nicolaidis, 1991, p.3). Hofstede infers in his many words that membership of a particular culture of a nation is usually permanent (1994). Javidan and House state culture to be a set of values and beliefs of desirable and undesirable things among the members of a society with a set of formal and informal customs to support the values (2001, p.292). When related to nationality, culture becomes the shared values among individuals within a certain national environment (Anwar and Chaker, 2003, p.44). Hofstede acknowledges the existence of variations in behaviour among the members of any culture. According to him, cultural patterns only show the possible and understandable reactions and behaviour based on one's past. It is impossible to have all individuals from one particular country behaving exactly the same (Hofstede, 1991).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture is not just a tool for coping, but it is also meant for creating awareness or learning. It underpins human activities and helps explain much of human behaviour. Most of the studies on culture aimed to discover the similarities and differences between people from the same or totally different cultural environments. The similarities and differences in culture are explained in its two common theories of culture involving the concept of convergence and divergence.

Findings on cultural research have revealed support for both divergent and convergent theories. A large number of studies carried out on culture are based on the understanding that the cultures of people from various ethnic backgrounds or groups bear some differences (e.g. Ford and Honeycutt Jr, 1992, Hartog et al., 1997, Mwaura, Sutton and Roberts, 1998, Raghuram, London and Larsen, 2001, Sharda and Miller, 2001, Anwar and Chaker, 2003, Ryckman and Houston, 2003). This assumption of diversity is indirectly related to the divergent concept of culture. Some authors like Hofstede, through their research, conclude that the convergence of management will never come (1983). However, some studies have shown opposite

results especially at a subcultural level (e.g. Miller and Mahmoudi, 1986, Heuer, Cummings and Hutabarat, 1999, Budhwar and Sparrow, 2002).

The relationship between culture and values has been mentioned by many prominent researchers studying culture (e.g. Hofstede, 1991, Trompenaars, 1993, Abdullah, 1996). Studies on values are normally conducted within one nation, or between a few countries. Replications of prominent studies or even questionnaires from reputable researchers are seen in most cases.

One of the most replicated questionnaires adopted is the one developed by Rokeach (1967, 1973) called the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS). His method was to name the values, briefly explain the meanings, and then ask respondents to arrange the values in their order of importance. Following Rokeach's study, a series of large scale studies of values were undertaken by Schwartz and his collaborators (Schwartz and Bilsky, 1990, Schwartz, 1992, Schwartz, 1994). Schwartz made a detailed review of earlier theories and studies of values from both Western and non-Western sources. His contributions included the derive of ten motivational *individual-level* and *cultural-level* value types.

Several local researchers have also shown an interest in looking at the pluralistic culture of Malaysia. However, the scope of these studies is still considered quite limited, with most failing to take into consideration all the main races in the country (e.g. Wah, 1993, Tamam, Hassan and Said, 1996, Kasa and Lope Pihie, 1997, Ward, Pearson and Entrekin, 2002). The most extensive study so far on the main races in Malaysia regarding cultural values would probably be the one conducted by Abdullah (2001). Abdullah used findings obtained from a series of conferences, workshops and seminars conducted in 1990-1992 by the Malaysian Institute of Management (with sponsorship from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation) to come up with a list of ethnic values in Malaysia. A further, similar study was carried out to investigate the similarities and differences in cultural dimensions among Anglo-saxons, Australians and Malaysians (Abdullah and Lim, 2001c).

It should be noted that a large number of studies carried out on Malaysia have tended to reflect the needs and interests of the researchers involved. So far, no study has been conducted for the sole purpose of guiding organisations in Malaysia to gain full advantage of the nation's diverse populations. Across the studies done by Abdullah (1996), Tamam, Hasan and Said (1996), Kasa and Lope Pihie (1997), and Ward, Pearson and Entrekin (2002) several values are found to be similar such as collectivism, security, career development or success, economic returns or money, thrift, and preservation of face.

Most of the studies conducted on Malaysians failed to extensively incorporate all the three main races as samples. As such, it remains unclear whether the findings can be fully applied to or fully generalise the Malaysian workforce. Since no other studies is carried out to explore possible variances in values in terms of the different races in Malaysia, the study of Abdullah (1996) remains unchallenged. More studies

are therefore needed to explore the current status of variations among the population of Malaysia to help update the existing literature.

METHOD

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to generate a deeper understanding of the phenomenon surrounding the issue on cultural values. In the beginning, 17 management employees from Nestlé in Malaysia were chosen randomly from the clusters of the main ethnic backgrounds (Malays, Chinese, and Indians) for interview. However, out of that total, 4 were not available during the times allocated and allowed by Nestlé in Malaysia. In the end, only 13 management employees were interviewed for this study.

The material recorded in the interviews was transcribed immediately after the sessions had ended. Since the spoken language in the interviews was mainly English, the transcriptions were reported as they conversed, although translations were sometimes required in a few parts of the transcription and note-taking processes. The notes taken during the remaining interviews were also refined as soon as possible while the information was still fresh. Any quotations recorded were carefully written to avoid any confusion later on. Since not all of the interviews were tape recorded, software was not used in analysing them. Instead, the data analysis was done manually.

In an effort to discuss the interviews, all the participants are explained as individual cases. The participants are identified with the letters A to M with the letter I added in front of each letter identifying them as contributors to the in-depth interviews. For an example, participant A was called participant IA.

BACKGROUND TO RESPONDENTS

Of the 13 interviewees, six were Malays (46.2 per cent), four were Chinese (30.8 per cent) and three were Indians (23.1 per cent). To add, 46.2 per cent were male employees (six interviewees) while another 53.8 per cent were female employees (seven interviewees). Finally, nine interviewees worked as executives (69.2 per cent) while another four interviewees were managers (30.8 per cent). Normally, the 'executive' term in Malaysia included any individuals with a qualification of a diploma or higher and whose job title and job description was 'executive' or the equivalent while the managers included individuals with a qualification of a degree or higher and whose job title and job description was 'manager' or the equivalent.

From the total number, only 3 participants had worked in the organisation for more than 20 years. The length of employment of all the other participants was between 2 and 7 years. These distributions correlated with the age of the participants, in which the ones who had worked longer were mostly older. In addition, only 4 had

overseas degrees or work experience with other organisations. The rest of the group were mostly locally educated, and some considered Nestlé in Malaysia as their first employer.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In order to find the similarities and differences across the ethnic backgrounds, employees were asked about the values they adopted before and after they joined the organization. All these cultural values are summarised accordingly in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Throughout the interviews, several similar cultural values shared by the three races were discovered. However, there were no cultural values mentioned specifically by each set of race. Of all the values, there was only one value, Politeness (*Sopan-*

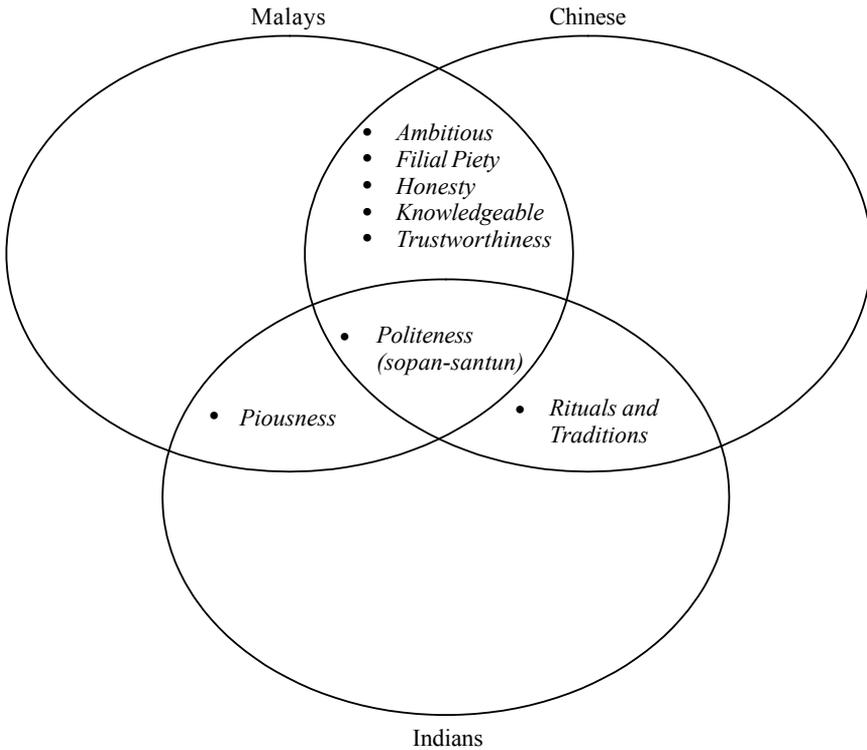
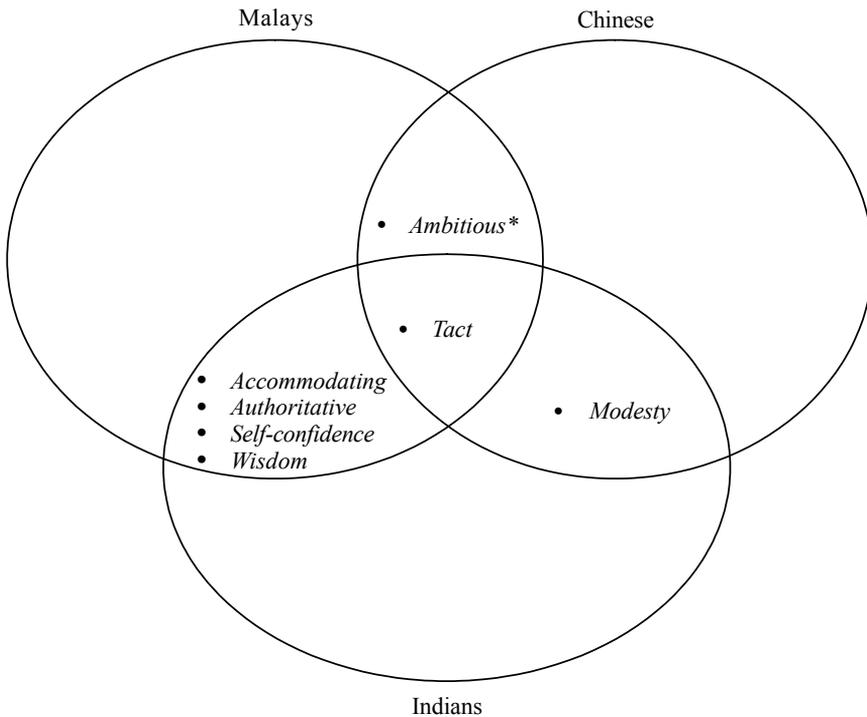


Figure 1 Important Values and Beliefs of the Malays, Chinese and Indians Before They Joined Nestlé in Malaysia



* - This value was inserted again here to indicate the increased number of respondents adopting it once they started working for Nestlé in Malaysia

Figure 2 Important Values and Beliefs of the Malays, Chinese and Indians Added After They Joined Nestlé in Malaysia

santun), which was highlighted to be important by all three races. The Malays and the Chinese were seen to have the most similar cultural values, which were Ambitious, Filial Piety, Honesty, Knowledgeable, and Trustworthiness. The Malays and Indians were only similar in their value of Piousness, while the Chinese and Indians were similar in their values of Rituals and Traditions.

The cultural values that were common among the Malays and Chinese participants were Ambitious, Filial Piety, Honesty, Knowledgeable, and Trustworthiness. Not surprisingly, the Malays shared the value of Filial Piety with the Chinese where emphasis was put on minding and respecting the parents. Because Nestlé in Malaysia consisted of a number of expatriates from various countries in addition to the multi-racial employees, trust (Trustworthiness) was also taken as a very important value. Trust was an essential value between people working together. When trust was present, delegation of tasks and responsibilities was easier. The

fact that both races focused on being Knowledgeable inferred that they too placed great importance on education. Although the Chinese were always known to give importance to education for over a long time, this discovery suggested a change of perception for the Malays. Several statements supporting the value are as follows:

“My parents always encourage me to study hard until now. They always preach on the importance of education when I was little.” [Participant IH]

“Last time it is more on personal development, learning the job. Learning is more important than the monetary side.” [Participant ID]

At the same time, both races were also taught the need to be ambitious in everything that they did. However, from the quotations of a Chinese manager (Participant IA) and a Malay executive (Participant IJ) below, it appeared that, unlike the Malays, the Chinese encouraged their young ones to be the best by using direct and obvious approaches. On the contrary, the Malays had to infer the need to excel from the behaviour of her mother.

“At school I was encouraged to try my best in everything. Although at times I may not get to be number one, I was taught to be competitive.” [Participant IA]

“At home, I often see my mother trying her best to serve delicious food for our relatives and friends. In fact she will try her best in everything she does. I learned a lot from her.” [Participant IJ]

The Malays and the Indians had one similar cultural value, which was Piousness. Apart from good conduct, the Malays were always presumed to be religious people. Two of the Malay participants stated that they had been exposed to religious education and laws since their childhood. As they explained:

“I learned about Islam all the time. If not from my teachers, I will learn from my parents.” [Participant IC]

“The Malays have been exposed to religious values from young. Concepts such as ‘halal’ and ‘haram’ have long become part of their lives.” [Participant IK]

Note: Halal means legally permissible by Islam and Haram means legally forbidden by Islam

The importance of this particular value is usually recognised by organisations where the Malays were permitted to take some time to pray in the praying rooms. On Fridays, longer lunch times were normally allowed for male Muslims to enable them to perform their Friday prayers, which was a requirement of their religion.

Moreover, the Chinese and Indians were similar in their cultural values of Rituals and Traditions. Among the traditions that were spoken of were the relationship between boys and girls, marital arrangement and ways of eating. During the interview, an Indian employee mentioned:

“Indian girls should not mix with Indian boys. During my school time, I had male friends, but none was an Indian.” [Participant IG]

“My marriage was arranged by my family and my husband’s family. I was married to one of my male relatives.” [Participant IG]

Another Chinese respondent stated the following:

“As a Chinese you must know how to use the chopsticks the proper way and then whenever you go to other people’s house you must know how to call people, how to greet people, before you eat, how you say, ‘excuse me’ that kind of thing.” [Participant IE]

There was only one common cultural value that was similar for all the three main races, which was Politeness (*Sopan-santun*). In this case, Politeness (*Sopan-santun*) was marked by polished manners and by respect for and consideration of others, and covered a wide range of other values such as courtesy, gratefulness, and kindness. Examples of the importance of Politeness (*Sopan-santun*) are mentioned below:

“When you start reading about God, the learning will guide you. Good attitude will follow.” [Participant IG]

“I was trained to talk, behave and dress properly by both my parents and teachers.” [Participant IH]

“Principally, the one value that I would not forget is manners.” [Participant ID]

There were also several other values thought to originate from culture that were believed by each of race individually without overlapping with one another. Since these values were mentioned only once, they were not included in Figure 1. For example, one of the Malay interviewees also believed in having a balance in work and life (Work/life Balance). Although Nestlé in Malaysia was a very demanding organisation, she tried very hard to divide her time equally. She explained:

“I strongly believe in having a good family. My life and work need to have a balance. Whatever I instil in myself, I would want to see it in my children.” [Participant IM]

Other values of the Malays include Affiliation, Appreciative, Fairness, Loyalty, and Obedience. An interesting value indicated by one of the Malay participants in the interview was the value of Individualism. This has been inferred as the importance to the Malays of being concerned with themselves rather than the group, which opposes some of the findings found in the literature. The Work/life Balance value indirectly suggested the Malays' preference for a moderate burden at work to enable them to focus on their families. The idea that family was important here seems to contrast with the previous Individualism value. One more value proposed by another Malay participant was Indirectness. This value was seen to be related to the value of Politeness (*Sopan-santun*), and the need to be polite. In general, the Malays viewed being direct as inappropriate in most situations. Even if it was a positive thing, an individual should try to be indirect when expressing their comments or opinions.

As for the Chinese, one participant mentioned the value of Lifelong Learning. However, the same Chinese interviewee revealed an interesting point. According to him, he had been taught to continuously learn new things, but he was asked to refrain himself from being competitive. He stated:

“During school, the students were encouraged to continuously learn rather than engaging themselves in unhealthy competitions.” [Participant IB]

The statement showed a contrast with the *Kiasu* value, which focuses on being competitive with others. The same individual also raised the importance of maintaining a peaceful environment (Harmony) between the races. Concurrently, he was educated by his parents to always Respect other Races and Religions. Recalling what had been told by his father, he stated:

“As I grow up, I was exposed to different thoughts and point of views. My father always told me to respect other races and other religions.”

Since Malaysia is a multi-racial nation, people from different races and religion need to understand and respect one another to avoid disagreements.

Most of the Chinese focused heavily on individual growth. Apart from Lifelong Learning, there was also the value of Self-improvement. In addition, the Chinese continued to believe in their ancient values such as Filial Piety and Reciprocation of Favours. These values are closely related to each other, but they are not exactly the same. While Filial Piety relates only to the parents, Reciprocation of Favours covers a larger territory that involves all acquaintances known to the individual. In this case, a Chinese male acknowledged the fact that he had a responsibility to help his parents and at the same time return the kindness shown by the people around him either tangibly or intangibly. As he mentioned during the interview:

"I should help my family after I got a good job. They sacrificed a lot for me."[Filial Piety][Participant IB]

"I was taught not to forget the people who have sacrificed for me. I am to return the favours whenever there are chances to do so. Once I have started working, I began to give a certain amount of money to my parents to help them in their old days. They have sacrificed a lot for me and now it is time for me to pay back."
[Reciprocation of Favours][Participant IB]

On the other hand, the Indians were taught to value Self-confidence and Self-respect. For them, when individuals were confident of their own abilities, they would be able to achieve anything. As stated by an Indian male:

"Once I joined Nestlé, I realised that I need to build up my self-assurance. Even though it is a hard task, I must try."[Self-confidence][Participant IL]

"My parents and teachers always told me to believe in myself."[Self-respect][Participant IL]

Furthermore, the Indians also favoured the Authoritative value. Indirectly, this value showed the importance to the Indians of being in command. They came across as eager to accept the responsibilities that came with being in charge of any events.

The degree of importance placed on these cultural values was subjected to a few changes when these participants started working for Nestlé in Malaysia. More cultural values were now added (Figure 2) to the previous complement of cultural values found in Figure 1 as the need to adopt a new set of values became essential in their work environment. In contrast to Figure 1, some of the cultural values in Figure 2 were included due to them being referred to by more respondents as values that they acquired after they joined the organization. However, the value of Ambitious was simply stated again in Figure 2 due to the increase in the number of respondents adopting it once they started working for the organisation.

Apart from the similarities presented in Figure 1, more interesting similarities surfaced between the three races after joining the organization (Figure 2). For example, the Malays and the Indians now considered Wisdom as important. According to them:

"It is important to make people understand when you explain something. To do that, you should understand the problem first." [Participant IJ]

"You have to be matured in anything you do. You have to experience various ways in order to interact effectively with people around you. You must also learn

to be strong, how to complete the work by yourself and not be extra sensitive.”
[Participant IL]

The underlined expressions in the quotations above make up the definition of Wisdom. A wise person was expected to be able to reason with and accept challenges in a sensible manner. In addition, the Malays and the Indians both stated the need to be Authoritative in order to improve in the organization. Other than the cultural values of Authoritative and Wisdom, both races also believed in the cultural values of Accommodating and Self-confidence.

Moreover, the Chinese and the Indians also focused on Modesty as another essential cultural value to be adopted in the organisation. Modesty is the act of expressing a lower opinion of one's own ability than is probably deserved, hiding one's good qualities. Finally, all the three races now believed in the importance of Tact at work. Tact meant being able to deal with others competently. Since Nestlé in Malaysia comprised people from various backgrounds, many of the interviewees believed their successes also depended on their behaviour towards other employees. As mentioned by the participants:

“While working, you have to learn to be more tactful in your actions because that will lead to different consequences.” [Participant IB]

“Our culture has taught us to be considerate when dealing with other individuals. In conflict, rather than pinpointing to people, we tend to tell them about the consequences and the negative impacts of their acts. Sometimes when they understand the situation, they will remember better not to repeat the mistakes.”
[Participant IG]

“Everybody is busy in Nestlé. It really depends on the individual to get along well with others.” [Participant IH]

In other words, Tact came across as a value that stressed the skill to interact with people. An Indian manager even suggested that people would react better towards diplomatic corrective measures than they would otherwise.

A Chinese respondent explained that most of the time, these cultural values were not very specific to each race. Instead, the values appeared to be mixed together among the races. In certain cases, the participants were even allowed to choose the values suitable for them as they grew older. However, having said that, he also said that he was now trying to teach his son a variety of other values apart from the ones that he had learned in his childhood days:

“...we want to teach him the moral way because in the old days, when the old people teach us, they used cane. When my father said no, it is a no. No explanation.”

So, we are trying to change a little bit here. A little bit on the Western style. More on the explanation.”[Participant IE]

Likewise, an Indian participant stated:

“Yes, I do have certain Indian cultural things to follow. But, I do not follow all. I only follow those that I think are suitable for me. And, concurrently, I also try to take any good bits from the culture of others.”[Participant II]

At the same time, most of the participants believed that the main races in Malaysia seemed to be merging together and practised similar cultural values. It can be seen from the previous figures presented that these values keep moving around from one race to another. For example, the Malays did not have the value of Self-confidence at first, but they adopted it once they entered the organization. As remarked by one Chinese executive:

“Racially I think because of the Malaysian culture there is definitely a slight difference. Because basically you know Chinese people, they tend to be aggressive in general. Partly and then more mathematically inclined. So that’s why like sale you know all these kinds of jobs suited to them and the Indians. Err...but you know, nowadays Malaysian, the gaps seemed to have crossed because even Malays, we have some managers who are equally aggressive. In fact some are more terer (more alarming). And Chinese also, we do have some Chinese managers who are quite laissez-faire...not really...performing. I think personally Malaysians are actually quite close, the gaps have closed up very much. Compared to last time. The integration is quite good.”[Participant ID]

In addition, another employee from the same ethnic group stated:

“That’s a beauty of being a Malaysian. I must admit people will be amazed, you as a Malaysian, you can speak Chinese, you can speak Malay, you can speak English. Even in Chinese itself, you have so many dialects. I can understand and speak five dialects. So, we were saying that Malaysia is actually a very unique country. Because we have a so-called open policy when it comes to culture.”[Participant IE]

Still, through the processed qualitative data, several cultural values were able to be pinned to the three main races in Malaysia.

As can be seen from Figures 1 and 2, although the Malays were still focused on their self-worthiness, there appeared to be some modifications that led to the same thinking as the Chinese such as the addition of the cultural values of Ambitious, and Self-confidence. These cultural values were now considered crucial to their success in an organisation like Nestlé in Malaysia.

As for the Chinese they continued to adopt a few more cultural values to ensure their movement further up on the organisational ladder. Among these values are Ambitious, and Knowledgeable. But, one of the Chinese interviewees also acknowledged the fact that apart from the Chinese, the Malays were also getting more ambitious whether they realised it or not. She stated:

“Basically, Chinese people tend to be aggressive in general. But, the gaps seemed to have crossed because now we have Malay managers who are equally aggressive.”[Participant ID]

On the other hand, the Indians were now adding the cultural values of Accommodating, and Modesty. These values are normally imperative in an organisation. Two of the Indian employees mentioned the respective values in the following way:

“You have to be flexible. Because different bosses acts differently. It’s a mixture. You don’t always work for one person forever.” [Accommodating][Participant II]

“Nestlé requires a lot of teamwork. Trainings are conducted in groups. All the activities are linked with one another. Jobs from various departments are also linked.”[Cooperation][Participant IL]

DISCUSSION

In terms of ethnic variations in the relationship with cultural values, the data showed that the Malays’ cultural values tended to focus on displaying proper etiquette. Values such as Accommodating, Affiliation, Appreciative, Filial Piety, and Obedience showed the importance of controlling oneself when socialising with other people. Studies by Abdullah (1996) referred to this behaviour as *Adab*. By definition, *Adab* is a ‘code of personal conduct, which is expected of an individual in his or her relationship with others, and it denotes individual’s responsibility to be courteous in words, generous in deeds, and sincere in actions to all people at all times (Abdullah, 1996, p.22-23).’ By demonstrating the *Adab* behaviour, an individual shows their good breeding and a dignified control in their physical and non-verbal behaviour. In addition, most Malays are motivated by their affiliation to groups (i.e. family, friends, etc.) (Ahmad, 2001). Therefore, success for the Malays is measured not only by the acquisition of material gain or power obtained, but also takes into account relationships with other people. In corporate terms, the Malay employees are more likely to be motivated if they see benefits not only for the company, but for their own family, community, and nation as a whole. That was perhaps the reason why the Malay employees listed a Work/life Balance among their values. The Malays

are said to be the 'being-oriented' workers, meaning they view work as 'a necessity for life, not as a goal in itself, and their concern for output and performance depends on their individual needs' (Ahmad, 2001, p.88). The Malays also believe strongly in the concept of a Supreme Being – Allah. To show this commitment, prayers and shared rituals to remember God are practised daily (Abdullah, 1996). The value of religion was referred to as Piousness in the qualitative data. Tayeb supported this finding saying that in many countries, religions still influences characteristics of their people and institutions (1997).

A few interesting cultural values were proposed by the Malay respondents during the interview sessions. First of all there was the value of Individualism, which opposed the findings from most of the studies (e.g. Hofstede, 1980, Trompenaars, 1993, Abdullah, 1996, House et al., 2004) indicating that the Malays are a collectivist community with collectivist minds. Previously, the Malays were prone to being collective where the 'we' predominates the 'I' in order to maintain harmonious relationships with other members of the social network. In this research, some of the Malay individuals were beginning to think that being individualistic might be better at times. The existence of the values Ambitious and Knowledgeable showed another deviation from the traditional values. It seems now some of the Malays have changed their perspective, and have a strong desire for success, wealth, and power in order to be among the best in the organisation. The findings oppose the idea of Alatas (1977) who named the Malays as a lazy society. The possible connection between the three cultural values (Individualism, Ambitious, Knowledgeable) were suggested by Ahmad (2001). According to him, although the Malays may be collectivist within their own clans, this may change when competitiveness increases in society at large.

On the other hand, the Chinese were more concerned with education and improving oneself as inferred by the cultural values of Lifelong Learning, Knowledgeable, Ambitious, and Self-improvement. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Chinese children were the largest community in schools in Malaya compared to the other races (Nordin and Hussiin, 2004). Perhaps these values are related to the fact that they are the 'doing-oriented' performers. As 'doers,' they actually monitor the link between the level of effort they put in and the outcome they receive (Ahmad, 2001, p.88). Being educated is the first step towards achieving success. In addition, they also believed in the Reciprocation of Favours, in which all good deeds should be returned equally in worth although not similarly. This practice occurred both at home and at work. Furthermore, family institution was considered very important to the Chinese (Filial Piety). The head of the family is always viewed as the leader. Their aim to achieve success leads back to providing for their families' needs and being able to gain good social standing and status in the Chinese community (Ahmad, 2001). Familial, social and political stability, and harmony are the ultimate aims of Confucianism (Lu, 1983, King and Bond, 1985, Liu, 1986). Other than that, due to the importance of the harmony concept, the Chinese also emphasised being

polite, honest, modest, and respectful (Politeness, Honesty, Modesty, Respect for Other Races and Religions) to others. For example, it was stated by Ahmad (2001) that the Chinese as individuals are very modest in exhibiting their riches.

Finally, the Indians' cultural values evolved around self. The beliefs in the caste system and the concept of 'rebirth' influenced their way of life. The Indians believe that their reincarnation after death depends very much upon their conduct in the present life (Nordin and Hussiin, 2004). This might be the reason why they strived very hard to gain authority, self-confidence, and self-respect (Authoritative, Self-confidence, Self-respect). Because their beliefs focused on individuals being of their best behaviour in order to be reborn into a higher caste, the Indians were also found to be polite to others (Politeness).

At the same time, the Indians were also categorised as religious people. This was deduced again by the value of Piousness. Most Indians begin their activities with prayers to deities (Ahmad, 2001). In addition, the Indians placed much importance on the rituals and traditions of their people (Rituals and Traditions). The interviews revealed that one female Indian employee showed a very strict obedience towards her family and society's rituals and traditions.

CONCLUSION

Although these cultural values cannot be generalised to the whole population in Malaysia, new patterns in terms of the choices and the believed implications of these cultural values seemed to occur among the community members. In a country with a variety of subcultures resulting from the different races, the understanding of these cultural values is very important especially for organisations. This is because the need to conduct organisational activities in accordance to these changes to ensure that the results based on these activities are able to achieve the maximum impact on employees' performance is essential in determining the success of each organization.

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