PERCEPTION OF MANAGERIAL DECISION – MAKING BY MALAYS, INDIANS AND CHINESE MANAGERS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY*

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SINOPSIS

Malaysia ialah negara berbilang bangsa yang terdiri dari Melayu, India, Cina dan beberapa kumpulan kaum lain yang hidup saling hormat menghormati antara satu sama lain terhadap kepercayaan agama dan adat resam, kebudayaan dan tradisi. Wakil dari kebanyakan golongan ini bekerja di jabatan-jabatan kerajaan Malaysia. Kajian penyelidikan ini hanyalah terhadap pegawai perpusakaan dan pegawai sains maklumat. Mereka terdiri dari berbilang bangsa dan keturunan yang bertanggung-jawab kepada kerja membuat keputusan dalam berbagai bidang di perpustakaan dan pusat perkhidmatan maklumat. Adalah dipercayai bahawa perbezaan kebudayaan, tradisi dan adat resam akan mempengaruhi seseorang pengurus itu terhadap persepsi kerja pengurusannya. Oleh yang demikian kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui sama ada persepti terhadap pengurusan membuat keputusan berbeda mengikut ras seseorang pengurus itu seperti yang diperlihatkan dalam masyarakat berbilang kaum di Malaysia. Pengurus dalam kajian penyelidikan ini ialah pegawai perpustakaan dan pegawai sains maklumat yang terlibat secara langsung atau tidak langsung dalam kerja membuat keputusan di Perpustakaan dan Pusat Perkhidmatan Maklumat.

SYNOPSIS

Malaysia is a multi-racial nation of Malays, Indians, Chinese and several other ethnic groups who live side by side observing their own religious beliefs and customs, culture and traditions. Representatives of most of these groups of people work in various Malaysian government department in Malaysia. This research study is mainly of Malaysian librarian and information scientists. They were members of different races who are responsible for decision-making on various matters in the library and information services. It is believed that cultural differences, traditions and customs tend to influence managers' perception of managerial job. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to discover in general whether the perception of managerial decision-making will vary according to the race of the decision-makers as reflected in the multi-racial society like Malaysia. Managers in this research study refer to the librarians and information scientists who are involved directly or indirectly in decision-making in the Library and Information Services.

INTRODUCTION

This research study is an examination of the perception of managerial decision-making in Malaysian Library and Information Services. It asks the question — when the librarians and information scientists (managers) think about managing, are their ideas all pretty much the same, or, if it differs, how do the managers group themselves together? Is there a readily discernible pattern in managers' responses by clusters or groups of different races and cultural backgrounds. To answer these questions simply for the moment, it seems clear from the data reported here that there is a very high degree of differences among the managers' perceptions according to their different cultural backgrounds and beliefs. Of all the differences observed among managers many of the variations were associated with cultural differences, so there are identifiable determinants of perception within each race.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

It may be suggested that racial differences will have bearing on managerial decision-making since different cultures will give individuals different perception of their working situations. Furthermore individual facets of jobs will be valued differently by different cultures, and the relationship between facets may be viewed in different ways according to managers' ethnic background.

The attributional theory[1] suggests that individuals are motivated to maintain consistency between their various beliefs or behaviours. Generally, individuals tend to alter or reinterprete new information in such a way to allow their original belief to remain unaltered or even strengthened. On the other hand, it is believ that individuals tend to search for the underlying cause or events that occur around them and identify the locus of causality within the individual or within his environment. In other words, individuals tend to assign credit for positive outcomes and blame for negative outcomes if the locus of causality of these outcomes is percieved to be internal, and to with hold credit and blame if the locus of causility is perceived to be external.

A review of the literature indicates that cultural differences can be demonstrated in areas such as work values, motivation and attitudes, supervision and management, work relationships, compensation systems and organizational structure.[2] However in another study,

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[1]Heider, F., *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relation.* New York: Wiley, 1958.

[2]Barrett, G.V and Bass, B.M., "Cross-cultural Issues In Industrial And Organizational Psychology " In Dunnette, M.D. (ed) *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology.* Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1976, pp. 1639 – 1686.

Negandhi[3] stated that:

...there is increasing evidence to support the contention that management practices, behaviour, and effectiveness are as much, if not more so, functions of such contextual variables as size, technology, location and market conditions as they are of sociocultural variables.

In other words, races with different cultural background, beliefs and economic classes are associated with different views of the world of work.[4]

However, cultural differences can affect work attitudes in two major ways. Firstly, by providing individuals with different frames of reference or standards of comparison by which to judge and evaluate their employment situation. On the other hand, an individual from one cultural background may perceive a job as conflict-laden and varied while an individual from different cultural background may perceive the same situation as monotonous and conflict-free. Such differences in frames of reference may be transmitted in early socialization periods and internalized by the individual,[5] or they may reflect current differences in the norms and expectations held by the various cultural groups in line with the social informational model of job attitudes.[6] Secondly, cultural differences were expressed not in the level of job related perceptions and attitudes but rather in the relationship among the various perception and attitudes. In other words, individuals with varied cultural background may attach different values to certain facets of jobs, and these differences may be reflected in differences in the relationship among the perceptions and attitudes related to these facets, and in the relationships between the various facets, and individuals' overall evulation of their jobs.

On the other hand, cultural differences are obvious in the ways by which American and Japanese executive make decisions regarding major goals and objectives. Usually the typical American or Western approach to decision-making is for the executives to gather relevant information, ask for advice and then arrive at a decision.[7] The evaluation is based on whether the decision is effective and efficient.

[3]Negandhi, A.R., "Comparative Management And Organization Theory· A Marriage Needed." *Academy of Management Journal* 18, 1975, pp. 337

[4]Feldman, J.M., "Race, Economic Class And Perceived Outcomes of Work And Unemployment." *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 58, 1973, pp. 16 – 22.

[5]Wanous, J.P., "The Role of Individual Differences In Human Reactions to Job Characteristics." *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 59, 1974, pp. 616 – 622.

[6]Salanick, G. and Pfeffer, J., "A Social Information Process Approach to Job Attitudes and Task Design." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 23, 1978, pp. 224 – 253.

[7]Drucker, P., "What Can We Learn From Japanese Management." *Harvard Business Review*, 49(2), 1971, pp. 110 – 122.

The Japanese managers on the other hand are more likely to emphasize that the important element in decision-making is defining the question. The Japanese group decision-making is widely noted in the literature.[8] It is obvious that the intriguing point is the importance of maintaning harmony and the right spirit in the decision-making process. Creating and maintaining harmony for the Japanese places primary emphasis on reaching consensus, the nature of indeterminacy,[9] indirect speech, and the use of subtle nuances in communication. It is obvious that due to cultural differences between the Japanese and the American executives managerial decision-making varies accordingly. The proposition that the cultural and ethnic framework within which the managers operate has an important bearing upon managerial roles and decisions are the hypothesis which is to be tested.

METHODOLOGY

SUBJECT

The results of this study are based on a sample of 80 managers (librarian and information scientist) from different races or cultural backgrounds in Malaysia. The sample is further divided into 29 Malays (14 male and 15 female), 23 Indian (10 male 13 female) and 28 Chinese (13 male and 15 females) separately. The sample is drawn from different types of libraries and information services, and includes various levels of managerial jobs in cataloguing, acquisition, reader services etc. and different sizes of libraries. Managerial cooperation in the research came through the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Library, Universiti Malaya Library, Puspati, National Library of Malaysia, State of Selangor Public Library and British Council Library in the State of Selangor and Federal Territory

However, this sample does not represent a sample of management in Malaysian library and information services. It is not strictly a representative sample. To produce such sample one must have a complete list of all the librarians and information scientists in a country. Another problem that arises is in finding male librarians and information scientists. Most of the librarians and information scientists in Malaysia are female. Futhermore, it is very difficult to get a male Indian or Chinese librarian for the sample. Consequently the sample does not really represent the total population, but consists of persons selected to fulfill the requirements of the research.

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[8]Hattori, I.A., "A Proposition On Efficient Decision-Making In The Japanese Corporation." *Columbia Journal of World Business,* 13, 1978, pp. 7 – 15.

[9]Peterson, R.B. and Shimada, J.Y., "Sources of Management Problems In Japanese-American Joint Ventures." *Academy of Management Review,* 3, 1978, pp. 796 – 804.

SURVEY DESIGN

To answer the research questions stated above, a questionnaire was prepared which each manager-respondent could complete for him/herself. A four-item questionnaire was constructed to examine the work of the librarian and information scientist in relation to managerial decision-making. The items were constructed to represent problems in decision-making such as the availability of sources of information, books, reports and journal, on management, and discussing problems with colleagues before making decisions. Respondents were asked to choose from the five alternatives — 5 (strongly agree), 4 (agree), 3 (uncertain or don't know), 2 (disagree), 1 (strongly disagree).

This form of tapping attitudes and perceptions has real draw-backs, among them being that it is more difficult to go into great depth in the exploration. Its virtue, however and the consideration that seemed overiding in this case — is that it is possible to ensure that each respondent answered exactly the same questions, and that the results are strictly comparable from one group to another However, the greatest problem is in understanding the perception of managers from different races or cultural backgrounds. Finally, the culture itself is hard to separate from the impression of the institution. For all these reasons a very careful attempt was made in this study to ask identical questions of each managers, and to ask them of the same kinds of managers in each race so that the answers could be compared with as little error as possible.

PROCEDURE

The questionnaire was distributed to persons of different races, namely Malays, Indians and Chinese working in different sections or divisions in the library and information services. Respondents were asked to answer all the questions related to their jobs on managerial decision-making and to rate on a five-point scale. A 'high' score included those who scored '5' or '4' on the scale, 'medium' the mid point and 'low' is '2' or '1'.

RESULTS

The hypothesis is that managerial decision-making will vary according to the race of the decision makers. The study tries to examine and show that there are significant differences when the Malays, Indians and Chinese make decisions.

Respondents were asked in question one to rate on how they felt whether books, reports and journals on management were useful to them in making decision. The distribution of responses is shown in table 1. The chi-squared test was used annd the distribution was found to be significant at better than to 0.001 level. Therefore, races differ

significantly in relation to the above question. Close examination of the table suggests that the major sources of differences are that more Indians than the Malays and Chinese scored high points with the statements. On the other hand, Malays scored lower than the Indians and Chinese.

Question two was related to how generally respondents discussed problems with their colleagues before making decision. The distribution of responses is shown in table 2. The chi-squared test was used and this distribution was found to be significant at better than to 0.001 level. This suggests that there are significant differences among the Malays, Indian and Chinese in relation to the above question and that more Malays than Indians and Chinese prefer to discuss problems with their colleagues before making decision.

Table 1. Usefulness of Books, Reports for Decision-Making
Scored by race

	RACES			
Score	INDIANS	MALAYS	CHINESE	Total
High	3	21	22	46
	(13.2)	(16.7)	(16.1)	
Medium	4	1	1	6
	(1.7)	(2.2)	(2.1)	
Low	16	7	5	28
	(8.1)	(10.1)	(9.8)	
Total	23	29	28	N = 80

( ) Expected values
X^2 Test significant at 0.001

Table 2. Discuss with Colleagues before Making Decision
Scored by race

	RACES			
Score	INDIANS	MALAYS	CHINESE	Total
High	1	26	3	30
	(8.6)	(10.8)	(10.5)	
Medium	8	1	11	20
	(5.7)	(7.2)	(7.0)	
Low	14	2	14	30
	(8.6)	(10.8)	(10.5)	
Total	23	29	28	N = 80

( ) Expected values
X^2 Test significant at 0.001

The third question was related to how generally respondents consulted any other sources of information before making decisions. The distribution of responses is shown in table 3 The chi-squared test was used on this distribution and was found to be significant at better than to 0.001 level. This indicated that there are significant differences among the Malays, Indians and Chinese in relation to the above question. The major sources of differences are that more Malays and Chinese than Indians scored higher on the statement.

The fourth question was related to how respondents felt about the adequacy of sources of information available to them for making decisions. The distribution of responses is shown in table 4. The values of chi-squared for this table was significant at better than to 0.001 level. This also sugguests that races differ significantly in relation to

Table 3. Consult other Sources for Decision-Making
Scored by race

	RACES			
Score	INDIANS	MALAYS	CHINESE	Total
High	4 (8.3)	23 (10.5)	2 (10.2)	29
Medium	5 (5.2)	2 (6.5)	11 (6.3)	
Low	14 (9.5)	4 (11.9)	15 (11.5)	
Total	23	29	28	N = 80

( ) Expected values
X^2 Test significant at 0.001

Table 4. Source Adequacy for Decision-Making
Scored by race

	RACES			
Score	INDIANS	MALAYS	CHINESE	Total
High	3 (11.2)	20 (14.1)	16 (13.6)	39
Medium	5 (2.1)	1 (2.5)	1 (2.4)	7
Low	15 (9.7)	8 (12.3)	11 (11.9)	34
Total	23	29	28	N = 80

( ) Expected values
X^2 Test significant at 0.001

the above question. The table indicated that its major sources of differences are that more Indians and Malays than the Chinese said that there are adequate sources of information available for decision-making.

CONCLUSION

The above results indicate that racial differences have a bearing on perception of managerial decision-making. Furthermore, individual facets of jobs will be valued differently by different cultures, and the relationship between facets are also viewed differently according to the managers' ethnic backgroud. Similarly, the Malays, Indians and Chinese as individuals are motivated to maintain consistency between their various beliefs and behaviour [10] It is obvious that cultural differences among the Malays, Indians and Chinese affect their work attitudes or perceptions in many ways. Firstly, it provides individuals with different frames of reference or standard of comparison to judge or evaluate the employment situation. Therefore, it is not unusual to see that the Chinese dislike to discuss problems with their colleagues, and on the other hand, the Indians agree that books, reports and journals on management are useful for decision-making, and other studies, for example, show that an individual from one cultural background may perceive the job as conflict-laden and varied while an individual from other cultural backgroud may perceive the same situation as monotonous and conflict-free.[11]

The data suggest that more Malays and Chinese used to consult other sources of information before making decision than the Indians which ties in with the fact that more Indians and Malays said that there are adequate sources of information available for decision-making. But the Chinese felt that there are not enough information available. Thus, if an Indian manager feels that he already has enough information he will be less willing to undertake a search for more, whereas the opposite will be true of the Chinese manager Finally, it may be concluded that views of decision-making do vary according to the race of the decision makers. Generally, before the managers make a decision they will be influenced or motivated by their cultural background, beliefs and behaviours.

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[10]Heider, P., 1958, op. cit.

[11]Wanous, J.P., 1974, op. cit.

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