

## **IMPACT OF CULTURE ON THE ACCEPTANCE AND OUTCOMES OF ASSESSMENT CENTRE METHOD**

(Kesan Budaya terhadap Penerimaan dan Hasil Kaedah Penilaian Berpusat)

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### *ABSTRACT*

Assessment centre (AC) is a popular method that has been used to facilitate human resource decisions and it has also been used in developing countries including Malaysia. Thus, it is important to understand how different cultural settings may influence the implementation of AC and how this might differ from its implementation in more developed nations. Therefore, this study aims to empirically investigate the impact of cultures (collectivism and relationship preference, power distance and preference hierarchy, and communication context) on the acceptance (structural aspect, information sharing, interpersonal treatment and distributive justice) and the outcomes from attending the AC (in terms of the attitude towards AC, affect and recommendation). This study utilises organisational justice theory in exploring participants' reactions on the implementation and outcomes from attending AC. A total of thirteen hypotheses have been put forward to test the relationships amongst the culture values, acceptance and outcomes after attending the AC. The respondents for the study are from those who have had experience as participants of AC in Malaysian public sectors. In total, a survey of 405 respondents was successfully carried out and 381 useful feedbacks were analysed. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with SmartPLS software using Partial Least Squares (PLS) estimation is used for modelling analysis. The findings showed mixed results that would be discussed in this article. In conclusions, human resource practitioner may adopt the results from this study to improve the current practice in the selection process of staff in an organization.

*Keywords:* human resource; assessment centre; national culture

### *ABSTRAK*

Penilaian berpusat (PB) adalah kaedah yang popular dan telah digunakan untuk membantu dalam membuat keputusan berkaitan sumber manusia dan telah digunakan di negara-negara membangun seperti Malaysia. Sehubungan itu, adalah penting untuk memahami bagaimana perbezaan budaya boleh mempengaruhi pelaksanaan PB dan bagaimana ianya berbeza dengan pelaksanaan di negara maju. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kesan budaya (kebersamaan dan keutamaan hubungan, jarak kuasa dan keutamaan hirarki dan kontek komunikasi) terhadap penerimaan (aspek struktur, perkongsian maklumat, layanan interpersonal dan keadilan pengagihan) dan hasil daripada mengikuti PB (dari segi sikap terhadap PB, kesan dan cadangan). Kajian ini menggunakan teori keadilan organisasi dalam meneroka tindak balas peserta terhadap pelaksanaan dan hasil daripada menghadiri PB. Sejumlah 13 hipotesis telah dibentuk untuk menguji hubungan di antara nilai budaya, penerimaan dan hasil daripada mengikuti PB. Responden untuk kajian ini melibatkan mereka yang berpengalaman sebagai peserta PB dalam sektor perkhidmatan awam di Malaysia. Secara keseluruhan, tinjauan terhadap 405 responden telah berjaya dijalankan dan 381 maklum balas yang berguna telah dianalisis. Pemodelan Persamaan Struktur (SEM) dengan perisian *SmartPLS* menggunakan *Partial Least Squares* (PLS) digunakan untuk analisis pemodelan. Penemuan dari kajian menunjukkan keputusan yang bercampur. Kesimpulannya, pengamal sumber manusia boleh mengguna pakai hasil daripada kajian ini untuk menambah baik amalan semasa pemilihan staf dalam sesebuah organisasi.

*Kata kunci:* sumber manusia; penilaian berpusat; nilai budaya kebangsaan

## 1. Introduction

Since independence from Britain in 1957, the Malaysian government has introduced several administrative reforms, with the main important objectives were to improve the efficiency and quality of service delivery by challenging conventional attitudes and values (Triantafyllou 2002). Throughout the 1980s, arguments and comments continued to be made by politicians and senior civil officers on the need to change the attitude of public service officers (Mahathir 1984; Mohammad 1988). The reformation in the public sector can be seen through the introduction of various activities to inculcate the desired values among public servants including honesty, discipline, integrity, dedication, accountability, trustworthiness and efficiency (Ahmad 2017; Mustaffa *et al.* 2007; Siddiquee *et al.* 2017)

As part of administrative reformation, the Malaysian government has introduced assessment centres (AC) in the 1990s. The suggestion of using an AC approach was first proposed by Hamid, the Chief Secretary of the Government of Malaysia, at the Third Conference of Public Service Commissions in 1993 (Hamid 1993). The suggestion was made as part of the effort by the government to reform human resource practice in the public sector. Hamid (1993) suggested that AC should be used to improve the process of selecting suitable candidates to work in the government sector. At the federal level, the AC approach was used for the first time as part of the process for selection of Administrative and Diplomatic Officers in 1998. The government judged the approach to be a success in improving transparency in the selection process and helping measure candidates' competencies and abilities, and the use of AC was extended for selection purposes to other positions in 2009 (Public Service Commission of Malaysia 2011). In addition, four states i.e. Johor, Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah also use AC in the selection of their Administrative Officers.

## 2. Literature Review

Assessment centre (AC) is a popular method used in human resource management (HRM) and has been widely studied over the last five decades (Cahoon *et al.* 2012; Thornton 2011). The approach involves multiple assessment processes, where a group of participants takes part in exercises and is observed by a team of trained assessors who evaluate each participant against a number of predetermined job-related behaviours (Ballantyne & Povah 2004; Cahoon *et al.* 2012; International Task Force on Assessment Center Guidelines 2009; Lanik & Gibbons 2011; Rupp *et al.* 2015; Thornton & Rupp 2006; Thornton *et al.* 2014; Thornton *et al.* 2017). Scholars suggested that AC may be able to help an organisation obtain a large amount of information about a person in a relatively short period of time which is useful for human resource decision making (Bray 1982; Gibbons & Rupp 2009).

The rapid increase in the number of AC around the world however, has raised questions about the application of this approach in diverse countries. Scholars explained that the success of this approach is due to its adaptability to the different purposes of the AC, as well as to cultural, societal, and organisational requirements (Elegbe 2010; Thornton 2011). In this context, scholars urged that it is important to understand how differences in cultural settings may influence AC implementation and how such factors might differ from one nation to another. Indeed, there is a general lack of research into the implementation and effectiveness in developing countries in spite of a widespread growth in their use (Krause & Thornton 2009). In the same vein, Elegbe (2010), Krause (2010) and Povah (2011) highlighted that the region-specific approach is very vital as the findings of AC applications from one country or region cannot be generalised to other countries or regions due to the social, economic, and educational circumstances differ from one country to another. A number of scholars commented that the study on design, implementation and acceptance of AC is mostly based on research conducted in societies in Western cultures (Claus & Briscoe 2009; Elegbe 2010; Lanik & Gibbons 2011; Lievens & Thornton 2005; Thornton & Povah 2011).

Yet, little is known about the adaptation of the well-established principles and techniques of western AC to very different cultural and organisational contexts.

### **2.1. Malaysian Culture**

According to Malaysian anthropologist, Dahlan (1991), Malaysian culture is strongly influenced by indigenous values. He specifically explained that the indigenous values of the Malays, the single largest ethnic group in Malaysia, could be dealt with under the notion of *budiman* or polite system. This *budiman* system can be defined as a concept incorporating such attributes as wisdom, virtue, kindness, etiquette, and morality (Richardson *et al.* 2016). The polite system embodies all the virtues ranked in the system of values of the society, which is composed of virtuous qualities such as generosity, respect, sincerity, righteousness, discretion and feelings of shame which Dahlan (1991) termed as *murah hati*, *hormat*, *ikhlas*, *mulia*, *timbang-rasa* and *malu*, respectively. Therefore, the polite system governs the worldview and emotions of the society and play an important role in guiding how they conduct all their interpersonal activities. It also shapes their approach to ethics, behaviour, and etiquette in the workplace (Richardson *et al.* 2016).

Mustaffa *et al.* (2007) explained that the polite system is strongly influenced management practices, especially in Malaysian public-service organisations because public servants are expected to display appropriate behaviour when dealing with members of the public. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration the elements of the polite system in making decisions about who to select and who to promote. Scholars further discuss how these indigenous values influence Malaysian culture specifically in the context of respect to elders (power distance and preference of hierarchy), harmony (collectivism and relationship preferences) and face saving (high-context communication) (Abdullah & Low 2001; Bakar *et al.* 2016; Hofstede & Hofstede 2004; House *et al.* 1999; House 2004).

Studies by Western scholars like Hofstede (Hofstede 1980; 2001) and the GLOBE research by House *et al.* (1999; 2004), showed that Malaysia is a society that scores highly on power distance. Employees in high power distance society tend to create a formal relationship within their organisations, with high reliance on supervision to ensure effective implementation of the given tasks. In this regard, members of such a society or organisation tend to expect, and agree, that power should not be equally shared (Hofstede 1980; House *et al.* 2004; 1999). Organisations normally practise a hierarchical organisational structure with many supervisory personnel, wherein subordinates are expected to be informed as to their tasks (Hofstede & Hofstede 2004). Studies by Malaysian researchers support the finding that Malaysia is a high power distance society and tends to place emphasis on respect to elders, authority and hierarchical differences (Abdullah 1992; Abdullah & Lim 2001; Abdullah & Pedersen 2003; Lim 2001).

Studies also found that Malaysian society is more group- than individual-oriented. This is in line with the findings of various studies that indicate that Malaysia is a collectivist society (Blunt 1988; Hofstede 1980; House *et al.* 1999). This is also supported by local Malaysian research, for example Abdullah (1992) who found that Malaysians work much better in a group, as they have a strong sense of belonging. The spirit of teamwork is important, which can be seen by the readiness to put group interests ahead of individual concerns. Abdullah (1992) explains that satisfaction at work comes from having opportunities to receive appropriate respect from fellow colleagues and maintaining harmonious, predictable and enjoyable friendships with subordinates and peers.

A third important finding in regards to Malaysian culture is in the context of communication (Abdullah & Pedersen 2003; Abdullah 2010; Amir 2009; Bakar *et al.* 2007; Salleh 2005). Rogers *et al.* (2002) explain that high context-cultures like Asians prefer to use high-context communication. This cultural context assumes that most information resides in the person and therefore it is important to understand informal and body language in communication. A study by Salleh (2005) shows that Malaysian put higher emphasis in high communication context as part of the process of

maintaining harmony, to avoid confrontation, criticism and outspokenness, as it may damage self-esteem or standing.

## **2.2. Organisational Justice Theory**

To explore the acceptance of AC practices in Malaysia, this study adapted the organisational justice theory. Organisational justice is concerned with what people think is fair and how they react if they believe that the procedures to make the decision, or distribute the resources, are unfair (McCarthy *et al.* 2017; Steiner & Gilliland 2001). This model consists of two sub-elements, i.e. distributive and procedural justice (Bies & Tripp 1995; McCarthy *et al.* 2017; Steiner & Gilliland 2001). Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of the process by which outcomes are reached, or decisions are made (Konradt *et al.* 2017). The procedural justice consists of ten rules that can be categorised under three categories. The first category is structural aspect or formal characteristics, which include job-relatedness, chance to perform, reconsideration opportunity and consistency. Information sharing is the second category and it consists of feedback, information known and openness. The final category is interpersonal treatment, which includes treatment at the test site, two-way communication and the propriety of questions. Meanwhile distributive justice refers to how the outcome is distributed. Distributive justice is also closely related to equity and equality theory. Equity theory focuses on meritocratic in which the most highly performing candidates during the AC programme are the ones most likely to be hired. Meanwhile equality theory refers to the situation where outcomes are equally distributed among all individuals, which means that the evaluation is less based on individual merit. Equity is preferred if emphasis is given on productivity whereas equality in distribution is more important for group harmony.

## **2.3. Hypotheses Development**

Steiner and Gilliland (2001) explained that little research has been conducted to explore how culture might influence the process, as compared to questioning the influence of culture on distributive justice. However, it is likely that cultural dimensions might also have an influence on the procedural justice rules. For instance, Aycan (2005) explained that recruitment and selection process as well as performance evaluation in high power distance and collectivist culture are more towards 'soft criteria' (e.g. social and interpersonal skills, etc.) and are conducted in unstructured and unsystematic way. In this context, it is likely that AC approach might be less effective in high power distance and collectivist culture and thus, it is important to design and implement AC systematically and very structured. Therefore, it is likely that the high power distance society like Malaysia which put emphasis on power distance and preference to hierarchy will not argue the structural aspect or the formal characteristics of the assessment process. In relation to this, in collectivist culture, arguing top management decision might be seen as unethical and may disturb group harmony (Aycan 2005). In contrast, giving arguments and voicing opinions is common in individualistic and low power distance societies. In the selection process, people in these societies are more concerned with clear performance standards and how these relate to the job. They also show greater concern in regard to the appropriateness of criteria, including consistency and accuracy (McFarlin & Sweeney 2001). Based on these arguments, the following hypotheses are posited:

H1: Collectivism and relationship preference is negatively related to structural aspect

H2: Power distance and preference to hierarchy is negatively related to structural aspect

Scholars also suggest that there is a tendency of reluctant to seek or share feedback and information in high power distance society. An appeal of process is not common in this culture because it is considered as challenging authority (Fletcher & Perry 2002). Similarly, Steiner and Gilliland (2001) argue that power distance is an important influence on information sharing. In low

power distance societies, it is expected that information sharing will be greater with individuals of lower status. In contrast, it might be difficult for individuals of lower status to gain more information in high power distance societies.

In addition to this, among collectivist, feedback and information sharing is normally indirect, non-confrontational, subtle, private and face to face discussion rarely happened (Aycaan 2005; Fletcher & Perry 2002).

H3: Collectivism and relationship preference is negatively related to information sharing

H4: Power distance and preference to hierarchy is negatively related to information sharing

Communication context may also influence information sharing. Malaysians as a society that tends to adapt high context of communication (Abdullah & Pedersen 2003; Abdullah 2010; Amir 2009; Bakar *et al.* 2007; Salleh 2005), may reluctant to ask for information. Salleh (2005) explained that as a society that more towards high context communication pattern, feedback and information sharing are also rarely happened due to maintaining harmony, as well as to avoid confrontation, criticism and outspokenness, as it may damage self-esteem or standing. Most information is delivered indirectly to maintain group harmony.

H5: High context communication is negatively related to information sharing

In the context of interpersonal treatment, Malaysian as a society that put emphasis on working in group and maintaining harmony, good interpersonal relationship is important in helping the group to perform better. As mentioned by Steiner and Gilliland (2001), commented that opportunities to perform and job relatedness are factors related to individualism whereas consistency of treatment and equality is more important in collectivist societies. Therefore, it is expected that in collectivist society, there will be a positive relation towards interpersonal treatment as stated in the following hypothesis.

H6: Collectivism and relationship preference is positively related to interpersonal treatment

Second component of organisational justice theory is distributive justice. Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of the allocation of rewards (Bies & Tripp 1995). In the context of the selection process, this distributive justice is related to the outcomes of the selection process for each of the candidates, as to whether or not they succeed in the selection process (Gilliland 1993). This distributive justice is commonly measured from the context of equity, equality, or needs (Steiner & Gilliland 2001). In the context of AC, equity refers to the meritocratic situation where the most highly performing candidates during the AC programme are the ones most likely to be hired. Meanwhile, equality is a perspective in which outcomes are equally distributed among all individuals, which means that the evaluation is less based on individual merit (Steiner & Gilliland 2001). In general, Kabanoff (1991) explained that equity is preferred if emphasis is given on productivity whereas if the focus is more on group harmony, equality in distribution becomes more important.

In the context of personnel selection processes, Steiner and Gilliland (2001) explained that most methods used are based on the equity principle, with a candidate's competencies evaluated against a number of predetermined, job-related behaviours (Krause & Thornton 2006; Lanik & Gibbons 2011). Steiner and Gilliland (2001) commented, however, that the use of the equity method is more likely to occur in an individualistic society. In contrast, as harmony is given more priority in a collectivistic society, such cultures are more likely to prefer equality approaches (James 1993). However, as collectivist society put emphasis on maintain harmony, reward is normally given to the group and not to an individual person. In this context, there is an issue between AC evaluation and distribution of rewards. Because the evaluation is normally based on individual basis but the

distribution of reward is based on group. The following hypotheses are developed to test further these issues:

H7: Power distance and preference to hierarchy is negatively related to distributive justice

H8: Collectivism and relationship preference is negatively related to distributive justice

In addition to the above discussion, this study also aimed at exploring organisational justice (procedural and distributive justice) may influence the acceptance of AC process in the context of attitude towards AC, affect to individual and recommendation to others. By exploring these issues, this research contributes to new theory and the body of knowledge of culture and AC. As suggested by the guidelines, every organisation should provide sufficient information to participants prior to the programme, including what decision might be made with the assessment results. By giving enough information, it can improve acceptability of AC (Thornton & Rupp 2006) and reduce stress of attending the programme (Dodd 1977). Joiner (1984) explains that, most complaints about AC by assessees are filed due to a lack of knowledge relating to the programme's intentions at the beginning. Previous research as explained by Thornton and Byham (1982) shows that participants believe AC programme measures important managerial qualities, feedbacks received are useful, and that the programme is effective in promoting self-development.

Furthermore, they also found that most participants are willing to promote this method to their friends. As this method would affect career to those who participated, it is important to evaluate their perception about AC (Dodd 1977). For instance, Anderson and Goltsi (2006) study the effects of this method on participants before participating in the AC, immediately after the AC but before outcome decisions were known, and 6 months after the AC. They found that participation in an AC affects self-esteem, well-being, positive and negative effects, and career exploration behaviour of both accepted and rejected candidates.

Based on the above discussion, it is expected that procedural justice components (structural aspect, information sharing and interpersonal treatment) would have positive relation with attitude towards AC. In addition, distributive justice (allocation of rewards) would have positive relation with affect and recommendation to others.

H9: Structural aspect is positively related to attitude towards AC

H10: Information sharing is positively related to attitude towards AC

H11: Interpersonal treatment is positively related to attitude towards AC

H12: Distributive justice is positively related to affect

H13: Distributive justice is positively related to recommendation

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Procedure and Sampling**

This research is exploratory and focused on the self-perceptions of respondents' experiences and how they are seen to relate to cultural influences. The sampling design employed in this study was convenience sampling. This method helps the researcher to recruit the targeted sample from the total population based on who are easily and willing to involve in this study. A survey was conducted among those who had experience as participants in AC. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with SmartPLS software using Partial Least Squares (PLS) estimation were used to analyse the model with 381 useful feedbacks from the questionnaire.

### 3.2. Instruments

The questionnaire in this study has been adopted from previous survey and empirical research by various scholars in measuring attitudes towards AC and reactions towards selection procedures (Bauer *et al.* 2001; Bell & Arthur 2008; Byham 2005; Gilliland 1993; Hausknecht *et al.* 2004; Ryan & Ployhart 2000; Smither *et al.* 1993; Stone *et al.* 2007). In order to explore perceptions regarding Malaysian culture with regards to this issue, the questionnaires developed by local researchers, Abdullah and Pedersen (2003) were adapted for the study. The respondents were guided to give accurate answers compared to unlabeled indicators. The assessment used a scale of 0 – 5 as follows: 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neither Agree nor Disagree), 4 (Agree), 5 (Strongly Agree). Table 1 and 2 briefly describes the number of items used for each measure for this study.

Table 1: Construct and items for Section A

	Variables	Number of Items
Structural Aspect/ Formal Characteristics	Job-relatedness	2
	Chance to perform	1
	Propriety of activities/exercises	3
	Consistency	1
Information Sharing	Feedback	7
	Information known	3
	Openness	2
Interpersonal Treatment	Treatment	5
	Reconsideration opportunity	2
	Communication	3
Distributive Justice	Distributive justice	3
	Affect	4
After Performing AC	Recommendation	2
	Attitude	2

Table 2: Constructs and items for section B

	Variables	Number of Items
Collectivism and Relationship Preferences	Relationship-Task	2
	Harmony-Control	2
	Shame-Guilt	2
	We-I	2
Power Distance and Preference of Hierarchy	Hierarchy- Equality	2
	Religious-Secular	2
Communication Context	High Context-Low Context	2

### 3.3. Data analysis

The first process carried out before the analyses was data screening. This was done to verify the suitability of using PLS path modelling in the study; thus, the extent to which data collected meet the psychometric assumptions were assessed in advanced. This process involves treatment of missing data, multicollinearity, data outlier, normality of data distribution, and common method bias which all may have a direct influence on the use of data analysis techniques. All the processes was carried out with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics 23 software (Statistical Package for Social Science).

381 sets of questionnaires were obtained and analysed by using SPSS 23 version. All of the outliers were removed leaving only 373 of complete sets of data that were considered for the analysis process to increase the authenticity of study (Sekaran & Bougie 2016). Next, the

Multivariate outliers are identified for each of the variables with Mahalanobis distance greater than the critical value of chi-squared ( $df = 10, p < 0.001$ ) are removed from the data set (Filzmoser 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell 2012). Finally, 8 outliers have been removed and the total numbers of respondents i.e. 373 of them are still fulfilling the criteria needed for the analysis.

Multicollinearity analysis shows that there is no multicollinearity problem existed among the independent variables. Thus, the remaining data screening and primary analysis is proceeded. The VIF and tolerance values among the independent variables which are lower than 5 and more than 0.20 respectively (Hair *et al.* 2014). Meanwhile, normality analysis showed that all constructs had significant values. This indicated that the data were not normal. This deviation from normality assumption was a strong reason for using PLS path modelling in this study (Henseler *et al.* 2009).

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was done and revealed that the unrotated factor solution of all the items in the questionnaire with the first factors explaining only 26.68% of the variance. This showed that no single factor is explaining more than 50% of the variance. Subsequently, there was no general factor generated from the unrotated factor solution. Thus, common method bias is not contaminating the data.

### **3.4. Measurement Model Analyses**

#### **Reliability**

The value for the reliability coefficient is in the range of 0 to 1. There are several opinions about the acceptable value for the reliability coefficient in a study. Among them, Nunnally (1978) stated that a reliability coefficient as low as 0.50 is adequately acceptable but a higher value is definitely better (Nunnally 1978; Sekaran & Bougie 2016). On the other hand, Hair *et al.* (2010) suggested that a coefficient higher than 0.70 is generally acceptable.

Table 3 shows the values of composite reliability (CR) and the number of indicators for each construct. The results demonstrated that the composite reliability values ranged from 0.749 to 0.933 which were considered reliable.

#### **Convergent Validity**

Also, in Table 3, it shows the loading of the indicators, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) values. The results of the analysis showed that 38 of the 44 indicators had loading values greater than 0.70 as recommended (Chin 1998; Gotz *et al.* 2010; Henseler *et al.* 2009). As another indicator which had loading value of below 0.70, it was decided to keep the indicators in the model as if the AVE values are more than 0.50, the factor loadings can still be accepted until 0.40 or above (Hair *et al.* 2014). Table 3 also shows the results of the convergent validity analysis, which showed the number of indicators for each construct, loading values, *t*-values, composite reliability (CR) values, and average variances extracted (AVE) values. The loadings for all indicators exceeded the recommended value (Hair *et al.* 2014) and all loadings values were significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) with *t*-values ranged from 3.166 to 62.760. Composite reliability (CR) values, which is a measure of internal consistency, the value ranged from 0.749 to 0.933 which exceeded the recommended value of 0.70 (Hair *et al.* 2010). The results also showed that the AVE range from 0.507 to 0.715, which are above the accepted value (Chin 2010; Fornell & Larcker 1981; Henseler *et al.* 2009). Thus, the results indicated that these indicators satisfied the requirement for the convergent validity of their respective constructs.

#### **Discriminant Validity**

Examination of the loadings and cross-loadings indicated that all the measurement items/indicators loaded highly on their own latent construct than on other constructs and, therefore, all constructs share a substantial amount of variance with their own indicators (Fornell and Bookstein 1982). An item was deleted in this cross loading analysis (Job2) as it fails the cross loadings analysis. In addition, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations is used for



determining the discriminant validity examination with the threshold value used of 0.85. The result of the HTMT ratio of correlations is depicted in the Table 4. The result indicated that there is no problem in discriminant validity according to the  $HTMT_{0.85}$  criterion. In other words, it shows that the latent constructs are really discriminant to each other. Therefore, the assessment of measurement model (outer model) is complete and the analysis is proceeded to evaluate the structural model (inner model).

### **3.5. Assessment of the Structural Model**

There are thirteen hypotheses that were proposed in the structural equation model and they are tested using PLS estimation. The result of the modelling is depicted in the Table 5, Figure 1 and Figure 2. The table represents the path coefficient ( $\beta$ ) and their significance level in the structural model. It is also found that collectivism and relationship preference significantly influence structural aspect ( $\beta = 0.444, t = 7.325, p = 0.000$ ) but the hypothesis H1 was not supported. Findings also indicate that power distance and preference to hierarchy was not a significant factor in influencing Structural Aspect ( $\beta = -0.016, t = 0.259, p = 0.802$ ) and thus the hypothesis H2 was not supported. Finding also shows that collectivism and relationship preference was a significant factor in influencing Information Sharing ( $\beta = 0.242, t = 3.643, p = 0.00$ ) but the hypothesis H3 was not supported.

The next result shows that power distance and preference to hierarchy was not significantly influencing the Information Sharing ( $\beta = 0.024, t = 0.356, p = 0.721$ ). Therefore, Power Distance & Hierarchy was not a contributing factor in influencing Information Sharing; thus, the hypothesis H4 was not supported. It is also found that high context communication significantly influence information sharing ( $\beta = 0.103, t = 1.877, p = 0.057$ ) but the hypothesis H5 was not supported. Finding also shows that collectivism and relationship preference was a significant factor in influencing Interpersonal Treatment ( $\beta = 0.432, t = 7.778, p = 0.00$ ) and the hypothesis H6 was supported.

Findings indicate that power distance and preference to hierarchy was not a significant factor in influencing Distributive Justice ( $\beta = -0.015, t = 0.258, p = 0.798$ ) and the hypothesis H7 was not supported. It is also found that collectivism and relationship preference significantly influence Distributive Justice ( $\beta = 0.408, t = 6.449, p = 0.000$ ) but the hypothesis H8 was not supported. It is also found that structural aspect significantly influence attitude towards AC ( $\beta = 0.449, t = 7.109, p = 0.000$ ) and the hypothesis H9 was supported.

The next findings indicate that information sharing was not a significant factor in influencing attitude towards AC ( $\beta = 0.037, t = 0.580, p = 0.561$ ) and the hypothesis H10 was not supported. Meanwhile, it is also found that the interpersonal treatment significantly influence the attitude towards AC ( $\beta = 0.183, t = 2.587, p = 0.009$ ) and the hypothesis H11 was supported. It is also found that distributive justice significantly influence affect ( $\beta = 0.552, t = 12.683, p = 0.000$ ) and the hypothesis H12 was supported. Finally, the result shows that distributive justice is significantly influencing the recommendation ( $\beta = 0.559, t = 12.899, p = 0.000$ ) and the hypothesis H13 was supported. Analysis for the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) found that the highest coefficient was scored by Attitude towards AC variables with more than 0.35. It indicated that 35 percent of the variation in the attitude towards AC could be depicted from structural aspect, information sharing and interpersonal treatment together with their antecedents.

Table 3: Loadings of indicators, CR and AVE

Constructs	Items	Loadings	t-values	p-values	CR	AVE
Affect	Afe1	0.818	30.974	0.000	0.839	0.566
	Afe2	0.732	15.837	0.000		
	Afe3	0.721	19.657	0.000		
	Afe4	0.733	21.764	0.000		
Attitude towards AC	Att1	0.828	34.645	0.000	0.926	0.715
	Att2	0.841	42.823	0.000		
	Att3	0.891	62.760	0.000		
	Att4	0.852	32.325	0.000		
	Att5	0.810	31.638	0.000		
Collectivism & Relationship	Cul2	0.806	22.115	0.000	0.839	0.514
	Cul3	0.743	16.862	0.000		
	Cul5	0.778	23.806	0.000		
	Cul6	0.591	8.265	0.000		
	Cul7	0.643	12.986	0.000		
Communication Context	Cul15	0.614	3.166	0.000	0.749	0.608
	Cul16	0.917	10.235	0.000		
Distributive Justice	Dis1	0.809	30.674	0.000	0.863	0.677
	Dis2	0.807	24.406	0.000		
	Dis3	0.851	38.637	0.000		
Information Sharing	Fee1	0.498	8.393	0.000	0.858	0.507
	Info1	0.726	18.418	0.000		
	Info2	0.767	22.526	0.000		
	Info3	0.745	23.454	0.000		
	Ope1	0.789	30.307	0.000		
Interpersonal Treatment	Ope2	0.709	17.027	0.000	0.933	0.637
	Com1	0.776	23.660	0.000		
	Com2	0.755	21.385	0.000		
	Com3	0.749	24.759	0.000		
	Tre1	0.839	41.824	0.000		
	Tre2	0.846	38.123	0.000		
	Tre3	0.821	31.393	0.000		
	Tre4	0.767	21.791	0.000		
Tre5	0.827	28.784	0.000			
Power Distance & Hierarchy	Cul10	0.767	12.540	0.000	0.794	0.566
	Cul11	0.622	6.744	0.000		
	Cul9	0.850	16.572	0.000		
Recommendations	Rec1	0.909	59.024	0.000	0.909	0.833
	Rec2	0.916	71.526	0.000		
Structural Aspect	Chance	0.693	18.389	0.000	0.893	0.584
	Con1	0.664	15.985	0.000		
	Job1	0.725	23.446	0.000		
	Pro1	0.823	37.458	0.000		
	Pro2	0.810	39.879	0.000		
	Pro3	0.852	43.841	0.000		

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Table 4: HTMT analysis

Constructs	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Affect (A)									
Attitude towards AC (B)	0.678								
Collectivism and relationship preference (C)	0.368	0.393							
Communication context (D)	0.350	0.297	0.641						
Distributive justice (E)	0.677	0.699	0.524	0.332					
Information sharing (F)	0.656	0.527	0.343	0.284	0.506				
Interpersonal treatment (G)	0.721	0.577	0.515	0.414	0.621	0.785			
Power distance and preference hierarchy (H)	0.247	0.245	0.836	0.606	0.308	0.269	0.299		
Recommendation (I)	0.828	0.670	0.524	0.397	0.717	0.554	0.753	0.350	
Structural aspect (J)	0.711	0.685	0.535	0.371	0.668	0.790	0.796	0.325	0.765

Table 5: Result of the structural model

No	Relationships	Std Beta	SE	<i>t</i> -values	<i>p</i> -values	Sig.	Decision
1	Collectivism & Relationship → Structural Aspect (-)	0.444	0.062	7.325**	0.000	Significant	Not supported
2	Power Distance & Hierarchy → Structural Aspect (-)	-0.016	0.063	0.259	0.802	Not Significant	Not Supported
3	Collectivism & Relationship → Information Sharing (-)	0.242	0.067	3.643**	0.000	Significant	Not supported
4	Power Distance & Hierarchy → Information Sharing (-)	0.024	0.067	0.356	0.721	Not Significant	Not Supported
5	Communication Context → Information Sharing (-)	0.103	0.054	1.877*	0.057	Significant	Not supported
6	Collectivism & Relationship → Interpersonal Treatment (+)	0.432	0.056	7.778**	0.000	Significant	Supported
7	Power Distance & Hierarchy → Distributive Justice (-)	-0.015	0.06	0.258	0.798	Not Significant	Not Supported
8	Collectivism & Relationship → Distributive Justice (-)	0.408	0.064	6.449**	0.000	Significant	Not supported
9	Structural Aspect → Attitude towards AC (+)	0.449	0.063	7.109**	0.000	Significant	Supported
10	Information Sharing → Attitude towards AC (+)	0.037	0.064	0.580	0.561	Not Significant	Not Supported
11	Interpersonal Treatment → Attitude towards AC (+)	0.183	0.07	2.587**	0.009	Significant	Supported
12	Distributive Justice → affect (+)	0.552	0.041	12.683**	0.000	Significant	Supported
13	Distributive Justice → recommendation (+)	0.559	0.043	12.899**	0.000	Significant	Supported

\*\*  $p < 0.01$  ( $t > 2.33$ , one-tailed), \*  $p < 0.05$  ( $t > 1.645$ , one-tailed)

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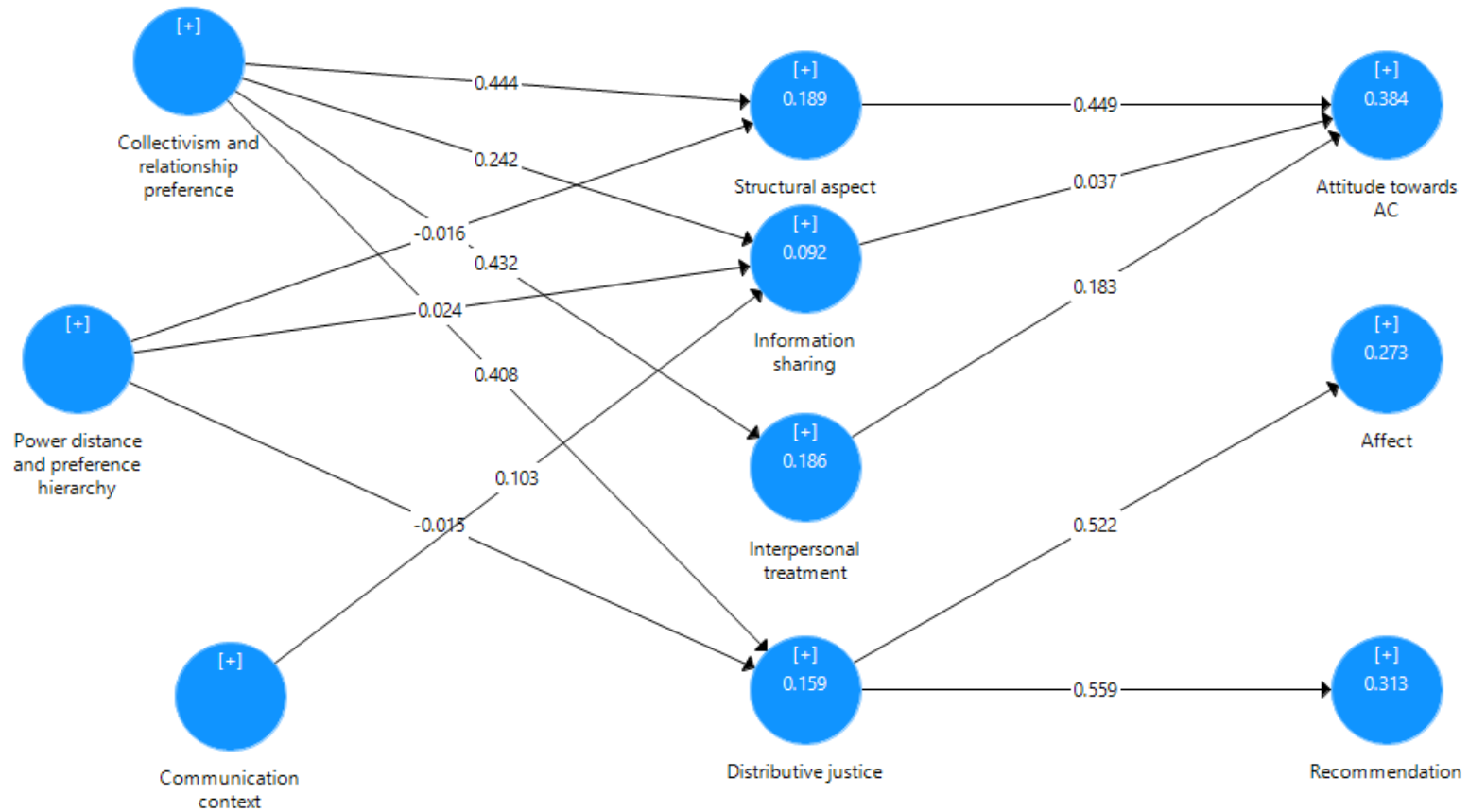


Figure 1: Structural Model

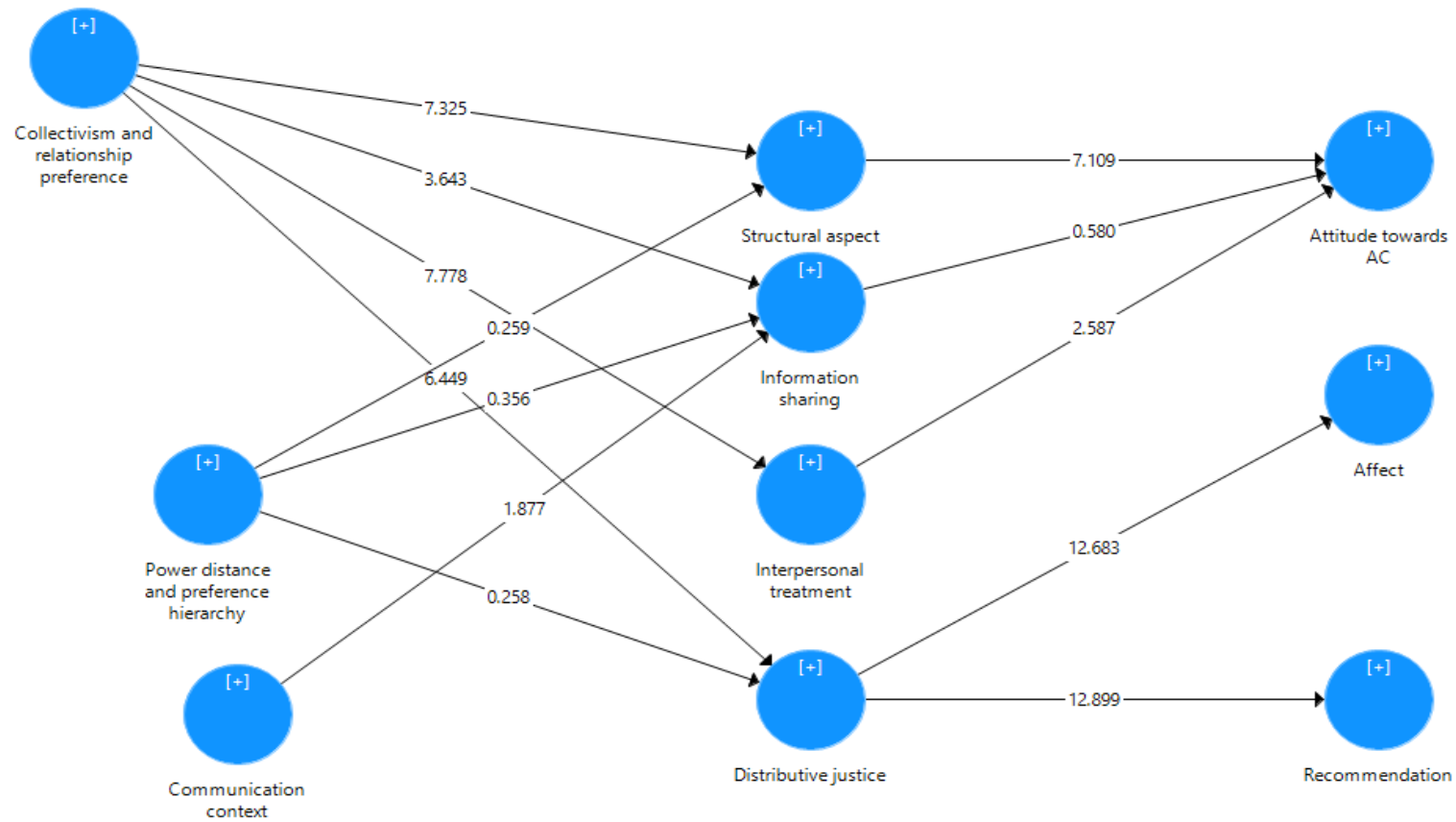


Figure 2: Bootstrapping Analysis of the Research Model

#### **4. Discussions and Conclusions**

To investigate how culture might influence acceptance of AC among participants, the theory of organisational justice was used. The theory of organisational justice refers as the rules and norms used by an organisation to determine how outcomes are distributed (distributive justice) and also involves the procedures in making decisions (procedural justice), and how the recipients of those outcomes are treated (Bies & Tripp 1995; Steiner & Gilliland 2001). Organisational justice is also concerned with what people think is fair and how they react if they believe that the procedures to make the decision, or distribute the resources, are unfair (Steiner & Gilliland 2001). For this study, eight hypotheses (H1 until H8) focused on measuring how culture might influence the acceptance of AC.

Based on the result as discussed above, out of eight hypotheses, only one hypothesis was significant and supported (H6), which shows that interpersonal treatment was significantly influenced by collectivism and relationship preference. In another words, the collectivism and relationship preference is positively related to interpersonal treatment that might explain the importance of maintaining harmony in a collectivist society. This is due to the emphasis on working in group, maintaining harmony, and good interpersonal relationship in the society. This finding is consistent with Steiner and Gilliland (2001) who commented that consistency of treatment and equality is more important in collectivist societies than individualistic society.

This finding also consistent with Abdullah and Pedersen (2003) who explained that for collectivist societies it is important to maintain of, in order to successfully perform any tasks, and therefore, during the discussions in AC activities, everyone is encouraged to give ideas and others will normally support each other's ideas. In addition, Bernthal and Lanik (2008) as cited in Lanik and Gibbons (2011) study, the findings showed that participants from Asian countries were more focused on relationship building and less on the task that needed to be accomplished. Lanik and Gibbons (2011) further explained that those who managed to build relationships during the activities may have an advantage in the AC.

Collectivism and relationship preference also shows significant relationship with information sharing (H3) and distributive justice (H8), however, relationship for both hypotheses are not supported. H3 suggests that collectivism and relationship preference is negatively related to information sharing, nevertheless, the result shows that relationship between both dimensions is positive. This finding shows that Malaysians as collectivist society are willing to share information. Although the information might not come from the authority of AC, candidates might still get the information from related web sites. To support this statement, an online search on 11 September 2017 found that information related to AC selection process for Administrative and Diplomatic Officers is widely available online as displayed in Table 6. Three keywords were used and the results show that for the first three pages, result for two keywords (tips lulus PAC and PTD Assessment Centre) are all relevant to AC and for Tips PTD 26 out of 30 web site are related to AC.

Table 6: Results of Web Search on 11 September 2017

Keywords	Hit Result	Relevancy (3 pages)
Tips PTD	3,710	26/30
Tips lulus PAC (PTD Assessment Centres)	272,000	30/30
PTD Assessment Centre	15,500	30/30

Meanwhile, H8 suggests that collectivism and relationship preference is negatively related to distributive justice, yet the result shows that relationship between both dimensions is positive. This finding might show that collectivism and relationship preference has influenced in decision-making system. In this context, the finding may reflect that Malaysia as a collectivist society put emphasis on maintaining harmony and therefore, the reward is equally distributed. This might give indication

that Malaysian prefer to use equality perspective in deciding the outcome of AC where the distribution of outcomes is given equally to all individuals and merit or performance is not important.

Collectivism and relationship preference also shows significant relationship with structural aspect (H1), but relationship for the hypothesis is not supported. This finding might show that collectivism and relationship preference has influenced in designing the structural aspect of AC in terms of operating the AC activities. Another significant relationship is between high context communication and information sharing (H5). It is however, relationship for this hypothesis is not supported. H5 suggest that high context communication is negatively related to information sharing. This contradict findings may give signal that although in high context communication society might reluctant to ask for information (Abdullah & Pedersen 2003; Abdullah 2010; Amir 2009; Bakar *et al.* 2007; Salleh 2005), they can still get information available online as in the borderless world a lot information could be easily available.

Although the result shows that Malaysian still more towards a society that high in power distance, hypotheses testing related to power distance and preference to hierarchy and structural aspect (H2), information sharing (H4), and distributive justice (H7) shows that the relationships are not significant and thus not supported. These findings might also reflect to the result that religious factor is the most influencing factor for high power distance as compared to hierarchy factor, and therefore candidates will accept the design and decision of AC not because of the power but because of the demand of Islam to respect and obey the instruction.

This study also aimed to explore organisational justice (procedural and distributive justice) and outcome from attending AC in the context of attitude towards AC, affect to individual and recommendation to others. It is expected that positive outcome from attending AC will positively influence employee engagement to the organization. Five hypotheses (H9 until H13) measured the relationship between organisational justice and outcome from attending AC.

Result as discussed previously shows that only information sharing and attitude towards AC is not significant (H10). This shows that information sharing is not the important dimension in determining the attitude to AC. Although suggested by the guidelines that every organisation should provide sufficient information to participants prior to the programme, including what decision might be made with the assessment result, the result from this study shows that attitude towards AC was not influenced by information sharing. This is also contradicted by the suggestion that giving enough information will improve acceptability of AC and reduce stress of attending the programme (Thornton & Rupp 2006). As discussed previously, Malaysian is a society that adapt high context of communication and as a result they might reluctant to ask for information in order to maintain harmony and to avoid confrontation (Abdullah & Pedersen 2003; Abdullah 2010; Amir 2009; Bakar *et al.* 2007; Salleh 2005).

Meanwhile, the other hypotheses are significant and supported. Result for H9 and H11 shows that attitude towards AC was influenced by structural aspect and interpersonal treatment. These findings which show attitude towards AC was influenced by structural aspect and interpersonal treatment were consistent with the view that applicants who find particular aspects of the selection structure invasive might view the organisation as a less attractive. These results is consistent with findings by scholars who found that a positive company image including during the selection process is important, if it is not conducted properly they might lose the best candidates (Chapman *et al.* 2005; Hausknecht *et al.* 2004; Uggerslev *et al.* 2012).

Findings from the analysis also showed that H12 and H13 were supported which mean distribution justice influenced the affect and recommendation to others. This findings is consistent with previous research by Thornton and Byham (1982) which they found participants believe that AC measures important managerial qualities, feedbacks received are useful, and that the programme is effective in promoting self-development. They also found that participants who believe with the process and outcome from AC programme are willing to promote this method to their friends. In addition, Anderson and Goltsi (2006) who study effects of this method on



participants before participating in the AC, immediately after the AC but before outcome decisions were known, and 6 months after the AC. They found that participation in an AC affects self-esteem, well-being, positivity and negativity effects, and career exploration behaviour of both accepted and rejected candidates.

## **5. Implication and Recommendations**

Literature search suggests that although AC approach is highly adaptable to societal, and organisational requirements, it is however very limited research carried out in the field of AC to support these suggestions. Furthermore, it is found that there is very limited study has been done to explore this issue in Malaysia. Findings from this study show that understanding the region-specific approach is very vital to ensure the effectiveness of AC as its application from one country or region cannot be generalised to other countries or regions. Hence, this study extends the work on non-Western perspectives on culture and AC practice by injecting Malaysian notions of AC, as seen by Malaysians. In relation to the above, this enquiry in Malaysian culture and AC practice enriches the current literature on AC styles of countries in Asia and help Malaysian to understand better and appreciate their practice in AC. Thus, it will eliminate misunderstandings and disagreements due to a lack of awareness or appreciation of their unique styles of designing and implementing the AC.

This study also managed to extend our knowledge on candidates' reactions to AC practice which involve the process and procedure they faced during the AC, and also the outcome from the AC using organisational justice theory. Generally, the current study shows that collectivism and relationship preference is the most influential one towards acceptance of AC practice compared to high context communication, and power distance and preference to hierarchy. From the context of the procedural justice component, it shows that information sharing dimension is the least one that will influence the view of fairness of the AC procedure. In the context of distributive justice, this study also contributes to our knowledge the importance of equality perspective in deciding the outcome from AC. This finding is important as western countries focus more on equity perspective in deciding the distribution of outcome. In addition, the current research also extends the application of theoretical model of organisational justice by evaluating how this model influence the participants in the contexts of their attitude, affect and whether they would recommend others to attend the AC. Interestingly, results from this study show that except for information sharing, other dimensions of organisational justice significantly influence the outcomes of AC practice. This might show that the candidates view AC as useful and therefore will give positive image to the selection system.

## **6. Limitation and Future Directions**

This research focuses on the experiences of implementation of AC in Malaysian public sector which focuses more on application of AC for selection of Diplomatic and Administrative Officers. Unlike most of the research to date, it sets out to explore what is experienced and perceived by assessors and participants in the private sector. It is good if a comparative study can be conducted on how different context of private and public sectors in practicing AC. In addition, it is also suggested for further research to look into the influence of Islamic Work Culture on the design and acceptance of AC which combine both Islamic principles and contemporary AC practice.

For this study, majority of the respondents among AC participant of this study comes from those who experience AC for selection. Therefore, the understanding of the participants' perspective may be disadvantaged by the absence of information from participants in developmental AC and promotional AC. Furthermore, this study was conducted within a limited period of time, thus caused difficulties in finding subjects and the instrument used for this study was questionnaire. This approach may be disadvantaged by lacking of observing the actual implementation of AC.

Finally, it is also suggested to explore the influence of technologies on personnel recruitment and selection tools (e.g. gamification in AC). This will help scholars to understand how new technologies affect fairness perceptions and reactions especially among millennial. This also includes the study on the impact of social media and online information on organisational justice and engagement theory in the context of AC practice.

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