

THE EFFECT OF CULTURAL FACTORS ON
THE DESIGN AND ACCEPTANCE OF
ASSESSMENT CENTRE PRACTICES IN
MALAYSIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

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SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I have checked this thesis and in my opinion, this thesis is adequate in terms of scope and quality for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citation which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at Universiti Malaysia Pahang or any other institutions.

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PUBLIC SECTOR

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Industrial Management
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA PAHANG

AUGUST 2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praise is due to Allah S.W.T. for his Bounty and Blessings upon us. It is with deepest gratitude to Him for giving me the strength and ability to complete this study.

I wish to express my deep and sincere gratitude to a number of people without whom this thesis would not have been possible. I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Mohd Rashid bin Ab Hamid, whose guidance, encouragement and support were invaluable throughout the preparation of this thesis. I would have been lost without him and might even miss his direct, frank but always constructive criticisms. I would like to thank my co-supervisor, Professor Dr. Noor Azlinna binti Azizan for her sound advice and friendly discussions which have been very beneficial for this study. I would like also to express my heartfelt gratitude to my former advisor, Dr. Duncan J. R. Jackson and Professor Dr. James Arrowsmith for their advice in my study.

I am also indebted to officials at the Public Service Department of Malaysia, especially to Mr. Mohd Haikal bin Mohd Yusuff for their kind assistance and support, particularly, in giving me access to a lot of valuable information as well as in distributing my questionnaire. I would also like to thank those who participated in this study, for, without their time and cooperation, the study would not have been completed.

A special thanks to my friends and colleagues, both in Massey University, New Zealand and Universiti Malaysia Pahang, for their kind words of encouragement at times when it seemed impossible to continue.

Finally, and most importantly, I wish to thank all those whose love for and assistance to me have helped to lighten the difficulties of doing a PhD degree. To my lovely wife Hasnidar binti Muhammadon for her blessing; and to my dear children, Nur Hamizah, Nur Hazirah, Nur Hanisah and Nur Harizah, for giving me happiness and joy despite them having to bear with my frequent absences, to my brothers, sisters, in-laws, aunts and uncles who were particularly supportive.

Finally, my heartiest thanks go to my late mother Zauyah binti Abdullah and my late father Ahmad bin Endut who have been my true inspiration all along. May they be granted the highest level of Jannah. Amin.

ABSTRACT

The proliferation of assessment centre (AC) around the world has raised questions about their application in specific countries. Although a number of studies have found that differences in cultural settings across countries may have an impact on human resource practices and strategies, very little attention has been given specifically to AC. As the AC approach has also been used in developing countries such as Malaysia, it is important to understand how these factors in different cultural settings may influence the implementation of AC and how this might differ from its implementation in more developed nations. Using the model of cultural fit and organisational justice theory, this study aims to explore how the national culture may influence the design and implementation of assessment centre in Malaysian public sectors. This exploratory study involves two stages of data collection. The respondents for the first study (semi-structured interview) are personnel who have had experience as developer/assessors, and also those who have had experience as participants, in AC in various ministries in Malaysia. The first study aims to explore how assessors and participants perceive the design, scoring methods, and feedback associated with traditional approach *dimension-based assessment centre* and alternative approach *task-based assessment centre* and how culture influence the process. For the second study (survey questionnaires), the respondents are from those who have had experience as participants. In total, a survey of 405 respondents was successfully carried out and 381 useful feedbacks were analysed. This second study utilises organisational justice theory in exploring participants' reactions to the fairness of AC design, implementation and outcomes. A total of thirteen hypotheses have been put forward to test the relationships amongst the culture values, distributive justice latent, three categories under procedural justice, and outcome after attending AC. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with SmartPLS software using Partial Least Squares (PLS) estimation is used for modelling analysis. Findings from the first study showed that Malaysia is a society that put emphasis on working in group, and accept the importance of power distance, and rely on high communication context. These socio-cultural findings reflect the internal work culture which focus more on working in group, maintaining harmony, and respect to seniority in decision-making process. Meanwhile, findings for study two showed that collectivism and relationship preferences as the most significant cultural variable in influencing reaction on fairness of AC. In addition, this study also showed positive outcome related to attitude, affect and recommendation towards AC. Interestingly, this study also revealed that the relationship of power distance and preference of hierarchy onto other variables in this study is not significant, therefore, it provides a new perspective on the relationship of cultural values and management practices in this millennium. This research also has closed the gap by highlighting the practice, acceptance and outcome from attending AC in Malaysian public sector from holistic view which include assessors, participants and module developers.

ABSTRAK

Peningkatan penggunaan penilaian berpusat (PB) di seluruh dunia telah menimbulkan persoalan tentang aplikasi kaedah ini di pelbagai negara. Walaupun beberapa kajian mendapati bahawa perbezaan budaya mungkin memberi kesan terhadap amalan dan strategi sumber manusia, namun hanya sedikit tumpuan diberikan kepada PB. Disebabkan pendekatan PB juga telah digunakan di negara membangun seperti Malaysia, adalah penting untuk memahami bagaimana perbezaan budaya dan faktor lain mempengaruhi pelaksanaan PB dan perbezaannya dengan negara yang lebih maju. Dengan menggunakan model kesesuaian budaya dan teori keadilan organisasi, kajian ini dilakukan untuk meneroka bagaimana budaya nasional boleh mempengaruhi reka bentuk dan pelaksanaan PB di sektor awam Malaysia. Kajian ini melibatkan dua peringkat pengumpulan data. Responden untuk kajian pertama (temubual separuh berstruktur) adalah kakitangan yang mempunyai pengalaman sebagai pembangun/penilai, dan juga mereka yang berpengalaman sebagai peserta, di PB di pelbagai kementerian di Malaysia. Kajian pertama bertujuan untuk meneroka bagaimana penilai dan peserta melihat reka bentuk, kaedah pemarkahan, dan maklum balas yang berkaitan dengan PB berdasarkan penilaian berpusat berasaskan dimensi dan kaedah alternatif, penilaian berpusat berasaskan tugas serta bagaimana budaya mempengaruhi proses tersebut. Untuk kajian kedua (soal selidik tinjauan), responden adalah dari mereka yang mempunyai pengalaman sebagai peserta. Secara keseluruhan, tinjauan terhadap 405 responden telah berjaya dijalankan dan 381 maklum balas yang berguna telah dianalisis. Kajian kedua ini menggunakan teori keadilan organisasi dalam meneroka tindak balas peserta terhadap kesesuaian reka bentuk, pelaksanaan dan hasil PB. Sejumlah tiga belas hipotesis telah dikemukakan untuk menguji hubungan di antara nilai-nilai budaya, keadilan pengagihan, tiga kategori di bawah keadilan prosedur, dan kesan selepas PB. Pemodelan Persamaan Struktur (SEM) dengan perisian SmartPLS menggunakan *Partial Least Squares* (PLS) digunakan untuk analisis pemodelan. Penemuan dari kajian pertama menunjukkan bahawa Malaysia adalah sebuah masyarakat yang memberi penekanan kepada bekerja dalam kumpulan, menerima perbezaan kuasa, dan bergantung kepada komunikasi berkonteks tinggi. Penemuan sosio-budaya ini mencerminkan budaya kerja dalaman yang memberi tumpuan kepada bekerja dalam kumpulan, mengekalkan keharmonian, dan menghormati kekananan dalam proses membuat keputusan. Sementara itu, penemuan untuk kajian kedua menunjukkan kebersamaan dan keutamaan hubungan sebagai pemboleh ubah budaya yang paling penting dalam mempengaruhi tindak balas terhadap penerimaan PB. Di samping itu, kajian ini juga menunjukkan hasil positif yang berkaitan dengan sikap, kesan dan cadangan terhadap PB. Menariknya, kajian ini juga menunjukkan bahawa hubungan jarak kuasa dan keutamaan hierarki terhadap pemboleh ubah lain dalam kajian ini adalah tidak signifikan, dengan itu, ianya memberikan perspektif baru berkaitan hubungan nilai budaya dan pengurusan dalam era milenium ini. Penemuan daripada penyelidikan ini juga telah merapatkan jurang ilmu dengan membincangkan amalan, penerimaan dan hasil daripada menghadiri PB dalam sektor awam Malaysia dari pandangan yang holistik melibatkan penilai, peserta dan pembangun modul.

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