

A STUDY OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE
AND EMPLOYEE VOICE AT XYZ SDN BHD

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Specially dedicated to my beloved
Mother and Father

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ABSTRACT

Getting employee' opinions and suggestions are very important to the organisation. Organisational culture is one of the factors that have been identified to stimulate and encourage employee voice. Organisational culture is argued to exert a lot of influence in encouraging employee voice in organisations. This study is aimed to examine the relationship between organisational culture and employee voice. A questionnaire was used to collect data about employee voice (i.e. acquiescent voice, defensive voice and ProSocial voice) and organisational culture (i.e. power distance and collectivism). The data were than analyzed using Pearson Correlation and descriptive analysis to answer the study's research objective. The results of the study show that XYZ SDN BHD practiced a high power distance and collectivism culture. In addition, a high level of acquiescent voice and defensive voice, and moderate level of ProSocial voice was also found. The findings also indicated that employees face difficulty in expressing their points of view as the cultural practices of their organisation inhibit them from expressing themselves. The conclusion drawn from the study is that organisational culture has a relationship with employee voice. It is suggested that superiors need to nurture a more open and transparent communication culture when dealing with their employees which consequently may stimulate and encourage employees to be more daring when voicing their opinions or ideas to the organisation.

ABSTRAK

Mendapatkan pendapat dan cadangan daripada pekerja adalah perkara penting bagi sesebuah organisasi. Budaya organisasi merupakan salah satu faktor yang telah dikenalpasti boleh merangsang dan mempengaruhi suara pekerja. Budaya organisasi dikatakan mempunyai banyak pengaruh dalam menggalakkan suara pekerja di organisasi. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji hubungan antara budaya organisasi dan suara pekerja. Borang soal selidik telah digunakan untuk mengumpul data mengenai suara pekerja (*acquiescent voice*, *defensive voice*, dan *ProSocial voice*) dan budaya organisasi (*power distance* dan *collectivism*). Data ini kemudiannya dianalisis menggunakan Korelasi Pearson dan analisis deskriptif untuk menjawab objektif kajian. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan XYZ SDN BHD mempraktikkan budaya “*Power Distance*” dan “*Collectivism*” yang tinggi, selain daripada memperoleh tahap tinggi dalam “*acquiescent voice*” dan “*defensive voice*”, dan tahap “*ProSocial voice*” yang sederhana. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa pekerja menghadapi kesukaran menyurakan sudut pandangan mereka disebabkan oleh budaya yang dipraktikkan oleh organisasi mereka. Kesimpulan dari kajian ini mendapati bahawa budaya organisasi mempunyai hubungan dengan suara pekerja. Adalah dicadangkan bahawa pegawai atasan perlu berkomunikasi dengan budaya komunikasi yang lebih terbuka serta telus apabila berurusan dengan pekerja; budaya komunikasi sebegini boleh merangsang dan menggalakkan pekerja untuk menjadi lebih berani semasa menyuarakan pendapat atau idea – idea kepada organisasi.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SDN – Sendirian

BHD – Berhad

VS – Versus

PDI – Power Distance Index

IDX – Individualism Index

Std.D – Standard Deviation

IPA – Involvement and Participation Association

DV – Dependent Variable

IV – Independent Variable

LIST OF SYMBOLS

α - alpha

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Employees are regarded as a major source of change, creativity, learning and innovation, which are critical to the success of organisations (Liping & Kan, 2010). Nowadays, the employee voice is slowly gaining much interest among human resource practitioners and organisations alike. The employee voice is now being recognized as bringing various benefits, not only to the employees but to the organisation as well (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011). Hence, it is not surprising that the employee voice is now becoming of significant research interest to academics. According to Dwonmoh (2012), researchers are now placing considerable attention on the way employees express their concerns regarding workplace issues to the management, which is argued to consequently improve communication between the organisation and its employees.

Hence, this descriptive research study is aimed at examining how organisational culture (i.e. power distance and collectivism) could impede or promote employee voice behaviour (i.e. acquiescent voice, defensive voice and ProSocial voice). Meanwhile, the Spiral of Silence (SOS) theory will be applied as the theory helps to explore how the spiral can exert its influence on the expression of opinion by the employees. In short, the findings of this study aim to provide a solution to build a free

climate for those employees to voice out their valuable opinion concerning workplace issues, despite a culture that might attempt to limit them from expressing themselves.

1.2 Background of the Study

Employee voice is a whole variety of processes and structures which enable, and at times empower, employees to directly or indirectly participate in the decision making process (Wilton, 2010). According to Wilton (2010) in an organisation, employees may express themselves either directly or indirectly. An example of a direct expression of individual or a collective point of views is via face to face conversation (i.e. direct). On the other hand, an example of the indirect method of expression is through employee representation in a trade union. In other words, the direct way is when an employee expresses his/her concern straightly to the management, while the “indirect” way is when an employee concerns are communicated through a particular platform such as the trade union. Wood and Fento-O’Creevy (2005) claim that using the union produces a higher level of voice among the employees. Employee unions help to provide the formal platform whereby employees can convey their grievances or point of view to the organisation and this is particularly useful for those employees who are incapable of independently and personally voicing out their opinion. The employee unions help ensure the management will seriously consider and take action rather than ignore issues raised by the employees. Nevertheless, even though the collective voice remains important, the paradigm of the employee voice appears to be slowly shifting and is now more focus on the individual voice (IPA, 2012).

Dundon et al. (2004) subdivided the meanings of voice based on four principal strands. The first strand is refers to the voice as an “articulation of individual dissatisfaction”. This strand asserts that the purpose and articulation of voice is aimed at rectifying problems and to prevent deterioration in relations. The possible mechanism or channels for this strand can be conveyed through lodging a complaint to the front line

manager, or communicating a formal grievance using a particular procedure or “speak up” programme (Dundon et al., 2004; Harlos, 2010). The “expression of a collective organisation” is the second strand, which aims to provide a countervailing source of power management by recognizing a trade union and by using collective bargaining to obtain consensus for both the employers and employees (Dundon et al., 2004). Hence, it is believed that the union channel would be able to produce higher levels of voice to ensure employers would take serious action to mitigate the issues arising (Wood & Fenton-O’Creevy, 2005). The existence of union helps employees who work in an organisation that lacks the mechanism to express opinions or grievances. Thirdly, Dundon et al. (2004) argue that employee participation in decision making helps strengthen the engagement of employees and bonds towards their organisation that consequently, result in an increased sense of empowerment. Allowing employees to participate in decision making is not only argued to increase productivity, but also efficiency. Moreover, when employees are given the opportunity to have a say in decision making, not only will this enhance their confidence, but also increase their job satisfaction and sense of belonging to their organisations (IPA, 2012). IPA (2012) further asserts that these positive attitudes towards the organisation will help organisational efforts in achieving its mission and vision. Fourthly, the last strand states that a voice is a form of “demonstration of mutuality and cooperative relations” which seeks to achieve long term viability for the organisation and generated added value for its employees through a joint consultative committee or a work council (Wilton, 2010). However, even though lodging a complaint through a union is easier, and a popular approach in Europe, Asian countries are still lagging behind and employees are found not to actively engage in union activities (Wood & Fenton-O’Creevy, 2005).

The main principle behind employee voice is to provide a platform for the employee to positively enhance their workplace experiences not just through their labour but also through their views (Simmonds et al., 2008). From an organisational perspective, employee voice is a tool for employees to speak about problematic situations. Hence if there is a good voice mechanism available it would be very helpful for the organisation to respond and deal with the arising issues (e.g. dispute, dissatisfaction) brought up by is

employees (Hunjra et al., 2010). Hunjra et al. (2010) further asserts that the failure of an organisation to address issues raised by the employees may result in the organisation losing its talent. Furthermore, through employee voice, the message and content being conveyed can be a way to help improve organisational performance (LePine & Dyne, 1998).

Nevertheless, when discussing employee voice, researchers and academicians alike seem to agree that the issues are not just about the lack of a particular platform provided by the organisation, or the issue of an organisation not allowing its employees to express themselves nor voice out their opinion or grievances, but the issue of why employees are not sufficiently voicing out nor expressing their point of view to the organisation. A situation where employees choose to remain silent and reluctant to express their views is an unhealthy phenomenon and could be detrimental and impede growth of the organisation (Dwonmoh, 2012). Telltale signs of employee dissatisfaction are when employees refuse to reveal useful information or feedback to the company and often leads to expression of this dissatisfaction in undesirable behaviours such as high absenteeism and turnover rate (Kim et al., 2010). In short, if an organisation fails to address the employee voice positively, the above consequences may possibly occur in the workplace.

Hence, there is a crucial need to understand why employees speak or do not speak out their inner feelings. According to Dyne et al. (2003) what is contended is that employee willingness to express their opinions, suggestions or grievances depends on their primary employee motive (i.e. disengaged, self - protective and other - oriented) and would result in specific voice behaviours namely the Acquiescent Voice, Defensive Voice and ProSocial Voice. The acquiescent voice refers to those employees who have low self - efficacy due to feelings of resignation within a group (Dyne et al., 2003). This type of employee is usually passive while their primary employee motive is trying to be disengaged. Hence they would prefer to not to voice out their opinion and instead go along with the group. The defensive voice refers to those employees who try to express their agreement with the group due to fear (Dyne et al., 2003). Employees who express

themselves this way are categorised as proactive. They express much more agreement and provide supportive argument due to the need for self - protection. The ProSocial voice refers to those employees who try to voice out their opinion based on constructive concern for their organisation even though others might object to it (Dyne et al., 2003). In brief, the expression of employees' voice behaviour varies according to their motives.

Voice behaviour is the result of a calculative cognition process (Boichuk & Menguc, 2013). In general, employees hope for something to change, whenever they are expressing themselves. However the potential risk (e.g. perceived as a troublemaker, fear of negative feedback) associated with employee voice tends to impede them from doing so (Boichuk & Menguc, 2013). There is a bond between an individual and culture because culture will influence an individual's behaviour (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Greenberg & Edwards, 2009; Khatri, 2009; Lavelle et al., 2010). Briefly, the cultural dimension will help to understand how employees map their motive before it is reflected in their voice behaviour in an organisation.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

In this study, "voice" refers to the speaking up behaviour (i.e. proactively making suggestions for change rather than merely criticise) (Dyne et al., 2003). The voice in a non – union setting is particularly significant in the environment today because of the limited attention that it has received so far (Kulkarni, 2010). Therefore, "having a voice" can be referred to as the capability of an employee to the extent of freedom and the opportunity to use a resource in a way that allows speaking behaviour (Edgar & Geare, 2005). However, a reduction in the employee voice may occur, mainly due to the fear of employees of being perceived negatively by the superior when doing so (Kulkarni, 2010).

According to Asma and Low (2001), Malaysia is a country that exercises a high power distance and collectivism. The role expectations in a high power distance culture bind employees to show deference, respect, loyalty and dutifulness to authority figures. Further, the role expectation of a collectivism culture emphasises loyalty to the group, hence it would hardly be appropriate for them to express their personal point of view due to the group interest which serves as the priority in work group (Junchao et al., 2010).

In general, Malaysians prefer to follow the norms rather than question these norms (Schermerhorn, 1994). They seldom ask questions and are usually willing to follow exactly the instructions assigned to them by their superiors (Schermerhorn, 1994). According to Asma (1994), Malaysians tend to do a lot of supporting, building and accommodating in order to avoid airing their concerns for fear of being labelled as arrogant or as a self - opinionated person (Kennedy, 2002; Schermerhorn, 1994). Concisely, if these two dimensions, power distance and collectivism are allowed to become stronger, they may result in unfavourable conditions for the employees. This might produce detrimental effects and generate a greater amount of the “keep mum” effect within the employees. This is especially true for those who work at the bottom level who would be very reluctant to give negative feedback, and dare not voice any concerns regarding their conditions of work to their organisation (Dan et al., 2009).

Recent research has determined that work related values among the three major races in Malaysia (i.e. Malay, Chinese and Indian) do not differ significantly (Kennedy, 2002). Therefore, most Malaysians tend to build and maintain good relationships with the person or person with whom they work in order to maintain a harmonious environment, despite any of racial differences (Ahmad, 1993). According to Ahmad (1993), most Malaysians place a high emphasis on group affiliation. When there is a high level of group affiliation prevalent in an organisation, it means there is a close connection and relationship between the subordinates and the employer. Hence, the relationship between employees and employers would be much appreciated.

Those countries who exercise a larger power distance usually take hierarchical inequalities as granted. Superiors who have more power at work, are seldom questioned or challenged by their subordinates (Travis et al., 2011). This is because subordinates do not want to take any risk by speaking up and causing conflict with those who are holding the power (Xu et al., 2005). For instance, Malaysians tend to avoid arguments or debates with their boss, who has more power than they do, in order to maintain a harmonious relationship (Schermerhorn, 1994). Furthermore, unlike the countries who exercise a small power distance culture, when employees from countries which implement a large power distance are given the chance to participate in the decision making process, they really do not become more productive or even feel satisfied with their work (Xu et al., 2005). Therefore, it can be deduced that due to the high power distance already deeply embedded in Malaysian employees, they tend to be supportive rather than critical or show disagreement over the decisions made by their organisations. They do this in order to maintain a harmonious relationship as well as to show respect for the decision makers by avoiding embarrassing their bosses, or making their superiors “lose face” if the disagreement of the employees is aired or expressed.

Nevertheless, the voice of the employees is not something that organisations should consider lightly. This is because according to IPA (2011), failing to stimulate and encourage employees to voice out their point of view, suggestions or comments, will only put the organisation in a disadvantaged position. IPA (2011) further asserts that employees hold a vast amount of information, experience and knowledge, and failure to utilise these valuable resources may have an effect on organisational productivity and efficiency. In short, to understand the cultural influence of the voice behaviour of employees, it can be argued that a study on organisational culture and voice behaviour is still a crucial area of study that requires further examination.

The general of nature of behaviour of employees can be divided into passive and proactive (Dyne et al., 2003). These two natural behaviours will determine the primary motives of the employees (i.e. disengaged, self- protective and other - oriented) and it would reflect on the specific type of behaviour (i.e. acquiescent voice, defensive

voice and ProSocial voice) respectively (Dyne et al., 2003). However, questions arise as to why employees have that particular voice behaviour when comes to the voice issue. A few literature examples had pointed out that organisational culture indeed has implications to influence employee voice behaviours (Botero & Dyne, 2009; Greenberg & Edwards, 2009; Khatri, 2009; Lavelle et al., 2010). These literatures exclude those employees with no issues to voice out because the focus of the studies were to discuss why employees voice the issues in those three specific voice behaviours as suggested by Dyne et al. (2003). Those who remain silent or refuse to voice any opinion will not be further discussed in this study, even if voice and silence have frequently been associated together.

According to Hofstede and Bond (1984), Malaysia applies very high power distances and is relatively high in collectivism. Hence, it would be interesting to take another look at this finding that was collected between 1967 – 1973 and confirm whether it still holds true in the Malaysia of today. The last well known studies of the Malaysian workforce culture were conducted by Asma and Koh (2010), Asma and Low (2001), Asma and Pedersen (2003), Hofstede (1990) and Dahlia (2008). To the knowledge of the author, to date there has not been a recent employee voice study discussed in Malaysian context. Hence this study aims to fill the gap to further examine the relationship between organisational culture and employee voice in Malaysia.

Apart from having an open door policy, suggestion boxes, attitude and opinion surveys can be used as the platform for the employee voice in XYZ SDN BHD (name changed to protect anonymity). The organisation has also created an “XYZ Employee Self Service Portal” for the permanent staff. When employees click inside the portal, it has a sub portal that refers to “Employee Community Service”. Under the “Employee Community Service” column, there is a “Chit Chat” interactive forum which allows the employees to voice out their views or allows sharing of knowledge among the employees who work in XYZ SDN BHD. However, all these tools are not fully utilised by the employees, despite the system being able to conceal the identity of its users. The fear of being perceived as a troublemaker is often the reason why employees choose to

maintain their silence. In addition, most of the function buttons are also not fully utilised for discussion. There is no active discussion taking place among the employees at XYZ SDN BHD. In other words, despite the tools provided to help the employees express themselves with ease, the employees at XYZ SDN BHD are still not sufficiently expressing their point of view. Hence, it can be argued that the organisation has failed to stimulate its employees to give genuine feedback or to give ideas either voluntarily or when solicited by the organisation. This study aims to determine the level of organisational culture and employee voice at XYZ SDN BHD. The study also analyses whether the organisational culture (i.e. power distance and collectivism) has an effect on employee voice (i.e. acquiescent voice, defensive voice and ProSocial voice).

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. What is the level of organisational culture at XYZ SDN BHD?
2. What is the level of employee voice at XYZ SDN BHD?
3. What is the relationship between organisational culture and employee voice at XYZ SDN BHD?

1.5 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

1. To analyse the level of organisational culture based on the dimension of power distance and collectivism at XYZ SDN BHD.
2. To analyse the level of employee voice based on acquiescent voice, defensive voice, and ProSocial voice at XYZ SDN BHD.
3. To analyse the relationship between organisational culture (i.e. power distance and collectivism) and employee voice (i.e. acquiescent voice, defensive voice, and ProSocial voice) at XYZ SDN BHD.

1.6 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyse the relationship between organisational culture (i.e. power distance and collectivism) and employee voice (i.e. acquiescent voice, defensive voice and ProSocial voice). This study is aimed at helping the frontline managers to be aware of the pros and cons of employee voice that may apply to the organisation if this subject is not addressed properly. Through studying the type of voice behaviour, this can help the management to foster a positive voice climate which can promote constructive voice output towards the organisation. Hence, if managers are able to foresee and utilise employee voice effectively, the benefits can far outweigh any disadvantages. In addition, the finding of this study can also be beneficial to the organisations to design a better voice mechanism that may stimulate and encourage employee voice.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Based on the literature reviews conducted, discussions of employee voice mostly take place in the western countries. Much of the literature used in this study is mostly contributed by western scholars especially from Europe. Employee voice is an area of significant research interest to academics and an issue of great importance to many human resource practitioners (Dwonmoh, 2012). Dwonmoh (2012) further contended that nowadays many researchers believe organisations ignoring the voice or suggestions made by employees is one of the main contributing factors that leads to low productivity. Hence, in order to encourage employee voice, there is a crucial need for employers to know which type of organisational culture is more helpful in building an atmosphere that encourages employee voice (Liu & Cho, 2011). According to Botero & Dyne (2009), although research on voice behaviour is growing, to date, research examining the role of culture in predicting voice behaviour in different culture settings is still very much lacking. By addressing the gap, in its own small way the study contributes to a deeper understanding of employee voice behaviour.

Hofstede's cultural framework is the most widely used in a work related context that applies his framework to psychology, sociology, marketing, and management studies (Soares et al., 2007). This current study uses the culture dimension defined by Hofstede's study in 1980 - 1988. He has proven that Malaysia is one of the countries that maintain a high power distance dimension and is also relatively high in the collectivism dimension. However Hofstede's study has not been updated to reflect current culture trends. Hence, there is a crucial need for a more current and updated review of the present Malaysian culture to determine if Hofstede's findings still hold true today.

The current researcher believes this study which connects employee voice and organisational culture is of great value to be discussed. Asma and Koh (2010) contended that Malaysia had a great potential to do further research in culture, especially if the culture research could take place in multinational organisations, since diversity would

vary greatly and thus can offer a more valuable data. It is also believed that this study can help XYZ SDN BHD to be aware of how the significance of employee voice should be actively engaged by their employees. This would help the organisation to create a climate to further encourage the employee voice to take place.

1.8 Scope of the Study

Using voice is one way employees respond when they experience mistreatment or reflect the feedback towards issues at work. Voice behaviour is preferred so as to take the initiative to respond, making comments and suggestions, accepting the responsibility to speak up, promoting innovation and improving organisational performance (LePine & Dyne, 1998; Morrison, 2011). According to Dyne et al. (2003), they are three different motives for voice in organisations. They determined that the voice behaviour can be much influenced by a disengaged motive (i.e. resignation), self - proactive motive (i.e. fear) and other - oriented motive (i.e. cooperation) that would produce the acquiescent voice, defensive voice and ProSocial voice respectively (Dyne et al., 2003; Gambarotto & Cammozzo, 2009).

Studying the culture in an organisation will help to understand and be aware of employee voice evidence and its impact in the way it is presented. In this study, the term “organisational culture” is modelled using the research study done by Hofstede who is an expert in cultural research and who developed the most influential cultural framework which has been used by many scholars (Terlutter et al., 2006). Hofstede’s study of national cultural differences took place at a multinational corporation (IBM) in 71 countries between 1967 until 1973. He distributed around 111 700 questionnaires and used 20 different languages (Peterson & Sondergaard, 2008). Initially, Hofstede defined four types of culture which included power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity that held between 1967 and 1973 (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). These four dimensions formed the basis of

Hofstede's book *Culture's Consequences* in 1980 (Hofstede, 2011). A fifth cultural dimension was added later for short term orientation versus long term orientation in 1988 (Peterson & Sondergaard, 2008). However, in 2010 data from a World Value Survey had added a new cultural dimension namely, indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede, 2011).

This study only uses power distance and collectivism from the six cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede. The rationale of selecting just two dimensions of the cultural aspect is due to Malaysia ranking top in the power distance dimension and ranking 23rd in the collectivism dimension (Hofstede et al., 2010). Furthermore, the ranking indexes for the other four dimensions do not show significant results to indicate that Malaysia is associated with the remaining four dimensions. Hofstede (1991) determined that Malaysians have a high power distance, low individualism, moderate masculinity, and are relatively weak in uncertainty avoidance scores (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008). The fifth and six cultural dimensions have still not received much attention in Malaysian culture studies because of Malaysia ranking 54th (index score is 41) in long term orientation and ranking 29th (index score is 57) in Indulgence (Hofstede et al., 2010). Up to date, no research has pointed out that Malaysia is strongly influenced by the fifth and the sixth cultural dimensions defined by Hofstede. Hence the current researcher did not embrace these two cultural dimensions in this study.

The two important cultural dimensions that explore the facets of Malaysian culture and society, particularly power distance and collectivism as identified by Hofstede (1990) are relevant to the present study (Ahmad, 2004). This current study focuses on how organisational culture (i.e. power distance and collectivism) affect the employees' voice. The voice behaviour is defined as not merely regarding criticism by the employees but also includes their inputs and constructive suggestions. Even though the domain is the employee voice, however literature concerning employees silence are also included. This is because according to Morrison (2011), employee silence is the opposite of employee voice. Hence, researchers usually prefer to integrate the two literature sources when explaining voice behaviour. This research intends to generate

awareness within the management to help them become mindful of how to promote proactive voice behaviour and establish a free climate to encourage the employee's voice without assertion or influence by a high power distance and collectivism dimensions that constrain and limit the voice behaviour of the employees.

1.9 Place of the Study

The media industry requires rapid changes and transformation in order to stay competitive. The study was conducted at XYZ SDN BHD, a subdivision of a huge media conglomerate in Malaysia. There are ten divisions under this company. However, this study was conducted in the customer service division only. Therefore, in this study customer service executives will be selected as respondents. Lastly, the researcher selected the headquarters of XYZ SDN BHD which is located in Kuala Lumpur to distribute the questionnaires. This is due to the proximity to make it easier to collect the completed questionnaires.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

Firstly, this study will be undertaken in XYZ SDN BHD. XYZ SDN BHD which is a private organisation and part of the media industry. Hence, it cannot be generalised to other industries. Secondly, there are six cultural dimensions generated by Hofstede (2011) although only power distance and collectivism variables will be used in this study. Hence, it is possible that the exploration of the organisational culture is not that fully generalised to hold for the whole Malaysia. Thirdly, there are many cultural dimensions proposed by other scholars such as Schwartz's Cultural Values, the Project GLOBE study by House et al., Trompenaars' Cultural Diversity and the Cultural Dimension by Hall. In short, apart from the dimensions defined by Hofstede, others

dimension from the other scholars might could possibly be used and integrated in an organisational culture study in the future. Lastly, the stated research questions bound the scope of the study. The study will only address the relationship between organisational culture and employee voice. However the dimension of employee voice in this study is specifically limited to employee voice behaviour. Hence, this leaves an opportunity for future research.

1.11 Conceptual Definitions

The conceptual definitions given here provide a general explanation of the terms which will be frequently used in this research. The dependent variable (DV) of the study is Employee Voice and the independent variable (IV) is Organisational Culture. The following section will discuss the definitions of these variables.

1.11.1 Employee Voice

Hirschman is the forerunner in discussing the concept of voice in 1970. He named his voice model as exit – voice - loyalty (ELV) (Craig & Karen, 2001; Gambarotto & Cammozzo, 2009; Ghodratollah et al., 2012; Luchak, 2003). According to Hirschman, he defined voice as “any attempt at all to change”, meaning any attempt whatsoever to change rather than escape from an objectionable state of affairs (Luchak, 2003). It encompassed direct petition, protest, and appeals to management or other higher authorities and also including efforts to mobilise public opinion as well (Craig & Karen, 2001). Furthermore, he also pointed out that the loyal employees will select to voice their concerns, instead of suffering in silence in response to workplace problems (Luchak, 2003). In brief, his analysis of motivation focused on the voice and exit reaction through the much emphasised voice being used to express dissatisfaction, and

the voice should be applied to find ways to express any mistreatment in the workplace rather than simply exit the problem.

The voice is not only used to complain about problems, as it can be useful to point out flaws or bottlenecks, or proactively develop solutions that can form important feedback for the organisation (Paukstat et al., 2011a). According to Dyne et al. (2003), employee voice can be conceptualised as a multi - dimensional construct and present three types of voice, namely acquiescent voice, defensive voice and ProSocial voice. The acquiescent voice is described as intentionally passive behaviour to express supportive ideas due to compliance to the work group (Dyne et al., 2003). The defensive voice is described as deliberate proposing of work related information that focuses on others or shifts attention elsewhere due to fear of reprisal (Greenberg & Edwards, 2009). Lastly, the ProSocial voice is expressing work related information that will benefit the operation of the organisation (Greenberg & Edwards, 2009).

According to research by IPA (2011) research, voice is a two - way communication, an exchange of information between managers and employees or “having a say” about what goes on in the organisation. Employee voice is also known as “speaking up” to refer the actions whereby employees can contribute and point out problems or issues in their workplace in order to obtain refinement of the issue (Paukstat & Wittek, 2011). In brief, employees can use their voice behaviours to alert the management to solve problems that might occur, before the issue turns into a crisis which could generate a detrimental effect on the organisation (Paukstat & Wittek, 2011).

Generally, employee voice is the two - way communication between an employer and employees regarding workplace issues (CIPD, 2012). This is the process which allows or permits the employees to return feedback while the employer can use this to listen and receive communication from their employees (Janssen & Gao, 2013). According to McCabe and Lewin (1992), from a Human Resource Management

perspective, employee voice contains two elements. In the first element, employees can express their feedback and complain about issues to their superiors to request to rectify the problem. The second element points out that employees could try to find the opportunity to participate in the decision making process in their organisation, which is often referred to as “participative management” (McCabe & Lewin, 1992).

Marchington (2005) conceptualised employee voice in four key aspects of participation. There are degrees of involvement (i.e. depth), scope of dimension (i.e. scope), hierarchical status in the organisation (i.e. level), voice mechanism presented (i.e. form) (Bennett, 2010). Briefly, he tried to conceptualised employee voice related with participation because he believed it would affect how workers would be able to initiate a useful employee voice. For instance, employee voice is often associated with the level of position of the employee, the extent given to employees to influence management decisions and the environmental setting given to employees to play a role within that environment (Bennett, 2010). In brief, employee voice is hardly ever exerted without a strong degree of employee involvement and employee participation to support.

Employee voice is a term which is widely used in Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations. It is frequently associated with involvement, participation, engagement and empowerment, and these terms have often been used interchangeably (Sablok et al., 2013). Many definitions and much of the literature have defined employee voice. However the central aspect of most definitions state that employee voice is a mechanism that allow employees to have “a say” (Gollan & Patmore, 2013). Having “a say”, includes not only negative issues which are unsatisfactory to the employees but also includes are employee suggestions and ideas to help enhance the organisation. When employees have been given the chance to express their feedback, their inputs may help the organisation to look at the problem and come up with an action plan, hence preventing the issue from turning into major problem if not addressed accordingly. The conceptualisation of voice defined by Dyne et al. (2003) is highly relevant to apply in this study.

1.11.2 Organisational Culture

Culture is a significant factor that affects the function of an organisation. It starts from strategic change, leadership, and the relationship between managers and employees or customers, and how they all relate to each other in terms of creating, sharing, maintaining or even utilising the knowledge (Alvesson, 2012). Moreover, culture is seen as an element in ordering reality in societies for dedicated mutual regulation and control for that specific community (Alvesson & Berg, 1992). Understanding organisational culture can offer insights to the thinking of superiors because without understanding culture, it would be hard for any superior to handle the feelings, attitudes, expectations, values and assumptions of their employees (Pepper, 1995).

Organisational culture is used to indicate a view of organisations as mini-societies with a distinct set of meanings, values, and symbols shared by the majority of the employees who are working in the organisation (Ashkanasy et al., 2010). Based on the anthropology perspective, culture does not have any fixed or broadly agreed meaning. However, variation in the use of this term is often noticeable in the literature of organisational culture (Alvesson, 2012). Hence, organisational culture has to do with assumptions, priorities, meanings, and values which are shared by the members of the organisation collectively (Alvesson & Berg, 1992).

Organisational culture is composed of and acts differently based on the role, power structure and the leader's capability of the leader to manage the organisation. It tends to facilitate an acceptable method to detect problems, observes how members learn, feels and sets the principles, expectations, behaviours, patterns and norms that promote a high level of achievements in the workplace (Raduan et al., 2008). Organisational culture plays an important role in sustaining the capability of the organisation in the competitive global market place (Ng et al., 2012). According to Schein (2010, p. 34), organisational culture as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as

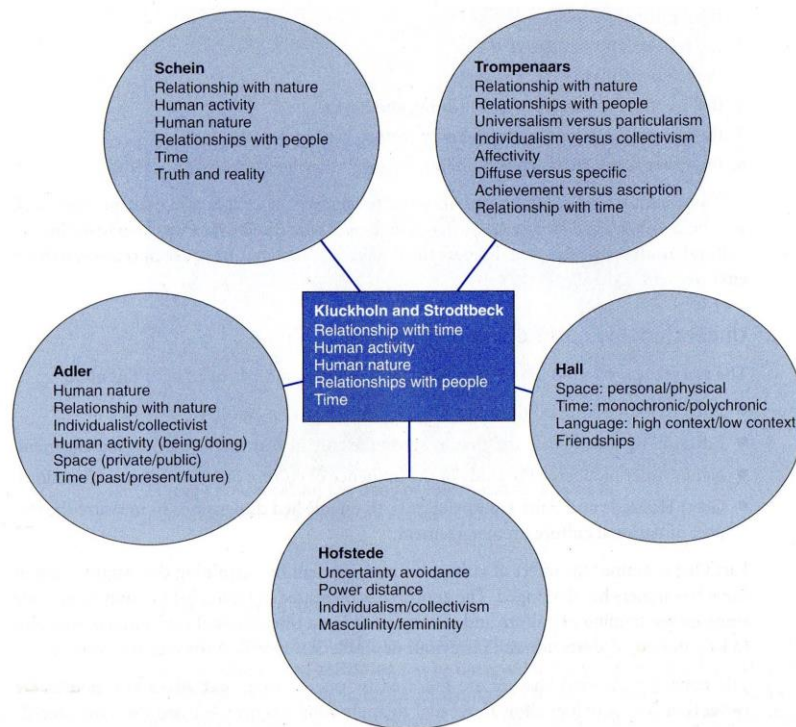
it solved its problem of external adaption and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problem". In a similar vein, organisational culture can facilitate the members to learn, feel and set the principles, expectations, behaviours and patterns based on the demands of their organisation to promote a high level of achievement (Raduan et al., 2008). In summary, organisational culture can be considered as a guideline which leads its members to accepted shared knowledge practices by all members in their daily working life (Amir, 2009) .

Although there are many dimensions of organisational culture, it is believed that the work of anthropologists namely Kluckholn and Strodbeck, has inspired researchers such as Schein, Adler, Hall, Hofstede and Trompenaars to develop subsequently other models of cultural dimensions (Browaey & Price, 2011). Kluckhohn and Strodbeck proposed that "all human societies must answer a limited number of universal problems, that the value based solutions are limited in number and universally known, but that different cultures have different preferences among them" (Hills, 2002, p. 2). Figure 1.1 shows the details regarding each dimensions of culture as defined by the various scholars respectively (Schneider & Barsoux, 2003) .

Hall's research into the cultural dimension is focused primarily on how cultures vary in interpersonal communication, but also included work on personal space and time (Nardon et al., 2009). Trompenaars's model looked at attitudes towards both time and the environment, of which the outcome of his research is a wealth of information that helps to explain cultural diversity in business and offers practical ways in which multinational companies (MNCs) can do business in various countries (Nardon et al., 2009). Schein examined the effect of the organisation on culture while Adler focused his research to find out how the influence of culture will impact on organisational functions (Browaey & Price, 2011). Based on Figure 1.1, some scholars such as Adler and Trompenaars include dimensions such as individualism and collectivism which is similar to Hofstede's research (Browaey & Price, 2011).

Among the several frameworks of cultural study, Hofstede's dimensions have been used time and time again internationally by many researchers in many countries (Hin, 2007). His model was derived from a study of employees from various countries working for a major multinational corporation and was based on the assumption that different cultures can be distinguished based on differences in what they value. Hofstede (1980) initially developed four dimensions of culture values namely power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism – collectivism, masculinity – femininity. A fifth dimension namely, short term orientation – long term orientation was added to the list in 1991 (Hofstede et al., 2010). The latest dimension indulgence – restraint was added in 2010 (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Figure 1.1: Dimensions of Culture



(Source: Schneider and Barsoux, 2003, p. 34)

1.12 Operational Definition

An operational definition refers to how a “precise statement of how a conceptual variable is turned into a measured variable” (Stangor, 2010, p. 43). An operational definition will act as a measurement to access the relationship between the dependant variable (i.e. employee voice) and the independent variable (i.e. organisational culture). The dependent variable in this study is employee voice which refers to acquiescent voice, defensive voice and ProSocial voice. These three voices are based on different employee motive which result in different types of behaviour (Dyne et al., 2003). In addition, organisational culture which refers to power distances and collectivism will be defined in this operational definition section.

1.12.1 Employee Voice

In this study, employee voice refers to the voice behaviours, namely acquiescent voice, defensive voice and ProSocial voice which proposed by Dyne et al. (2003) in their research article entitled “Conceptualizing Employee Silence and Employee Voice as Multidimensional Constructs” in 2003.

i. Acquiescent Voice

The acquiescent voice is likely to occur due in an employee who feels that they do not make a difference in the organisation even they raise their concerns and issues (Dyne et al., 2003). According to Dyne et al. (2003, p. 1372), they define acquiescent voice as the “verbal expression of work related ideas, information, or opinions based on feelings of resignation”. It shows that the acquiescent voice is a passive approach and demonstrates disengaged behaviour based on the impression of being unable to make a difference, especially when employees hold feelings of a very low self - efficacy. When employees suffer from low self - efficacy, they will tend to

feel undeserving and think they have inadequate abilities to perform well in the workplace due to low self – esteem. Hence this will result in them acting less independently and they will be influenced more by situational factors such as negative feedback and will be less willing to espouse their ideas.

ii. Defensive Voice

According to Dyne et al. (2003, p. 1371), the defensive voice is defined as “expressing work related ideas, information or opinion based on fear with the goal of protecting the self”. In other words, the defensive voice is a voice behaviour that occurs when an expression is made mainly to protect oneself (e.g. expressing ideas that shift attention elsewhere based on fear) (Dyne et al., 2003). It is a fact that employees want to receive managerial endorsement for their ideas while at the same time avoid taking any risk that may place them in a bad light with the management. Therefore, in order to secure themselves, a variety of defensive communication could be apply at the workplace, such as shifting attention towards others, blaming others, and using a lot of excuses or explanations in order to protect themselves (Dyne et al., 2003).

iii. ProSocial Voice

According to Dyne et al. (2003, p. 1370), the ProSocial voice is “expressing work related issues, ideas, information, or opinion based on cooperative motives”. The main purpose of this voice is to benefit the organisations. Even though ProSocial voice has a very good intention for speaking up, it is not favoured positively by other observers due to most of the employers who naturally hold the power in their hands preferring to do things the existing way rather than break from the status quo. The ProSocial voice will normally consider the benefit of the organisation as the priority concern. Employees will not be afraid of the threat that their comments could be dangerous and might lead them to be seen in an unfavourable light. In short, the ProSocial voice is the most dedicated voice compared to the acquiescent and defensive

voice because this voice is under discretionary behavioural action which is not required by an organisation (Dyne et al., 2003).

1.12.2 Organisational Culture

i. Power Distance

According to Hofstede & Bond (1988, p. 96), power distance is “the extent to which the less powerful members of organisations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally”. Hofstede (1990) asserts that Malaysia is a country which has the highest score in terms of power distance among the samples. Malaysians are generally very willing to accept power inequality (Asma & Low, 2001). Power authority requires their lowest level of employees often to be unquestioning, not to challenge management decisions and to agree with whatever ideas are proposed by the power holder. This is because it is considered improper and rude to question the power of authority (Ahmad, 2004).

Most of the time, superiors will use their authority and power when dealing with work related issues with their subordinates (Hofstede, 2003). For organisations that hold a high power distance culture, subordinates are not allowed to intervene or participate in the organisational process. This is because any involvement by a subordinate can be seen as a sign of weakness in the power of the superior (Hofstede, 2003). Nevertheless, employees who work under a high power distance culture may prefer decisions made by managers because they expect to be told what to do. Moreover, employees are not willing to express their views in order to avoid additional responsibilities or to avoid misunderstandings on the part of their management (Hofstede, 2011). In short, this phenomenon might be detrimental in organisations whose employees easily feel lost when there is a lack of dependable superiors to give them clear instructions to implement their job.

ii. Collectivism

According to Hofstede and Bond (1988, p. 8), collectivism is defined as “the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups”. In a collectivist society, the people are strongly integrated with each other from the moment of birth onward into strong, cohesive in – groups. This often includes extended families such as uncles, aunts and grandparents as long as they have the bond or relationship with that particular group, which undoubtedly gives rise to protecting unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, 2011).

In collectivism culture, people tend to act in the group’s best interest of the group rather than emphasise individual achievement (Hofstede, 2007). In such a culture, harmony should always act as the main priority concern as any individualistic behaviour which contradicts with most of the members is not favourable (Hofstede, 2011). Relationship prevails over task, hence this highlights the significance of maintaining the good relationships between the employer and the employees (Hofstede, 2011).

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