Research on Work Values in Malaysia and Thailand: A Cross-Cultural Research Proposal

Wan Rafaei Abdul Rahman[1]

International Islamic University Malaysia

The aim of this research is to examine the similarities and differences of work values in Malaysia and Thailand. The relationship between ethnic culture, work culture, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and productivity, as well as sex, marital status, age, academic qualification, duration of service and monthly income will also be analyzed. The participants for this study are 900 primary school teachers, of which will be divided into 3 groups of 300 participants selected from, Kuala Lumpur, Alor Setar and Bangkok, Thailand. The work value scale used will be from the scale developed by Wan Rafaei Abdul Rahman and Che' Su Mustaffa (2004), The Twelve Pillars of Malaysia, and The Nine Thai values of orientation (Komin, 1995).

Keywords: work values, ethic culture, work culture, cross cultural research

The work values is a cultural norm that advocates being personally accountable and responsible for the work that one does and is based on a belief that work has intrinsic value (Cherington, 1980; Colson & Eckerd, 1991; Quinn, 1983; Yankelovich & Immerwahr, 1984). The work values, as we know it today, is a secularized construct derived from Weber's (1904, 1905) Protestant work ethic (PWE) theory.

The PWE, asserting that Calvinist theology encourage accumulation of wealth, has been widely used as an explanation for the success of capitalism in Western society. Over the years, however, attitudes and beliefs supporting hard work have blended into the norms of Western culture, and are no longer attributable to a particular religious sect (Lipset, 1990; Rodgers, 1978; Rose, 1985). The elements of work values that of greatest significance in the preparation of people for work are the attitudes and behaviors ascribed to work ethic rather than a sectarian belief system that inculcates these characteristics.

Previous research has identified numerous affective characteristics considered desirable for working people. Beech, Kazanas, Sapko, Sisson, and List (1978) identified 63 affective work competencies considered important by industry leaders and educators and clustered them into 15 categories.

[1] Professor, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia

In Malaysia one could distinguish among four major values systems, each pertaining to a specific 'ethnic group', namely the Malays, the Chinese, the Indians, the Westerners. For example the values of the Malays, the single largest ethnic group in Malaysia, could be dealt with under the notion of *budi*. According to the (Malay) anthropologist H.M. Dahlan, *budi* embodies all the virtues ranked in the system of values of the (Malay) society.

The structure of budi is composed of virtuous qualities, such as *murah hati* (generosity), *hormat* (respect), *ikhlas* (sincerity), *mulia* (righteousness), *timbang-rasa* (discretion), malu (feelings of shame at individual level). In social relation, these virtues imply that codes of conduct for politeness, refinement, and consideration for others would involve gestures, and intonations of speech that varied according to the hierarchical status of the person addressed.

In 1985, the Islamic values can bureaucratic self –conduct was expended from three to eleven. There included: trustworthiness, responsibility, sincerity, dedication, moderation, diligence, cleanliness, discipline, cooperation and gratitude. In 1992, the National Institute of Public Administration published "The Twelve Pillars" specifying twelve fundamental values that should guide the conduct of all Malaysia civil servants, namely, valuing time, perseverance, pleasure of working, dignity of simplicity, character, kindness, influence of examples, obligation of duty, wisdom of economy, patience, improvement of talent, and joy of originating (INTAN, 1992). The document's message was subsequently disseminated in the form of pamphlets, posters and calendars, and publicized in numerous speeches by senior managers. The subject became a compulsory element in human resource a development course for civil servants. Who were ethnics as an aspect of any eventual job promotion decision.
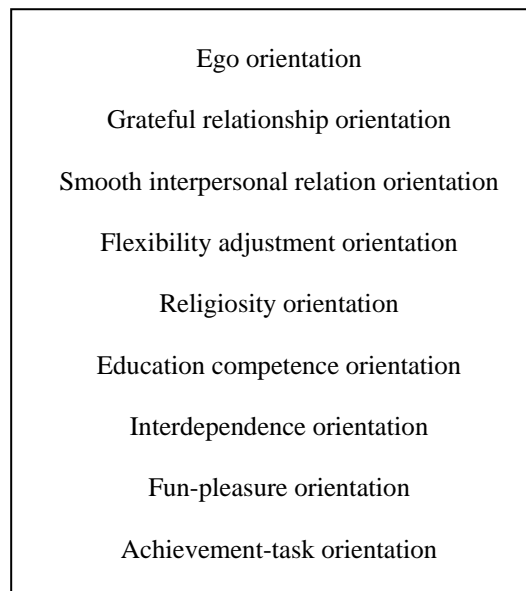
Komin (1995) identified nine Thai value orientations. The value orientations are placed on a continuum of psychological importance from high to low as shown in figure 1. the higher the order, the more likely it is to be activated.

The present study is an extension of studies by Wan Rafaei Abdul Rahman and Che' Su Mustaffa (2002) and Che Su Mustaffa, Maznah Abu Hassan, Faizah Ahmad and Wan Rafaei Abdul Rahman (2006) to examine the similarities and differences of work values in Malaysia and Thailand. The work in Thailand will be based on research work done in Thailand., for instance by Komin (1995).

Objectives of the research

1. To analyse the work values of primary school teachers in Malaysia (n=300 In Kuala Lumpur, and n=300 in Alor Setar) and Bangkok (n=300).

2. To analyse the relationships of variables – work culture, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and productivity – vis-à-vis work values in Malaysia and Thailand.

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:1em; text-align:center;">

Ego orientation

Grateful relationship orientation

Smooth interpersonal relation orientation

Flexibility adjustment orientation

Religiosity orientation

Education competence orientation

Interdependence orientation

Fun-pleasure orientation

Achievement-task orientation

</div>

Figure 1. Nine Thai value orientation.
Source: Komin, 1995.

3. To analyse differences in terms of demographic variables – sex, marital status, age, academic qualification, duration of service, and monthly income – vis-à-vis work values in Malaysia and Thailand.

4. To identify dimension of work culture in Malaysia and Thailand that may act as predictors for OCB, job satisfaction, productivity, and organizational commitment among primary school teachers.

5. To make recommendations for improvements on the work culture, OCB, job satisfaction, organizational commitment. And productivity among primary school teachers in Malaysia and Thailand.

Cross – Cultural Research Approach

As discussed elsewhere (Wan Rafaei Abdul Rahman, 2005), the cross-cultural research approach is appropriate to use when the researcher is confronted with cross-cultural research problems. For instance, in Malaysia and Thailand where the population is multicultural, the cross-cultural problems must be minimized before any meaningful comparison can be made between two different cultural or

ethnic groups. As in both countries theories and instruments developed in the west are frequently used equivalence of concepts, phenomena, methods and participants as suggested by Fridja and Jahoda (1966) must be obtained before the comparison can be made. Brislin, Lonner, and Thorndike (1973) suggested that the occurrence of rival hypothesis in the study must be overcome. Some procedures have been suggested to minimize the problems involved in cross cultural research, for instance by Berry (1969) and Niblo and Jackson (2004).

Method

This study will use survey method. The target of participants is 900, of which 300 will be from Kuala Lumpur, 300 from Alor Setar, and 300 from Bangkok, Thailand. The work values scale developed by Wan Rafaei Abdul Rahman and Che Su Mustaffa (2004) using items in The Twelve Pillars of Malaysia, and The Nine Thai values of orientation (Komin, 1995) following the dimensions introduced by Deal and Kennedy (1982) and O'Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell (1991) will be used.

Development of the Instrument

A work values scale will be developed using items in The Twelve Pillars and The Nine Thai Values of orientation and based on dimensions introduces by Deal and Kennedy (1982) and O'Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell (1991). Using the cross-cultural approach a work culture scale was developed for Malays in Malaysia. In addition to the dimensions by Deal and Kennedy (1982) such as, strictness, meticulousness, results orientation, comfortable working environment, stability, innovation, humanistic orientation, aggressiveness, and emphasis in rewards, the scale included indigenous items such as gotong-royong (working cooperatively) dignity, hierarchy/courtesy and religious value (Wan Rafaei Abdul Rahman & Che' Su binti Mustaffa, 2004) as in appendix 1. The Thai work culture is in preparation. The group of researchers will deliberate on these two scales to be used in the study at this colloquium.

The researchers: It is hoped that the following researchers will participate in this study:
1. International Islamic University Malaysia:

    Wan Rafaei Abdul Rahman

    Mohd. Zaki Shamsudin

2. Northern University of Malaysia

    Che Su Mustaffa

    Maznah Abu Hassan

    Faizah Ahmad

3. Behavioral Science Research Institute, Srinakharinwirot University

   Wiladlak Chuawanlee

   Oraphin Choocum

   Ungsinun Intarakawang

References

Beech, J. P., Kazanas, H.C., Sapko, J. Jr., Sisson, K.A., & List, R. (1978). *Necessary work values, habits & attitudes: A final report (Report No. 1368).* Jefferson City, MO: Missouri State Department of Education.

Berry, J. W. (1969). On cross-cultural comparability. *International Journal of Psychology*, *4* (2), 119-128.

Brislin, R. W., Lonner, W. J., & Thorndike, R. M. (1973). *Cross-cultural research methods*. New York: Wiley.

Cherrington, D. J. (1980). *The work ethic: Working values and values that work*. New York: AMACOM.

Colson, C. W. & Eckerd, J. M. (1991). *Why American doesn't work?* Dallas: Word.

Deal, T. E. & Kennedy, A. A. (1982). *Corporate cultures: The rites and rituals of corporate life*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Frijda, N., & Jahoda, G. (1966). On the scope & methods of cross-cultural research. *International Journal of Psychology, 1*, 109-127.

INTAN (1992). *Tonggak dua belas*. Kuala Lumpur: INTAN.

Komin, S. (1995). Socio-cultural influences in managing for productivity in Thailand. In Hwang, K-K (Ed.), *Easterization: Socio-cultural impact on productivity*. Tokyo: Asian Productivity Organization.

Lipset, S. M. (1990). The work ethic – Then and now. *Public Interest*, Winter , 61-69.

Niblo, D. M. & Jackson, M. S. (2004). Model for combining the qualitative enrich approach with the quantitative derived ethic approach. *Australian Psychologist, 39* (2), 127-133.

O'Reilly, C. A., Chatman, C. & Caldwell, R. (1991). People and Organizational culture: A profile comparison to assessing person-organization fit. *Academy of Management Journal*, *34*, 487-516.

Rodgers, D. T. (1978). *The work ethic in industrial America*, 1850-1920. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Wan Rafaei Abdul Rahman & Che Su Mustaffa. (2004). Amalan budaya kerja dan hubungannya dengan keberkesanan organisasi di pejabat daerah yang memenangi anugerah kualiti dengan pejabat daerah yang tidak mencalonkan diri. Unpublished URPA Research Report. Universiti Utara Malaysia.

Appendix

Table 1
Work culture scale for the Malays in Malaysia

	Dimension	Item
1	Strictness	• Punctuality • Symphatise with other's difficulty and problems • Quality can be sacrificed • Lackadaisical
2	Meticulousness	• Following work manual • Hard work • Emphasis on reward • Priority
3	Result Orientation	• Hard work • Feeling happy to give idea and suggestion • Punctuality
4	Comfortable working environment	• Work equally shared by all • Friendliness • Able to leave office on personal matters
5	Stability	• Opposing others opinion without giving constructive suggestion • Work for Allah/God • Clear work procedures
6	Innovativeness	• Emphasis on rewards if one is creative in his work • Inform through a third party • Praiseworthy job
7	Humanistic orientation	• Cooperation • Work as group member/teamwork • Vague instructions

	Dimension	Item
8	Aggressiveness	• God's will • Work punctuality • Temperamental • Jealousy • Dislike people's success
9	Emphasis on reward	• Work for promotional reward • Failure to recognize people's success • Procrastination
10	Group orientation	• Cooperation and respectful of others • It's okay attitude
11	Working as part of deed	• Work must have aims • Work quality • Follow instructions
12	Cooperativeness	• Work completion priority • Happy working • Prefer to work alone • Busybody • Snobbish
13	Observing one's dignity	• Helping others • Conducive workplace • Difficult to make suitable decision
14	Courtesy	• Work as part of deed • Meticulous • Vague procedure for work promotions
15	Dimension value religious values	• Hard work • Encouragement for new innovation • Bragging about oneself