



7. THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON TEAMWORKING: A MALAYSIA-JAPAN COMPARISON

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Introduction

The use of teamworking in the manufacturing sector is aimed at improving productivity as well as employee well-being. It is expected that output would be enhanced by the synergy created through the contribution of several team members all engaged on the same task, while psychological well-being arises through increased opportunities for interaction between team members and involvement in job-related decision-making (Dunphy & Bryant, 1996; Guzzo, 1996). The extent to which this premise holds true differs from company to company and from country to country. An international comparison of teamworking found that significant differences in acceptance of teamwork and self-management could be predicted by cultural values such as collectivism, individualism, power distance, doing versus being and determinism versus free will orientations (Kirkman, Gibson & Shapiro, 2001). This paper intends to make a contribution to knowledge in this area by presenting the results of a study comparing the practice of teamworking in a Japanese company in Malaysia with that of teamworking with a Japanese company in Japan. The paper begins by defining teamworking and its components before reviewing past studies on the impact of culture on teamworking. It then presents the results of the current study followed by a discussion of its implications for both theory and practice.

Teamworking and Correlates of Team Effectiveness

The most critical components of teamworking are interdependence among team members and having shared responsibility for a common objective (Sundstrom, de Meuse & Futrell, 1990). Other definitions have placed importance on skill complementarity (Katzenback & Smith, 1993), empowerment (Wellins, Byham & Dixon, 1994), autonomy (Sonnentag, 1996), and flexibility (McDermott, Brawley & Waite, 1998). These latter characteristics are important in facilitating the superior performances expected through teamworking, however interdependence and shared vision are essential as pre-requisites because these two features create the synergy distinguishing teams from groups. Group performance is based on the summative contribution of its members, whereas teamworking creates an outcome larger than the collective contribution of its individual members (Guzzo, 1996). Interaction, interdependence and common goals are the means through which team contribution becomes superior to group outcomes. In this study teams are defined as a small group of individuals, between 4-8 members, working interdependently on shared tasks towards achieving mutually agreed upon objectives.

Autonomy, interdependence, multiskilling, heterogeneity, flexibility, communication and co-operation as well as management support are key correlates of teamworking identified as having significant impact on team effectiveness. Autonomy refers to the extent to which team members are able to independently make decisions about how



assigned tasks are carried out. When team members are given full autonomy, the term self-managed work teams (SMWT) is used. Self-management requires team members to take on much of the responsibility traditionally reserved for management. In SMWT, team members set their own goals, monitor progress, adjust behaviour to increase the chances of attaining goals and in some instances even self-reward or punish (Kirkman et al., 2001). The need for autonomy arises from the model of work design put forward by Hackman and Oldham (1980) who proposed that improved performance and individual well-being emerge when employees take ownership of tasks. Delegating responsibility to employees through provision of autonomy is assumed to make the job more meaningful and thereby stimulate ownership thereby allowing employees to produce peak performance. This level of self-responsibility however is not welcomed by all employees nor is it feasible due to insufficient skills, knowledge and information about work processes or in some cases autonomy may also be limited by the nature of work processes, for example in computer-controlled processes (Mueller, Proctor & Buchanan, 2000; Morita, 2001). Thus several levels of team autonomy exist from fully autonomous teams to semi-autonomous to less autonomous teams. Whatever the level, empirical studies have shown high levels of autonomy to be positively related to intrinsic job satisfaction as well as the absence of negative mental health symptoms (Wall, Kemp, Jackson & Clegg, 1986; Sonnentag, 1996). Increased participation in job-related decision making has been found to increase performance quality and productivity (Tannenbaum, Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 1996) and to be predictive of enhanced motivation and team effectiveness (Campion, Medsker & Higgs, 1993; Campion, Papper & Medsker, 1996). Thus increased levels of autonomy appear to generally predict higher levels of both quantity and quality of performance, subject to the condition that employees are willing to accept self-responsibility. This willingness is affected by both wider cultural values as well as individual predispositions towards independence and free-will. The significance of autonomy for teamworking in Malaysia and Japan will be discussed in later sections of this paper.

Interdependence is the second key of teamworking and has been operationalized in terms of task interdependence, goal interdependence and interdependent feedback and rewards (Campion et al., 1993). The assembly line is an example of interdependence where team members must rely on each other to produce a complete product. Interdependence contributes positively to team effectiveness when there is a sense of shared responsibility, greater co-operation through improved communication and co-ordination as well as increased cohesiveness. Empirical studies have shown inter-dependence to have motivational impact on team members (Campion et al., 1993; 1996).

Multiskilling, heterogeneity and flexibility refer to the way in which work skills are distributed amongst team members. One of the main advantages of teams is flexibility in responding to changes in product mix or member composition. Greater flexibility and a quick response is possible when team members are multiskilled and together there is heterogeneity of abilities and competencies within teams. Empirical studies have shown mixed results of the effects of multiskilling, heterogeneity and flexibility on team effectiveness. Tannenbaum et al., (1996) and Dunphy and Bryant (1996) report increased





team effectiveness through efficient coordination of workflow, greater efficiency and reduced staffing. However Campion et al., (1993; 1996) did not find significant relationships between flexibility and team effectiveness. One reason for the ambiguous results is that the acquisition and use of skills is very much determined by the nature of the task as well as how tasks are structured. For example multiskilling has been found to be effective when there was high task interdependence and low skill complexity and less appropriate for other combinations of task complexity and interdependence (Dunphy & Bryant, 1996).

Communication, co-operation and management support have been collectively termed process variables. These correlates of teamworking describe the nature of interactions between team members as well as interactions between teams. Generally team process characteristics have been found to be positively related to high job satisfaction, low job tension and to be negatively correlated with burnout (Gladstein, 1984; Sonnentag, 1996; Campion et al., 1993; 1996).

In summary this section has defined teamworking and described some of the correlates of team effectiveness. Autonomy and interdependence are two characteristics that have reported the most consistent effects empirically, where higher levels of autonomy and interdependence are related to greater team effectiveness. The results for multiskilling, heterogeneity and flexibility are more uncertain because of the significant impact of task characteristics on the effectiveness of these team characteristics. The results are clearer and more consistent for the effect of team process characteristics which generally have reported positive relationships with job satisfaction and psychological well-being. The next section discusses the impact of culture on teamworking by considering the practice of teamworking in both Malaysia and Japan.

Teamworking in Malaysia

Teams have been traditionally used in Malaysia in the agricultural context where temporary and informal teams were created to attain specific objectives within a short period of time, such as harvesting or preparing fields for the transplantation of rice seedlings (Wan Rafaei, 1993). The practice of *gotong-royong* (working together for a common purpose) is thought to reflect the Malay cultural values of co-operation, harmony, mutual help and consensual decision-making which make teams a natural response towards attaining common goals. Malaysia has been characterized as being high in power distance, low individualism, having being and deterministic orientations as well as being conservative (Hofstede, 1980; Kirkman & Shapiro, 1997; Schwartz, 1999). The majority of Malaysians belong to the Muslim faith and thus can be expected to subscribe to the Islamic work ethic (IWE) described as encouraging hard work, co-operation at work, consultation, having good relationships with both equals and superiors and latent fatalism, namely the belief that adherence to religious tenets will bring about a good and peaceful life (El-Kot & Leat, 2005). This profile of values has been described as accepting of teamwork but resistant to self-management (Kirkman & Shapiro, 1997) and empirically supported by data from cross-cultural comparisons of teamworking in Indonesia and Puerto Rico (Kirkman, Gibson & Shapiro, 2001). More recently local data has shown that process aspects of





teamworking related to communication and co-operation, higher management support, belief in team potency to be significantly related to higher job satisfaction (Ratnasingam, 2007) and organizational innovation (Ratnasingam, 2008). Job designs aspect of teams emphasizing autonomy such as self-management and participation have had insignificant impact on job satisfaction, psychological well-being and innovation. To some extent these results support the Kirkman and Shapiro (1997) hypothesis that local cultural values influence preferences for aspects of teams, however the results may be confounded by gender as well as task characteristics as both samples have been primarily female and working contexts that do not fully support teamworking.

Teamworking in Japan

The history of industrial group work in Japan began after the Second World War with the introduction of statistical control procedures which later evolved into quality control circles (Hayashi, 1989) and later became the mechanism for company wide quality control (Rahman, 1990). Two significant characteristics of this intervention were the support and patronage of higher management that extended all the way down through middle management to first line supervisors, and secondly the willingness to delegate decision-making authority to workers and their corresponding acceptance of this greater responsibility (Rahman, 1990; Sako, 2002). Higher management support ensured that improvement suggestions arising in group discussions had a greater chance of being implemented and thereby reinforces the perception that shopfloor workers are making an important contribution to the company. Similarly allowing shopfloor workers to make decisions related to task performance is a reflection of the Japanese executive's tendency to rely on line workers for quality control (Hayashi, 1989), a trust that is returned by operators who take the initiative to solve problems and then send up this information to managers and engineers so that it can be used to further improve design and work processes (Sako, 2002).

This mutual trust and respect between workers and management is a reflection of the decision to integrate conception and execution in direct opposition to Tayloristic tendencies of imposing information hierarchies between those who think and those who do (Pruijt, 2003). This approach has been termed team-theoretic (Aoki, 2002) and creates the perception of the entire company as one team. Increasing information to the shopfloor and practising collective decision-making does have its limits, in that workers' decisions tend to be limited to their immediate work environment. However the benefit of such practices is that making adjustments to work processes and co-ordination of operations between workshops then occurs horizontally without managerial intervention; all of which speeds up response time and ultimately productivity.

However opinions differ as to whether this practice is the sole source of competitive strength in Japanese companies. Koike (2002) contends that the most vital skill contributing to efficiency in modern Japanese companies is intellectual skill, which he defined as the ability to deal with problems and changes as they occur. The author traces the development of intellectual skill to the Japanese practice of not defining jobs clearly,





instead it is expected that junior workers will closely observe their fellow workers and veteran workers reciprocate by including the instruction of less skilled workers as part of their duties. This teamwork is said to be founded on the Japanese group orientation, which is one reason why it has been difficult to transfer such team spirit to other countries (Morita, 2001; Saka, 2004).

Applied to teamworking it appears that Japanese society which has been classified as highly collective would readily accept teamworking based on their tradition of group learning, sharing and discussion (Morita, 2001). Acceptance of self-management is expected to be related to the Japanese practice of sharing information, both top-down and the reverse, as well as the practice of collective decision-making that was introduced with the advent of quality circles. Japanese employees entering the company already have a high level of technical knowledge and skills (Rahman, 1990; Hayashi, 1989; Tung, 1985). This is further developed by the practice of veteran employees instructing less experienced workers on the shopfloor in such a way that productivity does not decline even though frequent changes occur in work processes as well as product mix (Koike, 2002). Thus what is thought to be the superior effect of teamworking is in fact combined with the effects of superior technical education.

In summary there appears to be a clear difference between Malaysian and Japanese attitudes to teamworking. On the one hand support for teamworking comes from the fact that it is an established practice on an informal and temporary basis and that the values of a collective society would greatly support the needs of teamworking. A similar argument can be made for the acceptance of teamworking in Japan, however it is expected that their history of information sharing and collective decision making combined with high levels of technical knowledge and skills would result in Japanese acceptance of self-management in addition to teamworking.

Method

This study used a cross-sectional design with convenience sampling. Data was collected in a large Japanese multinational company operating in Malaysia. In Japan, data was collected from an iron manufacturing company and one of its affiliated companies as well as from a large electrical manufacturing company. Details of the participants and measures are presented below.

Participants

153 Malaysian working in the Japanese company in Malaysia answered the questionnaire. They were mainly male (71.5%), Malay (56.6%) and had an average age of 34.3 years. 42.2% had completed 11 years of formal education (SPM) and 41.5% had completed a degree or diploma course. The majority of respondents (69.7%) consisted of technicians, chargemen, foremen and leaders. The remainder comprised administration personnel such as executives, managers, assistant managers and clerks.

The Japanese sample consisted of 163 participants from three companies. 100 were from a large electronic manufacturing company in Japan. The remaining participants were





from an iron manufacturing company and one of its affiliate companies. The sample was entirely male, with an average age of 45.13 years. The majority had completed a bachelor's degree (56%). 63% of the sample consisted of group leaders or section chiefs, while the remainder comprised executives and heads of departments.

Measures

Team characteristics were measured using the Campion et al. (1993) scale made up of five dimensions of teamworking, namely job design, interdependence, team composition, team context and team process. Job design characteristics measured were self-management, participation, task variety, task significance and task identity. Interdependence was measured in terms of task and goal interdependence as well as interdependent feedback and rewards. Team composition referred to the structural aspects of teams designed to increase team effectiveness. The measure included team heterogeneity, team member flexibility and preference for teamworking. Team context referred to resources and organizational context characteristics such as training, management support, communication and co-operation between teams. The final dimension measured team processes and included team potency, which was a measure of team efficacy, social support, workload sharing, communication and co-operation within teams. All 18 aspects of teamworking above were measured by 3 items each. Participants were required to indicate one answer on a 5 point scale to show the extent to which that item was relevant for them.

Team effectiveness was measured using the Warr, Cook and Wall (1979) job satisfaction scale consisting of 16 items. Psychological well-being was measured using Warr's (1990) job-related measure of affective well-being consisting of 12 items. Each item was answered on a 5 point scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree.

All the three measures used in this study were translated into both Bahasa Malaysia and Japanese using the method of back translation. In Malaysia the items in the questionnaire are presented in both English and Bahasa Malaysia, such that participants could choose their preferred language. In Japan the items were presented in Japanese only.

Reliabilities assessed using Cronbach's alpha indicated alpha values ranging from 0.69 to 0.91 (Malaysia) and from 0.65 to 0.91 for the Japan data. Thus the three scales were found to be valid and reliable.

Results

A comparison of mean scores using ANOVA analysis shows several mean scores to be significantly different between Malaysian and Japanese participants. The results as indicated in Table 1 below show that the Malaysian scores are generally higher than the Japanese scores, with significant differences being observed for all subscales except on three subscales of the job design dimension. The job design dimension shows some differences from the general pattern described above. The Japanese mean scores on participation and task significance are a little higher than the Malaysian mean scores, however the differences are not significant. The Malaysian mean scores on task variety and task identity are significantly higher in comparison to the Japanese mean scores.



The same pattern of results is observed with job satisfaction and psychological well-being, that is Malaysian mean scores are significantly higher than the Japanese mean scores.

Table 1: Malaysia-Japan comparison of means scores on teamwork dimensions

Team components	Malaysia (mean score)	Japan (mean score)	ANOVA F value	p value
JOB DESIGN				
Self-management	9.91	9.50	2.98	.09
Participation	10.74	11.16	2.98	.09
Task variety	10.29	8.96	31.20	.001***
Task significance	11.78	11.90	0.38	.54
Task identity	11.06	10.61	4.89	.03*
INTERDEPENDENCE				
Task interdependence	10.74	9.80	17.84	.001***
Goal interdependence	10.44	8.90	28.38	.001***
Interdependent feedback and rewards	10.50	9.91	3.98	.05*
TEAM COMPOSITION				
Member heterogeneity	11.39	10.40	15.84	.001***
Member flexibility	10.61	8.89	45.73	.001***
Preference for teamwork	12.39	10.60	51.12	.001***
TEAM CONTEXT				
Training	10.37	8.60	41.22	.001***
Management support	10.45	10.01	6.84	.01**
Communication and co-operation between teams	14.43	13.88	4.11	.05*
TEAM PROCESS				
Team potency	11.62	10.09	20.76	.001***
Social support	11.92	10.18	78.68	.001***
Workload sharing	11.22	9.80	45.22	.001***
Communication and co-operation within teams	11.59	10.42	39.86	.001***
TEAM EFFECTIVENESS				
Job satisfaction	58.98	53.60	17.61	.001***
Psychological well-being	40.56	33.92	44.10	.001***

$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

To determine which team components were most critical to job satisfaction and psychological well-being separate hierarchical regressions were undertaken on the Malaysian and Japanese data.

Relationship between team components and job satisfaction

For the Malaysian data, gender, age and race were entered ahead of the team components as these variables were different for both groups. The Japanese group which consisted of only male participants had a higher average age and race was not relevant to that sample. Entering these variables ahead of the team variables allows us to subtract their effect on job satisfaction.

The results indicate that gender, age and race explained insignificant amount of variance on job satisfaction. The fourth model was significant, $F=4.63$, $p \leq .001$ and explained 47 per cent of the variance observed in job satisfaction. The most significant beta coefficient was observed for workload sharing ($\beta = .34$, $p \leq .001$). The next significant contribution was from participation ($\beta = .20$, $p \leq .05$) and management support ($\beta = .18$, $p \leq .05$).

Similar analysis was carried out with the Japanese data where gender and age were entered ahead of the team components. The results indicated that gender and age explained insignificant amounts of variance in job satisfaction; however the team components together explained 24 per cent of variance observed in job satisfaction. Model statistics were $F=2.21$, $p \leq .01$. The main contributing team components were management support ($\beta = .25$, $p \leq .05$) and task variety ($\beta = .17$, $p \leq .05$).

Relationship between team components and psychological well-being

Hierarchical regression analyses were similarly performed separately to determine the contribution of team components to psychological well-being. For the Malaysian data the team components explained 39 per cent of variance observed in psychological well-being. Again the fourth model was significant at $F=3.39$, $p \leq .001$. Significant contributions were observed from workload sharing ($\beta = .34$, $p \leq .01$), management support ($\beta = .30$, $p \leq .01$), member flexibility ($\beta = .21$, $p \leq .05$) and preference for teamwork ($\beta = .20$, $p \leq .05$).

For the Japanese data the team components explained only 16 per cent of the variance observed in psychological well-being. The model was barely significant, $F=2.3$, $p \leq .05$. The only significant contribution was observed from the team component of communication and co-operation between groups ($\beta = .21$, $p \leq .05$).

Generally the results have indicated that the model used in this study was more successful in explaining observed variance for the Malaysian data and appeared to be less relevant for the Japanese data. This was particularly true for the outcome variable of psychological well-being. The teamworking model was most successful in explaining variance in job satisfaction among Malaysian participants and also relevant for the Japanese level since the regression model was significant, though at a lower level than that shown by the Malaysian data. A similar pattern was observed for the outcome variable of psychological well-being, where the teamworking model explained a substantial amount of variance observed. Thus clear differences were observed between Malaysian and Japanese participants as to the correlates of team effectiveness.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to compare forms of teamworking in Malaysia and Japan. Both Malaysia and Japan share collectivistic values which would make their people amenable to working in teams, however the history of team development differs in these two countries. In Malaysia teamworking had its roots in agriculture whereas in Japan it was introduced as a technique of quality improvement. Another difference between the two countries is their economic status. Japan is an industrial leader in Asia while Malaysia



has had its successes but still has a long way to go towards becoming a developed country. It is possible that differences in economic development may be related to differences in cultural values between the two countries, thus affecting creating differing perceptions and expectations of teamworking.

The results of this study clearly show that there are differences in perceptions of teamworking between the two countries. The significant differences observed in the results of the analysis of variance would tend to suggest that Malaysians have more positive perceptions of teamworking compared to the Japanese participants in this study. However this conclusion would be erroneous due to the confounding effects of differences in age, gender and ethnicity between the two participant groups.

The results of hierarchical regression indicate that there are both differences and similarities in perceptions of teamworking between Malaysia and Japan. One similarity is the emergence of management support as a key contributor towards job satisfaction in both countries suggesting the presence of close relationships between team members and managers. This may be an example of a Japanese management practice that has been successfully transferred to the Japanese multinational in Malaysia.

The results however indicate more differences than similarities, among them the emergence of workload sharing, participation, member flexibility and preference for teamwork as significant contributors to both job satisfaction and psychological well-being for Malaysian participants. The pattern of results suggests emphasis on process and context dimensions of teamworking rather than the interdependence or job design aspects of teamworking. The results of regression analysis appear to indicate that shared responsibility is the more significant aspect of teamworking in Malaysia rather than interdependence. Participation is the only job design team characteristic that is significant as a contributor to job satisfaction suggesting that the participants in this study welcome the opportunity to be engaged in collective job-related decision-making through teamworking. Previous applications of the Campion et al. (1993) framework have shown negative results for job design element which could be explained by previous samples being predominantly female (Ratnasingam, 2007; 2008).

For the Japanese participants task variety was the most significant contributor to job satisfaction after management support. This result was not observed among the Malaysian participants suggesting that the practice of teamworking in Japan was associated with a greater product mix. In the Malaysian sample team member flexibility was a significant contributor to psychological well-being. These results suggest differences in ways of working between Malaysia and Japan. Task variety refers to the opportunity to be engaged in a number of different tasks whereas team member flexibility refers to the team member having a variety of skills which enables him or her to move about between tasks. The former is associated with working on different products whereas the latter suggests team members acquiring a wider repertoire of skills and knowledge. This result appears to support Koike's (2002) of team effectiveness arising from effective use of skilled and less skilled workers instead of being a product of the Japanese group orientation. The interest in acquiring skills for Malaysian participants may be a reflection of the importance placed on





training and learning as an indicator of progress and development as has been observed in the implementation of teamworking in an American multinational (Ratnasingam, 2007).

The most significant disparity observed between the two countries is the vast difference in the amount of variance in job satisfaction and psychological well-being explained by the model in both countries. The Champion model explained 47 versus 24 per cent variance observed in job satisfaction between the Malaysian and Japanese participants, and 39 versus 16 percent of the variance observed in psychological well-being between participants in both countries. Clearly the Champion model is more relevant to the Malaysian rather than Japanese context. One possible reason for this difference in results may be the way in which teamworking is used in both countries. In Malaysia the results of regression analysis indicates an emphasis on process and context variables and not the job design aspects. This pattern suggests teamworking is viewed as enhancing relationships between workers as well as with management. The significance of workload sharing suggests that teamworking is perceived in the sense of developing team spirit or a sense of camaraderie among workers. This interpretation supports the Kirkman and Shapiro (1997) model which characterises countries high in collectivism, low in uncertainty avoidance and high in power distance as accepting teamworking but rejecting self-management.

In Japan however the history of quality circles indicates that delegation of authority to shopfloor and integrating decision-making with operational activities as well as horizontal co-ordination between workers (Aoki, 2002) resulted in teams being integrated into work processes. As a result the emphasis would be on job design dimensions rather than process and context dimensions of teamworking. It is possible that in Japan the development and maintenance of harmonious work relations is viewed as a pre-requisite of any interaction, whether it in the workplace or outside. Thus the relational aspects of teams are taken for granted and do not assume significance just in the context of teamworking. However the results of this study indicate that very few of the aspects of teamworking as found in the Champion model are significant for this group of participants, neither the job design elements nor the process and context dimensions. The low regression values (R^2) indicate that this model of teamworking has limited relevance to the experience of these Japanese participants.

This observation suggests the need to develop an alternative model of teamworking to describe interactions in the Japanese firm. It appears that the western emphasis on autonomy as a means towards creating meaning and a sense of ownership are not applicable to Japanese firms. For example Japanese workplace is said to be characterized by collective decision-making, such that negotiations with outsiders are prolonged while the mandatory internal discussions take place (Hodgetts, Luthan & Doh, 2006). This suggests the collective autonomy may be more relevant to Japanese culture rather than individual autonomy as emphasized by western cultural values such as individualism. The results of this study show that only certain aspects of the Champion model are relevant to the practice of teamworking in both Malaysia and Japan, namely the process and context dimensions rather than the job design and interdependence dimensions.

The results of this study have both theoretical and practical implications. The first





positive implication is that teamworking has considerable impact on job satisfaction and psychological well-being for Malaysian participants. Thus the introduction of teams is good for morale in the Malaysian workplace, however the question remains as to how effective teamworking is in improving efficiency and productivity. The results of this study suggest that greater attention needs to be given towards encouraging self-management and acceptance of decision-making authority. The example of Japan in integrating planning and executions shows that such delegation of authority to the shopfloor can be effective in promoting performance on the shopfloor as well as productivity for the organization. However it must be remembered that Japanese employees are highly trained and possess the technical skills and knowledge required to utilize the opportunities provided for greater participation in job-related decision-making. Thus the implications for Malaysia are to upgrade the knowledge and skills of workers before introducing avenues for participation.

The implications of this study for the practice of teamworking in Japan are more theoretical in nature. The results clearly indicate the inadequacy of this model to explain perceptions of teamworking among Japanese participants. Therefore there is need for further research to identify appropriate correlates of teamworking in Japan, for example the inclusion of the sense of collective autonomy which coincides with the group orientation and cultural values of the Japanese. Such theoretical development can also be undertaken in Malaysia to further contextualize models of teamworking.

In fact, a major limitation of this study is the lack of qualitative studies to describe the current form of teamworking prevailing in Malaysia. As the country moves closer to being fully industrialised in tandem with the dominance of information technology in the communications and manufacturing sector, it is necessary for local research that identifies the form of teamworking most suited to local conditions. Similarly there is a need for qualitative research in Japan to identify the components of teamworking as practised in modern Japan. The results of these qualitative studies can then serve as the basis for the development of teamworking models that may or may not have considerable overlap. Other limitations of this study include the non-representativeness of both samples; the ideal comparison would be between Malaysian and Japanese workers in the same multinational. However since the Japan head office did not permit data collection at the home factory the comparison was with Japanese workers in different companies. As a result this study could not control for the influence of organizational practices and environment. Thus to some extent the results of this comparison may be confounded by the differences in management styles, recruitment policies and even work processes that may or may not have supported teamworking. Thus it is suggested that future research be undertaken under more controlled conditions using matched samples of participants and questionnaires that have been proven to be context relevant.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine if there are cultural influences on the practice of teamworking in Malaysia and Japan. It was thought that by comparing Malaysian





participants working in a Japanese multinational with Japanese participants in Japan, it would be possible to control organizational context influence to some extent. The results clearly show that the influence of culture far supersedes the influence of organizational environment. The model of teamworking used was found to be more relevant in explaining Malaysian rather than Japanese perceptions of teamworking. This difference is interpreted as reflecting differing emphasis on teamworking between the two countries. The Malaysian participants have highlighted the importance of process factors such as workload sharing and preference for teamwork. The only shared feature of teamworking between the two countries was management support. The significant contribution of teamworking towards psychological well-being for Malaysian participants but at a much lower level for Japanese participants indicates that the Champion model of teamworking has different impact in both countries. Thus there is a need for much future research using both qualitative and quantitative methods to develop models of teamworking appropriate for both countries. Teamworking is frequently used in the manufacturing and service sectors as a means of encouraging workers to fully contribute their knowledge and skills through group based learning, sharing and decision-making. There is no reason to doubt that this practice will continue in both countries, therefore there is an urgent need for more research into the impact of culture on team processes, the relationship between culture and teamworking structure as well as how best to adapt teamworking to match task and organizational characteristics.

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