

Cultural Values and Management Approach of Suluk Leaders in Sabah

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this paper is to investigate the relationship between cultural values and management approach among leaders. Data were collected from 100 leaders of Suluk ethnic from various organizations such as public, private and non-government organization. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) were used to test the hypotheses. The findings show that there is a positive relationship between cultural values and management approach. Specifically, the relationship was found to be stronger for leaders who have a low power distance culture and entrepreneurial management practice. The study provides an important implication in term of cultural values on leaders practice such as planning, organizing, leading and controlling. To embedded on entrepreneurial practice, leader should lower their power distance by equally used the power such as encouraging subordinates to be involved in organization decisions. The study also contributes to the research on divergence theory by understanding that management practices are culture-bound.

Keywords:

Cultural values, management approach, leaders

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1. Introduction

Sabah has known as multi ethnic in Malaysia. Therefore, Sabah population share a diverse element of language, religious, cultural and socio-economic. Suluk is one of the ethnic groups of the Malaysia and located in Sabah. Mizpal [22] noted that Suluk has been recognized as the most entrepreneurial ethnic group in Malay Archipelago. In addition, a study by Warren [44] was also reported that entrepreneurship culture has exists among Suluk ethnic for a long time ago. Suluk ethnic has seen a lot of success in its economic sector with famously successful in fishing industry [1].

Survey such as that conducted by Mairaning *et al.* [27] have shown that their success has a relationship with demography such as location wise. These result match those observed in earlier studies by Asmah [3] whereby Suluk ethnic were found in Kudat, Tawau, Lahad Datu, Semporna and Sandakan. Most of the location situated at coastal area. Thus, fishing and plantation become their primary source of needs. Despite its needs, they expand their survival life into entrepreneurial skills by venturing a fishing business. They developed a leadership, communication, writing and financial

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skills from time to time. The skills that they possess indicate a significance of Suluk ethnic contribution on Sabah economic development.

In community context, it is pivotal to begin by understanding the cultural values from Suluk ethnic. They are exposed by their own traditional ethnic cultural values [25]. This also accord with Abu Najal [1] observation, which showed that Suluk ethnic inherit the cultural knowledge from generation to generation. This cultural knowledge has been applying and practicing in their daily life. For instance, in a workplace, previous research shows that culture knowledge is one of the antecedents for organizational commitment. Moreover, research done by Mitchell and Katie [21] stated that individual belief has a significant impact in influencing employees or employee behavior at workplace.

Cultural values and choice of management approach in a workplace have been an object research over years. Recently, Aminah [1], she noted that a sense of uncertainty avoidance values exists in Suluk ethnic and therefore some of the entrepreneur successfully penetrate a global market. She also mentioned that, low ambiguity feeling values has made Suluk ethnic expand their abilities by joining a politic arena. Furthermore, a collective self-identity values also can be found in Suluk ethnic. They have a strong tie with others who seeking for help [1]. They love to share their success and act as a motivator to encourage self-development.

The past decade, Hofstede [22] introduced the concept of national culture. According to him, national culture is a set of beliefs and behaviors shared by a group of people, also known as the collective programming of the mind distinguishing members of one group from another. Later, Webster [46] found that national culture may identify the outcome of organizational culture. For example, research by Baker and Patrick [5] stated that high uncertainty avoidance and feminine cultures have an impact on entrepreneurial management style. Hence, this study was aiming to determine the impact of ethnicity culture on management approach.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1 Individualism and Rational Management

Individualism is a situation where people are looking after themselves and their close family and friends [9]. In individualistic cultures, people always want to make a fast-decision-making process. The most important skills that they should have are strong conceptual skills such as abilities and creativity to solve the problem. Surveys conducted by Ugrin *et al.*, [32] shows that individualistic are bond with their belief when deciding. However, Smith and Hume [30] and Swaidan [31], addressed people with individualistic are more tolerant on questionable activities.

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature on individualism and preference of management style. In a workplace, Ozgur [35] mentioned that rational management approach is a systematic change by using a strategy formalized in developing an objectives and action plans. Rational management approach focuses on achieving predefined goals and facing external competition; thus, leaders are goal oriented [10]. In Agency Theory perspective, individualism factors were classified as antecedents for rational management approach. Andrew [2] reported that individualism culture contributes to rational management approach. It happened when individualistic persons were stimulated with strong intuitive, they tend to maximize their intellectual ability to become more rational [29]. In other hand, individualistic people tend to benefit rational knowledge [11]. From the literature, individualistic person is significantly engaged with rational management approach. Thus, this hypothesized that:

H1: Leaders with high individualism is positively related to rational management approach.

a. Collectivism and clan management approach

In cultural context, dimension of national culture in Hofstede has evolved into the field of choice in management approach. Hofstede has proposed five cultural dimensions for cultural study. One of the dimensions in Hofstede is collectivism. According to Bochner [6], collectivists were more dependent on each other because their personal interest is in their group membership. Previous research has indicated that collectivist have a universal characteristic such as interdependent self-concept, their aims are congruent with group members, their social behaviour and have a good social exchange [4]. Their concept of self includes family members, friends and colleagues in workplace. As such, research done by Bhawuk [4] points out that people in Asia have a strong interdependent self-concept. Meanwhile, a study by Aminah [1] examined the trend of collectivism in Suluk ethnic. She found that, they try to help each other whenever there is a problem arises. Suluk ethnic views other people as a continuation of their selves. Therefore, the spirit of teamwork is highly embedded among them. In a teamwork environment, collectivists tend to less rigid and structure less. They accept other as equal. Hence, the relationship between self and others is closer.

In a workplace context, leader who exhibit high collectivism are incline with clan management approach. Clan management approach is determined as an approach that apply internal network, status and relationship [17]. The primary element on clan approach were collaboration, trust, cohesion, participation, communication and empowerment [9]. The leader applies this element during the leadership process. Ramlah [28] mentioned that Tun Datu Mustapha from Suluk ethnic developed Sabah through collaboration and trust to their followers. Leaders trust may positively affect employees' positive attitude and behavior. Meanwhile, from the follower's perspective, they viewed this leader as a mentor because the leaders occupied the groups need.

Interestingly, Marianna and Rutaichanok [20] has found a positive correlation between clan management and collectivism culture. The research highlights that clan management approach were adopted by the leader when there is high interdepends culture in self. Thus, this study believe that collectivism influence the clan management approach.

H2: Leader with high collectivism is positively related to clan management approach.

b. Uncertainty avoidance and entrepreneurial management approach

Uncertainty avoidance describe how the person perceived about uncomfortable and comfortable in new and unusual situation [13]. In practicality, uncertainty avoidance act in different context. In a country with high level of uncertainty avoidance, their people try to minimize all the uncertainty by developing a strict law and straightening security mechanism because of anxiety feeling for a new environment [34]. Meanwhile, country that have a low uncertainty avoidance feel more pleasant with uncertain environment. Uncertainty avoidance cultural hold a tolerate characteristics and behaviors towards other perceptions and behaviors.

In organization context, uncertainty avoidance has a direct impact on entrepreneurial orientation [21]. A large and growing body of literature has investigated about the uncertainty avoidance in entrepreneurial approach. Among the significant trends are the impact of uncertainty avoidance and entrepreneurial management approach [19]. Entrepreneurial approach is defined as a management that bear any risk [8]. There are few main characteristics that entrepreneur should have such as innovative, accept the risk and profit-making idea [10]. Economist mentioned that entrepreneur approach must have a strong linked with low uncertainty avoidance, so that it can generate more profit to the organization. Therefore, when the country has a low uncertainty avoidance, they tend to apply entrepreneurial management approach. According to Mohd Fazil and Nelson [24] Suluk

ethnic take a high risk by moving from one area to another for their business survival. They hold a believe that this risks and challenges as an opportunity. Thus, it can hypothesize that:

H3: Leader with low uncertainty avoidance is positively related to entrepreneurial management approach.

c. Power distance and entrepreneurial management approach

The concept of power distance proposed by Hofstede [9] who saw it as to which people accept unequally distributive power in a society and organization. The level of power distance beliefs depends on the country. For example, country that have high power distance, inequality power is being perceived as a normal and natural compare to the country who have a low power distance. Country that have a high-power distance hold a belief that, superior have the ability and reliable to decide [18]. In contrast, country with low power distance aim to reduce power differences by deciding and encourage subordinate to be involved [17].

Several researches have been done by identifying the contribution of power distance and entrepreneurial approach among leaders [16,17,27]. Entrepreneurial management approach encourages the organization to push for innovation. Followership play a vital role in organizational setting specifically in achieving the goals and mission. Therefore, implementation of innovation in organization requires an effective social exchange between leaders and followers. Leaders who exhibit high tolerance and flexibility will create a positive outcome on followers. Much of the current literature, found that low power distance is strongly associated with entrepreneur spirit. Low power distance has a several advantages specifically for-profit oriented context such as stimulate creativity among employees, benefit top management for goal setting and increase responsibility among members [35]. Thus, effectiveness of entrepreneurial management approach is depending on leaders who have low power distance. Thus:

H4: Leader with low power distance is positively related to entrepreneurial management approach.

3. Methodology

The population of this study consists of leaders from Suluk ethnic. Samples were then selected randomly. Gpower software was used to identify the sample size for this study. 100 respondents were selected from various type of organizations. Table 1 depicts the demographic profile of the respondents. The findings indicate that most of the respondents consists of male. In addition, more than 50 per cents of the respondents have more than ten years' working experience

Table 1
Demographic profile of respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	65	65
Female	35	35
Years of service		
1-5	12	12
6-10	24	24
>10	64	64

3.1 Data collection method

Researchers identifying a total number of leaders from Suluk ethnic through a contact person. There are two types of method to distribute the questionnaire. First, the questionnaire is distributed by face to face. Second, researchers used an email invitation and provide a URL link to answer the survey. Researchers contacted or followed up the respondents several of times. This is to show that their feedback is important for this study.

3.2 Measures

The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part is related to the respondent's background. The second part of the questionnaire consists of 12 items about cultural dimension. The last part encompasses management approach. Items for cultural dimension were adopted from Hofstede [9]. Meanwhile, management approach was adopted from Bendixen and Burger [6]. All items were measured using a 5-point scale with labelled as strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree.

3.3 Data analysis

To test the model proposed, SmartPLS version 3.2.7 was used to analyse the data. PLS-SEM is a structural equation modelling which examine a complex cause-effect relationship model [14]. Furthermore, to test the significance of the path coefficients and the loadings a bootstrapping method (5,000 resamples) was used to determine the significance levels for loadings, weights, and path coefficients. For statistical remedies, this study used Harman's single-factor. During the test, all the items in every construct are loaded into factor analysis. The result shows that the first factor explained 43.12 per cent which conform that common method bias is not a serious problem in this research.

4. Results

4.1 Assessment of measurement model

There are four types of assessment that need to be used in measurement model namely internal consistency, factor loadings, convergent validity and discriminant validity [38]. Table 2 depict that indicator loading for all items exceed the suggested point of 0.5 [14]. All the AVE were greater than 0.5 and the CR ranged from 0.9 to 0.98. Both are exceeding the recommended value of 0.7 by Hair *et al.*, [14]. The next step is to assess the discriminant validity. In Table 3, it is indicated that all

constructs demonstrate enough or satisfactory validity [16], where the square root of AVE is larger than correlation for all constructs. In summary, the measurement model indicates satisfactory for convergent validity and discriminant validity.

4.2 Assessment of structural model

There are two main criteria in structural model that is coefficient of determination (R²) to quantify the endogenous constructs and the path coefficients [15]. For this study, R² value for management approach is 0.521 explaining that 52.1% of the variance in management approach can be described by the cultural dimension. Meanwhile, the path coefficient of the structural model has been measured with resampling=5000 in bootstrapping analysis. The result in Table 4 revealed that individualistic has positive relationship with rational management approach with β 0.414, $p < 0.05$. Thus, H1 is supported. Further, there is a significant effect of collectivism on clan management approach with β 0.439, $p < 0.05$. For uncertainty avoidance and entrepreneurial approach, the hypothesis is supported with β 0.225, $p < 0.05$. Finally, the findings showed that power distance also have a significant effect on entrepreneurial approach with β 0.543, $p < 0.05$.

Table 2
 The results of measurement model

Variables	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR
Cultural dimension	B1	0.762	0.804	0.98
	B2	0.818		
	B3	0.910		
	B4	0.883		
	UA5	0.910		
	UA6	0.900		
	UA7	0.786		
	UA8	0.721		
	PD9	0.801		
	PD10	0.910		
	PD11	0.761		
	PD12	0.811		
Management approach	RM13	0.780	0.82	0.98
	RM14	0.689		
	RM15	0.767		
	RM16	0.615		
	EM17	0.659		
	EM18	0.876		
	EM19	0.960		
	CM20	0.972		
	CM21	0.954		
	CM22	0.970		
	CM23	0.986		

Note: AVE= average variance extracted, CR=composite reliability

Table 3
 The results of discriminant validity analysis

		1	2
1	Cultural dimension	0.728	
2	Management approach	0.561	0.843

Note: The bold represent the squared root of average variance extracted

Table 4
 The results of structural model

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta	SE	t-value	Decision
H1	Individualistic → Rational management approach	0.414	0.136	2.860**	Supported
H2	Collectivism → clan management approach	0.439	0.038	3.998**	Supported
H3	Uncertainty avoidance → entrepreneurial management approach	0.225	0.054	4.144**	Supported
H4	Power distance → entrepreneurial management approach	0.543	0.039	5.389**	Supported

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

4.3 Predictive relevance (Q2)

Henseler *et al.* [21] used this measure to assess the research model's capability to predict. Based on the blindfolding procedure, Q2 evaluates the predictive validity of a model via PLS. Q2 values larger than zero indicates that the exogenous constructs have predictive relevance for the endogenous construct [15]. The Q2 of management approach (CV Red = 0.198) signifies that the research model has good predictive relevance.

5. Discussion

The objectives of this study is to identify the cultural dimension that influence leaders management approach. The finding shows that, 52.1 percent of the variance in management approach. The significant relationship highlight that Suluk ethnic culture influence their preference on management approach. This empirical result corroborates with findings from other scholars who identify that Suluk ethnic cultural is one of the potential sources for their success in organization [3].

6. Implication for theory and practice

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge in cultural dimension specifically on choice of leaders management approach. However, less specific outcomes such as management approach by Suluk ethnic being discussed. The influence of cultural on organizational and individual success is widely concern across the world. Thus, to further understanding about this scenario, this study broadens the prior theory by connecting cultural dimension and management approach. Consequently, this new idea will provide a specific explanation on how cultural background give an impact on organization success.

For practical implications, the top management may benefit from the realization that cultural dimension differentially affects the organizational success. The results indicated a causal relationship between dimensions of culture and choice of management approach, management should consider by providing management trainee programs that analyse employee cultural dimensions to guide management on how to train and place employees within the organization

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