"Individualism-collectivism: a tale of two countries"

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Individualism-collectivism: a tale of two countries

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the level of individualism-collectivism of managers in Malaysia and Australia. This study revealed that there are significant differences between Malaysian and Australian managers on the levels of vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism, and vertical collectivism. The results of this study may be of interest and assistance to managers of multinational and international organizations who need to manage in global contexts and, therefore, need to understand cultural-driven differences in personal and interpersonal work-related conditions between and across nations. The implications of the study findings to organizations and directions for future research are also discussed.

Introduction

An understanding of cross-cultural diversity is critical to the development of international strategies and to the management of multicultural organizations (Cox and Blake, 1991). For the last 30 years, the literature on management has yielded diverse positions on the transferability of modern management principles into different cultures. Many of the management concepts and theories used in the literature are of American origin (Hofstede, 1993). US management theories, in a global perspective, contain a number of idiosyncrasies not necessarily shared by other cultures. Three such idiosyncrasies are: a stress on market processes, a stress on the individual, and a focus on managers rather than workers (Hofstede, 1993). In the same vein, Randall (1993) states that present understanding of management theory and practice came primarily from the United States. In support of this, Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) comment that researchers observed and measured the attitudes and behaviors of employees in United States-based organizations and largely ignored the world outside of the United States. Whether or not theories developed in the United States applied to other cultures was not of great concern to academics (Randall, 1993). It was as though there was a silent assumption of universal validity of culturally restricted findings in scholarly journals (Hofstede, 1980). That assumption is being increasingly questioned (for example, Hofstede, 1983, 1993; Triandis et al., 1986, 1988; Earley, 1989; Earley and Stubblebine, 1989; Earley and Singh, 1995; Cox, Lobel, and McLeod, 1991; Janssens, Brett, and Smith, 1995; Riordan and Vandenberg, 1994; Kelley and Worthley, 1981). Researchers have begun to realize that they have paid insufficient attention to the extent to which culture profoundly influences management thought and practice (Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991), and researchers now recognized that management theories developed in one culture may simply not apply to other cultures (Randall, 1993).

Riordan and Vandenberg (1994) state that this concern extends to psychometric (measurement) theory underlying instrument development, as well as to the theoretical foundation specifying relationships among constructs as operationalized through those instruments. They point out that it does little good to test theoretical and conceptual relationships across cultures unless there is confidence that the measures operationalizing the constructs of that relationship exhibit both conceptual and measurement equivalence across the comparison groups. Simply translating the instrument into the language of a culture is no guarantee that (a) the same conceptual frame of reference will be evoked in that culture as was evoked in the culture in which the instrument was originally designed (Steers, 1989) and (b) diverse groups will calibrate the scores of the instrument in the same manner (Riordan and Vandenberg, 1994). Thus, using only Western developed constructs and measures may lead to biased results because the instrument questions are a product of a single culture (Hofstede and Bond, 1984), and this leads to a thought provoking question: "Can Non-Western value system be captured with instruments based on Western ideology?" The majority of cross-cultural research in the literature has focused primarily upon comparative differences between cultural groups (Riordan and Vandenberg, 1994). This identified differences which, in turn, are commonly used as vehicles for explaining and understanding the influence of culture on work-related attitudes, behaviors, and values (Barrett and Bass, 1976; Price-Williams, 1986). However, according to Drenth (1985), within these comparative studies, there has not been a comparable devotion to investigating the equivalence of measures used to operationalize organizational constructs between the culturally diverse groups. This paper reports a study on individualism-collectivism among managers in the different cultural environments of Malaysia and Australia taking into consideration the equivalence of measures used as proposed by Drenth (1985).

1. Individualism-collectivism

Since Hofstede's (1980, 1983) pioneering research that mapped 53 countries on four dimensions (power

distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and uncertainty avoidance), his work has inspired a great deal of research. The dimension of individualism-collectivism (I-C) has generated the most research, and, as some scholars fear, has become a catchall default explanation for cultural differences in human behavior (Kagitcibasi, 1994).

Hofstede (1980) views individualism-collectivism as a bipolar construct and suggests that it is a fundamental distinction between cultures. Triandis (1990, 1995) argues that there are many kinds of individualism and collectivism, for instance, American individualism is different from Australian individualism, likewise, and the collectivism of Israel kibbutz is different from Malaysian collectivism. Triandis and his colleagues (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, and Gelfand, 1995) refined Hofstede's (1980) bipolar dimension of individualism-collectivism into horizontal and vertical dimensions of individualism and collectivism. They contend that the most important attributes that distinguish among different kinds of individualism and collectivism are the relative emphases on horizontal and vertical social relationships. Horizontal patterns assume that one self is more or less like every other self. By contrast, vertical patterns consist of hierarchies, and one self is different from other selves according to position in a unifying structure.

Triandis (1995) argues that the ways in which these relative emphases combine with individualism and collectivism produce four different patterns: horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism, and vertical collectivism. He further adds that by including the vertical and horizontal dimensions of individualism and collectivism in studies, researchers would gain information on the way in which individuals and societies perceive and accept inequality between people. He defines horizontal collectivism as a cultural pattern in which the individual sees the self as an aspect of an in-group. That is, the self is merged with the members of the in-group, all of whom are extremely similar to each other. In this pattern, the self is interdependent with and the same as the self of others. Equality is the essence of this pattern. Vertical collectivism, on the other hand, is a cultural pattern in which the individual sees the self as an aspect of an in-group, but the members of the in-group are different from each other, some having more status than others. The self is interdependent with and different from the self of others. Inequality is accepted in this pattern, and people do not see each other as the same. Serving and sacrificing for the in-group is an important aspect of this pattern. Triandis (1995) refers to horizontal individualism as a cultural pattern where an autonomous self is postulated, but the individual is more or less equal in status with others. The self is independent and the same as the self of others. Vertical individualism, on the other hand, is a cultural pattern, in which an autonomous self is postulated, but individuals see each other as different, and inequality is expected. The self is independent and different from the self of others. Competition is an important aspect of this pattern.

Chen, Meindl, and Hunt, (1997) support Triandis's (1995) vertical and horizontal distinction. They argue that the vertical-horizontal distinction provides additional insights into cross-cultural studies in several ways:

♦ it encourages and enables further classifications of different types of collectivism. This is important because, given that the individualistic West constitutes only 28% of humanity, about two thirds of the world's population are lumped into an undifferentiated collectivism (Singelis et al., 1995);

♦ to the extent that the individualistic orientation increases with levels of industrialization and wealth (see Triandis, 1990, for a review), a more differentiated view of collectivism encourages within-culture examinations of continuity and change in different aspects of value orientations (Fiske, 1990); and

♦ the distinctions can stimulate research on cultural effects on social, organizational, and interpersonal behavior. The construct of individualism-collectivism may have different explanatory power for a given behavior depending on which of its dimensions is invoked.

For instance, horizontal collectivism may be more appropriate than vertical collectivism for studying areas such as co-operative and helping behaviors towards peers, allocation of resources among peers and by peers, and ethics governing interpersonal behaviors. In contrast, vertical collectivism may be more appropriate for research on inter-group co-operation/competition, social loafing, need for socialized power as opposed to need for affiliation, and ethics that govern one's behavior toward the organization.

Triandis (1994) and Triandis et al. (1985, 1986) have labelled individualism and collectivism at an individual level as idiocentrism and allocentrism respectively. Triandis (1995) later distinguished between vertical and horizontal individualism and vertical and horizontal collectivism based on idiocentrism and allocentrism. It has been found that allocentrism is correlated with perceived quantity and quality of social support, and low levels of alienation and anomie, whereas idiocentrism is correlated with an emphasis on achievement and perceived loneliness. The impact of negative life events appears to be stronger in individualistic cultures and

among the idiocentrics than in collectivist cultures and among the allocentrics. According to Henry and Stephens (1977), the reason for this seems to be that in collectivistic cultures, social support system is better developed.

Cox, Lobel, and McLeod (1991) found that ethnic group differences affect at least some aspects of behavior in task group. At an individual level, Asian, Black and Hispanic individuals had a more collectivist-co-operative orientation to a task than Anglo individuals. Ethnically diverse groups composed of Asians, Blacks, Hispanics and Anglos acted more co-operatively than all Anglos groups, and these behavioral differences tended to increase when the situation favored co-operation.

Some researchers have found that individuals from different cultures differ in their work attitudes. Cole (1979) observed that Japanese employees (Japan is reported to be a collectivistic culture) have unusually strong identification with the company, but not necessarily high job satisfaction or strong involvement in performing specific tasks. This might suggest that Japanese employees remain in the organization out of their affective commitment towards the organization, and that seeking job satisfaction is not of paramount importance.

Although most recent work on individualism-collectivism has been cross-cultural, there is some evidence to suggest that a distinction between collectivists and individualists may exist within cultures in the form of an individual difference (Moorman and Blakely, 1995). As noted by Hui and Triandis (1986), cultures which are labelled collectivistic or individualistic are simply cultures in which the majority of individuals have the corresponding collectivistic or individualistic individual difference. Wagner (1992), in a study of social loafing among U.S. college students, labelled the variable individualism-collectivism, but it was quite obvious that he was discussing an individual difference, not a cultural influence. In addition, Earley (1989, 1993) measured individualism-collectivism directly and did not merely rely on country or culture to indicate the degree the respondents were either individualistic or collectivistic. This measurement strategy suggests that, even though overall trends may exist within cultures towards one dimension or the other, there still may be variance within a culture which could predict changes in dependent variables of interest.

IsHak and Moore (1988) point out that four nations within Hofstede's (1980, 1983) sample – Canada, Belgium, Malaysia and the United States – are composed of more than one culture. They argue that linguistic, regional, tribal, ethnic, religious, and caste cleavages within nations may make the data non-representative for the whole of the nation. Further, factors such as local environment, organizational sub-culture, industry, or recent history may explain why so widely divergent scores for the same national cultures are found (Bosland, 1985). Singelis et al. (1995) have incorporated several aspects of these factors in their scale. By including the vertical and horizontal dimensions in the measure more information can be gained on the way in which individuals and societies perceive and accept inequality between people. This allows finer distinctions to be made along cultural dimensions than is possible when only individualism and collectivism are considered. Since this study is interested in measuring individualism-collectivism at individual and cross-national levels, the scale was used in its entirety. The scale uses 9-point response format (strongly disagree to strongly agree).

Based on the discussion above, the objectives of the present study are to examine the level of horizontal and vertical dimensions of individualism and collectivism in Malaysia and to analyze the level of horizontal and vertical dimensions of individualism and collectivism in Australia. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide better insights into our understanding of culture.

2. The study

2.1. Subjects and data collection. Data were collected by questionnaire from middle managers in a total of 28 organisations in Selangor, Malaysia (18 organizations) and Queensland, Australia (10 organizations). The Kompass Directories of Industries for Malaysia and Australia were used as sampling frames because they provide the most up-to-date and comprehensive information on organizations in the two countries.

Each organization was mailed 15 questionnaires. The organizations used their discretion in distributing them to employees who met the definition of manager we supplied. After exclusion of inappropriate and unusable responses, a final analytical sample of 323 (Malaysia = 203 and Australia = 120) was obtained, resulting in effective response rates of 75% in Malaysia, 80% in Australia, and 77% overall.

The Malaysian sample includes 27.1% females and 72.9% males whereas the Australian sample is even more male-dominated with 20.8% females and 79.2% males. Malaysian respondents have an average of 11.2 years of employment with their current organizations compared to Australians' average of 8.6 years. The mean age of Malaysian managers in the sample is 39.4 years and that of the Australian managers is 41.2 years. The modal educational level was having a university degree in both countries (68.5% for the Malaysians and 50.0% for the Aus-

tralians). Most of the managers were married: 84.7% for the Malaysians and 81.7% for the Australians.

2.2. Measurement. Individualism-collectivism was measured using Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, and Gelfand's (1995) 32-item scale. The items in the scale are designed to measure the horizontal and vertical aspects of individualism-collectivism. The items were answered on seven-point scale where 1 indicates strong disagreement and 7 indicates strong agreement.

Since our study is a cross-national investigation, it was essential to prepare the measures in both the English and the Malay languages, and to ensure that the two versions are comparable. The processes of back-translation and decentering of instrument items were conducted by four bilingual individuals who were experts in both the English and the Malay languages. The method of back-translation and decentering developed by Werner and Campbell (1970), Brislin (1970), and Brislin, Lonner, and Thorndike (1973) was employed. A pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted prior to the main study. In addition, a set of 15 demographic items was developed and included in the questionnaire.

3. Analyses

Exploratory principal axis factor analysis was undertaken to determine a structure for the individualism-collectivism data. We used similar procedures to Dunham et al. (1994) and Vendenberghe (1996),

to examine the structural validity of the individualism-collectivism conceptualization in the Malaysian and Australian contexts. Then multiple group confirmatory factor analysis was employed to assess whether measurement equivalence was operating in the two cultural groups.

In seeking answers to the research objectives, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, of the constructs were computed. Internal consistency of the scales was tested by using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951). To test the effect of demographic variables on the constructs used in the study, a series of two-tailed independent t-tests and one-way between groups ANOVA with post-hoc comparison analyses were conducted for the Malaysian and Australian sub-samples.

4. Results

4.1. Tests of model equivalence. Table 1 shows the results of the tests for each hypothesis for each component of the variables in the study. Based on the results of the tests of model equivalence, it was concluded that the form, factor loadings and reliability of the measures under study were invariant across the two cultures of interest. These tests of model equivalence are of prime importance in cross-national research that seeks to compare findings from different countries, because lack of measurement equivalence could threaten the reliability and validity of the results (Mullen, 1995).

Table 1. Tests of invariance of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism

Hypotheses	X^2	(df)	ΔX^2	(Δdf)	GFI	NNFI	CFI	Decision
Horizontal individualism								
Factor form	23.44	(10)	–	–	.97	.67	.83	Accept
Factorial invariance	26.50	(14)	3.06	(4)	.96	.78	.85	Accept
Equivalence of reliability	26.52	(19)	.02	(5)	.96	.90	.91	Accept
Vertical individualism								
Factor form	31.97	(18)	-	-	.98	.89	.94	Accept
Factorial invariance	42.75	(23)	10.78	(5)	.97	.88	.91	Accept
Equivalence of reliability	44.41	(29)	1.66	(6)	.97	.93	.93	Accept
Horizontal collectivism								
Factor form	55.46	(28)	-	-	.96	.87	.91	Accept
Factorial invariance	65.33	(34)	9.87	(6)	.94	.87	.90	Accept
Vertical collectivism								
Factor form	54.33	(28)	-	-	.95	.82	.88	Accept
Factorial invariance	56.85	(34)	2.52	(6)	.95	.87	.89	Accept
Equivalence of reliability	57.00	(41)	.15	(7)	.95	.92	.93	Accept

Note: X^2 = chi-square; df = degree of freedom; GFI = goodness of fit index; NNFI = non-normed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index. GFI for factor form equivalence is >.90 and this indicates a good fit. All the X^2 differences were not significant, indicating that the constructs were invariant in the last two hypotheses, i.e. factorial invariance and equivalence of reliability.

4.2. Reliabilities of the measures. For the total sample, most of the measures, except horizontal individualism, showed acceptable levels of reliability (ranging from 0.54 to 0.73). The reliability

coefficient of horizontal individualism measure was 0.54. Nunnaly (1967) has argued that reliability estimates of .50 to .60 are sufficient for basic research.

Table 2. Reliabilities (Cronbach's Alpha) of the measures

Group measures (No. of items)	Total group (N=323)	Malaysia (N=203)	Australia (N=120)
INDIVIDUALISM-COLLECTIVISM			
Horizontal individualism (5)	.54	.56	.52
Vertical individualism (6)	.62	.58	.64
Horizontal collectivism (7)	.68	.67	.64
Vertical collectivism (7)	.73	.63	.65

The differences in reliability coefficients between the two culture groups were not bigger than 0.10 for all measures. A total of 4 measures for individualism-collectivism were included in the primary data analysis. The fact that the same items were utilized in calculating the reliability coefficients for all constructs in both countries provides additional evidence of construct and measure equivalence. Overall, the reliability coefficients in Table 2 indicate that each of the measure possesses a moderate to high level of internal consistency.

4.3. T-tests comparisons. To determine whether the differences between means for the two culture groups of concern, Malaysia and Australia, were significant, four sets of t-tests were conducted. As shown in Table 3, at the cultural level, the t-tests on the four dimensions of individualism and collectivism found that there is no significant difference between Australian and Malaysian managers in terms of horizontal individualism. But Malaysian managers perceive themselves more as vertical individualists, as well as horizontal and vertical collectivists than their Australian counterparts.

Table 3. Independent groups t-test: Malaysian (N = 203) and Australian (N = 120) respondents

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	t-value	2-TAIL SIG.
Horizontal individualism			-.67	.502
Malaysia	4.8851	.977		
Australia	4.9576	.864		
Vertical individualism			4.29	.000
Malaysia	4.7196	1.046		
Australia	4.1906	1.112		
Horizontal collectivism			5.70	.000
Malaysia	6.0005	.590		
Australia	5.5931	.671		
Vertical collectivism			9.06	.000
Malaysia	4.9218	.946		
Australia	3.9052	1.021		

Discussion

The present study's findings on individualism-collectivism of Malaysian and Australian managers are indeed quite interesting. To identify which as-pects of individualism-collectivism contribute to such findings further examination of the means of individual items in the individualism-collectivism constructs for the two culture groups was conducted. As shown in Table 4, Malaysian managers perceive themselves to be more vertically individualistic in relation to competition. Their emphasis on winning is slightly lower than their Australian counterparts (Malaysia: t = 3.6059; Australia: t = 3.7414), but this difference is not significant.

Among the Malaysian respondents, harmony and social behavior appear to be important, as shown by the significant t-test results for the items on horizontal collectivism. Relationships, self-sacrifice and family integrity are perceived to be of greater importance among the Malaysian respondents. This is evidenced from the t-test results of items on vertical collectivism.

In sum, Malaysian respondents are inclined towards collectivism in situations involving in-groups and tend to be individualistic in situations that involve out-groups. In this sense Malaysian managers are basically collectivistic in nature, but the rapid development of the Malaysian economy has undoubtedly introduced another element into the Malaysian culture, that is, competition.

Australians, on the other hand, perceive self-reliance as an important virtue and believe that they are masters of their own fate. In this respect, Australian managers are basically inclined towards horizontal individualism. This pattern is consistent with Daun's (1991) findings, where he reported that Australian and Swedish managers appear to fall in the category of horizontal individualism. Furthermore, Feather (1992) identified a tendency among Australians to bring down "tall poppies", that is, Australians want to bring down those who have high status. This "tall poppy" attitude is also consistent with the results of culture-level analysis reported by Schwartz (1994). He found that, whereas Australia and the United States were similar on most culture-level value dimensions, the United States had a higher mean importance score on mastery, and Australia had a higher mean importance score on harmony. These findings indicate that Australians can be described as horizontal individualists. Triandis (1995) describes horizontal individualism as a cultural pattern where an autonomous self is postulated, but the individual is more or less equal in status with others. The self is independent and the same as the self of others.

Many commentators (for example, Encel 1970; Hancock, 1930; Lipset, 1963; Ward, 1958) have referred to equalitarianism in Australian society and to an Australian concern for 'mateship'. Others have noted the tendency for Australians to be

critical of "tall poppies", who are atypical or different from others in their high levels of achievement, and to a related tendency for Australians to play down or devalue their accomplishments in relation to similar levels of achievement elsewhere (Feather, 1975; 1986).

Table 4. Independent groups t-test: Malaysia (N = 203) and Australian (N = 120) respondents – horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism items

Items	Mean		t-value	2-TAIL SIG.
	Malaysia	Australia		
HORIZONTAL INDIVIDUALISM Alpha = .56 (M); .52 (A)				
1. I often do "my own thing".	4.2512	4.8333	-3.08	.002
2. One should live one's life independently of others.	3.9754	3.4250	2.60	.010
3. I like my privacy.	5.7931	5.5667	1.54	.126
4. When I succeed, it is usually because of my abilities.	4.9015	5.6250	-4.65	.000
5. I enjoy being unique and different from others in many ways.	5.1921	5.3583	-1.07	.286
VERTICAL INDIVIDUALISM Alpha = .58 (M); .64 (A)				
6. Competition is the law of nature.	5.6552	4.9167	4.26	.000
7. When another person does better than I do, I get tense and aroused.	3.2759	2.9667	1.62	.107
8. Without competition, it is not possible to have a good society.	5.1823	4.5333	3.41	.001
9. Winning is everything.	3.0887	2.9833	.52	.605
10. It is important that I do my job better than others.	5.6946	4.6667	5.69	.000
11. Some people emphasize winning, I am not one of them*.	3.6059	3.7417	-.66	.511
HORIZONTAL COLLECTIVISM Alpha = .67 (M); .64 (A)				
12. If a co-worker gets a prize, I would feel proud.	6.2266	6.1583	.68	.495
13. If a relative were in financial difficulty, I would help within my means.	6.0591	6.0333	.23	.815
14. It is important to maintain harmony within my group.	6.5813	6.1000	5.02	.000
15. I like sharing little things with my neighbors.	5.3596	4.7500	3.67	.000
16. I feel good when I co-operate with others.	6.3054	5.9167	4.06	.000
17. My happiness depends very much on the happiness of those around me.	5.5714	4.7667	4.56	.000
18. To me, pleasure is spending time with others.	5.1232	4.6917	2.71	.007
VERTICAL COLLECTIVISM Alpha = .63 (M); .65 (A)				
19. I would sacrifice an activity that I enjoy very much if my family did not approve of it.	4.8522	4.4417	2.19	.029
20. I would do what would please my family, even if I detested that activity.	4.3054	3.5000	4.31	.000
21. Before taking a major trip, I consult with most members of my family and many friends.	4.9310	3.9167	4.92	.000
22. I usually sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of my group.	5.2315	4.5500	4.75	.000
23. Children should be taught to place duty before pleasure.	5.5813	4.0917	8.41	.000
24. I hate to disagree with others in my group.	4.0345	2.8250	6.66	.000
25. We should keep our ageing parents with us at home.	6.2463	3.5667	16.35	.000

Note: *Reverse-scored item.

According to Feather (1986), linked with equalitarianism is a concern with mateship, a value that social historians see as related to the loneliness and hardships of life in outback Australia where the male settlers had to contend with a difficult environment without much benefit of family (Clark, 1963; Ward, 1958). These conditions were assumed to reinforce a social, collectivist outlook involving loyalty to one's mates, a willingness to share activities and reciprocate favors, and conformity to group norms within the outwardly masculine culture. Mateship is usually described in relation to male, working-class relationships and it involves a complex mixture of collectivist and equalitarian values, realized at the individual level in companionship, joint activities, sharing, and loyalty to one's mates, supporting them in an emergency (Feather, 1986).

It has been widely reported that Australia is an individualist nation while Malaysia is reported to be a collectivist country (see Hofstede, 1980, 1984; Schwartz, 1994; Triandis, 1995). The data from the present study suggest that collectivism in Malaysia has shifted slightly. Malaysians are still basically collectivists in terms of their social relations, self-sacrifice and family integrity but, at the same time, they have inculcated the elements of competition, an individualism factor, at least in their working life. This change can be explained from the rapid economic development that has taken place in Malaysia since Hofstede's studies on individualism-collectivism published in 1980 and 1984.

The Malaysian economy has gone through rapid structural changes since Independence in 1957. At the time of independence, there was a pervasive popular belief that Malaysia, with its perceived limitless resources, would 'take off'. Only 37 years ago, almost 40% of Malaysians lived in absolute poverty.

Less than 5% did so in 1996 and even lesser today. As a multiracial society, it has been necessary to ensure economic growth with social stability. Consequently, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1970, followed by the privatization concepts, "Malaysia Incorporate" and "Look East" in the 1980s. One of the main goals of the NEP was the creation of a Malay business class. In 1970, Malay businesses were 14.2% of all businesses, by 1980 it had climbed to 24%, and by 1985 was 30.5%. This rate of growth was nearly twice the rate of non-Malay business expansion (Jesudason, 1989). These changes marked the emergence of a Malay bourgeoisie. The development of a middle class presupposes social mobility and social mobility in turn leads to individualism. Individualism is born when rapid social change, including much social strife, results in the destruction of existing groups, making it necessary for individuals to act alone. Similarly, when there is high social mobility, individuals do not conform to groups. Thus, social change and social mobility lead to individualism.

Implications and future research

The present research may provide guidance to organizations that wish to develop and maintain human resources management procedures on the basis of empirical data. As global competition increases in the private sector, and organizations hire a more ethnically and culturally diverse workforce, there seems to be a greater need for human resources management systems that are adaptable, comprehensive, and easy to operate.

In this context, the findings of this study also have several implications for international human resources management. One of the central functions of management is anticipating future actions of employees, colleagues, and competitors. Often, difficulty in predicting the behavior of Malaysian employees is attributed to language issues or behavioral idiosyncrasies. More likely, these predictive problems arise from a lack of appreciation of the thought processes experienced by Asians in Western managerial environment. Australian managers may fail to understand how Malaysian employees are modelling their surroundings and what kinds of causal dimensions they use to see the world (Adler, 1986). By understanding the types of culture (horizontal and vertical dimension of individualism and collectivism) that Malaysian employees covet, Australian managers can tailor and adjust their organizational value type espoused by the organization to more effectively manage the employees and more effectively communicate work assignments, requirements and priorities. This awareness also demonstrates that managers are sensitive to the needs and concerns of their Malaysian superiors, colleagues, and subordinates.

In addition, a manager who understands these facets of Malaysian culture can more effectively grasp how Malaysian employees see the organizational environment, and is better able to create a workplace that avoids intra-organizational culturally-based conflict. By comprehending how this segment of the corporate workforce thinks, a manager is better able to motivate, assign jobs and control interactions. Further, by knowing the Malaysian affinity for competition, social relationships, family integrity, and self-sacrifice, a manager can access a larger perspective from which to identify and analyze problems and develop and implement solutions.

The differences documented here hold considerable value for Australian managers working in Malaysia, or overseeing largely Asian employees in Australia. Managers who have been trained and have operated in the Australian environment will have developed management styles that are well suited to an Australian workforce. However, a reality of global business is that these managers will be called on to manage, supervise and negotiate with Asian employees. Hence, knowledge of the nature of Asian culture will be better enable managers to effectively and efficiently orchestrated organizational objectives.

In recent studies on the failure of expatriate managers in foreign postings, those organizations with ethnocentric managerial attitudes were those found to have the highest number of failures (Tung, 1987; Whitney and Yaprak, 1991). The failures were closely linked to the managers' belief that their own cultural values, that of parent organization's home-base country, were superior to those of the host countries. To reduce, if not eliminate, similar problem(s) in the future, it is suggested that the parent organization to willingly acknowledge cultural differences and at the same time take steps to make them discussable and therefore usable. There has to be a genuine understanding by all parties involved that more creative and effective ways of managing people can be developed as a result of cross-cultural learning. Effective training programs on managing multicultural workforce could generate positive responses from managers to challenging situations. These programs should help managers to recognize preferential values and practices and the resulting strengths and weaknesses of their actions. At the same time, increasing their sensitivity to the differences in values and practices of their counterparts should help them to anticipate actions of employees, colleagues, as well as overseas business associates. Training could identify the link between managers preferential values and practices and potential con-

flicts. This would enable managers to develop ways to avoid potential conflicts if differences exist.

The findings of this study seem to suggest that the individualism-collectivism constructs are complex and not simple either/or constructs. Collectivism does not seem to mean low self-reliance and low competition, nor does it seem to imply a certain subordination of the interests of the individual to that of the collective. Respect and concern for family and a willingness to feel responsible for and serve in groups seem to be evident in the Malaysian sample, but this does not need to be in conflict with an individual striving for his/her own goals because, ultimately, they can benefit the family or community as a whole. There certainly seems to be scope for individualist attitudes within a broad framework of collectivist loyalties. Here, unlike "Western" countries such as Australia, individual striving is paramount in securing a share of scarce resources (Niles, 1998). What benefits the individual will benefit the collective too. Therefore, there need not be any contradiction in being self-reliant in a collectivist society. Triandis et al. (1993) suggest that the meaning of the construct self-reliance could be different in collectivist cultures, and perhaps they are indeed saying that they do not want to be a burden to their family or community. They even may be saying that, by their own efforts, they can improve the lot of their collective. In individualist cultures, self-reliance may be linked to competition and self-actualization goals, whereas in collectivist cultures it may be a means of survival, which could benefit not just the individual but also the family (and others in the in-groups). Therefore, there need not be real contradiction between fulfilling one's family obligations and realizing one's desire for material prosperity and success through individual effort and self-reliance. This needs to be explored in future research. And more refinement is needed, especially with researchers from the collectivist cultures playing a significant role.

It should be noted that values are but one of the elements of cultural syndrome, and that there is an unknown amount of errors in any measurement (Triandis, 1995). Triandis notes that the use of attitude items works moderately well in grouping the participant's proclivity towards individualism-collectivism. The problem is that participants sometimes like to appear to outsiders as more "modern" than they really are, so that this method seems to underestimate the extent of collectivism in collectivist cultures. An alternative method which seems to be less vulnerable to social desirability pressures is the use of scenarios. Therefore, it is suggested that future research should use the scenario method or multiple methods.

Subsequent investigations could also focus on variables that have been reported to influence the level of individualism and collectivism in a particular country such as affluence, social and political changes, and identification of subcultures. Triandis (1995) argues that affluence leads to individualism. Affluence means more choices that the individual rather than the group makes, hence more individualism. Reykowski (1994) found that social and political changes experienced in Polish society in recent years have led, to some extent, to an increase in acceptance of individualism. Investigating subcultures within national boundaries helps researchers to see the significant differences in the culture as a whole, particularly if the people within a country are highly heterogeneous. For example, Huo and Randall (1991) report that there are differences in loafing behavior resulting from sub-cultural heterogeneity on the dimension of collectivism among Chinese managers in different regions of China. Therefore, there is a need for future research to carefully consider and investigate the possible effects of affluence, social and political changes and identification of sub-cultures of the countries or cultures under investigation on individualism and collectivism. Consequently, researchers can then investigate the impact of these influences on motivation, organizational commitment, career commitment, job satisfaction and other work-related behaviors.

Cross-cultural research examining patterns of employees' tendencies to individualism-collectivism and their potential ramifications is lacking. Further research examining potential similarities and differences in this regard would be quite fruitful. The significant amount of empirical research evidence and data on such studies in various countries could warrant suitable systematic (meta-analytic) comparisons. If performed, these comparisons would provide valuable grounds for assessing similarities and differences in aspects of work attitudes in different institutional and economic sectors across different nations. These comparisons would also help in highlighting some methodological issues surrounding the multidimensional character of employee work behaviors in different contexts.

Finally, the findings of this study have also given rise to the same important question that was raised by Wink (1997): Are values changing? If so, which ones and in which direction? In the present study, these questions appear to be applicable to both Malaysia and Australia. The changes may not necessarily be moving these values toward some universally common point. Therefore, future research should seek answer to questions such as: (1) Are particular values or value dimensions becoming more similar,

becoming less similar, or staying the same? (2) Which values are converging, which are diverging, and which are following other patterns? A better understanding of horizontal and vertical dimensions of individualism and collectivism, and values in general should contribute to understanding of simi- larities and differences of the Eastern and Western cultures (Bond, 1991). Awareness of similarities and differences should help managers better understand and appreciate their international counterparts and, ideally, should lead to improved cross-national working relationships.

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