THE INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL CULTURE ON COMMUNICATION PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY ON MALAYSIAN ORGANISATION

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Abstract

National culture is deeply rooted in values, which are learned and acquired when we are young (2007, p. 6), and 'embedded deeply in everyday life' (Newman & Nollen, 1996, p. 754). Values have helped to shape us into who we are today. In other words, as we grow older, the cultural values we have learned and adapted to will mould our daily practices. This is reflected in our actions, behaviours, and the ways in which we communicate. Based on the previous assertion, it can be suggested that national culture may also influence organisational culture, as our ‘behaviour at work is a continuation of behaviour learned earlier’ (Hofstede, 1991, p. 4).

Cultural influence in an organisation could be evidenced by looking at communication practices: how employees interact with one another as they communicate in their daily practices. Earlier studies in organisational communication see communication as the heart of an organisation in which it serves, and as ‘the essence of organised activity and the basic process out of which all other functions derive’ (Bavelas and Barret, cited in Redding, 1985, p. 7). Hence, understanding how culture influences communication will help with understanding organisational behaviour.

This study was conducted to look at how culture values, which are referred to as culture dimensions in this thesis, influenced communication practices in an organisation that was going through a change process. A single case study was held in a Malaysian organisation, to investigate how Malaysian culture dimensions of respect, collectivism, and harmony were evidenced in the communication practices. Data was collected from twelve semi-structured interviews and five observation sessions. Guided by six attributes identified in the literature, (1) acknowledging seniority, knowledge and experience, 2) saving face, 3) showing loyalty to organisation and leaders, 4) demonstrating cohesiveness among members, 5) prioritising group interests over personal interests, and 6) avoiding confrontations of Malaysian culture dimensions,
This study found eighteen communication practices performed by employees of the organisation.

This research contributes to the previous cultural work, especially in the Malaysian context, in which evidence of Malaysian culture dimensions of respect, collectivism, and harmony were displayed in communication practices: 1) acknowledging the status quo, 2) obeying orders and directions, 3) name dropping, 4) keeping silent, 5) avoiding questioning, 6) having separate conversations, 7) adding, not criticising, 8) sugar coating, 9) instilling a sense of belonging, 10) taking sides, 11) cooperating, 12) sacrificing personal interest, 13) protecting identity, 14) negotiating, 15) saying ‘yes’ instead of ‘no’, 16) giving politically correct answers, 17) apologising, and 18) tolerating errors. Insights from this finding will help us to understand the organisational challenges that rely on communication, such as during organisational change. Therefore, data findings will be relevant to practitioners to understand the impact of culture on communication practices across countries.
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List of Abbreviations

1. CEO: Chief Executive Officer
2. HSP: Head of Special Project
3. CSB: A name given to the organisation selected as a case study
4. CCT: CSB’s Change Team
5. GLC: Government Link Company
6. E&P: Exploration and Production
Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: __________________________

Date: __________________________
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Sabrina Amir ©
This piece of work is dedicated to

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

With Malaysia's economy growing into one of the world's top investment destinations for offshore manufacturing operations (Malaysian Industrial Development Authority, 2009), understanding how Malaysians communicate in organisations will be helpful for more than 5,000 foreign companies from over 40 countries currently operating in Malaysia (Malaysian Industrial Development Authority, 2009), as well as for future investors. It will also provide understanding of certain behaviours in the organisations. Since culture can be manifested through practices, such behaviours are observable, for example, through communication practices when employees interact with one another in an organisation.

In explaining the manifestation of culture, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) describe cultural values as having the fundamental role in the formation and maintenance of a particular culture. The cultural values are manifested as practices, which can be observed as the members of a particular group interact with one another. This also suggests that organisational practices are shaped to a certain extent by the national culture of a country in which the organisation operates. For instance, a particular national culture may influence how employees in an organisation communicate, as culture shapes the practices accepted by its members. However, there is little empirical research considering the effects of national culture on the way that organisational communication practices take place, especially in Eastern countries.

Culture can be conceptualised at several levels; meta culture (for instance global culture), national culture, and micro culture (for instance organisation
culture) (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Hofstede (2007) emphasises that national culture is deeply rooted in values, which are acquired when we are young. Thus, with the values that we learned, we become who we are today as national culture is ‘embedded deeply in everyday life and is relatively impervious to change’ (Newman & Nollen, 1996, p. 754). This suggests that as we grow older, the cultural values we have learned and adapted to will somehow mould our daily practices, which can be seen through our actions, behaviours, and how we communicate. Considering also our ‘behaviour at work is a continuation of behaviour learned earlier’ (Hofstede, 1991, p. 4), it can be suggested that national culture may also influence organisational culture. This can be observed through the organisational practices employed by members of the organisation. An example of organisational practices is how people in the organisation interact with one another through communication practices.

Earlier studies in organisational communication see communication as the heart of an organisation in which it serves as ‘the essence of organised activity and is the basic process out of which all other functions derive’ (Bavelas and Barret, cited in Redding, 1985, p. 7). In other words, communication is essential in an organisation, for it serves as a medium that connects the members. One area in which organisational communication practices need to be considered is during organisational change. In their research on educating participants of the need for change, Kotter and Schlesinger (1979) state that most organisations create moderate to major changes at least every four to five years.

Previous research on change discovered that communication during change involves the processes of exchanging and transmitting information in order to materialise the desired change (Eisenberg, Andrews, Murphy, & Laine-Timmerman, 1999; Lewis, 1999), as issues pertaining to the ‘why’ and ‘how’ need to be clearly addressed to the entire organisation (Armenakis & Harris, 2002). This suggests that to ensure organisational survival in the current competitive world, change has become a constant phenomenon that needs to be attended to and managed appropriately. In doing so, communication
has been identified as crucial, because change is created, sustained, and managed in and by communication (Ford & Ford, 1995).

Considering that culture is manifested in practices (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), culture might influence how organisational members communicate as they facilitate change in the organisation. Thus, as culture itself is a set of shared behaviours accepted and practiced by a particular group of people, it implies that communication practices among members of organisations might be different across the world. For example, management in the Western world cannot necessarily be applied in the Eastern world (Hofstede, 1984, 1991, 2007). As such, this suggests that the communication practices employed in organisations such as in the United States might not be practiced in organisations in other regions such as Japan or Malaysia.

Hofstede (1980) identifies Malaysia as one of the countries with the highest level of power distance. In other words, inequality in power is generally accepted by the Malaysian society. Those in power, in terms of their positions or ranking in a family or organisation, as well as seniority in terms of age, are highly respected by subordinates, followers, or their juniors (Abdullah, 1996). So much respect is given to leaders who take the lead and make decisions, and questioning or challenging leaders is considered rude as they are seen as the wise elders (Abdullah, 1996). These cultural values serve as the basis for Malaysians placing a high importance on values such as respect for authority and hierarchical differences; the emphasis on collective well-being and displaying a strong humane orientation within society; the practice of face saving as an important element in daily life, and inhibiting assertive and confrontational behaviours by prioritising the maintenance of harmony (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Abdullah, 1992; Lim, 2001; Kennedy, 2002). The influence of these values, which are identified as cultural dimensions of respect, collectivism, and harmony in this thesis, justifies Hofstede’s manifestation of culture, as he explains values as the most central feature of a national culture, which relates to all aspects of attitudes and behaviours.
Given the fact that communication is an essential element in situations like organisational change, and little attention has been given to the relationship between national culture and communication practices, this study will address this research gap. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to seek a deeper understanding of cultural influences on organisational communication practices. This will be done by analysing the culture dimensions in a Malaysian organisation and observing the evidence of respect, collectivism, and harmony displayed in communication practices. Insights from these findings will help us to understand the organisational challenges that rely on communication, such as during organisational change.

1.2 DEFINITIONS

As mentioned earlier, this research is centred on the concepts of culture and communication during change, and its two key constructs are culture and organisational communication practices. The following definitions will be used within the content of this thesis.

1.2.1 Culture

Hofstede’s (1980) and Hofstede and Hofstede’s (2005) frequently cited phrase, the ‘shared collective programming of the mind’, sees culture defined as the norms, values, and beliefs of a particular group or community in a particular area or geographic location, and shared by its members. Thus, culture is studied in nations and organisations, and can be conceptualised at several levels including national and organisational culture. Thus, national culture is therefore seen as the beliefs, practices, norms, and values shared by the majority in a given nation (Hofstede, 1980).

Schein (1992, p. 12) defines organisational culture as ‘a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problem of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be
considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems’. Even though Hofstede (1980) says there is no standard definition of organisational culture, he mentions that organisational culture is holistic, historically determined, related to what anthropologists are studying, socially constructed, soft, and difficult to change. In other words, based on the definitions by Hofstede (1980) and Schein (1992), it can be suggested that organisational culture is a shared knowledge which is accepted and practiced by all members of an organisation in their daily working environment.

In this study, culture is defined as the shared knowledge of beliefs, practices, norms, and values accepted and practiced by members of a particular nation, and translated through communication practices in an organisation. On the other hand, culture dimensions refer to the values of respect, collectivism, and harmony.

1.2.2 Organisational Communication Practices

Communication, a process of interaction, can be seen as the heart of an organisation, as it serves as an important medium which connects organisation members (Myers & Myers, 1982). Hence, organisational communication plays an important role in shaping the organisation, as it is also seen as a process through which organisations create and share events (Shockley-Zalabak, 2002). In the event of organisational change, communication becomes vital as information pertaining to ‘why and ‘how’ change is implemented needs to be communicated. Thus, change communication refers to organisational communication specific to change efforts (Zorn, Page, & Cheney, 2000).

Practice is defined by Dictionary.com (practice, nd) as habitual or customary performance. Communication practices can therefore be seen as an act of interaction performed habitually. Thus, it is suggested that in the organisational communication context discussed in this thesis, communication practice is
any particular communication action or behaviour performed guided by thoughts and feelings, which is moulded by the culture a person lives in.

1.3 RESEARCH SETTING AND QUESTIONS

In order to be able to explore how Malaysian culture dimensions are displayed in communication practices, this research is conducted in a Malaysian organisation currently undergoing change. The organisation identified for this research is CSB¹, one of the subsidiaries of a large Malaysian Oil and Gas Corporation, which is undergoing an organisational change process in its effort to position itself to contribute to the Group's Corporate Agenda aspiration of becoming the Global Champion. In order to accommodate this, a change team was set up and expected to work with many stakeholders within CSB, across the hierarchy and geographies in engaging the organisation towards the goal of change. A two-pronged approach is introduced in reaching the goals; Shaping to Play and Shaping to Win. In order to win in the competitive market place, the organisation needs to first ensure that its members are ready to play. This is done through the aim of building internal integration among employees, which leads to their commitment to helping the organisation compete in the market. Such an organisational situation provides an opportunity to investigate how Malaysian cultural dimensions are displayed in communication practices.

By exploring and understanding three Malaysian culture dimensions developed from the literature reviewed in this study (respect, collectivism, and harmony), this research aimed to answer the following research questions:

¹ CSB: For confidentiality purposes, this is not the real name of the organisation.
Central Research Question:

How are Malaysian culture dimensions evidenced in communication practices?

Supporting RQs:

1. How is the Malaysian culture dimension of Respect evidenced in communication practices?
2. How is the Malaysian culture dimension of Collectivism evidenced in communication practices?
3. How is the Malaysian culture dimension of Harmony evidenced in communication practices?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Previous studies show that most work on managerial values has focused on Western countries (Westwood & Everett, 1995), leaving opportunity for studies to be conducted in other parts of the world, such as Eastern countries like Malaysia. Because communication is an essential element of an organisation and is crucial for overcoming challenges such as organisational change, and little attention has been given to the relationship between culture and communication, especially from an Eastern cultural perspective, this study will address this research gap by looking at the influence of culture on communication practices in a Malaysian setting. Thus, CSB was selected as it is part of a large growing multinational corporation based in Malaysia, and it is working towards meeting the multinational standards on its quest of becoming the Global Champion. Also, 95% of its employees are Malaysians.

The purpose of this research is to identify how Malaysian culture dimensions are displayed in communication practices in a Malaysian organisation. The findings will be highly relevant for academics and practitioners in understanding how culture can influence how people communicate in
organisations, for example, during change. This will be useful for preparing action plans, considering the impact of such communication practices on the change itself. Thus, it will give a better overview on the effective ways change can and should be communicated in an organisation of such a culture.

1.5 OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGY

This is an interpretivist research, based on the fact that the investigation needs to analyse, interpret, and evaluate participants’ views of the situation being studied (communication practices) and factors influencing such behaviours (Malaysian culture) (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001; Travers, 2001; Creswell, 2003).

According to Creswell (2003), there are several lists of the characteristics of qualitative research. One requires the researcher to go to the site where the participant is (e.g. home or office) to conduct the research (see also Cavana et al., 2001). This suggests that by being on the grounds, the researcher will have the opportunity to obtain first hand information through the observations and identifications of details that are related to the research, as well as being highly involved in the actual experiences of the participants.

In this research, a case study was conducted to investigate how culture influences how people communicate in an organisation. This approach is also supported by Zikmund’s (1991) statement that a case study is a technique used to investigate a problem intensively. The entire organisation can be investigated in depth to identify the relationships between functions, individuals, or entities. Thus, a case study searches for answers (the ‘why’ or ‘how’) from the ‘participant’s point of view, and that is the crux of the research (Yin, 2003; Stark & Torrance, 2005).

For this research, data was sourced from twelve semi-structured interviews as well as observations in one departmental meeting, three unit meetings,
and one workshop. The samples for both observations and interviews were selected using purposive and snowball sampling strategies, as targeted samples were needed for this research. Interviews and observations were conducted involving the management and employees of a change team responsible for planning and communicating the change initiatives in CSB. Besides being Malaysians, they were chosen as they were aware of the need for effective communication during change, yet at the same time provided an opportunity to gain insights into their organisational communication practices that were influenced by national culture of Malaysia.

1.6 THESIS OUTLINE

Chapter 2 provides reviews of the related literature on communication during organisational change and culture. The discussions will present what past research has argued regarding how (national) culture influences how people communicate, and communication in an organisational change context. Upon studying the literature, the gap leading to the development of research questions will be identified.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology used by this research, including discussions on the rationale for the qualitative research approach selected, data collection, data sampling, and the methods used to analyse the data collected from interviews and observations.

Chapter 4 outlines the findings based on data collected, by discussing how three values of Malaysian culture dimensions; Respect, Collectivism, and Harmony are evidenced in communication practices.

Chapter 5 concludes this research by discussing the data presented in Chapter 4 in relation to the research questions stated in Chapter 2. Besides outlining the theoretical and practical implications of this research, this chapter also discusses the research limitations and concludes the thesis with suggestions for future research.
1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As this is a single organisation case study research, replications of results across other organisations or industries are limited. As such, the replication of the results across organisations outside Malaysia will be the main limitation of this research. Nevertheless, the use of a single case in this research context allows the findings to be used by Malaysian organisations or organisations that are operating in Malaysia.

Given the fact that this is a qualitative research, researcher’s bias is another potential research limitation, as this method presents the opportunity for researchers to be biased in their data interpretations. Besides the fact that the researcher herself is a Malaysian, bias is also a limitation in this research due to the prior working experience the researcher had with the studied organisation. Nonetheless, the use of interviews and observations, as well as supporting the findings with the literature helped to minimise potential bias. Thus, the data analysis was also reviewed by independent judges in ensuring that it was not the researcher’s own opinion.

1.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter has given an overview of the research conducted, by addressing the purpose and significance of this research. Research questions were introduced and a brief overview of the research methodology in answering the questions was also presented. The brief thesis outlined is provided as an overview of the followings chapters.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses the related literature on culture and communication in developing the research question this study seeks to explore. Section 2.1 will discuss the existing literature on culture. Reviews on previous literature related to organisational communication will then be laid out in Section 2.2. Section 2.3 will further discuss the link between culture and organisational communication. Finally, in Section 2.4, there will be a summary of the literature reviewed where the gap is identified, leading to the building of research questions this study aims to answer. The chapter concludes with a short summary of the chapter in Section 2.5.

2.1 CULTURE

The concept of culture derives from the field of anthropology, in which studies were conducted in understanding ‘how’ and ‘why’ a group of people behave the way they do (Schein, 1992; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). To answer these questions, an in-depth investigation was conducted by joining the group in their daily activities, analysing all possible aspects of their behaviours including their rituals, beliefs, values, attitudes, language, and norms. In other words, by investigating and analysing how members of a particular group interact and make sense of the reality in their daily practices (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), explanation and clearer reasons for a particular action performed by members of a particular group can be understood.

There have been various definitions explaining what culture is, from various perspectives including the field of psychology, sociology, and anthropology. One of the views on culture sees it as ‘shared attitudes, values, beliefs, categorizations, expectations, norms, roles, self-definitions, and other
elements of subjective culture found among individuals whose interactions were facilitated by shared languages, historical period and geographical regions’ (Triandis, 1993, p. 3). Similarly, Schwartz (2003, p. 2) defines culture as ‘the rich complex meanings, beliefs, practices, symbols, norms and values prevalent among people in a society’.

Thus, culture can be described as a particular way of life among people or a community (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006), and the manner in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), Schwartz (2003), and Schein (1992) point out that culture manifests itself in both invisible elements and visible components. The invisible elements include elements such as beliefs, values, and attitudes, while the visible components include rituals, symbols, and heroes. Although there have been many views given on the concept of culture, Hofstede and Hofstede’ (2005) and Hofstede’s (1980) work on culture has been among the most referred to by scholars. The much cited phrase, ‘shared collective programming of the mind’ (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 282), represents the essence of culture. Nonetheless, these various definitions of culture show consensus that culture is a patterned way of thinking, feeling, and acting, in which it is shared and unconsciously communicated by the majority in a particular group.

Though there are numerous studies related to culture, this research will drawn upon the concept of culture introduced by Hofstede (1980) and Hofstede and Hofstede (2005). Besides the relevance of Hofstede’s studies to this research, Hofstede’s findings are highly credible and are widely used and acknowledged by other scholars. Chandy and Williams (1994) used citational data over the 10-year period (1984-1993) from every issue of the Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS) in examining the influence of individuals and disciplines on international business research. The results show that besides having made one of the most significant contributions to international business research, Hofstede is also one of the most cited authors. Another citation study, conducted by Søndergaard (1994), concluded that Hofstede’s work has been applied by researchers extensively.
Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) use the image of an onion as a metaphor to further explain the manifestations of culture. Figure 2.1 below illustrates the concept of culture – values, rituals, heroes, and symbols. Hofstede ranks this concept with symbols as the most superficial and values as the deepest manifestation of culture. In between these two are heroes and rituals. A summary of these 'layers' of culture is given in Table 2.1.

**Figure 2.1:** The ‘Onion’: Manifestation of Culture at Different Levels of Depth

![Onion diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

(Source: Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 7)

**Table 2.1:** Hofstede’s Manifestation of Culture at Different Levels of Depth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbols</th>
<th>Includes words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning recognised as such by members of that culture.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heroes</td>
<td>Any particular person or character who possesses characteristics that are highly recognised in a culture and seen as a role model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritual</td>
<td>Collective activities, technically unessential in reaching the desired ends, but considered socially essential by a particular group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Broad preferences for a certain state of affairs over others, which direct our feelings, perceptions, and behaviours of good and evil, and on how things are and should be.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Adapted from Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005)

Figure 2.1 suggests that culture can be manifested in practices, which can be observed. If religions were used as an example to explain Hofstede’s
manifestation of culture, symbols are ‘the cross’ to identify Christianity and ‘the crescent and star’ to identify Islam. Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad would represent heroes for the Christians and the Muslims respectively, while attending classes to recite the holy books at either the church or mosque is an example of ritual. Finally, elements of values can be seen in instances that shape our behaviours such as the teaching of respect for older people and telling the truth. Thus, in summarising Hofstede’s manifestation of culture, culture can then be perceived as everything that people in a particular group have (objects or material possessions like clothes), think (ideas, values, and attitudes like respecting elders), and do (behavioural actions like shaking hands when meeting someone or replicating other’s accepted behaviours).

According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), culture can be conceptualised at several levels. These include meta culture (for instance global culture), national culture, and also micro culture (for instance organisation culture). In an interview with Fink (2007) Hofstede explains that national cultures belong to the field of anthropology and are rooted in values. The values are acquired when people are small children, whereby we learn the very basic values. Hofstede further elaborates that this is the time when we are able to ‘acquire an enormous amount of implicit diffuse information, everything we need to function as human beings’ (Hofstede & Fink, 2007, p. 15). In other words, it is with such knowledge of values that we become who we are today as national culture ‘is embedded deeply in everyday life and is relatively impervious to change’ (Newman & Nollen, 1996, p. 754).

Although studies on organisational culture began to receive attention in the early 70s, it was in the 80s that management scholars began to widely adopt the culture concept (Hatch, 1993). While national culture is shared among and unique to members of a particular country, organisational culture on the other hand is ‘a particular way of life in an organisation’ (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006, p. 204), whereby members of the organisation shared the meanings, beliefs, assumptions, understandings, norms, values, and knowledge. The
following Table 2.2 summarises some selected definitions of organisational culture offered by scholars from a variety of fields.

Table 2.2: Selected definitions of Organisational Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author and Year</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pettigrew (1979, p. 574)</td>
<td>A system of publicly and collectively accepted meanings operating for a given group at a given time. This system of terms, form, categories, and images interprets a people’s own situation to themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schwartz &amp; Davis (1981, p. 33)</td>
<td>A pattern of beliefs and expectations shared by the organisation’s members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siehl and Martin (1984, p. 227)</td>
<td>The glue that holds an organisation together through a sharing of patterns of meaning. The culture focuses on the values, beliefs, and expectations that members come to share.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schein (1992, p. 6)</td>
<td>The pattern of basic assumptions that a given a group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to these problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hofstede &amp; Hofstede (2005, pp. 282-283)</td>
<td>The collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one organisation from another. It is maintained not only in the minds of its members but also in the minds of its other “stakeholders”, everybody who interacts with the organisation (such as customers, suppliers, labour organisations, neighbours, authorities, and the press).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite these various definitions given by scholars to describe organisational culture, they share a common understanding in which members of a particular organisation share common ways of understanding and interpreting organisational occurrences, making such occurrences unique to the organisation and accepted as a culture practice. Thus, it serves as guidance for organisational members in performing their organisational roles.

In conclusion, the literature suggests that culture is basically a set of learned characteristics and meanings, which are shared by a particular group of people. Specifically, cultural values have a fundamental role in the formation
and maintenance of a particular culture. Thus, culture influences individual behaviours and can be observed, as it influences how an individual internalises a particular cultural belief. As such, national culture can therefore be viewed as the norms, values, and beliefs that are accepted, shared, and practiced by the majority in a particular country. On the other hand, organisational culture shares the same traits in which it is shared and practiced by members of a particular organisation. Be it national or organisational culture, those particular shared norms, values, and beliefs are translated into their daily practices which can be observed, causing the members to act in ways that they believe are appropriate, but might not be to others.

2.1.1 National Culture Influence on Organisational Culture

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) hypothesise that culture distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another, in a particular area or geographic location. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), the behaviours and actions of members of a particular community can be influenced by the beliefs, norms, and values systems which exist in the community. However, this is true, as long as such behaviours and actions are acceptable by the other members in the same community. Thus, according to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) and Hofstede (1980, 1991), the sources of a person’s mental programmes lie within the social environments in which they grew up and collected their life experiences. It started within the family, neighbourhood, at school, in youth groups, at the work place, and in the living community. In addition, culture is always a collective phenomenon, because it is at least partly shared with people who live or lived within the same environment.

As discussed earlier in Section 2.2, culture is learned and ‘derives from one’s social environment rather than from one’s genes’ (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 4). Values, the most central feature of national culture, are acquired in the early years as we interact with others from our environment. As we
grow up, these acquired values guide and shape our behaviours as we display certain practices when we interact with people in our family, society, or later in the work environment. This learning of values and practices process is explained by Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) as pictured in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: The Learning of Values and Practices

![Figure 2.2](image-url)

(Source: Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p. 9)

Culture is transmitted from one generation to another in many ways (Sun, 2002; Hwa-Froelich & Vigil, 2004), in the process of acquiring the values and displaying the practices. As shown in Figure 2.2, it first starts as we ‘unconsciously absorb necessary information from our environment’ (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 8) in the family compound. The values and accepted behaviour that we observed and learned from our parents and family members will then shape our behaviours as we interact with others. This process gradually changes as we begin to practice those acquired values in our daily lives and apply them in our interactions and socialisation with people around us, as we enter school, university, and the workplace.

Such values are communicated through both verbal and nonverbal means, and shared from one generation to the other ‘through parenting practices that teach social and communicative behaviours’ (Hwa-Froelich & Vigil, 2004). It is through this learning process that we understand how to behave in a given situation, such as how we should communicate with others and which words to use in our conversations. For instance, the value of respect for parents
and teachers that we acquired at home and school leads to our respecting the leaders as we enter the workforce. In other words, the exposure gained through interactions with family members shape our behaviour as we interact with the outsiders we meet in school and at work as we grow up. Thus, it is possible for national culture to influence organisational culture, like the communication practices of an employee in an organisation.

Studies by cross cultural theorists like Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), Schwartz (2003) and Inglehart (1997) have developed national culture frameworks based on core value dimensions that could be generalised across countries. Among all, Hofstede and Hofstede’s (2005) and Hofstede’s (1980) studies on National Culture received the most attention from scholars and have a significant connection with this study, which will be discussed in the following sections. Their findings demonstrate that there are national and regional cultural groupings that affect the behaviour of organisations, and that are very persistent across time. These ideas were first based on a large research project across subsidiaries of a multinational corporation (IBM) in 64 countries, which leads to the development of four dimensions of national culture. Further studies by others have together identified and validated all four dimensions, while Michael Harris Bond introduced the fifth dimension of national culture related to Eastern values. The five dimensions (further details on each of the dimensions are explained below) are; 1) low vs. high power distance, 2) individualism vs. collectivism, 3) masculinity vs. femininity, 4) uncertainty avoidance, and 5) long vs. short term orientation.

1. **Low vs. High Power Distance**

   It is the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. The less powerful accepts power relations that are more autocratic and paternalistic, in which the subordinates acknowledge the power of others simply based on where they are situated in certain formal, hierarchical positions.
2. **Individualism vs. Collectivism**
   It is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. Individualism relates to societies in which the ties between individuals are weak as everyone is expected to look after their own self and immediate family only. In contrast, collectivism relates to societies in which people act predominantly as a member of a group or organisation. Collectivist societies are those who continuously protect their members in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

3. **Masculinity vs. Femininity**
   It refers to the distribution of roles between the genders. Masculine cultures value competitiveness, assertiveness, ambition, and the accumulation of wealth and material possessions, whereas feminine cultures place more value on relationships and quality of life.

4. **Uncertainty Avoidance**
   It is the extent to which people feel threatened by ambiguous circumstances and have created beliefs and institutions to avoid such conditions by minimising uncertainty. Cultures that scored high in uncertainty avoidance prefer rules (e.g. about religion and food) and structured circumstances, and employees tend to remain longer with their present employer. They are also more emotional, and motivated by inner nervous energy. On the other hand, in the uncertainty accepting cultures, people are more tolerant of opinions different from what they are used to and allow many currents to flow side by side.

5. **Long vs. Short Term Orientation**
   Describes the importance attached to the future versus the past and present. In long term oriented societies, thrift and perseverance are valued more; in short term oriented societies, respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations, protecting one’s ‘face’, and reciprocation of gifts and favours are valued more.
Despite critics and reservations from other researchers (Tayeb, 1994), Hofstede’s culture dimensions is considered as ‘the most comprehensive and straightforward means to dimensionalise national culture’ (Smith, cited in Lim, 2001, p. 211), and almost all of those who criticise his findings acknowledge the significance of his work (Westwood & Everett, 1995).

In short, the discussions presented on national culture and organisational cultures in the earlier sections suggest that it is possible for national culture to influence the shaping of how organisational members behave and interact with one another. Thus, the cultural dimensions as presented by Hofstede in his studies can also be observed in an organisation, making such dimensions part of an organisation’s culture, be it consciously or subconsciously practiced and adapted as ‘behaviour at work is a continuation of behaviour learned earlier’ (Hofstede, 1991, p. 4). If a tree is used as an analogy of the links between these two, the roots of a tree can be described as the national culture, while the branches and leaves represents the organisations, which have their own uniqueness and cultures. Nonetheless, the development of the branches and leaves are also a result of the nutrients and minerals transmitted through the roots. In other words, an organisation’s culture is partly a result of a national culture as it contains the main values (culture dimensions) of that particular national culture.

Previous studies show that most work on managerial values has focused on Western countries (Westwood & Everett, 1995), leaving opportunity for studies to be conducted in the other parts of the world, such as an Eastern country like Malaysia. The following section will discuss the Malaysian culture, a national culture of interest in this study.

### 2.1.2 Malaysian Culture

Abdullah and Lim (2001, p. 1) discuss that ‘Malaysia has often been described as a minefield of cultural sensitivities due to its diverse racial and ethnic composition. Yet, Malaysians work in apparent harmony and unity
brought about by a few unifying factors, the most important which are values that have stood the test of time’. From a model of Malaysian culture that was developed, their research found that Malaysians diverge in only one dimension, which is religiosity. A study by Fountain and Richardson (2005) as well as the GLOBE Study (Mansor & Kennedy, 2000) confirmed this finding, when their survey results indicated that the cultural perception towards religion stands out as being the only significant difference between the main ethnic groups. While the Malays alter with their daily behaviours to fit in the Islamic teachings, Chinese people, on the other hand, are seen as ‘manipulating’ their religions to suit their goals (Lim, 2001). However, despite their differences in religious beliefs, similarities can still be seen as all religions practiced by Malaysians emphasis good ethics and values in keeping harmony. Thus, as a multicultural country, there is a strong need to keep Malaysians united despite cultural and religious differences, with a sense of common and shared destiny (Mohamad, 1991), which will naturally leads to shared values (Fontaine & Richardson, 2005).

With Malaysia’s economy growing into one of the world’s top investment destinations for offshore manufacturing operations (Malaysian Industrial Development Authority, 2009), understanding how Malaysians work in organisations will be helpful for more than 5,000 foreign companies from more than 40 countries that are currently operating in the country (Malaysian Industrial Development Authority, 2009), as well as for future investors. Nonetheless, unlike the Chinese culture (for instance the concept of guang-xi) which has been receiving much attention from researchers, Malaysian culture is yet to be discussed by cultural theorists. Even though research interests in the area of ASIAN culture are growing, especially in the cross cultural research studies, there are limited studies focusing on Malaysian culture per se. Hofstede’s study on IBM and the GLOBE project, which both

[2] GLOBE: Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness Research Programme set up in the early 1990s to investigate leadership behaviours in over 60
look at leadership and management across cultures, are the two examples of cultural studies that include Malaysia as part of their research. Nonetheless, they do not focus on a specific interest in Malaysia; it is only one of the Asian countries that participated in the study. Thus, in the management literature, most work on managerial values has been done in the Western countries, especially the United States (Westwood & Everett, 1995).

In his views on management in multicultural societies, Hofstede (1991) has briefly discussed Malaysian culture, based on the results from his previous studies on the IBM. The findings on the first four dimensions in Figure 2.3 below are based on data collected from Hofstede’s renowned IBM study. The Long Term orientation on the other hand is based on a separate study conducted by Bond (Hofstede, 1991) and did not include Malaysia.

**Figure 2.3: Malaysian scores on Hofstede’s five cultural dimensions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Dimension</th>
<th>Score (Range)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low vs. High Power Distance</td>
<td>104 (6/6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism vs. collectivism</td>
<td>26 (2/6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance</td>
<td>36 (2/6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity vs. femininity</td>
<td>50 (3/6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long vs. short term orientation</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Power Distance Index 1 = 1-20, 2 = 21-40, 3 = 41-60, 4 = 61-80, 5 = 81-100, 6 = 101-120*

(Source: Adapted from Hofstede, 1991)

With the scale 1-20 to describe the lowest and 101-120 as the highest, Figure 2.3 shows that Malaysia is a country that practices high power distance in which power is distributed unequally. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, p. 55), in an organisation where power is unequally distributed, ‘subordinates expect to be told what to do’. Thus, they further

countries around the world, including Malaysia, since existing research at that time was based on research carried out in Western countries.
explained that ‘there is a lot of supervisory personnel, structured into tall hierarchies of people reporting to each other’ (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 55). This suggests that communication in a Malaysian setting normally follows the ‘proper route’ in order to get the message successfully delivered and job done.

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) also highlight that countries with high power distance tend to be more collectivist than those of low power distance. The result shows that Malaysia scored low in the individualism index, implying that it is a collectivist country that people are concerned about the reputation of the family at large, as they have been integrated into a strong and cohesive in-groups spirit since they were born (Hofstede, 1991). They further argue that in a collectivist organisation, relationship between superiors and subordinates ‘resembles a family relationship with mutual obligations of protection in exchange for loyalty’ (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 100). In other words, this implies that in Malaysian society, people place an emphasis on family or group interests more than personal interests. Thus, in the spirit of collectivism, leaders are to protect their ‘family members’ in which loyalty will be given in return.

Results also showed that Malaysia is low in uncertainty avoidance implying that people are not risk averse and are more tolerant to mistakes, ambiguity, and chaos (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Perhaps this is in relation to Malaysia being a collectivist society, whereby people tolerate mistakes, for example, to keep the family intact.

In their discussion on feminine and masculine cultures, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) point out that organisations in a masculine society are results oriented and rewards are given based on equity, where everyone is awarded based on their performance. On the other hand, organisations in a feminine society give rewards on the basis of equality, where everyone has the opportunity to be rewarded according to need. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) and Hofstede (1991) also describe a masculine country as tough, in which people are very assertive and competitive, while people in feminine
countries are relatively tender, in which they are modest and caring. Nonetheless, Malaysia’s result implies that it is neither very tough, nor very tender (Hofstede, 1991).

2.1.2.1 Research on Malaysian Culture Dimensions

As briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, this thesis looks at culture from the perspective given by the renowned ‘giant’ in cultural studies, Geert Hofstede. Hofstede’s framework is selected for several reasons: the first is that abundant literature has been developed around his framework, which this research can utilise. Secondly, the centre of this thesis is developed according to the national culture concept developed by Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) and Hofstede (1980), which is well acknowledged and cited by others scholars. Finally, as highlighted by Lim (2001), there is a lack of satisfactory follow-up research specifically on Hofstede’s work on Malaysian cultural values as this particular research aimed to look at.

Even though focus on Malaysian culture in the research world is not as much as research on other cultures, the work done by Hofstede has been used extensively by Malaysian scholars (Abdullah, 1992, 1996; Lim, 1998; Mansor & Kennedy, 2000; Abdullah & Lim, 2001; Lim, 2001; Manshor, Fontaine, & Chong, 2003; Rashid & Ho, 2003) and foreign researchers studying Malaysia (Kennedy, 2002; Fontaine & Richardson, 2003, 2005). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, culture is manifested in practices such as during communication between individuals. This section will highlight studies conducted on Malaysian culture, guided by the National Culture Dimensions developed by Hofstede. Focus will be given to the three dimensions that showed some distinct characteristics describing Malaysian culture, as per Hofstede’s study listed in Figure 2.1:

1. Low vs. High Power Distance
2. Individualism vs. Collectivism
3. Uncertainty Avoidance
Since there is no result recorded for long vs short term orientation and the result for masculinity vs femininity was recorded as neutral for Malaysia, this study will exclude these two dimensions.

Hofstede’s result suggested that Malaysia is a high power distance country, which implies that power is unequally distributed and members of the society acknowledged the autocratic, hierarchical, and paternalistic system. Studies by Abdullah (1992) and Lim (2001) also concluded that Malaysians are known to place high importance on respect for authority and hierarchical differences. Authority comes with a position that a person has, be it in the family or an organisation. Traditionally, Malaysians are very loyal to their leaders, be it a leader in the family or an organisation. Lim’s (1998) research on the cultural attributes of the Malay and Chinese people in Malaysia highlights that the Malays are slightly more hierarchical and oriented towards relationship building, while the Chinese are more hierarchical regarding business dealings.

High emphasis on the hierarchy leads to a strong authoritative leadership (Ramasamy, Ling, & Ting, 2007). As a result, decision making tends to be centralised on those in power, as they see it as their responsibility to make the final say, and as a result, subordinates continue to accept centralised power and depend on superiors for directions (Lim, 2001). Thus, it is considered rude to display assertive behaviour, give negative feedback, or challenge elders openly (Abdullah, 1996; Lim, 2001), especially in the public. While Americans, for an example, opt for the ability to openly express individual views and opinions, Malaysians on the other hand tend to be reserved as ‘outspokenness and expression’ (Schermernhor, 1994, p. 49) are not emphasised in the culture. Consequently, Malaysians often display what is seen as passive obedience to their superiors and decision-making appears involve the top-down approach (Schermernhor, 1994; Abdullah, 1996; Lim, 2001). Thus, decisions are often influenced by connections rather than merits, and seniority in employment is given considerable emphasis, at the expense of performance criteria (Kennedy, 2002).
Thus, attention is given to age in determining status and position in the family that some rituals will begin with the eldest child and followed by the rest (Gannon, 2004). There is also a strong need to be aware of one’s locus within the society and to behave according to that locus (Dahlan, 1991). In other words, it is important to have a clear idea of one’s status and to address them correctly. If you are addressing someone who is older than yourself, titles such as Pakcik (Uncle in Malay) or Shu Shu (Uncle in Chinese) or Anne’ (Uncle in Tamil) must be addressed before a name – Pakcik Amir or Shu Shu Lim. Thus, calling someone who is older than you by his or her first name is not accepted and considered rude (Schermerhorn, 1994; Abdullah, 1996). Such an action is also practiced in the correct use of titles, protocol, and ranking structures based on connections with the royalty, religious standing, as well as award. An example is the conferment of the ‘Datuksip’ or ‘Tan Sri’ titles, normally awarded by the Government or the King. Such titles are given to those who have made significant contributions or achievements in certain fields like politics and business. In respect of the title given and as a sign of respect for the title holder, it is therefore necessary to address the title prior to mentioning the first name of that particular person. Thus, it also coincides with the Malaysian’s underlying values of politeness (Abdullah, 1996).

Hofstede’s study also demonstrated that Malaysian scored high in collectivism as compared to individualism, making it a collectivist country. As such, Malaysians are assumed to have a strong spirit of togetherness and continuous protection of each other in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. Research by Ahmad (2001) validates this claim when he shared the importance of family relations, as most Malaysians feel a strong need for group affiliation. Malaysians place particular emphasis on collective well-being and display strong humane orientation within the society, where they place emphasis on loyalty and cohesiveness within family and work units (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Kennedy, 2002). Cooperation is emphasised greatly, especially when it is for the common good. Thus, Malaysians practice shared beliefs in the importance of encouraging practices that reward the collective distribution of resources (Abdullah, 1992). This suggests that
Malaysians tend to prioritise the group’s benefits as compared to individual benefits. Thus, prioritising the group’s need rather than the individual’s is also a sign of loyalty to the group in which an individual belongs.

Nonetheless, Tayeb (1994, p. 438) claims that collectivism in Malaysia ‘has not translated itself well into effective organisational behaviour’. This is evident with the Malays in particular, who are not keen to sacrifice their family or religious obligation for the company (Rashid et al., cited in Lim, 2001). As hypothesised by (Hui, cited in Lim, 2001, p. 12) ‘collectivism’ varies according to targets of interpersonal concern. The highest concern is normally for the most intimate individuals, such as family members. Hence, some organisations are expanding to maximise the numbers of friends and relatives as employees (Rodrigues, 1998). Similarly to the Malays, the Chinese are also strong in their collectivism spirit that associations and guilds linked with the business community are formed among members of the same clan, dialect, or educational group to provide mutual help and security (Lim, 1998).

On the other hand, the collectivism that Malaysians practice does not dictate their decision making style (Lrong Lim, 2001). Despite the fact that collectivism entails a decision made through group discussion in getting consensus, the decision style in Malaysia is usually autocratic, in that the advice and wisdom from leaders can actually over-ride group decisions. Thus, the respect they have for their leaders results in the authority that is not questioned or challenged (Schermherhorn, 1994; Ahmad, 2001). As commented by Abdullah in an interview with Schermherhorn (1994, p. 50), ‘this is because Malaysians have been “programmed” not to fight or question their bosses’.

The results from Hofstede’s study also showed that Malaysia, as an uncertainty avoidance society, has a culture that inhibits assertive and confrontational behaviours, giving priority to maintaining harmony. Leaders (in a family, or in an organisation – company or political party) are expected to show compassion while using more of an autocratic than participative style
The GLOBE Study reveals that Malaysian managers prefer leaders who will coordinate activities in a diplomatic style, avoiding internal disputes and showing consideration for the team members. Moreover, favourite leaders are individuals who use metaphors to refrain from making negative feedback in preserving harmony and maintaining good relationships, as way of saving face (Kennedy, 2002). In an interview with Schermerhorn (1994), Abdullah stated that relationships produce results. This suggests that by avoiding confrontation in maintaining harmony, relationships among individuals or group are preserved. Thus, the positive relationships developed will come in handy in the future.

Nevertheless, disagreement will be relayed through indirect communication, as it is important to preserve face, which will also contribute to maintaining group harmony (Abdullah, 1996; Lim, 2001). Face-saving is regarded as an important element in daily life, especially with superiors or an elder person, in that Malaysians are unwilling to challenge their superiors. Thus, it is rude to display assertive behaviour, give negative feedback or challenging others especially in public, as such action brings embarrassment to that person (Abdullah, 1996; Lim, 2001). Furthermore, the concept of guanxi (relationship building with a network of people) requires people to not to damage another’s self-esteem or face (Lim, 2001). As such, there is a need to maintain dignity by not embarrassing another person, especially in a big crowd (Abdullah, 1996).

Malaysians are also seen as hospitable, peace loving, and charitable, concerned with the effects of their actions on the feelings of others and taking care not to upset others by tolerating errors (Abdullah, 1996). As such, focus is given to what should be said to avoid misunderstanding, rather than simply saying what one really feels. Thus, openness is not favourable in the community as being too direct may be seen as insensitive and rude, hence jeopardising harmony (Abdullah, 1996; Mansor & Kennedy, 2000; Fontaine & Richardson, 2003; Manshor et al., 2003). As a result, Malaysians tend to avoid voicing their opinions, regardless of how correct they are, for fear of being seen as trouble makers and labelled arrogant and self-opinionated.
(Schermerhorn, 1994; Abdullah, 1996). Hence, disagreement is usually relayed through indirect communication (Mansor & Kennedy, 2000; Manshor et al., 2003), in which the hurtful truth will not be revealed. Goddard agrees to this as he stated ‘don’t say it straight, go around’ (cited in Paramasivam, 2007, p. 98). In addition, in the event of trying to save face, Malaysians find it hard to say ‘no’ (Schermerhorn, 1994; Abdullah, 1996), especially to requests or favours asked by leaders. This creates a problem for others when determining whether a ‘yes’ is a yes, and not actually implying a ‘no’.

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) and Hofstede (1980) demonstrate that there are national and regional cultural groupings that affect the behaviour of organisations, and that are persistent across time. As a result of his large research project, which started across subsidiaries of a multinational corporation (IBM) in 64 countries, Hofstede identified five dimensions of national culture:

1) Low vs. high power distance
2) Individualism vs. collectivism
3) Masculinity vs. femininity
4) Uncertainty avoidance
5) Long vs. short term orientation.

Guided by Hofstede’s national culture dimensions, the review on the Malaysian literature as discussed in Chapter 2 has identified Malaysian culture dimensions related to Hofstede’s dimensions of High Power Distance, Individualism vs Collectivism, and Uncertainty Avoidance. The three Malaysian culture dimensions identified are addressed in this thesis as 1) Respect, 2) Collectivism, and 3) Harmony. The following table summarises the attributes of these two dimensions:
Table 2.3: Hofstede’s and Malaysian’s Culture Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture Dimensions</th>
<th>Attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Hofstede’s Low vs. High Power Distance** | 1. The extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.  
2. Subordinates acknowledge the power of others simply based on where they are situated in certain formal, hierarchical positions. |
| **Malaysian’s Respect** | 1. Respect is given to seniors in terms of age and position in the family or organisations, as they are considered the ‘wise one’ due to their experiences in life.  
2. Orders and decisions are seriously obeyed and followed.  
3. Face saving is important, as questioning their capabilities and credibility through either actions or words is considered rude and unacceptable. |
| **Hofstede’s Individualism vs. Collectivism** | 1. Collectivism relates to societies in which people act predominantly as a member of a group or organisation, who continuously protect their members in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. |
| **Malaysian’s Collectivism** | 1. Strong emphasis is placed on loyalty.  
2. Cohesiveness within family and work units.  
3. One’s action is influenced by the impact that such action has on the benefit for the masses, rather than for the individual alone. |
| **Hofstede’s Uncertainty Avoidance** | 1. The extent to which people feel threatened by ambiguous circumstances and created beliefs to avoid such conditions by minimising uncertainty.  
2. Employees in cultures that scored high in uncertainty avoidance tend to remain longer with their present employer. They are also more emotional, and motivated by inner nervous energy. |
| **Malaysian’s Harmony** | 1. Confrontational behaviours are to be avoided at all times as such behaviour can be seen as a threat to a long term relationship.  
2. Sugar coating is widely practiced in order to preserve harmony, where disagreement is indirectly expressed. |

In linking Hofstede’s three cultural dimensions and Malaysian cultural dimensions as summarised in Table 2.3, the results can be interpreted as such: in Malaysia, leaders have virtually ultimate power and authority. The rules, laws, and regulations are developed by those in power and control in order to reduce the amount of uncertainty. Such a situation is more likely to follow a caste system that does not allow significant upward mobility of its
citizens (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), which can also be seen as a sign of Respect towards those in power. The results also indicate that Malaysians are collectivists rather than individualists, which was later acknowledged by Lim (1998, 2001) and Abdullah (1992, 1996). The low scores on uncertainty avoidance can be concluded as a translation of Harmony, the third Malaysian dimension as presented in Table 2.3. In other words, the results show that Malaysians place high importance on maintaining harmony, in which they place more value on relationships through actions such as avoiding confrontation and being more tolerant of opinions that are different to theirs.

Drawing from the literature, it can also be suggested that when a national culture has more rigid rules of social interaction, the organisational culture will therefore display a more rigid relationships between individuals. Thus, there might be significant differences between how communication takes place in organisations in different countries. Nonetheless, studies are yet to analyse how communication is practiced in a context other than the Western world, especially in organisations situated in an Asian country like Malaysia, where power distance is highly recorded (Hofstede, 1991) and the communication approach is more one way and downward due to cultural values (Abdullah, 1996). Therefore, to further understand the influence of a particular national culture on communication practices in an organisational change context, the following section will briefly discuss the communication in an organisation, before looking at how culture and communication are linked during organisational change.

2.2 ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Communication involves interactions between individuals that may occur directly or indirectly, as individuals interact face-to-face or through other means of communication such as technological media, and it may flow ‘from one to one, one to many, or many to many’ (Craig, 1999, p. 143). In the organisation context, communication is essential for it is the fundamental
process which leads to other activities in the organisation (Barvelas and Barrett, cited in Redding, 1985).

The study of organisational communication helps people to understand and appreciate communication as the central process in an organisation. According to Myers and Myers (1982, p. xv), organisational communication is ‘the central binding force that permits coordination among people and thus allows for organised behaviour’. In other words, communication can be seen as the heart of an organisation, as it serves as an important medium that connects organisation members. Hence, organisational communication therefore plays an important role in shaping the organisation. This is consistent with Rogers and Rogers (1976, p. 3), who emphasise that ‘the behaviour of individuals in organisations is best understood from a communication point of view’.

Furthermore, organisational communication is also seen as a process through which organisations create and share events (Shockley-Zalabak, 2002). An instance where organisational communication plays its role is in the event where organisational change is to be implemented. The following section will briefly outline the reasons for organisational change, before discussing the communication practices that take place during organisational change.

2.2.1 Communication during Organisational Change

Organisations are required to change because of the rapid, complex, dynamic, and unpredictable changes in the organisational environment (Zorn et al., 2000; Kitchen & Daly, 2002; Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). This includes phenomena such as market globalisation, increasing competition, customer demands (Zorn et al., 2000), changing labour forces (Allen, Jimmieson, Bordia, & Irmer, 2007), mergers, revolutionary advances in technological developments, and privatisations (Kitchen & Daly, 2002). In other words, such phenomena causes organisations to compete with one another in order
to survive, making frequent change essential regardless of how hard it is to be implemented. Thus, as suggested by Kotter and Schlesinger (1979), most organisations create moderate to major changes at least every four to five years.

Even though the need for change as emphasised by Eisenberg and co-authors (1999, p. 128) ‘has never been greater’, they acknowledged the fact that the process of change is not easy or straightforward. In other words, despite a widely accepted notion that change is essential to survival, change is not easy to be introduced or imposed on, as some people are ‘reluctant to abandon routines for psychological reasons, preferring certain dysfunctionality to an uncertain future’ (Eisenberg et al., 1999, p. 128).

Building on a depiction of continuous change as constant, evolving, and cumulative (Weick & Quinn, 1999), Frahm (2005, p. 2) describes continuously changing organisations as organisations that ‘seek to be more flexible, more innovative and more responsive to the dynamic external environment’. Thus, organisations are involved in continuous change in order to be flexible enough to quickly adapt to environmental changes (Zorn et al., 2000). Even though organisations might have difficulties in being effective and improving their performances if they were to constantly change (Rieley & Clarkson, 2001), it is important for them to be able to undertake continuous change to keep abreast with the current fast-moving environment (Luecke, 2003).

Eisenberg and co-authors (1999) highlight that there is a possibility that people are reluctant to change, especially for uncertain futures. Therefore, change-related information such as what is going to happen and why change is an option (Klein, 1996) needs to be cascaded throughout the organisation. Hence, there is a need for change communication. The instrumental perspective views change communication as an instrument used to effect change (Eisenberg et al., 1999). Drawing from this perspective, Zorn co-authors (2000), refer to change communication as organisational communication that is specific to change efforts. In other words,
communication is seen as a tool to effect organisational change, and change communication can then be described as any form of communication that deals with change-related initiative in an organisation undergoing change.

Employees who are well-informed are more satisfied, involved, and able to contribute more to the success of the organisations (Bertelsen & Nerman, 2001; Barrett, 2002). As Kotter (1995, p. 5) explains, without credible communication, ‘the hearts and minds of the troops are never captured’. This argument is supported by Frahm and Brown (2003) who identify poor communication as one of the causes for problems with managing change in organisations. This complements earlier research by Kotter (1995) who also identifies ‘under communication’ as one of the main reasons why companies do not have successful change programmes. In other words, effective change communication can also assist the positive acceptance of employees regarding organisational change (Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois, & Callan, 2004), as ‘change is created, sustained, and managed in and by communication’ (Ford & Ford, 1995, p. 560).

Several management literatures on planned change have discussed how communication is used as a managerial tool to control and manage change in the organisations (Ford & Ford, 1995; Lewis, 1999; Bourke & Bechervaise, 2002; Lewis, 2007). Through this instrumental communication, conversation is such that any communication about directions on how things should be done will come from the top management cascaded to the entire organisation (Ford & Ford, 1995). Earlier research by Lewis (1999) discovered that the leaders or implementers of change consider communicating the information to employees as far more important than getting feedback on the content or process of the change itself.

Nonetheless, despite the mutual understanding that leaders need to lead the way to change, Eisenberg et al., (1999, p. 137) also state that there has also been a concern over the need for employees’ participation in making the change goal a reality. They further elaborate that ‘tension emerges as leaders seek to drive organisational change, but at the same time require
employee participation and involvement to make it happen’ (Eisenberg et al., 1999, p. 137). In other words, although leaders are the ones responsible for leading the organisational change, they also need to find ways to gain the support and participation of employees’ to ensure the success of the organisational change. However, leaders should also be open to feedback from the employees as interactions between both leaders and employees assist in the ongoing development of the organisational change. However, Eisenberg et al., (1999, p. 141) highlights that ‘those with power can disproportionately shape organisational symbols and meanings’. In other words, despite the fact that both leaders and employees have the opportunity to be actively involved in a two-way kind of communication, in some cases, those who are in managerial positions like leaders will somehow still have influence on organisational change related issues, especially when it involves decision making.

Drawing from the literature, it can be suggested that communication plays an important role in ensuring the success of organisational change. Nonetheless, as culture itself is a set of shared behaviours accepted and practiced by a particular group of people, it implies that communication practices among members of organisations including during organisational change might be different across the world. The following section will further discuss the relations between culture and organisations, which will lead to the research questions of this research.

### 2.3 CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

It was acknowledged in the literature that due to the rapid market development and global change, organisations need to continuously change in order to stay competitive and keep up with business needs (Eisenberg et al., 1999; Weick & Quinn, 1999; Frahm, 2005). Thus, communication becomes an essential element, as issues pertaining to the ‘why’ and ‘how’ need to be clearly addressed.
From the culture literature discussed earlier in Section 2.1, it is understood that culture influences how people behave and communicate in a particular way that is accepted in that particular group. Thus, what employees do in organisations is embedded in the culture. In a study on the managerial practices in Malaysia, Abdullah (1992, p. 3) highlights that ‘the culture of a country has a strong influence on the way people behave’ as it ‘plays a significant role in determining and developing the culture of an organisation, its expected norms and practices’.

Studies by Conrad (1990) show that organisational culture plays a role in influencing how members of an organisation communicate. Therefore, it can be suggested that national culture does have an influence on organisational culture, as it helps to shape the behaviour of organisational members. Thus, such a cultural awareness shapes the behaviours and influences how people communicate in the organisation. In other words, unconsciously or consciously, the culture determines how organisation members communicate with one another. Thus, it is worth investigating such communication practices observable in organisations.

### 2.4 DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As culture can be manifested in practices (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), it can therefore be suggested that communication practices in the organisation might be influenced by culture. Considering that culture is manifested in practices (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), culture might influence how organisational members communicate as they facilitate change in the organisation. Thus, as culture itself is a set of shared behaviours accepted and practiced by a particular group of people, it implies that communication practices among members of organisations might be different throughout the world. As stressed by Hofstede (1984, 1991, 2007), management in the Western world cannot necessarily be applied in the Eastern world (Hofstede, 1984, 1991, 2007). As such, this suggests that the communication practices
employed in organisations such as in the United States might not be practiced in organisations in other regions such as Japan or Malaysia.

2.4.1 Gap identified

Although there is immense literature on national culture (for instance Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1993; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998; Hofstede & Fink, 2007), the interest has been focused on the cultural issues involving national culture in the Western world, especially in the United States and Europe. This raised an interest in understanding national culture perspectives from the Eastern world, by looking at the Malaysian setting. From the literature, we understand that people behave in certain ways in different cultures, resulting in the differences in communication practices. Given the fact that communication is an essential element of organisational change and little attention has been given to the relationship between culture and communication in the Eastern context, especially in Malaysia (Ching, 2004), this study will address this research gap. The purpose of this research is then to identify the ways in which culture is evidenced in communication practices, in a change context.

2.4.2 Development of Research Questions

The literature reviewed has revealed key theories and constructs used in the fields of organisational change, communication practices, and culture. This research seeks to give insights into the three Malaysian culture dimensions developed from the literature, by investigating how the Malaysian culture dimensions of respect, collectivism, and harmony are evidenced in communication practices during change communication in Malaysian organisations. In doing so, a central research question is developed, guided by the research framework as shown in Figure 2.4:
The central focus of this research is formed by providing answers to the central research questions of:

‘How are Malaysian culture dimensions evidenced in communication practices during organisational change?’

In answering this research question, three supporting research questions are developed:

1. How is the Malaysian culture dimension of Respect evidenced in communication practices?
2. How is the Malaysian culture dimension of Collectivism evidenced in communication practices?
3. How is the Malaysian culture dimension of Harmony evidenced in communication practices?

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the literature reviews on change, organisational communication, and culture respectively. From the literature, it was highlighted that there is a strong need for organisations to continuously change in staying competitive in the market. As such, communication plays an important role in communicating the change agendas and strategies in achieving the change goals. Nonetheless, it was also identified from the literature that the national
culture of a respective country has influences on how people communicate, hence the interest to investigate the ways in which Malaysian culture dimensions are displayed in communication practices during change communication. The presentation of the reviewed literature led to the development of the research framework, which later serves as a basis for the development of the research design to be discussed in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter presents details of the research design and the methods employed in this research. In Section 3.1, there will be a brief explanation regarding the choice of qualitative research adopted. This will be followed by detailed descriptions on the selection of case study approach for this research in Section 3.2. In this section, the case study design, research setting, unit of analysis, sampling strategy and timeline of the case study conducted will be further outlined. Section 3.3 will discuss the data collection techniques employed by this case study, while discussions on data analysis will be presented in Section 3.4. Section 3.5 will highlight the ethical considerations prior to conducting the case study, while research limitations and bias will be discussed in Section 3.6. Finally, a summary of this chapter is outlined in Section 3.7.

3.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The choice of research paradigm is important as it will assist in determining how research will be conducted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Basically, in conducting a research, there are two epistemological approaches; positivism and interpretivism (Patton, 2002). The positivism approach uses quantitative and experimental methods in testing the hypothetical-deductive generalisation, while interpretivism uses qualitative methods in understanding experiences in real life settings.

Qualitative research methods can be used ‘to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Qualitative research methods are ‘ways of finding out what people do, know, think, and feel by observing,
interviewing, and analysing documents’ (Patton, 1990, p. 94). Due to the unexplored nature of the research problem, that is to look into national culture (in this case a Malaysian culture) in relation to communication, this research adopted an exploratory qualitative research strategy (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As (Babbie, 2001, p. 88) indicates, exploratory research is undertaken ‘when there is little known about the situation at hand, and when the problem has been subjected to very few studies’.

Thus, as asserted by Lee (1999), a qualitative research design is preferred over a quantitative research design if a researcher is able to answer in the affirmative one or more of the questions, as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Guiding Questions in Deciding a Qualitative Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is it important for the researcher to understand the in-depth processes that operate within the organisation or industry?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the research issues involve poorly understood organisational phenomena systems?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the researcher interested in the differences between stated organisational policies and their actual implementation (example: strategic versus operating plans?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the researcher want to study ill-structured linkages within organisational entities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the study involve variables that do not lend themselves to experiments for practical or ethical reasons?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the point of study to discover new or thus far unspecified variables?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Lee, 1999: p.41

A qualitative approach is therefore appropriate for this research as it intended to look at the ways in which Malaysian culture dimensions are evidenced in communication practices, which has been under-reported. Focus is given to the participants’ views of the situation being studied, which was the attributes
of culture in their communication practices, and to make sense of such communication practices by interpreting their meanings. The following Table 3.2 is a summary of the characteristics of qualitative research and the approach a qualitative researcher takes in approaching the research process, as outlined by Marshall and Rossman (1999)

Table 3.2: Characteristics of Qualitative Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Research</th>
<th>The Qualitative Researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Takes place in the natural world</td>
<td>• View social phenomena holistically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uses multiple methods that</td>
<td>• Systematically reflects on who she is in the enquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are interactive and humanistic</td>
<td>• Is sensitive to her personal biography and how it shapes the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is emergent rather than tightly</td>
<td>• Uses complex reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prefigured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is interpretive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Marshall and Rossman, 1999: p. 3)

Creswell (2003, p. 8) states that through qualitative research enquiry, ‘individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work’, for qualitative research method is one the ‘ways of finding out what people do, know, think and feel by observing, interviewing and analysing documents’ (Patton, 1990, p. 4). Instead of commencing with theory, a qualitative approach helps to generate themes or categories based on the data collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), as this method is more theory-building, rather than theory-testing oriented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Babbie, 2001). As highlighted by Miles and Huberman (1984), qualitative research is an investigative process that gradually makes sense of a social phenomenon. This is done through the process of contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing, and classifying the object of the study.
3.2 CASE STUDY APPROACH

As pointed out by Marshall and Rossman (1999) and Yin (1994), a case study is appropriate when the main purpose of the research is exploratory. As stated earlier in Section 2.4.2, this research intends to investigate and explore how communication practices are influenced by three Malaysian culture dimensions.

One of the characteristics of qualitative research requires the researcher to go to the site where the participant is, to conduct the research (Creswell, 2003). This gives the researcher the opportunity to observe and identify details related to the research and be highly involved in the actual experiences of the participants (Cavana et al., 2001; Creswell, 2003). This supports the intention to conduct a case study for this research, as it allows close interaction with research subjects to gain a deeper insight into what they are experiencing. Thus, a case study is a preferred technique used to investigate a problem intensively (Zikmund, 1991), as it is useful for facilitating an understanding of the current situation and generating theories for further empirical testing (Cavana et al., 2001). Through a case study, the entire organisation can be investigated in depth to identify the relationships between functions, individuals, or entities.

The adoption of a case study method for this research also provides the opportunity to observe and understand the influence of culture on communication, as it allows the researcher to explore the current phenomena to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of events, including organisational and managerial processes (Yin, 1994). As Yin further elaborates, a case study is adopted in an exploratory research as it allows the investigation of contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between the phenomena and the context are unclear. In view of the limited views of the values of Malaysian culture and its impact on change communication, a case study is considered the optimal method for this research.
Table 3.3: Relevant Situations for Different Research Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Form of Research Questions</th>
<th>Requires Control Over Behavioural Events?</th>
<th>Focuses on Contemporary Events?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>How, Why</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Who, What, Where, How many, How much</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Analysis</td>
<td>Who, What, Where, How many, How much</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>How, Why</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>How, Why</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Yin, 1994: p. 6)

A case study searches or answers (the ‘why’ or ‘how’) from the participant’s point of view and that is the crux of the research (Yin, 2003; Stark & Torrance, 2005). As illustrated in Table 3.3, a case study is an appropriate research strategy when ‘a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control’ (Yin, 1994, p. 13).

Patton (1990, p. 37) highlights that ‘philosophers and methodologists have been engaged in a long standing debate, on how best to conduct research’. Therefore, given the nature of the research questions is to explore how the Malaysian culture dimensions are evidenced in communication practices, a case study approach is deemed most appropriate.

3.2.1 Case Study Design

A single-case design was chosen for this research. According to Yin (1994, pp. 45-46), single-case design is ‘eminently justifiable under certain conditions’, including:

> when the case represents (a) a critical test of existing theory, (b) a rare or unique circumstances, (c) a representative or typical case
or when the case serves a (d) revelatory or (e) longitudinal purpose’.

Yin (1994, p. 46) further elaborates that defining the case is a major step in designing and conducting a single case, ‘to ensure that the case in fact is relevant to the issues and questions of interest’. Even though a single case study can make it difficult for the researcher ‘to determine unique aspects of the case, as no comparison is available (Cassel & Symon, 1994), single case studies are appropriate to illustrate a particular issue that cannot be researched appropriately by other methods (Creswell, 2003; Stake, 2006). Therefore, by looking at one particular organisation for this research, the researcher was able to explore the research questions in depth. Drawing on these arguments, and given the nature of the selected organisation as a Malaysian multinational organisation striving towards becoming a global champion with 95% of its employees as locals, a single case study has allowed the researcher to explore the complexity of the phenomena focused in a real life setting.

### 3.2.2 Research Setting

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this research was conducted to explore the evidence of Malaysian culture dimensions influences on communication practices, with organisational change as a research context. Given the fact that change is strategic for organisations to ensure organisational survival in the current competitive world, change strategies are understood to be ‘kept within the organisation proximity’. As such, access to organisations undergoing change can be difficult. Thus, the following criteria have been considered in the selecting of the research site in order to answer the research questions listed in Chapter 2:

- A Malaysian organisation with majority of the employees being Malaysians
• An organisation undergoing change at time when the research needed to be conducted

• An organisation which is accessible for observations – i.e.; approval to attend departmental meetings and conduct interviews

• Availability and access to employees who are directly involved or affected by the change introduced by the organisation

Guided by the criteria listed above, the case study site selected is CSB, a subsidiary of one of the Oil and Gas Corporations in Malaysia. Further details of this corporation will be outlined in Chapter 4. At the time this research was conducted, the organisation was officially in its fourth month since it first embarked on its change journey. Although this organisation is in operation in the major cities in Malaysia, the research was conducted at the head office in Kuala Lumpur. This was due to the fact that the majority of the employees are residing in the Kuala Lumpur’s head office. Furthermore, this was where access was granted for the researcher to attend meetings and conduct face-to-face interviews with both management and employees.

3.2.3 Unit of Analysis

Yin (2003) states that the selection of an appropriate unit of analysis should be aligned to the specification of the research questions. As this research aimed to explore the evidence of Malaysian culture dimensions on communication practices in an organisational change context, the unit of analysis at the individual level is therefore the most fitting. In other words, information on how culture dimensions are evidenced in communication during change would be best sought from members of the change team responsible for the governing of change initiatives in the selected organisation. Thus, interviews also involved some of the organisation’s senior management. These targets are selected as their involvement in the change journey itself allowed them to give more holistic insights into the ways in which their communication practices during change are influenced by the said culture.
3.2.4 Sampling Strategy

The sample was selected using purposive sampling strategy as targeted samples were needed for this research (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The interest in looking at Malaysian culture existing in an organisation justifies the selection of CSB, as it is a Malaysian company with more than 95% of its employees being Malaysians. Thus, as mentioned earlier in Section 3.2.2 and Section 3.2.3, CSB was selected as this research is looking at change as a context, and CSB had just launched its change journey at the same time this research was conducted. This allowed for the opportunity to observe and analyse the influence of cultural dimensions of respect, collectivism, and harmony (as highlighted in Chapter 2), as the members of the organisation communicated during the change journey.

Judgement, snowball, and quota sampling are the three main methods of purposive sampling strategy (Cavana et al., 2001). This research employed the non-probability sampling of the snowball method, whereby key informants are identified to then assist the researcher in identifying additional participants with knowledge pertinent to the research (Cavana et al., 2001). As briefly discussed in Section 3.2.2, the snowball strategy was executed through the assistance of the Head of the Special Projects (HSP) in the organisation. The HSP is highly respected by the members of the organisation, not only because of his senior position, but also due to the fact that he was ‘hand-picked’ by the President of the Corporation to lead the change initiatives because of his experiences and excellent performance. As such, the majority of the suggested samples introduced by the HSP have given their full cooperation during the data collection.

Several correspondences via emails and phone conversations were held between the researcher and the HSP prior to the data collection. Through these series of communications, the researcher provided detailed explanations with regard to the research requirements. Based on these requirements, several possible target groups were identified. After several discussions in meeting the research requirements, it was agreed to conduct
the data collection by interviewing a selection of the Change Team members (further information about the team will be provided in Chapter 4). A total of 16 samples were selected for this research. Out of these 16 samples, five people were involved in interviews only, four were involved in observations only, and seven were involved in both interviews and observations. The samples consist of eight females and eight males, with 25% of them holding a senior management position, 25% holding a middle management position, and the remaining were employees. The samples’ ages ranged from 20 to 50 years old, with 56% of them having served the organisation for more than 10 years. Table 3.4 provides detailed profiles of the samples.

Table 3.4: Profile of the samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age*</th>
<th>Length of Service with the Company *</th>
<th>Tertiary Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>GM1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41–50</td>
<td>10–15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>GM2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41–50</td>
<td>16–20</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>GM3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41–50</td>
<td>21–25</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>GM4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>10–15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>SM1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41–50</td>
<td>21–25</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>M1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>10–15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>16–20</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>M3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>10–15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>10–15</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>E1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20–30</td>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>E2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>E3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20–30</td>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>E4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>6–9</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>E5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>6–9</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>E6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20–30</td>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = years
3.2.5 Time Horizon

In explaining the differences between a cross sectional study and longitudinal study approaches, Cavana et al., (2001) describe cross sectional study as a period whereby data is collected at one point in time, and can be carried out over a period of days or months. On the other hand, if a data collection involves collating data at two or more points of time in order to answer a research question that seeks to examine change or a process, the research then falls into a longitudinal research approach. As this research is not analysing the change outcomes, but rather the evidences of Malaysian cultural dimensions in communication practices, a cross sectional study approach was implemented whereby data collections were officially conducted from 13 May – 16 June 2008.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

Creswell (2003) contends that qualitative data collection method is suitable for exploring the perceptions of people in previously unexplored or under-explored environments. There are several qualitative methods suggested by scholars, which are commonly employed in a case study research. These include documentation analysis, interviews, direct observations (Yin, 2003; Stark & Torrance, 2005), archival records, participant-observation, physical artifacts (Yin, 2003), and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2003). Even though all of the said methods are applicable in a case study research, not all sources will be relevant for all case studies (Yin, 2003). Therefore, guided by the research questions, interviews and participant observations were conducted in order to understand how national culture influenced organisational communication practices.

Interviews and observations were conducted involving the senior and middle management, and employees of a department who were responsible for planning and communicating the change initiatives in CSB. Coupled with corroborating the data collected from interviews and observations, these data
collection methods will provide holistic and valid representations of the evidences on the influence of Malaysian culture dimensions on communication practices.

3.3.1 Interviews

Exploratory research seeks to better comprehend the nature of the problem through qualitative investigation, and it can be done by conducting observations, interviews, or focus groups (Cavana et al., 2001) Thus, semi-structured interview is most suitable when enough is known about the phenomenon, so questions can be framed in advance, but not quite enough to anticipate the answers (Morse & Richards, 2002). This research employed the face-to-face, semi-structured interviews to obtain rich data pertaining to culture and communication. As there is significant knowledge regarding culture in the literature, but little is known about the influence of culture on communication practices, the semi-structured interview allowed for the interviewees to reflect their perceptions on the related topics. Moreover, the interviewer will also be able to probe for further explanations and elaborations (Yin, 2003). In other words, semi-structured interviews were conducted because they not only allow for opportunities to answer targeted main topics and themes through specific questions, but also for flexibility to explore other relevant issues as they arose (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Besides the fact that most case studies are about human affairs (Yin, 2003), in this research, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted as interview is one of the most important sources of information of a case study (Yin, 2003). The interviews were conducted to assist in providing answers to research questions, whereby the questions asked were used to ascertain:

- How are Malaysian culture dimensions evidenced in communication practices?
Considering the amount of responsibilities the interviewees have, interviews were conducted according to the time and place that suited them. According to Yin (2003, p. 72), when conducting interviews ‘you must cater to the interviewee’s schedule and availability, not your own’. The interviews were conducted at the interviewees’ conveniences. As a result, some of the interviews had to either be cancelled or rescheduled should the targeted interviewees have other work commitments. The locations for the interviews were either in the office’s meeting rooms or the interviewees’ respective offices.

Prior to the researcher’s arrival, the Head of Special Project (HSP) sent an email to the Change Team members informing them of the researcher’s research intention and requesting them to provide all possible assistance where necessary. The email indirectly introduced the researcher to the Change Team members and key people in the organisation. Subsequently, once the research was in Malaysia, the researcher began to work with the HSP’s office in making appointments with available team members to be interviewed. However, in respect to the organisation’s policy, interviews with the Senior Management were set through the HSP’s’ secretary, who liaised directly with the secretaries of the respective Senior Management members. Emails were sent out and interviews were set based on the positive responses, at their most convenient times.

Instead of writing down the answers given, the interviews, which lasted for 45 minutes to one hour each, were recorded to allow the researcher to focus on the content of the interviews (Lindlof, 1995). Each interview was recorded on a digital voice recorder, downloaded to a folder, and labelled not according to names, but according to the sequence of interviews. The following table summarises the profile of the interviewees.
Table 3.5: Profile of the Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age*</th>
<th>Length of Service with the Company *</th>
<th>Tertiary Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>GM1 Senior Management</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41 – 50</td>
<td>10 - 15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>GM3 Senior Management</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41 – 50</td>
<td>21 - 25</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>GM4 Senior Management</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>10 - 15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M3 Middle Management</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>10 - 15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>S1 Secretary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>S2 Secretary</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>10 - 15</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>E1 Executive</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20 – 30</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>E2 Executive</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>E3 Executive</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20 – 30</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>E4 Senior Executive</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>6 - 9</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>E5 Senior Executive</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>6 - 9</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>E6 Executive</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20 – 30</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = years

3.3.2 Observations

Despite the ability to gain enormous amounts of information through interviews, especially open-ended ones, Yin (2003, p. 92) emphasises that interviews should always be considered as verbal reports only as ‘they are subject to the common problem of bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation’. However, Yin (2003) also highlights that to minimise this problem, a reasonable approach is to corroborate the data from interviews conducted with information from other sources. Therefore, this research employed another data collection technique, which is observation, in validating the data gathered from the interviews.

Yin (2003) Johnson and Turner (2003) and Creswell (2003) described observation as making a field visit to the ‘site’, where the observer creates the opportunity for direct observations on relevant behaviours or environmental conditions, which serve as another source of evidence. It
involves observing meetings, sidewalk activities, or office work. In this research, besides being granted permission to be in the office surroundings while planning for the interviews with available Change Team members, the researcher was allowed to attend and directly observe meetings pertaining to change strategies, with a reminder to only observe the communication style, but not the content.

As highlighted by Creswell (2003), observation is has the advantage, as the observer is able to take field notes on the behaviour and activities of individuals at the research site. It involves taking descriptive notes (e.g. describe physical settings, accounts of particular events or activities) and reflective notes (e.g. researcher’s personal thoughts on observations). This is supported by Stark and Torrance (2005), Johnson and Turner (2003), and Yin (2003) when they concluded that observation provides the ability to observe and gather extensive first-hand information, as it offers rich descriptive data of the general background.

Despite these advantages, Yin (2003) highlights issues related to reflexivity and reactivity, as events may proceed differently because participants are aware of being observed. Johnson & Turner (2003) stated that Goffman’s (1959) most highlighted social behaviour is front stage behaviour (i.e., what people want or allow us to see) rather than backstage behaviour (i.e., what people say and do when acting naturally). This could also be due to participants seeing the observer as an intruder (Creswell, 2003). However, the fact that the researcher had a prior working relationship with some of the employees who attended the meetings and the workshop helped to minimise this problem. The researcher’s first appearance was in a departmental meeting, whereby the researcher entered the meeting room 15 minutes after the meeting started, and the attendees were already deep in discussion. When the researcher entered the meeting room, the HSP paused and said “Everyone, this is Sabrina, she worked with some of us before pursuing her studies and as some of you already know, she is conducting research on change.” The HSP quickly continued with the meeting, and such action was planned to minimise the front stage behaviour as they did not have time to
think about the researcher’s existence. Thus, there was no issue when the researcher attended the other meetings and workshops, as by then the researcher had interviewed some of the Change Team members. In addition, the fact that the researcher was in their office vicinity on a daily basis helped to minimise the thought that the researcher is an ‘outsider’.

There is also an issue with timing and difficulty in observing large groups (e.g. seminar or forum) whereby there is the need for more than a single observer, as well as having good attending and observing skills (Creswell, 2003; Johnson & Turner, 2003; Yin, 2003). However, as the observations only involved small numbers of people in one given situation, this was not an issue in this research.

Observations were conducted by attending departmental and unit meetings, as well as a workshop organised by the management for the Change Team members. For this research, observations were conducted by attending one Change Team departmental meeting, three Thrust Unit meetings, and one workshop. Descriptive and reflective notes were taken during the observation, by focusing on the evidences of the three culture dimensions identified in Chapter 2, and not the content of the meetings or workshop.

Observation 1

The first observation was the Change Team’s departmental meeting. The objective of the meeting was to further explain their roles as members of the team and to discuss the project updates. The meeting was chaired by the Head of Special Project (HSP), who is the project leader of the change initiatives, and it lasted for 2.5 hours as they had deliberate discussions on the strategic change plans that each Thrust Unit is responsible for. The following table summarises the profiles of the 11 samples observed (meeting attendees):
Table 3.6: Profile of the Meeting Attendees – Observation 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age*</th>
<th>Length of Service with the Company*</th>
<th>Tertiary Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 GM1</td>
<td>Senior Management</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41 – 50</td>
<td>10 – 15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 GM2</td>
<td>Senior Management</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41 – 50</td>
<td>16 – 20</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 SM1</td>
<td>Middle Management</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41 – 50</td>
<td>21 – 25</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 M1</td>
<td>Middle Management</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>10 – 15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 M2</td>
<td>Middle Management</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>16 – 20</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 M3</td>
<td>Middle Management</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>10 – 15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 E1</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20 – 30</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 E2</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 E3</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20 – 30</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 E4</td>
<td>Senior Executive</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>6 – 9</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 E5</td>
<td>Senior Executive</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>6 – 9</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = years

Observation 2 & 3

The second and third observations involved the same Thrust Unit, where two representatives from the unit had discussions with the Head of Special Project (HSP) to further discuss the project updates and related change tasks assigned to their team. Both observations were conducted in different days, with the second meeting (observation 3) conducted as a follow up to the earlier meeting (observation 2). In the first meeting, the discussions lasted for 1.5 hours, where the discussion was more on the detailed update of the unit progress with regard to the change initiatives the unit is responsible for and the next tasks. The second meeting took 45 minutes as it was a follow up meeting to update the HSP of the outcome of one of the tasks assigned to the unit during the first meeting. Table 3.7 summarises the profiles of the three samples observed:
Table 3.7: Profile of the Meeting Attendees – Observations 2 & 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age*</th>
<th>Length of Service with the Company*</th>
<th>Tertiary Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>GM1 Senior Management</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41 – 50</td>
<td>10 – 15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M1 Middle Management</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>10 – 15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>E2 Executive</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>1 – 5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = years

Observation 4

The fourth observation was between the HSP and another two representatives from another Thrust Unit in the Change Team. Similarly to observation 1, this meeting, which lasted for 1.5 hours, was also conducted to discuss the project updates and tasks assigned to the unit. Table 3.8 summarises the profiles of the three samples observed:

Table 3.8: Profile of the meeting attendees – Observations 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age*</th>
<th>Length of Service with the Company*</th>
<th>Tertiary Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>GM1 Senior Management</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41 – 50</td>
<td>10 - 15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M3 Middle Management</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>10 - 15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>E4 Senior Executive</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>6 - 9</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = years

Observation 5

The final observation was of a workshop attended by the representatives from two Thrust Units in the Change Team. This workshop was conducted by two consultants, who were there to share with the team on the best practices in solving problems, particularly on getting the buy-ins from other members of the organisation in their change journey initiatives. During the one-day workshop, the two Thrust Units' leaders were swapped. In other words,
during the activities conducted in the workshop, the two Thrusts leaders were leading another Thrust Unit’s team members, with the consultants acting as the facilitators. Nonetheless, the recorded observations did not include the communication practices displayed by the two consultants. Table 3.9 summarises the profiles of the seven samples observed;

Table 3.9: Profile of the Workshop Attendees – Observations 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age*</th>
<th>Length of Service with the Company*</th>
<th>Tertiary Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>10 - 15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>10 - 15</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>E1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>E2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>E3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>E4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>6 - 9</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>E5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>6 - 9</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = years

Attending the meetings and workshop allowed the researcher to observe the communication practices of the samples, as they developed the plans for change strategies, discussed related issues, proposed solutions, produced the final decision, and gained insights into how change messages should be cascaded to the employees. Descriptive and reflective notes were taken during the observations, to record the existence of the three culture dimensions of respect, collectivism, and harmony.

By drawing upon both the interviews and observations as sources of data, the reliability and validity of this research is enhanced and researcher bias is minimised. As argued in Sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2, semi-structured face-to-face interviews coupled with corroborating them with observations is clearly the most suitable and viable method of data collection for this research. The combination of both strategies helped to provide holistic and valid representations of Malaysian culture dimensions in communication practices.
3.4 DATA ANALYSIS AND CODING

For the data analysis, content analysis was adopted in which identifying and categorising the primary patterns in the data were conducted (Cavana et al., 2001, p. 170). This method allowed themes to emerge from the data, in line with the exploratory nature of this research. The coding process, which is the heart of a qualitative data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1984), was conducted to identify communication practices around the three main themes that emerged from the literature - respect, collectivism, and harmony. This was done through a coding and analysis by the researcher, which allowed ‘intimate engagement with the data and the search for confirming and disconfirming evidence’ (Richards, 2005, p. 143).

All of the interviews were conducted by the researcher and recorded upon acquiring verbal consent from the interviewees. Besides allowing the researcher to focus on the content of the interviews, recording also allowed the interviewer to review the interview closely at a later stage (Lindlof, 1995). Each interview was recorded on a digital recorder, which was then downloaded to a laptop accessible by the researcher alone. This process gave an opportunity for the researcher to analyse the quality of the interviews and decide on whether a second interview was needed. The interviews were then saved in a folder with a reference index understood by the researcher, in maintaining the anonymity of the interviewees.

Once all interviews were secured and downloaded to the laptop, they were all individually transcribed by the researcher. Though the interviews were fully transcribed, attention was not given to heavy notation of the text as the focus was on getting the content of the interviews related to culture and communication practices. As the data from the interviews were analysed, focus was given to similar responses to each question in looking for recurring regularities, which was then coded according to the three culture dimensions derived from the literature.
Notes taken during the observations were also focused on identifying incidents or communication styles where the three culture dimensions were evidenced during the communications between meeting attendees. This was done by filling in the observation guidelines sheet (see Appendix C) and field notes. As soon as a particular observation was done, the observation sheet and field notes were converted into write-ups to ensure details were correctly captured and recorded. This helped to avoid losing important details as ‘raw filed notes themselves are usually partially illegible, and contain many private abbreviations’ (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 50) which might be understood by the researcher at the time notes were taken. Thus, as pointed out by Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 50), ‘a write-up will usually add back some of the missing content, since the raw field notes, when reviewed, stimulate the fieldworker to remember things said at that times that are not in the notes’. Similarly to the data collected from the interviews, the observations data collected were then analysed and coded according to the three Malaysian dimensions. In other words, guided by the literature, attention was given to data that was only relevant to this research, then a framework was made to organise the results.

Once all data was coded around the three themes identified, detailed analyses were conducted by going through each theme where results were then classified into a few subheadings, which emerged from the analysis’ processes. This repeated processes of analysing and coding helped the researcher to produce findings on the ways in which the Malaysian culture dimensions of respect, collectivism, and harmony were displayed in communication practices. In addition, if data collected were inconsistent or contradictory, the researcher actually went back to the respective interviewee to clarify the issues, and compared the findings with the existing literature.

### 3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

This research was subjected to the policy dictated by CSB and ethical clearance guidelines drawn by the Queensland University of Technology, in
which the low risk research involving human participants’ approval was granted. Prior to conducting this research, ethical clearance was also obtained from the organisation, where the case study research was conducted. On top of an announcement made in a meeting to inform the staff of the research, the Head of Special Project (HSP) also circulated an introductory email with regards to the intended research, prior to the data collection. In other words, they were all aware that the researcher would be attending some of the meetings and that they would be observed. Before any particular interview was carried out, the participant was given a consent letter to sign as an agreement that their participation would be voluntary, confidential, and private (a copy of the consent form is attached in the appendix). As such, no individual or organisation is identified in this research. The organisation is referred to as CSB throughout the thesis, while interviewees are referred to by letters or numbers in order to protect their identities. Thus, all interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the interviewees.

3.6 LIMITATIONS AND RESEARCH BIAS

The first limitation to this study is the replication of results across other organisations or industries. Considering that this is a single organisation case study research, the replication of the results across organisations outside Malaysia will be the main limitation of this research. Nevertheless, the use of a single case in this research context allows the findings to be used by Malaysian organisations or organisations operating in Malaysia, as a single case study provides the advantage of analysing the issue in a more specific and relevant context.

A single case study approach was also employed as the researcher had access to the organisation, which was previously inaccessible for scientific observation (Yin, 1994). Carrying this research at CSB came in handy as the researcher had the advantage of a prior working relationship with the Head of Special Projects (HSP), who is responsible for looking after the change
initiatives in the organisation. Nonetheless, given the fact that this is a qualitative research, researcher's bias is another potential research limitation as this method opens the researcher to be biased in data interpretations. The prior working experience granted the researcher access to meetings, which is impossible for outsiders, and the support shown by the HSP opened doors for interviews not only with employees, but also the senior management in the organisation. Furthermore, the fact that the researcher herself is a Malaysian creates the potential for bias due to her knowledge and experience of the culture dimensions discussed in this thesis. Nonetheless, the use of interviews and observations, as well as supporting the findings with the literature, helped to minimise this potential bias. Thus, the data analysis was also reviewed several times by independent judges in ensuring that it was not the researcher's opinion. In addition, the cross checking through interviews, observations, analysis on literature, and the review of data analysis by independent judges helped to increase the validity and reliability of the research findings.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the research methodology chosen in answering the research questions outlined in Chapter 2. It justifies the adoption of a single case study methodology, which provided the opportunity to explore a real-life phenomenon of how Malaysian culture dimensions are evidenced in communication practices during organisational change. The following chapter will present the data collected and its analysis.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In the previous chapter, case study methodology was used to collect and analyse the data in answering the research questions formed in Chapter 2. This chapter presents the research findings of the data collected and its analysis, and begins with a background to the case study, CSB\textsuperscript{3}, and its organisational change journey in Section 4.1. This will be followed by Section 4.2, which highlights the discussions of the organisational communication in CSB. The findings of focus of this research, Malaysian culture dimensions, will be presented in Section 4.3. In this section, analysis will be done by addressing the central and supporting research questions developed in Chapter 2. A brief summary to conclude the chapter is provided in Section 4.4.

4.1 BACKGROUND OF THE CASE STUDY – CSB

MUTIARA\textsuperscript{4}, a large oil and gas corporation in Malaysia, has grown over the years since its establishment in 1974. From just a manager and regulator of the country’s upstream oil and gas sector, it has transformed to become a fully-integrated oil and gas multinational corporation. The corporation has ‘driven the overall growth and development of the Malaysian oil and gas industry [...] providing a significant contribution to the socio-economic growth of the nation’

\textsuperscript{3} CSB: For confidentiality purpose, this is not the real name of the organisation.

\textsuperscript{4} For confidentiality purpose, this is not the real name of the corporation.
(MUTIARA, 2008: 16). To date, the corporation has been in the industry for more than 30 years, and has been operating in more than 30 countries around the world.

In the early 1990s, MUTIARA embarked on a strategic globalisation programme, driven by its vision of becoming a ‘Leading Oil and Gas Multinational of Choice’ (MUTIARA, 2008). The globalisation programme aimed to enhance the country’s crude oil reserve, adding value to its core business and providing exciting new challenges for its young employees. When MUTIARA decided to embark on the international route in 1990 as one of its first steps towards globalisation, the corporation has been growing in keeping abreast with the globalisation that has opened up vast growth opportunities. Various initiatives and changes were planned and conducted at all levels of its subsidiaries across the globe to support the ‘Global Champion’ agenda, in realising the corporation’s vision. Today, besides being listed as a FORTUNE Global 500 corporation, MUTIARA’s achievement in the Financial Year end 2007/2008 has put the corporation as the biggest single contributor to the Malaysian national budget as it contributes more than 40% of the Federal Government revenue (MUTIARA, 2008).

MUTIARA’s significant achievement over the years, despite an increasingly volatile and uncertain global oil and gas industry, drew an interest to conduct this research within the corporation, focusing on the evidences of Malaysian culture dimensions which could be observed in communication practices during its organisational communication. The interest came about to see how the national culture that relates to the local employees of this Malaysian-owned company shape their communication practices, as they work together in achieving the company’s global vision. This case study was conducted at CSB6.

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5 FORTUNE Global 500 is a registered trademark of the FORTUNE magazine division of Time Inc.

6 For confidentiality purpose, this is not the real name of the organisation.
one of the 60 subsidiaries of MUTIARA, responsible for the exploration and production arm of the corporation, in both local and overseas ventures. CSB’s full involvement in all aspects of oil and natural gas exploration, development, and production activities has enabled the company to develop its capability as a hands-on operator with a track record of successful developments in both oil and natural gas. In other words, CSB plays an important role especially in the MUTIARA’s overseas expansion plan, in its quest of becoming the Global Champion (CSB’S Head of Special Project, personal communication, May 13, 2008).

With more than 6,000 employees working together under the flagship of CSB in realising MUTIARA’s agenda of becoming the Global Champion, CSB has successfully grown to become a full-fledged oil and gas field operator, since its first incorporation 30 years ago. Today, CSB is actively involved in crude oil and gas production in 25 countries around the globe, in addition to its Malaysian operations. Nonetheless, despite its worldwide expansion, CSB’s management is centralised in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, with the majority of its employees being Malaysians and based in the Malaysian offices.

To the CSB management, in order to successfully reach MUTIARA’s vision, there is a strong need for everyone at CSB to think and act like Global Champions. In February 2008, CSB officially launched its new vision of becoming an Exploration and Production (E&P) Global Champion (later addressed as E&P Global Champion), as a significant move to assist with propelling the company towards realising the MUTIARA Group’s Corporate Agenda goal of becoming the Global Champion. One of the moves taken for CSB to materialise its new vision is embarking on an organisational change journey, Shaping CSB, which will be discussed in the following Section 4.1.1.

### 4.1.1 Shaping CSB – A Change Journey

To better help CSB management to plan the initiatives towards reaching its new vision, the CSB Change Management Department (a department in CSB
overlooking plans and strategies to assist in managing the organisation) was assigned to gauge the organisation’s current performance and capabilities from its employees’ point of view through a survey. Besides gauging the organisation’s performance and capabilities, the annual internal employees’ satisfaction survey was also used as a platform for employees to address issues that were affecting their work and commitment. Results from the survey indicated that in reaching both the CSB and MUTIARA visions, focus should not only be given to initiatives boosting the corporation’s overall performance in the market, but also the initiatives that boost the employees’ commitment to assisting the corporation in reaching its goals. Resulting from this feedback, a change journey was introduced in CSB: ‘Shaping CSB towards MUTIARA Global Championship (Shaping CSB). In other words, Shaping CSB was introduced to position and drive the organisation to achieve the Group’s Corporate Agenda aspiration, in becoming the leader in the market.

Shaping CSB focuses on building the organisation to be a competitive exploration and production (E & P) player and subsequently outperform its competitors in the market. In achieving this goal, Shaping CSB needs to first focus on a two-pronged approach. The first one, \textit{Shaping to Play}, is about making CSB fitter. It was learned from the employees’ satisfaction survey that there was a weak integration in terms of commitment between departments and divisions. There was also an issue between the employees and the management, especially issues pertaining to human resources. On another note, the downfall of MUTIARA’s response towards globalisation strategy opened doors for employees to move out of the company to join competitors offering salaries in US Dollars (which is bigger than Malaysian currency). Therefore, it was hoped that through \textit{Shaping to Play}, the organisation would be able to increase internal integration, leading to employees’ commitment towards the organisation’s goal. At the same time, the second phase, \textit{Shaping to Win}, is essential for completing CSB’s journey to success, and this involves identifying and instituting new winning ways of thinking and practices. In other words, more effective plans need to be
developed and executed in ensuring that CSB is more than prepared in facing the challenges from the volatile and competitive market.

**Figure 4.1:** Structure of the CSB’s Change Team

In order to effectively govern all efforts planned with regards to Shaping CSB, a CSB Change Team (CCT) was established. The above Figure 4.1 illustrates the structure of the CCT. To achieve CSB’s new vision and its change roadmap, six major strategies described as ‘thrusts’ have been identified upon which the structure of the CCT will be based. Each thrust is intended to help develop and institute new thinking and practices that will enable CSB to become ‘An E&P Global Champion’. The Head of Special Project (HSP) was chosen by the President of MUTIARA to lead the CCT, and was given a full authority to appoint the CCT members for the Shaping

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7 For confidentiality purpose, no further details can be shared on the 6 Thrusts developed by CCT.
CSB journey. According to the HSP, in each thrust there is a Thrust Leader supported by a group of people known as the 'SWAT' team.

The CSB’s Change Team (CCT) members are expected to work with the rest of the other employees within CSB, across hierarchies and geographies in engaging the organisation towards the change goal. Among others, the CCT (CSB’s Change Team) broad roles include:

- Guide and facilitate the shaping effort to assure that CSB is on track to meet the aspirations of the Group’s Corporate Agenda.
- Provide assistance and in-house consultancy to CSB to ensure the successful implementation of the shaping process, realisation of the desired ambitions, and sustainable results (Source: CSB’s intranet, 2008).

Selection of the CCT members (both Thrust Leaders and SWAT team) was based on recommendations by each applicant’s superior or by direct application to the HSP, who then called them for interviews. However, there were some criteria to be met, in applying for the positions, which included having a proven track record and excellent reviews in their yearly Employees Performance Appraisals. In addition, the CCT (CSB’s Change Team) also consists of employees from the old change team - CMD (CSB’s Change Management Department). Prior to the introduction of Shaping CSB journey, CMD was responsible for any change initiatives that could help CSB to perform better both internally and externally. With the setting up of CCT taking over the change related initiatives, CMD was disbanded and members of the CMD (of all ranks) were offered positions in the CCT. Nonetheless, they were given the option to join CCT or move to other departments in CSB, or other subsidiaries of MUTIARA.

Since the CCT required not only senior and experienced leaders but also those capable of leading a change, the Thrust Leaders in this CCT were those holding a Manager, Senior Manager, or a General Manager position in their current department, prior joining the CCT. They could be nominated by superiors or
selected from the interviews. The role of the Thrust Leaders includes guiding and aligning the organisation to deliver the thrusts’ ambitions. The SWAT team of CCT on the other hand are a group of executives and non-executives, also selected based on their superiors’ recommendations or direct application to the HSP. The role of the SWAT members includes helping the respective Thrust Leader to implement and realise the ambitions of the respective thrust, to a sustainable level. The size of the CCT (CSB’s Change Team) will be examined from periodically, and adjusted accordingly throughout as the change effort progresses.

4.2 ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN CSB

Figure 4.2: Sample of Organisational Structure of a Department in CSB

Figure 4.2 illustrates the hierarchies in the ‘normal’ organisational structure of any given department or unit in CSB. The diagram shows that there are four
layers of hierarchy in CSB: employees, middle management, senior management, and top management. Such a structure has also influenced the communication style at CSB. Throughout the organisation, communication practices with regard to organisational directions and plans always come from the top management, and the employees subscribed to this pattern of communication. Figure 4.3 illustrates how organisational related information is *normally* communicated in CSB:

**Figure 4.3: Communication Flow at CSB**

![Communication Flow at CSB diagram](image)

### 4.2.1 Organisational Communication in CSB during Change

As briefly explained in Section 4.1.1, in the course of carrying out the work while Shaping CSB (the CSB’s change journey), the entire CCT (CSB’s Change Team) is expected to work and communicate not only with their respected thrusts’ members, but also with the other thrusts’ leaders and members, other employees within CSB, as well as the employees from other subsidiaries. Thus, unlike the normal hierarchical structure in MUTIARA, as shown in Figure 4.2, CCT organisational structure is an exception. Regardless of their personal grades/position (be it a Manager or a General Manager), all Thrust Leaders are equal as they work together, heading their respective thrusts. In other words, since the structure of the CCT is ‘out of the CSB’s norm’, the communication
style and flow in CCT as well as the communicating of change in CSB is expected to be different.

The following Figure 4.4 A and B illustrate the organisational communication practices in CSB, during the change journey.

**Figure 4.4:** Organisational Communication Practices in CSB during Change

- **Figure 4.4 (A)**

  Upon endorsement from the top management of CSB (which is granted after several discussions on the respective change initiatives and/or programmes proposed), the information will then be cascaded to the entire organisation. This is done through:

  a. Top Management addressing the information to Senior Management from departments/unit and they are to cascade the information to the rest.

  b. Leaders of each department/unit will be receiving the information from their immediate bosses and they are responsible to communicate it to their immediate subordinates.
Upon endorsement from the top management of CSB (which is granted after several discussions on the respective change initiatives and/or programmes proposed), the information will then be cascaded to the entire organisation. This is done through:

a. Mass communication to everyone (at the same time) in the organisation by the CCT
b. Communication to representatives (change agents) of all levels by the CCT. The representatives (change agents) will then share the information with their peers.
c. Communication by the CCT to targeted groups (for instance, issues pertaining to lower rank employees will be communicated only to non-executives).

‘A’ approach will normally be used when a new change initiative/plan is to be introduced to the organisation. Once members of the organisation know of the initiative/plan, ‘B’ approach will be exercised as more detailed information with regards to the initiative/plan will be provided, in getting the buy-in and feedback from the organisation. However, be it through the ‘A’ or ‘B’ approaches, the CCT welcomed any feedback from the ground. Both the employees and management were encouraged to work together to generate ideas or express criticisms, which would ensure the success of the change initiatives. When ‘A’ approach is used, some employees might have their opinions or ideas related to the information cascaded, but did not have the opportunity to share or vocalise it. As such, the CCT team is always open to feedback from the employees, and they are available to be approached by employees whenever ‘A’ communication approach is exercised.

In other words, besides the top-down communication approach, the CCT also encouraged two-way communication, which allows employees to share ideas and voice their feedback. As shown in Diagram 4.4 (A) and (B), to engage the organisation and communicate information pertaining to change, there were
several platforms used to cascade the change related information in CSB, as well as collecting feedback from the ground. These were practiced during communications at forums, workshops, and focus groups, on matters pertaining to the Shaping CSB. Thus, the selection of communication platforms or mediums is dependent on the objectives and target audiences. For instance, if the objective was to inform and update, then newsletter or mass email will be used. On the other hand, if the objective was to gain feedback on certain issues, the CCT will conduct a workshop or focus group. In addition, if the communication was specifically targeted for certain groups of employees, separate sessions will be conducted to better communicate the info as well as to gain better meaningful feedback.

In summary, despite the ‘normal' communication practice in CSB, which is related to the hierarchical organisational structure, organisational communication in CSB during organisational change is somewhat different. Besides maintaining the top-down communication approach, CCT members and the entire organisation are encouraged to employ the two-way communication approach, in which employees are also given the opportunity to share their opinions on the directions given and provide feedback, besides getting directions from the top.

4.3 FINDINGS: THE MALAYSIAN CULTURE DIMENSIONS AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

As set out in Chapter 2, this study seeks to understand how Malaysian culture dimensions are evidenced in communication practices. As summarised in Table 2.3 in Chapter 2, Malaysian culture values can be described in three dimensions; namely respect, collectivism, and harmony. Interviews as well as the observations of those involved in the Shaping CSB change initiatives revealed many examples corresponding with the literature, with regards to these three cultural dimensions.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

To provide context for the following presentation of data, it is useful to revisit the summarised attributes of the three dimensions. In helping to better understand and answer the research question posited in Section 2.4.2, discussions and analyses of the findings will be done by addressing each of the supporting research questions presented earlier in Chapter 2. The following Table 4.1 will guide the discussions and analyses of the findings:

**Table 4.1: Malaysian Culture Dimensions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Malaysian Culture Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respect</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Respect is given to seniors in terms of age and position in the family or organisation as they are considered the 'wise one' due to their experiences in life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Orders and decisions coming from the seniors are seriously obeyed and followed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Face saving is important as questioning a senior’s capabilities and credibility through either actions or words is considered rude and unacceptable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collectivism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Strong emphasis is placed on loyalty and cohesiveness within family and work units.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A person’s action is influenced by the impact that such action has on the benefit for the masses, rather than for the individual alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harmony</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Confrontational behaviours are to be avoided at all times, as such behaviour can be seen as a threat to a long term relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sugar coating is widely practiced in order to preserve harmony, where disagreement is indirectly expressed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.3.1 Culture Dimension of RESPECT**

**Table 4.2: Attributes of RESPECT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture Dimension of Respect: The Attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Acknowledging Seniority, Knowledge and Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Saving Face</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The first culture dimension to be discussed is *respect*. The data and its analyses will be presented by discussing the communication practices evidenced in relation to the attributes of *respect* in answering the following research question:

**Research question 1:** How is the Malaysian culture dimension of *Respect* evidenced in communication practices?

Guided by the literature, Table 4.2 above shows the two main attributes related to *respect*, which were identified in the data collected. This section presents data related to these attributes.

4.3.1.1 *Respect attribute of acknowledging seniority, knowledge and experience*

As summarised in Table 4.2, one of the attributes of *Respect* is that it is given to seniors in terms of age and position in the family or organisation. As a result, what they say or suggest is based on their knowledge and experiences, and they are often seen as having the best possible solutions, so orders and decisions will be obeyed. In other words, suggestions and decisions made by them are to be followed as a sign of respect for being the leaders. The data showed that five communication practices were observed: 1) acknowledging the status-quo or titles; 2) obeying orders and decisions; 3) name dropping; 4) keeping silent, and 5) avoidance of questioning. These five communication practices are now discussed.

1) *Acknowledging the status-quo*

One way of showing respect to those seniors was acknowledging their positions as leaders or someone senior in terms of age. This was done by not calling them by their first name. It was observed that every time junior CCT (CSB’s Change Team) members talked to the management team, they will be addressing them using titles like *Puan* (Mrs. in the Malaysian language), *Encik* (Mr. in the Malaysian language), *Tan Sri* or *Datuk* (titles awarded by the state...
government or king). It was also observed that in the event that relationships built between two people of different positions were stronger, where they developed closer relationships like good friends or ‘family’, respect for the status-quo would still be shown by calling the seniors *kakak* (older sister in Malaysian language) or *abang* (older brother in Malaysian language). However, it was also observed that some superiors in terms of positions were calling their subordinates by their first name, even though the subordinates were older than them in terms of age. In this situation, that respect for seniority over position overruled respect for age. For instance, S1 and S2 (the samples-employees) were called by their first name by M1 and M2 (the samples-managers), though S1 and S2 are older than these two managers (M1 and M2).

Interestingly, the HSP (Head of Special Project), having the highest rank in CCT, was not particular at all about the title. He did not complain if the staffs, even the juniors, were to call him by his first name. “*He was the one who asked us to call him by his first name,*” said S1. “*But most of the time we call him boss,*” said E5. Despite the HSP allowing them to call him by his first name to minimise the gap between them, S2 refused to call the HSP or other seniors by name:

*I will still call him with respect, Encik XXX (not the real name for confidentiality purpose). In fact I will still call that person with respect, kakak, puan or encik as I believe I should have respect for them as my boss or someone senior (S2).*

This was supported by a comment made by another interviewee:

*You see, in our family we were thought from small to respect our eldest by calling them abang (older brother) or kakak (older sister), and not just their name (E4).*

The respect for status-quo could also be observed through body language. In the departmental meeting, it was noted that everyone was listening attentively when GM1 (the sample-General Manager) was talking. However, it was observed that unlike the other senior employees who would either continue with
paying attention or asking clarification, junior employees would avoid eye contact with him and looked down whenever he raised a question. Such an action was explained by one of the interviewees:

Shake hands, bow your head when you are with older person. It’s already embedded in yourself (E4).

2) Obeying orders and decisions

It was observed from the data that when talking about following decisions made, the majority of employees said that the final decision was in the leaders’ hand due to their positions. In communicating change at CSB, the majority of the interviewees emphasised that the respect they had for the leaders caused them to obey the orders and decisions made. Disobeying the orders or going against the decisions made by the leaders would be unaccepted and considered rude:

You don’t want them to see you as ‘kurang ajar’ (ill mannered) (E1).

During the observations whereby the CCT was working on producing action plans for one of the change initiatives, many instances were seen whereby everyone was given the opportunity to contribute, despite their positions. However, when it came to the final say, the team seemed to give the leaders the opportunity to make the final call. This was true when no one wanted to speak up against the decision made by the leaders. As a result, when decisions were made and the leaders gave orders of the next move, everyone either nodded their heads, or said “Okay, boss.”

In observation 5, when E3 was nominated by her colleagues to present the outcome of their group work during the workshop, she refused to do so. She gave all sorts of reasons to avoid doing the presentation. This was understood by the researcher because of an earlier interview with her, when E3 clarified that she was not good at talking in public, even in giving a presentation to a small group. However, the moment M1, who was the team leader and a Manager by
position, said ‘come on...just read the results. It’s not that hard’, E3 simply stood up and presented. In other words, while she had the courage to refuse her colleagues’ nomination, she did not have the nerve to go against the leader, who is the senior in the team.

In an interview with one of the senior management, it was explained that the culture they live in has somehow influenced them in respecting the leader’s decision:

*We are pretty much paternal organisation. A lot of power lies in one man. So if he said me must do this, we have to respect that and subscribe (GM4).*

*In the end, even if you have some doubt about the change, you just have to move along as the ‘Number One’ man is onboard (GM4).*

This statement implies that if the highest authority has spoken, no one should object. Because he is the ‘number one’ man in the organisation, the power lies with him in making decisions. As subordinates, they are expected to accept the decisions to show their respect to him.

In Shaping CSB, decision making power is higher for those who are seniors in terms of position rather than age. Therefore, such a respect at times could cause a problem to the juniors especially when they believe that the decision is not quite right, or they are the one to communicate the decision or giving directions on behalf of the senior leaders:

*It’s a bit tricky sometimes to give direction to my staff especially to those who have been in the organisation longer and knows better than I do. So sometimes when they made a mistake that was in the past was not considered as a mistake, I have to find ways on how to put it as a positive feedback, so it would not give them ideas that it was a negative critic. I don’t want them to think I’m rude ‘because they are much older than I am (E2).*
It’s a bit hard though... this is like having to say no to your parents or brother. Like for example, when I am at home, though my brother is just 1 year older than me, I still have to show my respect for him and not simply disagree (E4).

In other words, it is a lot easier to obey the decisions made by leaders who are also seniors in terms of age, as opposed to a younger leader. Nonetheless, in any case whereby a decision made by a junior leader is to be followed, a strategy of getting a senior team member to talk to those seniors will be applied, as a sign of respect for the seniors’ knowledge and experience in the organisation:

With a senior person, we let the senior team member or same rank to talk to them (E4).

3) Name Dropping

The second communication practice identified in acknowledging seniority, knowledge, and experience as an attribute for respect was name dropping. It was noted in the departmental meeting that a suggestion was made for the CCT to approach leaders of a unit or department, when the team was discussing possible approaches in introducing and implementing new change-related initiatives to a particular group of employees. According to the HSP, by approaching the leaders, the team will get the required assistance as leaders are expected to be supportive of the Shaping CSB initiatives. As mentioned earlier, the CCT is comprised of employees from all levels. Some of the CCT members might have to communicate to those higher in rank or those with vast working experience as compared to themselves. As such, some of the team members, especially the juniors, might have difficulties in approaching the senior leaders. Interviews with the CCT members revealed that some of the ‘juniors’ had challenging times in communicating change plans to those in higher positions. Furthermore, some of the interviewees, who were in junior positions, highlighted that some seniors tend to be reserved, especially when the
discussed topic relates to their way of working. To quote one of the interviewees:

\[ \text{To tell them to change the way they should work is challenging (E6).} \]

Therefore, considering that the HSP is well respected due to his knowledge and experience in organisational change related matters, the team was allowed to 'drop' his name, should they encounter problems in convincing the leaders:

\[ \text{If you need to use my name, go ahead. If they are reluctant to assist, just tell them I ask you to talk to them and tell them you are in my team (the HSP).} \]

In fact, the researcher was also reminded by the HSP to mention his name whenever the researcher conducted the interviews:

\[ \text{Tell them I sent you to help you with your research (the HSP).} \]

Another example was observed when the HSP had to answer a phone call during an interview with the researcher. It was a phone call from one of the superiors of an employee who applied to join the CCT (CSB’s Change Team). In negotiating for the employee to be released from his current department, the HSP made a point by saying that he was given the mandate by the President of MUTIARA to select his team, in making sure that the Shaping CSB reaches its goals. He explained to the researcher:

\[ \text{I told the boss that I have to submit a list of potential team members, especially the Thrust Leaders, to the President to get his approval as the big guy is monitoring this Shaping CSB closely. I also told the boss that he should be proud of his staff being selected for this also helps to ‘expose’ his name to the higher management as a leader who managed to groom the staff well (the HSP).} \]
When asked if he managed to convince the superior to release the staff member, the HSP smiled and said ‘yes, and I wasn’t lying about the President. I know he would agree as this is a project that is well supported by the President and people will not say no to the big boss. But I am also sure he knows that this is for the better’. In other words, this implies that dropping names helps to expedite matters or gain buy-in, due to the respect that people have for the individuals involved, and in this case respect for the President. As highlighted by the HSP:

\[\text{The support from the top has helped me to get the support from the rest like getting key people to drive this effort (the HSP).}\]

4) Keeping silent

Another example of communication practice identified in showing respect for the seniority, knowledge, and experience is silence. The data suggests that in respect for those who are seniors and know a lot more about the subject matters, the junior employees would normally be the passive listeners and only contribute to the discussions when they are asked for opinions. Otherwise, they only listen and let the leaders take charge, as quoted by one of the interviewees (E1), ‘berdiri sama tinggi, duduk sama rendah’, which means speaking of the same wave length – literally, it means standing equally tall, sitting equally short.

During the departmental meeting observed, besides the downloading of information about the directions of the CCT from the HSP, there were also updates from all thrust units. It was noted that throughout the meeting, it was always the Thrust Leaders who were speaking on behalf of their units as they discussed, argued, or defended plans proposed by their respective thrust units. All other members only listened or took notes and they only said something if asked for support by their Thrust Leaders. Looking at how some Thrust Leaders occasionally asked for support or additional information from their members showed that the junior team members were only joining in the discussions when they were ‘invited’. Otherwise, the discussions of the change plans and
decisions were only among the senior leaders. When asked why they did not speak up during the meeting, two of the junior employees said:

I don’t think it’s appropriate for me to interrupt them. You see, at home I was thought not to interrupt when the adults are talking. It is disrespectful if you do and you can be considered rude (E3).

Since I’m new and less experience, I tend to keep quiet as I think my ideas might be irrelevant, and they know better. I respect the boss. He’s knowledgeable. So, I’ll reserve my comment (E1).

Another significant observation during the interviews and the meetings attended were the verbal and non-verbal communications in showing respect for the seniors and leaders. It was noted in all five observations attended that when a leader or a senior staff was speaking, none of the junior members would interfere. It was observed that most of the time, the juniors would just listen and take notes. Occasionally, they would nod their heads as an indication of agreement. For instance, in Observations 2, 3, and 4, the meetings were controlled by both GM1 and the Thrust Leaders. E2 and E4 would only listen and record all minutes of meetings, and only spoke when asked by their respective Thrust Leaders, in either supporting them, or to assist in providing further information. In other words, they did not interrupt the discussion, but only spoke when asked to.

In addition, it was also observed that if there was a disagreement between the employees and the leaders, the employees avoided eye contact with their superiors and tried not to do anything that might show their disagreement. For instance, it was noticed that E3 raised and shook her head as a sign of disagreement with a statement made by GM1. However, she quickly looked down when she realised that GM1 was looking at her. In fact, she simply shook her head when GM1 asked if there was anything she wanted to add. Thus, if there was a question, it would only be asked once the respective person had finished making his or her statement. To some extent, they only spoke when
they were asked by the superiors whether they had anything to add or comment on:

*It’s either you wait until your boss asked for your comment, or you really have to plan it very well to say your disagreement* (E4).

In addition, most of the time they kept quiet or said there was nothing to add.

5) Avoidance of questioning

The final communication practice observed was the avoidance of questioning the leaders, in showing respect for the knowledge and experience that leaders have. Senior members in the organisation are respected for their knowledge and experiences as they are seen as those who know how things should work, considering they have been ‘living longer’ and serving the organisation longer than the juniors:

*There is this notion of respect that ‘I am older, so I am wiser’* (M3).

When asked why she chose to not question the decision or at least seek for clarification of the decision she doubted, one of the employees described that knowledge has given leaders an advantage to claim and be seen as someone who knows what is the best, as they have ‘been there, done that’:

*I believe what they said because they have ‘makan garam’ (an expression to describe that someone knows the outcome based on what s/he has gone through) before me* (E1).

*I’ll take her argument because in the end of the day, the boss has been long in the company and has more experience, so I guess we can rely on their advice* (E2).

In respect of their positions as the leaders who should understand better and know what is best for the organisation, orders coming from them were taken
seriously without questions. In one of the interviews, an interviewee highlighted that her upbringing in her family has influenced the way she communicates and behaves at work. In respect for the senior members, she highlighted that she is taught to not question them:

*In family, regardless of year’s gap, we must respect our abang (older brother), kakak (older sister), and no question. So this applies to us here (E4).*

*In our family, we have been thought not to question the decision made by my parents. Though at times I am allowed to share my opinion, when the decision has been made, I should respect it (E4).*

Thus, as explained by one of the junior staff (E2), being new with a lack of knowledge regarding the operations of the organisation but full of ideas to try, she found it frustrating when she questioned the leaders for clarification on decisions made. She was considered rude by her superior, for her action was seen as questioning the credibility of the superior. She stated that she never questions the decisions made by her superior anymore. This implies that the knowledge and power leaders have has lead to an expectation that whatever they say or decide upon is final and should not be questioned.

In the departmental meeting, it was observed that when GM2 disagreed with GM1’s proposition, he simply voiced his disagreement and both of them started to discuss the disagreement. They are in the same position as General Managers, which implies that their knowledge should at least be on a par with one another. Hence, there is an exception to disagree and question each other. Nonetheless, it was also observed that when M3, who holds a Manager position, disagreed with the suggestion made by GM, she did not say it aloud or ask for further clarification. Instead, she mumbled to herself and shook her head. In fact, when GM1 asked if anyone had any questions, no one said anything. As pointed out by one of the interviewees:
I don’t show my disagreement when I talk to my parents. It’s the respect you have for your parents. But with my siblings, yes I do argue... but in the end, I always have to ‘mengalah’ (surrender) as I still have to respect my brother because he is the ‘abang’ (older brother). So I might say something just to myself, like whisper or something, but not to him directly (E4).

4.3.1.2 Respect attribute of saving face

The second attribute of Respect is that it is given with the intention of saving someone else’s face. Saving face, an act in which certain behaviour is conducted in favour of avoiding embarrassment of the other person, was observed when the researcher attended the meetings, as well as from the conversations during the interviews. Thus, this is true especially when it involves saving the leader’s face. The data showed that four communication practices were observed: 1) having separate conversations; 2) adding, not criticising; 3) keeping silent, and 4) sugar coating. These four communication practices are now discussed.

1) Having separate conversations

As leaders are seen as people who are knowledgeable, and are expected to know almost everything, the data suggests that subordinates should not question the leader’s credibility in public. In other words, due to the respect for position and knowledge, mistakes should not be highlighted in public as they might cause an embarrassment to the leaders. However, so that leaders are aware of mistakes, the subordinates will look for opportunities to personally communicate it to the leaders in private:

I will say to my boss that he was wrong when there was no one else, when he was in a good mood and when we talk about the issue out of the blue (E5).
If it’s an issue that will affect an individual and you think you want to bring it out in front of everybody, well... maybe not and should talk separately (M3).

In other words, in an event where a leader’s reputation is at stake from being corrected in front of others, not even the immediate subordinate would say anything about it. However, if there was a need for the mistake to be corrected, or else it might give significant impact to the organisation, the respective individual would actually alert the leader in the nicest way possible without anyone noticing it:

But if the comments are not very impactful, but it does have some influence, maybe it depends on the significance of it, you may take it offline, talk it separately. And maybe he will correct it the next meeting (GM1).

Even I if I have say once, twice, trice and it’s still the same, I’ll back off because it’s in the open, on the side I will have quiet talk with him, and that’s when I will whisper to him and let him change his opinion (GM4).

Do not embarrass them, but during coffee break, I will go and approach them to alert the mistakes (GM3)

2) Adding, not criticising

The second communication practice observed in the effort to save face, especially the leaders’, was when employees avoid criticising the leaders by showing how they could actually add value to what the leaders have said or done. For instance, if there was a strong need to correct the mistake immediately, it would be done in a subtle way so it would not look as if the subordinate was correcting the superior, but simply adding to the points made:
I will not correct him by saying ‘boss you are wrong’. I will instead add to what he said like ‘I would like to add to that...’ or ‘I agree with that, but I also like to add...’

In interrupting superior in intention to correct or add more info to what he has said, I’ll say ‘I agree’, and I will also say ‘if you don’t mind, I would like to add as I’ve read it somewhere etc’... say it that you are adding to his ideas, not condemning (E6).

It was also observed in the meetings that when leaders were caught in an argument, subordinates would kept quiet and only contributed when they were requested by their immediate superiors to assist (Observation 1, 2, 3 and 4). Even so, the subordinates would try as hard as possible not to look as if they were going against their superiors, should they have a different opinion. Instead, they make it look as if their ideas are in conjunction or in relation to what the leaders have said. For instance, in Observation 4, when GM1 questioned the report presented by M3, the immediate subordinate (E4) did not say a word and let M3 defend herself. However, when GM1 asked E4 of her opinion on the matter, firstly she responded in a way that showed she was in agreement with what M3 just said. After that, she asked if she could actually add something. In other words, though she had different views from the boss, she did not show her complete disagreement. Essentially, she agreed with what the boss said in saving the boss’ face before adding her own point.

3) Keeping silent

The third communication practice identified in an attempt to save face as a sign of respect was silence. For instance, in a situation where adding to the conversation would only make the leaders look bad or jeopardise their credibility, it is better for the rest to keep silent. An example of such an event was observed during the Departmental Meeting. There was a point when M2 asked GM1 the same question repeatedly, despite GM1’s answer, which was not in favour of M2. At first, M3 had taken the initiative to ‘simplify’ the answer given by GM1, considering that M2 was new in the team and might not have a
clear picture of the subject matter discussed. However, after several times trying
to explain, with GM2 adding to the points made by M3, M3 finally gave up and
kept quiet. After the meeting, the researcher approached M3 and asked why
she finally decided to stop explaining. According to M3, she was aware that M2
just joined the group and might not understand the information. However, she
also thought that she should stop explaining after realising that the more she
tried to explain, the more it looked as if M2 knew nothing about what she was
saying and it looked bad for her as a Manager. As M3 put it:

I don’t want to make her look bad in front of the rest, especially
with our young executives. I mean, she is a Manager, so you
know... must give her face as the staff would expect her to know
all these (M3).

Another instance was observed during Observation 2, when GM1 was
questioning the proposal presented by M1. There were times when GM1
pointed to mistakes made by the team, as well as challenged the ideas
presented. When M1 was unable to provide an answer, GM1 asked E2 if she
had anything to suggest, but E2 just shook her head signalling she had nothing
to add. GM1 then provided some directions and assigned them to work on the
proposal again, and to update him the next day. However, when M1 and E2 left
the room, E2 actually told M1 of her answers to what GM1 had asked earlier on.
When M2 asked her why she did not speak up in the meeting, E2 responded:

I thought I should let you know first and if it’s okay with you, then
you can tell him tomorrow (E2).

Such an action can be implied as E2 purposely choosing not to speak up even
though she had the answer, as she was trying to save her leader’s face. Had
she given the answer, it might have embarrassed M1 as GM1 might wonder
how a junior executive could know better than a Manager. Therefore, keeping
silent was the most appropriate action to take at that point of time, to save her
boss’s face.
4) **Sugar coating**

The final communication practice identified in helping to save face was sugar coating. To sugar coat is a situation when someone says something in an indirect way. In other words, instead of saying the real truth that might hurt feelings and embarrass the other person, other words will be used to describe it so it does not sound so bad. In sharing his experiences dealing with people in the organisation during the Shaping CSB change journey, the HSP highlighted that it is important to know how to talk to people in order to avoid embarrassing them and causing them to shy away from supporting the change initiatives:

> For example, in trying to point to my Thrust Leader that her team was not performing as expected, I will not just say ‘your team is not performing’. I’d say ‘I have a concern about your team’s performance’ (the HSP).

This was then observed in Observation 2, when he tried to ‘reject’ M1 and her team’s request for more time to work on their plan. Instead of refusing by saying ‘no’, he told them that they were running out of time.

In another observation, during the departmental meeting, GM1 asked for a volunteer to participate in one of the initiatives he was going to lead in conjunction with Shaping CSB. M2 was the only one who volunteered herself. Considering that she was the only one who volunteered and GM1 had specifically requested a volunteer, she should have been selected. Nonetheless, instead of saying ‘okay’ to her, GM1 said:

> It’s going to be tough. The project required you to have sharp knowledge especially on change. Maybe you can join the next project. Get yourself familiar first with the Thrust teams (GM1)

It was brought to the researcher’s attention that M2 had just joined the CCT. Perhaps it was due to her limited knowledge on the overall ideas about Shaping CSB, that GM1 was reluctant to approve her
volunteering in the project. However, instead of saying she did not have what it takes, GM1 highlighted the requirements to participate in the project.

4.3.1.3 **Summary of culture dimension of RESPECT**

The data suggested that there were nine communication practices identified from the two attributes of the culture dimension of respect; 1) acknowledging seniority, knowledge, and experience, and 2) saving face. Five communication practices were evidenced in relation to the first attribute, while four communication practices evidenced in relation to the second attribute. It was also noted that one of the communication practices, keeping silent, was evidenced in relation to both attributes of respect. In other words, keeping silent was practiced in acknowledging seniority, knowledge, and experience, as well as in saving face. The following table summarises the way in which the culture dimension of respect is evidenced in communication practices:

**Table 4.3: Communication Practices to Display RESPECT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes of Respect</th>
<th>Communication Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging Seniority, Knowledge and Experience</td>
<td>1. Acknowledging the status quo – titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. obeying orders and directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Name dropping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Keeping silent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Avoiding from questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving Face</td>
<td>6. Having separate conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Adding, not criticising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Keeping silent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Sugar Coating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.2 Culture Dimension of COLLECTIVISM

The second culture dimension to be discussed is collectivism. The data and its analyses will be presented by discussing the communication practices evidenced in relation to the attributes of collectivism in answering the following research question:

Research question 2: How is the Malaysian culture dimension of Collectivism evidenced in communication practices?

Guided by the literature, Table 4.4 above shows the three main attributes related to collectivism, which were identified in the data collected. This section presents data related to these attributes.

4.3.2.1 Collectivism attribute of showing loyalty towards organisation and leaders

As summarised in Table 4.4, the first attribute of Collectivism is showing loyalty towards organisation and leaders. The data showed two communication practices, which were observed as employees show their loyalty: 1) instilling a sense of belonging, and 2) taking sides. These two communication practices are now discussed:
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

1) **Instilling a sense of belonging**

Throughout the duration of the data collection, it was observed that the employees of CSB had a strong loyalty towards the organisation and their leaders. It was learnt from the interviews that from the first day an employee reported for his or her duty, either the Human Resource personnel or the head of the respective department would give ‘pep talks’ to inspire loyalty to the organisation and integration as a family. Interviewees E2 and E4 link this to the practice in their family, whereby their parents always reminded them and their siblings that besides having respect for their elders, they should also cooperate and be strong for each other:

*Macam orang tua-tua kata, air dicincang tak akan putus, cubit peha kiri, peha kanan terasa (Like the old saying, you can never cut water into two, and if you pinch the left thigh, the right thigh will feel the pain too) (E4).*

*It’s everyone’s dream to be working in this company. Some more, this is a national oil company. Working in this company means you are serving the nation. Of course we want to give our best to something that belongs to us (E2).*

An interview with one of the Senior Management discovered that not only did he make an attempt to meet all newcomers on their first day at work, but he also randomly called them into his office occasionally to keep track of their performance and open discussions. Besides constantly reminding the employees of their purpose of being in the organisation, GM3 reminds the employees of the importance of their roles and support as family members of the organisation. According to him, the organisation they are working with is the pride of a nation to which they belong. Therefore, they should be proud to be part of the family members of the organisation:
I constantly reminded my staff of the need to be feeling grateful of where they are today, so they will feel the sense of belonging that we are all in this together (GM3).

An interview with another Senior Management ascertained the same sentiment, whereby he highlighted the importance of having a strong loyalty to the organisation:

*Do not ask what the company can do for you, but ask what you can do for the company* (GM4)

Another example of a strong sense of belonging and loyalty to the organisation was also observed during the departmental meeting. The fact that the HSP was previously working with many other GLCs, as explained earlier in this chapter, gave the HSP vast experience and knowledge compared to the rest, especially in the area of change. It was observed that the HSP would several times quote examples of initiatives he conducted when he was working with his old companies. An interview with him clarified that the intention was to share his experience and challenge the team members to strive towards the organisational change goals. However, it was observed that some of the CCT members displayed uneasy reactions in their expressions. Even though the purpose of mentioning the old company’s name, or telling stories of how things worked there, was merely as an example to encourage the CCT members to work harder towards implementing the Shaping CSB initiatives, it was not well received by the CCT team members. In fact, one of the Senior Management actually voiced his disagreement with the HSP, implying his thought as if the HSP was ridiculing the other team members, who have been in CSB for years. In his words of ‘defending’ the team:

*That was different. This is not the same company. Here we are talking about CSB, about MUTIARA* (GM2).

A similar sentiment was detected when the researcher asked several other CCT members after the meeting, of their opinion regarding the HSP’s mentioning of
his previous company. Collectively, the team agreed that even though the
intention was good, it appeared to them as if the HSP had a stronger faith in his
old team in the previous company as compared to the CCT at CSB. As
commented by his secretary:

_I understand his intention, but I guess people were just too attached to
the company that they become a bit defensive. ‘Ya lah... siapa tak
marah kalau orang cakap tak baik’ (of course... who wouldn’t be angry
if people talk bad) about your family members, right? But knowing him,
he is very blunt. But with good reasons._

Although the intention of comparing other companies’ achievement with CSB
was done to encourage the CSB employees to strive for success, such a
practice was not condoned by the members of the organisation. The act of
comparing was unfortunately seen as a lack of sense of belonging, which might
create doubt regarding the loyalty GM1 had to CSB.

2) Taking sides

Besides loyalty to the organisation, data also showed that employees
demonstrated a strong loyalty to the leaders of CSB. This brought about another
communication practice, taking sides, which was observed during the data
collection. Despite some criticisms of her superior’s way of manoeuvring the
CCT, which was not the usual way things were done in CSB, one of the
interviewees defended her superior’s actions strongly. Even though she agreed
that some of the actions or ideas introduced by her superior were completely
against the norm in CSB, S2 fully supported her superior:

_Well, no doubt what he introduced is totally different from what people
are so used to in this organisation. Some people say his expectations
are too high. But then again, don’t you think that this is part of
change? In fact, having this kind of boss, I have more confidence to
talk to people, especially the higher management. Lagipun, dia dah
macam bapak pada budak budak kat sini. Takkanlah dia nak buat_
benda yang tak baik untuk keluarga dia? (After all, he’s already like a father to these people. No way he would ask them to do something bad for his family, right?) (S2).

Such a comment shows that due to the strong family bonding as a ‘daughter’, S2 was trying to defend her ‘father’, who she believes will do only good things for the benefit of the family.

Another way of identifying the communication practice of taking sides was by observing the body language of the employees. Gestures and physical expressions showing loyalty towards the leader, which signifies collectivism, were also apparent during the observations at meetings and workshop. For instance, during the departmental meeting, it was observed that when superiors were talking, their immediate subordinates showed supporting gestures like nodding their heads, having direct eye contact with their superior, and adding extra information to support statements made by their superiors when contested by others. Most of the time, when superiors were contested by others and their subordinates were asked if they had a different opinion to add, the immediate subordinates would say they have nothing to add and fully agree with what their superiors had just said.

Another instance was observed in the workshop conducted by a group of consultants appointed by HSP to assist the CCT in developing their communication skills. In this workshop, the CCT members were assigned to a different group. In other words, instead of leading Thrust Unit 1 in CCT, M1 was assigned to lead Trust Unit 2, and M3 who was the Thrust Leader for Thrust Unit 2 in CCT was assigned to lead Thrust Unit 1 in the workshop. In the beginning, despite being mixed in a different group, all of the new team members were working together in getting the tasks done. However, when there was a clash of opinions between M1 and M3, the team members were supporting their ‘original Thrust Leader’ in CCT, instead of the team leader appointed during the workshop. Thus, when E5 was asking for permission to leave early, he asked M1 instead of M3 who was appointed as his team leader in the workshop.
4.3.2.2 Collectivism attribute of demonstrating cohesiveness among members

The second attribute of Collectivism, as listed in Table 4.5, is demonstrating cohesiveness among members. In other words, the unity displayed by members of the organisation is a sign of the culture dimension collectivism. From the data, it was learned that cohesiveness can be observed through the communication practice of cooperating. This communication practice is now discussed.

1) Cooperating

Before a particular change plan was introduced or implemented, collective consensus among the team members needs to be achieved. At the CCT level, a unit meeting will be held with the members to get a collective agreement on a particular plan, before the team sees the HSP. Consensus at the unit level was important, so when they met the HSP or presented the idea to the CCT, others would see that it was not one person’s idea:

*During this planning stage, change team members are encouraged to give their views, suggestions, ideas which are raised and deliberated during group meetings (E5).*

*I will double check with my immediate superior first before seeing the head, to ensure that we are all aligned in the same goals and approaches (E2).*

*I didn’t get to implement my ideas straight away. It has to be discussed in groups, debated, presented to higher management by the head of change and agreed upon by all layers of management before it can be channelled out (E1).*

In other words, the data indicated that before a particular plan was implemented, it would be collectively deliberated at every layer to get the
majority consensus. However, as indicated in the literature, despite the collective agreement at the discussions level, the final decision will still be in the hand of the highest authority. From the observations, it was learned that the decision would be the leaders' whether they were ‘forced’ to make one, or ‘voluntarily decided’ to make one. This is consistent with the defence made by one of the Senior Management (GM3) on reasons for leaders having to make the final call – their responsibility to decide, having considered the pros and cons of the decisions to be made. The following are examples of both scenarios:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forced</th>
<th>Voluntarily decided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Observation 1:</strong> After asking the team several times for a suggestion on how often they should meet for updates, GM1 had to make the call as no definite responses were given.</td>
<td><strong>Observation 5:</strong> Both groups had one team member to write down the agreed discussions outcome on a piece of paper. However, when it was time for the team representative to present what was written, both M1 &amp; M3 were seen to provide the presenter with the papers that had ‘additional input’ they personally wrote during the break.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, employees’ perceptions regarding final decisions are based upon the notion that leaders have the power to make the call:

*I’ll take her argument because in the end of the day, the boss has been long in the company and has more experience, so I guess we can rely on their advice (E2).*

*In our family, we have been taught not to question the decision made by my parents. Though at times I am allowed to share my opinion, when the decision has been made, I should respect it. Well, he’s the boss. He has the power (E4).*
At the end of the day, what the boss says overrides everything (E2).

At the end of the day, the prerogative is in the hands of the boss (M3).

Thus, it was also agreed by the management:

In general, the management will give the broad guidelines as framework has been set. To fill in the details, we will do by taking feedback from the ground however it will not change the overall framework decided earlier (GM4).

On another note, leaders see decisions as a responsibility that comes with the positions they hold:

We should not hide behind a committee to make decision. You should deliberate as at the end of the day you are accountable to the decision been made. You are empowered to. Then if you really cannot decide, then the highest authority should decide (GM3).

As highlighted by one of the employees, such an action was a replication of their daily life. In a family, the father is the leader of the house who would normally take charge of making decisions for his family in solving arising problems:

In our culture of I’m the man of the house, so let me carry this burden of solving it by making the decision (E4).

In other words, though the communication practices seem to show that everyone gets the opportunity to voice their opinion, discuss, and argue before reaching a collective agreement on the final decision to be made, it would still not be the ‘real final’ say. Nonetheless, organisation members will still cooperate in any way possible, in the spirit of togetherness.
4.3.2.3 Collectivism attribute of prioritising group’s over personal interests

The third attribute of collectivism, as mentioned earlier, is prioritising group interests over personal interests. This implies that in a collectivist society, which CSB falls into, personal agenda is a secondary option as priority is given to the benefits of the majority – in this case, the organisation (CSB). In doing so, sacrificing personal interest was displayed. This communication practice is now discussed.

1) Sacrificing personal interest

As previously outlined in Chapter 2, in a collectivist society, cooperation is emphasised greatly, especially when it is for the common good. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the HSP was self-appointed by the PRESIDENT of MUTIARA to assist the CEO of CSB in transforming the organisation in reaching its agenda. Even though he was given the mandate and the power to work his plan through, the HSP did not take advantage of the power given to him. Everyone was given the opportunity to prove to him that they deserved to be in his team, manoeuvring Shaping CSB efforts. Applications came from all levels of employment, seeing the opportunity to be part of the big initiatives in bringing CSB to greater heights. He did not insist or push for bosses to release their staff to join his team. In fact, he opened the door for everyone to volunteer themselves and apply to be part of his team, and negotiated with the bosses for the selected staff to be released. To quote him:

> With the power given to me by the President, I could have just picked my team without having to negotiate with the other bosses. But I have to think that this is not my own game. This is a game we all need to win. I do not want to be selfish in just getting the best people to be in my team to help making this Shaping CSB a success. If by taking a staff from other department would cause a disruption in that department and jeopardise the organisational effectiveness as a whole, I will not take that staff in. However, I will discuss with the
respective bosses on how best we can utilize this good manpower for the benefit of the entire organisation (HSP).

This suggests that even though he has the option to pick the said staff and focus on achieving CCT’s mission, the HSP decided not to do that, in the light of benefits for the entire organisation.

Another example of this attribute was evident in the HSP himself. When he was seconded to one of the GLC’s upon his excellent performance in one of MUTIARA’s subsidiaries, he was appointed as one of the Vice Presidents at the GLC. Such a position was equivalent to a Senior General Manager in CSB. However, when he returned to MUTIARA and was appointed by the PRESIDENT as the Head of Special projects, he accepted the offer with the interest of the organisation at large. Despite the ‘down grade’ of position that some people claimed, he stressed that he took pride in the task assigned to him as not everyone would be able to handle such a challenge. Even though he would have to sacrifice many benefits by not being in a position he was entitled to, he said that it was part of the change journey itself.

The same was evidenced in decisions made by those who wanted to join CCT despite their ‘static development’. According to the HSP, when the employees agreed to be part of CCT, they basically understood and agreed that for at least two years they would not be evaluated in the yearly performance rating. As such, they would not be entitled to the Personal Performance Appraisal’s bonus, which was given based on the appraisal’s rating. When asked why they would be willing to do this, the responses were:

*Because the change is important for the benefit of all (E5).*

*This is not a game to winning personalities. This is about what is best for all of us, survival for all of us (GM1).*

*I want to do this not only because of the experience, but also because of the meaning behind it. It’s for the benefit of everyone in this organisation. In fact, my role in this team allows me to be*
creative in coming out with plans that will not only benefit certain people, but the entire CSB, local and overseas (E4)

In other words, the data suggested that in introducing and implementing change in CSB, some personal benefits had to be left aside to benefit the masses. The CCT members would go beyond sacrificing their own interests to ensure that Shaping CSB reached its goals.

4.3.2.4 Summary of culture dimension of COLLECTIVISM

The data has suggested that there were three communication practices identified from the three attributes of culture dimension of collectivism; 1) showing loyalty to an organisation and leaders; 2) demonstrating cohesiveness among members, and 3) taking sides. Two communication practices were evidenced in relation to the first attribute, while one communication practice was evidenced in relations to the second and third attributes. The following table summarises the way in which the culture dimension of collectivism is evidenced in communication practices:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Communication Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Showing Loyalty towards Organisation and Leaders</td>
<td>1. Instilling sense of belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Taking sides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating Cohesiveness among Members</td>
<td>3. Cooperating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritising Group's interest over Personal's</td>
<td>4. Sacrificing personal interest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.3 Culture Dimension of HARMONY

Research question 2: How is the Malaysian culture dimension of Harmony evidenced in communication practices?

Table 4.6: Attributes of HARMONY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture Dimension of Harmony: The Attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Avoiding confrontation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Saving face</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final culture dimension to be discussed is harmony. The data and its analyses will be presented by discussing the communication practices evidenced in relation to the attributes of harmony in answering the following research question:

Research question 3: How is the Malaysian culture dimension of Harmony evidenced in communication practices?

Guided by the literature, Table 4.6 shows the two main attributes related to harmony, which were identified in the data collected; 1) avoiding confrontation, and 2) saving face. The followings will discuss how these attributes were evident.

4.3.3.1 Harmony attribute of avoiding confrontation

As stated in Table 4.6, one of the attributes of harmony is avoiding confrontation. In other words, actions are taken to prevent confrontations from either starting or being prolonged. The data showed five communication practices observed in avoiding confrontation: 1) protecting identity, 2) negotiating, 3) keeping silent, 4) giving politically correct answers, and 5) apologising. These five communication practices are now discussed:
1) Protecting identity

We learned from the literature that openness is not generally practiced in Malaysian culture. As such, criticisms or negative feedbacks are not openly expressed. This might create tension in the organisational change journey, especially when there is limited chance to voice feedback:

Leaders always tell us to voice our opinion, but some of the leaders are having problems to have that kind of feedback from the subordinates (E2).

With bosses, sometimes they don’t take ‘no’ for an answer. So you have to find another way as a solution to get your message across, rather than say ‘no’ to your boss (E2).

As such, there is a need for employees to find ways to communicate the message, without creating tension, which might lead to confrontation. Having said that, one of the communication practices evidenced in CSB in an attempt to avoid confrontation was protecting the identity of the messenger. Such an action was done in persuading and encouraging employees to provide their honest feedback, especially feedback pertaining to Shaping CSB initiatives, while conforming to the culture of staying away from giving open criticism.

One of the ways to protect the identity of the messenger or the employee who provided the feedback was through a communication platform such as focus groups. The feedback received in the forms of ideas, comments, and critiques were generated from the employees, for the CCT to escalate it to the respective leaders. Thus, through such communication practice, issues which might not be raised openly can then be discussed. This is because leaders were not involved in the focus groups, as focus groups were meant for employees of the same level (position) to voice their opinions on matters that were unsuitable for open discussion:
They are only going to speak up in a focus group, not in a big
group, or forum where you have all levels of staff (M3).

Thus, protecting their identity helped to avoid conflicts between superiors and
subordinates, as the superiors were not there to listen to any comment that
might sound negative to them. In other words, the focus group or forum was
conducted in such a way as to ‘protect’ the subordinates from their superiors,
should the feedback affect the superiors in any ways:

They don’t have to be afraid of the bosses might know that they
complained or anything like that (M3).

It’s like in the family-lah. The parents will not tell which siblings make
the report. So SharePoint forum is set up according to job grades in
order to protect the identity (M3).

2) Negotiating

Negotiating is another communication practice employed in promoting harmony
in the organisation. The negotiation example was discovered during the
discussion with the HSP, as he shared the process of setting up the CCT. As
previously explained in Section 4.1, one of the stages in finalising the application
to join CCT was a negotiation between the HSP and applicants’ current
immediate superiors. Realising that the Shaping CSB would need support from
every corner of the organisation, the HSP tried to minimise any possible
argument or crisis that would jeopardise future relationships. As such, though a
mandate was given by the PRESIDENT and CSB’s CEO for him to simply
select the manpower needed for CCT, the HSP would still contact the respective
superiors to negotiate in finding a mutual understanding.

According to the HSP, this is due to the fact that some superiors were reluctant
to let go of the key players in their respective teams. He further elaborated that
should he decide to exercise the power that was given to him and simply
ordered for the respective employees to be transferred to join his team, that
might lead to a confrontation and jeopardise future relationships. He further elaborated that the last thing he wanted to happen was for the organisation to lose the organisation’s performers and drivers to the competitors, due to the dissatisfaction of not being able to get the transfer they applied for.

In one of the interviews, a Senior Management highlighted that negotiating or opening the floor for discussion would help to prevent confrontation as well as give employees the opportunity to speak up:

*We are not in a culture that opens for open debate. When your subordinate says something and you are the kind of person who listens and accepts, that’s fine. But if you immediately counter his agreement, he won’t come back. He will just stop there. So you lose the enrichments of the argument. Give him a chance to further explain, and then you explain also from your point of view (GM4). If someone disagrees with me, I will not be hostile with him or her, or humiliate. I’ll go democratic way by acknowledging their thought before pointing my opinion, and open the floor for further discussion, not imposing my ideas. But try to convince them to come to an agreement (E6).*

3) **Keeping silent**

Another communication practice discovered from the data was when employees kept silent in their effort to avoid confrontation from being prolonged. In one of the interviews, it was shared that one of the common actions taken by subordinates when caught in a disagreement with their superiors was to keep quiet for the time being:

*It’s not my nature to just argue in front of someone. If I don’t agree, I will just comeback and have a close discussion to verify. One thing is because the way we have been brought up in this Asian environment whereby if someone who’s older than you are speaking, you are not supposed to argue. In a conflict involving...*
superior, I normally shut down and keep quiet. After thing has cool down, then only I’ll go and look for that person and explain why things happened (E1).

Nonetheless, besides keeping silent by not talking or commenting in avoiding confrontation, an interviewee also added that she would use body language in an attempt to get the message across:

*If I’m not happy with people distracted or sidetracked from the topic of discussion, I will not remind them out loud, but rather show my body signal by being quiet and don’t want to be seen as rude (E2).*

4) Giving politically correct answers

The fourth communication practice identified in avoiding confrontation was when the management gave politically correct answers. In other words, the answer given in response to the question raised was given for the sake of answering, without providing the correct answer. This is because the intention was not to provide an answer, but to instead calm the crowd. As highlighted by one of the Senior Management, politically correct answers had to be given for avoiding arguments and preventing confrontation from getting carried away:

*Especially issues involving policies which are clearly in the scope of the management. These are issues that need to be clearly sorted among the decision makers, before any statement can be made (GM4).*

*Perhaps the management were unsure if they can say it out. Maybe less transparent because certain things are not to be told too much to the staff. Afraid of the outcome of being too open will destabilize the organisation (E4).*
On another note, too many politically correct answers cause staff to stop questioning:

In a bigger session, people will join for the sake of joining but will not ask questions as at the end of the day, politically correct answer will be given (M3).

There is also a lot of corridor talk and when the issue is brought up, and basic answer given more on politically correct (E4).

5) Apologising

Even though it was mentioned earlier that keeping silent was one of the communication practices employed by some employees in avoiding confrontations, there were times when the opportunity arose for employees to speak up. In such times, the employees would wisely take the opportunity, in which they would ensure that the message was relayed without creating any tension. The communication practice employed was apologising:

If I know my statement will hurt people, I will start by apologising (E1).

Along the way, I bound to make mistake and going to someone to seek apology is something that you have to do. If you know you have screwed up and if you know that you can make things better by going and seek for an apology, and that whole things can make things better, it is worth it (E2).

Apologising in avoiding confrontation was also evidenced in Observation 4, when M3 started the conversation by apologising to the HSP that what they wanted to present was not up to the standard or was not what the HSP expected.
Another way of avoiding a confrontation, as stated by the interviewees, was to apologise on behalf of others once the mistake was already clear to a person’s point of view:

*To apologise on mistakes done by others is a bit difficult to do, but in the end of the day, if you have to do it, you just have to do it. If that is the best way to avoid potential headache might as well do it (E2)*

Thus, it was observed that during the departmental meeting, it was always someone who was senior in terms of position who would seek for an apology on behalf of his/her colleagues. In the departmental meeting, E2 apologised to the HSP on behalf of E3 for not paying attention when the HSP was making his point. From the observation, it was actually E3 who should have apologised as she was the one who kept asking E2 to further elaborate on what the HSP was saying. In fact, when M3 was the first to arrive at the workshop (Observation 5), she apologised on the team’s behalf for being 20 minutes late as they were caught up in another engagement prior to attending the workshop.

### 4.3.3.2 Harmony attribute of face saving

As summarised in Table 4.6, the other attribute of *harmony* is face saving. The act of saving someone else’s face was performed as one of the ways of keeping harmony. Saving face, an act in which certain behaviour is conducted in favour of not embarrassing the other person, was observed when the researcher attended the meetings, as well as in the conversations during the interviews. This is true especially when it involved saving the leader’s face. The data showed that three communication practices were observed: 1) sugar coating, 2) saying ‘yes’ to a ‘no’, and 3) tolerating errors. These three communication practices are now discussed:
1) Sugar coating

The first communication practice, to sugar coat, or say something with a double meaning as quoted by E1, was seen as a normal act in telling the truth about something unappealing, but in a more appropriate way to maintain harmony. Thus, to highlight a point made by one of the leaders who have vast experience in dealing with international business, “dealing with Asians, they are sensitive for wrong reason” (GM3). Considering that the culture inhibits assertiveness, sugar coating was practiced to avoid misunderstandings which could lead to uneasiness and jeopardise harmony:

- It’s already in our culture that we need to be polite and all. So I must look at the situation before deciding on my actions, especially when communicating with higher level people (S1).

- It is in our culture not to be so blunt to people. But some people actually appreciate us being honest than us trying to sugar coat every single word. But I guess you just have to sugar coat a little bit (E2).

From the interviews, it was unveiled that the concern to sugar coat was mostly due to long-term relationships. There were concerns over the possibilities that their paths might cross again in the future, so whatever they said or do in showing disagreement, or challenging the other party would be done in the most appropriate approach possible. This input was shared by E5 and M3 when asked about reasons for having to sugar coat:

- Sugar coating very much applied as the culture is such that people will always remember what you said, do to them. So if you said no or embarrassed them in the past, you never know if in the future it’s your turn (E5).

- Conflicts of being direct between management and staff arise as people are not sure if the other party can accept the directness and openness without having a grudge (M3).
Thus, as highlighted by other interviewees, sugar coating is already something they live with, have experienced, and been exposed to since they were young:

_Sugar coating is just like our ‘nasi’ (daily meal’). Sugar coating is almost all the time to ensure we take care of other people’s feeling. All these experiences are evolving from when I was small until I grow up (E1)._  

_We cakap berlapis (sugar coat) in our culture as people don’t like to rock the boat and will try as much to be harmonious (M3)._  

Nonetheless, it was also highlighted that although sugar coating was very much practiced as another way of trying to get the message across, there was a need to ensure that it was done in such a way that the original message would be correctly interpreted:

_People tend to sugar coat, by using positive words to carry out whatever message to be delivered. But I will not do sugar coating till the whole message is interpreted wrongly. Sugar coat is just to sooth them (E6)._  

_We will try to say it in a nicest way to get the message across and outcome reached (E4)._  

It was also learned from the data that once the decision has been made to actually let the other party know their mistakes, a non-provocative move will be made:

_Speaking up your mind is not a problem if you put it in a proper way, and that the receiving party is okay with that kind of approach, or else you have to find a way to fine tune what you have to say so that you will not send the wrong message or provoke or upset anyone (E2)._
Nonetheless, despite the need to save face, it was also ascertained by a subordinate that in some cases, leaders were given the green light to actually challenge, criticise, or bring up the matter by being blunt to make an important point:

_Sometimes you just have to be blunt especially as leaders because if you do not emphasise the message to your subordinates they might not get the real intention of it. They might not aware of their own potential until you tell them straight to their face (E2)._

However, although they have the power of being blunt with good intentions, leaders say that there are still ways to make a point:

_You must be cunning in the way of how to say it, so they will say oh I didn’t see it from that light. I think you must do it in a way that doesn’t embarrass that person. That is most important (GM1)._

_ I do give a politically correct answer which I call it a soft landing, I have to because I want to make sure message is there. Need to say it in a subtle way, which is not easy, in order to get the message across, without embarrassing that person (GM3)._

This was again summed up by the HSP:

_I think we are just being too nice. But sometimes the fact that we are nice is also our downfall because you don’t tell the truth. Saying “you are performing” when you are not, but because you want to save face and we fall into the palter of our culture, we are saying otherwise. Actually, by doing that you are not doing justice to that person. You should say “I have concern about your performance”. It depends on how you say it, but still effectively delivering the message. You should say it in a way that shouldn’t be shame to him especially in public. There are times that it doesn’t warrant to do that, so why do things like that?_
Nonetheless, according to another Senior Management, face saving will not be an option if several attempts to correct an employee were taken for granted:

However if there is no improvement after several reminders, action will be taken and no face saving is considered (GM4).

2) Saying ‘yes’ to a ‘no’

The second communication practice of saving face is by saying ‘yes’ to a ‘no’. Literally, a ‘yes’ signifies agreement to a request, order, or suggestion. However, it was observed that not all the time a ‘yes’ was a true ‘yes’. Apparently in some situations, a ‘yes’ was uttered simply to end a conversation when the other party was suggesting or requesting something difficult to agree upon. In this case, a ‘yes’ was uttered for fear that saying a ‘no’ would embarrass the other person.

For instance, in the departmental meeting, M2 requested to participate in a special project to be led by CCT members. The project required participants to give 100% of their time from 8am to 6pm daily working in a lab, for 1½ months. However, despite wanting to participate, M2 also mentioned that she would only be able to attend half days of the daily sessions. Her request was rejected by the HSP. Nonetheless, M2 continued to persuade the HSP to allow her to participate, and it came to a point where the HSP’s body language showed that he was not comfortable with being pushed. In the end, the HSP just said “Yes, you can come”, then asked if anyone who has attended such a project would like to share their experiences. GM2 then commented on the HSP’s decision, followed by M1 and M3 who raised the importance of having to commit 100% of their time in the lab. In the end, M2 withdrew herself and GM1 just nodded his head, and proceeded with the meeting. This raised a question for the researcher as to whether the “Yes, you can come” said by the HSP earlier on was really an endorsement for M2 to participate in the lab, or just to end the conversation without embarrassing M2.
Another instance was evident when the consultants were negotiating with the CCT during Observation 5. Since the team arrived 20 minutes late for the workshop, the consultant suggested for them to reduce their lunch break by 20 minutes, to cover the time lost. The team actually said ‘okay’ in the beginning, before highlighting that it was Friday and E5 would need time to do his Friday prayer (On Fridays, Muslim men will go for Friday prayer, normally performed between 1:30 – 2:00pm. This results in lunch time on Fridays occurring between 12:30 and 2:30pm, as the men need to go to the mosque for the prayer. Indirectly, all women and non-Muslim men have that period as their lunch time). As such, the consultants then suggested that they carry on with the workshop and have a break at 1:00pm, instead of 12:30pm. Again, the team agreed on the suggestion. However, when the clock hit 12:30pm, despite the consensus made earlier on, E5 said that he had to go. In this instance, the ‘yes’ was uttered to give face to the consultants, in acknowledging their efforts of trying to complete the workshop module while also fitting in to the clients’ personal religious requirements.

During the unit meetings, the same situations were observed. In Observations 2, 3, and 4, every time the HSP gave instructions or directions and asked if the team understood him, they would nod their heads in agreement. However, when they were out of the room, the researcher could hear them asking each other what the HSP actually meant. When the team came for a follow-up unit meeting as observed during Observation 3, they presented an outcome which was not what the HSP asked them to work on. The HSP then asked why they said they understood him earlier on (first meeting was Observation 2), and the team replied that they thought they understood him, but apparently not. The HSP then said “Next time tak paham cakap lah tak paham, jangan kata paham. Bukannya saya nak makan kamu! (If you don’t understand, say no I don’t understand, don’t say you did when you don’t. Not that I’ll eat you)”. In their defence, the team claimed that they said ‘yes’ because they acknowledged the fact that the HSP tried his best in explaining to them, and asking him to repeat himself might have led to the assumption that the HSP did not make a clear explanation or presentation.
3) Tolerating errors

The final communication practice identified from the data, in relation to saving face to maintain harmony, was tolerating errors. This practice was performed by leaders regarding errors made by their subordinate:

*If it’s a small matter and does not have significant impact to the rest, I would forgive and give them second chance. In that way, they have a chance to prove to me that it was not an intentional error. But I definitely want them to learn from this (GM3).*

*If it’s once or twice, and bearable, I’ll forgive. But as long as they admit the mistake and not pointing it to others. And I will make them aware of the mistake and the cost of it if the same mistake was to be repeated (GM4).*

In other words, the data suggests that leaders tolerated errors to save the employees’ face, with the hope that they would in return be more careful, especially of making errors that would cost the company a fortune.

4.3.3.3 Summary of culture dimension of HARMONY

The data has suggested that there were eight communication practices identified from the two attributes of the culture dimension of *harmony*: 1) avoiding confrontations and stopping them from being prolonged, and 2) face saving. Five communication practices were evidenced in relation to the first attribute, while three communication practices were evidenced in relation to the second attribute. The following table summarises the way in which the culture dimension of *harmony* is evidenced in communication practices:
Table 4.7: Communication Practices to Display HARMONY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Communication Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Avoiding Confrontations | 1. Protecting identity  
|                         | 2. Negotiating  
|                         | 3. Keeping silent  
|                         | 4. Giving politically correct answer  
|                         | 5. Apologising  
| Face Saving             | 6. Sugar coating  
|                         | 7. Saying ‘Yes’ to a ‘No’  
|                         | 8. Tolerating errors  

4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has thus far presented the data collected and provided its analysis of the ways in which Malaysian culture dimensions of Respect, Collectivism, and Harmony are displayed in communication practices. Guided by previous studies as presented in Chapter 2, evidence and examples were tabled and discussed. From the data, eighteen different communication practices were evidenced to have emerged from the three Malaysian culture dimensions of respect, collectivism, and harmony. Two of the communication practices, keeping silent and sugar coating, performed in the displaying dimensions of respect and harmony. The following chapter will summarise the findings of this research, as well as its implication for theory and practice, before concluding with suggestions for further research.
In the previous chapter, the background of the organisation and data collected were reported on, according to the three supporting research questions. This chapter will present the conclusion of this research, based on the research findings discussed in Chapter 4. It begins with a summary of the findings presented in Section 5.1, which is followed by implications for theories and practice, in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 respectively. Limitations of the research are highlighted in Section 5.4, and Section 5.5 will address the suggestions for further research. This chapter is concluded with a brief concluding remark in Section 5.6.

5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study was conducted to look at how culture values, which are referred to as culture dimensions in this thesis, influenced communication practices in an organisation. As discussed in the previous chapter, a single case study was conducted in a Malaysian organisation going through an organisational change process. The study was held to investigate how Malaysian culture dimensions of respect, collectivism, and harmony were evidenced in the communication practices. In identifying the communication practices, six attributes of the three culture dimensions were identified from the literature; 1) acknowledging seniority, knowledge, and experience, 2) saving face, 3) showing loyalty towards organisation and leaders, 4) demonstrating cohesiveness among members, 5) prioritising group’s interests over personal’s, and 6) avoiding confrontations. Thus, one of these attributes, saving face, was identified in culture dimensions of respect and harmony.
In response to the research question as highlighted in Chapter 2, this study evidenced eighteen communication practices performed by employees of the organisation: 1) acknowledging the status quo, 2) obeying orders and directions, 3) name dropping, 4) keeping silent, 5) avoidance of questioning, 6) having separate conversation, 7) adding, not criticising, 8) sugar coating, 9) instilling sense of belonging, 10) taking sides, 11) cooperating, 12) sacrificing personal interest, 13) protecting identity, 14) negotiating 15) saying ‘yes’ to a ‘no’, 16) giving politically correct answers, 17) apologising, and 18) tolerating errors. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the attribute of face saving was identified in both culture dimensions of respect and harmony. As such, it justifies the evidence for the communication practices of keeping silent and sugar coating in both culture dimensions. In other words, communication practices of keeping silent and sugar coating were displayed with the intention of saving face in showing respect and maintaining harmony.

Guided by the literature presented in Chapter 2, the following sections will provide summaries of how each culture dimension was evidenced in communication practices, as observed in the organisation studied. This will be done by addressing the three supporting research questions respectively.

5.1.1 How is the Malaysian culture dimension of Respect evidenced in communication practices?

The data presented in Chapter 4 indicated that the culture dimension of Respect was evidenced in communication practices during Shaping CSB through two main attributes: 1) acknowledging seniority, knowledge, and experience, and 2) saving face. To provide context for the following presentation of the summary of findings, it is useful to revisit the summarised communication practices in relation to these attributes. Table 5.1 (earlier labelled as Table 4.3) will guide the summary of the findings:
Table: 5.1: Communication practices to display RESPECT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes of Respect</th>
<th>Communication Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging Seniority, Knowledge and Experience</td>
<td>1. Acknowledging the status quo – titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Obeying orders and directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Name dropping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Keeping silent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Avoiding from questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saving Face</td>
<td>6. Having separate conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Adding not criticising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Keeping silent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Sugar Coating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The communication practices evidenced in these attributes are now summarised:

a) **Acknowledging seniority, knowledge and experience**

Study by Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) suggests that Malaysia is a high power distance country, which implies that power is unequally distributed and members of the society acknowledged the autocratic, hierarchical, and paternalistic system. As discussed in Chapter 2, the acknowledgement of the power a person holds leads to what this research described as a culture dimension of respect. Dahlan (1991) highlighted that in showing respect there is a strong need to be aware of one’s locus within society and to behave according to that locus. This was evidenced in a communication practice identified in the data presented in Chapter 4. Despite some leaders’ flexibility with their employees in calling them by first name, this study observed that the employees in CSB still feel the need to acknowledge the status quo by addressing the leaders appropriately according to their titles and positions, for fear of being seen disrespectful and rude. This is in agreement with what Abdullah and Schermerhorn (1996) and Schermerhorn (1994) highlighted in the literature, that
calling someone who is older than yourself by his or her first name is not accepted and considered rude.

It was also learned from the data that the respect gained gave leaders the power to make decisions that are unquestionable. This correlates with Ramasamy et. al., (2007) who state that high emphasis on hierarchy leads to a strong authoritative leadership. This is evidenced when the employees follow through the orders and directions given by the leaders, and do not question the decisions made by their leaders. Such a communication practice is consistent with the assertion made by (Schermerhorn, 1994; Abdullah, 1996; Lim, 2001), that Malaysians are often seen as having passive obedience to their superiors, and decision-making appears to involve a top-down approach. Thus, as evidenced in Chapter 4, employees keeping silent and obeying orders and directions without question was due to the respect they have for their leaders, who were expected to know what is best, considering his/her experiences that lead them to the positions they are currently holding. In other words, it was evidenced from the data that in showing respect towards their leaders, employees did not challenge the orders given by the leaders in that they refused to question the decisions made and opted to keep silent.

It was also observed from the data that at the beginning of the change journey, getting a buy-in from the organisation was challenging considering the CCT (CSB’s Change Team) had to convince the organisation why they should change the routines they were used to. The fact that subordinates continue to accept centralised power and depend on superiors for directions (Lim, 2001), name dropping, another communication practice evidenced in this research, was used to get the buy-in from the organisation. In other words, riding on the respect that employees have for their leaders, the CCT in communicating change have dropped names to convince them that Shaping CSB was fully supported by the leaders. By spreading the assumption that leaders were already onboard the change initiatives, it was a lot easier to get the employees to subscribe.
b) **Face saving**

Abdullah (1996) and Lim (2001) emphasise that it is rude to display assertive behaviour, give negative feedback, or challenge others especially in public, as such action brings embarrassment to that person (Abdullah, 1996; Lim, 2001). In other words, despite leaders’ mistakes, respect is to be shown by not challenging their capability and credibility, especially in public, and such actions are strictly avoided by saving face. From the data, it was learned that in communication during Shaping CSB, four communication practices were evidenced in relation to employees’ efforts to save face.

It was suggested from the data that when a leader made a mistake that was seen as unacceptable, considering his/her position or expected knowledge in subject matters, employees would apply communication practices like having a separate conversation, adding to the information made by the leaders instead of criticising it, or sugar coating should the employees need to highlight the mistakes. Although employees were granted the opportunity to share their ideas and give feedback during the communication of change, it did not mean that they were given the freedom to criticise or point out mistakes made by leaders, especially in the open as there is a need to maintain one’s dignity by not causing embarrassment, especially in a big crowd (Abdullah, 1996). The sense of respect for their leaders’ credibility made employees extra careful in highlighting the mistakes made by their leaders. This can be observed through the communication practices of having separate conversations or by providing a subtle comment, in which ‘extra’ input is suggested to the input already highlighted by the leaders. In some instances like expressing rejection, should there be a need to speak up, sugar coating will be practiced. On the other hand, should voicing or highlighting mistakes bring embarrassment to the leaders, the best communication practice preferred by the employees was to keep quiet.

In summary, the findings suggested that the older the person and the longer they have been in the organisation, the wiser he/she is regarded by others, hence the respect given by the rest. Thus, due to respect for his/her seniority, words coming from the leaders would be highly regarded. This can be seen
in the communication practices of which their instructions were acknowledged or/and obeyed, and not questioned. Thus, the respect that people had was obvious to the extent that anything coming from them, even if it is relayed through other people, would be followed. This explained why it was so important for the CCT to get the leaders’ support in obtaining the buy-in from the organisation during Shaping CSB. In addition, it was the respect they had for their leaders that cautioned them to save the leaders’ face by avoiding actions that could embarrass or disparage the leaders. As such, communication practices such as having separate conversations with the leaders instead of confronting them in the open, adding to the information instead of criticising the leaders’ ideas, sugar coating to get the message across in a subtle way, and even simply keeping silent were observed as being practiced during Shaping CSB to save face.

5.1.2 How is the Malaysian culture dimension of Collectivism evidenced in communication practices?

The data presented in Chapter 4 also indicated that the culture dimension of Collectivism was evidenced in communication practices during Shaping CSB through three main attributes: 1) showing loyalty towards the organisation and leaders, 2) demonstrating cohesiveness among members, and 3) prioritising group interests over personal interests. To provide context for the following presentation of the summary of findings, it is useful to revisit the summarised communication practices in relation to these attributes. The following Table 5.2 (earlier labelled as Table 4.5) will guide the summary of the findings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Communication Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Showing Loyalty towards...</td>
<td>1. Instilling sense of belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation and Leaders</td>
<td>2. Taking sides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating Cohesiveness</td>
<td>3. Cooperating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Communication practices to display COLLECTIVISM
among Members

| Prioritising Group’s interests over Personal’s | 4. Sacrificing personal interest |

The communication practices evidenced in these attributes are now summarised:

\[ a) \text{ Loyalty towards organisation and leaders} \]

It was learned from the data that collectivism can be observed through the act of loyalty that employees demonstrate for their organisation, as well as loyalty a subordinate has for his or her leader. This correlates with Ahmad (2001), who asserts that most Malaysians feel a strong need for group affiliation. In CSB, the sense belonging was instilled in employees from the beginning of their employment in the organisation. Because of this strong sense of belonging, it was observed that employees became ‘attached’ to the extent that they would initially be defensive when others talked badly about their organisation, even if they spoke true.

Thus, taking sides in defending the leaders was also observed in the employees’ communication practice, as a sign of loyalty to their leaders. In other words, the loyalty of employees was an example of communication practices, which described the collective well-being of Malaysian society which gives strong emphasis on loyalty within family or work units, as described by (Kennedy, 2002; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Loyalty to leaders had caused employees to take sides in arguments or be defensive when their leaders were criticised. In fact, the loyalty had also caused them to support or back the leaders even when, in reality, what the leaders did was not in favour.

\[ b) \text{ Demonstrating cohesiveness among members} \]

In the organisation, cooperation was stressed by the leaders in getting work done. As pointed by Abdullah (1992), cooperation is emphasised greatly,
especially when it is for the common good. From the data, it was understood that prior to implementing any change initiative, the plans would be collectively deliberated at every layer of the organisation in getting a majority consensus.

However, as stated in the literature, the collectivism that Malaysians practice does not dictate the decision making style (Lim, 2001). In other words, though the issues were collectively discussed and planned prior to making final decisions, when it was time to give the final verdict, the job would be in one man’s hand. Having said this, the data showed that in general, employees believed that the culture dimension of collectivism was practiced when opportunity was given for them to at least voice their opinion, discuss, and argue prior to the leaders making the final call. In other words, they worked collectively in helping the leaders to weigh all of the pros and cons, in order to make the best possible decision.

c) Prioritising group interests over personal interests

The spirit of collectivism among members of the organisation leads to the willingness to go the extra mile, to the extent of sacrificing personal interest. This correlates with statements made by Lim (2001) and Abdullah (1996), which described Malaysians as accustomed to prioritising the group’s benefits compared to individual benefits. Such a communication practice was evidenced when the groups’ interests were prioritised regardless of the negative outcomes on the individual’s side. This includes when the CCT members were willing to sacrifice promotions and other benefits offered to them should they be in other departments, while they worked in the Shaping CSB journey.

5.1.3 How is the Malaysian culture dimension of Harmony evidenced in communication practices?

The data presented in Chapter 4 indicated that the culture dimension of Harmony was evidenced in communication practices during Shaping CSB through two main attributes: 1) avoiding confrontations and 2) face saving. To
provide context for the following presentation of the summary of findings, it is useful to revisit the summarised communication practices in relation to these attributes. Table 5.3 (earlier labelled as Table 4.7) will guide the summary of the findings:

**Table 5.3: Communication practices to display HARMONY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Communication Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding Confrontations</td>
<td>1. Protecting identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Negotiating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Keeping silent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Giving politically correct answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Apologising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face Saving</td>
<td>6. Sugar coating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Saying ‘Yes’ to a ‘No’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Tolerating errors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The communication practices evidenced in these attributes are now summarised:

1) **Avoiding confrontations**

As highlighted in Chapter 2, Hofstede and Hofstede’s (2005) study has showed that Malaysians are categorised as an uncertainty avoidance society, in which the culture inhibits assertive and confrontational behaviours in giving priority to harmony. In avoiding confrontations, protecting identity by customising communication platforms according to the target groups was done so employees feel free to speak up and share ideas with regard to the change. Thus, negotiation between employees at all levels was also seen to be practiced in a quest to reach common consensus that could prevent arguments. Thus, negotiation was also practiced by leaders when communicating with employees, in encouraging the employees to share their thoughts, while preventing confrontations.
In addition, to ensure that confrontation is either avoided or minimised, it was advisable for especially the junior or subordinate to keep silent when there was an argument, especially involving superiors. On the other hand, leaders do not keep silent in avoiding confrontations, but give a politically correct, safe answer. Such a communication practice on the leader’s part was conducted with the intention to soothe things down and stops a confrontation from occurring or being prolonged. Finally, apologising, especially prior to revealing bad news or admitting mistakes, was also another communication practice employed in avoiding confrontation.

2) **Face saving**

Because Malaysians give priority to maintaining harmony (Lim, 2001; Abdullah, 1996), it was observed that disagreement was relayed through indirect communication practices such as sugar coating. The practice of sugar coating was also for the sake of long-term relationships. From the data, it was revealed that there was a concern for the possibility of having to work again with a person who held a grudge or was unfavourable. As such, any disagreement should be communicated in subtle way like sugar coating, so that person would not take ‘revenge’ in the future.

It was identified from the data that the ‘real truth’ or what they actually felt was withheld, which is another way of keeping harmony, by saying ‘yes’ to a ‘no’. This is in agreement with what (Abdullah, 1996; Mansor & Kennedy, 2000; Fontaine & Richardson, 2003; Manshor et al., 2003) highlighted: as openness is unfavoured in the community, rejecting or refusing would be hard to notice, as a ‘yes’ could have been said to save someone’s face in order to maintain harmony.

In addition, the data also revealed that leaders were also seen to tolerate errors in saving the employees’ face, in order to maintain harmony. This relates to the statement made by Abdullah (1996), who hypothesised that errors were tolerated in reflecting Malaysians’ love of peace.
5.1.4 Conclusion

It was learned from the literature that culture, the shared knowledge of beliefs, practices, norms, and values, which are accepted and practiced by members of particular nations, can be manifested through communication practices in an organisation. Thus, the data presented in Chapter 4 indicates that the Malaysian culture dimensions of respect, collectivism, and harmony have influenced how communication practices are displayed.

The culture dimension of respect was evidenced in communication practices as employees acknowledged the seniority, knowledge, and experiences of the leaders. The culture dimension of collectivism was evidenced in communication practices as members of the organisation showed their loyalty to the organisation, as well as their leaders. It was also evidenced when members of the organisation orchestrated their cohesiveness and placed the organisation’s interest over their personal interests. Finally, the culture dimension of harmony was evidenced as they avoided confrontations and hid the truth. Drawing from the findings of this research, it is proposed that the Malaysian culture dimensions of respect, collectivism, and harmony can be evidenced in eighteen communication practices, as listed in the following table:

Table 5.4: Summary of communication practices used to display Malaysian culture dimensions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication practices</th>
<th>RESPECT</th>
<th>COLLECTIVISM</th>
<th>HARMONY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Acknowledging status quo</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Obeying orders and directions</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Name dropping</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Keeping silent</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Avoiding from questioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Having separate conversation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Adding not criticising</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Sugar Coating</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Instilling sense of belonging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Taking sides</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Cooperating</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 IMPLICATION FOR THEORIES

This study has specifically shed light into how Malaysian culture influences communication practices in organisations. Even though existing Malaysian studies have looked at culture values, no specific studies have looked at how such values (which are addressed as culture dimensions throughout this thesis) influence the communication practices.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, studies on the managerial practices in the organisation highlights that ‘the culture of a country has a strong influence on the way people behave’ in which it ‘plays a significant role in determining and developing the culture of an organisation, its expected norms and practices’ (Abdullah, 1996, p. 3). In other words, it is suggested that national culture, which is manifested in practices (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), might influence the way organisational members communicate as our ‘behaviour at work is a continuation of behaviour learned earlier’ (Hofstede, 1991, p. 4).

Based on the previous assertion, it is suggested that this research contributes to the previous cultural work, especially in the Malaysian context, in which evidences of the Malaysian culture dimensions of respect, collectivism, and harmony were displayed in the eighteen communication practices identified: 1) acknowledging the status quo, 2) obeying orders and directions, 3) name dropping, 4) keeping silent, 5) avoidance of questioning, 6) having separate conversation, 7) adding, not criticising, 8) sugar coating, 9) instilling sense of belonging, 10) taking sides, 11) cooperating, 12) sacrificing personal interest, 13) protecting identity, 14) negotiating, 15) saying ‘yes’ to a ‘no’, 16) giving
politically correct answers, 17) apologising, and 18) tolerating errors. In other words, the findings show that national culture does influence organisational culture, and can be evidenced through communication practices.

5.3 IMPLICATION FOR PRACTICE

As mentioned earlier, this research was conducted to identify how culture dimensions were displayed in communication practices. The findings as presented in Chapter 4 and summarised earlier in this chapter will be highly relevant for academics and practitioners in understanding how Malaysian culture can influence how people communicate in organisations. This is especially important when more overseas companies are looking at venturing in Malaysia, as the country grows into one of the world’s top investment destinations.

Since this research was conducted in an organisation undergoing change, insights from these findings will help us to understand the organisational challenges that rely on communication, for example during organisational change. In other words, the findings provide insights into how communication practices may be used as a strategy to disseminate change in the organisation. Thus, data findings will be relevant to practitioners to understand the impact of culture on communication practices across countries.

5.4 LIMITATIONS

As this is a single organisation case study research, replications of results across other organisations or industries are limited. As such, the replication of the results across organisations outside of Malaysia will be the main limitation of this research. Nevertheless, the use of a single case in this research context allows the findings to be used by any Malaysian organisation undergoing change, or individuals seeking to better understand Malaysian culture influences.
on communication practices, as the single case study has allowed for a thorough investigation in understanding the key issues.

Given the fact that this is a qualitative research, researcher’s bias is another potential research limitation as this method opens the opportunity for bias in data interpretations. Thus, the researcher’s nationality as a Malaysian and previous working experience in one of the subsidiaries related to the studied organisation also contributed to the research bias. Nonetheless, the use of interviews, observations, independent judges’ evaluation, as well as supporting the findings with the literature helped to minimise this potential bias.

5.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The primary concern of this research is to look at the ways in which Malaysian culture dimensions of respect, collectivism, and harmony are displayed in communication practices. This is valuable to contribute to understanding organisational challenges that rely on communication, for example during organisational change. This research discovered that these national culture dimensions were evidenced, and have influenced the communication practices in the organisation studied. In his interview, Hofstede and Fink (2007) state that national cultures are not easily changeable. However, he also emphasises that organisational cultures are changeable as they are less deeply rooted, causing people to easily acquire a new culture when they move from one organisation to the other. Therefore, it can be suggested that the studies that could be conducted according to these research findings could include:

1) The impact of changing organisational cultures, which emerged from the national culture;

2) The impact of national culture on organisational communication practice.

On another note, a study on the influence of culture on the Malaysian workforce by Ahmad (2001) raised a concern that there is a possibility for the younger
generation of Western-educated Malaysians to not uphold the culture as much as the old generation, despite still respecting the cultural values. As such, this opens another door for future research, to examine the difference between the commitment between Malaysian-educated and Western-educated employees in upholding the culture dimensions highlighted in this research, as they communicate in organisations.

As this research looked at only one organisation as a case study, it is suggested that future research should consider conducting comparative studies, either between two organisations in the same country, or between organisations of different countries. Perhaps a comparative study between two different cultures like the Western and Eastern worlds can be conducted, in exploring the influence that national cultures have on organisational change.

5.6 CONCLUSION

This research has been conducted to explore how Malaysian culture dimensions are evidenced in communication practices, in an organisational change context. In exploring the communication practices and techniques used, interviews and observations were conducted to further understand how these culture dimensions identified from the literature are displayed in communication during organisational change. The findings shared serve as guidance for the practitioners to further understand the communication behaviours of Malaysians (and its neighbouring Asian countries) in organisations. Nonetheless, as noted earlier, further research should be conducted to further explore the relations between culture, communication, and organisational change.
Bibliography


Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Letter
Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaires
Appendix C: Observation Guidelines Sheets
Appendix D: Data Collection timelines
Appendix A: Consent Letter
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION for QUT RESEARCH PROJECT

The Influence of National Culture on Communication Practices: A Case Study on Malaysian Organisation

Research Team Contacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dr Jennifer Bartlett (Supervisor)</th>
<th>Sabrina Amir (Masters Student)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>+ 61(07) 3138 1237</td>
<td>Australia: +61 (07) 3138 1483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:j.bartlett@qut.edu.au">j.bartlett@qut.edu.au</a></td>
<td>Malaysia: +6 (017) 669 3009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Description

This project is being undertaken as part of a Masters dissertation for Sabrina Amir. The project is funded by Queensland University of Technology. The funding body will not have access to the data obtained during the project.

The purpose of this project is to investigate the ways in which Malaysian culture is displayed during communication.

Participation

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you can withdraw from participation at any time during the project without comment or penalty. Your decision to participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with QUT. Your participation will involve:

1. An interview, which is expected to last 30-45 minutes and will be conducted in the workplace.

   and/or

2. Observation – the researcher will be observing and/or recording as you perform your daily routine as a member of your organisation.

Expected benefits

It is expected that this project will not directly benefit you. However, a greater understanding of how culture influence the way employees communicate during change may benefit change planners, especially those in the Internal Communication department.
**Risks**

There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this project.

**Confidentiality**

All comments and responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially. The names of individual persons are not required in any of the responses.

With the participant’s consent, the interview will be audio and/or video recorded for transcription. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the recording and anonymity of participants will be protected at all times.

**Consent to Participate**

Interviews: We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate.

Observations: Due to the nature of the project a verbal consent mechanism will be used.

**Questions / further information about the project**

Please contact the researcher team members named above to have any questions answered or if you require further information about the project.

**Concerns / complaints regarding the conduct of the project**

QUT is committed to researcher integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Officer on 3138 2340 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The Research Ethics Officer is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.
CONSENT FORM for QUT RESEARCH PROJECT

The Influence of National Culture on Communication Practices: A Case Study on Malaysian Organisation

Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- have read and understood the information document regarding this project
- have had any questions answered to your satisfaction
- understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team
- understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty
- understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Officer on 3138 2340 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project
- agree to participate in the project
- understand that the project will include audio and/or video recording

Name __________________________________________

Signature ________________________________________

Date __________ / __________ / __________
Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Questionnaires
Interview Focus:
Looking for evidences of how Malaysian culture values of Respect, Collectivism and Harmony are displayed during the communication of change.

1) Intro (for ice-breaking):
   1. How long have you been working here?
   2. Is this your first job?
   3. Could you describe what do you do here? – Your position, roles…
   4. What made you decided to join the company?
   5. What is your opinion towards communication at work?
   6. How important is communication to you, in relations to your responsibilities in the company?

2) Understanding the environment (what is currently happening in the organisation):
   1. Are you aware of the changes that your organisation is going through?
   2. In your understanding, what is this change all about?

3) Understanding the communication behaviours in the organisation:
   1. How was the change-related information being communicated to you and the rest of the organisation?
   2. What sorts of communication channels used by the management to communicate the changes to the employees?

4) Understanding the influence of culture in communication: Respect, Collectivism and Harmony
   1. When the change was first introduced, did everyone get the information at the same time, or was it communicated in stages – for instance was it done from top management, to middle management, before it reached the employees on the ground?
   2. Were you or the other employees allowed or given the opportunity to give feedback on the change plans or the implementation
   3. For certain change to happen, who normally has the responsibility to instructs/introduces/communicate change in the organisation?
   4. In respect to the seniority in terms of age, position and years of service, how do people criticise or voice their opinion/feedback?
5. In your opinion, how would your communication style be if you are in this situation:
   a. talking to someone senior or younger than you are in terms of age and position
   b. apologise as a subordinate/superior over mistake that YOU did?
   c. apologise as a subordinate/superior over mistake that SOMEONE ELSE did?

6. With regards to change, are the plans/directions/decisions related to change collectively discussed across the organisation before introduced to the employees?

7. If the change introduced give more benefits to the organisation at large than you as an individual, would you voice out your dissatisfaction? If you do, how would you do it?

8. If you are responsible in communicating change, would you prefer and find it easy to convey to:
   a. a group of seniors (age and/or position) whom you know?
   b. a group of subordinates (age and/or position) whom you have least contact with?

9. How hard or easy it is to say ‘no’ to a ‘yes’, to your superior as compared to your subordinate?

10. Face saving, a situation when you try to not embarrass others especially in the crowd, is normally seen/practiced when people “sugar-coating” the statements they make. What is your opinion on this?

5) Closure:

1. In the scale 1–10 (1 is worst, 10 is excellent), how would you describe the change communication process in this company, and why?

2. If you are given the opportunity to change the communication processes in your organisation with regards to achieving the change goals, what would you change and why?

3. With regards to change, what would be the most successful communication processes practiced in your organisation and why?

4. In your opinion, do you feel your communication style is influenced by the culture you live in?
Appendix C: Observation Guidelines Sheet
**OBSERVATION: Office set up / environment**

Date: _______________  Venue: _______________  Number of employees: ____M ____F

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SUPERIOR (GM/SM/M)</td>
<td>SUBORDINATE (EXEC/NON-EXEC)</td>
<td>SUPERIOR (GM/SM/M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitting arrangement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who control the communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do they interact with one another</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred channel of communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Style/behaviour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### OBSERVATION: Meeting description

**Date:**

**Venue:**

**Number of attendees:** ____M ____F

**Chairman:** M/F

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>FOCUS</strong></th>
<th><strong>Dialogues related to culture:</strong> How they show R, C, H</th>
<th><strong>Behaviours related to culture:</strong> How they show R, C, H</th>
<th><strong>NOTES</strong> (who said or did)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Used</strong></td>
<td>* salutation * choice of words * intonation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pattern of Interactions</strong></td>
<td>* speaker vs listener * criticising * speaking up ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dissemination of Information</strong></td>
<td>* top down * bottom up * transparency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discussions</strong></td>
<td>* opportunity to give ideas * getting consensus * openness * agreeing * choice of words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflicts</strong></td>
<td>* reason for avoiding * criticising * correcting * apologising * speaking vs Listening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D: Data Collection Timeline
Table 3.6: Data collection timeline – May to June 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday 12/5</th>
<th>Tuesday 13/5</th>
<th>Wednesday 14/5</th>
<th>Thursday 15/5</th>
<th>Friday 16/5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethics approved</td>
<td>Communication with HSP on planning for data collection</td>
<td>Communication with HSP on planning for data collection</td>
<td>Communication with HSP on planning for data collection</td>
<td>Communication with HSP on planning for data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 19/5</td>
<td>Tuesday 21/5</td>
<td>Wednesday 22/5</td>
<td>Thursday 23/5</td>
<td>Friday 24/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with HSP’s office for interviews</td>
<td>Working with HSP’s office for interviews</td>
<td>Working with HSP’s office for interviews</td>
<td>Working with HSP’s office for interviews</td>
<td>Working with HSP’s office for interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 27/5</td>
<td>Tuesday 28/5</td>
<td>Wednesday 29/5</td>
<td>Thursday 30/5</td>
<td>Friday 31/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews: 10:00am: M3 &amp; E4</td>
<td>Interviews: 10:00am: E5</td>
<td>Interviews: 10:00am: E5</td>
<td>Interviews: 10:00am: E5</td>
<td>Interviews: 10:00am: E5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 2/6</td>
<td>Tuesday 3/6</td>
<td>Wednesday 4/6</td>
<td>Thursday 5/6</td>
<td>Friday 6/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews and discussion: 10:00am – 3pm: SM2 (understanding change and the organisation’s way forward)</td>
<td>Interviews: 10:30am: E1 12:00noon: S1</td>
<td>Interview: 10:00am: S2</td>
<td>Interviews: 10:00am: E4 11:30am: E3</td>
<td>Public Holiday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 9/6</td>
<td>Tuesday 10/6</td>
<td>Wednesday 11/6</td>
<td>Thursday 12/6</td>
<td>Friday 13/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview: 2:30pm: updates with GM1</td>
<td>Interview: 10:00am: E6</td>
<td>9:00am – Dpt. Meeting 2:30pm – Unit 1 Meeting 4:30pm – Unit 2 Meeting</td>
<td>2:30pm – Unit 1 Meeting 4:30pm – Unit 2 Meeting</td>
<td>Workshop: 8:30am – 5:30pm Interview: 6:00pm: E2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 16/6</td>
<td>Tuesday 17/6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews: 11:00am – GM3 3:00pm – GM4 5:30pm – GM1</td>
<td>Interview: 6:00am ETD KLIA 22:30 ETA BNE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>