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“Being Malaysian does not mean being Malaysian” - Cultural stereotypes is a hindrance to modern hospitality management

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Abstract

This research revolves around the field of cross cultural study whereby the researcher focuses on discovering exactly by what means and way cultural stereotypes influences management effectiveness in the Malaysian hospitality workforce. It was observed from past studies that organizations are taking necessary measures in forming strategies to overcome challenges formed by cultural stereotypes. However, the issue still exists due to the challenges in terms of adaptation and understanding of cultural differences among people. This indicates that the growing phenomenon of globalization has not spared culture, as the integration of different cultures leads to the act of “cultural stereotyping”, one of the many facets in the context of culture. This study consists of three research objectives; (i) to explore the understanding of management effectiveness among the Malaysian hospitality workforce, (ii) to examine and explore the means of influence cultural stereotypes has upon management effectiveness within the hotels in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and (iii) to identify the gaps of cultural stereotyping as being a hindrance to modern hospitality management within the hotels in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Methodologically, this study employed a qualitative approach whereby the samples were chosen based on snowball and criterion method. Data collected were then coded using In Vivo and Initial coding of which then were analyzed using Thematic analysis. This study proved the existence of contradictory evidence as oppose to the extensive literature from previous studies with regard to this research area. Therefore, findings from this study can be made as a comparison to prior studies with its aim in exploring for an in-depth understanding of what lays behind the different perspectives as previous studies were mostly conducted in Western settings. It is undeniable that comparisons made will bring to light of how cultural differences shape the mind set of individuals and societies alike.

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1. Introduction

Since the Industrial Revolution, globalization has been linked to a variety of global activities. It became a universal term which refers to the breaking of barriers that enables people, companies, organizations, and nations to interact and integrate with one another (Northouse, 2010). This phenomenon has fairly impacted the environment, culture, political situation, economic status and the physical wellbeing of humans in the different societies around the world. Consequently, the world is becoming global whereby people of different backgrounds are interacting and working with one another which results in the increased of multinational organizations, international trade, and worldwide telecommunications systems as well as cultural exchange (Northouse, 2010). However, it was observed that despite the benefits from globalization, there are challenges that have been brought to surface as well such as, the necessity to form effective multinational organizations, to identify and select fitting leaders for these entities as well as to manage organizations particularly with the culturally diverse employees (House & Javidan, 2004). This proves that culture has not been spared from the impacts of this growing phenomenon as the integration of different cultures bring about “cultural stereotyping”, one of the many facets in the context of culture. This act is inevitable as each culture has the tendency to judge the other based on theirs as the starting point. Stereotyping is not necessarily a negative action, seeing that if used appropriately, it could be a competitive advantage for organizations. However, if used in a negative approach, it could be a hindrance towards attaining an effective management in the organization. Consequently, it proves the relationship between globalization and culture of which calls the need to create competent leaders in cross-cultural awareness and practices (Northouse, 2006). This highlights the value of identifying leaders and top management that are able to minimize cultural stereotyping to ensure employees are able to work with one another in achieving organizational goals without causing any negative conflicts taking into consideration the diverse background. Cross-cultural management and a deeper insight of cultural influences has gained the focus of the world due to the increasing fast pace of globalization. This is further agreed by Adler and Bartholomew (1992) in their argument that to compete globally, leaders need to form five cross-cultural competencies consisting of the following characteristics; (i) the need for leaders to have suffice understanding of business, political and cultural environment worldwide (ii) the need to learn the perspectives, tastes, trends and technologies of the different cultures, (iii) the need to possess the ability to work in a diverse environment, (iv) leaders should adapt to live and communicate with other cultures from their own and (v) the necessity to learn to relate to other people of different cultures from the angle of equality instead of cultural superiority (Adler and Bartholomew, 1992).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Culture defined

Over the years, philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists are among the many that held continuous debates and discussions in determining the understanding of culture. Up till today, despite the number of studies on culture, a singular definition of culture is yet to be defined due to the volatility of its characteristics for cultural groupings that are constantly changing laid down by their environment. However, they remain constant to a certain extent in maintaining definite concept about the world and attitudes towards their fellow humans. According to Schneider & Barsoux (2003), culture as was proposed by anthropologist Margaret Mead can be understood as “a shared patterns of behavior”. Unfortunately, observing a particular behavior is not sufficient as one is not aware of the meaning behind the action as solitary action may carry different meanings and vice versa. The significance of meanings behind a behaviour results in another understanding of culture as was defined by Claude Levi-Strauss & Clifford Geertz (1971) whereby culture is seen as a “systems of shared meaning which is driven to explain a behavior or action observed”. However, for the usage of this research, the expression culture refers to “desirable and undersirable set of beliefs and values within a community of people as well as the formal and informal practices in support of the values” (Javidan & House, 2001, p. 292). The varying concepts and dimensions which fall under the umbrella of culture have made it into a complex and dynamic phenomenon. The complexity of understanding culture is due to the existence of two important elements occurring simultaneously; the current practices of cultures against the ideal practices of the particular culture (Javidan et al., 2005).

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