The Effect of Uncertainty Avoidance on Job Performance of Government Employees in Pahang Darul Makmur: A Regression Analysis Approach

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Received 15 August 2020; Accepted 30 September 2020; Available online 20 October 2020

Abstract: Research has shown that culture has an impact on how business activities are conducted in an organization. Thus, it affects the performance of the organization as a whole. The study focused specifically on Hofstede’s cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance in relation to job performance of government employees in Pahang Darul Makmur. Uncertainty avoidance is described as the degree to which a person in a society accommodates uncertainty and ambiguity in the environment. The regression analysis approach using IBM-SPSS AMOS 24 software was used to determine the effect of uncertainty avoidance on job performance. A total of 176 respondents were conveniently selected to participate in this study and answered a set of questionnaire. This study found that moderate positive relationship (r = .513, p = .000) existed between the two variables. In addition, there exists positive significance effect of uncertainty avoidance on job performance, whereby the uncertainty avoidance was identified as significant predictor (β = 0.453, p = .000). The result indicated that the greater the uncertainty avoidance culture, the employees tends to have positive motivation towards their job performance. The study concluded that majority of the government employees still depends heavily upon instructions and regulations set by the organization in the course of completing their tasks. They are not risk takers thus prefer greater structure in every situation and follow the norms of the society.

Keywords: Job performance; regression analysis approach; uncertainty avoidance

1. Introduction

Culture can be defined as the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, religion and roles that is acquired by a group of people in the course of generation through individual and group striving [1]. Malaysia known for being a multi-racial country faces challenges in all aspects of its daily administration to ensure that the cultures that it embraces are accepted and bring harmony to the people. Likewise, operating business in a multicultural country also requires the organization to understand the employees well in order to ensure good organizational performance. As stated by [2], culture is most likely to impact the business activities as well as the performance of an organization. The social norms and behaviors individuals believe they should or should not perform are influenced by culture. Therefore, it is of importance to be aware of culture because it can result in the
greater success of a business but will face failure if the people is not aware of it [2, 3].

The widely cited Geert Hofstede five culture dimensions was being used in this study focusing specifically on the dimension of uncertainty avoidance in order to understand better on the issues that might affect the employees’ job performance. Uncertainty avoidance refers to how a society accommodates uncertainty and ambiguity in the environment [4]. The people with high level of uncertainty avoidance tend to feel threatened by the unknown situation. In other words, they perceived that their life has many risks and they prefer to abide by the rules or follow the norms existing in the society. The notion could force the employees to only stick to the routines thus might affect the performance of the individuals as well as the organization in the long run [1, 2].

Based on [5], job performance refers to all the behaviours employees engage in while at work. More commonly, job performance can be referred to as how well someone performs at his or her work. According to [6], job performance consists of the observable behaviours that people do in their jobs that are relevant to the goals of the organization. It was found that job performance is a value that closely related with the organizational goals which employees focused directly and indirectly to accomplish it [6, 7].

With the need to keep up with a more liberal and modern way of doing business by the public sector, the researchers feel that it is imperative to understand the issues on uncertainty avoidance that might affect employees job performance in the long run. Thus, it might impede the progress of becoming a developed nation as aspired by the Government. Government employees were the respondents of this study as they are the building blocks of the nation. Hence, the study was conducted after the researchers found that there is no specific research conducted on the culture dimension of uncertainty avoidance and job performance among employees in government offices. The research was also conducted to determine the relationships between uncertainty avoidance and job performance. It is hoped that the findings would fill the gap that exists and contribute further to the body of knowledge.

2. Literature Review
Uncertainty avoidance reflects the degree at which a society or members of a society, tolerate, cope with or combats unpredictability otherwise known as the unknown or ambiguity [4, 8]. In organizations, unfamiliarity and ambiguity can be frightening notions for some employees as they refuse to face unusual ideas and wish to stay away from possible conflicts. They also believe that all problems should be handled with formal legislations [8]. Employees who possess these characteristics have high uncertainty avoidance while employees who are more open to new ideas and new situations and do not like intensive regulations have low uncertainty avoidance. Likewise, an organization that has countless legislations, regulations and laws in order to lower uncertainty and control everything is said to have high uncertainty avoidance whereby organization with low uncertainty avoidance believe that rules are not necessary to solve problems and people benefit from rules only when they need [8]. The notion was supported by [9] which stated that employees from high uncertainty avoidance cultures instill strict laws, formal reporting rules, safety and security measures in the organization and they expect subordinates to follow their plans. In general, the findings of the above research are consistent with the common nature of most government offices in Malaysia which still function using the hierarchical structure. A study conducted by [10] also confirmed that the Malays as the main ethnic group in Malaysia which formed a majority of the government employees are found to have high uncertainty avoidance.

According to [4, 8, 9], societies that exhibit strong uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) maintain rigid codes of belief and behaviour. They are intolerant of unorthodox behaviour and ideas and prefer to stay status quo. Meanwhile, societies with weak UAI maintain a more relaxed attitude, doing what they like to do the way they prefer them to be without being too concerned on the rules and principles. The studies have also found that people in high uncertainty avoidance culture tend to be more emotional and try to minimize the occurrence of unknown and unusual circumstances. Employees in this culture are more critical and will proceed with careful changes step by step by planning and implementing rules, laws and regulations. The findings were further supported by [11] which stated that people with high uncertainty avoidance only trust their family members and people who are closed to them. It would be difficult for outsiders to build relationships and gain the trust of these people. In contrast, people in low uncertainty avoidance cultures feel comfortable in unstructured situations or environment that changes constantly. They also prefer to have as few rules as possible in their daily lives [8, 9]. People in these cultures are more tolerant to change and they tend to be more accepting of risk. Employees with low uncertainty avoidance can solve problem easily as they are open for new suggestions and have high tolerance for ambiguity [11]. They are easier to establish relationships and gain trust with people from outside the community. On top of that, [12] stated that people with low uncertainty avoidance is most likely to be innovative people.

Job performance is a value that is closely related to the organizational goals which employees focused directly and indirectly to accomplish [7]. It is further defined as the overall expected value from employees’ behaviours carried out over the course of a set period of time or plainly stated, what people do at work. As stated by [6], job performance is an individual-level variable or something that a person does. An employee’s behaviour adds expected value to the organization which may be distinguished as helping or hindering an organization. Job performance commonly refers to how well someone performs at his or her work. The ability to perform effectively in the job requires good understanding of an up-to-date job description of the position. It also requires an understanding of the job performance requirements and standards that the employees are expected to meet [6]. Research by [13] shows that there is a positive relationship between uncertainty avoidance and employee’s job performance. In other words, employee’s performance will be much better if employee’s uncertainty avoidance is high.

3. Research Methodology
A set of questionnaire was developed and adapted from [4, 7] as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into three parts, namely Part A, B and C. Part A consisted of questions on Demographic Background of the respondents, Part B consisted of questions on Uncertainty Avoidance and Part C consisted of questions on Job Performance. A 10-point Likert-scale format range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree) was used for Part B and C. A total of 176 government employees working in Kuantan, Maran and Temerloh, Pahang Darul Makmur were randomly selected as the respondents for this study. The

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http://www.fazpublishing.com/ccam

Hasan et al., Communications in Computational and Applied Mathematics Vol. 2 No. 2 (2020) pp. 13-16
questionnaires were distributed and collected by industrial training students attached to various government agencies located in the above respective districts of Pahang Darul Makmur.

The data was analysed using IBM-SPSS AMOS 24 software which included the descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The objective of this study was to test the following hypothesis.

\[ H_1: \text{Uncertainty avoidance has significant effect on government employees' job performance} \]

4. Findings and Discussion

In total, 70 (39.77%) male and 106 (60.23%) female employees aged more than 20 years old were involved in this study. Of all the selected employees, 49 (27.84%) of them have more than 15 years of working experience, 38 (21.59%) have less than 2 years of working experience, 37 (21.02%) have between 5 to 9 years, 31 (17.61%) have between 10 to 14 years, and 21 (11.93%) of the employees have between 2 to 4 years of working experience. The data shows that majority of the respondents are senior employees of the government sectors, thus it is expected that their job performance should be better.

In this study, the job performance of the government employees, \( Y \), is predicted by uncertainty avoidance, \( X_1 \). As shown in Fig. 1, the R-squared of the model is 0.26 indicated that the predictor can explain 26% of the variation of employees’ uncertainty avoidance towards their job performance, and the other 74% is explained by other predictors. In addition, it can be determined that there existed a moderate positive significant effect of uncertainty avoidance towards job performance among government employees in Pahang Darul Makmur \( (r = .513, p = .000) \). This finding is consistent with previous study [13] stated that there is a positive relationship between uncertainty avoidance and employee's job performance.

On average, the selected employees tend to strongly agree that uncertainty avoidance dimension influenced their job performance \( (M = 7.55) \) as shown in Fig. 2. Therefore, the result in Table 1 indicates that uncertainty avoidance \( (X_1) \) became significant predictor towards job performance among government employees since the \( p \)-value obtained is less than 5% level of significance. In addition, there exists positive significant effect between the two variables, whereby the uncertainty avoidance dimension was identified as significant predictor \( (\beta = 0.453, p = .000) \), so that the hypothesis \( H_1 \) is supported. The result indicated that the greater uncertainty avoidance observed among respondents, more focused and confident the respondents were towards their jobs. Thus showing a more positive motivation in achieving good job performance. The finding is in line with [11, 13].

The estimated model obtained to show the effect of uncertainty avoidance on job performance of government employees in Pahang Darul Makmur is as follows:

\[ Y = 4.881 + 0.453X_1 \]  

The model is useful to predict the level of employees’ job performance for a given level of uncertainty avoidance. In addition, the positive slope value indicates that for any additional level of uncertainty avoidance, the employees’ job performance level expected to increase by 0.453 unit. Based on the model obtained, the level of employees’ job performance predicted as highly performed (almost at scale 9) when his level of uncertainty avoidance is also high (scale 8). The estimated predicted level of his job performance obtained from the following estimation:

\[ Y = 4.881 + 0.453(8) = 8.505 \sim 9 \]

In comparison, when the level of uncertainty avoidance of the employee is low (scale 1), the estimated predicted level of his job performance predicted as average (at scale 5), as shown in the following equation.

\[ Y = 4.881 + 0.453(1) = 5.334 \sim 5 \]

Therefore, the results highlighted the importance and implication of uncertainty avoidance towards job performance especially among government employees, which is consistent with [7]. The previous study stated that employees’ job performance is highly related to the organizational goals. It is also supported by [13], which stated that there is a positive relationship between uncertainty avoidance and employee’s job performance. Commonly, most government agencies in Malaysia are known to be highly bureaucratic and have tall command structure. Therefore, a high level of uncertainty avoidance is said to be common among the employees of the government sector. As such, the job performance of the government employees is expected to be higher when their uncertainty avoidance is higher.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concluded that majority of the government employees still depends heavily upon instructions and regulations set by the organization in the course of completing their tasks. They dislike uncommon environments and prefer
to stay away from anything risky with regards to their job. They still prefer greater structure in every situation and more conscious of the societal norms. Employees with higher level of uncertainty avoidance in an organization will be more prepared and tend to be more acquainting with the organization’s roles and procedures [13]. The notion is supported by [14] which stated that in a culture that is oriented toward tradition and stability, the individuals are more concerned about keeping the status quo and prefer not to disturb the existing order.

Meanwhile, the findings of [15] showed the opposite characteristics of employees which have lower level of uncertainty avoidance. They tend to be perceived as unreliable among other employees in the organization. Since the culture has no strict systematization of predictable rules or procedure, there is a possibility of employees not performing their tasks as they should. Thus, from the findings obtained in the study, it is recommended that equipping employees with periodic briefings and trainings about the organization be conducted as those initiatives would assist the employees to understand better the culture of the organization. The exposure on the organization’s daily operation focusing on the organization’s strategy as well as organization’s rules would result in a more coordinated and procedures compliant work culture, thus promoting better job performance among the employees.

References