



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**A CASE STUDY ON ISSUES RELATED TO ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN A  
SMALL AD HOC GROUP**

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**A CASE STUDY ON ISSUES RELATED TO ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN A  
SMALL AD HOC GROUP**

SARAVELLA ANAK SUNDAY

This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a  
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The project entitled ‘A Case Study on Issues Related to Ethnic Diversity in a Small Ad Hoc Group’ was prepared by Saravella anak Sunday and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science with Honours Human Resource Development.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### ***A CASE STUDY ON ISSUES RELATED TO ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN A SMALL AD HOC GROUP***

*Saravella anak Sunday*

*This study explores the issues related to ethnic diversity in small ad hoc group among students in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). An in-depth interview method was used as a main source for data collection to elicit in-depth information from the respondents. Documentary analysis was also carried out to enhance the findings of this research. Due to time constraints, limited respondents were interviewed, the researcher only managed to interview six respondents, which is still acceptable since the nature of the research are exploratory and descriptive. The findings from this study could be limited but yet interesting as the study on this issue is still rare. Findings indicated that the perceptions of students towards diversity are willing to work, develop openness and acceptance of ideas from others. The benefits from working in a diverse small ad hoc group are knowledge of others culture, different life experience, respect, develop tolerance, widen networking/relationship, develop cooperation and increase creativity. Sometimes, there are drawbacks from working in diverse group such as lack of communication lead to failure, no acceptance for others opinions, miscommunication and no understanding. The various efforts contributes by group members and group leaders are compromise, respect others opinion, do not touch on religion, avoid mentioning sensitive issues and tolerate with other members.*

## **ABSTRAK**

### ***SATU ANALISA KES BERKAITAN DENGAN KEPELBAGAIAN ETNIK DI DALAM KUMPULAN KECIL YANG BERSIFAT SEMENTARA (AD HOC)***

*Saravella anak Sunday*

Kajian ini dilaksanakan bertujuan untuk meneroka isu-isu yang berkaitan dengan kepelbagaian etnik di dalam kumpulan kecil bersifat sementara(ad hoc) di kalangan para pelajar di Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). Temubual secara mendalam telah digunakan sebagai metodologi utama untuk mengumpul data sejajar untuk mendapatkan informasi secara menyeluruh daripada responden. Analisa dokumentari juga telah dilaksanakan untuk meningkatkan hasil dapatan dari kajian ini. Memandangkan masa yang tidak mencukupi, responden yang di temubual adalah terhad; pengkaji hanya menebual 6 orang responden, dan ini masih diterima kerana ini memang sifat kepada kajian yang dilakukan secara mendalam dan deskriptif. Hasil dapatan kajian ini mungkin ada kekurangan namun, kajian ini adalah menarik walaupun hasil dapatan kajian lepas masih samar. Hasil dapatan kajian menunjukkan perspektif pelajar terhadap isu kepelbagaian adalah sanggup bekerja, membina sifat keterbukaan dan boleh menerima idea antara satu dengan yang lain. Manfaat bekerja di dalam kumpulan kecil sementara yang pelbagai adalah mengenali budaya ahli-ahli yang lain, pengalaman hidup yang berbeza, hormat-menghormati, membina toleransi, meluaskan perhubungan, membina semangat kerjasama dan meningkatkan daya kreativiti. Namun, masih terdapat kelemahan untuk bekerja di dalam sesebuah kumpulan kecil yang bersifat sementara. Antara masalahnya adalah seperti, kurang komunikasi di antara ahli, tidak boleh menerima pandangan ahli kumpulan yang lain, kesalahfahaman, dan kurang sikap memahami. Pelbagai sumbangan dan langkah boleh diambil oleh ahli kumpulan dan ketua kumpulan seperti tolak-ansur, hormat kepada pandangan ahli kumpulan, jangan menyentuh isu agama, elakkan daripada menyentuh isu-isu sensitif dan bertoleransi antara satu dengan lain.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter covers the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives and definition of important terms, contribution of the study and the limitation of the study.

## 1.1 Background of the study

Globally, diversity is a big issue in any organization. With the increasing age of the “baby boomers” and the inclusion of “generation X” into organization life, employees of diverse ages and background will have to work with one another for example, the students and lecturers have to coexist and put aside their differences for a common purpose and that is education and knowledge.

The study of diverse groups from different cultures, backgrounds and national origin will help increase group effectiveness. Thus, diversity impacted how people work together and has a role in increasing the group effectiveness and efficiency.

The study of diversity in small ad hoc groups among human resources development students proposed is projected to take the challenge in realizing the 51<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Independence Day Motto which is “*Perpaduan Teras Kejayaan*”. This is an effort to promote diversity in the field of education and helps develop students so that they have positive attitude towards diversity. Previous studies have shown that diverse work groups can be more effective, creative and could make better decisions than homogeneous groups (McGrath, 1984; McLeod & Lobel, 1992, cited in Shaw & Barret-Power, 1998).

An attitude toward cultural diversity is defined as one’s feeling, thought or disposition about the differences among people with respect to race, class, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, religious affiliation, age, language, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, and other human attributes (Grogan & Eshelman, 1998; Stanley, 1996, cited in Zhai & Scheer, 2004). Malaysia is a country where the people are diverse in term of ethnic, racial and religious

backgrounds. In order to maintain peace and unity in this multicultural society, Malaysians must possess cross-cultural skills, knowledge and sensitivity. To be more specific, students in University of Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) should possess those skills in order to become excellent students not only in academics but also interpersonal skills and ability to coexist with other students who are diverse from them.

In addition, diverse in terms of gender, age, race, ethnicity, national origin and other personal characteristics of members in groups could also influence the group effectiveness. According to Magjuka and Baldwin (1991), they found that within-group diversity had positive effects on group performance in a sample of 72 manufacturing teams.

Diversity not only projected in schools and universities, but also in business organizations. Konrad (2003) has stated three primary arguments in the business case for diversity. Firstly, the competition for the best talent requires organizations to reach out and embrace an increasingly diverse labor pool. Secondly, a global economy requires that organizations have a diverse workforce so that they can effectively deal with an increasingly diverse customer base. Thus, a diverse workforce can lead to an increased market share, whereas lack of diversity in the workforce can lead to a shrinking market share. A third argument is that demographic diversity unleashes creativity, innovation, and improved group problem solving, which in turn enhances the competitiveness of the organization.

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

It is a good attempt to study the problems in diversity among students in FCSHD due to diversity has become increasingly important factor in the workforce and it is crucial for them to prepare themselves to work together in cross-national teams. In FCSHD, the students are from different backgrounds, race, ethnicity and place of origin. To work together better in diverse society, the students need to have positive attitude toward cultural diversity.

**Previous research** revealed that students with a higher level of global perspective tended to have a more positive attitude toward diversity. This research coincides with Pike's (2002) conclusions, which noted that students who had more opportunities to interact with diverse group of students were open to diversity. According to Zhai & Sheer (2004), student who had more contact with people from other countries were more likely to have a heightened level global perspective and a more positive attitude toward cultural diversity. Although this research has been done, caution should be taken not to over generalize the results. This research only focused on summer 226 agriculture students at College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at the Ohio State Universities (OSU), 1999. Therefore, the present research studied the perception toward diversity in UNIMAS.

**Most research** focuses on team heterogeneity in school teams and its relations with team support and team effectiveness (Drach-Zahavy & Somech, 2002). The results of the study imply that, for school teams at least, team-level considerations should include enhancing gender and diversity function but limiting team-tenure diversity (Drach-Zahavy & Somech, 2002). Although there is research on team heterogeneity in school teams, but there are lack of research on the benefits and drawbacks of diversity in small ad hoc groups in schools and universities. Furthermore, several analyses of advantages and disadvantages of diversity had been



conducted but the results have been ambiguous as to whether an organization can benefit from diversity or not (Muhr, 2006). Thus, this encouraged the researcher to explore further on this issue.

A study by Shaw & Barret-Power on the effects of diversity on small work group processes and performance implicate that there are several factors that could possibly influence diversity in work group. But, there is no study on various efforts that contribute to unity conducted on small ad hoc work group. Moreover, the journals and books obtainable which focus to enhance the unity of the groups are extremely rare. Hence, this research interested to further study this issue.

### **1.3 Objective**

#### **General objective:**

- To study the perceptions of small ad hoc groups members on the issues of ethnic diversity.

#### **Specific objectives:**

- i. To study the pros and cons of ethnically diversified small ad hoc groups.
  - a. To explore the benefits/advantages of diversified small ad hoc group
  - b. To explore the drawbacks/disadvantages of diversified small ad hoc group
- ii. To study the various efforts by group members that contributes to unity in diversity among group members.
- iii. To study the various efforts by group leaders that contributes to enhance the unity in diversity among group members.

## **1.4 Definition of terms**

### **1.4.1 Diversity**

#### **1.4.1.1 Conceptual definition**

Diversity refers to any mixture of items characterized by differences and similarities (Thomas, 1996).

#### **1.4.1.2 Operational definition**

In this research, the focus is only on the diversity in term of racial diversity.

### **1.4.2 Small Group**

#### **1.4.2.1 Conceptual definition**

Small group is a gathering of people interacting and communicating interpersonally over time in order to reach a goal (Cathcart, 1996).

#### **1.4.2.2 Operational definition**

In this study, small group refer to a group of student that gather together to form a team to accomplish their assignment. The number of group member range from three to ten.

### **1.4.3 Ethnicity**

#### **1.4.3.1 Conceptual definition**

The character, quality or condition of ethnic group membership, based on an identity with and/or a consciousness of group belonging that is differentiated from others by symbolic 'markers' and is rooted in bonds to a shared past and perceived ethnic interests (Burgess, 1978 cited in Eller, 1999).

#### **1.4.3.2 Operational definition**

Ethnicity in this research refers to the race or group the student belong. An example here is Malay from Sarawak, Malay from Johor, Iban, Kenyah, Melanau, Kayan, Kelabit and so on and so forth.

### **1.5 Conclusion**

This chapter explained the background, statement of the problem and objectives of the study. Besides, it also described the important terms that are used in this research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

There are many previous studies on diversity and small group and the findings are generally in the field of education and business. This chapter covered the previous studies that have been done and the related theories. Perceptions, benefits and drawbacks on diversity are discussed specifically.

## **2.2 Review of related theories**

There are various theories that are looked in this study. Some of which are similarity-attraction theory, social-identity and self categorization theory and information-processing and problem-solving approaches.

### **2.2.1 Similarity-Attraction Theory**

Newcomb's theory of social attraction (Newcomb, 1968) is basically derived from Heider's theory of cognitive balance. It explains that similarity on attributes, values and beliefs will facilitate interpersonal attraction and liking, and vice versa. Liking and similarity enhance the attraction and create a strain toward symmetry. According to Rosenbaum (1986), people will avoid communicating with those they dislike or with those who hold opinions or views differing from their own as a mean of reducing the strain produced by the disagreements. A study by Newcomb (1961) support Rosenbaum's statement when he found that college students have predictable pattern of friendships by identifying it from the similarity of their attitudes.

Byrne (1971) confirmed that individuals are more attracted to others who they believe have similar attitudes to them and rate those individuals as more intelligent, knowledgeable, and well-adjusted. Triandis (1960) found that members of culturally dissimilar groups were less likely to be attracted to one another and face more difficulty in communicating with each other than members of culturally homogeneous groups did. Hoffman & Mainer (1961) also support the statement and found that racially diverse groups were keen to have more process related problems than racially homogeneous group did. In addition to that, similarity-attraction effects have been found for a number of less visible variables including attitudes and socioeconomic status (Byrne; (1966); Lincoln & Miller, 1979).

In organization term, Schneider's model (1987) argued that organizations will naturally evolve toward a state of homogeneity through the process of attraction, selection, and attrition. The process begins as individuals are attracted to join organizations whose members, they believe, are similar to themselves. Because current organizational members will prefer to select members who are similar to themselves, the screening process will tend toward the selection of like others (Chatman, 1991). As the new members join the organization and get to know tenured members, the similarity–attraction process works to increase the homogeneity that already exists or to weed out the overly dissimilar members. Over time, this process creates more homogeneous work groups, with homogeneity defined in terms of individual-difference variables such as values, attitudes, and personality factors (George, 1990; Jackson et al., 1991; Premack & Wanous, 1985).

### **2.2.2 Social-identity and self categorization Theory**

Self-categorization (Turner, 1985) is the process by which people define their self-concepts in terms of membership in social groups. This is primarily a cognitive process of categorization in which individuals are postulated to have a hierarchical structure of self-categorizations at the personal, group, and subordinate, or overarching, levels. Self-categorizations at a particular level become salient as a result of the “fit” of the category (ratio of between-group differences to within-group similarities) and the degree to which contextual factors make the category accessible. Self-concepts are activated and provoke specific behaviors depending on the characteristics of others who are present in a situation (Markus & Cross, 1990).

Thus, the key issue here is that the group context is predicted to shape the self-view of group members (Mannix & Neale, 2005). While social-identity theory (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel, 1981) provides both a cognitive and motivational perspective on the origins and consequences of group identification. Identification

with a group involves two key components: Membership in the group is an emotionally significant aspect of the individual's self-concept, and the collective interests of the group are of concern to the individual above and beyond their implications for personal self-interests (Brewer, 1991, 1995). Solely, social identity arises from a process of social categorization in which individuals put themselves and others into salient social categories that allow comparison among the resulting groups (Mannix & Neal, 2005).

Since one of the key motivating factors in social-identity categorization is the bolstering and maintenance of self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the act of social categorization activates differential expectations for in-group and out-group members. Social categories, in effect, create "us-them" distinctions. When people are judged as out-group members, they are seen as overly homogeneous, while in-group members tend to be seen as more heterogeneous than average. This distinction creates the atmosphere for stereotyping: Out-group members are stereotypically judged more quickly, and with more confidence, than in-group members are (Mackie & Smith, 1998).

Stereotypes shape the expectations group members have about one another's behavior and may, in turn, lead to differential treatment of group members (McGrath et al., 1995). Thus, in this expectations approach to diversity, demographic factors are not assumed to be linked to systematic differences in underlying attributes such as knowledge, values, and beliefs; however, they are likely to trigger inferences regarding those underlying attributes. The end result is likely to be biased behavior directed toward out-group members and favoritism and preference directed toward in-group members (Brewer, 1979, 1995; Schopler & Insko, 1992).