Diversity in the Workplace: A Study in 2 Organisations in Kuching, Sarawak

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Abstract – This study was conducted to seek the perceptions of employees in relation to the issue of ethnic diversity in the workplace. Particularly this study was design to answer four specific research questions related to perceptions of employees on issue of diversity in their workplace; issues that hinders unity in diversity; benefits of diversity in the workplace; and ways to promote unity in diversity in their workplace. A survey questionnaire was used to collect data from sixteen informants who were the employees of two organisations in Kuching, Sarawak. The results indicated the challenges that inhibit unity amongst employees of diverse ethnic groups, benefits and suggestions to improve togetherness in the workplace. In addition some findings supported the previous related past researches (such as one by Miller & Rowney (1999); Chemers (1995); Greenberg (2004); Saji (2004); Henry & Evans (2007); Green Lopez, Wysocki & Kepner (2009)), and some findings indicated new findings on the issues of ethnic diversity that revealed the workplace diversity allows individual to have better understanding of other ethnic, in a sense of their culture, foods, tradition and beliefs. It is suggested that the future study on related issue to discuss on the history of the diversity practices and the comparison between diversity practices in different places.

Keywords – ethnic; diversity; effective management.

INTRODUCTION

For the past few years, there were limited studies conducted to look for employees' opinion on how to deal with the diversity issues in Malaysia, specifically in Sarawak. Despite the fact that some researchers such as Selvarajah and Meyer (2008) who discuss the Malaysian's culture from the national perspectives, their study was not enough to explain the diversity issues in the context of Malaysia as a whole, as respondents used were just representing the three main ethnic groups of Malay, Chinese and Indian from the Peninsular Malaysia.

Diversity has become a controversy issue in today's business because conflicts always happen in a diverse group or team. In other words, diversity in the workplace could create problem for organisations (ButtersReed & Moore, 1992; Gotterfredson, 1992; Nametz & Christensen, 1996, as cited in Miller & Rowney,