

**The relationship between team
characteristics with team
performance
in Malaysian teams**

by

Siok Sim Agatha HENG

MBA(University of Hull,UK.)
BBus (RMIT, Melbourne, Australia)
Dip. in Counseling Psychology (De La Salle, Phillipines)

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University of Technology, Sydney

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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Siok Sim, Agatha HENG

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ABSTRACT

Organisations depend on teams to implement its strategies and enables organisations to be flexible and responsive in the competitive global environment. Teams contribute to the organisation while at the same time providing opportunities to team members to develop relationships within team. Teams are viewed as a major source of ‘environmental forces’ that help shape team members (McGrath and Kravitz, 1982). Previous research by Taggard and Brown (2001) shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between team members’ behaviour and team performance (e.g., participation and involving others, goal setting, feedback, team commitment, reaction to conflict, addressing conflict, averting conflict and communication). There is noticeably a lack of research on team behaviours in Malaysia.

The first objective of this thesis is to explore the relationships between team performance and ‘behavioural’ characteristics in the Manufacturing and Telecommunication industries in Malaysia. Past findings suggest that ‘behavioural’ characteristics of well developed team tend to possess certain ‘behavioural’ characteristics (e.g., Wheelan and Hochberger, 1996; Woodcock and Francis, 1996). The literature (e.g., Hoigaard, et. al., 2006; Stevens and Champion, 1994) has shown that that ‘behavioural’ characteristics such as role clarity, role satisfaction, liking, goal agreement, openness to change and differences, participative leadership style, division of task into sub-teams, informal leadership role, effective handling of intra-team conflict and inter-team conflict are critical in team performance.

The second objective seeks to investigate the relationship between team ‘structural’ factors (such as team size, team types, organisation size) and team behaviours. Team structure is viewed as ‘inputs’ to team behaviour (Gist et al., 1987). Goal contribution by teams (e.g., Hoegl and Parboteeah, 2003),

customers (e.g., Kaczynski and Ott, 2004) and management (e.g., Samson and Daft (2003) were also included in the study.

The third objective seeks to investigate the relationship between team members' demographic variables (such as gender, ethnicity, age and education) and team behaviour and team performance. Scholars suggest that there is a link between team's demography and team performance (e.g., Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven, 1990; Michael and Hambrick, 1992).

Questionnaire data were collected from 59 work teams comprising of 137 individual team members) from both small and large organisations located in four regions in Malaysia (Penang, Kuala Lumpur Seremban and Malacca). The respondents were mainly Malay (52.9 percent), followed by Chinese (31.4 percent), and Indian (15.7 percent). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlations and one way analysis of variance.

The findings suggest that 'behavioural' characteristics such as role clarity, role satisfaction and division of task into sub-teams are critical for all aspects of team performance. Goal agreement, role clarity, role satisfaction and division of task into sub-teams and participative leadership style correlate with the team performance indicator of downtime reduction. Role satisfaction and division of tasks into sub-teams correlates positively with waste reduction.

The findings indicate that team type and organisation size correlates with team performance. The findings suggest that involvement from team members drawn from cross-functional areas complement each other and these teams tend to have less conflict in task performance. Team members from large organisations seem to have a majority of effective team behaviours such as cohesiveness, liking for each other, goal agreement, role clarity, and openness to differences. These teams also have a preference for structured activities such as division of tasks into sub-teams, participative leadership style and are motivated to achieve team goals. Goal contribution by teams and customers

are critical for team performance. Celebrations of team success provide opportunities for reinforcing team values and bonding team members to one another, thus creating a cohesive team. However, team size does not impact team performance.

The findings show that teams with a majority of Malay members tend to be more cohesive, like each other more, agree to team goals, open to change and accept each other's differences. They also tend to prefer structured activities such as the division of tasks into sub-teams and participative leadership style. Teams with a majority of Chinese and Indian members tend to have higher inter-team conflict and tend to focus on the team's outcome.

The findings have important practical implication for managers and supervisors who need to be sensitive to the differences and needs of the multi-ethnic race team. Intra-team and inter-team conflict could be minimised by providing interpersonal training and conflict resolution skills for team members to communicate positively and build rapport. The findings show that there is a strong relationship between team performance and team type, and team membership composition. Therefore, teams need to be labelled accurately according to the different team expectations and needs of the team (e.g., training, supervision, motivation). The findings found that team involvement in team goals is associated with team performance. This finding suggests that managers need to involve team members in setting reachable goals which provide a sense of direction to teams.

In conclusion, the study found that there is a relationship between team 'behavioural' characteristics such as role clarity, role satisfaction and division of task into sub-teams and team performance in the Malaysian context. Ethnic values and cultural differences also influence team members' behaviour. The study suggests that goal contribution by team and customer provide a sense of direction to teams in achieving the teams' outcomes. Celebration of team success and team participation in convention enhances team performance.