CROSS CULTURAL MANAGEMENT: COMMITMENT AMONG EXPATRIATE EMPLOYEES OF AGROBANK IN THE EAST COAST OF MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Agrobank has envisioned to achieve world-class status in the future and ‘Employee’s Commitment’ is endorsed as the theme in its management and business ideals since it could contribute to the effectiveness of the organization’s management and performance. The total number of 150 respondents were selected for a survey to represent Agrobank in the East Coast of Malaysia; namely Agrobank Kuala Terengganu, Agrobank Kemaman and Agrobank Kota Bharu. This study employed a mixed methods design. The emphasis was on quantitative survey data, with qualitative data from focus group interviews used to further clarify response themes. The statistics that were employed to analyse the survey response data included descriptive statistics, such as measures of central tendency, and response frequencies and percentages. The analysis on the Agro bank staffs on cross cultural management reveals that there were groups who were unclear and uncertain about the meaning of cross cultural management in their organization. The younger individuals were inversely related to the knowledge of cross cultural management, employee’s commitment and quality of service delivery. It proposed that the management forms committees which constitute an office that independently trains and advises any contenion of the expatriates in the actual working condition of the organization. Hence, the expatriates will be convinced to work in Agrobank in harmony, respected, effective, and accountable to the commitment of work.

Keywords: employee commitment, cross cultural management, expatriates, organizational performance

1. Introduction

According to Wikipedia Encyclopedia, Agrobank, previously known as Bank Pertanian Malaysia, is an institution which offers financial services and banking facilities such as savings activities, banking services, loan facilities, insurance coverage and advisory services. The bank is a Government-linked-
Company (GLC) under the Minister of Finance Incorporated (MFI) with 176 branches in 14 states of Malaysia (as at 25th October 2011).

In Agrobank, the reliance of the customers is achieved through a combination of highly skilled employees and good managerial strategy. This signifies that a good rapport between customers and employees is very important in creating an excellent working environment. The rebranding of Agrobank that was done on 8th April 2008 was made with the intention to from local activities to international endeavours, hence, bringing about a paradigm shift by organizing and endowing itself to be better prepared in providing for a broader range of and borderless services and catering for the whole segment of the agriculture industry.

Employee’s commitment is the theme in Agrobank’s management and business ideals. It is believed that the said theme can contribute to the effectiveness of the organization’s management and performance in its efforts to achieve world-class. Organizations that have employees who are committed to the success of the business and exhibiting high engagement levels are naturally healthier and is on the right track towards effective key performance indicator (KPI) outcomes and growth. In Agrobank itself, several diversified issues needed to be addressed and resolved by the bank because present day employees are multiracial, even multinational. Therefore, teamwork, organizational trust, customer focus, employee’s involvement and organizational communication will maintain the invaluable commitment of the employees in the establishment.

i) Teamwork

Teamwork is defined in Webster's New World Dictionary (2010) as "a joint action by a group of people, in which each person subordinates his or her individual interests and opinions to the unity and efficiency of the group." This does not mean that the individual is no longer important; however, it does mean that effective and efficient teamwork goes beyond individual accomplishments. The most effective teamwork is produced formed when all the individuals involved, harmonize their contributions and work towards a common goal.

ii) Organizational trust

Trust is a vital ingredient in organizations since they it represents a type of on-going relationship. Galford and Drapeau (2010) analyse this important aspect of leadership and offer models for understanding trust and how to build it and at the same time identifying three categories of trust within an organization:

a) Strategic trust - trust in the organization's mission, strategy, and ability to succeed.
b) Organizational trust - trust that the organization's policies will be fairly administered and implemented as stated.
c) Personal trust - trust that subordinates place in their manager to be fair and to look out for after their interests.

Galford and Drapeau focus primarily on building personal and organizational trust. Trust reduces unproductive rumours and second guessing that can distract employees from their work. It motivates, stimulates creativity, and helps the organization to attract and retain great employees especially in their commitment towards the job.
iii) Customer Focus

Customer focus is considered to be one of the keys to employee’s commitment. Achieving customer focus involves ensuring that the whole organization, and not just frontline service staff, puts its customers first. All activities, from the planning of a new product to its production, marketing, and after-sales care, should be built around the customer. Every department and every employee should share the same customer-focused vision. This can be aided by practicing good customer relationship management and maintaining a customer relations program (Business Dictionary, 2010).

iv) Employee Involvement

Employee involvement is creating an environment in which people have an impact on decisions and actions that affect their jobs. Employee involvement is not the goal nor is it a tool, as practiced in many organizations. Rather, it is a management and leadership philosophy about how people are most enabled to contribute to the continuous improvement and the ongoing success of their working organization (Heathfield, 2010).

v) Organizational Communication

Organizational communication can be defined as the process of sharing information with the other individuals (Trout et al, 1995). The communication refers to the process whereby individuals and groups transact in a variety of ways and within different areas with the aim of carrying out organizational goals (Brunetto and Farr-Wharton, 2004). Several authors note that communication is important for improving employees’ commitment and for positive outcomes (Goris et al, 2000). Stuart (1999) argues that the communication construction can affect empowerment of employees which in turn affect impinge on the effective commitment. Moreover, the way organizational goals are communicated to employees and their role in advancing they them strongly affect have an effect on the effective commitment (Anderson and Martin, 1995). Robbins (2001) posits that there is a relationship between the quality of communication process and employees. Thus, managing the communication feedback processes is fundamental to achieve both, perceived with real organizational communication effectiveness.

Organizations clearly and intuitively understand that in order to deliver effective output and outcomes, the people in the organization must have the right attitudes, resources, competence, cross cultural management abilities, and hence, the employees commitment. The cross cultural management that may lead to employees’ commitment is shaped by the satisfaction values, loyalty to the organization and the productivity of the staffs. In generating employees’ commitment across the cultural management in Agro bank, especially in the East Coast of Malaysia, the manager will have to define concretely the characteristics that affect staffs’ commitment focusing on how to effectively and harmoniously deal with persons from other cultures (Mitchell and Foa, 1969).

An individual’s cross cultural experience may also have an effect on his or her enthusiasm to perform well in managing host country nationals (HCNs). Individuals who have had previous experience in foreign countries may adapt better to cultural differences by having better endurance and greater tolerance towards people of different cultural backgrounds (Steinkalk and Taft, 1979; Cui and Awa, 1992).
cultural differences account for the large number of expatriates in Malaysia who fail to commit and complete their assignment, apart from performing quite ineffectively, causing consequential and considerable amount of losses to the organization. Hence, the Agro bank of the east coast will have to determine the problems that may lie in the method used to measure the expatriate’s commitment in completing their organizational task that could very well be in their services segment and area of specialization that is direly needed by Agro bank.

2.0 Employee’s Commitment

A person who is hired to provide services to a company on a regular basis in exchange for compensation and who does not provide these services as part of an independent business is known as employee (Webster's New World Dictionary, 2010). Meanwhile, the employee’s commitment can be explained as the psychological bond of an employee to the organization, the strength of which depends on the degree of employee’s involvement, employee’s loyalty, and belief in the values of the organization (Heathfield, 2010). Employee’s commitment was badly damaged in the late 20th century during corporate reorganizations and downsizing, which undermined job security and resulted in fewer promotion opportunities. This led to the renegotiation of the psychological contract and the need to develop strategies to increase commitment. These included flexible working and work-life balance policies, teamwork, training and development, employees’ participation, and empowerment.

3.0 Expatriate’s Commitment

At one fell swoop, an expatriate is a person temporarily or permanently residing in a country and culture other than that of that person's upbringing or legal residence. The organizational role in handling this issue consists of two major approaches i.e. in combating the non-commitment to their works and upgrading the expatriate’s behaviour among the servants in that organization (Piccolo, 2004). First, is the transformational leadership approach in the organizational role whereby leadership is put on the manager or leader himself. What does the leader or manager do are directly affecting the subordinates behaviour, which means that if the leader or manager is not committed to their works, it will automatically be implicated onto their subordinates who shall be non-committed as well. Later on, this will influence the expatriates who shall follow their leader’s behaviour by being non-committed to their works. In this case, the leader or the manager must be totally dedicated to ensure that the subordinates are free from the non-committed behaviour. Second, is the transactional leadership approach where it depended on the subordinates not to the leader or manager. This situation occurs because the managers or leaders depend on their subordinates as they do not have enough time to monitor what transpires in their office. So, the pressure is put by the organizations on the subordinates particularly the expatriates.

4.0 Cross Cultural Management

Lewin has developed an improved performance on the commitment to the job which involves the management of three phases of behaviour modification. Unfreezing has been determined as capable of reducing those forces that sustain behaviour in its present form, in recognition of the need for change and improvement to occur. Then, movement which refers to the development of new attitudes or behaviour and the implementation of the change, meanwhile the last stage is refreezing. All these stages are needed to persuade the personality changes.
According to France, Kast and Rosenzweig, specific components of a planned-change effort related to the process; movement for the change of personality can be determined as initial problem identification, obtaining data, problems diagnosis and action planning. There are wide ranges of forces acting upon organizational decree making the need for change inevitable. These forces of change can be summarized under five broad headings. First, changing technology in which the rate of technological modification is greater now than at any time in the past, for example in automation and robotics. Second, knowledge exploitation in which the amount of knowledge is continually increasing equals to the number of people in some levels of education. Third, the rapid product will fast becoming obsolete, which is due to the changes in consumer preferences. Then, it will rapidly change the technology which shall, in the process, shorten the life-cycle of many products and services. Fourth, the changing nature of the workforce shall also include changes in the composition of the working population, broader educational opportunities and part-time working. Lastly, the working life quality has heightened the importance attached to the people’s satisfaction, needs and expectations at work and to such factors as frustration and alienation. It has also drawn attention to the relationship between the quality of working life and employee’s commitment, levels of work performance and productivity.

Refreezing can be determined as stabilizing changes at the new level and reinforcing them through supporting mechanism, for example policies, structure or norms for the ideal personality. According to France, Kast and Rosenzweig, refreezing refers to specific components of a planned-change effort related to the process; movement for the change of personality can be determined from the implementation, follow-up and stabilization, assessment of consequences and learning from the process. One strategy of change is through the adoption of a system approach. The organization can be viewed as a system and analysed in terms of its major interrelated variables (sub-systems). The variables can be identified in a number of ways including task, technology, structure, people and management. All the variables are related to the changes of personality and the personality regarded as ideal by the people in their lifestyles. In practice, change in any one variable is likely to involve changes in the other variables. The implementation of change can be approached, in terms of a choice of strategies relating to modifications of the task, technology, structure, people or management. As a conclusion, the cultural competency is the ability to live across the culture and the cultural boundaries. The same can be obtained by making a serious and thorough study of specific cultures and beliefs of a country in a very elaborate way. Hence, the cultural competency has become very important, since, it can overcome difficult and awkward situation resulted from the judgment on the culture of a country on the stereotyping basis.

5.0 Research Objectives

Several objectives of the study focus on the factors that serve as a guidance to the expatriates’ employees at Agrobank in the east coast to become dedicated and committed personnel. This study will concentrate on issues pertaining to the staffs of the bank itself, such as:

i) To solve the cross-cultural management that reverses the employees’ commitment especially among the expatriates.

ii) To recommend to the organization on the means to enhance the employees’ commitment.

6.0 Research Questions

i) To what extent the organizational performance is influenced by employees’ commitment?
ii) How far can the expatriates’ employees’ commitment be improved for the organizational benefit?

iii) How could it be achieved?

iv) What is the level of achievement needed to enhance the employees’ commitment?

7.0 Research Framework

Factors that lead to employees’ commitment markedly the expatriates are organizational trust, customer focus, employees’ involvement, organizational communication and teamwork. These factors are the independent variables for this study while the dependent variable is employees’ commitment. The independent variables are the key factors that determined and encouraged the dependent variable existence. If we can control the independent variables, at the same time, we can control the dependent variable. The diagram of the framework for this study is shown below:

![Diagram of Research Framework]

This research framework will provide a description of the methods used to conduct the study.

The methodology reviews:
(a) Participants and sampling
(b) Instrumentation
(c) Procedures
(d) Design and analysis.

7.1 Participants and Sampling

In the study, we evaluated the performances of three Agrobank agencies in the East Coast; namely Agrobank Kuala Terengganu, Agrobank Kemaman and Agrobank Kota Bharu. We chose these agencies because of several contributing factors, such as, time constraint, cost and the easiness with which information could be obtained as they were near to our base.

7.2 Instrumentation
This study gathered information on the commitment of Agrobank employees and surveyed concerning the perception of integrity among civil servants and the effectiveness of the programs carried out by the bank. The effectiveness of the programs was determined by their beliefs, as indicated by the survey instrument and focus group interviews, that the programs helped increase and enhance their (a) understanding of knowledge integrity, (b) skill integrity and (c) integrity of performance-related attitudes.

The emphasis of the research was on quantitative survey responses, with qualitative data from focus groups used to further explicate the response themes. For the quantitative survey, the study employed a researcher-designed survey instrument adapted from various research frameworks. By using this approach, this research used to convey the hypothesis in searching for the answer of the case study. The focus group interview protocol was based on the quantitative survey data. The main aim of the focus group interviews was to explore more fully the views of participants expressed through the survey instrument. The focus group interviews were conducted in Malay, the language conveniently spoken by the participants.

7.3 Procedures

The letters of permission and acknowledgement receipt were submitted to the respective agencies of the respondent. A copy of the permission and receipt letters were given to the person in charge of the distribution of questionnaire in each department. Once approval was granted, the permission to distribute the questionnaire form was requested through a receipt note. The person in charge signed the acknowledgement receipt letter stating the amount of questionnaires received for all their staffs. The receipt letter served as proof for the person in charge to ensure the right amounts of questionnaires are returned. The questionnaire forms were then distributed and collected by assigned enumerators to and from the respective state agencies. The time given to complete the questionnaires was three days i.e. from Friday to Sunday for each agency.

7.3.1 Validity and Reliability

Validity is the degree upon which an assessment instrument measures what it purports to measure. The measurements obtained should be accurate, relevant, representative, and complete. In order to maximize the validity of the survey instrument, the following measures were taken: (a) survey instrument items were directed to students of Universiti Teknologi MARA Terengganu in Dungun; and (b) survey instrument items were directed to address the most common, critical and frequently cited components of the students. The validity of test-score interpretations can be supported by evidence that the processes had actually been engaged by the test and are consistent with a particular construct or constructs. Reliability indicates stability, that is, participants respond in the same way at different times. It refers to “the consistency of the research and the extent to which studies can be replicated”.

7.4 Study design and analysis

This study employed a mixed methods design. The emphasis was on quantitative survey data, with qualitative data from focus group interviews used to further clarify response themes. The statistics that were employed to analyse the survey response data included descriptive statistics, such as measures of central tendency, and response frequencies and percentages.
8.0 Data Analysis and Findings

8.1 Sample Characteristics

The total number of respondents was 150. The data revealed that the majority of the respondents were female (74.0%) as compared to male (26.0%). The respondents comprised of 40 (26.7%) from the Administration group, and 110 (73.3%) from the Professional group. The age average of respondents was 33.4 years. In term of religion, 138 (93.2%) were Muslims, 2 (1.4%) Buddhists, 5 (3.4%) Christians and expatriates while three (2%) were Hindus. The average length of service for both male and female was 15.2 years. In terms of education, the majority of the respondents totalling to 39 (52.7%) had reached secondary level and 31 (41.9 %) completed tertiary level and four of primary level (5.4%). The majority of the respondents that comprised of 112 (74.7%) individuals were seniors and 38 (25.3%) new staffs with less than five years’ working experience.

8.2 The Organizational Trust of Agrobank Staffs on the factors that lead to employees’ commitment

This section deals with the cross cultural management in Agro bank and their perceptions on the organizational trust that lead to employees’ commitment. The survey shows some indecision on their departments regarding organizational trust and the following representations:-

i) To what extent do Agrobank staffs willing to learn and know about cross cultural management and putting it into practice in their daily works?

ii) How knowledgeable are Agrobank staffs the methods to become committed with delivering quality services to their clients?

iii) The perceptions among the Agrobank staffs on the factors provided by their departments that lead to employees’ commitment.

All of these items have brought down organizational trust in particular on the factors that lead to employees’ commitment and in the researchers’ point of view; it could be due to the fact that Agro bank staffs do not really understand other cultures. It is safe to conclude here that most Agro bank staffs are not eager to provide answers especially on personal and private issues as regards to their knowledge on cross cultural management.

Findings from the employees’ commitment among the Agro bank staffs on the on the subject of cross cultural management demonstrated that a lot of respondents agreed that they understood that (a) cross culture management exists in today’s working environment, (55.4% agreed while 20.3% totally agreed); (b) employees’ commitment includes working with others (e.g. non-Malaysian and non-Malay) (54.1% agreed, 24.6% totally agreed); (c) leaders understood the need to treat their subordinates equally between local and foreign workers – (83.8 % agreed, 12.2% totally agreed); (d) leaders were directly involved in teamwork (52.7 % agreed and another 13.5 % totally agreed); (e) Leaders were directly committed in raising the employees’ commitment - (40.5 % agreed, 31.1% totally agreed); (f) leaders were giving the full support towards employees’ commitment (37.8 % agreed, 16.2 % totally agreed); (g) leaders were abusive of the foreign workers (54.1 % agreed, 20.3% totally agreed); (h) leaders were using intimidating actions in order to get employees’ commitment (52.7 % agreed, 21.6% totally agreed) and (I) leaders abused power or position in order to gain something from the foreign workers (50% agreed, 24.3 % very agreed).
In this research, the respondents consisted of 59.5% of Professional group, while 40.5% came from the Administration group. 52.7% were from Secondary level while 41.9% from tertiary level. It could be stated that most of the respondents did not fully understand their job description and responsibility. The levels of education of the respondents have provided with the proof that those respondents who were in the mid-section of educational levels needed to have their behaviour monitored. For instance, in giving their thoughts about the cross cultural management, it showed that they did not understand the culture of others especially on their understanding pertaining to certain rituals or religious behaviour.

Some forms of understanding, like the leaders in the organization are abusive of the foreign workers in their departments needs to be classified as unethical. Agrobank staffs need to appreciate that it is not the knowledge of cross cultural management that can assist them in their commitment towards the job but rather as an ice-breaker with their counterparts or partners in their daily jobs. Similarly, the Agrobank staffs were also given the same plot from the questionnaire done on the commitment of the current service, wherefrom the feedback received revealed that 24.3 % were unsure compared to the 29.7% who disagreed. From this perspective, some factors might have contributed to this issue of low commitment of current service. Among others, Agrobank staffs tend to inefficiently utilize their working hours, while simultaneously, making their clients wait for long hours.

It can be concluded herewith that most of the Agrobank staffs were not keen to give definitive or affirmative answers because of some private issues regarding their perceptions on their departments. It simply means that it was hard to obtain actual views from the Agrobank staffs in this section. Additionally, it also suggested that most of the Agrobank staffs were still in dilemma because of irresolute decisions on their perceptions regarding the means and knowledge related to the cross cultural management. Probably, it could be attributed to the lack of reading and slow absorption of new information on the topic of cross cultural management as introduced by their respective departments.

### 8.3 Customer Focus on factors that lead to employees’ commitment

In general, from the survey done on the Agrobank staffs on their departments’ customer focus, the result illustrates that most of them were satisfied with their organization especially in having clear sets of rules and regulations to instil customer focus approach that have guided them to be committed notably from the expatriates. It can be seen in a few criteria like the followings:

i) Perceptions of the staffs regarding their departments’ customer focus

ii) Perceptions of the staffs regarding the general order, rules and regulations in their departments’ customer focus

iii) Perceptions of the staffs regarding the role of leadership in interpreting customer focus like creating friendly environment, advising and guiding them to be fully committed to the customer.

iv) Rewarding and motivating the staffs to increase their commitment to the clients especially the expatriates

v) External influence on their department on customer focus

The result shows that Agrobank staffs’ understanding of the General Order were at 51.4%, their understanding on how to define a customer’s needs at 52.7%, 66.2% of them agreed that the current working condition is comfortable for them harmonious relation between the superior and subordinates stood at 78.4%, 78.2% approved of the examples of good manner by their superior. These mean that
the staffs believed that their departments were doing well in upholding the good values of customer focus.

64.4% of Agrobank staffs felt that their superiors treated them unfairly. However, the Agrobank staffs who believed that top management people did get involve in their daily works shot up to 87.8%. This shows that top management did affect Agrobank staffs’ commitment levels.

The findings of this study indicate that there are significant differences on job categories and the knowledge of cross cultural management among the Agrobank staffs on the One-way ANOVA analyses (F = 1.245, p > 0.005). There is an insignificant difference in terms of job categories between Malaysians and non-Malaysians as shown on One-way ANOVA (F = 5.529, p < 0.005). However, there is a significant relationship with knowledge of cross cultural management. The analyses show that there is no different perception on knowledge of cross cultural management between the management level and professional group among the Agrobank staffs. Nevertheless, different citizenships such as Malaysian and non-Malaysian had influenced Agrobank staffs in their knowledge comprehension and understanding of cross cultural management. The new staffs could be less knowledgeable and did not fully understand about the cross cultural management and employees’ commitment in determining the customer focus.

8.4 Employees’ Involvement on the factors that lead to employees’ commitment

The levels of employees’ involvement indicated that respondents whose education ended in the secondary level needed to be monitored closely particularly on their behaviours. In providing the services to non-Malaysian, for example, it was shown that they did not understand the culture and behaviour of others in order to make a team works, apart from knowing sensitive and non-sensitive issues. Considering a few aspects, such as involving oneself in teamwork with all Malaysians in their departments needed to be clarified as unethical in cross cultural management. They needed to understand that it was not about the opportunity of working among their own ethnic group but as blocking other people of different ethnics.

8.5 Organization Communication in the Factors that lead to employees’ commitment

The point of discussion on the level of organizational communication among the Agrobank staffs in the East Coast of Malaysia shall be focused on a few important areas which are as follows:

a) The effectiveness of leadership in that organization as the main enforcement in implementing the cross cultural management among the Agrobank staffs in the East Coast of Malaysia.

b) Rules pertaining to harmonies, understanding and respecting other cultures.

c) Level of communication of Agrobank staffs in their daily works.

On the issue of the effectiveness of leadership as enforcement officers in implementing the cross cultural management in Agrobank in the east coast of Malaysia, the statistics show that the majority of the respondents had doubts and were unsure over the effectiveness of their leadership (score of average is 3.06). This shows that despite leaderships’ efforts to prove its effectiveness, they still failed to convince the Agrobank staffs in the east coast of Malaysia.

As for the level of communication perceived by the Agrobank staffs in the East-Coast of Malaysia and where the Malaysian cross culture is concerned, the majority of Agrobank staffs perceived that the
communication in cross cultural management is worse than that in the non-cross cultural management. This also indicates that they were of the view that the level of communication in Agrobank in the East-Coast of Malaysia was fairly high in general.

9.0 Conclusion

The analysis on the Agrobank staffs on cross cultural management reveals that there were groups who were unclear and uncertain about the meaning of cross cultural management in their organization. Those with younger age were less knowledgeable on the rule and procedure which led them to be in the state of uncertainty about cross cultural management. The younger individuals were inversely related to the knowledge of cross cultural management, employee’s commitment and quality of service delivery. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are tabled with the purpose of enhancing the cross cultural management as well as the leadership in their organization:

1. Organization media and the leadership must coordinate effective campaigns to educate Agrobank staffs on the cross cultural management.
2. Frequent campaigns and other forms of promotions should be conducted by the leadership at organizational level on cross cultural management in factors that lead to employees’ commitment and these sorts of campaigns must be given proper coverage by the organization. The involvement of the top level management is an added boost in this particular area.
3. Rules pertaining to harmonies, understanding other cultures and respecting the cultures’ of others should be amended and proper training like allowing them to attend the training course through the internet or probably via a video conference similar to the programs as carried out in the United States of America should be given to the expatriates.
4. The leadership in the organization should consider forming committees that constitute an office that independently trains and advises any contention of the expatriates in the actual working condition of the organization. The formation of the committee will generate confidence among the expatriates enabling them to work in the Agrobank organization in harmony, respected, effective, and accountable to the commitment of works.
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