CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the results and its implication will be discussed thoroughly. Few limitations will be pointed out, followed by recommendations for further study and contributions of this study. Conclusions for overall study will also be made in this chapter.

5.2 Findings and Discussions

The concept of White Supremacy Culture in organisations came to mind as a form of modern discrimination, where the white expatriates are believed to be superior to other local employees in MNCs. It has been observed that Malaysians working in local subsidiaries of MNCs are not “moving up” as easily as European / American managers in MNCs. In addition, there were lack of succession plans to replace the white expatriates by local employees or even local employees are promoted, their supervisory autonomy was lessened.

Hence, a model of White Supremacy Culture was developed from the literature with the aims:

a) To identify the existences of white supremacy culture, a potential modern discrimination within MNCs local subsidiaries in Malaysia.

b) To identity the correlations between the determinants contributed from individual, organization and society influence to the existence of White Supremacy Culture within MNCs local subsidiaries in Malaysia.

The results of the analyses undertaken this study indicated that the existence of White Supremacy Culture in MNCs was linked to the influence contributed from individual, organization and society. The following sections explain the relationships and trends identified in relation to the hypotheses, prior to presenting an integrated discussion of the overall findings.

Influence of Belief in Ethnic Barrier in White Supremacy Culture

As hypothesised, Barrier of Ethnicity was found to be positively related to the perceived White Supremacy Culture. The significant effect of barrier of ethnicity having a positive influence on the perception of White Supremacy Culture in MNCs suggests that the existence of class consciousness in Malaysian employees. This may link to the strong cultural values inherited in Malaysian. The study conducted by GLOBE showed Malaysian as high “humane orientation”, where they are encouraged to be generous, caring and kind to others (Kennedy, 2002), resulting Malaysian to hold back and unwillingly to speak out (Wood and Jogulu, 2006). Malaysians refrain themselves from making negative comments and tend to be more willing to accept opinion from leaders in favour of face-saving approaches or for the fear of appearing to be arrogant.

It is suspected that these cultural traits may be viewed as less confidence and less competent by the white expatriates. As noted by Lam et al. (2002), individualistic society, for example the Americans, tends to have more confidence in their own to influence decision. These two different cultural perspectives would have created an even bigger class consciousness gap for Malaysian to perceive themselves in a lower ranking although they are aware that their education level and competencies are on par with the white expatriates. Perhaps, this is what the so called “cultural baggage” (Scott, 1992, pp. 20) that has indirectly hindered Malaysian employees’ career advancement in MNCs.

Influence of Participative Decision-Making Opportunities in White Supremacy Culture

As hypothesised, Participative Decision-Making Opportunities was found to be negatively influenced to the perceived White Supremacy Culture. This may be explained by the fact that the participative decision-making opportunities are related to the trust conferred to local employees (Singh, 2009). Approval, trusts or respect that are granted to local employees to influence company decisions may be regarded as the sincere commitment of management to push for equality among all employees, regardless if they are white expatriates or local employees. In addition, the trust and sharing of decision-making opportunities may empower local employees in having the same goal and shared vision with the rest of the organisations (Cludts, 1999). In this way, local employees could feel their inclusion in the organisation, and feel their presence as full joined-up and accredited employees.

Contrary, ethnocentric practices that favour the expatriate in making corporate decision over local staff, whether intentionally or unintentionally may send a message to local staff that they are less valued than the expatriates. As pointed out by Toh and DeNisi (2005), such differential in power and unequal treatment would draw clear lines between local staff and expatriate. Thus, it creates an intergroup mentality where local staff view expatriates as "outsiders" and expatriates remain in their exclusive expatriate circle.

Influence of Job-Focused Impression Tactics in White Supremacy Culture

Results indicated that Job-focused Impression Management Tactics is not a significant predictor on the perceived White Supremacy Culture, although a positive correlation among them was observed. In explaining this finding, it could be possible that there is a correlation between these variables as observed by Wayne and Ferris (1990), however the impression tactics employed by Malaysian employees have evolved. As the opportunities for Malaysian to gain better education and better training, Malaysians are able to expose themselves to more insight of modern management beliefs and practices. For example, tactics like "arrive at work early" and "stay late", which were included as part of the questionnaires, may not be relevant to Malaysians anymore. Traditionally, these tactics were regarded by Malaysians as a sign of respect to their superior or to impress their supervisor as hardworking employees. However, the introduction of workplace flexibility policies by MNCs from the U.S and European countries, including flexible working hours or telecommuting, may have changed Malaysian perspectives.

Malaysians' exposure to greater knowledge attainment may have allowed them to assimilate their beliefs together with business knowledge and skills to challenge the white expatriates' managerial competence. This in turn may have possibly narrowing the gap of impression management misplace of local employees to the expectation of the white supervisors.

Overall model of White Supremacy Culture

The overall findings of the proposed White Supremacy Culture model confirmed the preposition suggested by Cortina (2008). These findings also confirmed the first objective of the study, in identifying the existence of white supremacy in local subsidiaries of MNCs. As noted by Li and Kleiner (2001), inequality between the dominant and minority group structure in organisations will be created when the three elements, ethnocentrism, competition and differential power, exists at the same time.

Signs of ethnocentrism on the white expatriates are reflected by the biased policy in organisation practices in MNCs, for instance in the decision-making, resources selection, promotion and monetary compensation. At the same time, the presence of differential power may enlarge the separation of local employees from the white dominated team. For example, the decision makers from the white expatriates would bring more white expatriates into the local subsidiaries to hold prominent decision-making roles. Local employees on the other hand are left with little opportunities in advancing into responsible positions. Dissatisfaction and feeling of inequality would arise among local employees when they believes their competency are on par with the white

expatriate or they perceive the white expatriates as not possessing any unique or specialized skills above themselves, but were denied opportunities to hold higher supervisory roles in the organisations.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

As with other researches, this study faced some limitations. Three limitations were identified in the study.

The first limitation was mainly due to the fact that this study was an exploratory research. Particularly in Malaysia, modern discrimination in organisation and workplace incivility were seldom the key topic to be studied. Most of the past researches focused on inequality and discrimination occurred to different ethnicities in the white dominant societies or countries, for instance Jones, Ni and Wilson (2009) and Rodriguez (2008) on perceived discrimination in multi-ethnic settings. These studies focused in comparing the treatment received by black Americans or Asian Americans (for instance Chinese Americans from mainland China) ethnics to the white Americans. Therefore, there were limited relevant articles on the dimension and framework linked to White Supremacy Culture from Asian perspective.

The second limitation was due to time constraint. As the questionnaires were distributed through convenient sampling method, the respondents were dominated by certain group of respondents. The dominated demographics include respondents from the Chinese ethnicity group, age group of 31 – 40 years, with first degree education level and holding senior executive position.

There was also high concentration of respondents from the Telecommunication industry and working in Engineering and Information Technology job functions. In addition, as this study was supposed to focus on MNCs from both the U.S and European countries, it shall be proper if the study was represented from a more balance respondents. However, a very high number of respondents from local subsidiaries of MNCs from the European countries were recorded compared to respondents working in local subsidiaries of MNCs headquartered the U.S.

The third limitation was on how the measures for Barrier of Ethnicity were structured. In the questionnaires, respondents were asked to link their success in the organisation with their racial or ethnic background. The intention of the questionnaires was for the respondents to indicate their response based on their ethnicity of being “Malaysian” in comparison to the treatment received by the White expatriates. However, as Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country, Malaysians may tend to distinguish their racial or ethic background as “Malay”, “Chinese”, “India” or “Others”. The questionnaires may have given different interpretation by the respondents and, thus may lead to inaccurate responses.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The findings and limitations of this study suggest avenues for future research. First of all, to improve the limitation due to time and money constraint in this study, efforts could be made to include a more balance respondent demographics. The sampling method could be conducted through stratified or

controlled sampling as it may reduce response biases from specific demographics of respondents.

In addition, future studies can explore the comparison of White Supremacy Culture, the perceived discriminations, between local subsidiaries of MNCs headquartered in the U.S. and European countries. Although the expatriate from these countries are considered the “white expatriate” and most of them are considered as the developed countries, Hofstede (1983) found distinctions in cultural differences among these countries. For example, countries like the U.S. and United Kingdom showed very small power distance, Germany and Sweden at marginal low power distance, while France and Belgium showed a marginally high power distance. Different cultural influence may impact different organisation and management principles in managing organisations (Ralston, Holt, Terpstra and Yu, 2008).

Thirdly, to understand deeper the potential workplace incivility, the research could include more quantitative researches and possibly the expansion to qualitative researches. The current study focused on responses solely from local employees’ perspective. Further research can include a larger scale study that covers the both the perception from local employees and the white expatriate. Gathering data from the white expatriates may provide the difference or similarity of perceptions by both local employees and the white expatriates. This provides a platform for future researchers to discover the variables of interest between these two stakeholders and thus, create greater awareness of the simultaneous effects of perceived discrimination.

Another approach that could be used is through collecting primary data from the relevant organisations to analyse the extent of White Supremacy Culture, rather than based on perceptions. For example, researches on the comparison of salary and supervisory autonomy between local employees and white expatriates (Kim and Lewis, 1994) and the actual promotion to top management according to race (Powell and Butterfield, 1997) could be replicated and conducted in local subsidiaries of MNCs setting.

Future replication of the research would need to include a larger number of predictors and control variables for the existence of White Supremacy Culture in MNCs. This includes the refinement in the questionnaires of the study, especially to avoid potential misunderstanding, like the term “ethnicity” in Malaysia setting. In addition, in order to investigate extensively, the effects of additional workplace factors could be utilized as an indicator of the work climate for minorities. For example, the autonomy or decision-making opportunities for local subsidiaries of MNCs may be influenced by the functions of the subsidiaries (Edwards et al., 2002, Varblane, Mannick and Hannula, 2005), core business of the organisation and size of the organisations (Varblane et al., 2005).

5.5 Theoretical Implications

This study provides two main important implications for researchers. Firstly, this study is relevant in tapping the awareness of discrimination of Malaysian employees. As past studies on this issue were rather minimal, this study opens a new avenue to understand the modern discrimination in MNCs

through adoption of an integrative approach. It will be the first step to strengthen modern discrimination research framework combining organisational and social psychology, and management science.

The second theoretical implication provides a new perspective in the theory of cross cultural management. Current diversity management focuses on clear organisation policies to combat visible or explicit discriminatory behaviour, for instance, prohibition of sexual or racial harassment. The proposed workplace incivility model in this study, on the other hand, provides a different angle to look beyond traditional theory. As noted by Cortina (2008), it will be an addition to diversity management towards fairness and equality in MNCs through exploration of the concealed, unintentional, unconscious form of discrimination.

5.6 Managerial Implications

This study provides two main important implications for practitioners. Firstly, for the MNCs management, this study enables them to understand the dimensions of modern discrimination in organisation. It provides an opportunity for them to explore how local employees see and perceive in the implemented organisation policies. Management team in MNCs organisation shall be conscious that Malaysian employees are increasing aware of potential workplace incivility they experienced in MNCs. When local employees feel their capabilities are devalued and perceive organisation policies as inequitable, their work attitudes, commitment and job satisfaction may be impacted. As workforce is one of the important elements for

organisation to succeed, such discontentment and dissatisfaction may impact organisational effectiveness.

The second implication focuses on the role of local employees. While this study focuses on one way discrimination, from white expatriate supervisors to local subordinates, the impact of existence of White Supremacy Culture may be extended to other organisational relationships. As noted by a respondent of this study, the existence of workplace incivility may have also influenced how local supervisors treat others in the organisations. Local supervisors may serve better treatment to their white subordinates or peers, when compared to their local subordinates or peers. This kind of organisation cultures provides an unhealthy working environment to all stakeholders: local employees, white expatriate and organisations. With the exposure and awareness to workplace incivility, local employees shall instead be encouraged to play the important role as the “cultural mediator” between themselves with the white expatriate.

Hence, management teams should set leadership direction and emphasize that unacceptable discrimination includes not only on explicit acts of discrimination but also any practices that understate local employment competence. For execution, it is crucial that the management team to assimilate the influence of modern discrimination from different levels: individual, organisation and society. They must pay attention to and gather information on the cultural influence, attitudes, and feelings of the local employees. Transparency in organisation policies, for instance in the selection, promotion, decision-making autonomy, must be in place and

communicated to all employees. It is crucial for organisations to make an extra effort to be sensitive to the reactions of the local employees and to treat them with the necessary dignity and respect.

5.7 Conclusion (Overall Study)

The objectives of this study are to identify the existences of white supremacy culture, a potential modern discrimination by MNCs imposed onto local subsidiaries established in Malaysia and to determine its correlation with the determinants contributed from individual, organization and society influences. Within this study, White Supremacy Culture was defined and a new research framework was developed. Three influences, combining organizational and social psychology, and management science, have been hypothesised and tested.

Results from this study showed that the perceived existence of White Supremacy Culture was positively linked to the class consciousness of Malaysian employees, a tendency of perceiving themselves in a lower ranking than the white expatriates. It was also found significant that the opportunities for participative decision-making granted to local employees would reduce the perceived existence of White Supremacy Culture. Sharing of decision-making opportunities with local employees is regarded as trust and commitment from management to push for equality among all employees and would provide a sense of inclusion in the organisations. This research did not find evidence to support the influence of job-focused impression tactics to the perceived White Supremacy Culture in MNCs. However, this may be a sign that Malaysians

are slowly minimizing the gap on how they want to portray themselves to the expectation from the white supervisors.

In conclusion, the social changes undergone by Malaysians provide them avenues to identify any mistreatments and to challenge the white expatriates at all levels. Malaysians increasingly achieve similarity to expatriates in qualifications, fluency in English and are trained in the West or in Western managerial ideology. Being well-educated and well-informed, it is hoped that Malaysians could narrow the gap differences in backgrounds, qualifications, and experience in comparison with the white expatriates. It is time for Malaysians to leave behind the roots of colonialism, where they were more accepting of white expatriates being superiors and of the privileges the white expatriates enjoyed, but to progress towards equality and healthy competitions.