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**INTERETHNIC LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE IN MALAYSIAN  
ORGANIZATIONS: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

**NOEW HOOI SAN**



**UUM**  

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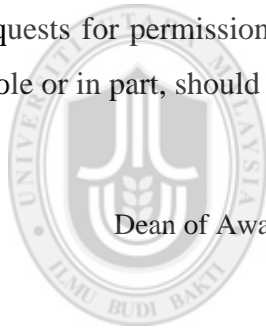
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## Abstrak

Para penyelidik telah mengenal pasti kesan perbezaan budaya ke atas hubungan pemimpin-anggota (LMX) di tempat kerja. Dalam konteks di Malaysia, setiap kumpulan etnik mempunyai nilai-nilai mereka sendiri di tempat kerja yang menggambarkan kepelbagaian budaya yang mantap. Penyelidikan ke arah memahami LMX daripada perspektif etnik adalah kurang dilakukan. Oleh itu, penyelidikan semasa bertujuan untuk memberikan maklumat yang merentas etnik LMX dalam organisasi di Malaysia dengan mengenal pasti dimensi yang ditukar antara mereka serta persamaan dan perbezaan antara kumpulan etnik berdasarkan keperluan mereka dalam LMX. Begitu juga dengan konsep 'memberi dan menerima' dalam hubungan sesama etnik. Berbanding skala yang sedia ada, penyelidikan ini menggunakan metod wawancara interpretasi yang separa berstruktur. Sejumlah 36 wawancara dijalankan dengan melibatkan peserta daripada pelbagai industri. Teknik analisis tematik digunakan untuk menganalisis data terkumpul. Penyelidikan ini berjaya memberikan gambaran baru LMX di Malaysia daripada perspektif etnik. Pertama, kajian yang dijalankan mendapati dimensi pertukaran antara pemimpin dan anggota antara-etnik adalah berbeza daripada dimensi yang sedia ada. Tujuh dimensi pertukaran telah dikenalpasti ditukar antara pemimpin dan anggota daripada kumpulan etnik yang berbeza di dalam organisasi di Malaysia- Hormat-menghormati, Kerjasama, Persahabatan, Tolong-menolong, Pertukaran informasi personal yang terhad, Penghargaan, Persepsi. Seterusnya, perbezaan dan persamaan antara kumpulan etnik yang berbeza berdasarkan keperluan mereka dalam LMX juga telah dikenal pasti. Penyelidikan semasa turut mengenal pasti ciri-ciri yang sentiasa ditegas dan yang ditoleransi dalam hubungan LMX antara-etnik. Penyelidikan semasa telah menyumbangkan beberapa implikasi yang jelas daripada perspektif teori, metodologi dan praktikal. Pertama, dapatan kajian yang disediakan merupakan lanjutan teori ketara kepada kesusasteraan yang sedia ada untuk kedua-dua LMX dan interaksi antara-etnik di Malaysia. Di samping itu, penggunaan wawancara separa berstruktur telah membolehkan para peserta untuk berkongsi pengalaman LMX mereka secara bebas, menggalakan penggunaan kaedah ini dalam kajian LMX masa depan. Hasil kajian semasa juga menyediakan beberapa garid panduan yang praktikal untuk pasangan pemimpin-anggota di Malaysia untuk bergual dan membina hubungan yang baik dengan pasangan kerja mereka daripada kumpulan etnik yang berlainan.

**Keywords:** Hubungan pemimpin-anggota (LMX), komunikasi antara-etnik, Malaysia

## Abstract

Researchers have recognised the impact of cultural differences on leader-member exchange (LMX) at work. In Malaysia, each ethnic group is bringing their own values to the workplace, exemplifying a strong cultural diversity. However, little research had been pursued towards understanding LMX from interethnic perspective. The current research aims to provide insight on interethnic LMX in Malaysian organizations through identifying the dimensions exchanged between the dyads, their similarities and differences with regards to their needs in LMX as well as the 'give and take' in the relationships. Instead of an existing LMX scale, the present research used a less-adopted interpretative method- semi structured interview. With a total of 36 interviews with participants from various industries, current research managed to provide a new insight into LMX in Malaysia from interethnic perspective. Data collected from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to answer the three research questions. First, the current research found the dimensions exchanged between interethnic leader-member dyads to be different from the existing dimensions, i.e.: Mutual Respect, Cooperation, Favour/ *Renqing*, Personal Friendship, Limited Personal Exchange, Appreciation towards Diversity and Perceptions. Next, the differences and similarities between different ethnic groups with regards to their needs in LMX were identified. The current research also identified the characteristics that interethnic dyads are always persistent on and those they always give in to their partners in their relationships. The current research made some obvious implications from theoretical, methodological and practical perspectives. Its findings provided a notable theoretical extension to the extant literature on both LMX and interethnic interactions in Malaysia. In addition, the use of semi-structured interview enabled the participants to share their LMX experiences discursively, encouraging the adoption of the method in future LMX studies. The current findings also provide some practical guidelines to leader-member dyads in Malaysia in getting along with their diverse partners.

**Keywords:** Leader-member exchange (LMX), Interethnic communication, Malaysia.

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## Table of Contents

Permission to Use .....	i
Abstrak.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgement .....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Tables .....	viii
List of Appendices .....	ix
<b>CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION/ BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background of Research .....	1
1.2 Conceptual Definitions .....	4
1.2.1 Race vs. Ethnicity .....	4
1.2.2 Cross-ethnic vs. Interethnic .....	5
1.3 Problem Statement .....	6
1.4 Research Questions .....	14
1.5 Research Objectives .....	14
1.6 Significance of Study .....	15
<b>CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1 Leader- Member Exchange (LMX) .....	17
2.1.1 Quality of Leader-Member Exchange.....	19
2.1.2 Stages of LMX Research .....	25
2.1.3 Dimensionality of LMX.....	39
2.1.3.1 Perceived Contributions .....	40
2.1.3.2 Loyalty.....	40
2.1.3.3 Affect.....	40
2.1.3.4 Professional Respect.....	41
2.2 Cultural Studies in Malaysia .....	46
Malay .....	48
Chinese.....	48
Indian .....	49

2.2.1 Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions .....	51
2.2.2 GLOBE Study .....	53
2.3 LMX Third Culture Way vs. LMX Two Cultures Way.....	63
<b>CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>69</b>
3.1 Research Design.....	69
3.2 Philosophical Underpinnings .....	69
3.3 Participants.....	72
3.4 Procedure.....	77
3.5 Research Etiquette.....	79
3.6 Data Analysis .....	84
<b>CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS.....</b>	<b>92</b>
4.1 The Dimensions of Interethnic Leader-Member Exchange .....	92
Dimension 1: Mutual Respect.....	93
Dimension 2: Cooperation .....	100
Dimension 3: Favour / <i>Renqing</i> (人情) .....	103
Dimension 4: Personal Friendship .....	111
Dimension 5: Limited Personal Exchange.....	116
Dimension 6: Appreciation towards diversity .....	122
Dimension 7: Perceptions .....	125
4.2 Similarities and Dissimilarities in Needs and Wants in LMX .....	135
Similarity 1: Participative decision making.....	136
Similarity 2: Personal Concerns.....	139
Similarity 3: Prefer to work with other ethnic groups than own.....	141
Dissimilarity 1: Religious Needs .....	147
Dissimilarity 2: Financial Aid.....	154
4.3 ‘Give and Take’ .....	156
<b>CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>168</b>
5.1 LMX Dimensions Exchanged between Interethnic Dyads .....	168
5.2 Similarities and Dissimilarities in Needs and Wants in LMX .....	182
5.3 ‘Give and Take’ .....	188
5.4 Summary .....	189



5.5 Conclusion .....	194
5.6 Contributions.....	198
5.7 Limitations and Future Directions .....	200
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>204</b>



## List of Tables

Table 2.1: Differences between LMX Third Culture Way and LMX Two Cultures Way ....	66
Table 3.1: Demographic information of Participants.....	75
Diagram 5.1: Existing Dimensions in LMX by Liden and Maslyn (1998).....	170
Diagram 5.2:Dimensions Exchanged in LMX between Interethnic Dyads in Malaysia .....	170
Diagram 5.3: Similarities and Differences between Interethnic Leader-Member Dyads ....	183
Diagram 5.4: Proposed Model for Interethnic LMX Dimensions .....	201



## List of Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview Protocol.....236



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION/ BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH

### 1.1 Background of Research

Malaysian culture is a mixture blended from people of diverse origins who still retain their own traditional identities while at the same time incorporating new forms of unique Malaysian expression (Asma & Pedersen, 2003; Shephard, 1992). In view of both the similarities and differences between different ethnic groups in the country, Smith (2003) described Malaysia as a complex multicultural society, exemplifying a stronger example of the practicalities of managing cultural diversities than any other country in Asia.

This diverse society makes Malaysians flexible when dealing with different cultures, forming a work culture where there is harmony, synergy and understanding (Asma, 1992). In order to preserve harmonious multicultural relationships, most Malaysians are always willing to accommodate the people they work with, seeking mutually satisfactory outcomes (Asma & Pedersen, 2003). Although harmony in the society has caused many to have illusions of integrity among the different ethnic groups, Hilley (2001) and Zahara, Amla and Hardiana (2010) stated that we are actually yet to achieve that.

Former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (2005) said that when managing a society, a one-size-fits-all model ignoring the uniqueness and needs of different ethnic groups may be easier but it actually creates more problems

rather than solving them. He believes that people from different backgrounds can live together in harmony if we are willing to find the way together. Thus, instead of being transformed into a single national identity, different ethnic groups in Malaysia are still able to retain our own cultures. The 1Malaysia program designed by current Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak on September 16, 2008 inherited the spirit of Tun Abdullah in managing the multiethnic nation. The 1Malaysia idea suggests achieving unity through inclusiveness, respecting and embracing the uniqueness of different ethnic groups, and building up mutual acceptance instead of trying to develop a single national identity like some other countries (Government Transformation Programme, 2010). None of the ethnic groups will be marginalized nor ignored under the principle of fairness in 1Malaysia.

Both of these policies show the efforts of the government in promoting integration between different ethnic groups at national level but academically, ethnicity-related research is still rather scarce in the country, especially in leadership study. This results in a lack of good understanding among Malaysian managers about the values of different ethnic groups at work (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2006). Among the domains in leadership study, Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) is one of the aspects that needs more research from an interethnic perspective in Malaysia (Abu Bakar, Mustaffa, & Mohamad, 2009; Ansari, Lee, & Aafaqi, 2007; Lo et al., 2009).

Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX) is a leadership approach which posits that leaders do not have identical relationships across different subordinates in a work group. On the contrary, they develop unique dyadic relationships with each

subordinate, and the quality of the relationships may be affected by several demographic characteristics including ethnicity (Tsui & O' Reilly III, 1989).

According to Chen and Van Velsor (1996), LMX is able to make distinctive contributions in intercultural leadership studies as it studies dyadic relationship and the process building up the relationship, unlike other traditional ways which focus on team relationship and are people-oriented. They added that in-group/out-group relationships in LMX may help yield important insights into the complexities of intercultural leadership, moving intercultural studies beyond unilateral, comparative work towards a more reciprocal, interactive dimension.

Tsui, Porter and Egan (2002) had also called for more studies on the potential of demographic differences and similarities in LMX as they may affect some organizational outcomes. In examining the existing literature, it is found that demographic diversity at the workplace usually affects a workgroup negatively (Bettenhausen, 1991; Milliken & Martins, 1996) or is challenging and beneficial at the same time (Cassiday, 2005; Graen, 2003; Hiller & Day, 2003; Williams & O'Reilly III, 1998), depending on how the members view the issue. Handling diversity at workplaces may not be easy but if it is well-managed, it brings a lot of benefits and potential advantages (Stewart & Johnson, 2009).

According to Graen, Hui and Qu (2004), there are two different approaches in a diverse leader-member relationship, i.e. the 'LMX Third Culture Way' and 'LMX

Two Cultures’, representing a ‘win-win’ and a ‘win-lose’ situation respectively. LMX Third Culture Way is a way of dealing with workplace diversity by capitalizing on the strengths and minimizing the weaknesses of both cultures involved, offending neither culture (Graen & Wakabayashi, 1994). Practicing the ‘LMX Third Culture Way’ does not only require both parties to recognize the nominal and systematic differences between each other but also to blend the different cultural backgrounds of both leader and member into a new culture that is acceptable to both (Graen, Hui, & Qu, 2004). This approach definitely runs in the same groove with the concept suggested by Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as well as the 1Malaysia program.

However in Malaysia, despite the voluminous research on LMX, its relationship with interethnic issues is still under-discussed. Thus, it is crucial for us to move beyond investigating LMX in isolation of ethnicity and start to consider the role of this demographic difference in superior-subordinate relationships.

## **1.2 Conceptual Definitions**

### **1.2.1 Race vs. Ethnicity**

Ethnicity is often used interchangeably with race but they are actually two different terms. Race is a biological concept based on someone’s origins (Bhopal & Rowley, 2005) but ethnicity is definitely a wider concept as it is not caused by these inborn characteristics alone (Strauch, 1981). Bhopal and Rowley (2005) stated that an

ethnic group requires a common origin such as race but it allows the members to be varied in terms of language, religion and other characteristics. According to Horowitz (1985), demographic features such as religion, caste, tribe and race are different forms of ethnicity under an umbrella but limiting ethnicity interpretation within these inborn attributions is definitely too narrow.

According to Bhopal and Rowley (2005), ethnicity includes numerous sub-divisions within a race, providing more chances to understand the sub-divisions and enables a richer appreciation of differences among people. In Malaysia, sub-divisions within a race are common, such as Chinese speaking different dialects and practicing different religions. Malaysian Chinese, as an ethnic group, are different from Chinese from other places like Thailand and China as they are not merely Chinese but Chinese with Malaysian identity (Tan, 2000). Zmud and Arce (1992) also supported that ethnicity is not a fully stable characteristic but varies from time to time according to social surroundings, which explains the differences of Malaysian Chinese and Indians from those who are from their places of origin. Thus, Malay, Chinese and Indians are referred to as ethnic groups in this research.

### **1.2.2 Cross-ethnic vs. Interethnic**

According to Fries (2007), a 'cross-cultural' study covers more than one culture but without any interactions studied such as comparison between the cultures. On the other hand, 'intercultural' indicates interaction between the diverse subjects, exemplifying interactions between the two. Myron and Koester (1993) also had the same opinion that intercultural communication involves people from diverse



background interacting with each other while cross-cultural communication means to compare interactions among people from a particular culture to those from another culture.

Although the terms cross-ethnic and interethnic were always used interchangeably, they are actually different. In the current research, the main objective is to understand leader-member exchange between different ethnic groups in Malaysian organizations by looking into their current relationships, their needs and the 'give and take' between the dyads, which require in-depth observation into the relationship instead of mere comparison, especially for the first and the third research question. Thus, the current research has adopted the term 'interethnic' instead of 'cross-ethnic' relationships.



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### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Research problems posited in the current research are based on both empirical gaps in existing literature as well as on a pragmatic interethnic integrity issue in Malaysia. Apart from a literature gap in the academic field, the current research also addresses both a methodological gap and a pragmatic gap.

First, during the early stages of LMX, Liden and Graen (1980) had already suggested the importance of looking into the effects of demographic and structural variables onto the exchange between leader-member dyads. Relational demographic literatures have also suggested that demographic similarities or differences including

ethnicity/race, gender and age between two employees have consequences on the quality of relationship between leader-member dyads at work (Abu Bakar & McCann, 2014; Bhal, Ansari, & Aafaqi, 2007; Green, Anderson, & Shivers, 1996; Hogg, 2004; Jones, 2009; Liden & Graen, 1980; Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993; Tsui & O' Reilly III, 1989; Tsui et al., 2002). Unfortunately, although the implications of relational demographic and cultural differences within supervisor-subordinate dyads have been implicit, they have not been made theoretically explicit. According to Bhal et al. (2007), this is probably because most researches in LMX have focused mainly on the outcomes, overlooking the antecedents within and between different ethnic groups that will affect the development of the relationships.

In Malaysia, research shows that ethnicity difference is one of the demographic characteristics playing a significant role at the workplace. The diversity of cultural values among different ethnic groups results in people bringing their unique values to the workplace (Asma 1992). For instance, Hamzah, Saufi and Wafa (2002) noted that there is a significant relationship between ethnicity and preference for leadership styles among Malaysian managers from their study. The authors found that Malay and Indian managers prefer participating style while Chinese managers like delegating style better. Another study by Selvarajah and Meyer (2008) also supports the notion that Malaysian managers maintain distinctive leadership behaviours between different ethnic groups. However, researchers have yet to recognize the impact of ethnic and cultural difference on LMX. Thus, local researchers started calling for more LMX research incorporating ethnic or cultural diversity in Malaysia to yield more fruitful results (Ansari et al., 2007; Abu Bakar et al., 2009; Lo et al.,

2009). This research aims to look into LMX from an interethnic perspective to investigate the relationship between interethnic leader-member dyads in Malaysian organizations.

The next problem statement of the current research is based on a few methodological defects in LMX studies. Since it was established, many different measurements have been used in LMX studies, ranging from 2 to 25 items in each scale (Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). According to researchers, most of the existing LMX scales do not measure the exchange process between the dyads despite the fact that LMX itself is an exchange-based theory (Berneth, Armenakis, Feild, Giles, & Walker, 2007; Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Jian, Shi, & Dalisay, 2014; van Breukelen, Schyns, & Le Blanc, 2006).

Even Graen, the primary developer of LMX theory has expressed his confusion about the contents being measured by some of the LMX instruments used (Schriesheim et al., 1999). Besides that, House and Aditya (1997) also questioned the results of LMX studies which adopted the common available LMX scales, expressing concern that the results might be affected by common method bias. Erdogan and Bauer (2014) seconded that a lot of studies measure LMX quality and outcome of interest using the same survey instrument, which might lead to possible common method and common source bias in some relationships observed. Thus, instead of existing LMX scaled instruments, researchers started calling for a more interpretative perspective in LMX studies in order to provide a more in-depth view of superior-subordinate

relationship development (Fairhurst & Hamlett, 2003; Tse, Dasborough, & Ashkanasy, 2006; Yukl, O' Donnell, & Taber, 2009).

Despite the widespread criticism of LMX measures, Dulebohn et al. (2012) found that the scale used in a study does not reveal any significant effects on the findings but problems arise as most researchers always add or remove items in existing scales to suit their own needs. In their review, Schriesheim et al. (1999) also stated that a good number of researches had modified existing LMX instruments impromptu according to their needs, without much clear explanation or logical justifications made, weakening the validity of the instruments. Erdogan and Bauer (2014) also reminded researchers about the importance of using the entire LMX measure in a study instead of selecting subsets of them as adding or removing items from a scale may affect the psychometric properties of a measure (Keller & Dansareau, 2001).

LMX-7 of Schriesheim, Neider, Scandura and Tepper (1992) and LMX-MDM of Liden and Maslyn (1998) are among LMX measurements being used widely (Erdogan & Bauer, 2014). However, questions have been raised about the adequacy of the popular LMX-7 for its unidimensionality (Jian et al., 2014), and even LMX-MDM included four dimensions in the scale, i.e. affect, loyalty, contribution and professional respect. Berneth et al. (2007) suggested that some important dimensions such as trust were left out in the version. According to Scherbaum, Finlinson, Barden, and Tamanini (2006), LMX-MDM is able to distinguish between people who have a high and low quality LMX with a leader but this multidimensional

instrument has rarely been fully utilized as the majority of researches only used it to measure overall LMX quality (Erdogan & Bauer, 2014).

These deficiencies in LMX measuring instruments made up the methodological gap of the current research. This research intends to look into interethnic superior-subordinate relationships in a Malaysian organization setting through a less-adopted interpretative method – the semi-structured interview. According to Fairhurst and Hamlett (2003), studying LMX with a scaled judgment does not allow the participants to share their LMX experiences and “ignores narrative as an alternative means by which relationship sensemaking and construction occurs” (p.118). An in-depth interview on the other hand enables leaders and members to reflect upon their LMX experiences in a meaningful way and share the meanings they have assigned to their relationships openly with the researcher. This idea is important as the fundamental assumptions of an ongoing LMX relationship are affected by perception and experience in the relationship, which are not easily assessed through standard measures of LMX (Tse et al., 2006).

In line with Fairhurst and Hamlett’s (2003) view, Yukl et al. (2009) claimed that interpretative data is useful in LMX study because it allows researchers to capture the reciprocal causality between the dyads’ behaviours and LMX relationships. Van Breukelen et al. (2006) also opined that using methods such as interview and observation enables researchers to record the patterns of exchanges and interactions between dyads over time in more detail. Furthermore, Stone-Romero (2004) stated that adopting the interview method in a cultural research can “provide considerable

depth on a research topic and may illuminate rich, culture-specific perspectives” (p. 229). Thus, the current research decided to use semi-structured interviews to look into the LMX relationship between interethnic dyads in Malaysian organizational setting as well as to contribute to the methodological gap in LMX research, which has been lacking of the adoption of interpretative method.

The third research problem in this research is an imperative current issue in the country which requires immediate attention. As mentioned earlier, achieving greater integration and unity among different ethnic groups has always been a priority for the Malaysian government for its importance in nation development (Tey, Halimah, & Singaravelloo, 2009; Zahara et al., 2010). According to Economic Planning Unit (2004), the most important goal of the New Economic Policy (NEP) from 1970-1990 and the New Development Policy from 1991-2000 was actually to promote national unity among different ethnic groups, rather than to achieve maximum economic growth as they used to be known for.

In addition, the Vision 2020 introduced by the fourth Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in 1985 was also aimed at achieving greater integration in the diverse Malaysian society (Norshidah, Sulaiman, & Zarina, 2009). The effort was continued by his successor, Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi by introducing National Integration Action Plan 2006-2010. Even now, the integration among each ethnic group is still one of the biggest aims of the current Prime Minister, Dato’ Sri Najib Razak with his 1Malaysia program.

Different ethnic groups in Malaysia have lived in harmony over the years. Nonetheless, Malaysia has yet to achieve desired objectives in ethnic relations despite all the efforts and all the achievements that we can be proud of in these years (Hilley, 2001; Nadaraja, 2009). It was found that the level of integration among different ethnic groups in Malaysia was at the 'functional' level, in which the interactions between the groups were triggered by situations on a need-to basis, such as when they were working together (National Integration Action Plan, 2006). On the other hand, the higher 'empathetic' level which is demonstrated by sincere, open and caring interactions was hardly found in the society.

In another study investigating the level of national integration among Malaysians, Zahara, Amla, Rohaty, Abu Bakar, Subahan and Mohd Amir (1993, 2010) carried out two researches in 1993 and 2007 respectively, using different sample sizes and locations. According to them, the level of integration among different ethnic groups in both studies was found to be on the third out of four levels, which seconded the previous study that contacts between different ethnic groups were only for basic needs. Although both studies found that integration levels remained the same over the years, the later study in 2007 showed some instances of interethnic communication declining (Zahara et al., 2010). While interactions between different ethnic groups at inter-personal level are common in daily life as at workplaces and markets, structurally, we still remain apart.

After living together for more than half a century, ambiguities still remained in the understanding of each other among Malaysians, both in life and at work (Dooley 2003; Selvarajah & Meyer, 2006). In addition, Selvarajah and Meyer (2006) also

stated that Malaysian managers view ‘multicultural orientation’ as less important in leadership excellence as compared to other components despite the diverse working environment, probably because they are not aware of benefits that it may bring.

This situation is absolutely an obstacle on our way to achieving national integration, while at the same time posing a threat to the harmony in the society. According to Asma and Singh (1992), integrity in the nation can be enhanced through building up good working relationships with other ethnic groups at the workplace. Thus, the current research hopes to look into the relationships between interethnic leader-member dyads at Malaysian workplaces in order to provide useful suggestions in building up good relationships at work.

The current research attempts to advance the research on interethnic leader-member relationship in several ways. First, this research intends to fill the knowledge gap due to the scarcity of LMX studies from an interethnic perspective in Malaysia. It involves leader-member dyads from diverse ethnic backgrounds in order to examine the LMX development between the dyads. Next, this research uses a less adopted method – the interview - in order to provide a more comprehensive and realistic picture of the interpersonal exchange relationship between interethnic leader-member dyads in Malaysia. This is also to respond to the calls by Ferris et al. (2009) and Leow and Khong (2009) to adopt a qualitative method for research in relationships at workplaces. Finally, this research also intends to verify the similarities and differences between different ethnic groups with regard to their needs in leader-member relationships. The interpretative method adopted in the



research is hoped to increase understanding between different ethnic groups at workplaces and consequently help promote integration among the diverse population in Malaysia.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

In view of the problems posited above, the current research is aimed to address the problems with the following research questions:

1. What are the contents/dimensions being exchanged between interethnic leader-member dyads in Malaysia?
2. What are the differences and similarities between interethnic leader-member dyads regarding their needs in LMX?
3. What are the characteristics that reflect in interethnic dyads that can be understood, reconciled or transcended based on ethnic differences in LMX?

#### **1.5 Research Objectives**

The research objectives are formulated as below:

1. To identify the dimensions of LMX being exchanged between interethnic leader-member dyads in Malaysia.
2. To identify the similarities and differences between interethnic leader-member dyads regarding to their needs and wants in LMX.
3. To identify the characteristics that reflect in interethnic dyads that can be understood, reconciled or transcended based on ethnic differences in LMX.

## 1.6 Significance of Study

The present research is designed to have some obvious implications from theoretical, research, and practical perspectives. Most LMX studies in Malaysia had been conducted without incorporating ethnic background of the dyads. From theoretical perspective, the present research provides an understanding in a long-deserted area- interethnic perspective that are largely absent in LMX studies in Malaysia. In addition to filling up the literature gap in leadership study in Malaysia, the current research is also hoped to call for attentions of researchers, starting a serious research series on interethnic LMX in Malaysian organizational setting

The second significance of the current research is its adoption of semi-structured interview method instead of existing LMX measurements. A semi-structured interview method enabled the participants to share their views and feelings about their current interethnic LMX relationship as well as their expectations towards the relationships unreservedly. According to Tse et al. (2006), this idea is important as the fundamental assumptions of an ongoing LMX relationship are affected by perception and experience in the relationship, which are not easily assessed through standard measures of LMX. The sample of this research also contains organizational members from different industries in four different regions in Malaysia, providing greater confidence for the data.

On top of that, although some local researchers have shown an interest in diversity studies in Malaysia, most of them are only to fulfil the needs or interests of the research instead of to provide a guideline for Malaysian organizations in managing the diversity to gain maximum benefits (Dahlia, 2008). Through the three research

questions, the current research hopes to provide some practical guidelines for interethnic dyads in getting together with their diverse partners to build up better LMX relationships at work.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Leader- Member Exchange (LMX)**

In the early 1970s, average leadership style (ALS) was the common practice for studying leadership (Uhl-Bien 2006). At this stage, a leader who is assumed to have a one-size-fits-all leadership style with all subordinates was the focus of research (Dunegan 2003).

This practice was then challenged by Dansereau, Graen and Haga (1975) who proposed that leaders actually develop different relationships, which they named Vertical Dyad Linkages (VDL) with every subordinate. Later, this proposition was supported by a few studies on work socialization and Vertical Dyad Linkages (see: Graen & Cashman, 1975; Cashman, Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1976). Thus, Dansereau et. al (1975) insisted that leadership occurs between vertical dyads although management deals with all members within the organization. It is impossible to yield identical quality relationships or outcomes in all dyads with a single set of behaviours or characteristics of leaders and members (Dulebohn et al., 2012).

Evolved from VDL, Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory which was later introduced as a relationship-based approach in leadership studies focuses on the dyadic relationship between a leader and a member (Chen & Van Velsor, 1996; Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Uhl Bien, 1995; Liden & Maslyn, 1998; Steiner,

1997), and brought about an immense impact on traditional leadership study at that time.

Due to time pressures and resource limitations, leaders manage to develop close relationships with only a few key subordinates while retaining formal authority with the rest of the groups (Graen, 1976; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). It is impossible for a leader to act in the same way and develop identical relationships with every subordinate. Thus, LMX proposes that a leader always develops different relationships with different subordinates (Dansereau, 1995; Graen, 1976; Yu & Liang, 2004). This is also supported by Hogg (2004) who showed that more than 90 percent of managers are having different types of relationships with each of their subordinates. To further refine the theory, Yu and Liang (2004) suggested that while it is impossible for a leader to treat all his subordinates in one pattern, it is neither possible for him to differentiate all of them one by one, treating each of them individually. The authors stated that a leader is more likely to divide his members into different groups and treat those from the same group in a similar pattern, exemplifying LMX 'in-group and out-group' concept.

In addition, LMX theory posits that the relationship between a leader and a member does not depend wholly on formal employment contract but also informal interactions between dyads (Hogg 2004). According to Yu and Liang (2004), formal relationship at work is regulated by formal contract rules while informal exchange between dyads is regulated by LMX rules. This makes LMX a great tool to assess dyadic interpersonal and relational aspects in working environment (Uhl-Bien 2006).

### 2.1.1 Quality of Leader-Member Exchange

The quality of LMX is important in determining the success of one's career and his entire working experience (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). On top of that, its impact is also apparent at the organizational level as it helps to establish effective leadership management, which is the major concern of an organization (Lo et al., 2006).

Researchers have identified the features for different kinds of LMX relationships according to the quality. In the early stages of LMX study, researchers divided the employees into two basic categories according to the level of their relationship with the supervisors: in-group and out-group (Dansereau et al., 1975; Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Later, this dichotomous grouping was abandoned, moving to a continuum, ranging from low, medium to high quality relationship.

Leadership Making Model (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991; 1995) elaborated the process of achieving high-quality relationship, including both reciprocity and social exchange foundations of LMX. In this model, there are three stages in the process of developing an effective relationship, i.e. stranger (low LMX), acquaintance (medium LMX) and maturity (high LMX) (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The authors have elaborated the stages as follows:

At the first stage, a leader meets a member as a stranger playing a role in the organization. The dyads are now at the role finding phase, looking for a suitable

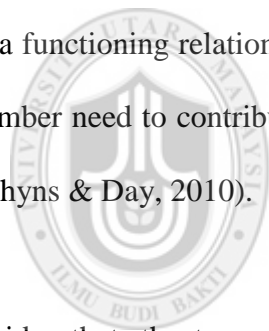
position for each other in the relationship. The interactions between the dyads at this early stage are at a minimal level, on a more formal and contractual basis. This stage resembles a simple 'cash-and-carry' exchange as the leader only provides for the basic needs of the member while the member does the work he was were asked to, without any extra efforts. Incremental influence between the dyads is lacking at this stage.

As interactions between dyads increase, they become medium LMX dyads and move on to the second stage - acquaintances. The dyads are in the role making phase now, negotiating for and finding suitable positions. Apart from contractual exchange, leader and member start exchanging more information and resources including both personal and professional information. Leadership at this stage is more effective as compared to the first stage but still lacking of a high degree of mutual trust and incremental influence, which can be found at the third stage.

Along with leadership maturity, LMX quality also increases to a high level at the third stage - mature partners. The dyads are now at the role implementing stage as the nature of relationship has been determined. Dyads may ask for special assistance from each other such as extra assignments and advice. They can rely on each other for not only behavioural but also emotional exchanges.

According to Dulebohn et al. (2012), a leader plays a more important role than a member in determining the LMX quality because when a leader shows extra efforts in the relationship, it encourages the member to reciprocate by doing more than

expected. Yu and Liang (2004) found that some subordinates may think having a good relationship with the leaders can bring them benefits such as receiving more resources and information but in fact, it is also important for them to contribute to the relationship simultaneously. Apart of showing themselves to be trustworthy and competent, they are expected to show their interest in building up a high-quality relationship with their leaders (Erdogan & Bauer, 2014). Upon receiving favourable treatment from a leader, members shall feel obligated to reciprocate the favours by working harder (Liden et al., 1997). For instance, if a leader provides subordinates with a sense of self-worth, the subordinate will most likely behave in the way they are expected to, in order to reciprocate (Dansereau 1995). In the process of building up a functioning relationship, reciprocity is an important resource as both leader and member need to contribute for the development and maintenance of the relationship (Schyns & Day, 2010).



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Besides that, the type and time span of reciprocity are also different at different levels of LMX quality (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). According to the authors, immediate reciprocity is expected at the first stage of a relationship. At acquaintance, exchanges between the dyads are limited and both leader and member are expecting all favours to be returned within a short time while at the third stage, there are numerous exchanges between the dyads, and they are not expected to reciprocate favours in a short period of time due to the high mutual respect and obligation between dyads.



Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) also noted that the progression of the life cycle varies in each case according to the dyads. Some dyads may develop high LMX quality with time but there are also dyads staying at the first or second stage throughout the whole duration of the relationship, depending on the situations. Thus, it is important for researchers to keep devoting their efforts in LMX research in order to provide practical suggestions and recommendations for leader-member dyads to build up good relationships.

High quality LMX (formerly known as in-group) is demonstrated by a high degree of trust, interaction, support, rewards, time and energy devoted to work (Dienesch & Liden, 1986), mutual affect, loyalty, obligation to change and respect between leader and member (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). A number of studies signified that high LMX is associated with a lot of positive outcomes at individual level such as higher level of delegation and job satisfaction (Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1995; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006), work performance (Jensen, Olberding, & Rodger, 1997; Luo & Cheng, 2014), better career advancement (Erdogan & Bauer, 2014) and job satisfaction (Steiner, 1997). At group level, high quality LMX leads to higher employee's group commitment (Luo, Song, Marnburg, & Øgaard, 2014), group cohesion (Kim & Van Scotter, 2002), and motivation to communicate (Myers, 2006). Moving higher, high quality LMX also brings positive outcomes at organizational level including higher organizational commitment (Major et al., 1995; Lo et al., 2010), organizational citizenship (Ishak & Alam, 2009; Kim & Taylor, 2001; Lo et al., 2006), productivity (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994) and positive

organizational behaviour as well as organization based self-esteem (Kamariah, Syed Khurram, & Wafa, 2011).

On top of that, high LMX quality helps to reduce unwanted negative effects including turnover intention (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Wilhelm, Herd, & Steiner, 1993) and unmet expectations for newcomers (Major et al., 1995). Schriesheim, Neider and Scandura (1998) also found that high LMX quality helps to increase subordinates' decision making skills by practicing participative management including empowerment and delegation. Last but not least, according to Scandura and Graen (1984), with a LMX intervention, a company managed to improve its productivity by 19%, saving an estimated annual cost of \$5 million!

According to Ilies, Nahrgang, and Morgeson (2007), LMX is actually more strongly related to individual-targeted behaviours than organization-targeted behaviours, bringing more individual benefits to the dyads instead of to the organizations. Eisenberger, Shoss, Karagonlar, Gonzalez-Morales, Wickham, and Buffardi (2014) also stated that in LMX, subordinates who received favourable treatment from their leader will reciprocate by working harder for the leader but not necessarily the organization. Similarly, Rockstuhl et al. (2012) found high quality LMX brings a lot of positive outcomes in an individualistic culture as compared to a collectivistic culture.

Actually, these findings do not make LMX any less significant but on the contrary, it further strengthens the main focus of LMX theory that reciprocation between leader-

member dyads is more on an interpersonal rather than an organizational level as a whole. Despite its not bringing as many positive effects at the organizational level as expected, engaging in a high-LMX exchange relationship is still more advantageous for both individual and organization as compared to low quality LMX, which may be disastrous.

According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), in low LMX relationships, leadership is absent. This is supported by Abu Bakar and Mustaffa (2008) who described the high and low quality exchange relationship to be as of 'leadership' and 'supervisor' respectively. Liden and Graen (1980) found that low-quality LMX members are less involved in decision making, boundary-spanning activities and volunteering for extra work. In addition, as compared to those having high-quality relationships with managers, members with low-quality relationships receive and report less positive outcomes (Abu Bakar, Mohamad, & Mustaffa, 2007) and are rated lower on overall performance by their superiors, regardless how their actual performance is (Liden & Graen, 1980).

Consequently, this unfairness may lead to feelings of second-class status in members with low-quality LMX (Yulk & Fu, 1999). Abu Bakar and Rowe (2006) also found that dissatisfactions and complaints are common among low-quality LMX members. Within a group, low LMX members may resent their lower status as compared to high LMX members who receive more desired treatment and this may affect their personal relationship especially when they are required to work together (Haynie, Cullen, Lester, Winter, & Svyantek, 2014). In a worst-case scenario, these

experiences may even lead to burnout at the workplace (Becker, Halbesleben, & O’Hair, 2005). Within a diverse group, low aggregated LMX will lead to poor performance even if the leader manages to differentiate role assignments well, according to Stewart and Johnson (2009). This further emphasizes the importance of creating high quality LMX in diverse working environments such as those found in Malaysia.

### **2.1.2 Stages of LMX Research**

The importance of LMX to both individuals and organizations has gained a lot of attention among researchers since it was introduced in 1970s and the efforts in studying it do not seem to have decreased until today. According Erdogan and Bauer (2014), the number of LMX researches has increased tremendously since 2006 as they found that nearly 50% of the total number of articles in the database were published from 2006-2010 in their review.

Since LMX was incepted, its departure from traditional ALS with its application of using dyads as the level of analysis constitutes a remarkable hallmark in leadership studies (Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). Due to time and resource limitations, a leader can only develop close relationships with a few key subordinates while maintaining formal authority and policies with the rest to ensure their performance at work (Graen, 1976). This line of reasoning led to the focus of vertical dyadic relationship, which divided the quality of leader-member exchange into in-group and out-group.

In the first few years since its inception, LMX studies mostly focused on validating the concept of differentiated VDL (Vertical Dyadic Linkage) relationships (Graen & Uhl-bien, 1995). In 1975, Dansereau, Graen and Haga (1975) carried out a longitudinal study in a public university and confirmed their concepts regarding the characteristics of in-group and out-group members. A series of studies have also been carried out to compare the differences between LMX and existing ALS approach. These studies showed that LMX and ALS are actually simultaneous and complementary to each other for their roles in the development of workplace relationships (Dienesch & Liden, 1986).

The earliest LMX studies were exploratory in nature without providing much detail in its constructs or dimensionality, and the list of LMX subdimensions kept changing as the researchers were trying to define its construct (Schriesheim et al., 1999). The inconsistency of the dimensionality was accompanied by a wide range of different LMX scales such as LBDQ (Dansereau, Cashman, & Graen, 1973) and LMX-4 items (Graen & Schiemann, 1978).

The subdimensions and the construct of LMX kept evolving throughout the 1980s, due to much disagreement among scholars regarding the basic definition of LMX as well as the lack of consistency in the direction of the theory development (Scriesheim et al., 1999). The relationships between LMX and various outcomes were also topics of research in this decade. According to Vecchio and Gobdel (1984), mixed results had been found for these studies due to the ambiguities of both conceptual and operational definitions of LMX construct.

In addition, Dienesch and Liden (1986) also stated that LMX studies at that time have been using several scales, none of which were based on systematic psychometric study or explicit construct validation. According to the authors, Graen and his colleagues should not jump to the conclusion that LMX is a unidimensional concept based on their role theory alone. Due to their realization of the lack of theoretical underpinnings of the theory, Dienesch and Liden (1986) proposed a three-dimensional model of LMX that consists of mutual affect, contribution and loyalty, which is also the preliminary model of LMX-MDM measure.

In their meta-review, Schriesheim et al. (1999) stated that the inconsistencies of LMX construct and its definition continued to the 1990s despite attempts by many researchers to look into the theory's underpinnings. Over the years, the definition of LMX and its subdimensions has undergone a lot of changes and the measures employed in assessing LMX have also varied widely, ranging from 2-item to as many as 25-item scale.

Fortunately, some improvements were made in the theory development in that decade. First, despite the inconsistencies in LMX measurement, one of the most used LMX scales - LMX7 was introduced by Schriesheim et al. (1992). In addition, Gertsner and Day (1997) consider LMX research at that time rather fruitful as researchers found significant correlations between LMX quality and a lot of positive outcomes. Schriesheim et al. (1999) were also happy to see that the majority of the studies had reached a consensus in taking the nature of LMX phenomenon as being

the quality of the relationship between leader and member, instead of focusing on the individuals.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the outcomes of LMX as well as its relationships with other factors were the main focuses of researchers. Researchers continued their efforts on the effects of LMX on various outcomes such as commitment, job satisfaction, performance, turnover intention and feelings of energy (Atwater & Carmeli, 2009; Bolino & Turnley, 2009; Cogliser, Schriesheim, Scandura, & Gardner, 2009; DeConinck, 2009; Shiva, 2010). Also, in this decade, cultural and demographic factors started gaining attention from LMX researchers for their significance in affecting leader-member interaction. The existing literature provides instances of researchers looking into the effects of factors such as gender (Peng, Ngo, Shi, & Wong, 2009; Varma, Stroh, & Schmitt, 2002; Varma, Pichler, Srinivas, & Albarillo, 2007) and national cultures (Aryee & Chen, 2006; Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Chen & Tjosvold, 2007; Testa, 2009) on LMX studies. According to Khatri (2011), although researches on intercultural perspective are gaining ground, they are still insufficient. On top of that, the old issues of inconsistencies of level of analysis, the content of exchange as well as the instrument still persisted at this period of time (van Breukelen, Schyns, & Le Blanc, 2006).

The development of LMX research after 2010 is about the same as the previous decade. Researches on the effects of LMX on outcomes such as OCB (Bowler, Hakbesleben, & Paul, 2010; Fisk & Friesen, 2012; Garg & Dhar, 2014; Sun, Chow, Chiu, & Pan, 2013), turnover intention (Kim & Barak, 2014; Kim, Lee, & Carlson,

2010) and job satisfaction (Brimhall, Lizano, & Barak, 2014) still made up the majority of the efforts. Demographic factors incorporated studies are also gaining attention from researchers recently especially the role of gender (Collins, Burrus, & Meyer, 2014; Tzinerr & Barsheshet-Picke, 2014) and cultural differences (Jian, 2012; Khatri, 2011; Lee, Scandura, & Sharif, 2014) in LMX development.

Obviously, interest among scholars in LMX has not decreased over the years but going through its chronological development, a few common criticisms of the theory are still yet to be resolved. First, the inconsistencies of LMX dimensions and the scales used in researches have been constantly mentioned by researchers since its inception (Schriesheim et al., 1999; van Breukelen, Schyns, & Le Blanc, 2006; Vecchio & Gobdel, 1984). In addition, although researchers have started paying attention to the roles of cultural and demographic factors on LMX development, more efforts are needed to provide a clearer picture of the phenomenon. For instance, most cultural researchers compare national cultures in their studies, neglecting the essence of a multicultural society as Malaysia.

In Malaysia, the study of Abu Bakar and Rowe (2006) is found to be among the earliest LMX studies. The authors tried to replicate the study of Lee (1997, 2001) from the US to examine the relationship between LMX quality and cooperative communication in Malaysia, attempting to test the applicability of the theory outside the US. Their result reaffirmed the findings of previous studies that cooperative communication is affected by LMX quality. This successfully extended the practical



and theoretical implications of LMX not only to Malaysia but also to an Asian context (Abu Bakar & Rowe, 2006).

With its cross-boundary validity, LMX research in Malaysia started gaining momentum in next few years. Most LMX studies in Malaysia at the early stage focused on antecedents (Anusuiya, Rozhan, & Murali, 2009; Bhal, Ansari, & Aafaqi, 2007) and effects (Ang, Muhamad, & Ansari, 2008; Ansari et al., 2007; Leow & Khong, 2009; Lo et al. 2009; Noormala & Syed, 2009) of LMX in organizations. Recently, the focus of research has gradually moved on to studying LMX in a larger context at group level (Abu Bakar, Dilbeck, & McCroskey, 2010; Abu Bakar, & McCann, 2014; Perumalu & Ibrahim, 2010).

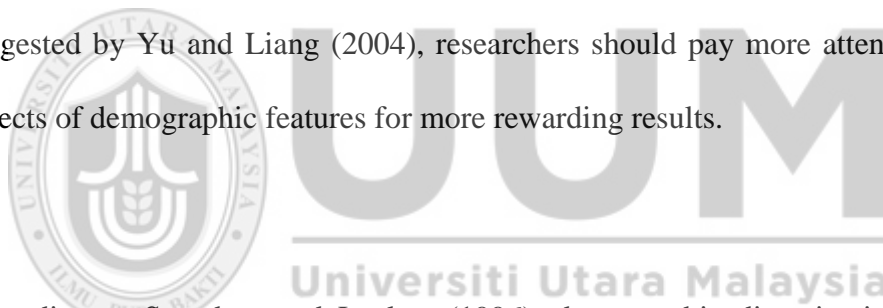
Through literature review, a few common drawbacks were found in most LMX studies. First of all, most LMX researchers assume strong convergence between leaders' and members' perspectives, involving only either leaders or members in their data collection process (van Breukelen et al., 2006; Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994; Schyns & Day, 2010). In their meta-review, Gertsner and Day (1997) found that only 22 LMX studies at that time used leaders' LMX rating while 69 were using subordinates' ratings. Hiller, DeChurch, Murase and Doty (2011) also reported that 83% of LMX studies were measured only from the employee's perspective in their review. In fact, both leader and member are playing equally important roles in influencing the exchange process as well as the quality of the relationship (Lappierre, Kackett, & Taggar, 2006; Martin, Thomas, Charles, Epitropaki, &

McNarnara, 2005; Schyns & von Collani, 2002). Thus, none of them should be excluded in data collection process.

Besides that, Gerstner and Day (1997) stated that leader and member are actually viewing their relationships differently. The agreement between dyads about LMX is affected by factors such as the LMX quality (Graen & Schiemann, 1978), the length of tenure, and the intensity of communication between dyads (Sin, Nahgrang, & Morgeson, 2009). Graen and Schiemann (1978) stated that only members having high quality LMX with their leaders show higher agreement about the LMX quality with their leaders while van Breukelen et al. (2006) speculated the agreement to be strongest in dyads with either very high or very low LMX quality. In their meta-review, Sin et al. also (2009) found that LMX agreement between dyads only increases when their relationship tenure and the intensity of their interaction increase. These show that getting responses from either superior or subordinate only is not sufficient in an LMX study. Both parties should be involved to provide the real picture of the relationship.

Furthermore, most LMX studies in Malaysia have used relatively homogeneous sample from a single organization/ sector. Due to geographical and time constraints, most data collection processes were carried out within a region/state (eg: Ang et al., 2009; Ansari et al., 2007; Abu Bakar & Rowe, 2006) or within a single company/sector (eg: Abu Bakar, Dilbeck, & McCroskey, 2010; Perumala & Ibrahim, 2010; Noormala & Syed, 2009). In fact, using participants from diverse

backgrounds provides greater understanding in a study (Jackson, 2008). Lo et al. (2010) also proposed that studying LMX across different professions, cultures and businesses in Malaysia helps increase understanding and generalizability of a study. In addition, although the breadth of LMX research in Malaysia has been remarkable, literature has yet to provide compelling evidence for the effects of ethnicity differences on leader-member relationships. A range of factors of homogeneity and diversity in demographic background (Green et al., 1996; Jones, 2009; Kozlowski, & Doherty, 1989; Maslyn, & Uhl-Bien, 2005; Tsui, & O' Reilly III. 1989) had been identified to affect LMX quality significantly but there are still a few aspects that have been neglected, leaving gaps waiting to be filled up with more researches. As suggested by Yu and Liang (2004), researchers should pay more attention to these aspects of demographic features for more rewarding results.



According to Scandura and Lankau (1996), demographic diversity issues are not unusual in LMX development but studies that take in diversity issues are however limited. Since the early stages, the importance of demographic variables in LMX relationship had been emphasized by Liden and Graen (1980) as these “underlying structural or personal variables” (p. 459) are believed to contribute to differences in the exchange. Even though they are not work-related, demographic characteristics such as gender and ethnicity play significant roles in affecting the quality of relationship between leader-member dyads (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Duffy & Ferrier, 2003) as well as group interactions (Nishii & Mayer, 2009).

According to Chen and Van Velsor (1996), leadership and diversity are inseparable in a demographically and culturally diverse company. It is thus crucial to take in demographic variables in LMX study as the relationships are affected by these underlying structural or characteristic variables (Liden & Graen, 1980). According to Duffy and Ferrier (2003), these demographic variables are affecting LMX as they may affect the social dynamics between dyads when they are getting along with each other.

Although studies incorporating demographic features and LMX have shown inconsistent results, the quality of LMX between heterogeneous dyads are usually dissatisfying (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Similar demographic variables such as gender (Bhal, Ansari, & Aafaqi, 2007), ethnicity and religion (Hogg, 2004) are found to be more likely to induce high-quality LMX, while dissimilarities on the other hand usually affect the relationships negatively (Liden et al., 1993; Tsui & O' Reilly III, 1989).

Dyads from different demographic backgrounds rarely communicate with each other, leading to higher role ambiguity, lower performance evaluation and personal attraction. Green et al. (1996) and Jones (2009) also found that gender difference between supervisor and subordinate results in low quality leader-member exchange. In addition, at team level, members in a demographically diverse team tend to perceive their team as less effective (Baugh & Graen, 1997).

The relationship between diverse dyads can be improved by providing training to managers, helping them to understand the characteristics needed for high-quality LMX relationships (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982; Nishii & Mayer, 2009; Mohd. Yusoff, Roselina, & Syed Azizi, 2002). It is possible for diverse leader-member dyads to have high LMX if they have the necessary interpersonal skills to work through conflicts caused by the differences between themselves (Scandura & Lankau, 1996). According to Goldsmith, Greenberg, Robertson and Hu-Chan (2003), many companies start providing diversity training in their corporate cultures as they understand the devastating consequences that might be resulted from a lack of training and education on diversity. Knowing how demographic differences or similarities affect LMX relationships to facilitate or limit the subordinates' extra-role performance benefits managers in their relationships with their subordinates (Waismel-Manor, Tziner, Berger, & Dikstein, 2010).

Despite the significant effects of demographic characteristics on LMX, researches looking into this aspect are still very limited. Since the initial effort by Liden and Graen (1980) on demographic characteristics, Hooper and Martin (2008) were still calling for investigations on demographic diversity between LMX, indicating a critical necessity to look into the aspect. Recently, Abu Bakar and McCann (2014) also highlighted the importance of expanding and modifying current theories and perspectives on leader-member interaction and work diversity for the increasing complexity in workplace diversity. In Malaysia, ethnicity background is among the demographic characteristics that have been emphasized by researchers to be

incorporated in LMX studies (Abu Bakar et al., 2009; Ansari et al., 2007; Lo et al., 2009).

Waismel-Manor et al. (2010) also agreed that among all the demographic characteristics, cultural background deserves exhaustive studies most as it used to be the one studied least, as compared to gender and age. Cultural difference should not be neglected in studying LMX for its significance on superior-subordinate relationships (Page & Wiseman, 1993). Similarly, Ayman and Korabik (2010) stated that studying leadership without considering the role of gender and culture will only restrict the scope of knowledge. In their meta-review, Dulebohn et al. (2012) stated that non-Western cultures are still insufficiently taken into LMX studies. Rockstuhl et al. (2012) also supported that intercultural LMX studies outside the US are still very limited. Even in a highly diverse society as Malaysia, the current literature has rather limited information about what underlies the LMX (Abu Bakar & McCann, 2014).

According to Pellegrini and Scandura (2006), apart from Japan and United States, the focus of cultural context studies in LMX is mostly on Asian values such as those practiced in China (Chen & Tjosvold, 2007; Hsu, Chen, Wang, & Lin, 2010; Hui, Law, & Chen, 1999, Wang, & Clegg, 2007), Korea (Jung, Takeuchi, & Takahashi, n.d.) and India (Pellegrini, Scandura, & Jayaraman, 2010; Varma, Srinivas, & Stroh, 2005).

Most of the studies in these countries show that cultural background is significantly affecting the LMX development between dyads at work. In the Middle East, Pellegrini and Scandura (2006) are among the pioneers to study LMX from a cultural perspective with their study in Turkey regarding LMX, delegation and satisfaction. In the study, they found that LMX is positively associated with managerial paternalistic behaviour. In the country, subordinates are expecting father-like superiors who always take care of them including their personal lives due to their collectivistic culture, which is totally different from the individualistic culture in western countries.

In India, Pellegrini et al. (2010) also found that there are actually differences between Indians and Americans in regard to LMX. The authors found that LMX and organizational commitment are positively related with paternalism for Indian organizations but not in the US.

Next, Hsu et al. (2010) looked into the relationship between Western (LMX) and Eastern (*guanxi*) concepts of relationship with supervisory support in their study involving participants from Taiwan and China. From the result, they found that one of the elements of *guanxi*, the ‘expressive ties’, which means “long-term and stable social relationship” (p.43) is positively correlated with LMX and supervisory support. Chinese employees also show higher LMX quality with their foreign managers when they have cooperative goals, instead of competitive or independent

goals (Chen & Tjosvold, 2007). This high quality relationship consequently makes intercultural leadership more effective, showing different needs of Chinese subordinates as compared to western countries.

Researchers in China have introduced an indigenous Chinese leader-member guanxi (LMG) construct which focuses on personal relationship, as according to the researchers, LMX focuses more on work-related exchanges while LMG captures social interactions between the dyads (Chen, Friedman, Yu, Fang, & Lu, 2009; Chen, Yu, & Son, 2014). According to Law, Wong, Wang and Wang (2000), besides LMX, leader-member dyads in the country develop LMG through activities such as gift exchange, family visits and after-hours socialization. LMG was thus introduced to capture the full picture of interactions between leader-member in the country in addition to the existing LMX measures. More recently, Zhao (2014) found that in China, Chinese traditionality is moderating the strength of the mediated relationship between RLMX and employee voice. Although the relationship found in this study is indirect, together with other previous studies, it still suggests that cultural value should not be neglected in LMX studies.

In Japan, Jung, Takeuchi and Takahashi (n.d.) found that the effects of LMX on other outcomes are actually also cultural-bound. In their study, they found that for Japanese who always care about their relationship with their supervisors, the positive relationship between P-O Fit (Person-Organization Fit) and work attitudes (job satisfaction and intention to stay) is weaker when they are having good exchange



quality with their supervisors. On the other hand, this moderating effect of LMX is not seen in Koreans, who care less about their relationships with superiors.

All of these studies had not only expanded the generalization of LMX outside the US but also proved the effect of cultural difference on LMX, resulting in different views and needs regarding supervisor-subordinate relationship. In spite of the significance of cultural effects, LMX researches incorporating cultural or ethnicity perspective are still very limited in Malaysia. This study is thus designed to look into LMX relationships in Malaysian workplaces from an interethnic aspect.

In Malaysia, most LMX studies were carried out without taking the ethnicity factor into consideration despite its multi-ethnic background and the significant role of cultural diversity in the dyadic relationship. A few researchers were actually aware of this weakness and started suggesting future LMX studies to include ethnic or cultural diversity after their studies did not take ethnicity into consideration (Ansari et al., 2007; Abu Bakar et al., 2009; Lo et al., 2009).

Reviewing the existing literature, there are several famous contexts of LMX which always get attention from researchers and have been studied thoroughly. The longstanding interests in LMX research include the relationship quality (van Breukelen et al., 2006; Schyns & Day, 2010) and the consequences of different types of exchange (van Breukelen et al., 2006). On the other hand, apart from cultural perspective, there are also several aspects that are under-discussed in LMX literature.

One of the neglected aspects that need more attention from researchers is the dimensionality of LMX.

### **2.1.3 Dimensionality of LMX**

LMX relationship is an exchange relationship based on competence, interpersonal skill and trust between the dyads, exemplifying an economic transaction based on a cost-benefit calculation (Graen, 1976, Scandura & Schrieim, 1994). One of the common drawbacks in LMX researches is that despite its emphasis on the exchange process, most studies overlooked the contents of dimensions exchanged in the relationships (Berneth, et al., 2007; van Breukelen et al., 2006). Dulebohn et al. (2012) also found that most existing LMX scales do not measure the exchange between dyads despite its emphasis on the exchange process.

Early works by Graen and his colleagues treated LMX as unidimensional, limiting the exchanges to work-related commodities only (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). This was then rejected by Dienesch and Liden (1986) who proposed that LMX is actually a multidimensional construct, based on role theory and social exchange theory. According to the authors, LMX is actually constructed by three dimensions - perceived contributions, loyalty and affect which act as the 'currencies of exchange' in the relationship.

When Dienesch and Liden (1986) introduced the multidimensional concept of LMX, they did not claim the three dimensions to be exclusive in LMX development;

instead, the authors were open to the possibility of other dimensions. Later, the fourth dimension, professional respect was added by Liden and Maslyn (1998).

### **2.1.3.1 Perceived Contributions**

Dienesch and Liden (1986) defined this dimension as the perception of dyads about the total and quality of work-related efforts each other put forth in achieving mutual goals. A leader evaluates a subordinate through the ability of the subordinate in handling his work-related responsibility and how much the member does beyond the minimum job requirement. On the other hand, the member is looking at how many resources and opportunities can be provided by the supervisor. According to the authors, the level of this dimension should have a stronger effect than other dimensions as both leader and member should have confidence in their own ability as well as in their partner.

### **2.1.3.2 Loyalty**

Loyalty refers to the level of support for each other between leader and member in public, where the level is usually consistent from situation to situation (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Loyalty performance can be reflected in the attempts of subordinates to maintain long term development and the degree of mutual protection between the dyadic members, especially in front of outsiders (Dienesch & Liden, 1986).

### **2.1.3.3 Affect**

Affect is basically based on interpersonal attraction, measuring the mutual affection between the dyads according to Dienesch and Liden (1986). According to the

authors, this dimension influences the intensity and tone of interactions between leader and member, creating a warmer and friendlier working environment. Liden et al. (1993) found this dimension to be a better predictor of LMX than the assessment of leaders on member's performance. Liking and affect showed by a leader towards a member also help increase member perceptions of LMX according to Dulebohn et al. (2012).

#### **2.1.3.4 Professional Respect**

This dimension added by Liden and Maslyn (1998) is defined as the perception of the degree of reputation built by each member in his line of work, within the organization or in public. They added that it is possible to develop a perception on this dimension about someone even before working with him or meeting him as this perception can not only be made through personal experience but also through comments about the person from others. A leader or member will always value his professional-respected dyadic partner because of the partner's knowledge and skills (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). According to Kim and Taylor (2001), Professional Respect is more likely to be developed among dyadic members with high quality of LMX.

Based on their natures, the dimensions were divided into two groups - perceived contribution as a work currency while the other three are social currencies. Studies show that leaders and subordinates are always looking for different currencies to exchange within a relationship; leaders always look for more work-related currencies

while subordinates are more into socially related currencies (Dockery & Steiner, 1990; Day & Crain, 1992; Zhou & Schriesheim, 2010).

While they identified these four dimensions to be the currencies of exchange in LMX, Liden and Maslyn (1998) stated that none of the four is compulsory in a LMX relationship. A leader-member exchange could be built on any one, two, or three, or all dimensions depending on the relationship development.

In Malaysia, the study by Ansari et al. (2007) has looked into the effects of the four dimensions on organizational outcomes. This may provide a brief idea about the importance of each of the dimensions in Malaysian context. First, Affect was found having the strongest impact on all organizational commitments among the four existing dimensions (Ansari et al., 2007). This is probably because Malaysia is a relationship-based society (Anusuiya et al., 2009) and leaders are expected to show compassion towards their subordinates (Abu Bakar, Walters, & Halim, 2014).

Next, the authors also found that Professional Respect has a strong effect on procedural justice climate in Malaysia as compared to the other two dimensions. According to Farh and Cheng (2000), subordinates always show respect to their superiors in Malaysia due to high power distance culture. In addition, apart from showing respect for their authority (Selvarajah, & Meyer, 2006), mutual respect is also expected between working partners for their age and experiences, regardless of their hierarchical position (Dooley, 2003). Thus, these two dimensions are said to be more important in Malaysian context as compared to the other two dimensions.

Although Perceived Contribution and Loyalty are not found to be related to organizational outcomes significantly in Malaysia, Ansari et al. (2007) didn't deny their importance in Malaysian context. Going through literature, Loyalty indicates the support of the dyads protecting and defending each other in front of others (Liden, & Maslyn, 1998). In Malaysia, this behaviour can be understood as the 'face' saving concept. All of the three ethnic groups are upholding 'face' value (Asma, 1992; McLaren, & Rashid, 2002), which can be portrayed in always taking care of others' face and avoid direct confrontation.

Next, Perceived Contribution which indicates the efforts put forward by the dyads in achieving mutual goal (Liden, & Maslyn, 1998) can be related to the Malaysian value which is always willing to contribute to their affiliation. According to Asma (1992), Malays are especially willing to contribute more if they know that their efforts are not only benefitting the organization but their family and affiliation. Indians are also willing to do more than they are required for their superiors and organization due to high inner sense of duty (McLaren, & Rashid, 2002). Thus, despite being found not significantly affecting organizational outcomes, these two dimensions may still be among the dimensions being exchanged between interethnic leader-member dyads in Malaysia context. Unfortunately, in Malaysia, researchers have yet to identify the exact dimensions of exchange between interethnic leader-member dyads in the diverse working environment. Questions such as "are the interethnic leader-member dyads only exchanging the four dimensions or more than that?" and "are there any of the four dimensions not being exchanged in the context?" remain unsolved.

Besides the quantity, researchers also raised questions about the contents of the dimensions identified. For instance, Yu and Liang (2004) pointed out that the contents being exchanged in a LMX relationship as suggested by Dienesch and Liden (1986) are too broad and unclear. According to the authors, contents such as perceived contribution, loyalty, and affection are too ambiguous to explain the real contents being exchanged in a relationship. Van Breukelen et al. (2006) also pointed out that among the identified dimensions, some can be taken as both a dimension as well as an antecedent of a high quality relationship, which requires further clarification. According to Brower, Schoorman and Tan (2000), the lacking of clarity of the dimensions is one of the reasons causing ambiguity in measurement of LMX.

Recently, Wang, Liu and Law (2007) found that the LMX dimensions exchanged in China are different from the existing dimensions, due to cultural difference between China and Western countries where most LMX dimension studies were carried out. With a speculation that the context of LMX in China will be different from western countries, the authors carried out a study to identify the domains and contents of LMX in China and compared the results with existing dimensionality of LMX. Apart from the four existing dimensions by Liden and Maslyn (1998), the study found that there are actually seven more categories in the context of LMX in China, i.e. intimacy, job-related support, favouritism, personal friendship, performance recognition, obligation and considering. The categories were then grouped into two emic dimensions which are specific for the China context - *closeness* and *personal*

*interaction*. Based on their findings, the authors built a new validated LMX scale for China, including all the emic dimensions.

From this, we can see that LMX dimensions actually vary between different places and different cultures. Scholars such as Shore, Coyle-Shapiro, Chen and Tetrick (2009) and Rockstuhl et al. (2012) also supported this and called for more studies to look into the contents being exchanged in intercultural LMX. In Malaysia, however, despite the diverse working environment, researchers have yet to look into the actual dimensions being exchanged between interethnic leader-member dyads.

Together with the ambiguities of LMX dimensions as well as the quantity of dimensions exchanged mentioned above, the current research question intends to answer the call by Shore et al. (2009) and Rockstuhl et al. (2012) by looking into LMX exchange between interethnic dyads in Malaysia. Thus, the first research question posed is:

Research Question 1: What are the contents/dimensions being exchanged between interethnic leader-member dyads in Malaysia?



## **2.2 Cultural Studies in Malaysia**

In Malaysia, each ethnic group is still practicing different cultural values and behaviours while living harmonically in the same society (Asma, 1992; Hamzah, 1991). As of 2009, Malaysia's population was estimated at 28.1 million, made up by about 49.9 percent of Malay, 22.7 percent of Chinese and 6.8 percent of Indians (Department of Statistics Malaysia, March 2014).

Together with other minorities, these three ethnic groups made up the culturally diverse society. Hamzah (1991) believes that Malaysia is probably the only country in the world where different ethnic groups live together with their own unique identities and cultures such as language, customs and behaviour patterns well-preserved. Malaysians are diverse with different languages, cultures and religions. While we have been living together for decades exchanging influences and ideas, we are still different from each other (Abu Bakar & McCann, 2014). This multi-ethnic background has brought obvious diversity to the country, leading to differences in both daily life and at work.

Ethnicity is often used interchangeably with race but they are actually two different terms. Race is a biological concept based on someone's origins (Bhopal & Rowley, 2005) but ethnicity is definitely a wider concept as it is not caused by these inborn characteristics alone (Strauch, 1981). Bhopal and Rowley (2005) stated that an ethnic group requires a common origin such as race but it allows the members to be varied in terms of language, religion and other characteristics. According to

Horowitz (1985), demographic features such as religion, caste, tribe and race are different forms of ethnicity under an umbrella but limiting ethnicity interpretation within these inborn attributions is definitely too narrow.

Malay, Chinese and Indians are referred to as ethnic groups in this research. According to Bhopal and Rowley (2005), ethnicity includes numerous sub-divisions within a race, providing more chances to understand the sub-divisions and enables a richer appreciation of differences among people. In Malaysia, sub-divisions within a race are common, such as Chinese speaking different dialects and practicing different religions. Malaysian Chinese, as an ethnic group, are different from Chinese from other places like Thailand and China as they are not merely Chinese but Chinese with Malaysian identity (Tan, 2000). Zmud and Arce (1992) also supported that ethnicity is not a fully stable characteristic but varies from time to time according to social surroundings, which explains the differences of Malaysian Chinese and Indians from those who are from their places of origin.

Backerville (2003) stated that ethnicity affects one's perceptions, attitudes and behaviour and many studies showed that different ethnic groups reflect diversity of human behaviours. This is supported by Abu Bakar et al. (2014) that ethnicity is always important in both secular and religious affairs in Malaysia as a diverse society. Ethnic values are said to be driving a business due to its influence on our thinking, behaviour, task performance as well as our relationship with others (Asma, 1992). Thus, comparing the major ethnic groups in Malaysia in different aspects should be fruitful according to Fontaine, Richardson and Yeap (2002).

## **Malay**

The Constitution of Malaysia (1964) described Malays as those “who profess the Muslim religion, habitually speak the Malay language and conform to Malay customs” (p.131). Together with Islamic teachings, Malays inherit *budi* intellect which teaches them to be rational and sensitive at the same time to others’ inner feelings, *rasa* from the ancestors (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008). They are also taught to be helpful, polite, considerate and courteous to others in their traditional teachings (Khairul, Jin, & Cooper, 2000). At work, Malay managers are always more tender and flexible in adapting to others (Hamzah, 1991).

## **Chinese**

In the late nineteenth century, the ancestors of Chinese Malaysians moved to Malaysia due to a harsh feudalistic life under the control of warlords in their country (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008). These authors added that the majority of Chinese Malaysians are of Southern China origin, mostly Confucianist, Taoist or Buddhist. Along with themselves, the Chinese ancestors carried a strong sense of cultural heritage (Strauch, 1981). Taormina and Selvarajah (2005) believed that most Malaysian Chinese have inherited a strong culture which “has gone virtually unchallenged for nearly 2500 years” (p. 5). Ninety percent of the four million population of Chinese Malaysians above 15 years old in Peninsular Malaysia are Chinese-literate (NMR-Media Index, 2010).

Being exposed to vastly different environments, Chinese Malaysians' value systems are likely to be different from Chinese of other South East Asian countries while sharing a lot of similarities with Chinese from Singapore and Hong Kong due to their exposure to non-Chinese cultures and systems for a long time as compared to those from Mainland China (Soontiens, 2007). This makes Chinese Malaysians unique, having both traditional Chinese values from their ancestors and new instilled values created from their surroundings. At work, Asma and Pederson (2003) think the relationship between a Chinese superior and subordinate resembles the relationship of a child with his extended family, as they like to integrate their business and personal life, building up complicated networks of relationships which are thought to be helpful at work.

### **Indian**



During the European colonization of Asia, Indians moved to Malaysia in a large scale (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008). Indians from South India and Sri Lanka mostly came here to become labour supply in plantations and road constructions (Selvaratnam & Apputhurai, 2006) while those from Gujarat, Sind (North India) and Chettinad (South India) were mainly merchants (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008). According to Population and Housing Census of Malaysia (2010), 80% of Indian Malaysians practice Hinduism. Strong work ethics and ability to adapt fast are among the criteria of an Indian Malaysian according to Asma and Pederson (2003). In addition, the authors added that Indians always have a high regard for the leader at work.

Maintaining separate ethnic identities and keeping their own cultures in their customs, behaviour, language, values and beliefs, different ethnic groups together make up the diverse workforce in Malaysian organizations (Anusuiya et al., 2009). Yet, most researches in management had incorrectly assumed the country as a homogenous society, ignoring the diversity of values between different ethnic groups in the country (Lim, 1998). This assumption equating nations with cultures actually have been recognized as a difficulty for multi-ethnic countries such as Malaysia according to Bhopal and Rowley (2005). In fact, Ayman and Korabik (2010) stated that assuming people who live within the same geographic boundaries share similar cultural values is inappropriate to a diverse, pluralistic society. Ignoring cultural differences is a big challenge to management, be it management of an organization (Asma & Gallagher, 1995) or management of the whole society in Malaysia (Abdullah, 2005). On the other hand, studying leadership from a cultural perspective can always be beneficial (Fontaine, 2007). Abu Bakar, Jian and Fairhurst (2014) also stated that in-depth understanding of local cultures as well as their consequences on leadership behaviours and outcomes is vital for effective leadership development programs.

In Malaysia, most efforts examining cultural differences in leadership compared it at national level with other countries while little attention has been given to multicultural settings within the country (Bhaskaran & Sukumaran, 2007; Fontaine, 2007; Selvarajah & Meyer, 2006), including the infamous Hofstede and GLOBE studies.

### **2.2.1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions**

Since the publication of Hofstede's first book in 1980, researchers have started paying attention to the influences of culture on attitudes and behaviours of individuals (Mohd. Yusoff et al., 2002). Hofstede's Cultural Dimension is described as the most widely recognized culture dimension although it is at the same time being interrogated strongly as well (Dickson, Den Hartog, & Mitchelson, 2003; Fontaine et al., 2002).

From his study based on a survey among IBM managers and employees in over 40 countries, Hofstede (1980) had identified four cultural dimensions for diversity study. Later in 1991, he added the fifth dimension after his Chinese Value Survey, due to the high correlation between the dimension and economic growth (Dickson et al., 2003). Hofstede kept replicating his study in different countries with different populations, trying to expand and strengthen the model. As of 2010, the number of countries in which the study had been carried out stood at 76 (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). The five validated dimensions through the series of studies are individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term vs. short term orientation. According to Dickson et al. (2003) and Zhang, Waldman and Wang (2012), these individual cultural orientations are affecting the influence of LMX on attitudinal outcomes.

Hofstede (1991) defined culture as "the norms, values and beliefs of a particular group or community in a particular area or geographic location, and shared by its members" (p.4), using culture and nationality interchangeably, assuming all nations

are having homogenous culture. Even though he was fully aware of the diverse population of the nation, Hofstede (1991) insisted that the differences between the ethnic groups are not significant and studied Malaysia as a homogeneous country. His study stated that Malaysians are generally collectivistic with high power distance, average on masculinity and relatively low on uncertainty avoidance. He also found the PDI (power distance index) of Malaysians to be the highest among all countries. However, for the fifth dimension, Hofstede (1991) inferred that ethnic groups in Malaysia are different. According to him, Chinese and Indian Malaysians prefer long-term orientation while Malays are more short-term orientated at work.

Although Hofstede (1984, 1991) provided some new insights about Malaysian culture, like many other studies taking Malaysia as a homogenous country, the validity of the results is doubted. Mc Sweeney (2002) questioned the applicability of Hofstede's model as Hofstede always insisted that culture is territorially unique and a country always has only one homogenous culture even though he conceded that some nations are 'subculturally heterogeneous'. Fontaine and Richardson (2003) also think that too many generalizations about Malaysia in Hofstede's study have caused it to be rather misleading. Some follow-up cultural researches after Hofstede's carried out by local researchers show that the three ethnic groups are actually more diverse (eg.: Lim, 2001; Mohd. Yusoff et al., 2002)

### 2.2.2 GLOBE Study

Despite the inadequacy of Hofstede's study, the next large scale study incorporating cultural context in Malaysia - GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program) still followed Hofstede's lead, treating Malaysia as a homogenous country. GLOBE was a 10-year research program intended to increase available knowledge regarding cross cultural interactions, with data collected from 17,000 managers in 62 societies throughout the world (House et al., 2004). Future orientation, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, humane orientation, in-group collectivism, institutional collectivism, performance orientation versus decentralization (power distance) and uncertainty avoidance are the nine attributes in GLOBE used to rank the 62 countries with respect to their cultures.

Like Hofstede, the study assumed that there is no significant difference between different ethnic groups in Malaysia, using Malay culture and leadership style to surrogate the whole population (Kennedy, 2002). According to Kennedy (2002), the GLOBE study found Malaysians generally showing high concern for collective interests, with high rates in humane orientation, group/ family collectivism and institutional collectivism dimensions while showing low levels in assertiveness dimension. These results are quite consistent with Hofstede's about Malaysians' high collectivism.

What is interesting about GLOBE is that Kennedy (2002) noted that there are a few dimensions in GLOBE which are found to be different from Hofstede's study which



was carried out 20 years earlier in Malaysia. First, the power distance rating in Malaysia was not as high as mentioned by Hofstede, Kennedy (2002) gave the credit to the political transformation towards a more open society during the gap of more than 20 years between the two studies. Next, Hofstede (1991) stated that Malaysians are low in uncertainty avoidance but the GLOBE study found Malaysians showing many characteristics associated with high uncertainty avoidance and high future orientation cultures. Performance orientation and gender egalitarianism of Malaysians are also found to be above the median of all countries. In the second part of the GLOBE study, the managers involved were asked to rate six dimensions (charismatic/ transformational, team-oriented, human-oriented, participative, autonomous and self-protective) regarding their perception of effective leadership in Malaysia (Kennedy, 2002).

This study was later critiqued by Graen (2006), stating that the study had claimed “too much cross-cultural ecological and construct validity and generalizability for their research findings” (p. 95), which is rather dangerous and misleading. First, the GLOBE study adopted the ALS approach which involved only managers without considering dyadic data from both managers and subordinates. According to Gertsner and Day (1997), researchers who are still employing the ALS approach in their studies are excluded from post-modern leadership research literature. Secondly, participants were given choices about the leadership style they prefer but many leadership styles had been left out such as transformational leadership and LMX. Relying on average scores of these choices for recommendations also made GLOBE missing the point of individual assessments.

Graen (2006) criticized that GLOBE had distorted the actual results because it had overlooked diversity within a country, including ethnic and regional differences. For example, Graen and Lau (2005) doubted the representability of the GLOBE study in China as only 300 samples from one location were used out of its 1.3 billion population with multi subcultures in the country. In order to cope with the drawback of GLOBE, Graen and his colleagues introduced a new approach to understand leadership in multicultural settings, the Third Culture Bonding (TCB) approach (Graen, 2006; Graen & Lau, 2005; Graen & Wakabayashi, 1994), which was later incorporated with leadership-member relationship to become LMX Third Culture Way.

Due to the deficits of GLOBE and Hofstede as mentioned, the applicability and representability of the studies in Malaysia are rather limited. However, these two large-scale studies have still provided some new insights into the cultural context of our country.

A culturally inclusive research is always more beneficial as it brings benefits such as expanding the theories and the range of variables, and yielding more understanding in the context (Triandis & Brislin, 1984). In order to fill the gap, Dahlia (2008) urged researchers to update the existing literature in Malaysia as the understanding of cultural values between different ethnic groups is very important. Lailawati (2005) also insisted that discussing different ethnic groups in Malaysia separately will be better than taking the whole society as a homogenous one due to the society

composition. Realizing the deficits in both Hofstede's and GLOBE, most local researchers started taking ethnicity into considerations in their studies in Malaysia.

In their model derived from an anthropological approach, Asma and Lim (2001) found that different ethnic groups in Malaysia are only different in one out of the eight dimensions built, the religious dimension. This is supported by Fontaine and Richardson (2005) in their study using Schwartz's model. However, in other researches, more differences have been found among the diverse population.

In her study, Dooley (2003) highlighted a few significant differences among the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia. According to her, Chinese believe in long-term accumulation of wealth, hard work, filial piety and food, while Malays hold values such as gentility, hospitality, religious requirements and sharing of food. Lastly, family expectations, traditional beliefs including karma, and the belief of cause and effect are among the beliefs in Indian groups.

At workplaces, Hamzah (1991) and Asma (2001) found that for most Malays, affiliation to groups is their main motivation. Malays prefer stability, emphasizing on relationship building and respecting tradition while Chinese are more materialistic, showing perseverance, thrift qualities and better adaption skills (Lim, 1998). Rafikul and Ahmad Zaki (2008) also found Chinese employees to be mainly motivated by high wages and opportunity to grow at work as compared to other ethnic groups. Khairul, et al. (2000) found that Malays always try to avoid public confrontation, as taught in Islamic teaching. Chinese on the other hand, are always seen to be more aggressive and self-confident. The politeness and flexibility of Malay managers in adapting to others are however always misunderstood for being

timid (Hamzah, 1991). Again, this misconception is probably derived from lack of understanding among different ethnic groups.

Attitudes and behaviours of an individual are culturally bound (Mohd. Yusoff et al., 2002), and so are leadership and management approaches (Hofstede, 1991). Besides cultural values, ethnicity also significantly affects a few aspects in regard to leadership, such as employees' preference for leadership styles (Mohd. Yusoff et al., 2002) and dimensions of excellence in leadership (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2006).

Ethnicity is a decisive constraining and enabling factor in leadership and management in highly diverse Malaysian organizations (Bhopal & Rowley, 2005; Selvarajah & Meyer, 2006). It is crucial to study and understand the importance of cultural dimensions to management (Hamzah, 1991) as well as to develop an intercultural management style in Malaysia (Fontaine et al., 2002). In order to get along with members from diverse cultural backgrounds, Malaysian managers are required to put on multicultural dimension, adapting and accommodating to a suitable leadership style the members prefer (Mohd. Yusoff et al., 2002; Selvarajah & Meyer, 2006). Sensitivity to diversity issues is vital to enhance the promising benefits of LMX model as well as to manage diversity challenges in a diverse working environment as in Malaysia (Chen & Van Velsor, 1996; Scandura & Lankau, 1996).

General advice from scholars and researchers such as being open minded may help a multicultural manager but is definitely not sufficient as different places always

perceive the same thing differently (Javidan, Dorfman, De Luge, & House, 2006). There is no one-size-fits-all advice for multicultural managers in different places around the world. Assumptions implying that there is only one single leadership style in a country may be valid for some homogenous countries like Japan but in Malaysia, it is rather misleading and dangerous (Fontaine et al., 2002; Kennedy, 2002). Unfortunately, Bhopal and Rowley (2005) found that ethnicity is always neglected in management issues especially in locations which are multi-ethnic, such as Malaysia. Thus, it is not surprising when Selvarajah and Meyer (2006) claimed that Malaysian managers are still lacking good understanding about different values at multicultural workplaces.

Asma and Singh (1992) found that the three ethnic groups in Malaysia have different preferences in leadership. According to the authors, Chinese are always looking for a leader who can be trusted and reciprocate the same trust to them in return. Malays on the other hand prefer a socio-centric leader who can be a friend and boss simultaneously while an impartial boss-centred leadership makes Indians feel comfortable.

Due to the debatable validity of Hofstede's (1980) findings in Malaysia and lack of satisfying follow-up research, researchers have replicated the same study in Malaysia from a different perspective. They looked into each ethnic group separately, trying to investigate the difference between different groups in Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Lim, 2001; Mohd. Yusoff et al., 2002). Mohd Yusoff et al. (2000) proved that the three ethnic groups are different in three out of the five cultural

dimensions including power distance, individualism-collectivism and uncertainty avoidance.

Among the three dimensions, individualism-collectivism and power distance have been identified by Anand, Hu, Liden and Vidayarthi (2011) to be important in affecting the development and consequences of LMX. In their meta-analysis, Dulebohn et al. (2012) supported that power distance and individualism affect the relationships between some antecedents and consequences in LMX relationships. For their differences in these two dimensions, the three ethnic groups are thus expected to be different from each other with regard to LMX.

Dahlia (2008) thought that although local researchers started showing interest in cultural differences in leadership study in Malaysia, the scope is however still quite restricted. The absence of LMX studies from a multicultural perspective in Malaysia explains the phrase precisely. Reviewing literature, the study by Anusuiya et al. (2009) is among the limited LMX studies in Malaysia that started taking ethnic diversity into account. In the study, the authors proved that different ethnic groups in Malaysia are associated with different Implicit Leadership Theory, having different expectations regarding the ideal characteristics of a leader.

More recently, Abu Bakar carried out two LMX studies in Malaysia with his colleagues. First, Abu Bakar and McCann (2014) found that ethnicity similarity is positively related to both leaders' and members' perceptions on their LMX quality in Malaysia. On top of that, subordinates' perceptions on job satisfaction, commitment

to work-group and subordinates' in-role and extra-role performance ratings by the supervisor were also affected by ethnic similarity. According to the authors, this is probably because dyads from similar ethnic backgrounds know better of what constitutes high and low quality LMX, making them easier to achieve better LMX relationships as the standards are clear. In another study, Abu Bakar et al. (2014) looked into the impact of cultural relational norms in Malaysia on the congruence model of LMX quality introduced by Cogliser, Schriesheim and Scandura (2009), which predicts that the agreement between a leader and their members' perceptions of LMX quality is significantly affecting the subordinates' performance outcomes.

According to Cogliser et al. (2009), members who agreed with their leaders on high LMX received the highest scores for their performance rating while those who agreed on low LMX received the lowest; and intermediate ratings were found for members who disagreed with their leaders on LMX ratings. In their study, Abu Bakar et al. (2014) found that the relationship between LMX agreement and follower performance ratings is the strongest when leader-member dyads are from the same ethnic group. In addition, they found that LMX agreement on both in-role and out-role performance of the dyads is also moderated by ethnic similarity. According to the authors, different values held by leaders from different ethnic groups are likely to influence their judgment on their diverse subordinates.

The findings of these studies highlighted the importance of ethnicity difference in affecting LMX development in Malaysia. Thus, current research presumes that there will be differences between the three ethnic groups in their needs and wants with

regard to LMX at work. The first part of the second research question thus is posted as:

Research Question 2(i): What are the differences between interethnic leader-member dyads regarding their needs in LMX?

According to Chen and van Velsor (1996), the usefulness of a diversity study is limited if it only focuses on differences between diverse groups without looking for the similarities which may help to reduce the social and psychological distance between them. In addition, it is not realistic to assume two different cultures to be totally different from each other without sharing any similarities. For instance, although the US and China are seen as the representatives of Western and non-Western Culture, they still share similarities such as performance orientation, humane orientation and power distance according to Javidan et al. (2006).

Compared to American and Japanese, the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia which share the same Asian heritage may have even closer cultures! In her study comparing cultural values among three ethnic groups in Malaysia and the western culture at work, Dooley (2003) found both similarities and differences between the three groups. Studies show that the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia share some segments of cultural dimensions while there are still considerable fundamental differences between them (Kennedy, 2002; Lailawati, 2005; Lim, 2001).



In view of the above, the second part of Research Question 2 of this study is:

Research Question 2(ii): What are the similarities between interethnic leader-member dyads regarding their needs in LMX?



### **2.3 LMX Third Culture Way vs. LMX Two Cultures Way**

According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), relationship-based approach such as LMX “accommodates differing needs of subordinates (p.224)”, making it a suitable practice when the followers are substantially diverse. Similarly, Chen and Van Velsor (1996) stated that LMX’s dyadic and relationship-based nature is able to yield fruitful outcomes in diverse leadership study. The authors believed that these features help researcher probe deeper into the complexities of intercultural leadership.

Hamzah (1991) stated that a successful multicultural manager needs to have extra qualities such as being people-oriented with high sensitivity to cultural differences, willing to learn management skills, appreciating the culture that causes the differences between members, and working with his heart in addition to working with his hands and his brain. It is also very important for leaders to be alerted of interethnic issues as according to Matkin and Barbuto Jr. (2012), a leader who is sensitive about intercultural issues tends to have higher LMX ratings from his subordinates.

According to Graen et al. (2005), there are two ways of handling LMX between two different cultures, i.e: ‘LMX Third Culture Way’ vs. ‘LMX Two Cultures Way’. A third culture is formed by synthesizing different cultural backgrounds into a new culture that is acceptable to all (Graen et al., 2005). The main code of Third Culture

is to enable both parties to preserve their cultures at the same time transcending some for mutual benefits, without offending the other (Graen et al., 2004).

As compared to acculturation which stresses on single cultural domination or adaptation, third culture is totally different as it creates a 'third space' hybridizing various aspects of different cultures (Bhabha, 1994). In his study looking into the relationship between acculturation of immigrants and workplace relationship quality, Jian (2012) found that the higher the level of adjustment to the host culture shown by an immigrant, the higher the quality of perceived LMX. While the finding suggests the importance of acculturation, the author also found that one does not need to unlearn his own culture in intercultural relationships. In contrast, one can always retain his original culture as higher level of retention of one's original culture may even strengthen the positive relationship of adjustment to the host culture with LMX according to him. This finding is similar to part of the principle of the third culture that one can always keep some of his own values when getting along with a partner from diverse background. Graen and Wakabayashi (1994) believe that a third, hybrid culture is always more beneficial in an organization by making individuals see themselves as a part of the new developed culture instead of seeing each other according to their demographic background.

Third Culture concept was then integrated with LMX by Graen et al. (2005) to form 'LMX Third Culture Way' together with its contradictory 'LMX Two Cultures Way'. Before a third culture is successfully created, organizational members have to understand the cultural differences between each other (Graen et al., 2004). In order

to create 'LMX Third Culture Way', managers need not only to know the differences but also how to utilize their knowledge of cultural values in adaptive ways (Chen & Tjosvold, 2007).

Graen et al. (2004) defined the 'LMX Third Culture Way vs. LMX Two Cultures Way' as a 'win-win vs. win-lose' situation respectively. The third culture way is called the 'win-win' situation as it capitalizes on the strengths and minimizes the weakness of both cultures involved, offending neither culture (Graen & Wakabayashi, 1994). For instance, in a relationship practicing LMX Third Culture Way, a member from an individualistic culture may try to integrate some collectivistic components in his leader-member relationship when dealing with a partner from a collective background (Graen, 2006). By practicing 'LMX Third Culture Way', mutual benefits can be achieved as both dyadic members are willing to accommodate the partners in some aspects while they also get to retain some of their own values (Graen et al., 2004). This 'give and take' concept creates a win-win situation between the dyads. On the other hand, 'LMX Two Cultures Way' causes serious cultural conflict as the two different cultures will always compete to retain their respective cultures without any toleration at the workplace (Graen & Wakabayashi, 1994). The differences between 'LMX Third Culture Way' and 'Two Cultures' are summarized in the table below:

*Table 2.1 Differences between LMX Third Culture Way and LMX Two Cultures Way*

Two Cultures	Third Culture
CYA (Cover Your Ass) attitude	Trust
Disinterest	Respect
Compete	Cooperate
Confront	Accommodate
Short-term focus	Long-term focus
Legal contract	Handshake
Contract breach	Mutual obligation
Win-lose view	Win-win view

Adopted from Graen, Hui, Wakabayashi, and Wang (1997), p. 180.

Graen and Wakabayashi (1994) found that people in a workplace with third culture see themselves as neither Japanese nor American but as part of the corporate culture. In addition, Yan and Luo (2001) state that ‘LMX Third Culture Way’ helps improve intercultural learning.

On the other hand, for ‘LMX Two Cultures’ way, both parties remain ‘strangers’ to each other in their relationship (Graen & Wakabayashi, 1994). This does not mean that they do not know each other; they still communicate but they do not put in effort to know each other better. In Two Cultures Way, there will be no intention between diverse dyads to accommodate the other culture (Graen & Hui, 1996). Graen et al. (2004) stated that this kind of cultural management may lead to competition and even confrontation between cultures, prohibiting long term relationships.

The initial intention of Graen and his colleagues introducing LMX Third Culture is for those managers who were transferred to a transplant located in a foreign country, such as Japanese managers in the United States. The importance of LMX Third Culture Way in a diverse organization can be illustrated by an actual case of a Japanese manufacturing company (Graen et al., 2004).

The case happened when a famous Japanese manufacturing company dismantled its plant in Japan and moved it to Australia. Little did the management expected, the plant which ran well in Japan met failure in Australia. The performance of the plant in Australia was far lower than the average of Australian industrial park. After investigation, they found that the main reason was that both the Japanese and Australian managers never tried to understand each other or to build up 'LMX Third Culture Way'. After the failure, the company decided to build another plant in Michigan but this time, before opening, they sent the Japanese and American managers for training, exposing them to each other's culture and to develop 'LMX Third Culture Way'. The intervention proved successful when this new plant's performance was extremely outstanding. This case shows that LMX Third Culture Way does not only benefit the dyads but it even determines the destiny of an organization.

The core value of LMX Third Culture Way is to create a 'win-win' situation where both dyadic members need to accommodate their partners in some aspects while retaining some of their own values (Graen et al., 2004). It is not only important for

the dyads to know about their interethnic differences but also to know which of the characteristics can be transcended and which are to be retained by their counterparts.

In her interview with Professor John Schermerhorn, Asma Abdullah ascribed the synergy of the multiethnic workforce in Malaysian organizations to a lot of 'give and take' between them (Schermerhorn, 1994), exemplifying the core principle of LMX Third Culture Way. For instance, Malays as the aborigines of the land are always open in viewing diversity, welcoming other ethnic groups and thinking that it may make their life interesting as long as it is not against their culture and Islamic values (Sulaiman, 1981). In return, other ethnic groups are willing to accommodate to the religious needs of Muslims as required (Smith, 2003). For example, pork and alcohol should be avoided in a company dinner with Malay guests and employees. Because of their flexibility and toleration, problems rarely occur between different ethnic groups at the workplace (Smith, 2003).

Since 'give and take' is important in interethnic relationships, the next research question intends to identify characteristics that can be given away as well as those that are always retained by the three different ethnic groups in Malaysia to provide some recommendations to the dyads at the workplace. The third research question is posted as:

Research Question 3: What are the characteristics that reflect in interethnic dyads that can be understood, reconciled or transcended based on ethnic differences in LMX?

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The three research questions posted in the current research aimed to understand interethnic leader-member interactions in Malaysian organizations through the exchange between the dyads, their needs as well as the ‘give and take’ between them, identifying the characteristics that they may give in and those they always persist on in their relationships. Based on a few considerations, including the methodological gap in LMX studies mentioned in the previous chapter, the current research has decided to adopt a qualitative interpretative approach - phenomenology.

#### **3.2 Philosophical Underpinnings**

Qualitative research is an interpretative approach, intending to explore a phenomenon from the inside, taking the perspectives of research participants (Flick, 2009). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research can generally be described as ‘a set of interpretive, material practices to make the world visible’. A qualitative research requires the researcher to go through an analytical process to interpret the meanings, values, opinions and behaviours of others in contrast to quantitative research which looks into the relationships between discrete measurable variables and outcomes (Jaye, 2002).

According to Ormston, Spencer, Barbard and Snape (2003), the development of qualitative research and interpretivism can be traced back to as early as 1781 when



Immanuel Kant stated that people make sense of what is happening around them with their own interpretations. Following this line of reasoning, qualitative researchers started to focus on the participants' and investigators' interpretations as well as their understanding of a phenomenon. In order to understand a social context, we need to look from the standpoint of people who are participating in it (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Interpretative methodology is a method that aims to understand a phenomenon from individuals' perspectives, looking into interactions between people and the context they live in (Creswell, 2009). According to Alveeson and Deetz (2000), interpretative research looks into the aspects in life which have been overlooked, waiting to be systematised and brought under the light of modernist logics.

Creswell (1998) distinguished five 'qualitative traditions of inquiry' which include: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. These five methods are different in their purposes, as well as in the process of inquiry. For instance, ethnography draws from anthropology with its central question 'what is the culture of this group of people?' while phenomenology from philosophy intends to look into the meaning and essence of the lived experience of a group of people in a phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

Phenomenology draws heavily from philosophy, particularly on the writings of a German mathematician, Edmund Husserl (Creswell, 2013). Although writers following in his footsteps have pointed out different arguments for the use of phenomenology, they still have some philosophical assumptions on some common

grounds such as phenomenology is the study of lived experiences of persons and the view that these experiences are conscious ones (van Manen, 1990). In a phenomenological study, researchers collect data from individuals who have experienced in the phenomenon and then build a composite description, including the 'what' and 'how' of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, instead of explanation or analyses, Moustakas (1994) also stated that phenomenology is to develop descriptions of the essence of the experiences. In order to make sense of the reality of this group of people, the interpretation process is vital (Puvenesvary, Radziah, Naidu, Mastura, Noor Fadhilah, & Noor Hashima, 2008).

According to Holloway and Todres (2003), data collection process in phenomenology focuses on the depth of a particular experience, trying to get information to describe the quality of experiences through methods such as interviews and narratives. Thus, phenomenology uses interviews as the primary data collection method which sometimes, may be assisted with other forms such as observations and documents (Creswell, 2013).

According to Fairhurst (2007), LMX is a type of knowledge structure that can be known through narratives such as interview as interviews enable participants to narratively reflect upon their LMX experiences. She added that sense-making and meaning actually gets worked out when we are communicating. In Malaysia, although LMX studies are not rare, most of the studies overlooked the importance of narration in describing the experiences, opting for existing LMX scales. In the current research, the research questions attempts to look into LMX from a different

angle, investigating the dimensions exchanged, the needs and wants as well as the ‘give and take’ between interethnic dyads in Malaysian context. These questions cannot be answered with the existing LMX scales but require the participants to share their actual experiences and real thoughts with the researcher as they are the main source of information to answer the questions.

Because little is known about interethnic LMX in Malaysia context, the participants are the main information sources in the current research. The current research intends to look into interethnic leader-member relationship through the phenomenology method, trying to make sense of these interethnic interactions through the dyads’ actual experiences as well as their interpretations of the phenomenon. This method is able to reflect the participants’ actual experiences and meaning discursively. This also allows the researcher to capture the experiences of individuals and then build a composite description of the experience based on the interview data.

### **3.3 Participants**

In the current research, participants involved in the interviews were pairs of interethnic leader-member dyads working together. As mentioned in the previous chapter, involving only subordinates’ or leaders’ perspectives alone in an LMX study is insufficient and may provide prejudiced data. This research has thus interviewed both leader and member in each dyadic relationship to avoid biased data.

Participants were selected through a purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 1990) in this research. This sampling strategy helps to obtain participants who are or have been embedded in the phenomena of interest according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000). In this case, they are pairs of interethnic leader-member dyads who volunteered to be interviewed. Most of the participants were reached from contacts provided by my family and friends, who may be a co-worker or friend of the participants. Some acquaintances were also involved in the interview process but not my family members and close friends to avoid bias and fabricated answers from them because of our close relationships.

In this research, leader-member dyads involved in the interviews have been working with each other for at least four months. According to Liden et al. (1993), in the first two weeks of working together, a leader is forming an impression of their member's job-related capabilities and once it is formed, the impression remains fairly stable. By the second month working together, LMX will be well established between the dyads (Dansereau et al., 1975).

With the list of contacts and by approaching anyone who fulfils the requirements (interethnic leader-members dyads who have been working together for more than four months) and is willing to talk, the current research managed to interview a total of 36 individuals, including 16 leaders and 20 members. Out of the 36 individuals, 32 of them were from 16 pairs of matching interethnic leader-member dyads, being interviewed separately. For the rest of the four members, their leaders could not be

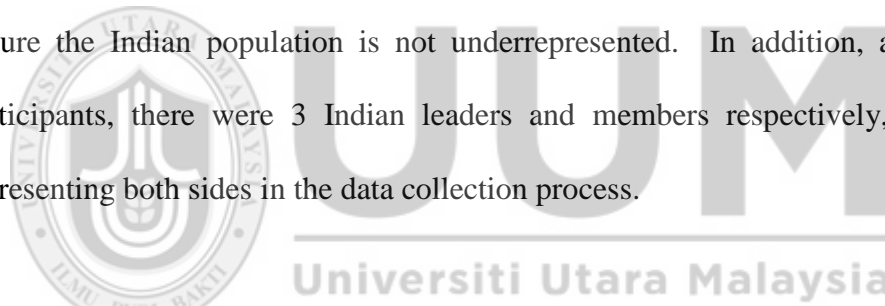
reached at the time of the interviews and had to be excluded due to time and resource constraints.

In most cases, interviews were conducted at the participants' workplaces, either in their room or a private room prepared by the participants. Besides that, six interviews took place in a cafe or restaurant nearby. All interviews in the rooms were conducted one-on-one privately, without a third party while for off-site interviews, they were also one-on-one, without having anyone the participants knew nearby.

Positions of leaders include owner, director, manager, engineer, supervisor and senior executive, while members also hold different positions which are directly under their respective leaders hierarchically. The interview participants are from four different places in the country - Kedah, Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. These participants are from different industries including manufacturing, education, technology, government sectors, food and beverage (F&B) and customer service.

Demographically, the participants are made up of 16 Malays (4 leaders, 12 members), 14 Chinese (9 leaders, 5 members) and 6 Indians (3 leaders, 3 members). Initially, proportionate quota sampling was intended to be used to get the participants according to the ratio of each ethnic group in the population in Malaysia. However, as the current research involved both leaders and members in a dyadic relationship, the researcher couldn't control the ethnicity background of the partner of any individuals who are willing to be interviewed. Thus, the researcher has opted for

non proportionate quota sampling by not fixing the ratio of the ethnic groups in whole population. Statistically, the ratio of Malay, Chinese Indian participants in the current research was 45: 39: 17 as compared to 50: 23: 7 in the actual population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, March 2014). Although the ratio is not proportionate, the researcher made sure that all of the three ethnic groups have sufficient representatives in the interview process, especially Indians with the smallest population. Despite only 6 Indian participants were involved in the interview process, they made up 16.67% of the participants which is higher than the population percentage of the ethnic group in Malaysia, 6.8%. This is also one of the reasons for the current research to opt for non proportionate quota sampling to ensure the Indian population is not underrepresented. In addition, among the 6 participants, there were 3 Indian leaders and members respectively, sufficiently representing both sides in the data collection process.



Regarding gender, 31.3% of leaders and 35% of members are female. In terms of age, supervisors ranged from 27 to 55 years old, while subordinates ranged from 21 to 55 years old. The basic demographic information of the participants is summarized as follows:

*Table 3.1 Demographic information of Participants*

Dyads	Ethnicity	Gender	Durations	Industry	Area
L1	Chinese	Female	4 months	Manufacturing	Selangor
M1	Malay	Male			
L2	Chinese	Male	1 year	Accountancy	Kuala Lumpur
M2	Malay	Female			

L3	Malay	Male	1 year	Technology	Kuala Lumpur
M3	Chinese	Male			
L4	Chinese	Male	7 years	Architecture	Selangor
M4	Malay	Male			
L5	Malay	Female	1 year	Accountancy	Penang
M5	Chinese	Female			
L6	Chinese	Male	6 months	Manufacturing	Selangor
M6	Malay	Male			
L7	Chinese	Male	4 years	Manufacturing	Penang
M7	Indian	Male			
[L8]	Chinese	Female	7 years	Architecture	Selangor
M8	Malay	Male			
L9	Chinese	Male	8 years	Education	Kedah
M9	Malay	Female			
L10	Malay	Male	4 months	Government sector	Kedah
M10	Chinese	Male			
L11	Malay	Female	3 years	Government sector	Kedah
M11	Chinese	Male			
L12	Malay	Male	15 years	Service	Kedah
M12	Indian	Male			
[L13]	Chinese	Female	4 months	Technology	Penang
M13	Malay	Female			
[L14]	Malay	Female	5 years	Government sector	Kedah
M14	Chinese	Male			
L15	Indian	Male	8 months	F&B	Kuala Lumpur
M15	Malay	Female			
L16	Indian	Male	1 year	F&B	Kuala Lumpur
M16	Malay	Male			
L17	Indian	Female	3 years	Service	Kedah
M17	Malay	Female			
[L18]	Chinese	Male	5 years	Service	Kedah
M18	Indian	Male			
L19	Malay	Female	5 months	Technology	Penang
M19	Chinese	Male			
L20	Chinese	Male	10 years	Construction	Kedah
M20	Malay	Female			

L: Leader, M: Member

\* [ ] indicates leaders who were not interviewed

### 3.4 Procedure

I have collected data through 36 semi-structured interviews in this research. According to Stone-Romero (2004), the interview method can “provide considerable depth on a research topic and may illuminate rich, culture-specific perspectives” (p.229) in cultural research. As the main objectives of the current research are to look into dyadic relationships between leader and member from different ethnic groups, one-on-one interview is thus considered more suitable than other methods such as focus group.

Before each interview, the research purpose was explained to the participants and assured their anonymity and confidentiality, considering that it might be sensitive to discuss about their ongoing relationships with their partners to a stranger. Participants were told that the whole conversation will be kept confidential, even to their partners who were also involved in the interview process. The participants were also ensured that if what they said need to be quoted,, it will be anonymous and details which might reveal their identity will also be altered when needed to ensure their confidentiality.

Permissions to record the conversations are acquired from participants before each interview and they were ensured that the researcher will be the only one listening to it for transcribing purposes. Among the participants, there was only one Chinese participant (M14) who refused to have the conversation recorded and thus there are only footnotes for this particular interview. For the rest of the participants, all of the



interviews are recorded using a digital recorder. Field notes were also taken down when necessary to capture some situations as well as interactions between the dyads before and after the interview.

During the semi-structured interviews, an interview protocol (refer to Appendix 1) containing questions regarding the main issues and the lines of inquiry was used as a guideline. Three types of research questions were asked - main questions, probing questions and follow-up questions (Klenke, 2008). After main questions, probing questions were asked to get more in-depth details from the participants about the answers they had given. When certain answers given were considered important or needed more elaboration, follow-up questions would be asked to encourage the participants to tell more. The actual flow and the sequences of questions asked in the interviews were according to the situations and replies from the participants. According to Daymon and Holloway (2002), allowing the participants to lead the interaction during an interview enables the researcher to explore the participants' thoughts more deeply and prompt for more information spontaneously following the answers from the participants.

The main aim of the questions is to explore the nature of LMX relationships between the interethnic dyads. Therefore, the questions posed to the participants during interviews included: 'What do you think of your supervisor/member personally?',

‘How do both of you work together usually?’ and ‘What are some positive/negative experiences in your relationship with your supervisor/member?’ These questions are believed to be able to probe into interethnic LMX relationships in depth.

The data collection process stopped at the point where theoretical saturation has been reached (Flick, 2006). After the 36<sup>th</sup> participant, the answers given by the participants started repeating and the data collection process is stopped.

According to Creswell (2013), a pilot test helps refine the interview questions as well as the procedures further. Pilot cases may be selected on the basis of convenience, accessibility and geographic proximity. In the current research, the first three pairs of interviews were used as pilot tests before the rest of the interviews took place (Yin, 2009). In the current research, after the first three pairs of interviews, the process was put on hold while the recordings were being transcribed and analyzed. During analysis, most of the questions were found helpful in answering the three research questions. Some questions which felt to be less important were highlighted on the protocol and only decided whether to ask during the interview process based on the situation.

### **3.5 Research Etiquette**

*Epoche*, a process helping researchers be aware of their personal bias and thus eliminating personal involvement in the subject studied is crucial in a phenomenological study. In addition, King and Horrocks (2010) emphasized the importance of *epoche*, which reminds researchers to bracket off their own preconceptions and previous theories from other academic works during the analysis process to avoid bias.

As a Malaysian who has been living with different ethnic groups since young, as well as an employee who has had experiences working with people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, it is very important for me to bracket my experiences. In addition, none of the participants in the current research had worked with me before. Throughout the interview and analysis process, the researcher was always aware of my role as a researcher looking into interethnic LMX issues, putting away my own perception as a Chinese in the society as well as theoretical preference from my literature review in order to minimize any potential biases. In order to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, an interpretative awareness was always maintained (Sandberg, 1994) to avoid being affected by “biased subjectivity” because of own ethnicity or perceptions on participants.

According to Gillham (2005), difference of ethnicity is one of the factors that may be sensitive during an interview and disadvantage the interviewee, which makes courtesy and respect vital in the process to minimize the consequences of the difference. As a Chinese female interviewing participants from different ethnic groups, especially regarding ‘sensitive’ questions such as their views about ethnicity issues and their personal relationships with current working partners, it is crucial for the researcher to be aware of own position during the interviews.

According to Rogers and Forsen (1979), to decrease one’s defensiveness and to make him more adaptive in a conversation, we must remove the threat of ourselves. In the current research, the researcher put herself as a student seeking the

participants' help to complete her study instead of a researcher. Upon being told that, most of the participants would ask about the researcher's university and study, making them feel more comfortable and warming up themselves. Some casual conversations before the interviews also helped putting the participants' guard down and be more open during the conversations. The participants were also ensured that the content of the conversations is strictly for academic purpose, which will neither be revealed to their partners nor the company management, bringing any effect to their current supervisor-subordinate relationships or their work.

As mentioned by Patton (2002), language difference may be an important factor in interviews as different words can always be perceived differently. It is very fortunate that the researcher was able to communicate with my participants in the language they were most comfortable with. Throughout the interview process, apart from some who spoke English, most Malays and Indians were speaking Malay while Chinese were using Mandarin or dialects including Hokkien and Cantonese. In most cases, participants were actually mixing different languages in their conversations or even in a sentence, just like what Malaysians do in our daily lives. For instance, participants who were using English in their interviews would mix some Malay or Mandarin in their sentences when they wanted to explain in more detail or when they could not find a suitable word in English. The flexibility of using their preferred language throughout the process made the participants feel more comfortable and express themselves freely.

While some may cast doubt on the researcher a young Chinese female interviewing people from all walks of life and from different ethnic backgrounds, it was in fact really surprising that the participants were very open and always willing to share their real thoughts and stories in the interviews, especially the Malay and Indian participants. According to Ramlee, Norzaini, Faridah, Abdul Razak and Maimun (2009), most Malaysians usually keep their discriminations to other ethnic groups secret, only revealing their real thoughts when they feel safe to share their true sentiments.

Throughout the interviews, some participants used sentences like ‘Okay, I’ll tell you personally...’, ‘I’m not trying to gossip/complain about my leader/ my own ethnic group but...’ and ‘It’s between you and me....’ before sharing some personal feeling or ‘sensitive’ information, convincing me that they were sincerely opening themselves up to me throughout the conversations. Sometimes, when some participants hesitated to share some information or when they asked questions such as ‘so this will not be told to him/her?’ They would be reassured firmly about their confidentiality and most of them were willing to share their stories after that.

In addition, interview participants were also involved in the current validation process. After each interview, participants were asked for their contact means and

they were explained that their assistance will be needed for data validation after the researcher's interpretation of the data.

From thirty-six participants, only half of the participants agreed to be contacted for this purpose. For the other participants, some humbly stated that they are not familiar with academic field or not highly educated, thus couldn't help in validating. For the rest, they just gave their consent to the researcher to make own decision as they trust the ability of the researcher.

After interpretation, the model and summary of the finding, together with some brief explanations were sent to the participants via email. The participants were told that they may raise any questions regarding to the findings if they have any problems or concerns. Fortunately, all of the participants who received the email agreed with the findings, without any disagreement or inquiries.

Although this pragmatic validation didn't make any changes to the findings, the findings were still refined after some conference presentations. While attending conferences, the researcher managed to present the work and got some really useful feedback to refine the findings. For instance, for the first research question, there were 8 dimensions found at the initial stage. However, after a conference presentation, the researcher was reminded about the high similarities between two dimensions, Toleration and Respect. After some readings and reconsiderations, the researcher agreed with the comment that the two dimensions were interrelated and

thus decided to combine the two, leaving only Respect and came out with the current 7-dimension model.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

After each interview, the translation and transcription processes were carried out immediately while it was still fresh in memory. The transcribing process is a really good process to help me become more familiar with the data (Langdrige, 2004) as well as to analyze the information simultaneously (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Guba and Lincoln (1989) also stated that transcribing earlier findings helps lead researchers to collect more related data. According to Gillham (2005) and Flick (2006), to ensure the validity of a research, a researcher should render the process of the interview authentically. During the transcription process, although most of the transcriptions were translated, the exact words of the participants were tried to be used, including their hesitation, the uses of ‘erm...’ and ‘hmm...’, laughter and silence to maintain the authenticity of the participants’ meaning.

In the current research, data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is able to identify, analyze and report themes within data by Braun and Clarke (2006). According to the authors, thematic analysis provides rich and detail, yet complex account of data and is more flexible as it is not wed to any pre-existing. This fulfills the need of the current research to identify the dimensions exchanged between interethnic leader-member dyads in Malaysian organizations, which are expected to be different from the existing four dimensions. In addition, thematic

analysis will also be able to identify the similarities and differences between interethnic leader-member dyads as well as characteristics in their 'give and take', which had yet to be discovered before.

The six phases of thematic analysis listed by Braun and Clarke (2006) served as the guideline in the current research to analyze the data for the three research questions. As reminded by the authors, analysis in a qualitative research is not a linear but a recursive process where a researcher needs to move back and forth throughout the phases when needed. In the current research, some of the phases were repeated back and forth to ensure the quality of the finding as discussed below.

#### Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with your data

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis may start as early as even during data collection when the interactions provide some prior knowledge and some initial analytic interests or thoughts to the researcher. In the current research, the researcher started gaining thoughts for the three research questions through responses from the participants while the interview process was still going on. This was especially during the second half of the interviews when the researcher started getting more familiar with the patterns of answers given by participants.

In addition, the transcription process had also enhanced the familiarization process. As mentioned earlier, transcription process was done right after each interview. Going back to read an earlier transcript while transcribing a new interview is normal in this phase. For instance, while transcribing the interview script for L10, if he



mentioned something which has been mentioned earlier by L7, the researcher would go back to have a look at L7's transcript to confirm the idea. This helped the researcher getting more familiar with the data.

However, Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasized that regardless how familiar a researcher thinks he is with the data during transcription, reading and re-reading of the data is crucial as the researcher needs to know the depth and breadth of the data. In the current research, all of the transcripts were printed out and arranged in pairs systematically for reading and re-reading purpose. Printed copies enabled the researcher to write some small notes and ideas of coding throughout the reading process, leading to the next phase for coding.

#### Phase 2: Generating initial codes

Boyatzis (1998) defined codes as “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon, p. 63”. In the current research, this process involved identifying codes for the three different research questions. In order to answer the three research questions, different colours were used to highlight the codes for different research questions on the transcript papers.

According to Weston, Gandell, Beauchamp, McAlpine, Wiseman and Beauchamp (2001), coding is not only a process but it constitutes a vital part in the analysis due to the reciprocal relationship between the development of a coding system and the evolution of understanding a phenomenon. In the current research, the codes for the

first research question are the experiences of the dyads about their current interethnic leader-member relationships such as their daily interactions and the ways of them working together. The codes for the second research question are more straightforward, asking for their needs and expectations towards workplace relationships, which can be asked directly through questions such as “Describe the characteristics that you look for in a superior-subordinate relationship” and “Personally, what are the qualities of an ideal leader/member to you?”. For the third research question, the codes are about the characteristics that they are willing to give in and those they always emphasize on. While the codes for this question can be found directly through question like “What are the things that you can always tolerate with your leader/member and what are those that you always stand firm on?”, this question also required the researcher to go through the whole transcript in order to look for characteristics that they might have mentioned in the previous question in order to compare with their response in the current relationship to identify their ‘give or take’ in the aspect.

As the data were generated through semi-structured interviews which the flows of each interview might be different from the other, it required the researcher to read in depth and for several times to ensure the accuracy of grouping the codes correctly according to the three research questions. During this process, some of the codes were put under more than one research questions as according to Braun and Clarke (2006), it is better to code as much as possible to minimize the loss of essence of the data.

After highlighting the codes for different research questions on hard copies, the researcher went back to the soft copies, copied and pasted all the highlighted codes in a new document, collating them according to different research question and printed the documents out. At the end of this phase, the researcher had three sets of codes collated for the three research questions waiting to be organized into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005) in the next phase.

### Phase 3: Searching for themes

This phase moves up to a higher level, sorting different codes into potential themes, and collating relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes (Braun, & Clarke, 2006). In the current research, with the three sets of code collation, the researcher now tried to make sense of the data by grouping repeated or similar codes to form an overarching theme.

This process was not only looking for certain keywords to group together but required in-depth reading and re-reading as sometimes a same concept might be told in a different way. For instance, when M3 described his relationship with his leader, the code has already been put under research question 1 in the previous stage. In the code, he stated that he is the top of the call list of his leader, they talked about everything apart from work and he is really comfortable getting along with his leader. Although the word 'friendship' or 'friend' was not mentioned, his descriptions portrayed their close personal relationship and thus were put under 'Friendship' theme.

According to Weston et al. (2001), as the codes and codebook are evolving, understanding of the phenomenon developed. A codebook was documented since the beginning of this process to assist the consistency of coding. As the coding process was going on, the codebook helped the researcher to determine if they can answer the research questions. A summary statistic was calculated on the codebook for each initial theme to in order to determine the significance of the themes. Big brown papers were also used as canvas to draw out the themes to put the codes in accordingly. This process didn't stop until after a few initial drafts of drawing and grouping the codes to form meaningful themes to answer the research questions.

For codes which couldn't be put under any theme at this stage, a miscellaneous theme was for them temporarily to prevent the loss of data which might be useful later in the next phase (Braun, & Clarke, 2006).

#### Phase 4: Reviewing themes

After forming the themes, this phase is important in order to finalize the themes. This was done by reading all the codes under each theme to see whether they form a coherent pattern (Braun, & Clarke, 2006).

In the current research, apart from the researcher alone, the reviewing process included pragmatic validation process by the participants as well as getting comments from different researchers at conferences. As mentioned earlier, although interview participants agreed on the initial 8-dimension exchange model for Research Question 1, the model was revised later by combining two of the

dimensions to become one after getting comments from other researchers in conferences.

#### Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

After finalizing, the dimensions needed to be named at this phase. Although some dimensions found in the current research resemble the original dimensions by Liden and Maslyn (1998), different names were used as in the current research. The naming process was based on the codes and descriptions of the participants in the interviews instead of prior literature. For instance, in existing LMX dimensions, 'Affect' is a dimension about interpersonal attraction and personal liking between dyads (Dienesch, & Liden, 1998) and in the current research, personal affect and relationship were also found between interethnic leader-member dyads. However, the dimension was named 'Friendship' instead of 'Affect' as most participants described their relationships as friendship throughout the interviews.

#### Phase 6: Producing the report

After forming a set of fully worked-out themes, the last step is the write-up of the report. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasized the importance of providing sufficient evidence of the themes within the data. In the current research, the reporting of the findings will be presented in the next chapter. Quotes of participants as well as some footnotes made during interviews were included in the chapter to provide evidence to the themes formed as well as to provide a clearer picture to answer the three research questions. In addition, Braun and Clarke (2006) also stated that the researchers are required to go beyond description of data to discuss and argue in relation to the

findings, which in the current research will be discussed in Chapter 5. The chapter includes discussions based on the findings as well as the big conclusion drawn about interethnic leader-member exchange in Malaysian organizations.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS**

The current research sought to look into interethnic LMX relationships in Malaysian organizations through research objectives that provide new insights into the interactions. In-depth interviews with interethnic leaders and members generated an abundance of thick description on interethnic LMX in the country. These data provide new insights into the exchange dimensions, expectations and the ‘give and take’ between diverse leader-member dyads in Malaysia. In the following discussions, quotations of the participants are used to explain the findings to enable readers to identify the validity of identified discourse.

#### **4.1 The Dimensions of Interethnic Leader-Member Exchange**

In the current research, the first research question intended to look into the currencies exchanged between interethnic dyads in Malaysian organizations as compared to existing dimensions by Liden and Maslyn (1998). In order to highlight the two-way exchange process, most quotations in the discussion of this question are taken from paired leader-member dyads. As for the four leaders who were not able to participate in the interview processes, the interview transcripts of their members were not used in this question as there were only one-sided responses from the subordinates. However, there are some quotations taken from only one of the dyadic pairs in this research question as the individuals mentioned about the contributions of both sides in the exchange.

From data collected, seven dimensions have been identified for the exchange between interethnic dyads in Malaysian organizations. The dimensions exchanged between interethnic dyads in Malaysian organizations are situated around (1) Mutual respect, (2) Cooperation, (3) Favour/*Renqing*, (4) Friendship, (5) Limited personal exchange, (6) Appreciation, and (7) Perceptions. Each of the dimensions reveals how interethnic leader-member dyads in Malaysia manage their relationships by exchanging unique dimensions with each other.

### **Dimension 1: Mutual Respect**

From the interviews, the first dimension exchanged between the dyads is **Mutual Respect**. Throughout the interviews, respect was emphasized by both the leaders and members in their relationships. Respect between interethnic dyads is performed in several situations, not only limited to professional respect as suggested by Liden and Maslyn (1998).

At work, members always respect their leaders for their professionalism and higher hierarchical status. For leaders, they always respect their partners for their experiences, working tenure and age, especially to those who are elder. In addition, the dyads also show high respect for different cultural and religious practices of their diverse partners at the workplace.

When asked about ways of getting along with their leaders, members emphasized the importance of showing respect to leaders who are hierarchically higher than



themselves in the organization, regardless of the quality of their relationships. Although no LMX scale was used to measure the quality of the relationships, participants were asked to rate their relationships with their partners on a range of 0-10 during interviews. Regardless of the scores given, members always know the importance of respecting their leaders. This can be elaborated with conversations of two participants who rated their relationship with their leaders as 8/10 and 2-3/10 respectively.

The first example is from M3, a male Chinese network engineer who rated the relationship with his Malay Senior Project Engineer (L3) 8/10 and got the same score from his leader. According to M3, his relationship with his leader is so close that he was once told by his leader that his phone number is at the top of his leader's call list. Although M3 is very close to his leader, he stated that it is very important for him to show respect to his leader by maintaining a suitable gap.

Q: Do you think there is a border between you and him as a subordinate and a leader?

M3: Yes, for sure. **As a subordinate, we always have to show respect to our leader, we cannot seize his power, don't go across the line.** When it's not your job, try not to get involved....But if it requires teamwork, then you may get into it. **Although we are very close, I still need show respect to him as my boss. We have to know our position, cannot override him.**

Next, according to M9, a Malay female teacher who rated only 2-3/10 for her relationship with her Chinese male supervisor, she still respects her supervisor for

his professionalism although she doesn't like him. Before the interview, the teacher kidded that she doesn't feel like participating in the interview as she doesn't like her supervisor and has nothing much to talk about him. Throughout the interview, she also expressed her negative feelings towards her supervisor in several aspects but still, she always respects him as a superior.

Q: How do you think about him as a superior?

M9: **Judging from his work, I still respect him.** Actually, he does his job quite well. He's always on time at work, very particular in time management. Just that he is a bit.....It's not that he is that bad but just okay as a superior....**I still need to respect him, talk to him politely and nicely.** I can take him as a friend but not a really close one.

Being respected by their members, both L3 (Malay) and L9 (Chinese) stated that they also respect their members, in religious and cultural aspects. Coincidentally, both leaders stated that they will not comment on the cultural practices and religious beliefs of their members to show respect.

### **L3 (Malay)**

Q: Will you be more alerted when you're working with someone from a different ethnic background like M3?

L3: Yes, for example, when I'm working with him. There are a few issues that I will be alerted. First, politics, we won't talk about that as we have different view. We actually can't talk about that with anyone. Then **about religion, we won't comment about each other's**, like asking me why I can't eat this or that, no. **We have to respect each other regarding to these aspects.** Sometimes, he will tell me about his family's things like when they are having a

wedding in the family, and a friend is also getting married, they can't visit each other because of some taboos. **I don't get it but I won't say that's nonsense, I will respect that's his belief. And he also has to respect mine, like some Malay practices.**

**L9 (Chinese)**

Q: Will you be more alerted when getting along with her (M9) as compared to your Chinese subordinates?

L9: **Sure, especially sensitive issues like religion. We try not to touch that. We have to respect each other.** Similarly, if they come to ask us some sensitive things about our religion, we will not feel good as well. **By respect, I mean we should not try to provoke any sensitive issues like religion or criticise others' culture and practices. That's wrong.** For instance, we know Malays eat with hand, we can't go to her when she is eating: '*Cikgu*, why are you eating with your hand? Don't you know that our hand has a lot of bacteria?' We can't say that, that's like derogating others' culture. Maybe we didn't mean that and we just want to remind them about hygiene but to them, it might be an insult, thinking that 'why are you bothering?' **So, we should always avoid conversation that may cause any misunderstanding, make people feel irritated or insulted. We should always avoid that.**

On top of that, leaders are also always showing respect to their subordinates who are older and more experienced. L20 (male, Chinese) who is the executive manager and the heir of his family business expressed his appreciation and respect to his Malay female secretary who has worked longer than him in the company. The executive manager expressed his respect and gratitude to the clerk by using words such as he

has 'followed' his secretary since he entered the organization and he learns a lot from her.

Q: How long have you known M20?

L20: She has been working here for 15 years I think, since when we were in the old office. I joined this company in 2002. So more than 10 years. **I had followed (been learning from) her since my first day here, she taught me a lot.** She is more experienced and familiar with all the procedures. We will need to know all the ins and outs as we need to advise the customers, and she knows that really well.

Q: She is more experienced and you are her superior, so how do you work along?

L20: Ermm... Okay, I am lucky as the company is my family business. My grandfather is the Managing Director. I have been at this position since day one, I don't start from a lower position but I still have to learn from the lowest, learn everything. **I learnt all the procedures I mentioned just now from her, she knows that better than me.** Of course I am the manager, but I can't act as if I know everything. I can't pretend to know something that I don't. So, maybe because of my attitude, I don't play bossy or being ego to her. **We can discuss and talk about anything, like when she needs to take leave, she will come to me. We both are polite and always respect each other, very good.**

As for his clerk, M20 said she feels respected as her executive manager always calls her by '*kak*' (elder sister), instead of her name.

Q: Tell me about your most memorable experiences working with him, both good and bad.

M20: I will say there are more positive than negative. He always listens to my opinions. Then when he has any problem, personal or work, he will tell me. **He calls me *Kak Wan* (elder sister), I feel like he respects me.**

Throughout their interviews, both L20 and M20 also mentioned about showing respect to their partner's beliefs. Both of the dyads show accommodations to their partner's beliefs out of respect. According to L20, since he is working in the same office with his clerk, he always avoids bringing food to work. He says: '**...we should know basic things like some of our food that they can't eat. I always avoid bringing our food to the office as I know she's here, I need to respect her**'.

While for M20, she is willing to work in the office alone for a whole week during Chinese New Year due to her leader's belief that he cannot work until the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the celebration.

Q: Do you see any differences between both of you ethnically or culturally?

M20: Not really, but he told me about some Chinese taboos. Like every year during Chinese New Year, he told me **he needs to take leave until the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Chinese New Year to ensure his wealthy and income for the whole year, so I will need to respect his belief.**

Q: The office is open during Chinese New Year?

M20: We close only on the first day. **So for the next whole week, I will be working alone, doing all the works when he is on leave.** For him, he really believes in that, so I need to understand.

Next, L11 and M11, a pair of Malay-Chinese dyad working in a government department also show examples of respecting their partner's beliefs in their interviews.

L11 (Malay) vs. M11 (Chinese)

Q: Does the ethnic difference between both of you bring any effects to your relationship?

L11: **To me I think as long as we don't step on each others belief, that's ok. If you go and comment others' culture or beliefs, hurting each other, then we cannot work together. So we will have to respect each other's beliefs and cultures.** Don't bring these issues into the office, then that's okay for me.

Q: Do you think it is important to know the dos and don'ts of his culture?

L11: Just don't mention. Because this is an office, you should not bring any practices or culture here and some are just too sensitive, don't do that in the office. This is a place to work, don't bring in personal beliefs here. **Of course I have a *surau* for praying here but if he wants to perform any Chinese practices or celebrate his festivals, just take leave and do that. We just have to respect each other.** Don't argue over that in the office.

Q: Is it too sensitive for you to talk about cultural or religious issues in the office?

L11: Depends. There are people who when discussing religion with others, they tend to make people believe in theirs and follow them. Like saying 'Your belief is so wrong', cannot. **So when people tell us about their beliefs, okay, so that's what you believe. I will just respect. We can't judge others like 'This is so silly', no. Not only in office but also when we are outside, we just cannot say that.**

Q: Do you think ethnicity differences had caused any issues between both of you at work?

M11: I don't think there is any difference. Of course there are differences regarding to like, they need to go praying everyday and their food, and probably for me, after so many years, I got used to it. So just accept it, no problem. Staying in the same room, having meeting with them, I accept that, so for me I don't think there is any contrast or inconvenience. **As long as you respect me, I respect you.** Not really affecting.

## **Dimension 2: Cooperation**

During interviews, participants portrayed strong cooperation with each other at work. In order to achieve the common goal, both dyads always combine forces to work with each other. When one needs assistance, instead of looking with folded arms aside, their leader or member will always try to help them regardless of their position and job scope.

M16, a Malay kitchen helper in a franchise restaurant, elaborated that his Indian supervisor always helps him in the kitchen when he needs help and in return, he will volunteer himself when the supervisor needs an assistant for stock checking. According to him, this is like a tacit understanding between them which doesn't have to be asked, as they are always having each other's back.

Q: Please describe an ideal relationship between a leader and a member.

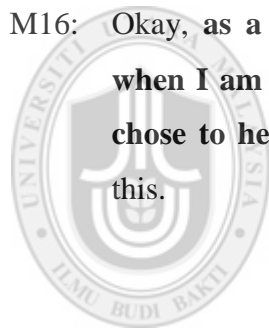
M16: *Tolong-menolong* (Helping each other). **Teamwork. Like between my supervisor and I. When I am busy in the kitchen during lunch hour, he will come to help me. I don't even have to ask!** He will come to help me to prepare food, to ease my work. Then, in return, **when he needs to do stock checking, I will go to the storeroom to help him.**

Q: Uh huh....

M16: Like no need to be too *kira sangat* (fussing about who's doing more). When the stocks come, I will go to help him at the back automatically and he helps me in the kitchen when I am busy. Actually as a supervisor, his job is only to supervise us, he doesn't have to involve in all hands-on procedure but he did.

Q: What does that make you feel?

M16: Okay, as a supervisor, he can actually sit there looking at me when I am busy and ask me to help him to do his work but he chose to help me. *Bestlah* (That's really good) we can work like this.



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Next, L20 shared his positive experience teaming up with his clerk during their peak period when asked to describe his most memorable experiences with his member. During that time, the company was crowded with customers and his clerk was too busy to serve all the customers, so he decided to divide the tasks to help her.

Q: Tell me about your most memorable experiences, both good and bad, with her.

L20: Okay, for good experience, there's a time when we have just launched a new lot, with around 120 new houses and the response was very encouraging. A lot of customers came to see us, so we will have to serve all the customers. **Serving customers is her**



**responsibility actually but there were just too many buyers at that time, so I divide the tasks**, splitting the customers into 2 groups. They came to my place for enquiries and go to her for documentations and other procedures. **We cooperated so well that time.** And, she can always lead me in many situations, I do agree with her point of views in many things. Ermm then... actually we are working formally together so there is barely any unforgettable good or bad experience. We are working quite well with each other and there is nothing bad like big fight or confrontation between us.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, his clerk is more experienced than him in some procedures and thus he always asks for her guidance when needed. In return, he will help his clerk when she has difficulties in managing documents in English. **‘I will always ask her politely, discuss and communicate with her for things I don’t know and she will also come to me when she has a problem like when she gets an English email that she doesn’t really understand.’**

Furthermore, cooperation is also found between L4 and M4, a Chinese managing director and his Malay art director. From their interviews, both of the dyads described their cooperation with each other using different examples. Both of them stated that their partners have helped them with their tasks at work.

Q: Tell me about your positive or negative experiences working with him.

L4: Okay, sometimes when we are rushing a project, the deadline is approaching, he will sacrifice his own time to help me. **Although he has finished his part, he will still help us to do something which**

**is not supposed to be his job.** Then when we get the payment, he still gets the same pay. He won't complain about that even after doing more work.

Q: Will you go to refer to him when you have any problems at work?

M4: Sure, that's for sure. **Like when I am running out of idea, I will go to ask for his help.** Go discuss with him, he will provide me his ideas if he has any. I will carry out the work after he provides the solution as that's my job as a creative manager. **Sometimes when I am really busy, he will even help me to do my job.** We have no problem at all with that. He is considered a helpful person, he likes to help.

### **Dimension 3: Favour / *Renqing* (人情)**

From the previous dimension, both leaders and members are found willing to do more for each other at work. Actually, apart from work, interethnic participants are also found willing to lend a hand to their partners even when it is beyond their job description or when it is not work-related. These behaviours are neither compulsory nor do they help them in their performance evaluation but they are performing that actions voluntarily, as a favour for their partners. A lot of Chinese leaders explained their favours to their subordinates as *Renqing* (人情), a Chinese word which can be translated as benevolence or human-heartedness, encouraging people always to be more humane and caring to others.

The most common favour shown by leaders is being considerate and helpful when members are applying for leave or asking for permission to leave their workplace

during working hours. Instead of interrogating their members, most leaders will try to approve the application without asking much when they are approached.

This kind of favour from a leader was observed during the interview with L12, a male Malay manager in a semi-government organization. The interview was interrupted when M12, his Indian general worker called him through intercom to ask for permission to leave the workplace for a while to go pick up his kids from school. L12 gave him the permission instantly without many questions but just reminded M12 to ask another colleague to take over his place before leaving. In addition, during his interview, L12 mentioned that his subordinates always come to him when they are in trouble.

Q: What do you mean by when they're in trouble?

L12: Like when their mom or relatives passed away, I'll say "It's ok, I'll do the work, you just go to do what you should." **I will help you here** or find someone to take over '. I can even transfer people from other department to help, as long as the work is done. That's why they also come to see me when they have problem, even personal problem.

Q: How about him (M12)?

L12: Yes. So many times. **Like when his father passed away, I gave him some money and I also attended the funeral.** And for me, I want it back when I ask you to do something. It's a win-win situation. **So when I ask him to do something for me, he's always okay.** If you are too strict at work, this doesn't work. We need to help people so when we need help, they will help us in return and we don't know when we need that.

L2 (a male Chinese Assistant Account Manager) also has the same view in this matter, always approving his clerk's application when she needs a day off. 'They only come to you when they really need to be away, so **there is no point asking them too much, that will only make them feel bad.** So when she (his Malay senior clerk, M2) comes to me, **I will always approve her application, don't have to ask too much.'**

In the interview with his subordinate (M2) later, the clerk also shared other favours shown by her leader as the most memorable memory in their relationship.

Q: Tell me the most memorable thing between you and him.

M2: Okay, something not really related to work. Sometimes, when I want to buy the latest magazine but I can't go the place, he'll help me to buy. Then, sometimes he will buy me the magazine when he saw it even before I ask.

In return, M2 also does her leader favours sometimes as according to L2.

Q: Please describe your relationship with her.

L2: Not bad. Sometimes, she will cook for me, for us to eat, we are like family actually.

Q: For all of you?

L2: Ya, like we are having potluck, she'll cook. Sometimes, like when we are busy during peak period, we don't really have to time to go out for lunch. **So when she brings her lunch, she'll bring for me as well.** Her cooking is really not bad. [chuckles] She's like my mom actually, she can be my mom for her age.

Next, L10, a Malay head of station in the government sector stated that he also does the same when his Chinese officer, M10 approaches him for leave application. In addition, he even helps the officer to make arrangements for substitution, knowing that it would be easier for him to do that as a leader.

Q: Do you think it is necessary for you as a superior to help him (M10) when he is in need?

L10: .... For me, **I will help if it is within my power. Like when he applied for leave to send his kid for an interview in KL, I approved.** Then, he also needed someone to take his place. **As a leader, it's easier for me to order someone to take his place instead of him went looking for substitution. So I made the arrangement for him.** If he was to go to others, he would be asking for help, which might be difficult. **But when I did that, I was giving an order as a leader to that person, which is much easier.** So I arranged that for him.

The courtesy of a leader at a workplace is not limited to leave approval alone. As described by L10, while he has to be strict to his member on issues stated in black and white in the handbook, there are always things that he can be flexible about with his member as a favour when needed.

Q: When will you be flexible to him?

L10: **I will be flexible when the issue is between two of us and it is not affecting our job.** For example, **when he needs to go the bank during working hours, the flexibility comes from me.** By right, he can only leave the office at 1 but if he requests to leave at 12, I can help him with that to let him leave earlier even by that he is wrong according to the rules. I can help him if he really wants to go out. When you build up

good relationship, it's easy to work together. **Like when they ask for a favour, I will say 'sure, no problem, I can stay here to help you'.** For example, he likes to take video and another Malay staff likes to read *yasin* in the mosque. **When they ask me if I can stay here to take their place when they need to take a day off, I am always okay. I will stay here to take his place although I can actually go home. I do that as I know that's really important for them.**

In the interview with M10, he also mentioned about doing his colleagues, including L10 a favour when they forgot to carry out their task. 'Like in here, there is a machine that we need to turn on once a week. Since we are rotating, each of us may only get to do the task once every 1-2 months, so sometimes we tend to forget. We can actually turn it on a day or two later if we really forgot, just put a remark there but that might get you a memo from the upper management. **So sometimes when my friends or he (L10) forgets, I come to turn it on for them on Friday.'**

In addition, leaders are not only the middle man between higher management and their members at work but also the 'messengers' to convey their members' personal requests or needs to upper management. According to L17, an Indian supervisor from the customer services centre of a telecommunication service provider, she helped her member who was financially tight to ask for advance salary from their employer. In addition, she has also lent money to M17 personally.

Q: What will you do if M17 come to you, asking for help for financial problem?

L17: Well, no problem. **If she comes to see me for that, I will talk to my**

**boss. I have lent her money before for a few times but mostly, when they need advance salary and when they were financially tight, I will help them to tell to my boss and we will help them.** Like my boss, immediately after I tell her their problems, she will give them. It won't be like some other bosses rejecting the staff. If you need advance payment, she'll give you. Of course she'll see how long you have been working with her, she will always be very happy to help. **And, sometimes, when we are eating, I don't care about the money, I will pay for them, because we take them as a family, we don't mind.**

In return, M17 who sees her supervisor as a big sister also does L17 favours when she is in need.

Q: What do you know about her personally?

M17: She's quite nice to all of us. Not those supervisors who are really mean and keep scolding you.

Q: What about her personal life such as her family?

M17: She has not married yet, still single. And I know she lives with her sister. They live in not far from here. Sometimes, when her sister needs to use her car, **I'll ask my husband to give her a ride home when he comes to pick me up after night shift.** It's not good to walk back alone at night, right?

For L11 (Malay) and M11 (Chinese), there are only two of them in their office in the government sector. According to L11, every weekend, one of them will need to be on duty in the office alone. Each of them is supposed to stay in the office every alternate weekend but most of the time, her subordinate, M11 will offer to stay in the office during weekends.

Q: As a supervisor, what are your responsibilities to your subordinate?

L11: Monitoring and supervising him. We both work at normal office hours. There is mutual understanding. Then normally for weekends, we will.... Because I am not local, usually I will go back to my hometown, so he will come instead. **Most of the time he will be here. This is not his job but.... mutual understanding. Sometimes I should be here but he will take over.** During weekends, one of us has to be here. If I am not around, he will have to cover since we have only two of us. Likewise, I will cover him when he can't make it.

In our off-record conversation after the interview, L11 stated that M11 is always willing to take her places because he knows that she always wants to travel back to her hometown to visit her kids during weekends. **“This is actually not his responsibility but he just wants to help me, you know?”** and she really appreciates that.



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Interview with M20 also shows that she is willing to do more for her leader. When asked to describe her daily routine and job scope, M20 whose leader has multiple businesses revealed that there is no clear job division for her. Getting paid for only one position, she is willing to help her leader with his businesses besides the development company. In return, her leader, the executive manager helps her to convey her personal needs to the director when she is in need.

Q: Tell me your daily routine.

M20: I just arrange my own time, I am not really restricted. I just do my works, there are a lot for me to do, and auditing is also under me. **The boss has several businesses in his hand, like rubber plantation and dairy farm.**



**I also help to do work of other businesses under him.** Audit, sales, then when there are buyers, I will need to attend and explain the plan to them. There is no really clear scope for my job here, I need to know all.

Q: So you are doing work for so many companies?

M20: **Yes, since they are all under him, so I just do that.** Besides this development company, he owns another construction company and a farm. **So I am actually doing work for these three companies.** I will have to divide my time wisely.

Q: But you are only paid for one job?

M20: Ya, but sometimes, he will give me extra money like a bonus.

Q: Have you ever asked for his help apart from your work?

M20: Yes, since he will meet his grandfather (the managing director) every morning. **When I have any problem, I will tell him so that he can help me to convey to his grandfather.** For instance, when I have some financial problems or the workload is too heavy.

Q: Do you think he is helpful enough?

M20: **He always says: okay, I will convey to the director. And then try to help me after that. He is considered very helpful and willing to listen to my problem.**

Next, according to L7, besides being a leader for his staff at the workplace, he is also the place for his member to look for advice and even financial aid.

Q: To what extend will you help your member when they asked for?

L7: **I will help him if that's what I can do, within my limitations. Financially or when they need advice. We need to have *Renqing Wei* (sense of *Renqing*) as a leader. I will lend them some money if they have financial problem but not in big amount. And when they are having problem, I will give them advice, analysing the situation for them**

since we are outsiders, we see things clearer.

Q: How about M7?

L7: For him, when he is in short of cash, like RM 1-200, I will always lend

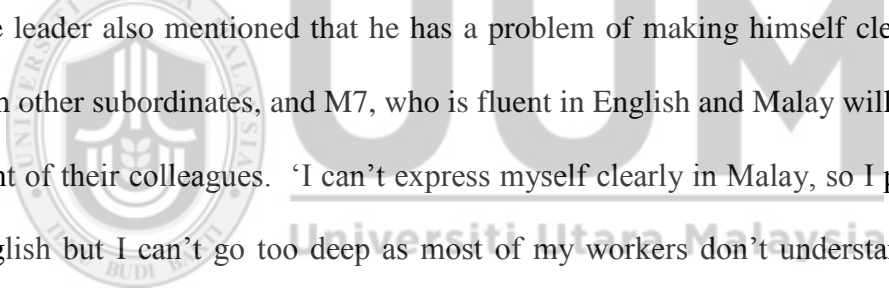
Q: him.

L7: How did he ask you?

He texted me. If I was not short of money at that time, I'd lend him and he paid me back on time usually. I won't ask him the reason at first usually but after that, when the problem is solved. Before this, he is in quite a big debt as he bet on football. **So I went to advise him, ask him to think about his kids and explained the effects of gambling to him patiently.**

Q: Did he change then?

L7: I heard he quit.



The leader also mentioned that he has a problem of making himself clear in Malay with other subordinates, and M7, who is fluent in English and Malay will help him in front of their colleagues. 'I can't express myself clearly in Malay, so I prefer to use English but I can't go too deep as most of my workers don't understand. But for M7, he is okay. His English is quite okay. So when I'm speaking Malay, I try to speak slowly and **he always help me to explain to others, tell them about what I want, what's the purpose of the meeting of the day and make my point clear, like my translator.'**

#### **Dimension 4: Personal Friendship**

The interactions between diverse leaders and members are not limited for working purpose alone but also personal rapport building. When the participants were asked to describe their leader-member relationships, the most common answer is 'We are

like friends' instead of leader and member. Some of the participants even mentioned that they view their partners as their family.

According to L10, he takes M10 as his best friend although they have not known each other for a long time. He also expressed that he wishes their friendship can last forever even though M10 is retiring soon. His descriptions about their interactions explain the closeness between the both of them, which exceeds the intimacy of a mere superior-subordinate relationship.

**“I actually take him as my best friend** you know? Not as a staff but he is my best friend, you can ask him. I haven't known him for very long but he is my best friend. There are people that we can only be friends but not best friends, and then there are friends and some acquaintances. You put them into groups, and he is my best friend”.

**“Besides wife and kids, we will need someone out of the family to share our problem.** At home, our wife knows us as a husband but friend is different. Your best friend knows you better than your wife, seriously. So **I prefer to tell something to my best friend (M10) as compared to my wife.** A best friend at work place knows you at work and personally, but your wife knows you in the family as a husband only, she doesn't know about your problem in the office. If you share something regarding to work with her, she will sure stand by your side and you can't get real advice. So I like to share with my best friend”.

When asked about the frequency of communicating with each other, L10 says:

**“Everyday! Sometimes, we text each other even when we are home,** like 'Hey, you free? Let's go for a drink'. There are a few more Chinese here actually, there is one I call him Ah Kau, he is also close to me but for Ah Kau, there is a limit. Like I said just now, some are close friends, some

are friends. For M10, **we actually plan to go Perlis this Friday on a road trip.** Sometimes when I am watching TV at home, I will ask him out for a drink but maybe he is busy. **We will not only talk about work but more about our future.** I am 54 now and he is already 53, we are going to retire so we mainly talk about our future plan. **We actually plan to start a business together after retirement.**”

Similarly, his Chinese subordinate also described their relationship to be like old friends although they have been working together for only a short time.

Q: Are you very close to him?

M10: Ya, very close. Although I have known him only for 4 months, **our interaction is like old friends already.** Because he can always erm... be very accommodative and very nice to us.

Q: Apart from work, what are your topics with him?

M10: Actually we are like friends. **Besides work, we will talk about things outside** like I like to take video, he can also chat about that with me. We can talk about everything.

Q: So it's more like friends instead of superior-subordinate?

M10: Yes. Like in our work, there is not much to discuss about. Our work is only like official thing, fixed routine. Like when I am doing morning shift, we will go breakfast together. **Sometimes, during my off days, he also calls me for breakfast.** So we are very close actually. When I take a day off at home, doing my own stuff, he will actually call me, tell me that he is bored not having me here. It's like a habit seeing each other here everyday.

Next, according to L17, she always takes her two Malay female staff, including M17 as her sisters. The close interactions between her and M17 portray the close relationship between them. According to her, on the day of M17's wedding, she

spent the whole day in the bride's house, accompanying her and helping out the family. In addition, she also elaborated the way of her getting along with the member when she was asked about the interactions between the both of them. **“Every day we will be eating together, enjoying food like a family,** eating together. We don't talk to each other only at a particular time but everyday during breakfast, lunch and dinner, we will ask each other, they will ask me like ‘What do you want to eat later?’ So we will join together to eat and having good fun.”

From the perspective of a member, a friendly leader makes him look more approachable and his subordinates will feel happier at work. Friendly leaders make members feel closer to them and thus view them as friends or even family members. For M17, she described her relationship with L17 who is elder as a big sister. When asked about her relationship with her supervisor, she said: ‘I have a good friend here, [co-worker's name] who is on leave today. I'm actually closer to her, she is my best friend and **Kak L17 is like our sister, always taking care of us.**’

Next, according to M7, who views his workplace as a big family, his relationship with his Chinese engineer, L7 is more as friends and family instead of superior and subordinate. According to him, this engineer is very friendly to all of his staff, making them feel closer to him. This does not only increase their personal relationships but also help in their work as they will not be afraid to go to him.

M7: He has a private office but when he finished his work with the computer, he will come to our place. His style is like...**He mixes with all the workers there, he is close with all of us.** Of course, as an

engineer, we have to respect him but being friendly is important. But, **if we are close with the engineer, take him as a friend, we won't be afraid to tell him when there is a problem.** If we take him as an engineer only, we will be afraid to tell him even if there is a problem. **But for a friendly supervisor like him, we can tell him anything.** When there is a problem, he can quickly solve that for us. He is really good from this aspect. Just like today, he is treating us lunch here.

This interview took place at a restaurant where L7 was treating his subordinates to lunch as a token of appreciation after the peak period of the company. The situation appeared to be more of a gathering between friends as the leader was very friendly, mingling well with all his subordinates, including M7. The supervisor, L7 stated that they have been working together for years and have built up a relationship which is strong and would not be affected by small misunderstandings.

Q: Have you ever had an argument with him?

L7: Not really big fight but just some small issues. He is a man who always understands the signs of the times, knows how the wind blow and bend to it. So, we don't really fight with each other.

Q: Will these incidents affect your relationship?

L7: **Our relationship is not built in a short time, we built it through years, through series of helping each other and cooperation. We are more than superior and subordinate, we are more of friends.** Till now, he is okay, still doing his job well.

### **Dimension 5: Limited Personal Exchange**

Despite their close relationship, the fifth dimension shows that interethnic dyads do not share much of their personal information with their partners at the workplace. According to most members, they want to keep a clear line between work and personal life, not wanting the leaders to know too much about or interfere in their lives, regardless of the quality of their relationship.

For example, according to M19, a Chinese male engineer, he doesn't really share a lot of personal information with his Malay female senior manager but he feels very comfortable getting along with her and described their relationship as 'really not bad'. According to him, the quality of the relationship is not related to the quantity of personal information shared. Similarly, his senior manager supports his opinion in this aspect.

#### **M19**

Q: How frequent do you communicate with L19?

M19: Everyday, we meet in the office but outside, no, **we won't contact each other outside if nothing happens. We will go for lunch together sometimes when we are at work but not really talk very frequently.** She sits only next to me but we both have our own work to do. Sometimes I leave my place and when I come back, she's not around. Although we sit next to each, the time for us sitting down together is very limited. So we seldom talk.

Q: What do you two talk about when you are together?

M19: Okay, **we will talk about our hobbies but not things that are too personal like my relationship with my girlfriend. We don't have to state clearly what is that we can't talk about but we just will not go**

**that far.** We will chitchat about small things but won't really go too personal. Sometimes we will discuss about our families like where does my sister work and where do I live, that's all. **Actually at workplace, I think it is not necessary to know each other that much.** Just maintain at a level that both feel comfortable. **Like for her, I can feel that she always likes to keep some distance, don't want to spill everything to me.** She didn't really tell me that but I can tell from her actions indirectly, like sometimes she tells me she is going to be absent on the next day. When I ask further for the reason, she will just say it is for some emergencies but not more than that.

Q: Do you think actually she can tell you that?

M19: I think yes but it is okay for me actually, since both of us feel comfortable at current stage.

Q: How do you see your relationship?

M19: **Although we are not talking very frequently and sharing everything but our relationship is really not bad.** I think a relationship is not based on how much secret do we know about each other or sharing all the problems. **In our relationship, when we are talking, it's very comfortable as we can make jokes and very comfortable, although we don't share a lot.**

**L19**

Q: Do you think it's important, as a superior to know your subordinate, M19 personally?

L19: No, I think no. **I like to separate work and life. I don't have to know about yours** and I don't like to tell things about my husband and so on, **I like to keep that for myself.**

Q: So, you only talk about work with M19?

L19: Yes. Even for myself, I have my own boss too. My previous boss is a guy, so it's awkward for me to tell about what I bought recently and what I am up to recently now. And even with my current lady boss, I don't



want to share all.

Next, M18, an Indian male supervisor also expressed that he doesn't like to share his personal information with his Chinese male manager although their relationship is really close. As described by M18, both of them are so close that they "work together, eat together, play together, and do everything together except sleeping". This can also be told from their interactions as before the interview, the Chinese manager came to offer to share his lunch with his subordinate as he knew that the supervisor had not taken his lunch. However, when asked about his opinion in sharing his personal details with his manager, M18 firmly expressed his refusal to share the information.

Q: What do both of you usually talk about?

M18: **Only about work. Nothing more than that.**

Q: Will you share your personal information with him?

M18: Personal information?

Q: Like your family...

M18: No, that's family matter. How can we share at our workplace? **Family is family, so when we are at work, just work, we cannot mix the two.**

Q: What about when you are feeling down, so you like him come to ask if you are okay?

M18: No, I seldom have any problem. Hopefully I won't have any in future.

In this aspect, leaders feel that there is a need for them to have some basic personal knowledge about their members due to their responsibilities. Most leaders think they need to know basic information of their subordinates for times such as when they need to contact their subordinates' family in the event of an emergency. However,

personally, leaders do not like sharing their personal details with their subordinates as well.

As illustrated by L1 and L5, although they want to know more about their subordinates, they can actually feel that the subordinates are not interested in sharing too much with them. Understanding the members' will to keep their privacy, leaders will not ask too much about their personal lives but only basic information which is especially important during emergencies.

According to L1, a Chinese QC engineer, while she doesn't like to share too much personal information with her subordinate (M1), she always hopes to know more about him, as a superior. However, just like herself, her member is not keen on sharing too much of his personal information.

Q: What do you usually talk about with M1?

L1: **We rarely talk about personal things.** He dare not ask me mine and I didn't tell a lot too. **Actually I don't like to share too much with them.** Like between me and him, we are working together but he still keeps something from me. His working attitude is quite okay, even to me as a new leader here, he is quite ok. The only thing is that his discipline. **He always, not really always but like once a month, there will be time like his wife is sick, and when I asked him more, he will be like very reluctant to tell.** Maybe his wife is having some disease that is too private to share, so he doesn't want to tell me. Since then, I didn't ask him much about that too. I always hear others talking about his wife getting sick also, that's what I know.

Q: Do you think it's important for you to know your subordinate

personally?

L1: Very important. For example, **when he is late to work because his wife is really sick, I will need to know and to understand.** *Renqing* (人情) plays an important part when I am supervising. I can't treat them like robots, asking them doing this and that, asking them do nothing else but only to work for the company. So, as long as your absenteeism is justifiable, it's okay to me, I won't ask too much. For him, at this moment, **I don't really have a clear picture of his situation but I didn't ask too much as he may think: 'I have already told you my wife is sick, why you keep digging?'** So I try not to ask too much.

Q: Apart from work, do you chat a lot with her (L1)?

M1: Sometimes, I joke with her, to kill boredom. Like I asked her if she likes working here in a humourous way but for **personal things, no. I don't like to share that.**

The same situation applies to L5, a Malay audit manager with her subordinate (M5), a Chinese female junior auditor. According to the manager, she always wants to know more about her subordinate but the junior auditor seldom comes to see her for any problems apart from work. The interview with her subordinate, M5 supports her statement.

**L5**

Q: Do you mind telling me the topics you are sharing with her?

L5: [Laugh] Normally most of the thing about... **I would like to know more about my staff's personal lives.** If for them, it is okay to share, I would like to know about their family, their background. **Actually it is important, maybe not directly affecting your job but at least you need to know about your subordinates, their family and their**

**background. So at least they got problems, you know how to help.**

Q: So you think it is important to know your subordinate personally?

L5: Ya.

Q: Will you help her if she comes to ask you for personal help? What do you feel if she approached you for her personal problems?

L5: I am okay if she comes to me. I think it's normal as I am quite close to all of them but so far don't have. **They are always like keeping a secret from me, a bit secretive.** When I heard her discussing something with others and wanted to know more, they will always like '*tak ada tak ada lah*' (nothing).

Q: What do you think that keeps them from getting too close to you?

L5: Maybe the level. Superior is different and there is always a gap. For example, if I were a staff, I can't share everything with my manager right? **For my personal life, I always want to keep for myself. So same goes to them.**

Q: You don't like to share your personal problem with your superior?

L5: **No, my personal life, of course I don't want to inform my manager,** I just want to inform my family. If I got any difficulties, you cannot be....because you need to separate personal life with career. To be professional, you cannot mix up. If not, you cannot perform.

**M5**

Q: What do you know about L5 personally?

M5: She is married with 2 kids. She studied in USM before. She is quite a nice person.... I think that's it.

Q: Do you think it's important to know your leader personally?

M5: **Not really important I think. She's our head at work when we're working together but after work, not really.**

Q: Will you ask for her advice or help apart from work?

M5: No, if I have problems like with my family or boyfriend, I'll call my good friend. I won't go to tell her.

## Dimension 6: Appreciation towards diversity

Through interviews, participants revealed that working with a diverse partner has benefited them in several ways and makes them appreciate the interethnic relationships. According to Hamzah (1991), appreciating differences between different cultures is vital for a successful multicultural manager. In the current research, appreciation is not only seen in managers or leaders but also members.

First of all, according to M3, having his Malay superior working with him has enabled both of them to enjoy each festive season fully as there will always be the other one taking over the duties when one is away. In addition, their differences have also helped them in task division when dealing with customers.

Q: What are the pros and cons do you think working with a Malay superior?

M3: Okay, there are actually some good things working with Malays. **During Chinese New Year and Hari Raya, we can cover each other when the other one is on holiday to celebrate.** We don't have to worry when we are away. And in my current situation, **when we are dealing with Malay customers, he (L3) will go to meet the clients.** It'll be easier for them to discuss. If we send a Chinese there, they sure won't bother to entertain us. Oppositely, **when it is a Chinese client, I will go meet them as that will be easier too.** I think it might be easier working in an all-Chinese team as communication will be easier but this is only my perception, we still need time to understand each other. Getting along with Chinese might be more comfortable but **there are still benefits working with different ethnic groups, depending on your perspective.** For a boss, it is sure better to have a multiethnic

Q: team but if for us, as long as we are comfortable.

M3: Do you feel comfortable with him now?

Sure, very comfortable. [laugh]

While for L3, working in an environment with a majority of other ethnicities opens his eyes about different ways of working as compared to his previous company. In addition, working with M3 also gives him different points of view at work.

Q: Is there anything special working with someone from a different ethnic group? Do you prefer working with your own ethnicity or mixing with others like now?

L3: I prefer working in a Chinese company. I think after my experience here, the way I communicate is more open now. If I work in *bumi* (Malay) company, I will only get opinion from Malay, it's kind of restricted. But **now that I need to deal with Indian and Chinese, their ideas are different.** Okay, in Malay companies, there is less time constraint, it's different from Chinese company. In Malay company, you will feel more relaxed but in Chinese company, you will have no time to sit back and relax. So, you need to learn to pick up your pace. Working in a multiethnic company, that's different.

Next, M4 stated that having his Chinese superior at work has helped him in his designing process. As suggested by Stewart and Johnson (2009), diversity in a group results in greater creativity as wider perspectives consider a wider range of issues, enhancing different processes such as decision making at work. According to M4, different background and culture between both of them have provided wider range of ideas to him in his designing process. In addition, he also pointed out that

having his Chinese managing director serve their Chinese customers is always easier, seconding the earlier statement by M3.

Q: Do you prefer working in with Malays only or mixing with other ethnicities?

M4: Mix. Like between me and him, we always have different ideas. **In architecture, Chinese will have their own ideas, so do Malays, so we need to know both.** Chinese's ideas will be different from Malay's, I think Malays are more literal and Chinese are more artistry. So we will need to know the difference and combine the different cultures and styles in a project. Maybe not for all projects but sometimes we will need that. So I can always ask for his opinions as a Chinese. I have observed this since our university time, from what I have seen, the ideas are really different between different ethnic groups. We will always see different designs between different ethnic groups when we are asked to work on a project together.

Q: So, it will have different cultural elements in one single building?

M4: Yes, mix all. **And our clients are also from different ethnicity, so it will be nice to have different ethnic groups in a company. Like it's not easy for us to handle a Chinese client, but it's different when we have him in our team, he can always deal with Chinese clients easily.**

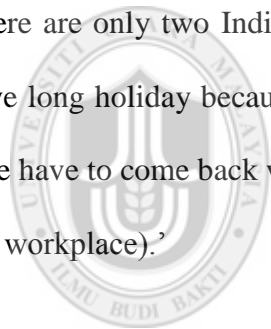
His managing director, L4 also has the same view and stated that he enjoys working with M4 who is from a different ethnicity background better than only with his own ethnic group.

Q: Do you prefer working with your own ethnicity or mixing with others like now?

L4: I prefer to mix. I think if only one ethnicity, the thinking will be very limited, very narrow. I think mix is better, more variety. In a mono-cultural environment, the thinking will get narrower, you will only follow the only way. In mixed environment, the diversity give us...**Like in**

**design world, different cultures have different experiences, the idea or the outcomes of their (M4 and another Malay subordinate) works sometimes really surprised me, out of my expectation.** Because of this difference, so I prefer mix.

Next, a pair of Indian-Malay dyad in a franchise restaurant, L17 (male) and M17 (female) stated that they appreciate the presence of their partner as they can always enjoy their own festive seasons while their diverse partner can always take their place when they are away. When they are asked about the opinions about having a diverse leader/member at work, the manager (L17) says: ‘In this field, the staff are mostly Malay. There are very few Indians, they think this is kind of a tough job. There are only two Indians here, my supervisor and I. So during Deepavali, I can have long holiday because the Malays still work. If there most Indians, we sure have to come back work earlier and my hometown is in Johor (which is far from the workplace).’



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### **Dimension 7: Perceptions**

During interviews, when participants were asked questions such as ‘how do you see yourself and your leader/member ethnically?’ and ‘do you think ethnicity brings any effects onto your relationship?’, the most common answer is a ‘no’ without a second thought. For others, they might try dodging from answering or became more alerted when they were asked these direct and ‘sensitive’ questions. However, when probed deeper, it shows that interethnic dyads are actually having different sets of perceptions towards their partners based on their ethnicity background. Despite their



denial of the effects of ethnic difference on their relationships, most participants still expressed their views on their partners based on their ethnicity, directly and indirectly throughout the interviews.

From the above discussion, it is not difficult to find that some participants also tend to categorize their partners according to their ethnic groups. For instance, they used terms like 'they', '*mereka*' or '*ta men* (他们)' (which mean 'they' in Malay and Mandarin) to refer to their partners when they were actually asked about their partners.

In this research, Chinese generally get good perceptions from their partners while for Malays, they tend to get negative comments of being lazy from their partners. For Indians, they get inconsistent but mostly negative perceptions from their counterparts.

Chinese usually get impressions of being hardworking and smart from their partners. When the participants were asked to describe their partners ethnically, most participants revealed high regard towards their Chinese partners. For instance, L5 (Malay) expressed her opinion thusly:

Q: Is there anything special working with her from a different ethnic group?

L5: **Chinese are more hardworking as compared to others.** You all got some feel like want to compete with each other.

Q: With each other?

L5: Ya, something like good *aura* (motivation). **They all are like always want to try their best at work. That makes me feel like want to try my best too.** While Malays, of course it's my own culture but the thoughts are a bit different. For Malays, we tend to be like 'I have achieved such level, I don't want to try harder already'. We are too easy to feel comfortable and don't feel like want to put extra effort. If I want a relax life, I will work with Malay but now I want to get more motivation, it will be Chinese. When I m around 35, looking a stable life, I will work with Malay.

According to L3, he also thinks that Chinese employees are generally better than Malay. The conclusion was made based on his experiences after working in a Malay company and a Chinese company, as well as his own perceptions on the two different ethnic groups.

Q: Is there any difference or special working in a multiethnic environment?

L3: Yes. Based on my experience. Ok, I work in a *bumi* company before this job, 100% *bumi*. The environment is different for me.

Q: As in?

L3: Okay, let me tell you personally. As I said, in Chinese company, deadline means deadline. Every day, there will be someone asking for your progression, so you really have to finish it by hook or by crook. In Malay company, the progression is slow. This is based on my experience, as the last company I work in was a Malay company, also in telco line and current company is a Chinese company. In this current company, there are about 60% of Chinese, and then Indians and Malays. [interrupted] In a Chinese company, you have to be punctual. **I think it's the culture of Chinese because for Malays, they are more 'lenggang-lenggang and slow slow' (slack and slow). It's not that I**

**am complaining about my own people but this is what I think.**

Q: How do you see a Malay and a Chinese staff? Is there any difference?

L3: Yes. **I think Chinese workers are more hardworking, their commitment and attitude, I think they are better.**

Next, from the responses of L12 (Malay), he is also having different perceptions regarding the attitude of different ethnic groups at work. He thinks Chinese are doing better than the others at work, including his own ethnic group.

Q: Do you think ethnicity difference is important in your relationship with M12?

L12: **I don't know, I don't think so.** As everything under me must be okay, so I don't really know. Even it's not okay, I'll make it okay. But usually we don't have any problems as at work, we should put our religion and culture aside. I don't want to know about your religion and neither do you need to know about Islam, work is more important. I can go eat in their house even he is Chinese or Indian. I just attended a dinner at a Chinese worker's, no problem. Nothing is wrong as long as you do your work. When we are working, we are one, out all things aside. I want the ship to get to the destination. That's important to me.

Q: Do you prefer to work with different ethnic groups or with your own group?

L12: I like to mix. If I work with my own ethnic, it will be very very difficult. You ask this from him (a Malay), 'Oh, cannot!' It won't be easy, as I am a Muslim, you are also a Muslim, then we can't do this but someone needs to do the task. **For Chinese and Indians, when we tell them the problem, they will say: 'No problem, we can do this'. It's much easier.** For example, like on Friday, if I stop a Malay from going to pray on Friday, it's a big sin to me. But for Chinese and Indians, when I ask them to take over my place for awhile, they will be 'Okay, no problem boss'. **You won't get this from a Malay.** It's good to mix around with

different culture you know? **Chinese, they are good in business**, we can be friends and learn about that from them. **Then for Indians, they have to be pushed.** You have to tell them 'you have to do this' then only they will do. You have to give them ideas then only they will know what to do but Chinese they know what to do, you just have to check and see, whether they have done their job. **Malay, very weak. They used to be 'tak pah lah, nantilah'** (I'll do it later), **that's the problem. I really really hate that, 'tunggu dulu, nanti dulu, sat lagi kita buat.'** (I'll do it later)

Next, M4 is also having his own set of perceptions about different ethnic groups in Malaysia. To him, not only the Chinese but all different ethnic groups have their own strengths.

Q: What do you think about working with different ethnicities?

M4: Good. Every ethnic has their own strength. Like **Chinese are more hardworking, then Malays are amanah (trustable)**, good in management. Indians also have their own strength. It will be good if we can utilize all these strength in one organization.

Q: How do you see Malay, Indian and Chinese at work?

M4: Usually, we will think Chinese are hardworking, but if I were a boss, I won't evaluate someone based on that, I'll need to see his qualification and ability.

Compared to Chinese, Malays are always labelled negatively as *cincai* by their counterparts. '*Cincai*' is a Hokkien (a Chinese dialect) word which is very common among Malaysians, even among non-Chinese. The word '*cincai*' reflects an attitude which is too easygoing and carefree at work, resulting in undesirable outcomes. In

other words, a *cincai* person does something only for the sake of finishing it without much consideration on the quality of the work.

Throughout the interviews, most leaders especially Chinese think their Malay members are too *cincai* at work, resulting in a lack of trust towards the members. L1 elaborated her perceptions towards her Malay staff, including M1 as follows.

Q: How do you work with M1?

L1: I don't trust him.... Erm...not fully trust. **For them** (her Malay staff), **because of different level, they will only do what they were asked to.....** Okay, **they are like *cincai* at work you know?** For example, labelling. When they were asked to stick labels on the products, they will do it in so many ways, very ugly and not presentable. Of course, the information is there but not presentable. When I go to talk to them, sometimes they will listen but sometimes they will just show their faces [frown] to me.

Next, according to L4, although he has been friends with M4 for more than five years since university and described M4 as a good person both at work and in personal life, he still cannot trust M4 fully in completing a task alone due to his perception towards Malays.

**“For Malays, I think they are easygoing but sometimes when they are too easygoing, too *cincai*, anything also they will go ‘okay, okay, no problem’, that’s not good I think. For example, I will refer to him (M4) when I can’t finish my work but I’ll still be worry about it after that. When I ask for his help for things that are supposed to be my job, I always find the outcome not achieve my expectation. I still need to revise the work afterwards. So, I will always recheck when he hands me an assignment”**

For Indians, they are labelled with different perceptions by their partners. Although the perceptions are rather inconsistent, they are usually negative. For instance, L10 mentioned that he thinks Indian workers need to be pushed at work. Next, L7 also shared his perceptions towards his Indian supervisor, M7.

Q: Do you see any difference between you and M7?

L7: Skin colour [laugh]

Q: Other than that?

L7: Actually he has quite some Chinese friends, so he knows how Chinese think sometimes. **Then we all know that Indians like to tell lies.**

Q: Is that what you think?

L7: Yes, **I think Indians like to tell lies** but of course we can't put this on every Indian. **We will have to observe, see what he does.**

Q: How about him?

L7: A little bit, sometimes.

Fortunately, while they are having certain perceptions towards their partners, most participants are like L7's '**will have to observe, see what he does**'. They are rational and do not judge their diverse partners with the perceptions alone but based on their own experiences. In an earlier discussion, M4 also stated that '...if I were a boss, I won't evaluate someone based on that (ethnicity), I'll need to look at his qualification and his ability'. Most of the participants stated that they do not judge their partner by their skin colour but rationally based on the performance and experience of getting along with the person, despite their perceptions.

During the interviews, some participants compared their experiences getting along with their partners to their perceptions to the group. This is also mentioned by M3 who always have a negative perception that a ‘typical’ Malay is lazy.

Q: After working here for a year, do you see anything special working with a leader from a different background?

M3: Not really [laugh] Any example?

Q: What is that you think you won’t see inside a pure Chinese company? Do you learn anything from the environment here?

M3: Okay. For example, **there was a Malay in our team before this, he is the typical Malay, a bit lazy.**

Q: What do you mean by typical?

M3: Typical is....Okay, **this is only my opinion, a typical Malay is a bit lazy.** In this field, we always need to on call. Even if you are busy, you have to pick up the phone but he didn’t, no one can get him or know where he was. We don’t have to stay in the office all the time, we are more on site so it’s important to stay connected but no one could get

Q: him. Is this answer okay?

M3: Yes, sure.

And there is also an Indian in the company, so far I think it’s okay with him.

Q: You mentioned about your perception about different ethnic, so you think see any difference between your perception and your actual experience?

M3: Yes, **it actually depends on the person we meet actually. Like for L3, I think he is different from a typical Malay. He is more motivated and hardworking as compared to other Malays.**

Q: So for other Malays, it is still the typical perception in your mind?

M3: Ya, I think so.

In addition, M19 (Chinese) also stated that his experience working with different ethnic groups has also changed his perception towards different ethnic groups. According to him, he realised that the set of perceptions he used to have on Chinese and Malays is wrong after the experiences.

Q: What do you think about working with different ethnicities?

M19: Very healthy. In here, we can really find what as suggested by the government, 1Malaysia. It's here. Three main ethnic groups mix well together and in the office, you can find all Malay, Indians and Chinese, they have no difference. **After working here, I realize Chinese is not really that outstanding and Malay, on the other hand, not all of them are lazy as we always think.** There are actually a lot of good Malaysia workers. The situation is very harmony here. **You have to understand every one of them.**

His leader, L19 (Malay) also stated that while she always thinks Chinese is better than Malay employees, she is not biased toward M19 just because of his ethnicity but his performance. Even though she is a Malay, she used the term 'they' to refer to the group of her own people whom she thinks are not doing their part at work.

Q: How do you see Malay, Chinese and Indian at work?

L19: **Chinese like to work.** They see their work more important than their family. **Malay, they like to talk more than work, they are a bit lazy,** they don't appreciate what they have and some of them just don't want to improve.

Q: Does that affect your relationship with M19?

L19: No, I think I treat him quite fair. **I won't be biased to him because he's a Chinese.** I'm good to him because he's good, he's a good worker actually.



L6, a Chinese project manager also talked about his original perception towards the ethnic group of his project supervisor, M6. However, he was impressed by the performance of M6 at work despite of his own perception and believes that skin colour is not an indicator of one's job performance.

Q: How you see workers from different ethnic groups?

L6: **Everyone will have a bit of certain perceptions I think at the beginning of knowing someone from different background. Actually I won't evaluate them based on their skin colour.** Won't be like, you are from this ethnic group, your performance will sure be at such level only. I have to evaluate based on their working attitude. **Like M6 is actually a very choosy supervisor here and he is Malay. So if we see him based on our normal view, we will say Malay are always *cincai* and there'll be a lot of things to solve after working with them.** For him, he sets high requirements for himself and he is very particular at work. Like me, sometimes, when I provide him with some solutions, he will question me back: you think that's good enough? Of course at first I will feel awkward but then I know that he is very particular and has very high requirement for himself. He just wants to make sure things run smooth, so I really trust him, I have never doubted or worried about him. He usually gives opinions based on his experience, **so I think skin colour shouldn't be used to evaluate someone at work.**

#### **4.2 Similarities and Dissimilarities in Needs and Wants in LMX**

During the interviews, aside from their current superior-subordinate relationships, participants were also asked about their needs and wants regarding ideal leader-member relationships through questions such as “What are the characteristics you are looking for in your relationships with your supervisor/staff?” and “What do you think a leader should help his subordinates with?” This is to answer the second question of this research which intended to find out the differences and similarities between interethnic dyads regarding their needs and expectations in their relationships. Determining these differences and similarities will not only contribute to the literature gap but also provide a guideline for interethnic dyads in getting along with their counterparts.

Through the interviews, diverse dyads are found to share more similarities than differences in their needs and wants regarding LMX relationships. From the data collected, three similarities have been identified in this aspect. First, both leaders and members of the three ethnic groups like participative decision making. Members like to be involved in decision making process and leaders are also very open in accepting their opinions. Next, members of all the three ethnic groups are also always looking for personal concerns from their leaders apart from basic reward systems at work. For the third similarity, it is quite surprising to find that the participants prefer to work with partners from a different ethnic group instead of with their own.

On the other hand, two dissimilarities have been found in this research regarding interethnic dyads' needs and wants in leader-member relationships. Regarding their needs related to religions and cultures, Malays generally need more attention and toleration from their partners. Secondly, this research also found that Chinese members are resistant to financial aid from their leaders as compared to Malays and Indians.

### **Similarity 1: Participative decision making**

At work, it is found that both leaders and members like to be involved in the decision making process. Leaders are found to be very open in accepting members' thoughts and opinions. When a decision is needed, leaders will usually carry out a discussion with their members as they think their members may be more experienced or more thoughtful. While for members, getting involved in the decision making process gives them satisfaction and some of them believe that it is their responsibility to make some decisions under their job scope.

According to L5, she likes to listen to her members who are younger than her as they have different thoughts. She understands that listening to others will not make her any less a leader but it will on the other hand open her eyes.

Q: What will you do when you have a different opinion from her (M5)?

L5: **I love to hear from my staff if they got different opinion.** I am already 30 something and they are younger than me. **Younger people**

**have different opinions and we cannot say they will sure be wrong. They have different thought, so we will need to tolerate with their opinions.** So normally, we will discuss and I will accept their opinion if I think they have a point. **I will accept their argument if they are right. Sometimes we need to listen to the younger.** If we only stick to our own opinions, maybe they will follow, but in fact you are wrong. Then if something happen and they will go: ‘See, that assistant manager, not even listen to others.’ *Tak boleh juga la* (It is not good). So we have to listen to them.

L7 also stated that he always debates with his Indian supervisor, M7 and other subordinates when they are having different opinions, in order to look for the best solution. He added that sometimes he will give up his own thoughts, knowing that the supervisors under him are more experienced than him.

Q: What will you do when you are having different opinion with M7?

L7: **Explain to each other, tell the reason, debate.** See who’s correct. First of all...Okay, sometimes like on site, he said that something is not workable, so **I will call a meeting with my other supervisors and other assistant supervisors, asking for their opinions.**

Q: Who is the decision maker usually?

L7: **Normally I will make the decision but I will always consider all the options they suggested, see which is better.** Since they are more experienced, so I will listen to them. **If mine’s really not workable, I will have to throw it away.** But if it’s the other way round, I will insist. You will always have to stand firm on your idea when it is right.

Q: What if they question something you insist?

L7: I will tell them to give a try first if they insisted. If their method is not working, then try mine. **I would not ask them to follow my idea blindly.** If their method is more traditional, I will ask them to try

mine. Try for a month let's say, if it's not working then change again. There is no definite right or wrong in our field. **So, we should always be open to others' opinion.**

Next, as a higher administration supervisor, L11 (Malay) knows her Chinese member (M11) is more experienced in technical issues. Thus, she will go to the member to ask for his opinions when she needs to make a decision on those issues.

Q: Who will always be the decision maker here?

L11: Depends. **I am the one doing paper work, so I will make the decision regarding to administration and for others,** we will always discuss and blend the ideas to get a better conclusion.

Q: Do you actually prefer discussion or making the decision by yourself?

L11: Depends on which aspect. **Like technically, he knows better than me after working here so long. I will ask for his advice about technical problem and let him carry out usually.** I don't feel ashamed to go to him when I don't know something as I know he is better than me and he is okay with that.

Similarly, members also like to participate in the decision making process rather than being told what to do by the supervisor. Being a part of the organization, regardless of their position and the nature of their jobs, members always like to get involved in the decision making process. This is exemplified by M13, a Malay female Environmental, Health & Safety Engineer in an international factory and M15, a Malay female waitress in a local franchise restaurant.

When asked about the quality of a good leader, M15 says that “**A good leader should be someone yang boleh bawa bincang** (who can always discuss with others). **We can always tell him our thoughts and discuss together** to find the solution”. M13 also reveals that she is not happy when her leader makes a decision without asking her opinion. For her, it is her responsibility to make some decisions which are under her job scope.

Q: How do you make a decision at work? Do you always need to discuss with your supervisor?

M13: Sometimes yes, sometimes no.

Q: What does that mean? How was it like?

M13: For me, when I need to do something, I will usually go to her “What do you think about this and that...”, asking for her opinion. If she’s okay then we will carry on. **Sometimes she will make the decision and only tell me after that. That’s really not cool.** She can be the decision maker sometimes but what I think is that **I am paid to do this job, and she already has so many things on her plate, she can leave it to me or discuss with me actually.**

### **Similarity 2: Personal Concerns**

When participants were asked about their expectation in a leader-member relationship, most members expressed their hope to have a leader who always shows personal concerns to them apart from basic formal reward system. According to M11 (Chinese), “Of course (as a staff), you need the pay. Without pay, no one will work but then **we also need to see a little bit of appreciation from our boss**”. According to him, apart from physical rewards, a member can be satisfied with small

friendly gestures from their leaders. Some simple actions like greeting the staff by names and asking them about their family already make a member feel contended and thus will be willing to do more for the organization. Although he had stated earlier that he would like to separate his personal life from his work, he still hopes his leader to show concerns towards that. Below are some of the quotes from M11:

“Like once a while, **you bring yourself down to the staff, the staff will feel happy. Like a simple ‘How’s your family lately?’ will already make us feel appreciated** and feel belong to here. Then when you need any extra thing from us, we will do for you.”

“Like last time we used to have name tag, it’s important for the boss, especially the big boss from the head quarter or the CEO. **Normally, they don’t know you but with name tags, they can greet you and call you by your name, this already makes us feel happy. When we are in need, personal concern from others is good.** It’s not necessary that a leader has to help you with your problem. **A simple greeting like ‘How are you today?’ when meeting you, we will feel that we belong to the company.**”

Next, M12, an Indian worker also has the same wish to have his superior approach him when he is down to share his problems.

Q: Tell me the quality of an ideal superior.

M12: He can’t be *cincai* at work, has to be serious. Then when we have a problem, he should know. **He should go to a staff if he feels the**

**staff having problem, give him some advices or see if he can help.**

Q: What do your feel if boss come to ask you about your situation when you feel down? Will you tell him the problem?

M12: If he comes to us, we can always tell him. If he offers to help then we can tell him the problem. If he sees us sad and come to us, we should let him know what had happened. **I like boss who always comes to me, that means he really cares about me.**

Next, M4 (Malay) also hopes his leader will show concern about his family matters.

Apart from physical rewards, he suggests that a boss can always show his concern to his subordinates with a small gesture when they meet outside the workplace.

Q: What are the characteristic for an ideal leader-member relationship?

M4: The leader has to be nice to the subordinates and the members need to respect the leader.

Q: Nice as in?

M4: Always try to fulfil their needs, on time payment, always keep his promise and walk the talk, take care of the welfare of the staff.

Q: Is it only regarding to work?

M4: Of course, work is work but like erm... **Apart from work, sometimes we will bump into each other outside right? Then we should greet each other and he can ask a bit about our family there, when he sees my wife. It will feel better if the boss wants to know about our family matters.** Then, if a staff is having some financial problems, the boss should also try to help if possible.

### **Similarity 3: Prefer to work with other ethnic groups than own**

Next, one of the most interesting findings in this interview is that most participants revealed that if they are given a choice, they will choose to work with people from



different ethnic groups as they are doing now, instead of working in a homogenous environment. Apart from the benefits of working with diverse partners as mentioned earlier, most participants revealed that the main reason is they do not like to work with their own ethnicity.

First, most participants ascribed this to their prior negative experiences working with their own ethnic groups. For example, M9 (Malay) and M11 (Chinese) had worked with their own ethnic groups previously and are currently working with their diverse partners. In their previous jobs, they both had negative experiences working with their own ethnic groups and thus prefer working with other ethnicity since then.

For M9, the Malay teacher who mentioned that she doesn't really like her Chinese superior, she still prefers a Chinese over a Malay leader due to her prior experience.

Q: Is there anything special working with a Chinese superior?

M9: I had a Malay boss in a factory last time. I think the factory is closed now. How to tell ya? I apologize as I am not complaining about my own ethnicity but Malay in the way of treating others, they are not really okay. **For Chinese, they still show respect to others but Malays, they are not that nice and tend to show as if they are higher, more powerful than you when we are together. Chinese is different.** In the factory, I was a store keeper initially and then I got promoted and I knew. When you made a small mistake, you will sure *kena hentam* (be walloped). They don't give you face, don't care about your feelings, that's what I feel about Malay boss. So I chose to work in a new environment with majority of Chinese. Here, they are better but just sometimes, like him, is easily influenced by others.

Q: Uh huh....

M9: **After working here for 8 years, I feel better getting along with different ethnic groups.** I just came back from a conference with a lot of Malays. From there, **I saw a lot of their *patterns* (attitudes), like always acting that they are more superior, as if they know everything.** I am not saying that I am good but I actually knew the topic they were discussing. Like when we were discussing about examination format, I have corrected a part but a Malay teacher kept saying 'No, no, no'. At last, we found out she's wrong. **Sometimes, between Malay and Malay, they tend to compete, showing that they are better than us.**

Next, M11 (Chinese) said that he prefers working with Malays over his own group due to his previous experience. According to him, he worked with a Chinese ex-boss who had scolded him 'brainless' in front of others and made him apologise. He also gave his opinions regarding the attitude of Chinese working in the government sector.

Q: Is there anything special working with different ethnicity?

M11: **I don't think ethnicity bothers actually but to be frank, from my experience, I think it's easier to work with a Malay boss than a Chinese boss.** Sometimes Chinese, like the one said I have no brain, is a Chinese. In front and behind of you, he acts differently but **Malays, they are very simple and friendly.** Some Chinese people like to play office politics. Of course there are also nice Chinese but not all. **From my experiences, I have worked with many bosses, I think working with Malay, like now is easier.**

Q: What is the main difference between a Chinese and a Malay boss then?

M11: In government sector or in our society, we Chinese, or some Chinese bosses are a bit insecure. Maybe they want to climb higher, so they will

need to act in such way. Then they are not so.... they don't even dare to make a decision, I think that's because of they are lacking of confidence. They are more insecure. In private sectors, I don't think we have this problem as I have also worked in private sector before but we can't compare in this way.

Besides previous experiences, some participants revealed that they do not like working with their own ethnic groups as they have negative perceptions towards their own group. This is opposed to the common thought that stereotypes are always towards other groups. For these participants, they feel that their own ethnic group is inferior as compared to others in some aspects and thus prefer to work in a diverse environment.

For instance, L19 stated that she is 'racist' to her own group, thinking that her ethnic group has a lot of weaknesses in both daily life and at work. Thus, she prefers working with the two other ethnic groups rather than with her own. In addition, she also mentioned that she feels 'awkward' getting along with her own group and thus always makes friends with people from other ethnicities.

Q: What do you think about working with different ethnicity?

L19: I think it's important for us to have different cultures. Like during our festivals, Chinese and Indians can take over our places. **There is more dynamic having different cultures at work and in Quran also, we are encouraged also to mix with different cultures to open our mind. I think some Malays tend to think they are the best, that's why I don't like some Malays. I think I prefer to work with Chinese.** Like when I am in a seminar, I actually go to

say 'hi' to Chinese and Indians instead of Malays. I don't know why but I feel awkward to talk to them.

Q: Were you grown up in Malaysia?

L19: Yes yes, in Kelantan some more. My hometown is Kelantan.

Q: Where the majority is Malay?

L19: Ya, **maybe I have had enough of that. I think I am racist to Malay maybe.** They took too many things for granted, they think they are the best and this country belongs to them. In fact this country belongs to all of us. I am a bit different. Sometimes I am pity on Chinese and Indians as they don't get what they have done and I feel embarrassed also. Maybe I am wrong but the *rempit* (illegal street racers) all Malay, drug addicts all Malay. So, what do you more? You've got so many things and should appreciate that. I don't know but my family are also like that. I don't like critiquing on that but that's the fact.

The next example is from L3, who stated earlier that he thinks Chinese are generally better than his own group at work. His current organization is a Chinese telecommunication company while his previous company is a Malay-owned company. He elaborated the differences between working attitudes of people in the two companies and which had his preference to work with.

Q: Do you see any special working with different ethnic groups?

L3: **I prefer to work in a Chinese company.** I think after working here, the way I communicate is more open now. If I work in *bumi* company, I will only get opinion from Malay only, so restricted. **But now that I am dealing with Indian and Chinese, the ideas from them may be different.** Let's say *bumi*, for certain issues like, erm...[interrupted]. Okay, in Malay company, there is less time

constraint which is from Chinese company. In Malay company, you will be more relaxed but in Chinese company, you will have no time to sit back and relax. That's the difference working in a multiethnic environment. I like working with Chinese better.

While Chinese's precise concept of time and punctuality were taken as a merit from L3's perspective, L4 (Chinese) has a different point of view. To L4, the way his own ethnic group manage time is too rushed, making people feel stressed. He also pointed out that his own ethnic group is too money-oriented. In addition, he redressed the perceptions of the two Malay participants earlier that Malays are always lazy. To him, they are just trying to do their work in a more relaxed way. He then suggested blending the cultures in a company to create a balanced working environment, which would be a good place to work in.

Q: Do you prefer working with own ethnic group only or mixing with others?

L4: **Mixing with others.** I can't really tell the benefits of working together with other cultures but okay, **if all Chinese work together, they will always be monetary oriented, keep talking about 'money, money, money', haggling over small things and always rushing 'faster, faster, finish the work faster!'**, that stress people out. **I like working with different ethnic groups, we will enjoy the working environment more.** Maybe I have got used to it since university. I had been working with different ethnic groups for 5 years in university. At first, it took me some time to get used to it but after that I think it's actually not bad. I think it's like complementing each other. **Many say Malays are lazy but I think it's not true. They just choose a happier way to carry out their task,** they may

not follow the schedule exactly and more loosen, but that brings more fun to the working environment, less tension. **Then when we add Chinese inside, to push and urge them ‘Faster! Faster!’, that will be complementing each other, making up a good team.**

Through the interviews, it is found that interethnic dyads share more similarities than differences regarding their needs in leader-member exchange. In the current study, it is found that the participants are generally having the same expectations towards their leader-member relationship except in regard to their religions. From data, it is found that Malay participants need more attention from their partners in their religious needs.

#### **Dissimilarity 1: Religious Needs**

For dissimilarities, Malay participants are found to have more religious needs at workplaces that need adaptations and toleration from their partners, as compared to Chinese and Indians. The statement of M11 (Chinese) gives a brief explanation about this situation. According to M11: “Let’s say for us, non-Muslim, we won’t always remind ourselves about our religion and no one will remind us about ours too when we are doing things, we don’t have to take religion into consideration in everything we do. But it’s different for Malays. **When you see a Malay, you see a Muslim**”.

As compared to Chinese and Indians, Malays have more religious and cultural practices that need more concerns from their partners at work. Although the Malay participants did not state their needs in the interviews, it is still mentioned indirectly by themselves or their partners throughout the conversations. To work with a Malay partner, one needs to be more alert of their cultural and religious practices.

Muslims need to pray five times a day. When they are at work, they may need to leave their places to perform their prayers. For a leader or member from other ethnic groups, he has to be alert and understand their needs and to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings. According to L2, sometimes his subordinates just pray in front of him and all he needs to do is just show respect and continue with his work.

Q: Do you think culture difference between both of you bring any effects here?

L2: Okay, like when they need to pray. **My staff will just roll out their mats and pray in front of my table**, in front of here [pointing to the space right in front of his table].

Q: What do you think about this?

L2: **You just have to accept that, it's nothing serious.** [Interrupted]. I think, you will attract a lot of attentions being the only Chinese here, everywhere you go within the office or the building, people will look at you, they will know that you are new or which department you work in. That's the pro I think and yea, **the only thing working with Malay colleagues is that you have to understand that they need to pray several times a day. It's okay for me.**

Q: What do you do when they are praying?

L2: **Just be quiet, do my work as normal**, no problem. Even they are

praying right in front of me, they are not disturbing me. I still can do my work, so no big deal. Just don't disturb them, show some respect.

During the interviews, food is also found to be one of the issues the participants need to deal with while working together with a Malay partner. Due to different eating habits, it requires accommodation from their partners in this issue. For example, working along with his Malay supervisor, M3 (Chinese) always gets to have lunch together with his supervisor. To him, eating spicy *mamak* (Indian Muslim) food every day used to be a bothersome issue but after he changed his mind, he has no problem with it now.

Q: Have you ever had any issue working together with him?

M3: I think maybe food. When we are working together sure I will eat with him. **It's quite a bothering issue to me sometimes** since he can't take our food, then we will go *mamak*. **For me, this used to be quite *xin ku* (hard)**. Eating spicy food at *mamak* everyday is quite hard for us, right?

**I wanted to eat some Chinese food also sometimes.**

Q: Uh huh.

M3: But I am quite okay with that now, get used to it already. **Since he can't change, so I changed!** It is not good to ask him to go eat alone while I go to Chinese restaurant when we two are working together. So, I have no problem with all kind of Malay food now, no problem at all [laugh] Ya, I think that's the only issue.

Next, L5 (Malay) stated that her Chinese member, M5 seldom asks her out for lunch when the member is going out with other colleagues. According to her, "I can't join some of their outings like going to sing karaoke because in some occasions, there are



only non-halal food. I am the only Malay here and they are all Chinese but I always try my best to mix with them”. She totally understands that as they have different eating habits. However, she is happy that when she is invited to join them, they will always accommodate her without being asked.

Q: Since you mentioned that you can’t join her for some activity with other colleagues, does that bring any problems to you?

L5: No no... **I understand them, they also understand me.** Normally I don’t join them. **But when I join, they will automatically go to Mc D or KFC** (where she can eat).

M11 (Chinese) also shared his views regarding this. While he had got used to the difference after working for a long time, he learnt it in a hard way, having experienced some unhappy incidents before.

Q: Do you think ethnic difference had caused anything between you at work?

M11: I don’t think there is any difference between us. Of course there are differences regarding to... **like they go praying everyday and their food. Probably to me, after so many years, I have got used to it.** So just accept it, no problem. Staying in the same room, having meeting with them, I accept that, so for me I don’t think there is any constraint or inconvenience. As long as you accept me, I accept you. No big deal.

Q: What about pros and cons working with different ethnic group?

M11: For me, since I have accepted it so it’s hard for me to comment on that. There are some disadvantages of course, **like when we are having some activities during their puasa (fasting) time. They can’t eat but we will always discuss about it beforehand when we have to work, like they will say ‘you go to go dinner first then only we will meet at the**

**location**'. They can accept it mostly, just a small crowd will make some noises but that shouldn't be generalized to all I think. **These are things that they cannot accommodate** you but generally they are okay. **So we accommodate**, that's my experience.

Q: Do you think all these are sensitive to talk about?

M11: That's why I said there are some people who take it as sensitive. I have Malay staff, friend and colleagues that we can talk about things like 'What are you doing this and that' openly. **But there are some, especially nowadays, when some Malays come to your place, they don't even drink those packed drinks you served**, don't you realise that? Like when you serve them a drink from the fridge, they will say 'Chinese fridge?' **So some are sensitive but most of them are okay, knowing that we won't set them up, they will accept.** I think as compared to last time, it's become more serious now, like **last time during Chinese New Year, they will ask if you have open house, they want to come visit you and they will ask for *kuih bakul* but now they won't.** I have given some *kuih bakul* to them but some told me that they just throw away. Because for us, that thing is ermm....

Q: *Halal?*

M11: We cannot use *halal* as when we use that, the ingredients also have to be *halal* but for us, we thought all the ingredients should be okay for them but it is actually not. So now I know to be more careful in front of them.

Two Malay subordinates, M1 and M9 shared their negative experiences at their workplaces resulting from their leaders' unfamiliarity with their praying time.

### **M1**

Q: Had ethnic differences caused any incidents between two of you?

M1: For me, sometimes.... **Like I am a Muslim, I need to pray, according to the time.** The management level in this company are mainly Chinese, **they don't really know well about the time.** That's the difference and

had caused a little difficulty for us because of this.

Q: Have you discussed with the management for this?

M1: Not really yet regarding to religion.

Q: How's your praying time now then?

M1: Okay, **like now we are allowed to pray for Zohor at 3.30pm here during our break time but the exact praying time for Muslims actually has to follow the sun, like from 1-1.15 till 4pm. When we are home, we usually start praying at 1.30 pm but here at 3.30 pm.** That's the thing.

Q: So is this actually acceptable for you to pray during your break time?

M1: Still acceptable but a bit rushed for me.

Q: So, you didn't discuss with higher management?

M1: I have told a Muslim superior but he can do nothing also. Then, I think there is no need to mention again as we are still given time for praying, just a bit rushed.

Q: Any other differences?

M1: **I think at work, religion is the point affecting.** Culture not really affects anything for me. **But from the point of religion, it's hard for us to tell or to raise an issue about too, so just try to accept it. Like we're still given time to pray here, so okay.**

**M9**

Q: Had the differences between you caused any incidents or issues so far?

M9: Ermm... yes. There were some incidents like last time **they always call for dinner at 7.30 pm, which is around our praying time. So, it is hard for us, we sure can't make it on time. But, it is getting better recently, they always make it later and wait for us.** As long as we haven't reached, they won't start eating. That's the good thing of them. Then for other things quite ok.

Next, conversation with L20 explains the benefits for a leader to understand these two needs of a Malay staff at work. According to L20, he has not had any problems with his Malay clerk regarding ethnic difference as he is always alerted and interested in their culture. He will ask his clerk regarding their cultures and religions, learning from her and thus avoided unhappy incidents.

Q: Have ethnicity differences caused anything between you and M20?

L20: Erm...I think not really for me but actually I learned a lot from them for what I don't really know initially. Like during their fasting month, I learn about it from them, why they are going to Mecca? Their praying time, their food....sometimes I will ask them and they will be very happy to tell you about that, as long as we ask in good ways. Then like for us, we should know the basic things like some of our food that they can't eat. I always avoid bringing our food to the office as I know she's here, I need to respect her. So there is not really any problem. Then like during Chinese New Year, I will give them something like mandarins and they will bring me some *kuih* during Raya celebration. I can't force them to follow what I believe or stop them from practicing their rituals. As long as we respect each other, I think it's really good.

From this, we can tell that it is important for the dyads, especially the leaders to have high sensitivities towards the needs of their Malay partners to avoid unpleasant incidents and to help the Malay partners work in a more comfortable environment. It is also more likely for a leader to have higher LMX ratings from his subordinates if he is sensitive to cultural issues of his members (Matkin & Barbuto Jr., 2012).

## **Dissimilarity 2: Financial Aid**

Next, Chinese members are found to be different from the other two ethnic groups in looking for financial help from their leaders. Through the interviews, it is found that most Malay (63.6%) and Indian (66.7%) members have asked for financial help from their leaders or are expecting their leaders to help when they are financially tight but none of the Chinese members have done that nor expect financial help from their bosses. According to M4 (Malay), **“If a staff is having some financial problems, the boss should also try to help if possible”**.

Besides that, leaders of some Indian and Malay members also stated that they have helped their subordinates financially before. For instance, L17 stated that she has helped her Malay staff to ask for advance payment from the employer. While for L7, lending money to his Indian subordinate is not a strange thing to him. According to him, he is always willing to do that as the member always makes the payment on time and the amount is not too big.

### **L17**

Q: What will you do if M17 come to you, asking for help for financial problem?

L17: Well, no problem. If she comes to see me for that, I will talk to my boss. **I have lent her money before for a few times but mostly, when they need advance salary and when they were financially tight, I will help them to tell to my boss and we will help them.**

### **L7**

Q: To what extend will you help your member when they asked for?

L7: **[...] I will lend them some money if they have financial problem but not in big amount.** And when they are having problem, I will give them advice, analysing the situation for them since we are outsider, we see things clearer.

How about M7?

Q: For him, **when he is in short of cash, like RM 1-200, I will always lend him.**

How did he ask that?

Q: He texted me. **If I was not short of money at that time, I will lend him and he pays me back on time usually.**

While Chinese leaders are willing to help their members financially, Chinese members will not seek financial help from their leaders even when they are in need. To them, getting financial help from their leaders may lead to trouble in the end. Several Chinese members like M10 and M11 shared their views in this aspect, thinking that it is not necessary for a leader to help a member in financial problem.

**M10**

Q: To what extend should a leader help his member?

M10: **I think materially no but psychologically yes.** Like when a member is having some problem with the family **and he needs some financial help, the boss has no responsibility to help him** but **for other problems, the boss can definitely help psychologically like giving him some advices** to help him to get over.

**M11**

Q: What do you think should a leader provide to his members?

M11: If I were a boss, I think we can't bother personal thing too much. Like sometimes, at work, we will have to follow the written rules to make sure the office runs well. While for personal, I think a boss just have to

be like I mentioned just now, ask about his staff's family once awhile, see if it will affect his work. Then about helping, **like financially, not really need to help especially lending money to the staff, it's definitely no.** There will sure be problems if you lend money to your staff like having problems to take it back and so on. Just help him by giving him some money if you really want to help him financially. Then for other aspects, we have to see if it's within our range, is it something we can do.

### 4.3 'Give and Take'

The third research question intended to look into the 'give and take' between interethnic dyads, identifying characteristics that they can give in to their partners as well as those they always insist on in their leader-member relationships. From findings, it is found that the attitudes of participants dealing with work-related and non work-related issues are very different. From the interviews, participants are found to be very easygoing and flexible in non work-related issues. On the other hand, in work-related issues, they are very persistent, always trying to defend their point of view in front of their partners.

From findings, participants are found to be accommodative when they are having different opinions or even when they are not satisfied with their partners in non-work related issues such as personal habits and personal attitudes. According to participants, as long as the issues are not work-related, they will just give in easily to their partners, let the partner make the decision or simply 'let it be'.

The conversation with M14, a Chinese member from a government organization who refused the interview to be recorded, reflects the situation. This member was quite resistive to take part in the interview initially and only changed his mind after being reassured that all the details will be protected and the whole conversation will not be recorded. Once being told the main subject of the study (leader-member relationship), M14 shared his main principle being a subordinate:

“Do you know 见风使舵 *jian feng shi duo*? (A Chinese idiom which can be literally translated as look upon the wind and set the helm of the boat, telling people always to be alerted to their surroundings and be accommodative to fit themselves into the environment). If you know what that means, you will have no problem getting along with your superior at work. **You just need to know the ‘style’ of your boss, know what he wants, you just do as he likes, then it won’t be wrong.**”

To him, as long as the issue is not related to work, he can always give in easily. Later in the interview, he added: “**But when it comes to work, of course you can’t be too *cincai*. You need to have some control in your job.**”

Besides M14, most participants also revealed that when they are having interpersonal conflicts or dissatisfactions with their partners, they will not bring up the issues but choose to leave them aside. According to M13 (Malay), she always hopes for more personal attention and support from her leader, whom she thought had neglected her for a while. However, she didn’t bring up the issue to the leader although she



mentioned a few times throughout the interview that she is really concerned about the situation. For her, it will be awkward to go to her leader for personal issues.

Q: How much contact do you have with your superior?

M13: Actually we used to chat a lot when I first joined here but now, I think because of her new boss, we seldom talk now. While for my colleague, he is involved in a new setup with her, so I think she talks to him more than to me. **It's not like I want her to talk to me, I don't know other workplaces but from my experience, I think it's important to let the boss know what you are doing. I am a bit concerned about this.** I spend a lot of time and energy to travel to work everyday, and I just got pregnant and always feel tired, I think all these made us talk less.

Q: What do you think about this situation?

M13: **I am concerned, I am concerned actually.**

Q: Have you talked to her about this?

M13: No no, she's very busy. I don't know but she is now having a new boss now and I can see that she has to work very hard as compared to before. She also told me that her new boss makes her very busy. I am actually concerned because as compared to my colleague, I am a bit threatened maybe. I think if he has more visibility from me, then it is quite dangerous to me as we are at the same level. **I guess she is probably thinking: 'What's she doing actually? Is she doing her work?'**

Q: But she didn't come to you?

M13: **No, she doesn't really give me feedback.** In my last company, my boss used to give me feedback to talk to me, one-to-one. Sometimes I went to him when I had problem and he'd be like 'Hey, we haven't talked in a while, come in!' It is very different here. Actually I like talking to my boss but at the same time, right now, I am also feeling safe as I am pregnant now and I think my capability has reduced. **I am also worried that she will be like 'This is all you have been doing all**

**these while?’** So it’s a good and also a bad thing. But I will always update her about my work as a motivation for myself. **I actually expect the motivation to come from her.**

Q: Are you feeling comfortable with current situation?

M13: **No, I am not.** I always want to communicate. I think you tend to think negatively if you don’t. Sometimes I will drop her emails but I got no reply from her. Then I will think ‘Am I thinking too much?’ and slowly, I reduced the emails. **I am not comfortable and actually very concerned about this.**

Q: Have you talked to her about this?

M13: No, **I just act normal and only go to her when I have any problem at work to consult her. It will be very weird for me if I go to her and say ‘I am not comfortable with current relationship, I think we to have a talk.’**

Next, according to L2 (Chinese), he has some opinions regarding his senior clerk’s attitude in communicating with others and he has also received complaints from others about that. However, instead of bringing it up to discuss with the clerk, he chose to reply to the complaints perfunctorily.

Q: Please describe her personally.

L2: She can be very mean sometimes. **She looks very mean and fierce when you ask her to do something.** She is willing to do the work but needed to be kicked to move.

Q: What do you mean by mean? She scolds you?

L2: No, **she won’t scold me but just increase her voice. But for others, those who are at same level with her, she will tell them off** when they went to ask for her assistance. She has a quite big voice.

Q: What do you think about this?

L2: I’m okay with it, it’s just a small thing to me.

Q: How about others then?

- L2: **They will come to me, telling me ‘Your subordinate... She always scolds us...’ and so on.** They will tell me in private. Actually, she had been working here for a very long time, she's very senior here. **She is just having a big voice, how can you go to tell her off?**
- Q: Will you bring out this to her then?
- L2: No no... **Actually they also know she's only bad in her mouth, she doesn't mean that actually.**
- Q: Will you take any actions after others complain to you?
- L2: No.
- Q: Why?
- L2: I think they are just complaining or mumbling only, they don't really want any actions also. **I just tell them to tolerate with her. And, it's only her personal attitude. So, no need to tell her.**

The same situation applies to M3 (Chinese) and M7 (Indian) who have highly rated their relationships with their leader. According to M3, his leader will sometimes work off his anger at their workplace, making M3 and other colleagues feel uncomfortable. Despite his close relationship with his leader, M3 never brought this up to his leader, thinking that it is the way for him to release stress.

### **M3**

- Q: Tell me about your most memorable experiences with him, both positive and negative.
- M3: Okay, positive first, he is quite generous, doesn't like haggling over small matters.
- Q: What makes you think that?
- M3: Okay, sometimes he will give us a treat in restaurant, knowing that we have been working hard, quite generous. He shares his knowledge to us, we have learnt quite a lot from him.
- Q: Okay, how about negative experiences?

M3: Okay....There is actually something making me feel uncomfortable about him. **He is not showing tantrum at me personally but I feel uncomfortable. Sometimes, when he is moody, he will release his anger in the office, not to us directly but we can tell that.**

Q: Like how?

M3: For instance, he dropped his phone several times the other day then **he got angry and started kicking tables and chairs around.**

Q: How did you feel at that moment?

M3: I will feel like....Of course he didn't do anything to me but **I felt.....ermm...uncomfortable.**

Q: Have you ever told him about how you feel?

M3: No. Usually, that only lasts for 5-10 minutes, he will be fine. **Everyone has their own way to release their stress. I think that's just his way to release his stress, maybe?**

Q: Do you hope him to change?

M3: **I won't force others to change, that's his personal thing. And, so far, I think there is no need to bring out the issue yet, that's just his way.** Everyone has their own way to release.

Q: So, it is still acceptable?

M3: [Laugh] **I think... still acceptable**, still okay *lah*.

Next, M7 (Indian) shares his different attitudes in dealing with work-related and non work-related issues with his Chinese Engineer, L7. According to him, when there is a problem during manufacturing process, L7 will work off the anger on him, pointing finger to him and refusing to talk to him for several days, although L7 understands that it is actually not his fault and despite their close relationship. Personally, he will not hold grudges against L7 but instead, he is always willing to talk to his leader again as long as the leader is willing to. However, for his work and

professionalism, he will always wait for the chance to explain to his engineer to maintain his own reputation and performance.

Q: Tell me about your most memorable experiences with L7, positive or negative.

M7: Erm....what we call that? Misunderstanding! Sometimes we will have that. **When we have misunderstanding, he won't talk to me for two or three days. For me, I am always okay, I am willing to talk to him anytime but sometimes he just, for two or three...two days the most, he just doesn't want to talk to me.** Because I need to do my work, I need to communicate with him, he also needs to see me for work, he can't avoid me for three or four days, cannot. One or two days, two days maximum then he will come to me. That's nothing serious, **only small misunderstandings like sometimes when the papers (product) get rejected, he will scold: 'it must be because of you, you didn't take good care of the machines.'** Actually he also understands, **just that he is angry at that time and need to work off the anger.** So after two days, he will come back to me after he calmed down. He is also like our family. Sometimes I tell him that we will never know when we are going to leave the world, so we need to be friendly to everyone. We should do what we can do for others, be nice to others. We have to be nice to everyone, so even if we fight, make it one or two days the most. And about me and him, we are not even fighting.

Q: Only not talking to each other for a few days?

M7: Ya.

Q: So, what will he say to you when he comes back after not talking to you for two days?

M7: **He won't say anything. Don't have to say sorry also.**

Q: Just act normal?

- M7: Just normal, then our friendship will even get deeper you know? When you fight with a friend and get back together after that, you will become even closer. **Over means over, no need to look back anymore.** After fighting, the relationship gets even better actually.
- Q: So you won't talk about it again like why did you not talking to me last few days?
- M7: Okay, **I won't say that because we are friends again, over means over. But when someone faces the same problem next time, I will tell him :** 'You see, that's the problem I met last time, it's not because of me, that's the situation I was in.' I will tell him with this point. It's normal for us to face all kinds of problem at work.
- Q: So you still need to explain?
- M7: **I need to let him know that you scolded me for the same problem and that's actually not my fault. Then he will say: "Oh.....so that's not your fault. That's because of the machine." So he will know that and he will say "oh.... Sorry sorry..."** I can't keep telling people that I am good at work or it's not my fault, so I have to wait till the same problem happen again. **When there is a proof, I can highlight the problem to him again for him to understand that it was not my fault.**

As portrayed by M7, while he can forget about personal issues, he will still try to clear his name with his supervisor about his performance at work when there is a chance. This is actually similar to the attitude of most participants in managing their leader-member relationships. As compared to their attitude in non-work related issues, participants are very insistent when they are having problems or different opinions with their partners in work-related issues. According to participants, they will always be persistent on their opinions when it is regarding their work or professionalism. Instead of giving in easily, they will always try their best to

convince their partners when working together. This is to ensure the best result for the company as well as to defend their professionalism.

L16 (Indian), an assistant manager in a franchise restaurant stated that it is important for him to make sure his subordinates follow the standard operating procedures (SOPs) to ensure the standard quality of their food. According to him, he rated his relationship 5/10 with his subordinate as the subordinate always goes against the SOPs even after being reminded many times. To him, it is his job to make sure the member follow the SOPs. Thus, he will keep reminding his member to follow the SOPs every time he finds the kitchen helper is not, even in small things.

Q: What will you do if he is not following the SOPs?

L16: **I will go advise him, asking him not to do that.** Because, we are a franchise restaurant, the taste has to be the same in all restaurants. So we have to follow the SOPs, **I will tell him the reason and make sure he follows.**

Q: Okay, how's the situation?

L16: Like, when we are preparing a drink. We will have to use a measuring cup to measure the ice but sometimes he will just do by hand. So I will tell him to use to the cup. He says he can estimate it and it is easier. I know but it is stated in the SOP that we need to use the measuring cup. So, I will ask him not to do that again. He says 'okay, okay' but then he will repeat again [laugh]. So I will go advice him again until he's fed up and goes 'okay, okay' again.

Q: Okay, so the quality and the SOP are things that you are firm on. Is there anything that you can actually tolerate with as a supervisor?

L17: Tolerate.....**If it doesn't affect the job or the product quality, then I will tolerate.** Like sometimes they have good ideas, I will always

listen to them and follow them.

Similarly, according to M6, as a project supervisor, he does not tolerate at work as his professionalism requires precise accuracy. However, toleration is allowed in non-work related matters to him.

Q: Is there anything that you can tolerate in your relationship with L6?

M6: **We can't tolerate in our work. Tolerance is not for engineering** as our job requires precise calculation. All must be accurate to make sure the products have good quality.

Q: How about when it is not about work?

M6: Yes, that's okay. **If there is something between us, I will need to know his situation and I will need to understand** a bit about his style (personality) too.

Next, M19 also shared his previous experience in his last company, having intense arguments with higher management in order to stand on his point. According to him, when he knows that he is right, he will fight till the end, even in front of the Board of Directors. He added that it will be a regret giving up easily in your own professionalism.

Q: How do you convince others when you are having different opinion?

M19: Okay, whenever I stand firm on my point, I actually already have the answer in my heart and have a complete plan in my mind, to convince them. It's not that I am arguing with my words only, I have all the facts.

Q: Have you argued with your superior, L19 before?

M19: I haven't really argued with anyone yet here but I have done this in my last company, in front of a lot of managers. **I just stood on my point**



**and argued with them. The situation was so intense that the chairman needed to stop us.** For me, as long as you are confident in yourselves, you should always stand firm on it. In front of so many managers, you have to stand firm. **When you are working, if you don't stand firm on your point of view and just give up easily, you will sure regret later. It's your job!** The issue was that they had actually agreed with one of my proposals and started the project but the progression was far behind. Then my assistant General Manager tried to point the finger at me, 'why you only bring out the problem now?' The justice was with me so I had to fight back and I was quite harsh that time until the General Manager didn't know how to stop us. Finally, they agreed to carry on with my plan and they did actually get the work done on time at last.

Q: How's your relationship after the argument?

M19: Very good! **Actually, at workplace, especially in front of our superior, we can fight with them very seriously in a meeting but after that, we are still friends.** Actually, I find this unbelievable too before working or when others told me this. But actually these upper people, they know about what they have done and know their fault and they know why you are angry but in front of others, they just want to take care of their faces at that moment. But after that, we are friends.

Q: What are the things that you can tolerate with and what are those that you will always be firm on when getting along with a leader?

M19: **I am particular to anything related to my expertise because if I don't, it will not only cause loses to the company, but even worse like causing casualties and even death. For other things not related to my work, I can be very flexible and easygoing.**

Lastly, L12 (Malay) stated that he feels irritated when his subordinates come to challenge him, not looking for advice or solution but only to sabotage him. As the

leader of his organization, he needs to maintain his professionalism in order to lead the people. Although he mentioned that he is always flexible and friendly to his subordinates, he will not tolerate when his professionalism is being challenged. He will try his best to win over the situation to protect his status as the head of the organization.

Q: What are the things that you cannot tolerate with?

L12: **Come challenge me without knowledge.** They just know a little bit and come to challenge me. Like this guideline [showing a book], I am not saying I mastered the whole book but it is always with me, it's about rules and regulations working here. **There were some staff who just came to challenge me when they know a little bit about it, that made me very very angry and started squelching them back. If you don't know, just come to ask me but don't challenge me.** Of course you can challenge me any time you want as I always have this book. Another thing is this book is in English, so not all can understand it well. Everyone working here will have to know but with different level of knowing. For me as the head, I have to know it thoroughly. For them, they will only need to know the basic but me, in and out, everything. So don't come to challenge me on this. **If you challenge me, it's like you're trying to test my ability, that doesn't feel good.** It's like you are trying to disdain me and I don't like that. **It's different if you are asking.** Then we can discuss, if both of us don't understand, then let's refer to the book and discuss together, what's your understanding and what's mine. **To me, if you just want to come to challenge me, that's totally a 'No' and I will challenge you back.**

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Although LMX studies are not rare in Malaysia, a careful review of the literature raises interesting new questions. First of all, despite its multi-ethnic workforce and the diversity between ethnic groups in Malaysia, most studies in Malaysia have been carried out without taking this into consideration. The multi-ethnic workforce in Malaysian organizations actually offers a unique site to examine ethnicity background and LMX at workplaces. The current research questioned whether ethnicity background as a proxy for cultural norms in Malaysia moderates the relationship between interethnic leader-member dyads. Through three different research questions, findings in the current research have revealed some unique ways ethnicity background affects the LMX between interethnic dyads in Malaysian organizations.

This chapter also concludes the whole research, including its contributions to the literature as well as the understanding of interethnic leader-member dyadic interactions in Malaysian organizations. Limitations in the current research and directions for future studies are also included.

#### **5.1 LMX Dimensions Exchanged between Interethnic Dyads**

In the first question, different dimensions are found exchanged between interethnic dyads, showing the influences of ethnicity on the development of LMX relationship. When Dienesch and Liden (1986) introduced the multidimensional concept of LMX,

they did not claim the three dimensions to be exclusive in LMX development; on the contrary, the authors were open to the possibility of other dimensions. The fourth dimension - Professional Respect was later added by Liden and Maslyn (1998) and more recently, Wang et al. (2007) found two more dimensions in China due to cultural differences. With a speculation that the multiethnic workforce will affect LMX commodities in Malaysia, the first research question looked into the commodities exchanged between interethnic dyads in Malaysia.

From the findings, it is found that seven dimensions are being exchanged between interethnic leader-member dyads in Malaysia - (1) **Mutual Respect**, (2) **Cooperation**, (3) **Favour/Renqing**, (4) **Friendship**, (5) **Limited Personal Exchange**, (6) **Appreciation**, and (7) **Perceptions**. Some of these dimensions correspond to existing dimensions (Liden & Maslyn, 1998) and some are new emic dimensions in the diverse working environment. In addition, apart from **Work** and **Social Exchange** in existing model (Liden & Maslyn, 1998), there is a new group of exchange discovered in the current research - **Diversity Exchange**. This group shows how interethnic dyads handle diversity issues at workplaces with their diverse partners and the effects of ethnic differences on their relationships. Each of these dimensions will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

In order to compare current findings with existing model, the two models were put into diagrams for a clearer picture. Diagram 5.1 shows the existing dimensions by Liden and Maslyn (1998) while Diagram 5.2 shows the findings of current research.

Diagram 5.1: Existing Dimensions in LMX by Liden and Maslyn (1998)

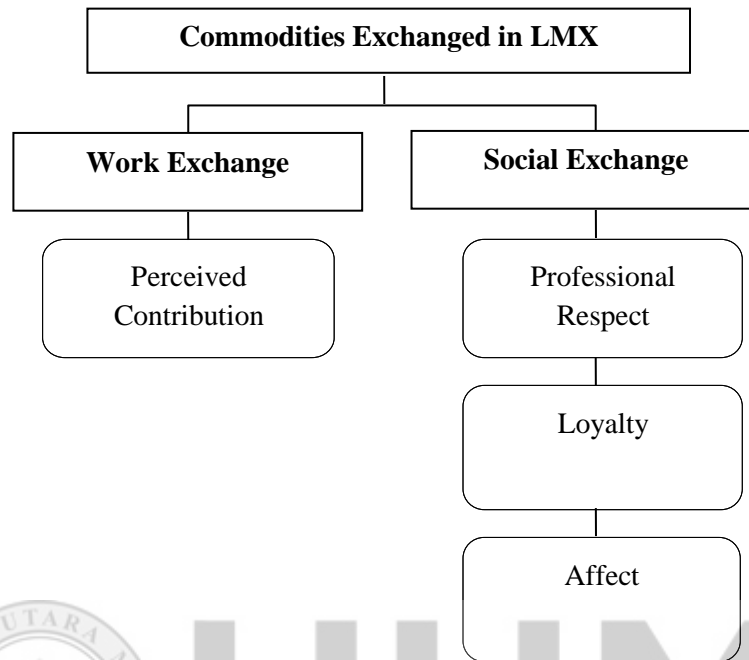
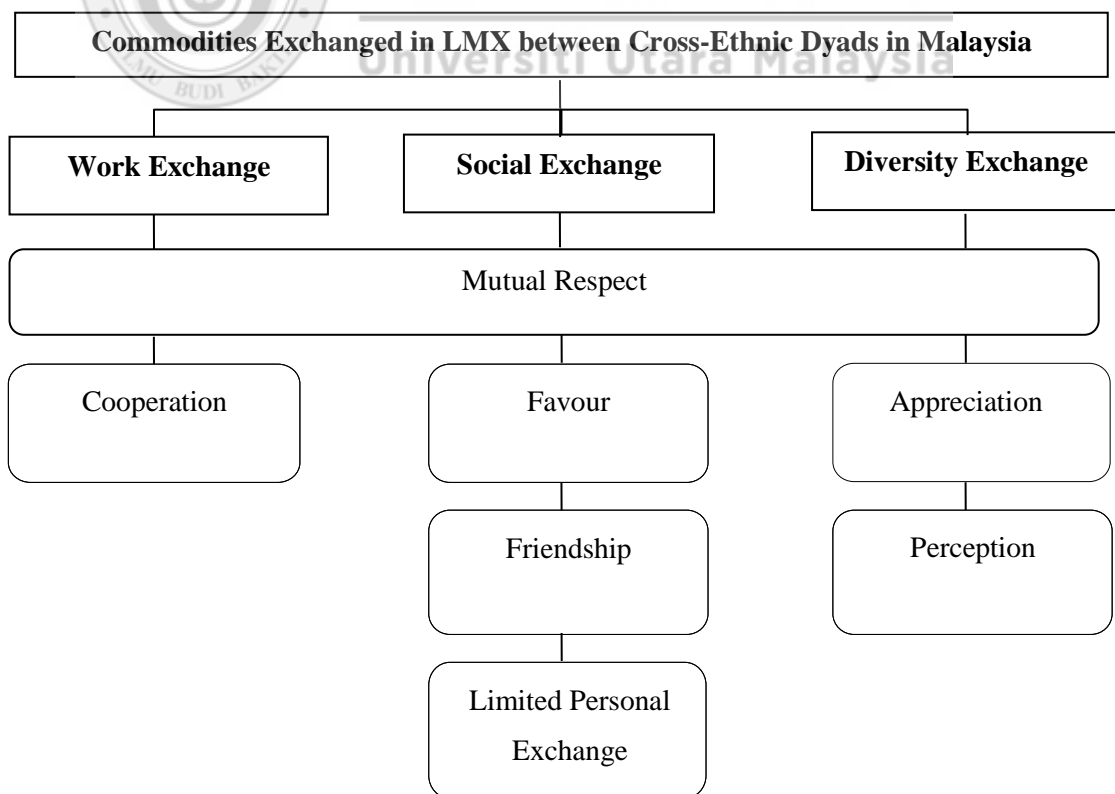


Diagram 5.2: Dimensions Exchanged in LMX between Interethnic Dyads in Malaysia



Out of the seven dimensions in the current research, three are found similar to the existing dimensions while the other four are new dimensions found between interethnic dyads in Malaysian organization setting. Comparing current findings with existing dimensions, it is found that **Mutual Respect** is similar to **Professional Respect**, **Cooperation** is similar to **Perceived Contribution**, and **Friendship** is similar to **Affect**. These dimensions in the current research have different names from their corresponding dimensions because of the adoption of interview method in the current research. This method enabled participants to share their own views without being restricted within existing dimensions. Thus, the naming of the dimensions was based on the data and only compared with the existing dimensions during data processing. Each of the dimensions will be explained in the following discussions.

In the current findings, each of the dimensions is put under an exchange group accordingly except for the first dimension - **Mutual Respect**. Throughout the interviews, participants frequently emphasized the importance of showing respect to their partners under different situations. Thus, instead of being put under a group, this dimension spanned over the three exchange groups. As mentioned, **Mutual Respect** is similar to **Professional Respect** by Dienesch and Liden (1986) but when compared to Professional Respect which is defined as ‘the perception of the degree of reputation built by each member in his line of work’, this dimension is definitely much wider. Compared to **Professional Respect** which is put under **Social Exchange**, **Mutual Respect** stretched over the three exchange groups as it is found under various different situations.

At work (**Work Exchange**), members were found to always respect their leaders who are higher hierarchically, regardless of the quality of the relationship. This reflects the difference between Malaysian and western countries, where respect tends to be exchanged in only high quality LMX (Kim & Taylor, 2001). According to Selverajah and Meyer (2006), it is vital for subordinates to show respect for authority in Malaysian organizations.

Next, under **Social Exchange**, leaders always respect their subordinates, especially those who are elder and more experienced. This again highlighted the uniqueness of Malaysian culture pointed out by Dooley (2003) in her workshop comparing Malaysian cultures with western (US) values at work. According to the author, the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia kept emphasizing on the value of ‘respect for elders’, which had not been mentioned even once by the participants from the US throughout the two-day program.

Respect is also exchanged between interethnic dyads under emic **Diversity Exchange**. Due to mutual respect, high accommodation and toleration were observed in participants when they are dealing with different cultural and religious practices of their partners at workplaces. While they might not be familiar with the practices of their partners, the dyads always try to accommodate and tolerate their partners out of respect. According to Asma and Pederson (2003) and Smith (2003), this is among the main contributors to harmonious relationships among Malaysians.

Spanning over the three exchange groups explains the weight of showing **Mutual Respect** in interethnic relationships at workplaces in Malaysia. According to Chen and Van Velsor (1996) and Graen et al. (2005), respect is among the characteristics of a successful intercultural LMX relationship. Having **Mutual Respect** spanning over the three exchange groups shows the success and functionality of interethnic LMX relationship in Malaysia.

Next, comparing Diagram 5.1 and 5.2, both of the **Work Exchange** groups contain only one dimension each. The existing model has **Perceived Contribution** while the current findings have **Cooperation**. While the names are different, the two dimensions run in the same vein to some extent. According to Dienesch and Liden (1986), **Perceived Contribution** indicates the “perception of the amount, direction, and quality of work-oriented activity each member puts forth toward the mutual goals (explicit or implicit) of the dyad, p. 624”. In LMX-MDM questionnaire by Liden and Maslyn (1998), the three items under **Perceived Contribution** include ‘I do work for my supervisor that goes beyond what is specified in my job description’, ‘I am willing to apply extra efforts, beyond those normally required, to meet my supervisor's work goals’ and ‘I am willing to apply extra efforts, beyond those normally required, to meet my supervisor's work goals’. The items appear to be more of the self-evaluation of the willingness to do more than they are required to for their partners, instead of commodities exchanged between the dyads. This also reflects the problem of lack of clarity of LMX dimensions (Brower et al., 2000).



From the interviews, the dyads are found willing to do more than their job requirement at work for their partners, which is parallel to the items under **Perceived Contribution**. However, while they are willing to do more than is required for their partners at work, they realized that their partners are also doing the same thing in return. The dyads always look for help from their partners at work and the partners are always willing to help, although it is not in their job scope. Thus, instead of emphasizing on their own contribution to their partners, the dyads take that as mutual **Cooperation** between themselves at work.

The willingness of diverse dyads to contribute to each other and the relationship is an indication of high LMX relationships (Liden & Graen, 1980; Wayne & Green, 1993). On top of that, referring to 'LMX Third Culture Way vs. LMX Two Cultures' table (Graen, et al., 2005), '**Cooperation** vs. Competition' is one of the opposing characteristics between the two situations. Cooperation will be formed between a pair of diverse leader-member dyad who practices 'LMX Third Culture Way'. On the other hand, for those who are practicing 'LMX Two Cultures', the dyads will always try to compete with each other to win over their partners. Fortunately, the current research found that instead of trying to outperform their partners, both leaders and members in Malaysian organizations are willing to cooperate with their partners regardless of their hierarchical levels. Although this is not sufficient to make a conclusion that they are practicing LMX Third Culture Way, it is at least a good indication that the dyads are working together in a healthy environment, which is beneficial to the company as well as the dyads themselves.

According to Wayne and Green (1993), dyads with high quality **Work Exchange** do not limit their exchange within tasks only. Instead, it leads them to expand their relationships to **Social Exchange** which captures the interactions between the interethnic dyads besides work. In the current research, three dimensions were found exchanged between interethnic dyads in Malaysia under **Social Exchange**, i.e. **Friendship, Favour/Renqing**, and **Limited Personal Information Exchange**.

Aside from work, interethnic leader-member dyads are found to show extra efforts to help their diverse partners in non-work related matters. These behaviours are neither compulsory nor do they help them in their performance evaluation but are performed voluntarily as a **Favour** in helping each other. For Chinese participants, they called it **Renqing**.

In the current research, the most common favour shown by a leader is when members apply for leave or ask for permission to leave their workplace during working hours. While the leaders could have handled the requests formally, asking the members to go through the formal procedures, most leaders will just approve the requests based on their own considerations. On top of that, leaders are also willing to help the members in their personal and even financial problems. Getting these favourable treatments from supervisors makes subordinates feel indebted and thus want to make some sort of repayment by performing beneficial behaviours beyond work requirement for the supervisors (Shore et al., 2009; Wu, 2009). Member participants in the current research supported this statement as they are also reciprocating the same favourable treatments from their leaders.

This concept of **Favour/Renqing** is similar to Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) which is defined as “those function or contributions that are not required by the system and for which there is no contractual guarantee of increased reward” (Organ & Bateman, 1991: p. 259). Still, compared to OCB which may be on an organizational level, **Favour** exchanged between interethnic dyads is directed more to their partners (Eisenberger et al., 2014). **Favour** is not explicitly examined in the LMX literature, but **Favour** and OCB are similar, and OCB is an indication of high quality LMX (Bowler, Halbesleben, & Paul, 2010; Lo et al., 2006; Oren, Tziner, Sharoni, Amor, & Alon, 2012; Weismal-Manor Tziner, Berger, & Dikstein 2010). Thus, it is positive that this dimension is another sign of healthy relationship between interethnic dyads in the current research.

Although similarity attraction posits that in-group favouritism usually happens between people from similar background as similarity produces interpersonal attraction and shared group identity (Abu Bakar et al., 2014), Waismel-manor et al. (2010) actually found that the performance of OCB within ethnically dissimilar dyads is not rare as in their study, they actually found that ethnically dissimilar dyads are performing more OCBs than similar dyads. However, the interpretation of the authors may be different from the current research. In their study, the authors explained that the phenomenon might be because of the resentment from similar dyads that were having higher expectations for each other as they felt resented when the OCBs received are lower than their expectations. Another explanation by the authors is that maybe the managers are overrating their dissimilar members' performance in order to show that they are not biased.

As compared to Waismel-manor et al.'s explanations, the statement of Gupta, Surie, Javidan and Chhokar (2002) explains the current findings better. According to the authors, Malaysians are the most humane-oriented society among Southern Asia cluster, always being caring and kind to others. Despite different teachings and backgrounds, different ethnic groups are generally humane-oriented and always care for their partners. For instance, Chinese participants ascribed the performance of their favourable treatments to the concept of *Renqing*, or benevolence which is actually one of the dimensions in Paternalistic Leadership in Chinese perspective (Sheer, 2010). While for Malays, their concept of *budi* intellect inherited from their ancestors teaches them to always be kind and sensitive to others' feelings (Selvarajah & Meyer, 2008).

Next, **Friendship** is the second dimension under **Social Exchange** in the current research. This dimension is similar to the **Affect** dimension in Dienesch and Liden's (1986) which is defined as "the mutual affection members of the dyad have for each other based primarily on interpersonal attraction rather than work or professional values, p. 625". Throughout the interviews, most participants described their relationships with their partners as those of friendship or even family, instead of mere superior-subordinate. Apart from work, informal interactions between interethnic dyads are very close and carefree. Hierarchical status difference did not stop the leader-member dyads from making fun of each other and having lunch together during break time. This is in line with Anusuiya et al. (2009) that status maintenance behaviour from leaders is not expected by Malaysian managers. Ansari et al. (2007) also stated that Malaysia is a relationship-based society where the

organizations always cherish enhanced leader-member relationships. In addition, this also supported Kennedy (2002) that the power distance index in Malaysia is not as high as suggested by Hofstede as friendship hardly formed between leader and member dyads in high power distance countries (Boyd & Taylor, 1998).

However, while the participants stated that they always view their partners as their friends and have good relationships with them, the third dimension under **Social Exchange** shows that the participants are sharing very **Limited Personal Information** with each other. From the findings, the participants are very secretive and protective about their personal details to their partners. Both leaders and members do not like sharing too much of their personal information with the partners, always wanting to have a clear line between their work and personal lives.

The second and the third dimensions under social exchange are rather in contrast as **Friendship** indicates good relationship development (Butler, 2009) while **Limited Personal Information** is the opposite (Graen & Wakabayashi, 1994). Similarly, Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) also stated that personal and professional information shared between dyads should always increase as the relationship develops. This again highlights the difference of interethnic dyads in Malaysia as compared to western cultures.

Next, the **Diversity Exchange** is an emic exchange found between interethnic leader-member dyads in Malaysia. Working in a diverse environment, it is unavoidable for the interethnic dyads to deal with differences between themselves. From the interviews, two diversity-related dimensions have been found exchanged between the dyads - **Appreciation** and **Perception**.

The first dimension under **Diversity Exchange - Appreciation** shows the positive side of the dyads' interethnic interactions. Mutual respect and accommodation of the dyads in their interactions were paid off. For instance, they can have longer festival holiday as the partners will always take over their places during their absence and there is greater creativity during a discussion. This made the participants enjoy and appreciate their interethnic relationships. Great **Appreciation** towards their diverse partners is found to be the first dimension under this exchange. Participants stated that they are grateful having their diverse partners with them and they always appreciate the presence of their partners. In the next research question, the dyads even stated that they prefer to work with a diverse partner rather than their own group.

While the first dimension portrayed the positive side of the **Diversity Exchange**, the second dimension shows that covertly, the dyads are actually having a set of **Perceptions** towards their partners based on their ethnicity background, both positive and negative. According to Ramlee et al. (2009), most Malaysians do not

reveal their discriminations about other ethnic groups until they feel safe to share their true sentiments. At the beginning of the interviews, most participants denied that they are having any perceptions on their partners but as they were getting more comfortable in the interview process, they revealed their real thoughts. Generally, Chinese are getting good perceptions while Indians and Malay are usually perceived negatively by their partners.

In addition, although some participants did not state their perceptions directly, it can still be detected by reading between the lines of their words. For instance, it was a common practice among participants to refer to their partners collectively by using 'they' referring to the ethnic group instead of 'he/she' when asked about their partner alone. In addition to their own experiences, participants also added their observations on other groups when they are describing their LMX with their diverse partners. This can probably be explained with Social Identification Theory by Tajfel (1982). According to the theory, people sharing the same attributes tend to construe themselves as a group cognitively, having a collective self-construal of 'we' vs. 'them' which makes them see themselves in their own group, being different from others. In the long run, this categorization leads to perceptual and attitudinal biases that favour those who are in the same group, derogate the outsiders and eventually lead to stereotype (Hobman, Bordia, & Gallios, 2004; Hogg, 2004).

Fortunately, in the current research, while the diverse dyads are having different perceptions towards their partners, they always keep it secret and do not let it affect

their performance and judgment at work. Most participants stated that despite their perceptions, they will always observe their diverse partners individually when they are working together. This is probably due to the positive interactions between the dyads under **Work Exchange**, as mentioned in previous discussion. According to Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), frequent contacts enable the dyads to have better understanding of each other and may reduce the effect of the perceptions to their partners. High quality **Work Exchange** between diverse dyads helps deepen understandings between themselves at work and reduces the effects of the perceptions in their minds.

Out of the seven dimensions being exchanged between diverse dyads in Malaysia, most are found to be indications of high quality LMX relationship. The dimensions included **Mutual Respect** (Tse & Troth, 2013; Kim & Taylor, 2001), **Friendship** (Butler, 2009) and **Favour** which is similar to OCB (Bowler et al., 2010; Lo et al., 2006; Oren et al., 2012; Weismal-Manor et al., 2010). Next, **Cooperation** is among the characteristics of LMX Third Culture Way, the win-win strategy managing a diverse LMX relationship (Graen et al., 2004). While **Appreciation** has not been related with high LMX or Third Culture Way, it is definitely a good relationship indication and also a vital characteristic for successful multicultural managers (Hamzah, 1991).

With the positive dimensions making up the most of the commodities exchanged, it suggests that interethnic leader-member relationships in Malaysia are rather healthy



and well-functioning as opposed to Montesino (2012) that workplace is where the most intercultural conflicts are found in Malaysia. However, the last two dimensions - **Limited Personal Exchange** and **Perceptions** show the less positive aspect of the relationships. Although these two are directly related to the **Work Exchange** between interethnic dyads, this finding still highlighted the importance of looking into LMX in Malaysia from an interethnic perspective as suggested by scholars such as Abu Bakar et al. (2009) and Ansari, Lee and Aafaqi (2007) due to the effects of ethnicity on the development of the relationships.

## **5.2 Similarities and Dissimilarities in Needs and Wants in LMX**

The second research question looked into the expectations of different ethnic groups regarding their LMX relationship to find out their similarities and differences. Determining these characteristics is important for the dyads in getting along with their diverse partners as according to Othman, Ee, and Shi (2010), in order to build up good LMX, a leader cannot behave too differently from the expectations of his subordinates. Waismel-Manor et al. (2010) also urged leaders to learn about how the similarities or differences of demographic features facilitate or deteriorate the extra-role behaviour performance from their subordinates. Actually, it is also important for the subordinates to know the needs and wants of their diverse leader in a LMX relationship. The current research involved both leaders and members in data collection, intending to deepen the understandings of each other regarding their expectations in leader-member relationship. Through interviews, the three ethnic

groups are found to share three similarities and two dissimilarities in their needs regarding leader-member relationships at workplaces.

*Diagram 5.3: Similarities and Differences between Interethnic Leader-Member Dyads*

<b>Similarities</b>	<b>Differences</b>
Participative Decision Making	Religious Needs
Personal Concerns	Financial Assistance
Prefer to work with other ethnic groups	

First of all, all the three ethnic groups stated that they like participative decision making. Members like to be involved and consulted when in decision making process while leaders are always open to members for opinions. This conforms to the findings of Yukl et al. (2009) and O'Donnell, Yukl and Taber (2012) that higher consulting behaviours of a manager lead to higher LMX. However, both of these studies were carried out in Western countries. In Malaysia, Hamzah et al. (2002) found only Malay and Indian managers like participating style in decision making while Chinese managers like delegating style. In addition, this finding again supported Kennedy (2002) that power distance index (PDI) in Malaysia is not as high as suggested by Hofstede (1984) because an autocratic leader is always preferred in a high power distance society (Dickson et al., 2003; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006). A plausible reason for this change is that the studies were carried out for more than 10 years and Malaysian society had undergone changes within this period.

Next, the current research found all of the three ethnic groups are always looking for personal concerns from their partners. Apart from basic reward systems at work, subordinates like their superiors to be ‘friendly’, greeting them in person and showing concern towards their personal lives for psychological needs. While this may seem reasonable for a relationship based country as Malaysia, it is however in contrast to the finding in the first research question that the participants are sharing limited personal information with their partners. Although the participants stated that they would like a leader who always shows concern about their personal lives, they are limiting their personal information from their diverse leader in current leader-member relationships. This also raises interesting question as “What is the border for personal information sharing in interethnic LMX in Malaysia?” for future research.

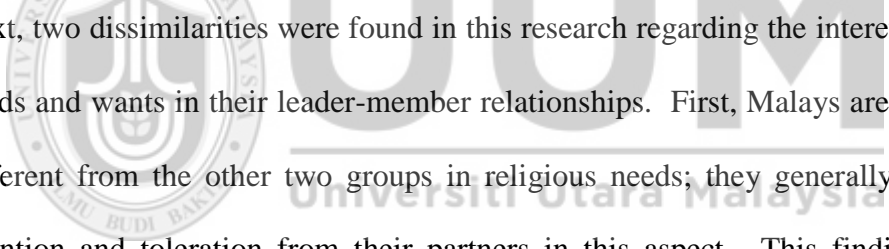
For the third similarity, it is surprising that the participants prefer to work with partners from different ethnic groups instead of with their own group. Apart from the benefits of working together with other ethnic groups, most participants stated that they prefer to work with different ethnic groups as they see other groups as better than their own. This is opposed to the usual conception and the similarity-attraction paradigm by Byrne (1971) that similarity always attracts. This finding is also contrasting to studies that show demographic similarity engenders attraction while diversity leads to negative result between a pair of dyads at work (Erdogan & Bauer, 2014; Abu Bakar et al., 2014; Pelled & Xin, 2000; Tsui & O’Reilly, 1989; Tsui et al., 2002). In addition, this opposes Mansor (2001) that Malaysian managers usually prefer members from the same ethnic group due to in-group favouritism

cultivated by strong ethnic identities, as well as Abu Bakar and McCann (2014) that ethnic similarity between leader-member dyads always attracts in Malaysian organizations.

Reviewing literature, the current findings can be explained with the statement of Boyb and Taylor (1998) that attitude and demographic similarity may be important at the initial stage of an LMX but as the interactions increase by time, congruence of values between a pair of dyad becomes more important in generating greater affect between each other. DiTomaso et al. (2007) also found that the effects of visible dissimilarities in a relationship become less important with time while it is the opposite for deep level differences which will become more important.

According to Liden et al. (1993) and Dulebohn et al. (2012), instead of demographic similarity, perceived similarities such as sharing similar interests, values and attitudes have a better effect between the dyads in LMX. In their meta-analysis of over 300 similarity studies, Montoya, Horton and Kirchner (2008) found similarity in attributes such as values and attitudes produces a moderate positive effect on attraction between two persons. In other words, when the dyads think that they are similar in aspects such as work values (Steiner & Dobbins, 1989) and agreement on job-related issues (Graen & Schiemann, 1978), they tend to have higher LMX quality as compared to dyads that are similar demographically. In the long run, deep-level diversity such as personalities and attitudes affect LMX relationship more than surface demographic characteristics including gender and ethnicity (Hiller & Day, 2003).

In fact, previous LMX studies have also mentioned the importance of perceived similarity in the relationships. According to Liden et al. (1993), perceived similarities are more important than ‘actual’ similarities with respect to attraction and high LMX quality. Similarly, Dulebohn et al. (2012) also found a follower’s perceived similarity with his leader is positively related to his perception of the LMX quality. The current research shows that working together with a diverse partner provides chances for both leaders and members to know better of each other. This may explain the findings that participants prefer to work with dissimilar partners whom they perceive to be better and suit their ‘style’ better as compared to their own groups.



Next, two dissimilarities were found in this research regarding the interethnic dyads’ needs and wants in their leader-member relationships. First, Malays are found to be different from the other two groups in religious needs; they generally need more attention and toleration from their partners in this aspect. This finding supports Fontaine and Richardson (2005) who stated that the three ethnic groups in Malaysia share similar values mostly at individual level with only a key difference in the rating of the value ‘devout’. Generally, Malays are more religious than the other two ethnic groups (Fontaine et al., 2002). Thus, it is rational for the current research to find Malay participants to have more needs in regard to their religion at workplaces.

Next, this research found that Chinese members are resisting financial aid from their leaders as compared to Malay and Indian subordinates. While Chinese leaders are willing to lend money to their members in need, Chinese members stated that they

will not look for their leaders' help even when they are financially tight. There is a Chinese saying - 讲钱伤感情 (*jiang qian shang gan qing*) which means 'it hurts feeling to talk about money' that explains the carefulness of the Chinese in managing money. M10 had also used this idiom when he talked about his opposition to borrowing money from a leader. In order to avoid any problems such as hurting each other's feelings while asking for repayment of the loan, Chinese members do not expect financial aid from their leaders even when they are in need. While this finding suggests that it is not necessary for leaders to offer financial help to their Chinese members, they should always make sure the members are sufficiently paid for what they have done as a study shows that Chinese Malaysians are very practical and highly motivated by high pay as compared to the other two ethnic groups (Rafikul & Ahmad Zaki, 2008).

Findings of the current research question show that the three ethnic groups are sharing more similarities than differences regarding their needs and wants in LMX. The similarities identified in the current research are rather different from previous studies and general thoughts, such as the surprising fact that they prefer to work with different ethnic groups. It is hoped that this can be useful for the organizations practically, helping both the dyads to understand each other better. While the differences between the groups may seem trifling and not directly related to work, it provides some practical guidelines for interethnic dyads in getting together with their partners. It is very important for them to know these because, as emphasized by Othman et al. (2010), in order to build up good leader-member relationship, a leader cannot behave too differently from the expectations of his subordinates.

### 5.3 'Give and Take'

Current harmonious diverse working environment in Malaysian organizations comes from flexibility and toleration between different ethnic groups (Smith, 2003). A lot of 'give and take' is required in Malaysian organizations (Schermerhorn, 1994) due to the differences between its diverse workforces. Knowing the similarities and differences between diverse leader-member dyads alone is not sufficient to help diverse partners in getting along with their partners at work, hence the next research question studied the characteristics that the dyads always retain and those can be transcended in their interethnic relationships. It is hoped that identifying these characteristics may provide some guidelines to interethnic dyads in managing different issues with their diverse partners at workplaces.

From the interviews, interethnic dyads stated that they are always willing to be flexible and give in to their partners as long as the issues are not related to work. According to the participants, when they are having a personal issue with their partners, instead of bringing up the issue to discuss with their partners, they will just avoid talking about it and yield to the situation. On the other hand, work-related issues are things that they do not give in easily. When they are having different standpoints at work, they will always be persistent on their own thoughts, and even intense discussion or debate is required. In short, 'give and take' is reflected in interethnic LMX in Malaysia where the former is found in non-work related issues while the latter is in work-related issues.

Although this ‘give and take’ transaction resembles LMX Third Culture Way, it does not reflect the core principle of LMX Third Culture Way. According to Graen et al. (2004), LMX Third Culture Way requires both diverse partners to understand the differences between each other in order to have a consensus about which characteristics are to be retained and which are to be abandoned by each other.

In the current research, instead of reaching a consensus, the ‘give in’ attitude shown by the dyads is merely to avoid potential conflicts. The dyads simply let their partners win the situation or just ‘let it be’ without showing any intentions to bring up the issues for discussion and accommodation as long as the issues are not related to work. While at work, when the dyads are always persistent, they do not mean to jeopardise the relationships or to make things difficult for their partners. In fact, they are just carrying out their job at their positions, doing their best for the good of the organization as well as to protect their own professionalism. This situation may be explained better in the following discussions, summarizing the three questions in the current research.

#### **5.4 Summary**

To sum up the findings of the three research questions, instead of ‘LMX Third Culture Way’ and ‘LMX Two Cultures Way’, interactions between interethnic dyads in the current research were found to match better with ‘melting pot’ and ‘salad bowl’, two interesting similes used by researchers in intercultural studies (eg: Akiner, 1997; Bhattacharya & Groznik, 2008; Melasutra & Nikmatul, 2010). In



Malaysia, Melasutra and Nikmatul (2010) used these two terms in their study looking into integrity between different ethnic groups in urban neighbourhoods of Klang Valley. According to the authors,

“We believed the “melting-pot” or amalgamation phenomenon could have happened slightly, but we can be satisfied with the fact that our society is living in a ‘salad bowl’ environment whereby we are willing to accept each other differences and respect each other practices and that will makes our neighbourhood diversify yet remain cohesive, p. 271”

Current research shows that the slightly-happened ‘melting pot’ situation can be found under **Work Exchange** between interethnic dyads at workplaces, where they are working as an integrated pair, without being affected by their demographic difference. According to Bhattacharya and Groznik (2008), a ‘melting pot’ is formed when people from diverse backgrounds put aside their own identities and fused into a homogenous amalgam. Under this ‘melting pot’ situation, dyads are not seeing each other based on their skin colour but as one integrated team pursuing their own and the organizational goal.

In the first research question, under **Work Exchange**, the dyads are always cooperating and helping each other at work. While they may have some perceptions towards the ethnic group of their partners, the perceptions are not affecting the working process with their partners. Most participants stated that they will not let their perceptions affect their judgement towards the partners at work. Next, the

‘melting pot’ can also be illustrated from the finding in the second research question that the participants prefer to work with a partner from a different ethnic group. Working along with their diverse partners increased their interactions. Thus, they do not rely on their inherited perception to judge the partners but based on their own experiences.

Next, while a ‘melting pot’ suggests amalgamation between the dyads, it does not forbid conflict and confrontation between the dyads at work. On the contrary, such integration encourages dyads to step up to their partners to defend their opinions and professionalism without any hesitation when they are having work-related issues as found in the third research question. As explained by Montesino (2012), driven by economic necessity and a common goal, different groups in Malaysia are always willing to put away all differences and combine forces at work. Thus, when they have different opinions or conflicts about work-related issues, they are not afraid to bring it up and argue with their diverse partners, without any fear that these actions will be misunderstood as inciting sensitive issues.

On the other hand, interactions under **Social** and **Diversity Exchanges** between interethnic dyads resemble a ‘salad bowl’ with a lot of ingredients but each retains its unique flavour although they are put together. According to Florea (2009), people in a ‘salad bowl’ get to preserve their own cultures and identities without coalescing but they only have a certain degree of respect and tolerance for each other. This explains the situation that in the current research, mutual respect is found to be the fundamental of interethnic LMX, spanning over the three exchange groups. High

flexibility and toleration are also found in the participants in dealing with their partners' religious and cultural needs. Despite their toleration and respect, current finding shows that interethnic dyads are not familiar with their partners' sociocultural needs and are not keen on learning them, fulfilling another characteristic of a 'salad bowl' according to Melasutra and Nikmatul (2010).

Under **Social Exchange**, the dyads stated that they are having close friendship and always exchanging favours but at the same time trying to limit personal information exchange between each other. Not to forget that, in the second research question, the dyads are actually always looking for psychological concern from their leaders. They are looking for leaders who show concern about their personal lives but in real life, most of them feel reluctant to tell their diverse leader too much about themselves even when they are approached. This conforms to Melasutra and Nikmatul (2010) that people in a 'salad bowl' show resistance to getting too close to each other.

Next, in the third research question, their 'simply give in' attitude in managing non-work related issues also looks rather perfunctory in an ongoing relationship. In order to preserve the superficial harmony, even when they are having personal or non-work related issues with their partners, the dyads always avoid bringing up the issues to their partners to prevent direct confrontation. This cautious attitude of dyads in handling personal issues is probably due to the lack of understanding between each other, lest the apparent harmony is affected. The attitude of the dyads in non-work related issues runs in the same groove with Minah's (2007) finding which found that

when Malay and Chinese Malaysians are dealing with ‘matters of heart’ or sensitive issues, indirect or evasive approaches are more frequently adopted. According to her, the two ethnic groups ‘prefer to tolerate rather than engage in *problematizing* things that might harm the “harmonious” relationship, p. 289’.

The achievement of ‘melting pot’ situation under Work Exchange can be explained with Allport’s intergroup contact theory (1954). According to the theory, there are four key conditions needed for positive effects from intergroup contact: equal group status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation and the support of authorities, law, or custom. Pettigrew (1998) later added that positive contact effects are actually reported in most studies, even when some of these key situations are absent. In the current research, cooperation is portrayed between interethnic dyads at work in order to achieve their common goals. Interethnic dyads are always communicating openly and clearly with each other under **Work Exchange**. Such frequent communications lead to better understandings between each other and thus the dyads stated that they are judging their partners at work based on actual experience instead of their inherited perceptions. This leads to the achievement of ‘melting pot’ situation in Work Exchange.

Frequent interactions under **Work Exchange** also lead to the situation that the dyads are not affected by their perceptions towards their partners. According to Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), intergroup prejudice (in current research, ‘perception’) can be reduced by intergroup contact. Although prejudice is usually deep-rooted (Ramlee et al., 2009), frequent contact with someone from the particular group helps reduce

negative perceptions of the person towards the group. This explains the reason the **Work Exchange** between the interethnic dyads is not affected by their perception, due to their frequent contact at work.

In contrast, in Social and Diversity Exchange, the dyads are found to always avoid too much information exchange. For instance, while the dyads are always hoping for a caring leader who cares about their personal lives, they are actually limiting their personal information from their diverse partners in their actual relationships. Lack of interaction leads to lack of knowledge of each other, causing the dyads to see each other in these two exchanges mostly still based on their perceptions and thus the 'salad bowl' situation. According to Scandura and Lankau (1996), an LMX relationship tends to stay stagnant at the stranger phase when dyads perceive the relationship to be coloured by stereotypical attitudes and see each other as in a category based on their identity. This is actually a causality loop which can only be avoided through increasing the knowledge between each other.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The current research looked into LMX from interethnic perspective that has been overlooked in the past and made some obvious implications from theoretical, methodological and practical perspectives. First of all, it provides a notable theoretical extension to the extant literature on both LMX and interethnic interactions in that it is among the first of its kind to directly compare supervisor-subordinate dyad demographic differences on their relationships.

Reviewing literature, most LMX studies in Malaysia did not take in ethnicity background into consideration [except Anusuiya et al. (2010) and Abu Bakar et al. (2014)]. This research studies how ethnicity background affects the LMX relationships between interethnic dyads in Malaysian workplaces by identifying the dimensions exchanged, their needs and expectations as well as the ‘give and take’ involved in their relationships. This definitely adds literature to LMX studies in Malaysia where interethnic perspective has been scarce.

Through the three research questions, the current findings highlighted the role of ethnicity background in LMX. First of all, the findings provide an intuitive and useful framework for understanding the currencies of exchange upon which the interethnic supervisor-subordinate dyadic relationships are developed. The finding shows that there are seven different dimensions being exchanged between interethnic dyads in Malaysian organizations as compared to the four existing dimensions by Liden and Maslyn (1998). These dimensions synthesised from the data reflect the actual commodities exchanged in the relationship as compared to some existing dimensions which are too broad, unclear or even not reflecting the exchange (van Breukelen et al., 2006; Yu & Liang, 2004).

In addition, these dimensions are grouped under three exchange groups instead of two as suggested by Liden and Maslyn (1998). Besides the existing **Work Exchange** and **Social Exchange**, the third exchange group is an emic group found in Malaysian organization setting - **Diversity Exchange**. The two dimensions -

**Appreciation** and **Perception** under this group illustrate the interactions between interethnic dyads in diversity-related issues in their relationships. These findings, coupled with Wang et al. (2007) who found different dimensions being exchanged between leader-member dyads in China prove that the currencies of exchange differ between places with different cultures.

Next, the current research also looked into similarities and differences of the three ethnic groups in regard to their needs in LMX relationships. Conforming to the statement that Malaysians actually share a large segment of cultural dimensions while maintaining fundamental differences (Kennedy, 2002; Lailawati, 2005; & Lim, 2001), the current finding finds interethnic dyads sharing more similarities than differences in their needs in LMX relationships. However, this does not refute the effect of ethnicity in the diverse society. In fact, the findings are worth noting because the similarities and differences found reveal a few surprises about the interethnic interactions. For instance, the preference of the three ethnic groups in participative decision making in this finding is in contrast to Hamzah et al. (2002) and Selvarajah and Meyer (2008) who said the three ethnic groups are different in this aspect. Also, the current research found that interethnic dyads like to work with a diverse leader/member instead of with their own groups, opposing attraction paradigm by Byrne (1971) that similarity always attracts. For differences, the current findings pointed out the different needs of Malays in religious practices and Chinese members in financial aid, providing a guideline for the dyads in dealing with these issues with their diverse partners. This finding emphasizes the importance of incorporating ethnicity in leadership studies in the country as ethnicity is always

shaping and affecting the interactions between the diverse workforces in different situations at varying patterns, which can only be known through more research.

More importantly, the current research gives special attention to the effects of ethnicity background, not only in work-related interactions of interethnic leader-member dyads but also in non-work related matters. Subsumed and integrated throughout the findings is a larger context of interethnic interactions between the three ethnic groups under different situations in Malaysia - the 'melting pot' in work-related issues and the 'salad bowl' outside of work. Generally, 'melting pot' or amalgamation is found in the interactions between interethnic dyads under work-related issues. However, ethnicity difference is still shaping the nature of the interethnic interactions in non-work related issues under the **Social and Diversity Exchange**, leading to the 'salad bowl' situation. Although this 'salad bowl' situation may not affect the work performance of the dyads directly, it should not be compromised in interethnic leader-member relationships. To improve the situation, more research needs to be conducted to answer questions such as how to encourage a deeper level of interactions between interethnic leader-member dyads.



## 5.6 Contributions

Methodologically, qualitative design in the current research has helped to increase understanding of interethnic leader-member relationships in Malaysia. As compared to existing scaled LMX measurements, a semi-structured interview method enabled the participants to share their views and feelings about their current interethnic LMX relationship as well as their expectations towards the relationships unreservedly. Through these one-to-one interviews, participants opened up their real thoughts such as their perceptions towards their partners and their opinions in ethnicity issues, which might be hard to be accessed with other methods such as focus group, due to the sensitivity of the issues. Data collected from the interviews also helped discover new ethnic dimensions exchanged between interethnic dyads which would be impossible to identify with existing LMX scales.

In addition, the current research involved both leader and member in the interview process as compared to most studies which involved only either one side in their data collection process, assuming strong convergence between leaders and members' perspectives (van Breukelen et al., 2006; Schyns & Day, 2010). It highlighted the importance of involving both dyadic partners in LMX studies to reveal the actual dynamic and the real exchange in the relationships. According to Greguras and Ford (2006), if LMX researches keep predominantly involving only subordinates, they will eventually restrict our ability in understanding LMX, as well as its impact on individual and organizational phenomena. The current research also breached geographical constraints, involving participants in several industries from four

different regions in Malaysia, providing greater confidence for the data. In addition, encouraging results in the current research that has highlighted the importance of ethnicity difference in LMX is hoped to highlight the importance of incorporating the demographic characteristics in their future studies, especially in diverse environment as Malaysia.

Practically, this research would serve practitioners in organizational and leadership development by contributing awareness about interethnic leader-member relationships in Malaysian context, including their needs and the ‘give and take’ being practiced in the diverse environment. This awareness is important for both expatriate as well as local leaders who are having members from different ethnic groups as leaders should not behave too differently from the member’s expectations in order to exercise their influence on their subordinates (Anusuiya et al., 2009). McLaren and Rashid (2002) also stated the lack of understanding or knowledge of other community’s culture may create misunderstanding, tension and confusion between people from different culture. This research is thus hoped to provide some guidelines for the dyads in getting along with their diverse partners.

## **5.7 Limitations and Future Directions**

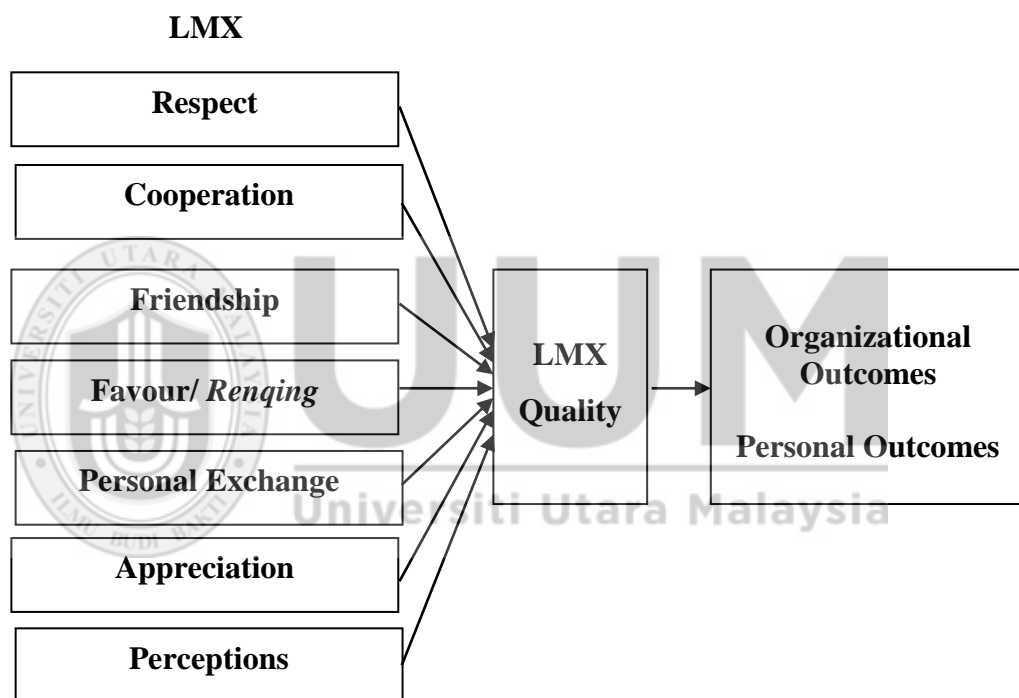
Although ambitious, the current research only represents the beginning of a serious research series on interethnic LMX in Malaysian organizational setting. Thus, some suggestions for future studies were proposed below to provide some directions for future researches to provide a clearer picture of diverse leader-member exchange in Malaysia context.

First, the LMX model developed in the current research is still subject to statistical testing. Despite inclusive, the 7-dimension model found in the current research still needs to undergo refinement for future implications. In future research, researchers may develop an indigenous LMX scale for the diverse working environment in Malaysia through Confirmatory Factor Analysis to analysis the construct or items under each dimension. In China, Wang et al. (2007) had built a new indigenous LMX scale for China based on data as collected, providing a parallel form of LMX scale in the country. In the current research, it is the currencies that are of interest, it intends to show the effect of diverse ethnicity background on the relationships rather than to construct a new LMX scale. Future work, however, may extend the effort to build a local LMX scale for the diverse interethnic working environment in Malaysian organizations.

In addition, the 7-dimension model in the current research may serve as the foundation to look more in-depth into interethnic leader-member exchange in Malaysian organizations as proposed below. In future researches, researchers may

look into the relationships between each dimension and LMX quality, which has been identified to affect a lot of organizational as well as personal outcomes significantly in earlier studies (eg: Erdogan & Bauer, 2014, Kamariah et al., 2011, Lo et al., 2010, Luo et al., 2014 Pellegrini & Scandura, 2006).

*Diagram 5.4 Proposed Model for Interethnic LMX Dimensions*



Future studies are also encouraged to involve both leaders and members in their researches in order to identify the different dimensions emphasized by leaders and members. In the existing 4-dimension model, Zhou and Schriesheim (2010) proposed that leaders are always looking for more work-related currencies while subordinates are more into socially related currencies. With the current 7-dimensional model, future research may try to identify the different dimensions that

leaders and members are looking for as that will contribute to better understanding between the dyads and thus increasing the LMX quality.

In addition, the researcher is also aware of the fact that although the current research had provided an insight about interethnic LMX in Malaysian organizations, it might have overlooked other important demographic and external characteristics in LMX development. Apart from ethnicity, literatures showed that demographic characteristics such as gender and age may be affecting LMX relationships (Abu Bakar et al., 2014; Bhal et al., 2007; Hogg, 2004; Jones, 2009; Tsui & O' Reilly III, 1989; Tsui et al., 2002). During interviews, some participants also mentioned about the role of gender in affecting their relationship with their partners at work. On top of that, other factors such as working tenure and nature of job may also be important in LMX development, which have been overlooked in the current research. According to Dasborough and Ashkanay (2002), the length of the relationships between leader-member dyads have been found related to the quality of the relationships. Anusuiya et al. (2009) also found that duration have a moderating effect on the relationship between leadership expectation gap and LMX quality. Given the significant effects of ethnicity in LMX in the current research, future researches may incorporate these overlooked characteristics for more fruitful results in LMX researches.

Methodologically, while semi-structured interviews have yielded some new insights of interethnic LMX in the current research, the method only allows the participants to share their thoughts during the one-time interview and the participants might miss

out some important information at that time. Researchers also called for more long-term longitudinal research in LMX studies as it does not only help assess the relationship development from different aspects but also looks into the maintenance and decline of a relationship (Dulebohn et al, 2012; Henderson et al., 2008). Future studies that may use a longitudinal design which will probably enable a more definite assessment on the effect of ethnicity difference on LMX as well as LMX which is developmental in nature.

In short, it is hoped that the current research had provided some useful suggestions that are to be seriously considered in future LMX studies in Malaysia. In addition to enriching literature, the need to conduct continual researches on interethnic LMX in Malaysian organizational setting is essential in order to portray a clear picture of the diverse working environment as well as to provide useful guidelines for the diverse workforce to get along with each other for better understanding.

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## **APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Thank you for taking your time to help me with my study. Let me introduce myself and explain about my study. My name is Noew Hooi San, a PhD student from UUM. The purpose of this interview is to help me to collect data for my thesis to understand interethnic relationship between leaders and members from different ethnic background in Malaysian organizations. Our discussion is expected to be around 60 minutes, and we will talk about your relationship with your leader/member, [name] in this one hour from a few different perspectives.

If it is okay with you, I would like to audio tape our discussion to help ensure accuracy. The audiotape will only be used to help me in my transcription process and will be securely stored. I will be the only individual to listen to the recording and it will be only used for academic purpose. Please also be ensured that I will not share the content with your leader/member who has been/ will be interviewed later. So, may I have your approval to audio-tape this conversation?

I want to remind you that participation in this study is voluntary. Our discussion today is confidential in nature and your name will not be used in my report or any other papers that come from this study. If I need to quote what you have said in this conversation, it will be anonymous to ensure your confidentiality.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **JOB SCOPE**

- Would you please briefly describe the job you do and the general work routines?  
(This will help the interviewee warm up)
  - What is the qualification needed to hold this position?
  - Is this the first position you hold in this organization?

[For Leader]

- Tell me your responsibility as a superior/ supervisor.
- There are how many employees under your supervision? [Name] is one of them?

[For Subordinate]

- So, you are reporting to your immediate supervisor, [Name].  
(This helps to lead to their relationships)

## RELATIONSHIP

[EMPHASIZE: Information will be strictly confidential]

- How long have you known him/her?
  
- How much contact do you have with [name] daily?
  - frequency, length of time...
- What are the means of communications are you using?
  - Instant Messenger, face to face, email, phone...
  
- Would you please describe your relationship with [name]?
  - On a scale of 1 to 10, please rate the relationship for both at work and out of work.
  - Do you think this rating is ideal? Are you comfortable with the current relationship?
  - Do you feel like improving or decreasing the rating? Why?
  
- Please describe the ways of both of you getting along with each other.
  - Is there any difference when you are at work and after work?
  - Can you give me some examples?
  
- If you had to describe [name] someone new or who don't know him well like me, how will you describe?
  
- We all have positive and negative experiences with people we work with. Can you please think of any important experience or incident you had with [name] that you feel shaped your relationship and your view of him/her? Let's start with positive experiences first.
  - Probe:
    - What happened? Please describe the circumstance for me? Who was involved?
    - How did you both act? What was said?
    - What resulted from this incident?
  
  - What about the not so good/ negative experiences?
    - Probe:
      - What happened? Please describe the circumstance for me? Who was involved?
      - How did you both act? What was said?
      - What resulted from this incident?
  
    - Probe for other incidents until exhausted.
  
- How would the situation be when you have to collaborate with [name] at work?  
(Can use similar follow-up probes to the ones in previous questions)
  
- How would the situation be when you have a conflict/disagreement/dispute with [name].  
(Can use similar follow-up probes to the ones in previous questions)



- Do you think you trust [name]?
  - What makes you feel that?

### NEEDS AND WANTS

- Personally, what are the qualities that an ideal subordinate/supervisor should have?
- How about the 'not so ideal' superior/subordinate?
  - Do you think you see these qualities that you have listed in your leader/subordinate?
  - Do you mind explaining with some examples?

(Can use similar follow-up probes to the ones in previous questions)

- Describe the characteristics/ requirement/foundation that you look for in a superior-subordinate relationship.
  - Why do you think these qualities are important?
  - Do you think you impose/have these in your relationship with [name]?

(Can use similar follow-up probes to the ones in previous questions)

- Do you think you know [name] personally?
  - Know his/her friends and family?
  - What makes your relationship with [name] successful?
  - Do you think it's important for you to build up good personal relationship with your supervisor/subordinate?
  - Why?
- Think of a time when you face a problem at work. Did you ask for [name]'s help?
  - Why? What did he/she say?
  - Do you think he is helpful enough? As you expected?
  - If not, what do you think he should have done?

### GIVE AND TAKE

- In your professional relationship, what are the things that you can concede/settle/tolerate with?
  - Can you explain to me with some examples?

○ Probe: Can use similar follow-up probes to the ones in previous questions

- What are the things that you will always be firm on?
  - Can you explain to me with some examples?

○ Probe: Can use similar follow-up probes to the ones in previous questions

- In Malaysia as a multicultural society, we used to deal with people from different cultural/ethnic background at work.
  - Will these differences affect your view/perception on someone?
  - Do you think these differences bring any effect to your relationship with [name]?

- Do you see any difference between you as a Malay/Chinese/Indian and [name] from a different ethnic group?
- Is there anything special working with a people from different ethnic/ cultural background?

Is there anything else that we have not talked about today that you would like to add?

Conclusion:

Once again, thank you for your time and participation today. Your comments will be very helpful to my study. If you have any questions or anything to add, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you

