TYPES OF EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING (PDM) AMONGST THE MIDDLE MANAGEMENT IN THE MALAYSIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, there has been tremendous growth of interest in employee participation in decision-making or PDM from a various discipline of studies such as industrial relations, management, human resource management (HRM), organisational behaviour, and political economy. Therefore, this paper aimed to identify the types of employee's direct participation particularly on delegative, consultative and non-participation in decision-making at the middle management in the six selected ministries in Putrajaya, Malaysia. To achieve the objective, a quantitative research design was used and 758 questionnaires were distributed and 454 (59.9%) were returned. The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis by mean, standard deviation, percentage, and frequency. The results of the study showed that majority of the middle management employees were involved in consultative decision-making rather than delegative decision-making, and only a small percentage of employees experienced with non-participation in the workplace. It can be concluded that employees were encouraged to participate in the decision-making process, however, most of the important decisions are still made by the top management. Also, there is no serious issue of very low level or high level of non-participation among the middle management employees in the Malaysian public sector.

Contribution/ Originality: This study enhances the existing body of knowledge by providing new empirical evidence to fill the gaps in the literature that might exist in previous studies of employee PDM in organisations and contributes to the limited number of studies on employee PDM, especially at the middle management level in the Malaysian public sector.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are many terms used in the previous literature that refer to employee participation such as 'employee voice', 'job involvement', 'job participation' and 'job engagement' (Bryson, 2004). However, participation in decision-making or PDM is the term that has been consistently used by previous researchers (e.g. (Scott-Ladd *et al.*, 2006;

Singh, 2009; Joyce and Dail, 2010; Ting, 2012; Appelbaum *et al.*, 2013)). Direct and indirect participation are two common forms of employee PDM in an organisation (Heller *et al.*, 1998; Markey *et al.*, 2002; Harley *et al.*, 2005). Firstly, direct participation, which is the primary focus of this study, refers to an individual's participation or a group of employees' involvement in the decision-making process at the workplace (Bratton and Gold, 2003). Cabrera *et al.*, (2002) indicated that "Direct participation involves the employee themselves…" (2002: 44). According to Strauss (2006) there are three types of direct participation, which are employee voice, actual participation of the employee in the decision process and the employer providing an employee with relevant information. Direct participation is one of the management techniques that has been used in Japan, Australia, UK, Europe, USA and elsewhere including Malaysia to improve organisation productivity (Davis and Lansbury, 1996; Cully *et al.*, 1998; Appelbaum *et al.*, 2000; Benson and Lawler, 2003; Kersley *et al.*, 2006).

On the other hand, according to Cabrera *et al.*, (2002) "… indirect participation takes place through an intermediary of employee representative bodies…" (2002: 44). Some examples are the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC), Union, Work Councils, Partnership, In-house Union and Labour Management Committees (LMC). In addition, Cotton et al. defined indirect participation as "… the process in which employees do not participate directly, but do so through representatives elected to a governing council or, perhaps, through representatives on the board of directors" (1988: 15). Frequently, the term "representatives" refers to indirect participation that takes place through employee representative bodies such as work councils or trade unions or other forms of elected employee representation (Salamon, 2000; Cabrera *et al.*, 2002).

Other than these two main types of participation (direct and indirect), there are various types of PDM that have been discussed by many researchers. For example, Dachler and Wilpert (1978) had identified three dimensions of PDM includes the influence of formality versus informality, directness versus indirectness and degree of access or control. A study by Rubinstein *et al.* (1993) which differentiated between offline and online participation examined whether employees make suggestions to the management through problem-solving groups or make decisions related to job tasks or quality control themselves as part of their daily work responsibilities. Whereas, Keith (2000) indicated that direct participation could be divided into two forms. The first one is consultative participation and the second one is delegative participation. Consultative participation is when management encourages employees to share their opinion before they make the final decision. Examples of consultative participation are regular meetings with supervisors, attitude surveys, and employee suggestion plans. Delegative participation gives empowerment to the employee and autonomy to perform their job that fits them such as scheduling of work, improving work processes and absence control. The degree of delegation depends on the extent of employees asking permission or approval from their leader before making a decision. Yukl (2010) stated that there is little or no delegation if employees must ask the leader what to do if problem arise and there is a moderate delegation when employees are allowed to figure out the solution but need to get approval before implementing decisions. Finally, there is actual or real delegation when the employees are allowed to make important decisions and implement it without prior approval (Yukl, 2010).

Furthermore, prior researchers (Dachler and Wilpert, 1978; Locke and Schweiger, 1979) indicated that there are four types of participation:

1) Autocratic decision-making: Managers make the decision alone without asking or discussing with their employees and not involving them in the decision-making process. No involvement and no voice from employees. Autocratic management is more significant to non-participation in the decision-making process which related to the autocratic decision, the situation where employees do not have the right to participate, share ideas or give suggestions for problems at the workplace (Dachler and Wilpert, 1978; Locke and Schweiger, 1979). Non-participation also means that there is only a few leader or manager at the top management that is responsible for making any decision in the organisation (Madinah *et al.*, 2009).

2) Information sharing: Managers get all the important and necessary information from the employees and make the decision alone.

3) Consultative decision-making: Managers share problems with the employees and get their ideas, opinions, and suggestions, but maintain the right to make the final decision.

4) Democratic/delegative decision-making: Managers share problems with the employees, analyse the problem together and make the final decision by majority or consensus.

Some researchers proposed slightly similar types of participation. For instance, Levine and Tyson (1990) had identified two types of PDM which are consultative and substantive participation; 1) Consultative participation means that employees participate in providing information, advice, ideas, and opinions, but only the top management has the right to make the final decisions in the organisation. 2) Whereas, substantive participation refers to employees having autonomy, control or empowerment to make decisions. The former is similar to consultative participation by Keith (2000) and partial participation proposed by Pateman (1970). Examples of consultative participation are regular meetings, attitude surveys and employee suggestion plans. While the latter is similar to full participation (Pateman, 1970) delegative participation (Keith, 2000) and democratic participation (Luthans, 2005). Examples of substantive participation are work schedules, improvement of work processes and absence control. Pateman (1970) also proposed another type of participation which is pseudo participation. In this participation, the management will persuade employees to accept the decision that has already been made. Employees are not involved in the decision-making process but they are manipulated by the administration to accept the final decisions. In this study, participation in decision-making refers to the direct involvement of employees (who are affected directly by the decision) in consultative and/or delegative participation at the workplace. Consultative participation means that employees have the right to participate and get involved in the decision-making through sharing sessions, meeting, discussions and consultation with their leader, but the leader has the right to make the final decisions. While delegative participation means employees have power and allowed to make decisions which related to their job with or without consulting their leader. Meanwhile, non-participation/autocratic decision-making refers to no participation or very low participation of employees in the decision-making process of an organisation. Non-participation/autocratic decision-making also related to a leader who does not listen to employee's ideas, does not give the opportunity to participate, ignore employee's suggestions and make decisions without consulting with others.

1.1. Decision-Making in the Public Sector Entities

The main functions of decision-making in the public sector are to deliver excellent services towards people and fulfill the needs of people (Bercu, 2013). Most of the important decision is related to the mission and vision of the public sector to improve the delivery system and to increase the performance of the public sector. An excellent achievement and performance of the public sector reflect the proper image of the country and the people. Based on Dillon et al. (2010) the process of decision-making in the public sector starts with vague objectives and goals then followed by searching the alternatives and solutions to accomplish it. Typically, decision-making in the public sector is related to various conflict, controversial and high influence of external factors (Ring and Perry, 1985; Kotler and Lee, 2007). Public sector always facing with a very complicated and risky decision, political forces, stakeholders involvement in decision-making which leads to a slow process of decision-making due to the delays, interruption from outsiders, changes in the decisions and a greater number of formal meeting with various parties to make the decision (Nutt, 2005; Kotler and Lee, 2007). The statistics from the Public Complaints Bureau Malaysia (2015) supported that the major complaints from the people towards ministries in Malaysia are the delay or no action from the public employees and poor quality of service (refer to Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1).

Furthermore, due to the large size and a large number of employees in the public sector, the decision-making process must through the hierarchy system, authority control, and top-bottom decision approach. The decision process in the Malaysian public sectors usually consist of three level of management based on the pyramid of control (see Figure 1).
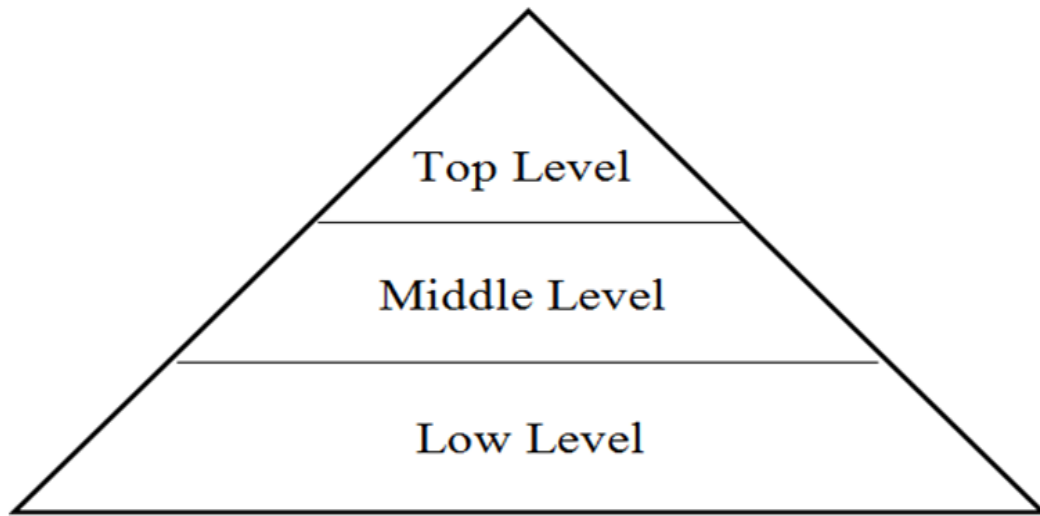

Figure-1. Level of hierarchy in management

Source: Chuck (2012)

The top level of management is more responsible for strategic decisions which related to overall decisions that connected to organisation goals, structure, main activities or core business of the organisation, investment, mergers and so forth (Torres, 1991; Knudsen, 1995; Vrba and Brevis, 2002). Furthermore, top management usually deals with non-programmed decisions which are significant, non-recurring, difficult, new, unfamiliar and complicated to handle (DuBrin, 2012). This is because there is no particular procedure to handle the new or unusual issues and no accurate method to fix the problem and it requires logic and creative thinking to solve it. Simon (1987) indicated that non-programed decisions are unique and unstructured. For instances, the decision for merging with other company, emergency or critical financial problem, top manager died and how to introduce new product/services. Examples of high-level positions like Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Chief Information Officer (CIO). Meanwhile, top positions at Ministries in Malaysia usually consists of Minister, Deputy of Minister(s), Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General and Director, and the Grade positions are: Officers of Grade *Turus* (Higher) 1 and 2, Officers of Grade *Turus* 3, Officers of Grade *JUSA* (Super) A, Officers of Grade *JUSA* B and Officers of Grade *JUSA* C.

This study mainly focus on employees PDM amongst the middle management. Middle managers can be defined as managers that implement senior management policies and are responsible for lower-level managers (Wentling, 1996). Furthermore, middle management also refers to "the coordinator between daily activities of the units and the strategic activities of the hierarchy" (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1997) who are responsible for the implementation and coordination at the department level. The middle management plays a significant role in organisational effectiveness (Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1997; Mair, 2005). Middle management or intermediate level are responsible for business units and major departments in setting, planning and implementing objectives align with top management goals (Huy, 2001; Daft, 2010). They are involved in tactical decisions which related to how to run and achieve the aims of the organisation and concerning on technology and work, job design, personnel management, operation hours and more (Knudsen, 1995; Vrba and Brevis, 2002). Middle management also handles both non-programed and programmed decisions (DuBrin, 2012). According to Chuck (2012) in his famous book 'Principles of Management (7ᵗʰ)', he indicated that there are four primary responsibilities of middle management:

1. Plan and gather resources to meet organisational objectives.

2. Coordinate and integrate groups, units, departments, divisions in the organisation.

3. Monitor and manage the performance of employees and departments under them.

4. Implementing change or strategies generated by top management.

Some of the examples of middle-level positions are plant manager, regional manager, department heads and division heads. Whereas, middle positions at Ministries in Malaysia hold positions like Under Secretary/Assistant Director, Principal Assistant Secretary/Director, Assistant Secretary/Director, Head of Department/Unit and Officers (from Grade 41 to Grade 54).

Finally, low level or shop floor level are more concern on the decision related to task/job and usually deals with programmed decisions such as office supply reorder, hiring procedures, consumer loan decisions and more (Vrba and Brevis, 2002). The programmed decision is non-significant, repetitive, routine and mostly related to daily activities. Simon (1987) stated that when the issues arise, employees already know how to handle and settle the problem because they already have a particular procedure and specific policies to take appropriate actions. Low-level employees are also responsible for implementing the plans from middle management. In Malaysian public sector, low-level employees usually called as support staff such as Assistant Officer, Administrative Clerk, General Office Assistant, Administrative Assistant and Driver (from Grade 1 to Grade 40).

In the public sector context, the collaboration and involvement of other agencies, stakeholders and politicians are very necessary to assist and help them to serve the best for people (Bercu, 2013). However, sometimes, too many interruptions in the decision-making process have increased the complexity and difficulty of decision-making in the public sector and limit the opportunity for employees to involve in the decision-making process. Furthermore, decision process in the public sector normally has limited information, solutions and alternatives compared than private sector due to many interferences and limited fund or investment (Nutt, 2005; Kotler and Lee, 2007). The decision process always shaped by the political influence which gives direct effects on the decision in the public sector (Nutt, 2005). Besides, the decision-making process in the public sector commonly bound by so many rules, procedures, regulations, and the process are very formal, structured, centralised with highly bureaucracy system (Dillon *et al.*, 2010). Employees in the public sector must follow the strict rules and procedures that have been provided to them. Moreover, a majority of the decision in the public sector are made by the group rather than individual decision due to the culture of Malaysian people that merely on group and collectivism (Hofstede, 2005; Tzu and Ying, 2013). Hence, the public sector is emphasised in a group discussion in a formal or informal meeting or think-tank group to make the decision and find the solution of the problems, and everyone in the group is responsible for the consequences of the decisions.

Moreover, most of the traditional public sector including in Malaysia had practised autocratic and masculine approach in the decision-making process where the involvement or participation from the employee are not allowed at all level of the decision process (Hofstede, 1980;2005; Hadi, 2004; Wan Yusof, 2010). However, after the implementation of NPM in most of the public sector around the world, the decision process in the public sector has started to change towards more openness, consultative and more encourage on employee PDM. The massive transformation of the public sector approach onto private sector approach under the NPM is believed to enhance the decision-making process in the public sector, increase the level of employee PDM and improve the public sector performance (Nor-Aziah and Scapens, 2007).

2. METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study is a descriptive study which employs the quantitative method. The population for this study consists of 3326 employees at the middle management level based on three job positions (Under Secretary/Deputy Under Secretary; Senior Principal Assistant/Principal Assistant Secretary; and Senior Assistant Secretary/Assistant Secretary – Grade 41 to Grade 54) from the six ministries in Putrajaya. This study

used a probability sampling to select the ministries and a non-probability sampling to select the respondents of the study. The first-stage sampling included a simple random sample to select six ministries for the three different organisational sizes. All ministries were sorted out accordingly according to the data given by HRMIS (2014) based on its organisational size – small, medium, or large. Before the process of sample selection began, the researcher had to identify and exclude all the ministries located outside of Putrajaya. The fish bowl draws (one of the simple random sampling technique) (Ranjit, 2014) was used to select two ministries from each category. The required sample size was determined using the table for determining sample size from Krejcie and Morgan (1970). In order to select the number of samples from each cluster, calculations were done based on the proportions. Overall, the total sample size for this study was s=758. Data for this study were collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire (one of the quantitative data collection techniques) through purposive sampling. Meanwhile, secondary data was collected from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2011;2012;2013) in the and HRMIS from the Public Service Department of Malaysia. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22.0 through descriptive statistics to organise, summarise, and describe the data (McBurney, 2001) by mean, standard deviation, percentage, and frequency.

2.1. Findings on the Types of Employee PDM among the Middle Management in the Malaysian Public Sector

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation for each item of participation in decision-making (PDM). The results found that the item of consultative PDM "My boss has frequent consultation processes with his/her employees" had the highest mean value (mean = 3.77, std. = .880), while item of delegative PDM "My boss gives me the authority to make my own decisions, without any input from him/her" had the lowest mean value (mean = 2.53, std. = 1.031). Out of 14 items, the highest mean value (m = 3.77/5.00) falls under the high category, while the lowest mean value (m = 2.53/5.00) falls under the moderate category. The results indicated that a majority of respondents always consult and discuss with their leaders at the workplace. Whereas, the lowest mean score stated that most of the employees only have an average power and authority to make decisions without prior consultation with their leaders. It revealed that most of the employees frequently involved in a consultative participation with their leaders than delegative participation. Employees are allowed to discuss, give ideas and opinion to the leader, however, they are unable to make decisions on their own.

Table-1. Descriptive statistics of each item of participation in decision-making (PDM)

No.	Items	N	Mean	SD
	My boss has frequent consultation processes with its employee (consultative)	429	3.77	.880
	My boss actively seeks input from employees on most decisions (consultative)	429	3.70	.937
	My boss asks for my opinion about how the work gets done (consultative)	429	3.65	.882
	My boss usually asks for my opinions and thoughts in decisions affecting my work (consultative)	429	3.62	.934
	Before making decisions, my boss considers what his/her employees have to say (consultative)	429	3.59	.880
	Before taking action my boss consults with employees (consultative)	429	3.53	.895
	My boss encourages employee to discuss regulations and new ways of working (consultative)	429	3.49	.975
	My boss encourages employee to speak up when they disagree with a decision (consultative)	429	3.49	.990
	I think that I have sufficient authority also to discharge my job related responsibilities (delegative)	429	3.45	.854
	My boss allow me to decide about my work related problem (delegative)	429	3.44	.888
	My boss permits me to get needed information from him/her and then make my own decisions (delegative)	429	3.28	.969
	My boss asks for my opinion about organisational policies and rules (consultative)	429	3.18	.962
	My boss lets me make decisions by myself, without consulting with him/her (delegative)	429	2.69	1.021
	My boss gives me the authority to make my own decisions, without any input from him/her (delegative)	429	2.53	1.031

Low (mean = 1.00-2.32); Moderate (mean = 2.33-3.65); High (mean = 3.66-5.00)

A descriptive analysis using mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution was performed to determine the level of employee PDM (consultative and delegative participation) experienced by the respondents (refer to Table 2). From the table, it can be seen that the overall mean of consultative participation is 3.558 with a standard

deviation of 0.690. Over half of the respondents (50.3%) experienced a high level of consultative participation, while 45.7 percent experienced a moderate level and only a small percentage (4.0%) had a low level of consultative participation. Meanwhile, for delegative participation, the overall mean of delegative participation is slightly lower (mean = 3.075) than consultative participation with a standard deviation of 0.717. More than half of the respondents (68.8%) experienced a moderate level of delegative participation, while 17.0 percent experienced a high level and quite a number of the respondent (14.2%) had a low level of delegative participation. Therefore, the results also supported that majority of the middle employees more involved in consultative participation rather than delegative participation in the organisation. The percentage of employees with a low level of delegative participation also higher than consultative participation.

Table-2. Descriptive statistics of employee PDM (consultative and delegative participation) (n =429)

Variable	f	%	Mean	SD
Consultative participation			3.558	0.690
Low (1.00 − 2.32)	17	4.0		
Moderate (2.33 − 3.65)	196	45.7		
High (3.66 − 5.00)	216	50.3		
Delegative participation			3.075	0.717
Low (1.00 − 2.32)	61	14.2		
Moderate (2.33 − 3.65)	295	68.8		
High (3.66 − 5.00)	73	17.0		

Meanwhile, Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation for each item of non-participation in decision-making. The results found that the item "My boss makes decisions that are based only on his/her own ideas" had the highest mean value (mean = 2.27, std. = 1.042), while item "My boss does not give all employees a chance to voice their opinions" had the lowest mean value (mean = 1.84, std. = .907). Out of six items, both of the highest mean value (m = 2.27/5.00) and the lowest mean value (m = 1.84/5.00) falls under the low category. This indicates that majority of the employees have participated in the decision-making process and only several employees are not allowed to PDM due to an autocratic decision-making style practised by their leaders in the ministry. It also revealed that there is no serious issue of non-participation or large number of employees with a very low PDM at the middle management in the six ministries in Malaysia. Furthermore, most of the employees have an equal chance to share their opinions, ideas and suggestions at the workplace and employees consistently have the opportunity to discuss and consult with their leaders regarding job matters.

Table-3. Descriptive statistics of each item of non-participation in decision-making

No.	Items	N	Mean	SD
1.	My boss makes decisions that are based only on his/her own ideas	429	2.27	1.042
2.	My boss does not uses employee 's suggestions to make decisions that affect them	429	2.07	.945
3.	My boss does not considers employee's ideas when he/she disagrees with them	429	2.01	1.057
4.	My boss does not encourages employee to express ideas/suggestions	429	1.91	.928
5.	My boss does not listens to employee 's ideas and suggestions	429	1.89	.895
6.	My boss does not gives all employees a chance to voice their opinions	429	1.84	.907

Low (mean = 1.00-2.32); Moderate (mean = 2.33-3.65); High (mean = 3.66-5.00)

Meanwhile, the overall mean of non-participation in decision-making is 1.998 with a standard deviation of 0.809 (refer to Table 4). The majority of respondents (71.8%) scored a low level of non-participation in decision-making, whereas 97 respondents (22.6%) scored a moderate level of non-participation and only 5.6 percent experienced a high level of non-participation in decision-making.

Table-0. Descriptive statistics of non-participation in decision-making (n =429)

Variable	f	%	Mean	SD
Non-participation in decision-making			1.998	0.809
Low (1.00 − 2.32)	308	71.8		
Moderate (2.33 − 3.65)	97	22.6		
High (3.66 − 5.00)	24	5.6		

Non-participation in decision-making is very synonym with traditional management system where employees PDM is not allowed. Therefore, a low level of non-participation in decision-making amongst the middle management employees in the six ministries indicated that most of the employees have participated in the decision-making process at their ministries. However, a few percentage of employees with a high level of non-participation revealed that several employees had only a little PDM/no participation at all in their ministry. High level of non-participation commonly related to high autocratic leadership styles and autocratic decision-making practices by a leader which can be a significant barrier towards employee PDM in the organisation.

3. CONCLUSION

The present study revealed that the type of participation that significantly related to the middle management employees in the Malaysian public sector is consultative participation than delegative participation. Although employees have frequently involved in the current operations, management discussion, meetings and group discussion, however, of the important decisions are still made by the top management, and the majority of the employees at the middle management only act as a 'feeder of information' by contributing ideas, opinion and suggestions to help and assist the leaders in making decisions. This further revealed that few number of employees had experienced less empowered in PDM at the workplace. This situation is probably related to the high hierarchical and bureaucracy systems in the ministry. The job scope and limited roles of middle management also related to the low level of delegative participation due to the primary functions of the middle management which is more significant to receiving orders from the top management and implementing organisational plan based on ministry's policies and goals; identifying problems and making short-term decisions relating day to day organisational operation and function within their job scope; and makes research, give input, information and ideas to the top management rather than having a full power to make decision relating the tasks and job. Perhaps part of PDM programmes possibly not fully implement and monitor in the organization.

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