COMPARING STRATEGIC THINKING AMONG THE BAJAUS, DUSUN, AND BUGIS ENTREPRENEURS IN SABAH

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ABSTRACT

The success of entrepreneurs depends strongly on the ability of entrepreneurs to strategies their business against other competitors. This research compares the strategic thinking capabilities between the Bajaus, Bugis and Dusuns in Sabah, Malaysia. Pisapia’s measure for strategic thinking was used in this study to measure the strategic thinking levels among the Bajaus, Dusun, and Bugis entrepreneurs in Malaysia. A total of 92 Bajau, 41 Dusun and 64 Bugis entrepreneurs’ usable data managed to be collected by this study through convenience sampling. An interesting finding for this study is that the systematic thinking means of all the three groups of entrepreneurs are all on the low side with means of slightly above 2. One significant difference was found on reflective thinking between the Bajaus and the Dusuns with the Bajaus having the significantly lower scores. The results found in this study regarding strategic thinking can help the government plan training programs in entrepreneurship in Malaysia which can help bumiputra entrepreneurs especially those in Sabah close the gap with their Chinese counterparts and in the end increase the competitive advantage of all entrepreneurs in Malaysia.
INTRODUCTION

Strategic thinking ability is an important ingredient that entrepreneurs must have that has been proven by previous researchers to determine business success. The success of these entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship can be linked towards the economic development of any nation (Schumpeter, 1934). As such it is critical for researchers to help improve the performance of businesses to ensure national economic development. This study will focus on determining the level of strategic thinking of entrepreneurs in Sabah among the three ethnic groups of Bajaus, Dusun, and Bugis. The determination of whether differences in strategic thinking exist between these three groups will also be looked at. With the understanding of the strategic thinking capabilities of these three ethnic groups, a more systematic training and development program for the improvement and development of these entrepreneurs can be planned and put into action towards ensuring the and enhancing the competitive capabilities of Malaysian entrepreneurs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fink, Marr, Siebe and Kuhle (2005) said that it is important to implement strategic thinking in order to survive and grow in an environment that is characterised with continuous change. A study by Liedtka (1998), identified five elements of strategic thinking; systems perspective, intelligent opportunism, hypothesis driven, intent focus and thinking in time. The combined effects of these are the creation of a capacity for strategic thinking that meets what Day (1994) refers to as the three fundamental tests for a strategically valuable capability:

1. They create superior value for customers,
2. They are hard for competitors to imitate and
3. They make the organization more adaptable to change.

Another study conducted by Pisapia, Reyes and Coukos (2005), identified the needs for reframing, reflection and systems thinking as important in the capability to have strategic thinking capability. They defined the three elements as:

- Reframing is a conscious effort by leaders to switch attention across multiple perspectives in order to generate new insights and options for actions (Pisapia, Pang, Hee, Lin, and Morris, 2008). The goal is to produce usable knowledge by rotating through appropriate conceptual models for the activities and events observed (Pisapia et al. 2008).

- Reflection according to Pisapia et al. (2008) is a cognitive skill that involves careful consideration of any belief or practice that promotes understanding of situations and then applies the newly gained knowledge to these situations. They said that by reflecting on both success and failures, leaders begin to unpack the assumptions and values that lie beneath rules, regulations and skills in work and everyday life. It will lead individuals to make sense of the situations even though without all the information needed by offering the possible options for action and prediction.

- According to Pisapia et al. (2008), systems thinking represent the ability to see systems holistically by understanding the properties, forces, patterns, and interrelationships that shape the behaviors of the systems which provide options for actions. The capability enables someone to understand how facts
relate to each other and enable them to seek the cause of a demand for products or services that their organization produces before taking action to meet the demand and seek feedback to help individuals and the organization (Pisapia et al. 2008).

Previous studies have shown differences in cultural dimensions as well as management styles between ethnicity and culture. A study by Pisapia, Pang, Fatt Hee and Morris (2009) on the level of strategic thinking implementation among aspiring school leaders in Hong Kong, Malaysia, Shanghai, and United States reveal that school leaders of USA show the greater level of strategic thinking skills instead of other countries. Another empirical study conducted in Malaysia by Mohd. Khairuddin and Mustafa (2007) strategic thinking practices among Malaysian SMEs reveals that the strategic thinking benefited the Malaysian SMEs in emphasizing more on insight which are as follows; search and evaluate new market, opportunities, keep track on demand trends and changes in the industry, monitor changes in customers’ need, keep track on technological changes in the industry and monitor changes of competitor’s actions and strategies. Differences in leadership style between the Malays and Chinese were found in the study by Roselina, Wafa, and Yusoff (2002), and differences in decision making styles were also found between the Chinese and Malays in a study conducted by Wafa, Karim, and Wajiran (2004). By looking at the entrepreneurs in the three ethnic groups in Sabah, the Bajaus, Dusun, and Bugis, it is hoped that this study can discover information concerning the levels and differences in strategic thinking and use this information objectively towards the improvement of their competitive advantage.

METHODOLOGY

Pisapia’s measure for strategic thinking was used in this study to measure the strategic thinking levels among the Bajaus, Dusun, and Bugis entrepreneurs in Malaysia. A total of 92 Bajau, 41 Dusun and 64 Bugis entrepreneurs usable data managed to be collected by this study through convenience sampling. The mean age for the Bajau entrepreneur’s is 37 years, the Dusun 43, while the Bugis was 40 years. The cronbach alpha’s for all measuring instrument were above 0.70.

RESULTS

The mean scores for the three strategic thinking components, reframing thinking, systematic thinking and reflective thinking are not significantly different for the Bajau, Bugis, and Dusun respondents. The only component in which they seem to differ is on reflectivethinking where it was found that the Dusuns have significantly higher scores than the Bajaus.

The results show that all the three groups of Bajau, Bugis and Dusun entrepreneurs have average scores for reframing thinking. Their systematic thinking means of the three groups however are all on the low side with means of around 2.2. All three groups scored their highest on reflective thinking with scores close to four with the lowest score obtained by the Bajaus with a mean score of 3.6374.

<p>| TABLE 1: T-TEST OF MEANS ON REFRAMING THINKING |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REFRAMING</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
### TABLE 2: T-TEST OF MEANS ON SYSTEMATIC THINKING

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<th>Std. Deviation</th>
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<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>.34634</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2.2703</td>
<td>.34736</td>
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### TABLE 3: T-TEST OF MEANS ON REFLECTIVE THINKING

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<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Graetz (2002) suggested that strategic thinking can be considered as an essential core towards the development and the sustaining of competitive advantage among organisations. Barnett, William, and Berland (1999) indicated that strategic thinking ability can aid organisations determine methods towards the development of reliable forecasting of the environment and as such reduce the problems associated with uncertainty of organisational decisions. The results of this study do indicate that all three groups of Bajau, Bugis, and Dusun entrepreneurs were found to have about the same levels of strategic thinking. The only significant difference found was on reflective thinking between the Bajaus and the Dusuns with the Bajaus having the significantly lower scores.

Another interesting finding is that the systematic thinking means of all the three groups of entrepreneurs are all on the low side with means of slightly above 2. In a previous study done on Malays and Chinese by the authors, the mean scores obtained were 3.973 and 3.923 respectively. This shows a big difference between those in peninsular Malaysia and Sabah. The lower scores means that the strategic thinking capability on reflective thinking of the Sabah entrepreneurs are weak and as such needs to be improved to increase the strategic thinking ability.

Efforts have been made by the government to improve the entrepreneurship skills and interest among the bumiputras in Malaysia. Liedtka, (1998), Sternberg, (1994), and Jaques & Clement, (1991) have suggested that strategic thinking is an inherent capability and conversely, that it can be developed. According to Jelenc (2008), and several other strategy theorist and practitioners, strategic thinking can be learned as a skill and become a habit from their continuous practices (Hanford, 1995; Liedtka, 1998; and Ohmae, 1982). It is hoped that by uncovering the abilities regarding strategic thinking, focus can be pushed towards emphasizing this ability in training programs on entrepreneurship in Malaysia which might help bumiputra entrepreneurs especially those in Sabah close the gap with their Chinese counterparts and in the end increase the competitive advantage of all entrepreneurs in Malaysia.
References


