Gender and Employee Involvement in Malaysia

(Gender dan Penglibatan Pekerja di Malaysia)

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the differences between the attitudes of men and women towards Employee Involvement (EI) programs in Malaysian context. Quality Circles (QC) and Employee Share Ownership Schemes (ESOS) were the focus of the current study of EI. Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were used in a mixed method study. The research found no significant differences in the attitudes of men and women toward EI schemes. However, with regard to participating in EI programs, men appeared to have more opportunity in comparison to women. This suggests that managers should seriously consider gender variations in designing EI schemes at the workplace.

ABSTRAK

Kertas ini mengkaji perbezaan sikap antara lelaki dan wanita terhadap Skim Employee Involvement (EI) di Malaysia. Kajian ini memfokus kepada Quality Circles (QC) dan Employee Share Ownership Schemes (ESOS). Pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif telah digunakan. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa tidak terdapat perbezaan yang ketara antara sikap lelaki dan wanita terhadap Skim EI. Namun, bersabit dengan penglibatan dalam program EI, pekerja lelaki kelihatan mempunyai peluang yang lebih besar berbanding pekerja wanita. Hal ini mencadangkan yang para pengurus sepatutnya memberi perhatian yang lebih serius terhadap faktor berkaitan jantina semasa merancang Skim EI di tempat kerja.

INTRODUCTION

Interest in employee involvement (EI) or participation by academics and practitioners has seen the emergence of a rapidly growing body of literature. Definition of employee involvement (EI) according to Strauss (1998) reflects the range of possibilities for employee from having some say or influence over their working environment. Fierce competitive environment is forcing many organisations to implement programs that aim to improve their operations and quality so they can serve their customers better than their competitors (Shelton 1991). Among the major elements of this change has been the extension of EI or participation at the workplace. These trends have been well documented but the literature is largely silent when it comes to considering employees' experiences at different levels of EI and in particular when considering gender issues.

The purpose of this paper was to address some of the critical needs expressed by those who have synthesised prior EI research. It attempted to tap the attitudes of employees, both participants and non-participants, and above all, included gender as the main variable. In this paper, it is argued that the research in EI continues to operate as gender blind. The study includes gender as a key independent variable in examining the differences between the attitudes of men and women towards EI programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT IN CONTEXT

EI may refer to involvement in the task design, as in quality circles (QCs) or some teamwork; gaining of power in decision-making, for example, through empowerment efforts or joint consultation; and financial participation, such as ESOSs or gain sharing (Harley *et al.* 2005). Research on EI consistently suggests that it leads to several desirable organisational outcomes, including improved decision quality, increased commitment, enhance employee development, increased job satisfaction (Mohr & Zoghi 2008) and self-efficacy (Steers & Nardon 2006). Nevertheless, Steers and Nardon (2006) defines employee involvement as the extent to which companies share information, knowledge, power and rewards throughout the organisation in an effort to maximize their return on human capitals.

EI takes many different forms both within and between cultures (Steers & Nardon 2006; Sagie & Aycan 2003). For instance, a study comparing the acceptance of employee involvement programmes in four countries (United States, Mexico, Poland and India) confirmed the importance of modifying practices to reflect national culture (Robert & Probst 2000). Robbins (2009) concluded that this is related to different cultural power distance among nations. The degree to which the employees wish to participate in the organisation is argued to be influenced by their cultural orientation. Hofstede (1983) pointed out that power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism are

linked to participative management. Cultures with low power distance tend to encourage participation. Malaysian positions on Hofstede cultural maps, especially on the Power Distance from those of the United States, Great Britain and most western countries, and show that Malaysia is "Large Power Distance – Low Individualism" whereas most western countries are in the opposite side of the quadrant. This seems to have some reference points in the above Malaysian studies. Therefore, attitudes towards EI schemes in Malaysia are likely to be different from those in western countries, where such schemes were conceived and implemented, and most research has been carried out.

The results from different styles of leadership studied by Savery (1994), that is consultative, autocratic and democratic, show that people under a democratic style of management had the highest level of commitment with the lowest level of commitment indicated by the autocratic group. This suggested that an increase in the level of perceived involvement in the decision-making process increases the feeling of commitment towards the organisation held by an individual (Savery 1994). There are various types of EI schemes among them include QC and ESOS. There two EI schemes are voluntary programs and thus employees are either participants or non-participants of the programs.

QUALITY CIRCLES (QC)

QCs are one of many forms of team-based EI initiatives, such as team briefings, suggestion schemes, and profit sharing, adopted in organisations since the 1970s (Marchington *et al.* 1992). The quality circles participants are often given some latitude in the determination of the issues to be covered in the work-related decision-making process. Members or participants are expected to receive training in problem-solving and group dynamics. The scheme is seen as a formalized avenue for eliciting and managing participation in relevant operational areas (Marks *et al.* 1986; Munchus 1983). The rationale for decision-making groups such as quality circles is based on the notion that those who are intimately involved in performing an activity are in the best position to address problems in that area. The group method of problem-solving and the participative management philosophy associated with it are natural outgrowths of managerial practices developed by the Japanese (Huse & Cummings 1985). Participation in QCs is viewed as method for enhancing employee attitudes and behaviours. For example, participation in QCs has commonly been studied in conjunction with satisfaction and organisational commitment.

QCs require active participation of line managers with skills in consultative and collaborative styles of management and their long-term survival depends on managers devoting some of their time to QC activities. Further, as Marchington *et al.* (1992) have found, there is a further problem that employee relations decisions tend to be downstream from other business issues (Purcell *et al.* 1999). Senior management's approach to QCs has not involved long-term planning and has been said to be faddish (Ramsay 1991), which makes a "collaborative" style of management hard to sustain by definition (Banas 1988). As a form of EI, QCs have thus become harder to justify their continuation when evaluated with more recent and popular EI and quality management practices.

EMPLOYEE SHARE OWNERSHIP SCHEMES (ESOS)

Employee share ownership (ESOS) has been credited with bringing some measures of employee control to production, engendering commitment in contexts where it is difficult to generate by other means (Pendleton *et al.* 1998, 2005), providing opportunities to employees to share in the reward of work (Hyman & Mason 1995; Kelly & Kelly 1991; Poole & Jenkins 1990) and thus motivating them to work harder (Heller *et al.* 1998). Moreover, where an increase in involvement in decision-making occurs, positive effects upon employee attitudes, including more co-operative behaviours between employers and employees, and productivity are anticipated (Long 1978). Specifically, systems of ownership can allow employees the opportunity to increase their involvement at their workplace, and improve their level of understanding and degree of communication with management (Poole & Jenkins 1990). It also shares some of the attributes of human resource management practice with the potential "to align the interest of employees with those of the organisation" (McHugh *et al.* 2004: 277). EI reduces the resistance to change and sparks creativity (Steers & Nardon 2006). However, Sengupta and Whitfield (2007) contradict the findings, where they found no significant relation between ESOS and employee commitment.

Share ownership is one of two broad categories of financial participation; the other is profit sharing. The main differences are that profit sharing is profit-based remuneration, where employees are able to take some share of profit into their income from their employer. In share ownership, employees are able to acquire shares, and thus have some degree of ownership over assets of their employer (Baddon *et al.* 1989). ESOS has been defined as a "plan in which most of a company's employees own at least some stock in the company, even if they do not have a right to vote, and even if they don't sell it until they leave or retire" (Rosen, Klein & Young 1986: 120). Whereas, another scheme that is similar to ESOS, which is employee share ownership plan (ESOP). The employee share ownership plan (ESOP) is a deferred employee benefit plan, similar to a pension fund. Corporations may directly contribute stock to the trust rather than funds for purchase. Such contributions, whether fund or stock, are tax-deductible for the company, which makes the ESOP attractive to existing owners who wish, for various reasons, to alter their ownership position in the company. The stock of the ESOP trust is then allocated to individual employee accounts, usually based on the employee's salary level.

In some plans, employees may contribute part of their wages to the trust to supplement their investment.

There are however studies that report employees' reasons for joining such schemes, from various perspectives. For example, Hammer and Stern (1980) found that in an employee buy-out of a failing manufacturing firm in the USA, there were three main responses employees gave as to why they purchased shares. These were firstly, to save their jobs, secondly, as an investment, and finally, because of a basic principle that employees should own part of the company. Ramsay *et al.* (1990), who studied companies in the UK with save-as-you earn (SAYE) share option schemes, found that employees joined the schemes because of the low risk and high financial rewards associated with them. The least contributing factor among their sample was attributed to having a 'stake or share' in the company. Similarly, French and Rosenstein (1984) studied a company operating an employee share ownership plan as an employee investment rather than an ownership scheme. Long (1978) reported that the most frequently cited advantage of employee share ownership was again monetary gain, with the second most popular response being the feeling of working for oneself as well as the company. These types of responses provide some tentative indication that employees participating in schemes, which do not confer a sizeable degree of ownership, do not in fact give ownership as an important reason for participation.

Perhaps most popular are the notions that employees join schemes to obtain greater participation and influence in the organisation or that they join in the expectation of a high financial return on their investment. Several researchers have examined either or both of these ideas in various ways (French & Rosenstein 1984; Long 1978; Rhodes & Steers 1980). The findings of these studies point to the conclusion that employees are concerned more with the financial aspects of share ownership than with having a greater voice in the company affairs. Similarly, French (1987) designed a detailed model of the predicted outcomes of employee share ownership assuming only that employees use schemes as a potential investment.

Nevertheless, recent findings by Menke and Buxton (2010) shows that ESOSs are adopted as a tool to facilitate business succession rather than as a plan replacing existing benefit pelan. Business succession means to pass on their ownership to the next generation, to identify and develop internal people with the potential to fill key leadership positions in the company. ESOP has created unanticipated wealth, economic security and consumer purchasing power for the employees and employee ownership will continue to increase over the next several decades (Menke & Buxton 2010). Next gender relation to EI is discussed.

GENDER AND EI

The organisational hierarchy is based on the presumption that lower-level positions carry a lower level of complexity and responsibility. These positions often are filled predominantly by women. Male workers with presumably undivided commitment to paid employment are considered more suited to positions of authority. Some even argue that women's inferior labour status is not a problem to be solved, but rather something women choose freely in their efforts to adapt paid work to household responsibilities (Bergmann 1989; Hakim 1996). However, job complexity and responsibility are defined in terms of managerial tasks from which women are excluded (Acker 1990).

Study by Peng and Ngo (2009) reveals that employee work commitment is negatively correlated to the perceptions of gender discrimination. Gender discrimination is said to occur when personnel decisions (such as hiring and promotion) are based on gender rather than on an individual's qualifications or job performance. The authors explain that when a female employee perceives that she is being discriminated against on the basis of her gender, her identification with her work role will be adversely affected and thus lead to reduced job commitment.

Some researchers (Angle & Perry 1981; Hrebiniak & Alutto 1972) have found that women are more committed to the organisations. However, other researchers (Morris & Steers 1980) did not find women to be more committed, suggesting that differences may exist between organisations and between occupations. Angle and Perry (1981) suggest that their result was unexpected because the organisational commitment questionnaire taps a form of commitment which is conceptually close to work involvement and earlier research suggests that women are less involved in their work than men. Studies found that women are less likely than men to see themselves as being involved in decision-making (e.g. Denton & Zeytinglu 1992). Research by Markey and Hodgkinson (2002) indicates that women have less access to workplace participation and empowerment as a result of constituting the majority of the part-time workforce.

However, Kahnweiler and Thompson (2000) concluded that gender is not a factor in how much employee wants to be involved nor how much they are asked to be in involved in decision-making. However, the level of education is. Higher level of education leads to higher degree of wanting and asking to be involved in decisions.

Because of "perceived" domestic commitments and responsibilities, women are often assumed to be less mobile, less committed to the organisation and more inclined to be absent from work than men, despite contradictory research evidence. Consequently, women tend to be overlooked in the promotion stakes, are more likely to be regarded as "non-progressional" and receive fewer training opportunities than their male colleagues (Elias & Main 1982). In this regard, men are more susceptible to programs at workplace, as women are hampered by domestic issues. In addition, authors such as Davidson (1987) and Lewis and Cooper (1987) suggest that women's advancement at the workplace is affected by the availability of appropriate role models and mentors,

and the degree of social support both at home and work. This further put them at a disadvantage position in regard to men. Therefore, this study predicted that:

H1. There are differences between men and women in attitudes towards EI programs.
H2. Amongst EI participants (both for ESOS and quality circles), there is a positive relationship between favourable attitudes towards EI.
H3. Amongst EI non-participants (both for ESOS and quality circles), attitudes towards EI will be less favourable than those of participants.

METHODOLOGY

In order to examine differences between the attitudes of men and women towards EI programs in Malaysian context, mixed methods were used. These comprised of a questionnaire-based survey, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The survey was for the purpose of addressing hypothesis one, i.e., to investigate the employee attitudes toward EI. Qualitative information from interviews with managers and focus groups with non-management employees is aimed at exploring the reasons for gender differences or similarities in EI schemes.

The research sample for the questionnaire consisted of all levels of employees from the three utility companies in Malaysia. There were 31 questions, typically based on a five-item Likert scale (with opportunities for open comment), covering issues of EI, QC and ESOS and gender differences and similarities.

In each organisation, the semi-structured interviews with managers included the Chief Executive Officer, the Director of Human Resources and other HR personnel together with senior operations managers. From this, and with the support of company executives, the researcher conducted interviews with personnel in the head quarters as well as the branches of the Northern and Southern states of Malaysia. The semi-structured interview comprised key themes to be explored with each respondent. For managers and those responsible for introducing and managing the EI initiatives, the questioning explored the background, intentions for the initiatives and perceived benefits, change in the way the organisation was to be managed, perceived problems regarding the implementation of employee involvement schemes and views as to what contribution employee involvement would make to the organisation. Having established the managerial intentions for EI, interviewees were asked to describe their own attitudes toward the schemes, how they perceived non-managers' attitudes towards the schemes, and differences between women and men on this issue.

Focus groups were conducted with the non-managerial employee. The key themes explored were gender issues, their experiences with the schemes, their perceptions regarding intentions for the initiatives,

perceived benefits, perceived problems regarding implementation, and perceived managers' attitudes towards the schemes. A total of 271 responses across the three companies were received from the survey, and 9 focus groups and 37 individual interviews were carried out. Altogether, 90 per cent of respondents were Malays, which represented well the population of public utility companies in Malaysia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study found no significant difference in the attitudes of men and women towards EI (see Table 2). Gender differences were found only in non-participants' attitudes towards QC schemes where women non-participants tended to be more positive than male non-participants. In summary, the hypothesis tests also showed a significant difference between non-participants and participants in their attitudes towards quality circles, with the latter tending to be more positive (see Table 3). Findings for attitudes towards Employee Share Ownership Schemes (ESOSs) showed there was a significant relationship between attitudes towards the scheme and organisational commitment among participants, but a non-significant relationship among non-participants.

The study also explores the reasons for gender differences in attitudes towards EI by examining the qualitative data gathered from management interviews and employee focus groups. Findings from the focus groups also showed that in organisational cultures where managers do not readily participate, managers refuse to let go of old autocratic styles of leadership. Referring to Table 4 and Table 5 for non-participants at the lower levels of the workforce, attitudes towards quality circles are also related even though non-participants, in general, tended to have less favourable attitudes towards the QC schemes. Both sets of positive attitudes were, unsurprisingly, related, even for the generally less positive staff with respect to QCs. The findings showed, moreover, that there were more positive attitudes among female non-participants than those among male participants. To explain this phenomenon, we may take into account the different positions of men and women in the organisation, with the men being mostly technicians and the women mostly clerks. From the focus group findings, female non-participants' unfavourable attitudes could be attributed to the fact that they were not being recognized and being asked to 'compete' with the male technicians in order to 'win' a quality circle project. The majority also highlighted the absence of a non-participative climate surrounding the work area. What they were most concerned with was the authoritarian management style that put them at a further disadvantage given their lower end. Their argument was that with such an environment they found it hard to believe that involvement practices can be fully implemented.

TABLE 1. Sample profiles of respondents by gender

	Men	Women
	%	%
Organisational levels:		
Senior	8.9	7.8
Middle	40.7	28.4
Worker	50.4	63.8
Age:		
Below 45 years	91.1	90.1
46-54	8.9	9.1
55	0	0.8
Years of tenure:		
Less than 10 years	22	38.3
10-20 years	60	50.5
Above 20 years	18	11.2
Levels of education:		
GCE (SRP)	13.2	0
O Level (SPM)	32.6	51.4
College Diploma	0	44.9
Degree	39.6	0
Post Graduate	14.6	3.7
Marital status:		
Married	89.7	81.7
Single Parents	8.2	3.3
Single	4.1	15
Number of Dependants (under age 16):		
Fewer than 3	14.9	39
Between 3 and 5	66.7	50
Between 6 and 8	17	10
Between 9 and 12	1.4	1
Salary scale: per month		
RM215-RM1,704	36.6	68
RM1,710-RM3,000	35.3	26
Above RM3,000	28.1	6
Total Respondents	146 (men)	125 (women)

TABLE 2. t-test comparison of mean scores of attitude towards employee involvement by gender

QC	Scheme	Females		Males		t-Value
		M	SD	M	SD	
1.	Opinion about QC	3.71	.5	3.83	.4	-1.93
2.	Participants' attitude towards QC	3.95	.42	3.96	.36	-.22
3.	Non-Participants' attitude towards QC Financial Scheme	2.6	.62	2.27	.59	2.76[a]
4.	Opinion about ESOS	3.18	.4	3.19	.42	-.22
5.	Participants' attitude towards ESOS	3.8	.5	3.6	.53	1.83
6.	Non-Participants' attitude towards ESOS	2.72	.5	2.55	.58	1.18

[a] $p < .05$

TABLE 3. Comparison of mean scores for attitudes towards employee involvement schemes (QCs and ESOSs) between EI participants and non-participants

		Participant		Non-Participants		t-Value
		M	SD	M	SD	
1.	Attitude towards QC	3.93	0.30	2.435	0.605	2.052[a]
2.	Attitude towards ESOS	3.70	0.515	2.635	0.54	2.132[a]

[a] $p < .05$

TABLE 4. Attitudes towards employee involvement (EI) and quality circles (QCs)

| Attitudes | Interview | | | Focus Groups | |
| | Top Management | Middle Management | | Workers | |
		Men	Women	Men	Women
Attitudes towards EI	To gain competitive advantage, to gain loyalty and commitment from employees	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Attitudes towards QC	Positive; to get employees involved	Good scheme; but concept is not clear. Some felt that it did not work in their organisations	Positive; platform towards getting recognition	Participants: Positive, projects recognized; Non-participants; poor support from management	Participants: some agree with management on importance of QC, but most felt 'project' hardly being recognized. Non-participants: extra–time, role conflict

TABLE 5. Summary of interview and focus group themes related to gender differences or similarities

| Perceptions/ views | Interview | | | | Focus Groups Workers Women |
| | Top Management | Middle Management | | | |
		Men	Women	Men	
Are women the same or different at work?	Similar. Differ in positions	Similar. Sometimes more committed than men	Similar. Work harder for dual role	Different in technical positions	–
Women bosses	Similar. But emotional, sensitive and not far sighted	Lack of confidence in decision making Set too high a standard	Perceived lack of respect from men	Lack confidence in decision-making. Not involved in fieldwork, more to admin/lab, emotional, can't accept pressure	Lack confidence in decision-making, sensitive, emotional
Discrimination	No discrimination	Yes, in technical positions. Some say yes also to managerial posts. Partial say no, for clerical	Yes, in meetings women's view is hardly taken	Yes, in hard engineering. Women ok in electrical engineering	Yes, in training, and contribution not recognised, office functions, communication
Stereotyping	Yes, males more robust in technical disciplines, women efficient if passed 'reproductive age.' Work context: women not suitable in technically high risk jobs	Yes. But some others were not critical.	Yes; perceive that men believe they are superior, women have to work 3-4 times harder	Yes, women technical = not suitable, Clerical = suitable	Yes, perceived women managers are equally biased towards women staff
Women's reasons for working	–	–	Initially work. Later, career/ profession	–	Secure income, support family

Nevertheless, if they are being treated as equal, it may for instance even be that women express a stronger demand for influence than men, given their similar circumstances. This could explain the finding of a significant difference between genders, where non-participant women workers have more favourable attitudes towards the scheme than non-participant men. Another possibility is that, despite their low position in the hierarchy and not being given a chance to participate, women's attitudes are better than men's. Women, or at least those in powerless jobs, may be more readily impressed by management initiated EI initiatives, as has been noted by Allen *et al.* (1991) who found that in the late 1970s/early 1980s at least, women were if anything more supportive of the worker-director idea.

Findings from the interviews suggested that even women at managerial levels claim that QCs are seen as a platform for them to get recognition. This points to one thing – that women in any position felt a disadvantage, even though it was more so at lower levels. They saw QCs as a chance to enhance their ability to compete with their male colleagues. Hence, participating in quality circles was presumed to be an advantage for being recognized by the management. As for men at middle management, especially the district managers, they commented that their main constraint on participation was more time and work pressures in comparison not participating in QC.

The root cause of QC is that top management or management in general put emphasis on the wrong focus, i.e., 'winning' quality circle projects. While presentation of the completed quality circle projects is part of the process, it is just part of the many other processes which need to be focused on. As an example, the processes of identifying a problem, of problem solving, of analyzing data, of brainstorming, of working as a team, and above all training are a crucial part and parcel of a quality circle. Workers at the lower level can never gain their confidence in quality circle success if not exposed to the proper training. This is where the majority of the non-participating women felt they were located.

From the interviews and focus groups findings, it was apparent that there was a 'culture' in the Malaysian public organizations that membership of QCs was perceived as primarily an exercise in being nominated for participating at the national conventions. Unfortunately, this attitude was shared by QC participants as well as the majority of the employees. The negative impact of this was felt mainly by women at lower levels in the organization, who were further disadvantaged when 'competition' for projects was against the generally male technicians.

The holistic approach to quality circles concerned with getting employees involved in their daily work activities may indeed have a positive impact on employee satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational efficiency. The quality of work life is also expected to be enhanced as a result of employees being given an opportunity to participate in problem solving and decision-making (Hutchins 1985; Yager 1980). Women workers should be able to demonstrate the benefits of QCs in achieving worker involvement in problem solving, which eventually can lead to personal development and greater recognition. This will only happen, however, according to Robson (1984), if companies can think fully through the meaning and implication of developing an open participative management culture, as would be expected in a well implemented quality circle.

EMPLOYEE SHARE OWNERSHIP SCHEMES (ESOS)

ESOS Members

Upon more careful consideration of the focus groups findings with employees, it appears that employees often considered the scheme to be just another part of the benefits package, no different from other benefits like pensions, for example. A similar result was found by Ramsay *et al.* (1990). In his study it was found that there was no significance attached to shares, as employees viewed it just like another benefit. In such a case, participation in the scheme is not significant which requires the type of internal justification suggested by the cognitive dissonance theory. The notion that cognitive dissonance would be responsible for attitudinal change is therefore not particularly well supported given the evidence available from this and other studies.

Findings from the interviews and focus groups generally indicated a lack of significant association between the scheme and any attitude towards the organization. Even executives who received more shares than their subordinates would leave the firm when and if they felt it was necessary. Having the shares in the company did not stop them from leaving. Partly, this can be attributed to the fact that the shares can be sold at any point of time. The majority of employees who own company shares were not convinced that ownership of shares transforms their attitudes or behaviour. They viewed ESOSs as just another benefit given to them; some had even taken it for granted that most companies these days would provide such a scheme for their employees.

Non-members of ESOS

For non-participants in any of the ESOS programmes, there was no relation between attitudes to the schemes and organizational commitment. Perhaps the entitlement policy of ESOS programmes has a role in explaining this finding. As employees, they have no personal choice in becoming a shareholder or not. It is all predetermined by policy, rank and seniority.

In addition, employees who do not own shares also had two particular characteristics with regard to employment status and length of service. One possibility is that non-shareholders who had substantial tenure (i.e., length of service) were not given a chance of share ownership due to their position or employment status in the company. The majority of employees in this bracket were from clerical and manual employee ranks.

Nevertheless, common themes emerged for participants and non-participants with regard to the qualitative findings. The interviews, including the focus group interviews, showed an inclination towards no relationship between employee share ownership and organizational commitment. The majority of the non-participants, who were unable to purchase the shares due to their non-eligibility through their position in the company, disagreed that employee share ownership had such a consequence. Regardless of negative attitudes towards the shares, they still felt committed to the company. The interviews revealed that most of the respondents shared the common understanding that large differences in the number of shares being allocated between managers and workers were unfair. The next other strongly supported statement that appeared from the focus groups was their disagreement that the ESOS reduced feelings of a gap between management and the employees.

As the majority of non-shareholders were at the lowest ranks of the company (i.e., manual and clerical workers) these views were unexpected. Although they felt unappreciated by management, the feeling of commitment to their companies, which they have served for years, had not changed. Perhaps the feeling of commitment to the organization, which has been developed over the years, could not be traded even for their negative attitude towards the employee share ownership scheme.

Gender Differences

The only gender differences found in the survey research were in non-participants' attitudes towards quality circles (QCs), with differences in the direction of more favourable attitudes for female non-participants. This finding supports previous empirical findings (e.g., Allen *et al*. 1991), which suggested that women were more supportive of a programme that was introduced by management, such as the worker director idea. However, the findings do not support claims that women are less likely to participate or be involved at work (e.g., Hakim 1995).

The more positive attitudes from women non-participants can be partly attributed to characteristics of the job stratification of the organization itself, whereby the majority of women were employed in clerical and administrative posts, and therefore most of them represented the lowest income earners in the organization. From descriptive statistics (see Table 1), slightly more than half (51%) of the respondents were the representatives of the lowest bracket of the organization pay levels, and the majority of women (68%) made up the lowest salary group. Perhaps, coming from the lowest level of the organization made them eager to participate whenever given a chance, as generally they never had any. This is in line with interview and focus groups findings, where some women felt that QCs gave them a chance to 'prove' themselves to management. They saw quality circles as an achievable means of getting involved, over and above their daily routine, mundane job. Quality circles could also be a

vehicle for them to gain recognition from management. In these companies, especially, getting the participants to compete towards contributing to company presentations at conventions seemed to be the main motivating factor keeping circles active. One respondent in an interview even saw it as an activity that could provide her with an opportunity to outperform male colleagues. She stressed that they were rarely given a chance to be involved in company activities other than the quality circles, hence that was the only means for them to prove themselves to management. Therefore, it is not a surprise that women workers showed a more positive attitude towards the scheme than the male workers, as they saw it as an advantage.

There were no other significant differences in the attitudes of male and female participants in the present survey. One possible reason could be that although women workers want to take advantage in proving themselves through quality circle, after a while, they realise it is difficult to 'compete' with male workers, who are mostly made-up of technical ranks, in getting recognition from management.

CONCLUSIONS

Research found there is no significant difference in the attitudes of mena and women towards EI schemes. The study also found that there is different between attitudes towards EI scheme among non-participants and participants. This suggest that the position of women regardless of status of participation indicates that women have higher tendency to conform in comparison to men at schemes introduce by management. This serves as an important point to consider when implementing EI scheme at workplace.

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