THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH QUALITY IN DEVELOPING MALAYSIA'S FIRST CLASS MENTALITY PERSONNEL: AN INDICATOR OF A GOOD HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

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Personnel are important assets to the organizations and the nation. This is because whatever role they play, they do contribute to the development and growth of the nation. Therefore, the quality and the development of the personnel should be taken into consideration by the organizations. As a result human capital development should cover the development of psychological quality of personnel. One aspect of psychological developments is mental health development. Therefore, the trend in human capital development should not only cover development of knowledge and skills on productivity and service delivery but at the same time to focus on the development and promotion of mental health among workers.

Government stresses the important of human capital development in Malaysia. For instance, the Malaysian Government in its Eighth and Ninth Malaysian Plan putting a major focus in human capital development [Chapter 11 and 14, Ninth Malaysia Plan, 2006]. Besides that, the Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak is inspiring the nation to develop *glokal* Malay personality (and also *glokal* Malaysian personality) in facing the world advancement. In addition, the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi himself advocates the towering Malay personality (and also towering Malaysian personality) to be developed in building Malaysian nation (BERNAMA, July 23, 2005; Malaysiakini, Feb 18, 05; & New Straits Times, July 19, 2005). All of the focus indirectly reflects to the development of Malaysian human capital development.

However, the question is how effective is the practice of human capital development in Malaysia in developing and preparing the development of first class mentality personnel? And do the human resource and vocational institution have found the ways and means to develop first class mentality personnel? Do they consider the aspect of mental health in developing first class mentality personnel? This is because the mental health is not only relevant in developing the first class mentality personnel but mental health is also reliable in dealing with various organizational issues such as work motivation, work-life balance, job satisfaction and so forth.

Therefore the objective of paper is to discuss the importance of mental health quality in the practice of human capital development in order to develop Malaysia's first class mentality personnel. To bring a good understanding and discussion on this issue, firstly it defines the mental health. Secondly it elaborates the relationship between mental health and first class mentality personnel. Thirdly, the importance of mental health quality in developing Malaysia's first class mentality personnel is discussed. Fourthly, it suggests the aspects of the mental health development to be considered in developing human capital. Lastly, it discusses approaches to develop a good mental health in human capital development in Malaysia.

1. Definition of mental health

Generally there are several of terminologies that represent the idea of mental health Miller (n.d). For instance, the term psychological well-being, psychological adjustment, quality of life refer to mental health. However the general idea is, mental health is the psychological condition of the mind (Century-health, 2006). Mental health also refers to the successful performance of mental function resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity (Fountainhouse, 2006). Besides that, mental health also covers aspect of our relationship with other and adjustment in environment.

In Malaysia context, mental health according to Malaysia National Mental Health Policy is defined as *"Kesihatan Mental adalah kemampuan seseorang individu, kumpulan dan persekitaran untuk berinteraksi dengan individu lain, dengan menggunakan cara pemikiran, perasaan dan*

keupayaan berkomunikasi bagi mencapai kesejahteraan hidup yang saksama" (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2006).

Psychological research from many sources indicates that positive mental health or psychological well-being for all people involves several basic factors: happiness or life satisfaction, self-actualization or a sense of meaning and purpose in life, and spirituality involving "other-centeredness" or service to others (Compton, 2001). People with mental illness have the same human needs as everyone else for these basic elements of well-being, and the same capacity to achieve them (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006).

In the other words, it is the ability to overcome psychological distress, develop psychologically and emotionally, become aware of others, and maintain social relationships (Zeman, 2003). And the other characteristics of having positive mental health have a high self-esteem, strong sociable encouragement, and are members of warm, compassionate families (Zeman, 2003).

In psychological or behavioral researches there are various measures that can be used to tap or measure mental health of individual. The example of the measures are Affect Balance, The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale, General Well-Being, LSI-Z Life Satisfaction, and Trait-Anxiety Inventory (Himmelfarb & Murrell, 1983) and other scales such as psychological well-being scales and self-esteem scales.

Mental Health in Malaysia

As any other developing countries, mental health in Malaysia is understudied and has not received the kind of attention it deserves. Amber Haque (2005) attributed this scenario to four reasons namely, a lack of knowledge or misunderstanding about what mental health really is, adherence to the traditional cultural belief systems and practices, and priorities of the government. However, the government put efforts in mental health program development and service delivery the mental health program development and service delivery since independence.

In fact, mental health in Malaysia has seen considerable growth since independence. Therefore the government and the Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) developed new programs in different places in the country in order to respond to the need of mental health programs and service delivery (Amber Haque, 2001). A few cases of mental health problems are highlighted by mass media, for instance, suicidal cases, *amok*, and other psychological disorders or mental illness. However, the statistics are rarely made available. Mental health programmes in Malaysia faces a few challenges especially in implementing the suggestions from a national seminar organized by the Ministry of Health and a WHO consultant have so far failed to be initiated (Crabtree & Chong, 2004).

In Malaysia there is one NGO called Malaysia Mental Health Association (MMHA) that tries to response to mental health issue of the country. The government itself plays it role in developing mental health policies and outlining a proper mental health services to make available to the public. The government seriousness can be identified from Mental Health Act 2001 (Act 615). However Act 615 is yet to be enforced, and prior to the enforcement, Mental Disorders Ordinance 1952 [Ord. 31 of 1952], Mental Health Ordinance (Sarawak) 1961 [Sarawak Ord. 16 of 1961], Lunatics Ordinance (Sabah) 1951 [Sabah Cap 74] are still applicable (Amber Haque, 2005; Crabtree & Chong, 2004; & Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia, 2006).

2. The relationship between mental health and first class mentality

Definition of first class mentality

Before we try to understand the relationship between mental health and first class mentality, we need to have some ideas on first class mentality. So what is first class mentality? First class mentality refers thinking styles and attitudes that are progressive, advanced and proactive which develop a good quality culture and life style equal to developed race and nations (Zaini Ujang, 2006).

In context of first class mentality personnel in organizations, the first class mentality personnel should have and demonstrate the thinking style and attitudes that are progressive, advanced and proactive. This positive thinking and attitude then ensure the employees and the organization to develop a good quality culture and life style equal to developed race and nations.

Relationship between mental health and first class mentality

Therefore, to understand the relationship between mental health and first class mentality, a good mental health does contribute to the development of first class mentality. In the other words, hypothetically the first class mentality personnel can only be achieved by individual who is mentally healthy. In contrast, a poor mental health (and also mental illness) is not capable of developing first class mentality. As a result, a poor mental health will buffer the development of first class mentality. It reflects in thinking styles and attitude of personnel.

In organizational context, personnel who are mentally healthy could develop a first class mentality or the way they are thinking. As a result they are capable to develop organizational culture and contribute for the betterment of the organization especially in delivering their product and services. In addition, first class mentality personnel will contribute to the development and betterment of the nation indirectly.

Besides that, this relationship can be understood from the contribution of mental health to the personnel development especially their personal growth for the betterment of the organization. This is because mental health is the springboard of thinking and communications skills, learning, emotional growth, resilience and self-esteem (Fountain House, 2006).

Mental health and role as a first class mentality worker

Mental health plays a vital role in developing first class mentality in public and corporate organizations. This is because, first class mentality is related to the thinking style and the quality of the attitudes that demonstrated by personnel in organizations. The most important thing, mental health of the first class mentality personnel will be able to fight against the negative organizational culture and practice. For instance, the first class mentality workers are capable of developing and promoting the development of a healthy and conducive organization culture in their working life. They are also capable of eradicating negative values and practice that is usually demonstrated by third class mentality personnel or personnel with poor mental health.

Besides that, good mental health employees will bring positive changes of norms and practices in organization. The changes of culture can be shown by a few scenarios. By eradicating the type of third class mentality such as *kerja sambil lewa*, a good mental health employee with first class mentality will have objectives and goals for personal development and the betterment of their organization in their daily working days. Besides that, working culture such as *budaya curi tulang* will be replaced with honest working culture. In addition, they are able to develop a work-life balance in their life. This means they are not bringing their personal issues into work place. This is because they know the implication of their behavior to the organization. The other example is employees who are having a good and stable mental health will not sabotaging their organization. This is because any dissatisfaction toward the management and leadership will be canalized in a proper means and ways. In fact they know the implications if they sabotage their organization.

Mental health issues and organizational behavior / culture

Mental health plays a vital role in determining the culture of an organization. It includes the norms and the practice in the organization. Most of the issues are related to moral and ethics and also crime in organization. Employees who are having a good mental health may not/less involve in moral and ethics issues. For instance, moral and ethical issue related to the corporate governance and also relationship.

Besides that, hypothetically employees who are demonstrating a good mental health also may less involve in organizational crimes. For instance, crimes related to corruption, misuse of power, sexual harassment, and other forms of white collar crime such as variety of frauds, schemes, corruptions, and commercial offenses or include a broad range of non-violent offenses that have cheating and dishonesty as their central element (Barron's law Dictionary, 2006).

Therefore, we can see the difference between employees who are having good mental health as compared to their counterparts. Those who are having good mental health will try to work honestly and follow the rules and regulations of the organization. In fact, the impacts of mental health on organization can not be denied. It does not only influence the organizational culture but at the same time influencing the productivity and its quality and the quality of services that are provided by the organization.

3.   The importance of mental health quality in developing Malaysia's first class mentality personnel

Why mental health development is important? This is because it is vital in promoting the development of first class mentality personnel that will promote the development of positive organizational culture. Then this positive organizational culture will make the organization capable to delivery its services effectively and increase the productivity of the organizations.

Moreover, mental health quality is vital in promoting a good and sound organizational leadership, organizational culture, and positive organizational behavior. An employer with good mental health state will promote a good leadership practice. Besides that, he or she will be a good example to their employees, subordinates and the organization. Therefore, we need to understand the contribution and the importance of mental health quality in human capital practice. The contribution of mental health quality in human capital practice are a.) as an indicator of a good human capital development and b.) as the stimulator of a good/sound psychological quality.

a. Mental health quality as an indicator of a good human capital development

A good mental health quality plays an important role in organizational development and performance. It can be seen in the aspects of organizational productivity, personnel's creativity, team work, and duration of employment.

• *Organizational productivity*

Personnel who have a good mental health will increase the productivity of the organization whether in delivering the services or in increasing the output of the production. It also covers the aspects of product quality and effectiveness in production and delivering services.

• *Personnel's creativity*

Besides that, good mental health personnel will experience a conducive organization atmosphere and this conducive organization atmosphere will promote the development of creativity in the personnel in designing, producing the products and delivering the services. On the other hand, they can think of the solution of the daily organizational problem creatively and their decision making is more creative as compare with the personnel that are working in an organization atmosphere that are not conducive.

• *Team work*

Personnel that have a good mental health tend to be a good working partner. They are capable to contribute to the team in finishing tasks and in achieving the team's goals together. They are effective in seeking the alternative in solving the team problem and not interested in finding who is to be blamed. Personnel with good mental health also will have a good sense of solidarity or *esprit de corp*. Besides that, they also experiencing and demonstrating the sense of oneness and belongingness.

• *Duration of employment*

In addition, organization that promotes the development of mental health and a conducive organization atmosphere will have their employees work longer with that organization. This is because normally the conducive organization atmosphere will promote their personal growth and they are happy and feel safe to work with that organization. Therefore, duration of employment will be longer and they found no pressure to leave the organization. They are happy to contribute and to grow with the organization.

b. Mental health as the stimulator of a good/sound psychological quality

In addition, to understand the importance of mental health quality in developing Malaysia's first class mentality personnel we need to see the role of mental health as the stimulator of a good/sound psychological quality. Being the stimulator of a good/sound psychological quality, mental health is vital in promoting the good psychological quality in first class mentality personnel. Those psychological quality are self-esteem, self-efficacy, positive and optimistic thinking, personality, Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ), stress management and coping skill and adjustment.

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This is because personnel that have a positive mental health are capable to perceive and accept him/herself, others, and his/her environment. Besides that, they are capable to understand themselves and their potentials, dealing with other people and interact with their environment. They are also very positive with themselves, other people and the environment they live with. This psychological quality makes their personality unique. The most important things they are also tend to have a good Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ). By having a good Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ) they are able to coping and adjust with their life event and environment. At the same time they are capable to manage their stress and channel it in a proper manner.

4. Aspects of the mental health development to be considered

In developing the mental health, a few aspects of human capital need to be considered. In organizational context, the mental health issues should cover these three aspects. These aspects are related to a.) development of personal aspects, b.) development of interpersonal aspects, and c.) the development of environmental aspects.

- **Development of personal aspects**

The development of personal aspects covers the development of psychological related skills. Where by having these skills, the personnel are capable of promoting awareness on their emotional and behavioral functioning. The best example is the development of self-confidence, ability to make positive life choices (NeLMH, 2006), coping and adjustment with environment and life event. By having these skills, the personnel are capable to maintain the mental health and dealing with their environment properly without bringing their personnel matters into work place. Besides that, the skills related to problem solving and decision making must also develop. These skills will be very helpful in dealing with personal issues, other people and their environment.

- **Development of interpersonal aspects**

The other skills need to be considered are the interpersonal skills. These skills are very vital in the development of interpersonal aspects, i.e. in relating with other people. Those skills are the communication skills, interpersonal skills, networking skills, (NeLMH, 2006) and persuading skills. Why do we need to have proper interpersonal skills in dealing with others? We need to have these skills because we need to deal with the other people effectively. If we are not dealing with them properly the interpersonal conflict may arise. Therefore the interpersonal conflict must be deal properly. If not if may interfere personnel in implementing their duties and responsibility. If this interpersonal conflicts are overcome properly then the organizational goals can be achieved effective and with proper time frame.

- **Development of organization's environmental aspects**

To promote a good mental health in human capital development, the development of a conducive organization atmosphere must be considered. This is because mental health could only groom in an environment that promotes its development. And the environment that can ensure this development is a conducive organization atmosphere. By having this organizational culture means to have a good employer-employee relationship practice. In the other words, it is an "employee friendly environment". By having this environment employee is given a proper trust to be free in apply problem solving and decision making. Personnel are also allowed to work independently with less supervision in promoting creativity and proper designed autonomy. Moreover, employees also should be educated about the meaningful work opportunities and freedom from discrimination in the organization. In contrast, the poor working conditions and low pay should be avoided in the organization that intends to promote a conducive environment (NeLMH, 2006).

5. Approaches to develop a good mental health in human capital development in Malaysia

The development of good mental health employees with first class mentality personnel call for a proper approach and strategy. In ensuring this, education and socialization process is the best answer. This is because via education and socialization process a good mental health quality development can be realized. Therefore, these approaches cover the process of mental health promotion in organization

and industry, b.) education and socialization process at the training institutions and higher learning institutions and at the industry, and c.) government's responsibility.

a.)   Mental Health Promotion in organization and industry

Generally mental health promotion is an effort that aims to develop or to contribute to the well-being of individuals and communities. Public Health Agency of Canada (2006) refers mental health promotion as a concept that has significant potential for contributing to the well-being of individuals and communities and mental health promotion is a means of reaching the goal of good mental health. "Mental health is promoted through processes which give people the ability to function well, or which remove barriers that may prevent people from having control over their mental health… any actions which are taken for the purpose of fostering, protecting and improving mental health can be seen as mental health promotion. These can range from community-level interventions such as equitable social policy development, to individual-level interventions which cultivate skills, attitudes and behaviors conducive to mental health" (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006).

Public Health Agency of Canada (2006) identified three factors that influence the mental health promotion. Those factors are the importance of informal relationships, forms of mental health promotion, and efforts to promote mental health recognize and reflect the diversity of cultures within our communities. For the purpose of mental health promotion at the organizational level, the importance of informal relationships—with friends, co-worker, subordinates and others. These individuals are vital in supporting and maintaining positive mental health especially in developing the networks of social support and create new relationships that enhance our sense of belonging in the organizations and much of the work of mental health promotion has to do with shifting attitudes by emphasizing the importance of maintaining positive mental health.

- **The Organization and Industry**

Here are the examples of the available and model of mental health promotion that are used by the developed countries. The discussion is adapted based on mental health promotion program that developed by Public Health Agency of Canada (2006) and Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), (2006).

In organizational context also, mental health promotion approaches can be seen as ways to help actualize employees' potential for psychological well-being. "All of these strategies (such as development of individual skills, participation in decision-making and in community/organization, and involvement in reciprocal peer-support relationships) can contribute to life satisfaction, self-actualization, and the ability to reach out to others - three cornerstones of psychological well-being (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006).

Besides that, referring to Mental Health Promotion Tool Kit A practical resource for community initiatives that was developed by Canadian Mental Health Association, (CHMA) (2006), at least there are two important aspects that need to be considered important promotion. Those aspects are social support and self help. Social support is very helpful in developing a supportive environments and self help enable employees to foster resilience.

Therefore at the organizational context it is vital for the organization to create a supportive environment. Supportive environment can be understood from the policy of the organization such as family/employee friendly policy and the mental health services that are made available by the organization. This strategy focuses on promoting community and organizational change to create healthy environments and access to social support (Willinsky & Pape, 1997, 2001).

Self-Help/Mutual Support

Self help/mutual support is such a powerful mental health promotion resource. Because it is based on relationships with like people especially in supporting their confidence (Trainor et. al., 1996). Therefore from the self-help and mutual support group the employee can get a proper social support and sharing knowledge and information on mental health and concern related to personal issues. Regarding the benefits "they not only provide the opportunity to share emotional and tangible support, but they make use of people's own strengths and capacities as sources of help for others. Based on

principles of shared experience, joint ownership and leadership, and free of monetary considerations, self-help/mutual support represents a fundamental tool to allow people to work together and take charge of their own lives. Self-help groups offer a forum where individuals acquire the knowledge and skills to "get help," "give help," and "learn to help themselves." " (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006).

Building Individual Skills

Some of the skills that can be helpful and relevant to the employees relate to managing the stress, coping skill, psychological adjustment, work-life balance, others to activities of daily living, and others to participating in decision-making or advocating for change. Some of these can be transmitted by professionals or peers, while others can be developed by the individuals themselves (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006).

Using the Literature

In addition Public Health Agency of Canada (2006) noted that "another interesting resource for building individual skills is self-help literature. The use of self-help books fosters self-determination...Self-help books can be empowering, greatly add to the number of choices and options open to the individual, and enable him or her to exercise more control over mental health as well as other related areas in life (Dewar, 2000)".

- **Organization and Industry: an employee-friendly organization**

Besides that, the organizations can not take for granted that the personnel will deal with their mental health individually. But the organizations need to take the proactive approach in ensuring the personnel is having a good mental health by playing a role in providing the organizational atmosphere or work places that are capable to promote a good mental health.

Therefore the organization must develop a conducive work setting by promoting *employee and family friendly policy* in organization. Besides that, to ensure the mental health issues of personnel are overcome at the work setting the organization must provide a good supporting service to take care the welfare of the personnel. For instance, to provide help to the personnel by offering the counseling services in organization.

In addition, the management of the organization must develop and promote the proper and *friendly employee-employer relationship policy*. It means not to create a wide gap between employer and employee. This approach is indirectly promoting welfare of the personnel at the particular organization. Besides that, the management in the organization also can organize outdoor / family activities for their personnel such as the family day, etc. By having these kinds of activities, it shows the management of organization pays attention on the family issues of their personnel.

To develop a good mental health in human capital development, every organization should take the responsibility and proactive action in providing the seminar, training and workshop on mental health in industry. By proving the opportunity to the personnel to attend the programs related to the promotion of mental health means the organization is taking action to educate and socialize the personnel on the issues of mental health and the importance of mental health in work setting itself. Besides that, with the help of the counselor at the organization, the management can promote team work on mental health by provide service on self-help groups for the personnel to overcome their personal issue related to mental health in the organization.

Counseling services at the organization

An organization should have at least a counselor at the organization to cater the psychological needs of the employees at the organization. However, not all organizations are capable to offer this service to their employees, if not, the management can invite counselor on weekly basis to serve the employees psychological needs as practiced by the developed countries or the management can refer to the organization that provides counseling services.

b) Training institutions and higher learning institutions

At the vocational training institutions and higher learning institutions, two important organizations must play their role in promoting a good mental health in human capital development in Malaysia. Those organizations are the university and the vocational training institutions.

The universities and the vocational training institutions play their role in educating and promoting the future personnel in human capital development by ensuring their syllabus and training on the related programs cover the mental health course. Therefore it is understood that they do not only need to impose knowledge and skills on the specific specialization but to add in into the program a course or training on mental health. Therefore, they are not only preparing the future skilled personnel with knowledge but at the same time to stress on the important of mental health education for human capital development in Malaysia. In the other words, they are not neglecting the psychological development aspects of the graduates.

c) Government approach in promoting mental health

In fact, the government must come hand in hand with the corporate sectors and Non-governmental Organizations in promoting mental health to civil servants and corporate personnel. To ensure the implementation of this matter a few considerations in promoting mental health must be worked on collaboratively. Therefore, the available models of mental health promotion must be studied before a proper implementation takes place. To do this the government should consider a few modification and adjustment of the models in fitting the needs of our personnel and human capital practice.

Therefore the government plays a vital role to develop the policy on mental health in work settings. It can be achieved by developing a proper mental health policy that can benefit workers and at the same time ensuring and promoting the betterment for productivity and services delivery. The best example is, to put the policy on the counseling services and mental health promotion in the organization and industry a mandatory for eligible organizations.

Conclusion

In sum, mental health is the secret to develop first class mentality personnel in human capital development practice. Therefore, efforts in developing first class mentality personnel should cover aspects of psychological development especially mental health. To understand the contribution of mental health in human capital development we need to understand the relationship between mental health and first class mentality personnel. By understanding this relationship we will understand the relevant of mental health in human capital development practice.

However, the major challenge to the government is to change and stimulate change of perception and impression of Malaysian society in order to be adaptable and adjustable to new situation and environment in organizations. To bring mentality change in society, mental health is a prerequisite of having a first class mentality society in Malaysia especially in human capital development. As a result developing first class mentality personnel calls for a collaborative efforts from relevant individuals, organizations, and government. In fact, efforts in developing first class mentality personnel are not on the basis of one time tasks but it is a continuous task that requires commitment, persistency and cooperation.

Besides that, the research implication of this paper should be considered by researchers in organizational behavior especially those who's their works are related to mental health and human capital development. This is because there are always rooms to understand the importance of mental health in developing first class mentality personnel. By considering this research implication, we are trying to promote a good human capital development practice in Malaysia.

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