PRIVATE HOUSING DEVELOPERS: COMPARISON BETWEEN ETHNICITY AND SIZES

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ABSTRACT

To embark on any housing project, a developer needs to have support from various parties. The housing and construction industries are interrelated; they are in a relationship where construction plays a major part in the development process. Questionnaires were posted to 600 private housing developers (PHDs) and 54 were returned. Analysis showed that there were significant different for Bumiputera and non Bumiputera PHDs to have contact with competitors and family/relatives/close friends and consultancy regarding business matter. Comparing the sizes of the company, the result indicated that there was no statistically difference between sizes of businesses except for having relationship with the chamber of commerce/other societies' officer where small firms tend to established more relationship with this party. Micro company established strong network with family/relatives/close friends and material/ machinery/ labor supply compared to the other firm sizes.

Keywords: Social Network Theory (SNT); housing developers; ethnicity and sizes

Introduction

Over the years, Private Housing Developers (PHDs) have been the dominant suppliers of housing in the country. In terms of definition, private housing developers are defined as entrepreneurs who construct houses for profit (Endan, 1988). This private sector plays an important role and is a key industry partner to the government's housing program in providing adequate and affordable housing to the citizens.

The important contribution of Malaysian private developers in providing houses has been proved by few studies. According to Goh (1997), private housing developers are the single largest providers of medium and high-cost houses in Malaysia. The growth of this sector has been identified to have significant contribution to overall economic growth due to its link with more than 100 related industries (Chan, 1997). Thus, the growth in this sector is likely to influence the growth of other sectors as well.

Social Network Theory is important to small and medium PHDs. Quality and success for small and medium PHDs lie in the people around them. In relation to that, PHDs need to assemble different types of resources from the beginning till the end of the project. In this highly competitive industry, the PHDs need to develop their linkages and relationships with other actors in their environment in order to obtain the necessary resources, information and other moral support. This relationship might look as informal and personal networking because the relationships do not have formal, written agreements (Aldrich *et al.* 1986, 1987, Birley *et al.* 1988, 1991, Greve 1995).

There are no studies that have been conducted to look into the Social Network Theory in Malaysian housing sector and probably worldwide as well. Furthermore, according to construction (Zainol & Abdul Aziz, 1999), studies on housing development in Malaysia is

lacking compared to other industries. For example, until today, studies related to housing industry have been focusing on housing delivery system, developers' resources, low cost housing, abandoned housing project and housing policy (Agus, 1997; Chan, 1997; Kamarul Baharain, 2004; Ho, 2006).

This study does not include big PHDs as the big players also start from small and medium size and this might happen long time ago or maybe from the early generation. Therefore, they might not have enough information about what happened long time ago. According to BNM (2005), SME can be defined either based on the number of people a business employs or the total sales of revenue generated by a business in a year. Number of employees has been used as the criteria to define SME in housing development. The number of employees for a small company is between 5 and 19; while for a medium company it is between 20 and 50 employees.

Theoretical background

Social Network Theory is a social science concept that discusses the connection and relationship in a social structure (Kadushin, 2004). The theory that emerged in the late 19th century attempts to find something that might connect people in their group or communities. According to Brass (1992), a social network is a generic way a set of nodes or actors are connected by a set of social relationships, ties, or a specified type of ties. The term "network" is generally used for the structure of ties among the actors in a social system (Nohria and Eccles, 1992). These actors could be roles, individual persons, organizations, industries, or even nation states. Their ties may be based on conversation, affection, friendship, kinship, authority, economic exchange, information exchange, or anything else that forms the basis of a relationship. In a network, flows between objects and actors and exchanges, which might contain an advice, information, friendship, career or emotional support, motivation, and cooperation, can lead to very important ties (Kadushin, 2004).

The use of SNT in entrepreneurship started in the 1980s (Birley, 1985). This study concludes that entrepreneurs used their own informal business and personal networks to establish new firms. For example, social network contacts are the most needed by new and small businesses to overcome their difficulties in getting suppliers and customers at the early stage of business formation. Network relationship refers to a strategy that focuses on creating and maintaining a lasting relationship between entrepreneurs and their network (Premaratne, 2002).

Strong ties can be defined as the relationship between an individual and his kinship, close friends, and family (Granovetter, 1982). Interaction with strong ties gives the person a stronger relation to the others (White and Houseman, 2002). The linkage is strong and they always get connected with each other. In contrast, the weak ties theory offers a satisfying approach to the study of integration in networks of face-to-face interaction consisting of multiple subgroups (Noah, 1980).

Defined in subjective terms, culture refers to a set of shared values and beliefs (Hofstede, 1980 and 2001). Particularly relevant in this regard are cultural values that emphasize change or certain time-preferences. It is therefore possible for Chinese and other entrepreneurs coming from Confucian-influenced societies to succeed in a highly collectivist environment while

drawing legitimacy for their conduct from a cultural emphasis on active change (Licht and Siegel, 2006).

Ethnic entrepreneurs need to develop socially meaningful relationships with the ethnic community in order to start a business (Salaff, et al., 2003). To start a business, ethnic entrepreneurs draw on co-ethnics to help them and to activate their networks for them to access social capital and shared cultural indicators including language and religion. Those that are established in ethnic networks can do best (Salaff, et al., 2003).

Trust can be defined as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustee and irrespective of the ability of the trustee to monitor or control that other party (Mayer, et al., 1995). Thus, trust becomes important because the transaction is embedded in a personal relation and structure that generates trust and discourages malfeasance. The trust develops dependability in a network of personal relationship because of the transaction that occurs (Welter and Kautonen, 2005).

Methodology

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire design was divided into three sections. Section A focused on the respondents' profile and background and Section B on the entrepreneur's business formation. A pilot survey to pre-test the questionnaire was conducted with four executives in the industry.

Population and Sampling

Population of this study comprised of small and medium PHDs in Peninsular Malaysia. The sample population of this study was served from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) in December 2006 through IDAMANweb (MHLG, 2006). The list from IDAMANweb had been compared with the sample population from the Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association (REHDA) via their REHDA Directory 2004/2005. A total of 600 postal surveys were sent throughout Peninsular Malaysia. Fifty-four (54) questionnaires were sent back, giving a total response rate of 9%.

Rao (2000) noted that low response rates are frequently observed in postal surveys. Such a low response rate had been anticipated from the beginning as previous studies also experienced the same thing (Ho, 2006 and Kamarul Baharain, 2004). A major disadvantage of the questionnaire survey method was its high rate of non-response (Judd et al., 1991 and Tan, 2001).

Analysis And Findings

28 or 51.9% of the respondents were Malay and 26 or 48.1% were Chinese. Majority of them (41 or 75.9%) were from top management level, such as chief executive officer and director, while the other 13 or 24.1% of the respondents were from middle management level, such as development manager and operation manager.

In terms of academic background, 38 or 70.4% of the respondents received formal education up to the tertiary level (i.e., college, institute, or university), while 15 or 25.9% of the respondents completed their secondary education. In terms of age, majority of the respondents (48.1% or 26 respondents) started their career during their early-career ages (i.e., between 20 to 30 years old); while 44.4% or 24 respondents started their business during their mid-career ages (i.e., 31 to 40 years old). Twenty-nine or 53.7% of the respondents attended courses before starting the firm. These respondents also confirmed to attending courses after starting the firm.

28 or 51.9% firms had Bumiputera status while 26 or 48.1% firms were non-Bumiputera. Eighteen firms or 33.3% had paid-up capital of RM800,001 (roughly equivalent to US 200,000) and above, 17 or 31.5% had paid-up capital of RM200,001 to RM400,000, while 15 or 27.8% had paid-up capital of RM400,001 to RM600,000. Only 3 firms or 5.6% had a paid-up capital of RM200,000 and below. In terms of the firm's nature, majority of the company or 96.3% claimed to be a private limited company.

In terms of number of permanent workers, 21 respondents or 38.9% stated that their workers numbered 5 people and below, while 19 of the surveyed firms or 35.2% employed between 6 to 10 workers, and 6 firms or 11.1% had 11 to 15 workers. Only 2 or 3.7% firms engaged up to 16 to 20 permanent workers while 6 or 11.1% firms engaged more than 21 workers.

Comparison between Bumiputera versus non-Bumiputera PHDs

An analysis had been conducted to look into the differences between Bumiputera and Non Bumiputera firms for all the variables. Table 1 shows the reason for PHDs to have link with certain parties. From the analysis, it was found that the greatest differences reason to have network with competitors is the contact with local authorities at $p<0.1$. For contact with local authority, Bumiputera score higher (mean=1.93) than Non-Bumiputera (mean=1.73). For network with family, relatives and close friend, the different significant can be found at material, machinery and labour supply at $p<0.05$ with Bumiputeras scoring higher (mean=1.86) as compared to Non-Bumiputera (mean=1.62).

Table 1: Differences in the reason for PHDs to have network by ethnicity

Competitors	Bumiputera (Mean)	Non-Bumiputera (Mean)	Approx. Sig.
Staff and management development	1.82	1.81	0.897
Land	1.89	1.92	0.702
Marketing	1.68	1.62	0.627
Material/machinery/labour supply	1.79	1.85	0.568
Consultation about business	1.79	1.69	0.434
Contact with consultants, contractors and material suppliers	1.71	1.81	0.422
Development process information	1.75	1.62	0.287
Finance	1.96	1.77	0.100
Contact with local authorities	1.93	1.73	0.051*
Family/relatives/close friends			
Finance	1.93	1.77	0.571
Land	1.54	1.65	0.377
Staff and management development	1.68	1.54	0.291
Consultation about business	1.75	1.58	0.178
Contact with consultants, contractors and material suppliers	1.79	1.62	0.171
Development process information	1.82	1.65	0.160
Marketing	1.82	1.65	0.160
Contact with local authorities	1.86	1.69	0.145
Material/machinery/labour supply	1.86	1.62	0.043**

Acquaintances			
Consultation about business	1.54	1.54	0.984
Material/machinery/labour supply	1.43	1.42	0.967
Finance	1.68	1.69	0.914
Contact with local authorities	1.36	1.38	0.835
Marketing	1.50	1.46	0.777
Contact with consultants, contractors and material suppliers	1.36	1.42	0.619
Staff and management development	1.64	1.58	0.619
Development process information	1.64	1.46	0.180
Land	1.61	1.42	0.176

Remarks: * $p \leq 0.10$, ** $p \leq 0.05$, *** $p \leq 0.01$

Table 2 shows the selected parties which the respondents had consulted regarding business matters at three phases i.e. before start up, at the start up and the currently on-going business. The analysis found that before the start up, the significant different can be found on officers of others at $p<0.1$ with Bumiputera (mean=2.00) scoring higher than Non-Bumiputera (mean=1.88). At the start up phase, there was no significant difference as all the items score more than 0.100. For currently ongoing business, there was a significant difference at $p<0.1$ in consultation with banks or financial institution officers where the mean value for Bumiputera is 1.68 while for Non-Bumiputera is 1.42 and consultation with officers of others at $p<0.05$ with Bumiputera score mean 1.96 and Non-Bumiputera score mean 1.77.

Table 2: Differences in the consultation regarding business matters by ethnicity

Before start up	**Bumiputera (Mean)**	**Non-Bumiputera (Mean)**	**Approx. Sig.**
Acquaintances	1.57	1.58	0.967
Banks/financial institutions officers	1.68	1.69	0.914
Chamber of commerce/other societies officers	1.86	1.85	0.910
Professional bodies/trade association officers	1.82	1.81	0.897
Individual from same-industry firm	1.71	1.73	0.893
Family/relatives/close friends	1.50	1.42	0.571
Government agencies officers	1.82	1.73	0.423
Officers of others	2.00	1.88	0.064*
Start up			
Professional bodies/trade association officers	1.79	1.77	0.884
Individual from same-industry firm	1.61	1.54	0.610
Officers of others	1.93	1.88	0.578
Chamber of commerce/other societies officers	1.68	1.77	0.457
Acquaintances	1.75	1.85	0.381
Government agencies officers	1.61	1.73	0.336
Family/relatives/close friends	1.79	1.65	0.280
Banks/financial institutions officers	1.79	1.62	0.171
Currently			
Professional bodies/trade association officers	1.57	1.62	0.743
Individual from same-industry firm	1.54	1.46	0.586
Acquaintances	1.75	1.65	0.439
Government agencies officers	1.68	1.54	0.291

Family/relatives/close friends	1.82	1.69	0.267
Chamber of commerce/other societies officers	1.54	1.69	0.238
Banks/financial institutions officers	1.68	1.42	0.059*
Officers of others	1.96	1.77	0.033**

Remarks: * $p \leq 0.10$, ** $p \leq 0.05$, *** $p \leq 0.01$

Source: Postal survey, 2007.

Comparison between Micro, small and medium PHDs

Analysis had been conducted to look into the differences between micro, small and medium PHDs for all the variables. However this result will only report the significant result from the analysis. Table 3 showed the result of one way anova for entrepreneur's business formation. The result indicated that there was no statistically difference between sizes of businesses except for the chamber of commerce/other societies' officer ($p<0.05$).). The mean value for the different company sizes are micro (mean= 1.36), small (mean=1.73) and medium (mean= 1.33).

Table 3: One way anova for entrepreneur's business formation

Before start up	F value	Sig.
Family/relatives/close friends	0.339	0.714
Acquaintances	0.540	0.586
Banks/financial institutions officers	1.086	0.345
Individual from same-industry firm	0.616	0.544
Government agencies officers	0.789	0.460
Professional bodies/trade association officers	0.009	0.991
Chamber of commerce/other societies officers	2.215	0.120
Officers of others	1.108	0.338
Within 5 years		
Family/relatives/close friends	0.210	0.811
Acquaintances	1.718	0.190
Banks/financial institutions officers	0.418	0.661
Individual from same-industry firm	0.659	0.522
Government agencies officers	2.123	0.130
Professional bodies/trade association officers	0.258	0.774
Chamber of commerce/other societies officers	0.343	0.711
Officers of others	0.789	0.460
Currently		
Family/relatives/close friends	0.234	0.792
Acquaintances	0.190	0.828
Banks/financial institutions officers	0.735	0.485
Individual from same-industry firm	1.063	0.353
Government agencies officers	1.029	0.365
Professional bodies/trade association officers	1.110	0.337
Chamber of commerce/other societies officers	3.781	0.029**
Officers of others	0.109	0.897

Remarks: * $p \leq 0.10$, ** $p \leq 0.05$, *** $p \leq 0.01$

Source: Postal survey, 2007

Table 4 shows the result of one way anova for the reason of PHDs to have network. For network with competitors, it showed that land is significant at $p<0.1$. The mean values for the

different company sizes are micro (mean= 1.91), small (mean= 1.89) and medium (mean= 2.00). Staff and management development are also significant at $p<0.1$. The mean value for the different company sizes are micro (mean= 1.82), small (mean= 1.81) and medium (mean= 1.83). For the reason to have network with family, relatives and close friends, material/ machinery/ labor supply was significant at $p<0.05$. The mean value for the different company sizes are micro (mean= 1.91), small (mean= 1.68) and medium (mean= 1.83).

Table 4: One way anova for the reason for PHDs to have network

Competitors	F value	Sig.
Land	3.049	0.087*
Finance	2.124	0.151
Marketing	2.596	0.113
Consultation about business	0.474	0.494
Contact with local authorities	2.785	0.101
Material/machinery/ labor supply	0.140	0.710
Development process information	1.463	0.232
Staff and management development	3.509	0.067*
Contact with consultant, contractors and material suppliers	1.082	0.303
Family/relatives/close friends		
Land	0.178	0.675
Finance	0.200	0.656
Marketing	0.002	0.962
Consultation about business	0.633	0.430
Contact with local authorities	0.022	0.882
Material/machinery/ labor supply	4.155	0.047**
Development process information	1.555	0.218
Staff and management development	0.050	0.824
Contact with consultant, contractors and material suppliers	0.714	0.402
Acquaintances		
Land	0.416	0.522
Finance	0.000	0.991
Marketing	1.487	0.228
Consultation about business	1.035	0.314
Contact with local authorities	0.363	0.549
Material/machinery/ labor supply	0.265	0.609
Development process information	2.154	0.148
Staff and management development	0.050	0.824
Contact with consultant, contractors and material suppliers	0.123	0.727

Remarks: *$p \leq 0.10$, ** $p \leq 0.05$, *** $p \leq 0.01$

Discussion

Although PHDs in Malaysia are dominated by Non-Bumiputeras, the number of respondents in this study is almost the same between Bumiputera (51.9%) and Non-Bumiputera (48.1%). It shows that for small and medium housing developers, the overall proportion of Bumiputera and Non-Bumiputera are almost equal. The majority of PHDs are small companies – 85% (Yusof,

2004). The targeted respondents of this study are from the top level management as this group are well-informed about their firm's background and current status. Almost more than half of the respondents (75.9%) are from top management level. It is found that 34 respondents or 63% of the respondents have degree.

In this study, it was found that most of the respondents started their business at their early and mid-career stage (48.1% and 44.4% respectively) i.e. between 21 to 30 and 31 to 40 years old. The findings are in accordance with a study by Hisrich and Peters (1989) where they found that most entrepreneurs started their entrepreneurial careers between the ages of 22 and 35.

For firm status, 51.9% were Bumiputera firms and 26 firms or 48.1% were Non-Bumiputera. It is a fact that the Non-Bumiputera private housing developer firms were the dominant player in housing industry in Malaysia but the data collected shows an equal number for both ethnics.

Most of the respondents' firms (33.3%) paid-up capital was in the range of RM800, 001 and above. According to MHLG (2008), an individual or organisations who want to set up a housing development firm must have a paid up capital of at least RM200, 000. It can be said that this type of business deals with money and land and whoever has money can be a developer. Financial strength is important to ensure that project can be smoothly constructed and delivered on time.

In terms of size categorisation based on the number of permanent workers, 38.9% of the respondents stated that they have less than 5 workers which can be categorised under micro enterprise. According to BNM (2005), SME in services is an enterprise with full-time employees not exceeding 50. Micro enterprise is an enterprise with less than 5 full-time employees. In this study, all the respondents do not have more than 50 workers which mean that all the respondents are under SME category.

It was found that the most significant different result for PHDs to have network with competitors is the contact with local authorities ($p \leq 0.10$). It is believed that Bumiputera PHDs are more likely to have network with local authorities as most of the local authorities workers are also Bumiputera. The core of the social dimension for encouraging entrepreneurs is the local authorities which echo the current broad consensus that are the key for a thriving economy. Belonging in the same community makes the job become easier as the communication is more outstanding (Mitchell and Jesselyn, 2005). However, it is different with the Non-Bumiputera as some of them might be face problem in communicating with the local authorities. Most of Non-Bumiputera firm will let their consultants get the development approval from the local authorities or they might send their Bumiputera employee to discuss with the local authorities.

For networking with families, relatives and close friends, it is evidenced that relationship with material, machinery and labour supplier is statistically significant at ≤ 0.05. The Bumiputera need to widen relationship as this business is dominated by Non-Bumiputera. It is believed that Non-Bumiputera have close contacts and it is easier for them to get credit for material, machinery and labour supply as the party is from the same race. Besides that, Non-Bumiputera have been involved in the construction and housing industry before Malaysia's independence. Most of Non-Bumiputera family, relatives and close friends work in this industry but with less Bumiputeras involved in the industry. Bumiputera entrepreneurs start their business at a time when Non-Bumiputeras are already running these businesses after one or two generations.

It is believed that PHDs consult other parties regarding their business matters. Before the start up phases, consultation with other officers is statistically significant (p≤0.10). In most cases, owners or managers of small firms do not have adequate managerial and technical skills to run their businesses efficiently and effectively (Ernst, 1997; Joyce et al. 1995; Staber; 1996). It is also indicated that Non-Bumiputera PHDs have more (42.3%) family, relatives and friends working with consultant rather than their Bumiputera PHDs (21.4%) counterparts (see Table 6.3). This is also because some of Bumiputera PHDs do not have the capacity to employ professional consultants. Coping with limited funds and tight budget, Small and medium PHDs usually shy away from retaining experienced and more expensive consultants and advisers (Buang, 1997).

For current ongoing business, The significant results are consultation with banks or financial institution officers (p≤0.05) and officers of others (p≤0.01). It can be said that banks play an important role in financing PHDs' projects. From the mean value, it shows that Bumiputera PHDs score a higher mean (1.68) than Non-Bumiputera (1.42). Having network and good contact relationship with bank might secure more favourable financial packages. It is believed that Bumiputera PHDs consult banks or financial officers to get capital and depend on bank loans to develop a new project while Non-Bumiputera PHD's have their own funding. While, Bumiputera PHDs consult officers of others to support their project development and Non-Bumiputera consult officers of others to advice them in terms of administration and dealings with local authorities.

In comparison between the firm sizes, it was found that the most significant result for an entrepreneur's business formation is chamber of commerce/other societies' officer (p<0.05). This chamber of commerce helps entrepreneurs in their businesses and networking in order to sustain them as players in the industry. As mentioned earlier, Ernst (1997) says that owners or managers of small firms do not have adequate managerial and technical skills to run their businesses efficiently and effectively. The best way is to get information or create network with those who are involved in the industry or the big players. Medium companies are more significant as the mean is low (mean= 1.33), followed by micro companies (mean= 1.36) and small companies (mean= 1.73).

As for competitors, land and staff and management development are significant both at p< 0.1. As for land, small companies were more significant as the mean is low (mean= 1.89), followed by micro companies (mean= 1.91) and medium companies (mean= 2.00). From Table 5.9, 66.7% of PHDs' acquaintances work with competitors. PHDs might want to have a joint venture with their competitor to develop a housing project. As for staff and management development, the mean value only shows a weak difference between the company sizes.

For network with family, relatives and close friends, material/ machinery/ labor supply is significant at p<0.5. The mean for small company is low (mean= 1.68), followed by medium companies (mean= 1.83) and micro companies (mean= 1.91). A helping hand from family members with material/ machinery/ labor supply may help PHDs to reduce cost effectively and efficiently and also get a better supply.

Conclusions

Bumiputera Company was more looking into creating networking with competitor to get close contact with officers in local authority. Bumiputera also was much dependent on their families/relatives or close friends for contact with material/machinery/labour supply. At the start up phase, Bumiputera depends on officers of other to give input about the industries and their

operation matters while at the current stage, bank officers seem to be important for them besides officer of other.

For different business sizes, at current stage small firms were more dependent on chamber of commerce as compared to the other sizes. Medium companies more emphasized to have network with competitor for land and management as compared to the other business sizes. For the reason to have network with family, relatives and close friends, material/ machinery/ labor supply was significant the most important for micro firms.

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