

# PAKIKISAMA: A Filipino Trait

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**Abstract:** Pakikisama refers to an interpersonal relationship where people are friendly with each other and is a typical personality trait of the Filipino people. It is expressed in their private lives, public workplaces, and relationships with neighbors. The purpose of this paper is to study this trait in detail. This study addresses Pakikisama as it is observed in the contexts of youth, workers, and national development. These examples will serve to better understand the value of pakikisama.

**Keywords:** Pakikisama, Filipino trait, FOW

## 1 - Introduction

Pakikisama is a basic tendency for Filipinos, and is expressed in their private lives, their public workplaces, and in their relationship with their neighbors. According to our results of the survey, the Filipino trait most taken up was Pakikisama. This indicates that this is a typical Filipino trait. Pakikisama refers to an interpersonal relationship where people are friendly with each other. To be with someone and to get along with each other indicates basic human friendliness and affinity.

The purpose of this paper is to study about Pakikisama as the typical personality trait of Filipinos in detail. The fact that this tendency was most taken up in Filipino trait studies means that Filipinos are friendly and feel strong affinity towards others. From my own personal experiences, and accounts from foreigners whom I've met, Filipinos are friendly people. This can be considered as a result of very friendly and amicable tendencies.

This Pakikisama trait comes from the word "sama", which means to "go along" (Andres, 1994; Limpingco, et al, 1999) and "yielding to the will of the leader or majority so as to make the group's decision unanimous." Interestingly, this trait is not to be described as a closely shut shell, but to have a rich as well as broad connotation which can be in fact understood in practice through different levels and in varied interpretations of the term, both positive or negative.

Accordingly, Pakikisama observed in the contexts of youth, workers and national development

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will serve as examples to give readers a more profound understanding of what the value Pakikisama is.

First, in the context of youth, Pakikisama has become the norm of friendship and camaraderie in youthful generations regardless of status. Camaraderie refers to feelings of friendship and trust among people who spend and work together for a lot of time. Pakikisama is most intense and perhaps extreme in this context. Pakikisama has become the core value of friendship among barkada or peers.

Second, Pakikisama in Filipino workers is seen in practices common in offices where officemates are united in certain ways which will fast track the tasks and responsibilities of everybody. Also, the gap between subordinates and the superiors is lessened and this helps bridge common understanding and harmony between each other. On the other hand, this value has been abused. It has become the tool for anomalous transactions and irregularities in most offices. In effect, some employees became corrupt to the extent that they use Pakikisama or this certain network of friendship either to bribe officials and employers, which is illegal or improper in nature.

Third, Pakikisama in the context of national development is the other side of friendship and camaraderie. It is neither the usual network of friendship among officemates nor is it a corrupted tool of vices and wrongful behaviors among the youth. As the alternative, Pakikisama as a simple value can move a nation towards development both as a people and as a country. Andres (1994) would say that “the Philippines is where it is today because it failed to harness the positive side of Pakikisama that should unify and reconcile Filipinos towards national values or goals.”

Etymologically, this trait “Pakikisama” comes from the root word “sama” which means “to go with” (Andres, 1994). It is a common tendency among the young and adult alike, which means uniting one’s will with the will of others in a colleague or peer group for the sake of camaraderie or friendship. This is the practice of yielding to the will of the leader or to the group so as to make the group’s decision unanimous. Conformity makes matters easier for the group. Without it, uniform decision is not possible and the group faces the constant danger of disunity. One who gets along well with his group even though he may have another important conflicting duty to take care of is called “magaling makikisama” (easy to be with). His reward is social approval of the group; but, should he avoid the role of being a conformist or a good comrade, he is called “mayabang” (haughty), meaning that he thinks he is too good for the group. To avoid being “yabang” (boastful), the Filipino says “kami”, “amin”, or “atin”, not “ako”, “akin”. In this sense, the Filipino is social-minded. Yet, in another sense, he/she is selfish to the extent that his/her personal “ako” is tied to his/her primary group and it is this group’s good that he/her seeks. His/Her “amin” and “namin” are not yet as encompassing as “atin” and “natin”.

Church and Katigbak (2000) define this term as “getting along with or making concessions to others.” This is the act of submission. The individual always conforms to his/her fellows. There is the emphasis of the “other” than the “self.”

This is a trait which is uniquely pervasive among the young. Jocano (2001) states that “to be a good Filipino, one must see to it that he does not hurt other people’s feelings; he is a good member of his family or of his barkada (peers); and he maintains good relationships with most, if not all, people around him.” Also, “it is the willingness to be one with the group in its opinions and decisions, to conform to group standards and expectations, to put oneself in the other’s place, to concede to the wishes of others, to extend help in times of need and sympathy in times of grief” (Espiritu, et al, 1976).

## 2 - Pakikisama in the Context of Filipino Youth

Youthful age defines the essence of enthusiasm, energy, adventure, risk and the like. The most determining factor of youthful vigor is breaking the usual and perhaps conservative rules. Along this line of what we may call a “rebellious factor” is the tendency to relate and associate with others, or that of peers. Panopio, et al. (1994) put it this way, “Among adolescents or teenagers, the peer group becomes an important reference group - their lifestyle, consumption needs, leisure, recreation and other activities are influenced by the peer group and aided by media. The current taste in food among teenagers shows a partiality for hamburgers, potato chips, pizza and soft drinks. Teenagers have a preference for jazz, rock or rap and go to discos, sing-alongs, or concerts. They are apt to be rugged in their fashion. They improvise words or have a lingo to set them apart from others. Some committed cause-oriented groups dedicate themselves to working for promoting human rights, social justice, and uplifting of the poor.”

The defining element of this stage centers on the value of Pakikisama, to go along with others or camaraderie. This points out the socialization process of a higher stage that runs in the blood of the youth. This is where the “rebellious factor” breaks in. That is, Pakikisama in this sense is corrupted and abused to the extent that some deviant and unpleasant behavior of the youth are by-products of “Pakikisama attitude. This results from peer pressure which causes one to pursue popular, trendy and commonly accepted behaviors so as not to be left behind and alienated from the peers. The pressure is so strong that an individual is left with no choice but to submit to the wishes of his/her “barkada” or peers. According to Palispis (1995) it is to please others in order not to hurt them or to use them that principles are overlooked.

The affecting factors are so spontaneous and tempting that they often lead to violations of common and accepted norms and create tension or senseless violence. Just for the sake of Pakikisama, a young adult may do everything ranging from rebellious behaviors to outright submission to extreme evil forces. Thus, gangwars and violent riots that are common in the streets mostly involve the youth. More often than not, Pakikisama is the big and influencing factor. Also, the interest and ideals that a certain club or organization on university campuses promote will decide the prevalent trend .

The success of many organizations can be credited to the Pakikisama value, which is so vibrant

and strong that it becomes the driving force for a person to join or to participate in youth-oriented activities. Basically, one looks for anything that may enhance the sense of youthful energy and a kind of sense of belongingness with others.

One surprising development in this aspect is the perpetual appeal of the extreme left-oriented movements whose growing membership can be accounted to the youth. One can observe the faces of the youth who are in the forefront of demonstrations and strikes. Most probably these organizations emanate and thrive from Pakikisama wherein the youth are motivated to work for some ideals by knowing that others in the same generation have similar views to their own. Yet, this kind of condition denotes the fact of Pakikisama in a higher stage and value.

During this time, the good value of Pakikisama which is born from simple enjoyment, fun trips and association can therefore be carried to the extremes. This value has the capacity to influence the whole of an individual. In cases such as being unable to say no to the barkada, Pakikisama then can become negative, which will hinder progress and development (Maslog, 1992).

It is in this context that the apparent misconception of Pakikisama is prevalent and it causes friction with conservative parents who want their kids to stay away from their peers. There is the common perception that an individual learns vices and rebellious behaviors in and through their "barkada" (a group of friends or technically called as peers). Mostly, they are involved in petty crimes such as rumbles, drug addiction, bag snatching, and stealing. It is the intense interaction within the group and the concern with group loyalties which lead to gang (barkada) wars and fraternity rumbles (Jocano, 1979).

Pakikisama as a core value of the youth can be regarded as a social development of the youth. Kapunan (1971) enumerates the following as characteristics of the adolescents: *desire to be liked - by their peers, by members of the group they admire and seek. they want to enjoy interdependence with their friends; they imitate their behavior regardless of whether or not their conduct and attitude are approved by their parents or teachers. They follow the fashion styles and manners; they read books about new trends; they imitate what they see on TV and movies about dating, fashion, leisure, desire for adult approval and adolescents.*

Gang is defined as a group of young people who have banded together in some way for a number of purposes. They may be considered as a peer group, although the age of the members may vary from fifteen to thirty-five (Jocano, 1979)

Pakikisama is what band the gang in this respect since the youth are united by feeling common aspiration to form their own group where they can feel accepted and a sense of belongingness. What is first a matter of acquaintance and association among an informal group of youngsters would readily develop within a Pakikisama attitude and afterwards they form either a club or an organization. It is the Pakikisama value that somehow holds the group together, be it a loose or banded one.

### 3 - Pakikisama in the Context of Filipino Workers

There is a common way of building good rapport in an office, private organization or particularly in government offices. According to the study of Andres (1989), "In order for these values of *hiya*, Pakikisama and *utang na loob* to work as a tool for discipline, it is imperative that the manager develops or cultivates a harmonious relationship in the organization. Positive Pakikisama will not thrive in a group if there is antagonism among the members. The employees should perceive that their officer is one of them, is concerned for them and looks after their welfare. When the employees perceive that their officer cares for them and is nice to them, they will have positive *utang na loob* (indebtedness)." Indeed, behind the varying tasks and responsibilities of every employee or worker, there lies a common understanding or the Pakikisama value that is vital in this sense. As a manager ranks higher than others he must solicit or win the loyalty of his/her subordinates by way of Pakikisama or by building good relationships by treating them humanely, enjoying their company and even going out to parties which usually take place after hours that fellow workers participate in or organize. Thus, Pakikisama is a way of overlooking the minor faults of subordinates and adjusting pleasantly to one's peers (Church, 1986)

However, Pakikisama in this context has a notorious connotation which has marred the image of some workplaces. Andres (2001) in his example states that a corrupt employee and dishonest employee who favors his/her relatives and friends by giving them or recommending them to favorable positions in the office even if they are not qualified can be described as "mabuting makisama" (easy to go along with) and those who are honest and vigilant against irregularities can be considered as "masamang makisama" (hostile; unfriendly). This is very common in the workplace and most probably is the condition that causes the Pakikisama value of the Filipinos to become corrupted from its real, positive and productive sense. Indeed, one has to "go along with others" either to maintain good friendship and harmony with others or to avoid disapproval, opposition, tension and outright dismal friction within an office. Indeed, Jocano (2000) called this a very unethical practice that is commonly accepted as a trait which usually happens in the workplace, and because of the trait one negotiates for something by using the network of friendships and association without going through the usual and proper protocol.

But one dimension of this value still has a positive meaning. It will bring about the positive outcome which is "bayanihan" or "team spirit". One's success doesn't depend exclusively on knowledge and skills but it is also necessary to work well with other people in an organization (Jocano, 2000).

Pakikisama is not all in vain. Aside from the excessive negative sense, positive usefulness among workers exists. That is, it is a prized value among the workers. Here, Pakikisama is a tendency to level with someone who is out of line and to curb anti-social attitudes by disallowing privacy (Andres, 1981). Below are some of the "conspicuous attitudes" practiced in this sense. 1. Tendency

to cooperate without hesitation. 2. Being sensitive and conservative. 3. Tendency to be obsequiously accommodating and hospitable. 4. Respect of elders.

What is good in this aspect is that it helps mold a worker into becoming a productive, worth-imitating and really valuable worker.

#### 4 - Pakikisama as “Tool for National Development”

Pakikisama is a concept of good human relations and involves yielding to the wish of the majority even if it contradicts one's own ideas (Panopio, et al, 2000). The good concept of this trait cannot be immediately associated with the notion of camaraderie or belongingness with others. This typical Filipino trait can in fact be a tool for national development of the country when it is practiced according to its value and can help mold the Filipinos as law-abiding and God-fearing citizens.

Andres (1989) says, “Pakikisama just like any other Filipino value when properly managed has a positive dimension.” Unfortunately, this positive dimension of Pakikisama is not the predominant aspect in our society today. The Philippines is where it is today because it failed to harness the positive side of Pakikisama that should unify and bring Filipinos together towards national values or goals. Positive Pakikisama leads Filipinos to assist and cooperate with each other and it restrains them from degrading a “kababayan” in order to obtain a desirable position or job. Positive Pakikisama stops Filipinos from maliciously withholding information or knowledge in order to put a fellow Filipino in a difficult situation. Positive Pakikisama makes Filipinos realize that if they do anything to hurt a kababayan (fellow countrymen) they are also hurting themselves and their country (bayan).

There necessitates from this observation to look into the present state of the Filipino people as regards this value. Indeed, some forms of evaluation or sort of examination among the people will be of importance since the most basic value and quality of Pakikisama concerns the person's enhancement and the community he or she lives in. The magnitude of this trait will definitely be a useful tool not only for the people but to the nation in general. The premise is good people will make a good society which can equally apply truly to the nation in larger perspective. Eventually, good citizens who are doing well with others in a positive sense will be a good source of productive and patriotic minded workforce who therefore can build and develop a further progressive country.

In a way, if we look at the greater perspective, this Pakikisama attitude is somewhat like human nature. This is a positive human way of reaching out to others. This is a type of socialization. Garcia (1994) defines this context as, “Man is a social being. He's always subject to human contact and relations. Infants need their mothers so that they could be fed. Young children rely on their teachers for information on what is going on around them. Teenagers indulge in special forms of relationship with the opposite sex. Adults marry and raise their own children. In other words, people need each other.”

Indeed, this positive nature of man to socialize with others is a Pakikisama trait for Filipinos,

which is actually not vain when we look at its real image in the society. Though this trait is often misconstrued as a wrongful way of acquiring values and norms in the society, such as boys learning to smoke and drink liquor from his/her peers or friends, but besides these common matters related to Pakikisama, this value seeks harmony with others and nature and aims for unity, peace and cooperation (Miranda-Feliciano, 1990). For Jocano (1997) this is a “willingness to subordinate one’s own interest in favor of others, in the spirit of harmony, friendship, cooperation and deference to majority decision so that the group goals can be easily achieved.”

In other words, Pakikisama or camaraderie is also a pakikipagkapwa-tao, in other words, to humanize with others. The former Senator Leticia Ramos-Shahani (1998) in her *Moral Recovery Program* identified this Pakikisama value as one of the strengths of the Filipino character in building a nation. That is, “Pakikipagkapwa-tao results in camaraderie and a feeling of closeness to one another. It is the foundation for unity as well as the sense of social justice.”

What is simply an effort or desire to go along or humanize with others by means of shared goals and aspirations, can indeed be a tool for national development in the sense that if this positive human tendency is mobilized and developed properly through concerted efforts, positive outcomes in a larger context such as “building a nation” as Ramos-Shahani (1998) imagined. This can change a nation. It can help the people to think about the good of the nation by just a matter of social contact and social awareness with their peers to create common good. Espiritu, et al. (1976) identifies Pakikisama as one of the Filipino values which has the potential for development. It can work for either good or evil. It can help or hinder development. That is, it can be utilized to answer the prevailing social needs and issues that are pressing.

One concrete example is the sense of Pakikisama in a team-building effort that can ultimately affect a nation’s development. A group or peer of mature persons through their network of friends with similar views can develop relationships beyond personal attachment. There are out-reach programs that may benefit not only the less-privileged but also the public in general. Consider some fraternity groups or other non-government organizations which were originally founded out of friendship, but have managed to create a positive image by providing free medical and dental examinations to the less-privileged, by cleaning the streets, tree planting, promotion of peace and development, preservation of natural resources, campaign against proliferation of illegal drugs and vigilance against rampant criminality. Pakikisama can be vital in uplifting the lives of the less-privileged and it can become the forefront to pursue lawless elements. Consider for instance a group of middle-aged people who volunteer to be civilian-police for free just to safeguard peace and order in the community. It is remarkable that these friends who share many things in common are also bonded by common views and aspiration not only for their group but also for public interest and welfare. Thus, Pakikisama or camaraderie in this aspect is a vital component for the society and country at large. It will empower the citizenry and develop from simple socialization towards something of greater value for the survival and development of humanity.

Pakikisama can be put in the right context through common efforts. It begins with friendship and mere association with one's fellows. Pakikisama is a strong motivational force that can be used by anyone who wants to influence and befriend people who are in need. Filipinos will go through fire for someone who treats them with Pakikisama and show a dedication and involvement unknown in the west (Palispis, 1995).

It is understood that scandalous practice of Pakikisama in the context of national development often leads to discouraging results and damaging images as well. However, the challenge in this context of national development is to redirect such misconception into something positive and good. Nation-building may be brought about first by the simple gesture of going along with others, but slowly this will lead to loyalty, patriotism, and bravery, promotion of human rights, social justice, peace, freedom and development of the majority of the population that is suffering from poverty.

## 5 - Polarization of Pakikisama as a Value

Gorospe (1974) identifies *Pakikisama*, together with Bayanihan (team spirit) as one of the Filipino values which has emotional resonance for the Filipinos. Similarly, Espiritu, et al (1976) also pinpointed Pakikisama as one of the Filipino values which has potential for development. Both clarify that if carried to the extreme, Pakikisama can become an obstacle to progress, yet it can be utilized to promote development; and can work for either good or evil.

Now, pertaining to the subject matter regarding values such as shared behaviors and norms of a group, Pakikisama is one such model value that is "so essential for a group to last and strongly hold together the camaraderie of the group in spite of the members' different backgrounds and conflicting views or attitudes." They tend to agree on certain matters and this is partly due to Pakikisama, or one's effort to "go along." Even so, Pakikisama is a two-edged sword which connotes both positive and negative denotations depending on the nature of "samahan" or camaraderie. Thus, the conception some hold that the "barkada system" (a peer group whose members have deep ties of friendship with one another - Andres, 1994) only instills wrong values to a person, has some basis since a person may eventually rebel against parents and learn some vices through the influence of "barkadas" (peers). In this way, Pakikisama may make a good worker become one and united with his/her fellows or may corrupt the worker by using a network of friendship or "samahan" in facilitating something anomalous in the office. Further, Pakikisama may produce good and law abiding citizens by living harmoniously with one's neighbors, which will be an advantage to the nation's development on the one hand, but on the other hand may disintegrate the people because of extreme emphasis on exclusive "samahan" (camaraderie).

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