

The Relationship between Perception of Quality and Length of Service on Integrity among Penang Civil Servant

Iskandar Hasan Tan Abdullah, Rusnah Ismail,
Nazlin Emieza Ngah & Asri Salleh

Abstract

Malaysia in its effort to become a fully developed nation by 2020 has undertaken a monumental task in instilling noble values into its society including its civil sector. The integrity of the civil servants needs to be greatly improved in order to turn this vision into a reality. This project attempted to examine the level of awareness, knowledge and understanding on noble values particularly integrity among selected civil servants in selected State Government agencies in Pulau Pinang, Malaysia. The respondents were selected based on a purposive sampling technique. The research used a quantitative approach where self-administered structured questions were distributed. Descriptive and inference analysis were carried out to meet the research objectives outlined. The research findings showed that there were civil servants groups who were unclear and uncertain about the meaning of integrity in public sector. Those with shorter length of services were found to be less knowledgeable on the rule and procedure which led to them being unsure about integrity. Length of service was found to be inversely related to the perception on the knowledge of integrity, corruption and quality of service delivery.

Keywords: Integrity, Civil Servants, Perception, Corruption, Public Service

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia in its effort to become a fully developed nation by 2020 has undertaken a monumental task in instilling noble values into its society including its civil sector. Consequently, among others, the Government has launched the “National Integrity Plan (NIP)” in 2004 of which main aim is to realize the fourth challenge of the Malaysia’s Vision 2020 i.e. to build a morally and ethically sound society where each individual encompasses strong religion and spiritual belief strongly rooted in good traits. NIP is a holistic plan aiming to tackle negative values in the society in an effort to instil the value of integrity among Malaysians (NIP Handbook, 2004). In order to achieve this, the Government believes that it is only appropriate that civil servants be part of the instilling process by emphasizing on them the value of integrity.

The commitment of Malaysian civil servants is vital to ensure that the Government policies are well implemented. Hence, the establishment of Malaysia Institute of Integrity provides a major boost to help develop the necessary human capital and knowledge resources of the public sector (Abdullah, 2004). The NIP had set its 2008 target to reduce corruption, malpractices and abuse of power and to increase efficiency of the public delivery system and overcome bureaucratic red-tape. However, the main obstacle to the achievement of the NIP’s Target 2008 appeared to be the perception that the public sector and the elected and appointed representatives were corrupt and inefficient.

The last two decades have seen major changes and innovations being introduced into the civil sector in order to provide better services to the public. According to Tan Sri Sidek Hassan (2006), the Government has introduced many reforms in public administration to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service beginning with the excellent work culture initiative in 1989 (*Gerakan Budaya Kerja Cemerlang*), put into effect through the implementation of public service administrative circulars (*Pekeliling Kemajuan Pentadbiran Awam [PKPA]*). Although a

lot of successes have been achieved since then, a lot more remain to be done. The commitment of civil servants still plays a vital role in ensuring that the smooth execution of the Government policies.

Integrity refers to a quality of excellence manifested in a holistic and integral manner in individuals and organizations (NIP Handbook 2004). In its specific sense, integrity in civil service means an observance of competency values, commitment to address and eliminate corruption, to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations either public or private as well as family units and lastly, to enhance the social welfare and the quality of life. It also includes the accountability, transparency and responsibility.

Gaining trust in the civil service is inevitably an integral part of the NIP. However, although many consider trust as a desirable value in administration, they also find it elusive. It is entirely possible that the meaning of trust may get even more elusive when one seeks to optimize it in administration (Choudhury 2008). The elusiveness may stem from the huge differences of the values that the people associate the public sector with such as legitimacy, lawfulness, accountability, and impartiality. These are contrastingly different with the values the people associate the private sector with such as profitability, competitiveness and customer orientation (Graaf and Wal 2008). Notwithstanding the varied understandings of integrity, it is all about observance of competency values, commitment to address and eliminate corruption, to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of organization of either public or private as well as family units. Undeniably, integrity is important to eliminate corruption and abuse of power (Noreha Hashim, 2008).

Besides, according to Susan Babbitt (1997), an adequate account of personal integrity must recognize that some social structures are of the wrong sort altogether for some individuals to be able to pursue personal integrity and that questions about the moral nature of society often

need to be asked first before questions about personal integrity can be properly be raised. For W. Paati Ofosu-Amaah (1999), the Asia and Pacific regions are characterized by countries with a range of institutional development in safeguarding integrity and accountability in their administrations. Singapore, for one, provides a good example of an Asian country with the near absence of corruption problem. This, according to Syed Hussein Alatas (1999), means that the authority is not dominated and manipulated by corrupt elements. It effectively reveals one common theme that primary emphasis on prevention of future corruption and on changing systems through values should be based on efforts to create a culture of professionalism. Therefore, the importance of a civil perception on integrity itself must be clear and the rules must be followed.

This research is significant in the sense that it can be seen as one of the attempts to provide a preliminary indication with which to measure the success of the Government's effort to instil noble values among the civil servants. The main objective of this research is to evaluate integrity perception against public sectors in term of their effectiveness, efficiency, honesty, accountability in service provided.

METHODOLOGY

The main source used for research analysis was a set of data collected through the questionnaire. The study was among the first being conducted after the launch of the NIP on 23 April, 2004. There were about 10,000 civil servants working in public sector in Penang. The sample of the study consisted of 74 civil servants. The sample comprised 14 from Department of Education Penang, 30 from Penang State Secretary Office and 40 from Department of Health. Convenience sampling was used to collect data from two (2) levels of categories such as Professional and Management Staff, Support Staff 1 and Support Staff 2. The selection of the respondents is based on Purposive Sampling technique.

Data Analysis

Questionnaires were used and analyzed descriptively using “Statistical Package for Social Sciences” (SPSS). Descriptive and inference analysis were carried out to meet the research objectives outlined. To test the hypothesis, CrossTab and T-Test are used to measure the correlation between dependant variables (demographic variables) and independent variables (perception).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the perception of civil servants on the knowledge of integrity showed that a lot of respondents agreed that they did understand that (a) receiving a gift (money, items, or services) as a token of appreciation is considered as bribery, (55.4% agreed while 20.3% very agreed), (b) using office money for own benefits is part of corruption (54.1% agreed, 24.6% very agreed) , (c) gaining extra money by forcing the clients – (83.8 % agreed, 12.2% very agreed) , (d) directly involved in giving out contract to own relatives, (52.7 % agreed and another 13.5 % very agreed), (e) directly involved in hiring own relatives into the departments - (40.5 % agreed, 31.1% very agreed), (f) provide false logging and accommodation claims (37.8 % agreed, 16.2 % very agreed), (g) abused office’s assets/ belongings (54.1 % agreed, 20.3% very agreed), (h) intimidating actions in order to get money from clients (52.7 % agreed, 21.6% very agreed) and (i) abused power or position in order to gain something (50% agreed, 24.3 % very agreed).

In this research, the respondents consisted of 59.5% of Support group while 40.5% came from Professional and Administration group. 52.7% were from Secondary level while 41.9% were from tertiary level. It could be stated that most of the respondents did not fully understand their job scope and responsibility. The levels of education of respondents gave us a proof that respondents who were in the mid-section of education levels needed to have their behaviour monitored. For example, in providing false logging and accommodation, it showed that they did not understand the

financial circular about making claims that is what was entitled and what was not.

Some areas of understanding such as involving oneself in hiring relatives into the departments needs to be clarified as unethical. Civil servants need to understand that it is not about the opportunity of helping their own relatives but rather as blocking others' opportunities. In the section with regard to the quality of service of the Government department and the staff's perceptions and knowledge of good quality service, the findings showed some unsure decisions. This part of study showed some aspect likes (a) in what extent the Government servants are keen to learn and know about the quality and practicing it in their daily works, (b) in what extent the Government servants are sure to treat the clients with the quality services in their works and (c) the perceptions among the Government servants in the quality of their departments in delivering the services to the public.

Similarly, the Government servants were also given the same plot from the questionnaire done on the quality of the current public service. The feedback from the Government servants showed that the unsure were 24.3 % compared to the disagreeable of 29.7%. From this perspective, some factors might have contributed to this issue of low quality of public service. Among others, Government servants tend to not to utilize efficiently their working hours while at the same time, also tend to make their clients wait for long hours.

It can be concluded herewith that most of the Government servants were not keen to give definitive or affirmative answers because of some private issues regarding their perceptions on their departments. It might also mean that it was hard to obtain the actual views from the Government servants in this section. Additionally, it also suggested that most of the Government servants were still in dilemma because of unsure decisions on their perceptions regarding the means and knowledge related to the

quality. Probably, it could be attributed to the lack of reading and slow in learning of a new thing regarding integrity introduced by their respective departments.

Section A: Perception of Civil Servants on Public Service Quality

This section deals with the perception on the quality of service in Government departments and their perceptions on the knowledge of good quality service. The survey shows some indecision on their departments. This study also shows some aspects such as:

- i. To what extent do Government servants keen to learn and know about the quality of service and practising it in their daily works?
- ii. To what extent do Government servants know on how to treat their clients with quality services?
- iii. The perceptions among the Government servants in the quality of the service provided by their departments to the public.

All of these items have brought down the quality of public service and in my point of view, it could be due to the fact that civil servants do not rely on their customers' charter. As a conclusion for this part, it is safe to say that most civil servants are not keen to provide answers especially on personal and private issues regarding their departments.

Section B: Perception of Civil Servants on organizational integrity

Overall, from the survey done on the perceptions of the civil servants on their departments' integrity, the result shows that most of them were satisfied with their organization especially in having clear sets of rules and regulations to instil integrity. It can be seen in a few criteria like:

- i. Perceptions of the staff regarding their departments
- ii. Perceptions of the staff regarding the general order, rules and regulations in their departments

- iii. Perceptions of the staff regarding the role of Government in interpreting integrity like auditing, punishment and offences of rule and accountability.
- iv. Rewarding and motivating staff to increase their integrity
- v. External influence on their department of integrity

The result shows that Government servants understanding of General Order were 51.4%, Government servants understood what was to be defined as gifts 52.7%, Government servant who agreed that the current the work conditions was comfortable for them were 66.2%, the harmonious relation between the superior and subordinates were 78.4%, the examples of good manner by their superior were 78.2%. These mean that the staffs believed that their departments were doing well in upholding the good noble values.

The percentage of civil servants who felt that their superiors treated them with unfairness was 64.4%. However, the civil servants who believed that political people did get involved in their daily works shot up to 87.8%. This shows that political influence did affect civil servants' integrity level.

The findings of this study indicate that there are significant differences on job categories and perception on the knowledge of integrity. Table 2.4 shows One Way ANOVA analyses ($F = 1.245, p > 0.005$) and shows that there is an insignificant difference in terms of job categories compared with length of services which is showed One way ANOVA ($F = 5.529, p < 0.005$) significant relationship with knowledge of integrity. The analyses shows that there is no different perception on knowledge of integrity between civil management level and support group among the civil servants but the length of services had influenced civil servants toward their knowledge and understanding. The new staff could be less knowledgeable and understanding about the rule and procedures in determining which was right and which was wrong.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

The analysis on the perception of the civil servants on integrity revealed that there were groups of civil service who were unclear and uncertain about the meaning of integrity in public sector. Those with shorter length of services were less knowledgeable on the rule and procedure which led to them being unsure about integrity. However, there are problems and limitations in this research where respondents may or may have not disclosed the actual truth when answering questions such as their own perceptions on their own departments and in particular about themselves. For that reason, future research may improve on such limitation.

Bibliography

- Abdullah, A. B., 2004. Corporate sector against corruption. *Journal of Malaysian Management Review*, 2 (2).
- Alatas S. H., 1999. *Corruption and the Destiny of Asia*, Prentice Hall (M) Sdn Bhd, Simon & Schuster (Asia) Pte. Ltd.
- Arvis J. F. & Berenbeim R., 2002. Implementing anti-corruption programs in the private sector. Lessons from East Asia. World Bank. *Malaysian Management Review Journal*. 2.
- Atory, H., 2003. *Reformasi Pentadbiran Awam Malaysia (Reforms in Malaysian Civil Service)*. Sintok: Universiti Utara Malaysia.
- Babbit, S. E., 1997. Personal Integrity, Politics and Moral Imagination,' Brennan, S; Isaacs, T. and Milde, M (eds.) *A Question of Values: New Canadian Perspectives on Ethics and Political Philosophy*. Masterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi.
- Choudhury, E., 2008. Trust in Administration: An Integrative Approach to Optimal Trust. *Journal of Administration & Society*, 40 (6), 586-620.
- Cumaraswamy, P., 2005. The Importance of a Free Press. *The Kuala Lumpur Society for Transparency and Integrity Journal*, 6 (1), 3.

- Government of Malaysia (2004). National Integrity Plan, Institut Integriti Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur
- Graaf, G. and Wal, Z., 2008. On Value Differences Experienced by Sector Switchers. *Journal of Administration & Society*, 40 (1), 79-103.
- Kaufman H., 2001. Major players: bureaucracies in American government. *Public Administration Review*, 61(1), 18-32.
- Malaysian Anti-Corruption Agency. 2005. *Laporan Buletin Tabunan BPR (BPR Annual Report Bulletin)*. Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Nasional
- Malaysia Institute of Integrity. 2005. *Booklet; From Roots to Fruits*. Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia Institute of Integrity.
- Madison J., 1788. The structure of the government must furnish the proper checks and balances between the different departments. *Federalist No 51, Independent Journal*.
- Mokhtafizam A., 2004. *Perbandingan pentadbiran sektor awam dan swasta*. Sintok: Universiti Utara Malaysia.
- Navaratnam R. V. 2003. *Malaysia's Economic Challenges. A Critical Analysis of the Malaysian Economy, Governance and Society*. Kuala Lumpur: ASEAN Academic Press.
- Noreha, H., 2008. *The Integrity of the Public Sector: Issues from within and without*. Universiti Sains Malaysia: Georgetown.
- Transparency International. 2006. Transparency International Bribe Payers Index (BPI) 2006 Analysis Report. Retrieved 21 July 2007 from <http://www.transparency.org.my/BPIAnnualReport2006.htm>
- W.Paati Ofosu-Amaah, 1999. *Combating Corruption, A Comparative Review of selected Legal Aspects of State Practice and Major International Initiatives*. The World Bank.