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Perception of Civil Servants on the Knowledge of Integrity and Corruption Level in Three State Agencies in Terengganu, Malaysia

LA PERCEPTION DES FONCTIONNAIRES DE LA CONNAISSANCE DE L'INTEGRITE ET DU NIVEAU DE CORRUPTION DANS TROIS ORGANISMES D'ÉTAT A TERENGGANU, MALAISIE

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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 objective of this research was to examine the level of awareness, knowledge and understanding of integrity among selected civil servants of three State agencies in Terengganu, Malaysia, which basically served as the scope of the research. 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 indicated 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 respective rule and procedure which led to them being unsure about integrity. The civil servants also believed that corruption level in Malaysia was still high. The research contended that length of service was inversely related to the perception on the knowledge of integrity, corruption and quality of service delivery.

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Résumé: Dans l'effort de devenir une nation pleinement développée d'ici à 2020, la Malaisie a entrepris une tâche monumentale pour inculquer des valeurs nobles dans la société, y compris dans le secteur civil. L'objectif de cette recherche était d'examiner le niveau de sensibilisation, de connaissances et de compréhension de l'intégrité des fonctionnaires sélectionnés des trois organismes d'État à Terengganu en Malaisie, qui a essentiellement servi à la portée de la recherche. Les répondants ont été sélectionnés sur la base d'une technique d'échantillonnage raisonnée. La recherche a utilisé une approche quantitative où des questions auto-administrées et structurées ont été distribuées. Des analyses descriptives et inférées ont été réalisées pour répondre aux objectifs énoncés de recherche. Les résultats de la recherche a indiqué qu'il y avait des groupes de fonctionnaires civils qui n'étaient pas claires sur le sens de l'intégrité dans le secteur public. Ceux avec une plus courte durée de services ont été trouvés d'être moins bien informés sur la règle respectueuse et la procédure, ce qui les a donné un doute sur l'intégrité. Les fonctionnaires ont également estimé que le niveau de corruption en Malaisie était toujours élevé. La recherche a fait valoir que la durée de service était liée inversement à la perception de la connaissance de l'intégrité, de la corruption et de la qualité de prestation des services.

Mots-clés: intégrité; fonctionnaires; perception; corruption; secteur privé; service public

1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysian 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 instill 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 is considered to provide a major boost to help develop the necessary human capital and knowledge resources within 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 instill 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.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

2.1 Participants and Sampling

A stratified sampling technique was used in this research. Questionnaires were distributed to three State agencies in Terengganu state which were *Majlis Bandaraya Kuala Terengganu* (MBKT) (Kuala Terengganu City Council), *Suruhanjaya Perkhidmatan Air Negara* (National Water Resources Commission), and *Wisma Negeri* (State Government). These agencies had about 40% of male staff and 60% of female staff with above 24 years old.

2.2 Instrumentation

The emphasis of the research was on quantitative survey responses, with qualitative data from focus groups used to further explicate response themes. For the quantitative survey, the research employed a researcher-designed survey instrument adapted from various research frameworks (e.g., Crowder, 2000; Kanu, 2002). The research questions were explored through a series of 50 Likert scale statements. The survey items were based on domains of integrity knowledge, integrity skills, integrity performance-related attitudes, and the application of these. The chosen domains were those that were the

most frequently cited and discussed as well as ranked the most important in the literature e.g., Adams & Keim, 2000; Bauer, 2003; Gwaltney, 2000; Kanu, 2002; Moss & Jensrud; Noe, 2002; Pugh, 2000; Walker, 2001.

The focus group interviews were conducted in Malay, the language spoken by the participants. Chronbach's *alpha* correlation was a good estimate of reliability since the major source of measurement error is because of the sampling of content. According to Martella et al. (1999), the more consistent the items are, the higher the *alpha* coefficient, resulting in a more reliable measurement instrument.

This research employed a mixed methods design. The emphasis was on quantitative survey data, with qualitative data from focus group interviews used to further clarify response themes. The statistics that were employed to analyze the survey response data included descriptive statistics, such as measures of central tendency and response frequencies and percentages; Cronbach's *alpha* correlation to test inter-item reliability among the survey items combined into four total variables that addressed the four research questions; and *t* tests to compare male and female participants' responses to the total variables. The qualitative data analysis was achieved by tape recording, transcribing, reading, rereading, and coding. The data were coded relative to themes explored through the questions asked in the focus group interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Gall et al., 2003; Wiersma, 2000).

2.3 Procedures

The letters of permission and receipt acknowledgement were submitted to the respective respondent agencies. A copy of the permission and receipt letters were given to the person in charge of the distribution of questionnaire in each department. Once approval was granted, the permission to distribute the questionnaire form was requested through a receipt note. The person in charge signed the receipt acknowledgement letter stating the amount of questionnaires received for all their staff. The receipt letter served as the proof for the person in charge to ensure the right amounts of returned questionnaires. The questionnaire forms were then distributed and collected by our enumerators to and from the respective state agencies. The time given to complete the questionnaires was three days.

2.4 Pilot Test

The instrument was used in a pilot study conducted among 30 students of University Technology Mara Terengganu. Feedback from the pilot test was used to refine the survey instrument.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Sample Characteristics

The total number of respondents was 150. The data revealed that the majority of the respondents were female (74.0%) as compared to male (26.0%). The respondents comprised of 40 (26.7%) Professional and Administration, 110(73.3%) Support Group. The age average of respondents was 33.4 years. In term of religion, 148 (98.6%) were Muslim while two (1.4%) were Buddha. Average length of service for both male and female was 15.2 years. In terms of education, the majority of the respondents had secondary level which were 39 (52.7%) and 31 (41.9 %) tertiary level and four for primary level (5.4%). Majority of respondents were permanent staff which were 112 (74.7%) and 38 (25.3%) were contract staff.

3.2. Perception of Civil Servants on the Knowledge of Integrity

In this part, a lot of the respondents agreed that they understood that:

- a) Receiving a gift (money, items, or services) as a token of appreciation – is considered as bribery, (54.3% agreed while 34.7% did not)
- b) Using office money for own benefit – is part of corruption (51% agreed, 39% did not)

- c) Gaining extra money by forcing the clients – (56.6 % agreed, 31.4% did not)
- d) Directly involved in giving out contract to own relatives, (55.3 % agreed and another 31.7 % did not)
- e) Directly involved in hiring relatives into own departments - (46.6 % agreed, 41.4% did not)
- f) Provided false logging and accommodation claims (41.1 % agreed, 37.9 % did not)
- g) Abused of office's assets/belongings (40.1 % agreed, 42.5% did not)
- h) Intimidating actions in order to get money from clients (51.8 % agreed, 28.7% did not)
- i) Abused power/position in order to gain something (53% agreed, 27 % did not)

Apart from what the above results, it was also important to look at the percentage on 'Not Sure' for this category. There was high percentage of 'Not Sure' answers in every question. The highest percentage in this part was registered in questions of providing false logging and accommodation, (21%), receiving a gift (money, items, or services) as a token of appreciation (11%), Using office money for your own benefit (10%), intimidating actions in order to get money from clients (19.5%), directly involved in hiring own relatives into the departments (12%), gaining extra money by forcing the clients (12%), directly involved in giving out contract to own relatives (13%), abuse of office's assets (17.4%) and lastly abused power/position in order to gain something (20%). This percentage suggested as if those employees did not understand what they were supposed to understand as civil servants.

It can be inferred herewith that most of the government servants were not keen to give definitive or affirmative answers because of some private issues with regard to their perceptions on their own departments. It might have also meant it was hard to get the real views from the government servants in this section. Additionally, it also suggested that most of the government servants were unsure of their perceptions regarding the means and knowledge related to the quality.

3.3. Perception of Civil Servants of Corruption Level in the Civil Service

The point of discussion on the level of perceptions among the civil servants in Kuala Terengganu was focused on few significant areas. The significant areas were as follow;

- a) Effectiveness of Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) as the main enforcement agency in combating corruptions in Malaysia.
- b) Laws pertaining to corruptions, abuse of power and malpractices.
- c) Level of corruption of civil servants and in politics.

As for the level of corruption perceived by the civil servants in Malaysia and where Malaysia politics was concerned, the results showed that a majority of civil servants perceived that the corruption in politics was worse than the corruption in the public sector. 94 respondents disagreed that the perception on level of corruption in Malaysia was low and 99 respondents disagreed that the level of corruption in Malaysian politics was low and 75 respondents disagreed that the level of corruption in public sector was low respectively. These indicated that the level perceived by Terengganu civil servants on those three variables were quite low. This also showed that they were in the opinion that the level of corruption in Malaysia was generally quite high.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis on the perception of the civil servants on integrity reveals that there were groups who were unclear and uncertain about the meaning of integrity in public sector. Those with younger age were less knowledgeable on the rule and procedure which led to them being in the state of being unsure about integrity. The results also indicated that the civil servants believed that corruption level in Malaysia was high. It therefore can be contended that younger age was inversely related to perception on the knowledge of integrity, corruption and quality of service delivery.

The research could be treated as the beginning of a line of investigations examining the relationship between the perception of civil servants on public service quality and the perception of civil servants on

organizational integrity. These could be a highly relevant future extension of this research.

Future works of similar nature may expand on the scope and thereby be able to generate more comprehensive results of nationwide level.

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