

The Perception of Integrity of Three Public Agencies in Kuala Terengganu

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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 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 Terengganu, 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. For that reason, future research should identify the causes that will lead to enhancement of perception of integrity.

Key words: Integrity • Civil Servants • Perception • Corruption • Public Service

INTRODUCTION

The “National Integrity Plan (NIP)” was launched to realize one of the Malaysia’s Vision 2020 main challenges which is; the challenge to build a morally and ethically sound society where each individual encompasses strong religion and spiritual belief strongly rooted from 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 ethnic groups in Malaysia [1].

Malaysia Public Sector includes the Federal and State Governments, Statutory Bodies and Local Authorities. The last twenty years have seen major changes and innovations being introduced into the civil sector in order to provide better services to the public. According to Hassan [2], 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*) issued and to be put into effect through the implementation of public service administrative circulars (*Pekeliling Kemajuan Pentadbiran Awam (PKPA)*). Although a lot of successes have been achieved, a lot more remain to be done. Obviously, the commitment of civil servants plays a vital role to ensure that the implementations of Government policies are well-executed and delivered to the public.

According to Badawi [3], the establishment of Malaysia Institute of Integrity (MII) would help to develop the necessary human capital and knowledge resources within the civil sector. By year 2008, NIP aims to significantly reduce corruption, malpractices and abuse of power as well as to increase efficiency of the public delivery system and overcome bureaucratic red-tape. Public sector serves as the main platform with

which to increase efficiency of the Government. However, the main obstacle to the achievement of the NIP Target 2008 was the perception that the public sector and the elected and appointed representatives were corrupt and inefficient. In other words, misuse of power and corruption were rampant among civil servants.

Literature Review: 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 [4]. 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 [5]. 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 [6]. According to Oosu-Amaah [7], the Asia and Pacific regions are characterized by countries with a range of institutional development in safeguarding integrity and accountability in their administrations, while Syed Hussein Alatas [8] writes that the near absence of corruption problem in Singapore means that the authority is not dominated and manipulated by corrupt elements. In other words, it is possible for a generation to go through life without having to bribe government servants in their transactions with the authority; that taxes are properly collected; that the courts are not at the service of the corrupt; that the police perform their duty without bribes; and so do the other services for the public. Babbitt [9] notes that 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 raised. The above examples reveal 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. Besides, integrity 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.

Corruption reduces the efficiency of firms and increases the transaction costs of doing business [10, 11] and it has a composite effect spreading throughout the total life of society. Madison in *Federalist No.51* [12] argues that the check and balance would prevent one breach of Government from abusing their power, because men are not angels and there needs to be a method of not only governing the people but also governing themselves. This is why it is so important that public servants need to understand what their obligations are and their responsibilities and it have also prevented the growth of openness and accountability in the government [13] which contribute to economic inefficiency [14]. They need to be clear with what they do before asking others to follow the rules especially to those with younger age who are not aware of the importance of integrity. They need to be clear with what they do before asking others to follow the rules [15].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research evaluated the performances of three government agencies in Kuala 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). We chose these government agencies because of several contributing factors such as time constraint, cost and the easiness with which information could be obtained as they were near with our base. These agencies had about 40% of male staff and 60% of female staff with above 24 years old. A stratified sampling technique was used in this research as we focused on government agencies that involved delivery service to the people.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perception Civil Servants on the Knowledge of Integrity: The levels of education of respondents indicated that respondents who were in the secondary of educations needed to be monitored closely especially their behaviors. In providing false logging and accommodation for example, it was shown that they did not understand

the 'pekeliling kewangan' (Treasury General Orders) in order to make a claim; what was entitled and what was not. Understanding some aspects such as involving oneself in hiring relatives into the departments needed to be clarified as unethical. They needed to understand that it was not about opportunity of helping their own relatives but as blocking others' opportunity. 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.

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 shall be focused on few significant areas. The significant areas are as follow:

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

On the issue of the effectiveness of MACC as an enforcement agency in combating corruptions in Malaysia, the statistics show that the majority of respondents had doubts with unsure over the effectiveness of MACC (score of average is 3.06). This shows that despite MACC's efforts to prove its effectiveness, they still failed to convince the civil servants in Terengganu.

As for the level of corruption perceived by the civil servants in Malaysia and where Malaysia politics is concerned, this shows that a majority of civil servants perceive that the corruption in politics is worse than the corruption in the public sector. This also shows that they were in the opinion that the level of corruption in Malaysia was generally quite high.

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 showed some indecision on their departments. This study also showed some aspects such as:

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

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 showed that most of the respondents were satisfied with their organizations especially in having clear sets of rules and regulations to instill integrity. It can be seen in a few criteria like:

- Perceptions of the staff regarding their departments.
- Perceptions of the staff regarding the general order, rules and regulations in their departments.
- Perceptions of the staff regarding the role of government in interpreting integrity like auditing, punishment and offences of rule and accountability.
- Rewarding and motivating staff to increase their integrity.
- External influence on their department of integrity.

CONCLUSION

The analysis on the perception of the civil servants on integrity revealed 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 unsure about integrity. Younger age was inversely related to perception on the knowledge of integrity, corruption and quality of service delivery.

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