

## Knowledge and Perception of Integrity among Penang Civil Servants

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**Abstract:** The integrity of the civil servants needs to be greatly improved in order to turn Malaysian Vision 2020 into a reality. This objective of this research was to determine 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. In this research, respondents might or might have not disclosed the actual truth when answering questions. Most heads of departments might have not wanted to disclose actual work realities of their offices. They, in particular, did not want to wash their dirty linen in public. For that reason, future research may improve on such limitation.

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

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### INTRODUCTION

Malaysian in its effort to become a fully developed nation by 2020 has undertaken a huge step in instilling noble values into its society including its civil sector by launching the 'National Integrity Plan' (NIP). NIP is a holistic plan aiming to tackle negative values in the society in an effort to instil the value of integrity among ethnic groups in Malaysia [1]. In order to achieve this, the Government felt that it was only appropriate that civil servants formed the integral part of the instilling process by emphasizing on one of the noble values which was integrity. Among the goals outlined were to effectively reduce the levels of corruption, abuse of powers, malpractices and consequently to improve the efficiency in public delivery system through the reduction of bureaucratic red-tapes.

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*) which was 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. The commitment of civil servants still has to play a vital role to ensure that the implementations of Government policies are well-executed and well-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 aimed

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 perceived to rampant among civil servants.

**Literature Review:** Corruption reduces the efficiency of firms and increases the transaction costs of doing business [4, 5] and it has a composite effect spreading throughout the total life of society. Madison in *Federalist No. 51* [6] argues that the check and balance would prevent one branch of Government from abusing its power. This is why it is so important that public servants need to fully understand their obligations and responsibilities of which failure will prevent the growth of openness and accountability in the Government [7] as well as economic inefficiency [8]. 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 [9].

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 [10]. 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 [11]. 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 [12]. According to Oosu-Amaah [13], 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 [14] notes 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 public services providers.

Babbitt [15] argues 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 be raised. The above argument 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. 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.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Data Analysis:** 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, 20 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 20 from Professional and Management Staff, 54 from Support Staff 1 and Support Staff 2. The selection of the respondents was based on Purposive Sampling technique.

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 One Way Anova were 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 imply 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 for 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 were keen to learn and know about the quality and practicing it in their daily works, (b) in what extent the Government servants were 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 were inclined to not to utilize efficiently their working hours while at the same time, also likely to make their clients wait for long hours.

It can be concluded 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.

The discussion on the levels of perceptions among the civil servants in Penang also focused on few significant areas. The significant areas were (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 and (c) 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 showed that the majority of respondents doubted the effectiveness of MACC (score of average was 2.55). This showed that despite MACC's efforts to prove its effectiveness, they still failed to convince the civil servants in Penang. The role played by mass media showed a mean of 2.42 that indicates civil servants in Penang believed that the roles played by mass media was less supportive of MACC roles and this could be a reason on why civil servants had doubts over the effectiveness of MACC. Furthermore, this fact was supported by the percentage who disagreed (64.9%) compared to 17.6% who agreed with the statement with 86.5% were unsure. This can be further summarised by the cross tabulation below.

As far as the laws pertaining to corruption, abuse of power and malpractices are concerned, the issues scored among the highest mean [4.01 on the clarity of laws on corruption, 3.89 on the sufficiency of the laws and 3.65 on

effectiveness of preventive measures]. This showed that respondents almost unanimously agreed that Malaysia had ample laws and preventive measures in combating corruption, abuse of power and malpractices. Additionally, this could be proven from the percentages of respondents in answering the questions where 91.9% agreed on the clarity and sufficiency of laws on corruption in Malaysia. This was supported from their answers where 74.4% agreed that effective preventive measures were undertaken by the Government of Malaysia.

A cross tabulation between the opinions on the clarity and sufficiency of law showed that 68 respondents agreed to the idea. However, a mixed response appeared on the cross tabulation between the clarity of law and effectiveness of preventive measures. This again could be caused by the failure in the role of mass media in promoting prevention measures.

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

- Effectiveness of 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 showed that the majority of respondents had doubts over the effectiveness of MACC (score of average is 2.55). This shows that despite MACC's efforts to prove its effectiveness, they still failed to convince the civil servants in Penang. This probably due to the facts that civil servants in Penang believed that the roles played by mass media is less supportive of MACC roles and this could be a reason on why civil servants had doubts over the effectiveness of MACC.

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As for the level of corruption perceived by the civil servants in Malaysia and where Malaysia politics is concerned, the figures represent another outcome. Relatively the means for perception on level of corruption in Malaysia, level of corruption in Malaysian politics and level of corruption in public sector are 1.73, 1.41 and 1.88 respectively. These indicate that the level perceived by Penang civil servants on those three variables are quite low. This also shows that they were in the opinion that the level of corruption in Malaysia was generally quite high.

A cross check on the percentage of these three variables reveals that 91.9% of the respondents said that the level of corruption was high because they did not subscribe to the question posed in level of corruption in Malaysia. Whereas, even higher percentage did not agree that the level of corruption in Malaysian politics was quite low (94.9%). The most intriguing part is that 82.4% agreed that the level of corruption in public sector was quite high. This basically reveals that civil servants in Penang knew and admitted that the corruption level in public sector was high.

The reason for this failure could be caused by lack of effective laws curbing corruptions among civil servants as evident in the percentage of effective laws in curbing corruptions among civil servants where 81.1% said that it was not effective. Another reason is because of civil servants in Penang believed that the safety of informers or witnesses in corruption cases was not guaranteed by the law and MACC.

**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:

- To what extent do Government servants keen to learn and know about the quality of service and practising 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.

All of these items have brought down the quality of public service and in our 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.

**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 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:

- 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.

The result showed 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 meant 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 showed that political influence did affect civil servants' integrity level.

The findings of this study indicated that there were 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 showed that there was 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. Based on the findings of the study, in order to enhance the public management sector as well Government agencies, it is recommended that MACC to be made an independent body that answers directly to the Parliament. By doing this, the degree of impartiality shall be improved and the level of effectiveness will be increased and also laws pertaining to security of informers and witnesses should be amended by giving proper and full protection to the witnesses. Allowing witnesses to give evidence through video conference and a witness protection program as carried out in the United States of America are just as appropriate in Malaysia.

However, there are problems and limitations in this research where respondents might or might 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.

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