

The organizational ethical self-identity precautionary model through self-regulating of Malaysian public sector: conceptual analysis

El modelo de precaución de la identidad ética de la organización a través de la autorregulación del sector público de Malasia: análisis conceptual

Norazamina Mohamed*

Universiti Teknologi MARA - MALAYSIA
norazmi@tganu.uitm.edu.my

Suraya Ahmad

Universiti Teknologi MARA - MALAYSIA
surayaahmad@utem.edu.my

Najihah Marha Yaacob

Universiti Teknologi MARA - MALAYSIA
najihaam@tganu.uitm.edu.my

Azizah Abdullah

Universiti Teknologi MARA - MALAYSIA
drazizahabdullah@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study are to explore the five elements of public sector ethical self-identity precautionary and to propose the Organizational Ethical Self-Identity Precautionary Model in enhancing ethical accountability of the Malaysian Public Sector. This study employed qualitative research by analyzing data from interviews with key informers of the public sector using conceptual content analysis. The study revealed five elements of Organizational Ethical Self-Identity Precautionary Model which are ethical leadership (8 attributes), ethical employees (9 attributes), spirituality encouragement (6 attributes), spirituality acceptance (6 attributes) and code of ethical conduct (5 attributes). These identified elements and their attributes should become the ethical identity and ethical direction of the Malaysian Public Sector. This would enhance the ethical accountability of Malaysia Public Sector which further improved the trust among Malaysian and the international community towards the governance of the public sector.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, ethical employees, spirituality encouragement, spirituality acceptance, code of ethical conduct.

RESUMEN

Los objetivos de este estudio son explorar los cinco elementos de la autoidentidad ética pública preventiva y proponer el Modelo de precaución de autoidentidad ética organizacional para mejorar la responsabilidad ética del Sector Público de Malasia. Este estudio empleó investigación cualitativa mediante el análisis de datos de entrevistas con informantes clave del sector público mediante el análisis de contenido conceptual. (8 atributos), empleados éticos (9 atributos), estímulo a la espiritualidad (6 atributos), aceptación de la espiritualidad (6 atributos) y código de conducta ética (5 atributos). Estos elementos identificados y sus atributos deben convertirse en la identidad ética y la dirección ética del Sector Público de Malasia. Esto mejoraría la responsabilidad ética del Sector Público de Malasia, lo que mejoraría aún más la confianza entre la comunidad malaya e internacional hacia la gobernanza del sector público.

Palabras clave: liderazgo ético, empleados éticos, estímulo a la espiritualidad, aceptación de la espiritualidad, código de conducta ética

* Faculty of Accountancy, Universiti Teknologi MARA. Corresponding author.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Public sector plays a significant role in achieving economic growth of a nation. Thus, if the public sector is not managed in an ethical manner, the country may collapse as experienced by some countries such as Sweden¹ and India². Public sector refers to the entities that exist and people employed for the benefit of the public³. According to Federal Constitution Article 132, Malaysia has five categories of public sector organizations which are the state departments, federal departments, statutory bodies, local authorities and district and land office⁴. These organizations were established to provide efficient and ethical public services.

Figure 1. Attributes of Ethical Leadership



Newspapers and online Medias have widely reported the unethical conduct such as fraud and corruption involving the top and medium management of the public sector. They had reported on the misbehavior of some members of Federation Department, Local Authorities, State Department, Statutory Bodies and Land and District Office⁵⁻⁷. These fraud and corruption cases were proven through the accusation and arrestment made by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission. As a result, the public sector organizations loss the public trust and incur high cost of rectifying the damages of fraud and corruptions. As a preventive alternative, the public sector should apply the concept of self- regulation Self-regulation is to enhance ethical accountability of public sector for precaution purposes from any unethical conducts and to guide the employees' behavior to a directed aim or goal⁸. It covers the self-imposed behavioral standards, process or activity determined internally by the management without interference

from outside influence⁹. According to High Level Finance Committee Report, the corporate governance focuses on directing and managing business and its affairs towards improving businesses' prosperity and corporate accountability¹⁰. Thus it is recommended for the Malaysian Public Sector to improve their public services by giving high priority to the ethical accountability. This can be realized through self-regulation of the public sector by inculcating the ethical culture. Ethical culture can be measured from various perspectives such as companies' ethics codes of ethics, leadership effectiveness, authority structures; self-regulating capacity (Code of Corporate Conduct and management behavior), self-providing capacity and self-correcting and self-cleansing capacity; process of integrity and long term perspective ¹¹⁻¹². In fact, strong ethical culture will ease the establishment of ethical corporate identity¹³.

Thus, the objectives of the study are to explore the five elements of public sector ethical self-identity precautionary

and to propose the Organizational Ethical Self-Identity Precautionary Model of Malaysian Public Sector.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Subject: The subjects of the study consisted of key informers (KIs) from four government agencies or departments; statutory body (10), local authority (6), state department (6) and federation department (9). These organizations were well-known with the identity of ethical practices while the key informers were those who had experiences and knowledgeable in the subject matters under this study.

Settings: The KIs from each government agency or department were interviewed by the researchers using the protocol questions at their premises. The involvement of the researchers' during the interview was for the purpose of validity and reliability.

Procedures: The data collected were analyzed by performing the conceptual content analysis using NVivo11 software. This was to determine the elements of ethical self-identity precautionary in Malaysian Public Sector and the attributes/themes in each element. The analysis has suggested that these elements were valid concepts to be integrated under organizational ethical self-identity precautionary model.

Data Collection: KIs were selected by using the criterion purposive sampling. The interviews were recorded manually using the field notes. The recording was organized chronologically using both tacit and explicit information.

3. RESULTS

The number of KI interviewed in this study is shown in table 1. KIs are the manager/head of department/unit in the respective statutory body (SB), local authority (LA), federation department (FD) and state department (SD).

Table 1. No of key informers according to four categories of public sector

	SB	LA	FD	SD
No of Key Informers	10	6	9	6

Ethical Leadership

The KIs in this study have highlighted eight attributes of ethical leadership, which are the role model, attachment, ethical support, knowledgeable, disciplined, leaders' spirituality encouragement, virtue values and shared values as shown in Figure 1. The ethical leadership attributes were further identified as in table 2.

Table 2. Coverage of ethical leadership attributes

Attributes	Explanation/Sub attributes
Role Model	Ethical by example Ethical Values by example Self-behavior by example Proper/Accurate execution by Example
Attachment	Communication Firm messages/statement Clear instructions Direct Interaction/ Acknowledgement
	Concern Caring Consideration Understandable
	Approachability Willing to listen Willing to learn Willing to give and take
Ethical support	Consistent ethics reminder Against immoral activities
Knowledgeable	a. Works related knowledge
	b. Relevant related knowledge

Disciplined	Control of one's behavior and actions Understand company's objectives/ aims Understand own's works Be Strict Follow rules
Virtue values	Responsible, independent view, competency, be neutral, firm, honest and hold to religion.
Shared values	Accountability, teamwork, customer focused, continuous improvement, good governance, confidentiality, integrity, transparent.
Leaders' Spirituality Encouragement	Holistic and inter connected

Ethical Employees

The KIs further highlighted nine attributes of ethical employees which are honest, follow instructions, presence of duties, respect, Islamic value, virtue values, loyalty, attachment and financial planning as shown in figure 2.

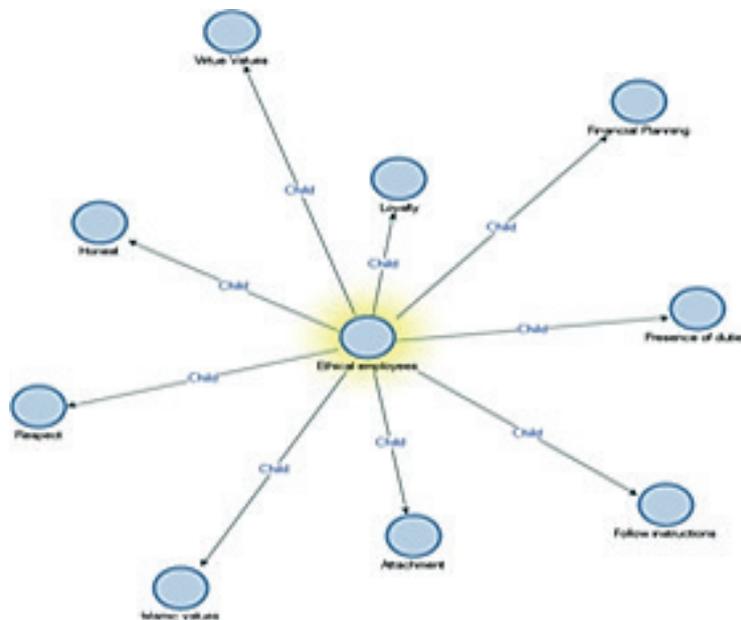


Figure 2. Attributes of Ethical Employees

The ethical employees' attributes were further identified as in table 3.

Table 3. Coverage of s of Ethical Employee

Attributes	Explanation/sub-attributes
Honest	Responsible Integrity
Follow instructions	Confidentiality Timeliness Dress code
Presence of duties	Discipline
Respect	Consideration Teamwork Communication
Islamic value	Duty is ibadah
Virtue values	Neutral Independent
Loyalty	Proud as part of organization Long tenure

Loyalty	Proud as part of organization Long tenure
Attachment	Strong self-belonging
Financial Planning	Good in income management

Spirituality encouragement and spirituality acceptance

The KI(s) have identified six attributes of spirituality encouragement which are the spiritual program, spiritual reminders, addin in working, human capital (modal insan), embark Islamic policy and instilling Islamic values. While for the spirituality acceptance, there are also six attributes which are harmonize values, positive commitment, change of behavior, inner-self, truly open for guidance (can receive advice) and religion as good value.

Code of Ethical Conduct

According to KIs element of ethics is practiced in each area/unit/section/department with complete ethical guidelines or code of ethics is still in progress. KIs agree that ethical guidelines or code of ethics have five attributes which are guidance, communication, check and balance, concern on stakeholder and compliance. The detail coverage of ethical guidelines attributes is shown in table 4.

Table 4. Coverage of ethical guidelines attributes

Attributes	Explanation/Sub attributes
Guidance	Statement of Policy (Integrity, No Gift) Workplace Requirement Employees Values
Communication	Formal Up-Front
Check and Balance	Preventive Minimize pressure
Concern on stakeholders	Customer Public
Compliance	Follow procedures Firmed Regulation

4. DISCUSSION

The present study addressed five elements of ethical self-identity precautionary which are ethical leadership, ethical employees, spirituality encouragement, spirituality acceptance and code of ethical conduct. Blake and Mouton Leadership Grid has two dimensions of leader behaviour, concern for people and concern for production – performance¹⁴ which was also found in the eight attributes of ethical leadership in this study. The nine attributes of ethical leadership also demonstrate normative conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships. The findings for ethical leadership have similarities with the outline given by Thorton¹⁵. According to Thorton¹⁵ cited in Fernandez¹⁶, ethical leadership is about model ethical behavior where a leader must adhere to high ethical standards, treats others with respect and authenticity, willing to talk honestly about ethical choices in the working life, adopt transparency in decision-making and communications, recognize and reward examples of ethical behavior and treats ethics as an ongoing learning journey. This study found similar attributes when the KIs indicate ethical leadership is concerning of the role model, attachment, ethical support, knowledgeable, disciplined, virtue values and shared values. This study found one additional attribute which was not discussed in literature which is leaders’ spirituality encouragement.

The findings of nine attributes of ethical employees in this study reflected the employee voluntary behavior that does not violate significantly from organizational norms and inculcate these attributes may protect the interest of an organization, its member, or both¹⁷. It seems that KIs practice behavior that is accordance to the sound moral principles inclusive of fairness, justice and trust that governed the behavior at the individual and organization levels¹⁸. There are some similarities between ethical leadership and ethical employees such as attachment, virtue values, shared values. Thus, it is true enough that ethical employee is a substantive basis to become an ethical leader as concurred by Wiley¹⁹.

One interesting finding regarding spirituality encouragement and spirituality acceptance in Malaysian Public Sector is the KIs understanding of spirituality which they relate it to religion. Thus, it is similar with one of the definitions given by Trevino et al ²⁰. The definition of spirituality is based on various perspectives such as intrinsic-original view, religious view and existentialist view²⁰. Religious view specifically refers to a particular religion which in the context of Malaysian Public Sector, they refer to the teaching of Islam. This is true because

94% of the KIs are Muslim. This is again true as majority of the government servants are Malays who religion is Islam. KIs believe spirituality (religion) encouragement can be in the form of program, reminders, workplace, policies, values and through human resources and they also believe spirituality (religion) acceptance is about one self who instill harmonize values and willing to accept advice. In addition, there must be a change of behavior to positive commitment and accept religion as good value.

A code is a formal written statement to portray ethical practices of companies that become the legal standards for placing self-regulation in the organizations²¹⁻²². In this study, a code is for the organization to guide, monitor and influence its members. In addition, the code is to communicate the ethical practices and to check and balance the actions done by the members, concern on stakeholders and for the members to comply with the standards or ethical guidelines.

Thus, this study proposes the Organizational Ethical Self-Identity Precautionary Model in enhancing ethical accountability of Malaysian Public Sector.



Figure 3. Organizational ethical self-identity precautionary model.

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Findings of the study were beneficial to discover the ethical precautionary elements to be adopted in an organization for the purpose of enhancing ethical accountability. However, findings of the study cannot be generalized to be made inference upon the public sector in the international level. KIs of this research are majority Malays who accept Islam as a way of life despite the multi races in Malaysia. Thus, it is the researchers' opinion that all elements in this study are to be taken into consideration in all organization.

6. CONCLUSION

Public sector organizations should improve the trust among Malaysian and the international community. This will become reality if the sector instills ethical culture which can prevent the unethical conduct. Strong ethical culture may lead to an ethical corporate identity. The identified elements in this study and their attributes should become the ethical culture in all organization and represents the ethical identity and ethical direction of the Malaysian Public Sector. As a result, this will enhance ethical accountability of Malaysia Public Sector. Ethical corporate identity is when the leaders and employees are

ethical and follow the ethical as prescribed by the organization which promotes high ethical values that enable to inculcate a positive state of mind towards society and environment.

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