WORKFORCE COMMITMENT IN MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT FRONTLINE AGENCIES

MOOI WAH KIAN

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study is to determine the level of frontline employees'commitment and identify the different factors that affect this commitment level. The problem statement, compiled from real life happenings based on feedback from the general public, shows that the target Public Departments are experiencing a sharp increase in public complaints about the delivery and quality of public services. This, directly and indirectly, shows both a slag and a lag of commitment level of the Civil servants in Malaysia. The research methodology provides a framework of an organized and systematic approach to understanding and resolving the issues discussed in this study, based on core features identified in the literature review. Despite the availability of many scales to measure organizational commitment, the instrument adopted here is the Alan and Meyer's Organizational Commitment Scale - Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire, Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), Minnesota Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ).Out of a total of 700 questionnaires distributed to Kuala Lumpur City Hall, Kuala Lumpur Police and Kuala Lumpur Public Work Department, 547 returned usable questionnaires were processed, and the results tabulated, analysed and interpreted. The overall findings show that the civil servants in the said target agencies and departments were comfortable in their current employment as there was no intention to leave. The general conclusion suggests that the surveyed Malaysian frontline workforce has identified itself well as civil servants, but with little obligation to remain loyal despite some complaints about current employment conditions. Nevertheless, they did not feel stressful or burnt out, and they had no intention to leave the services. This study recommends that, for frontline civil servants to be more committed to their respective organizations, their respective management should focus on factors such as decision making responsibility, resource adequacy, effective communication, challenging job and job satisfaction in order to induce their frontline employees to be committed in the delivery of effective and effective public services on time and every time, assuming the job stability in government service as a given *ceteris paribus*.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised /read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, as a thesis for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr Oo Yu Hock
Asia e University
Supervisor

Prof Dr Ahmad Atory bin Hussain
University Putra Malaysia
External Examiner 2

Dr Hardev Kaur a/p Latchimanan Singh
Universiti Teknologi MARA
External Examiner 3

Dr Ali Bin Boerhannoeddin
Universiti Malaya
External Examiner 1

Prof. Dr Siow Heng Loke
Asia e University
Chairman, Examination Committee

This thesis was submitted to Asia e University and is accepted as fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Assoc Prof Dr Wan Sabri Bin Wan Hussin
Dean, School of Management

Prof Dr Siow Heng Loke
Dean, School of Graduate Studies

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilled of the PhD degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree

Name of Candidate: Mooi Wah Kian

Signature of Candidate: Date:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

KL	Kuala Lumpur
QCC	Quality Control Circle
TQM	Total Quality Management.

In Figure 3.3: The Path Diagram of the Burnt-out construct

DP: Depersonalization
PA: Personal Accomplishment
EE: Emotional Exhaustion

In Figure 3.4: The Measurement Model

E COMM: Employee Communication
JOB SAT: Job Satisfaction
BURN: Burn Out/Burnt-out
COMM: Communication

In Figure 3.6: The Structural Model - Model 1

In Figure 3.7: The Structural Model - Model 2

In Figure 3.8: The Structural Model - Model 3

CHAL: Challenges
RES: Resources
E COMM: Employee Communication
DEC: Decision
COMM: Communication
JSAT: Job Satisfaction
INTEN: Intention to Leave
BURN: Burn Out/Burnt-out

DEDICATION

To my beloved wife

Cheah Lee Chu,

My children

Mooi Shu Yi and Mooi Yu Hang.

Without their patience, understanding, support, and most of all their love, the completion of this work would not have been possible.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A nagging issue of public interest that provides a continuing platform for political campaign agenda and a persistent feed for media publicity in Malaysia is the increasing and recurring number of public complaints against inefficient government agencies and the declining quality of their public service delivery. It pivots on the relationship between job attitudes and work performances of governmental workforce, particularly the front line employees who should have resolved the complaints immediately and effectively. This suggests that the issue is less the efficacy of political will and articulated governance but more the slack of consistent enforcement and pockets of questionable workforce. The values of efficacy and consistency in public service delivery, born out of people performances and functional human behaviours, are translated expressions of on-the-job employee engagement and commitment, manifested in levels and intensity of human motivation and satisfaction, or alternatively, the rate of employee turnover (intent to leave) and burnt out (stress). In essence, the nagging issue that plagues public service remains a human or people problem which, in the context of this study, is focused on an analysis of workforce commitment in Malaysian Government frontline agencies.

When determining public service, the measures of ‘publicness’ include the extent of its distinction from the private sector, the scope and composition of service recipients, the magnitude and intensity of its socio economic role, the degree of its public accountability and the level of public trust. This implies that the political processes and the changing policies it produces, rather than the technical certainties of economic theory, should be the guiding milestone. In the context of Malaysian public administration, the publicness in public service has become less a bone of contention than the quality of the public services being delivered, even though the debate continues about the encroachment of private interests into public realm, tempered by changing demands in the political environment. The fact remains that the quality of public service has declined, especially in terms of the publicity-driven relationship between the volumes of public complaints received by the Public Complaint Bureau in the Prime Minister’s Department and the perceived incapacity of frontline government agencies to deal with them effectively. How to improve the quality of public services delivery is no less important than understanding and rectifying the weak linkages within and outside government institutions, particularly frontline agencies that may harbor a large workforce with increasing failings that include employee commitment to organization and work as well. The latter is manifested in the growing number of public complaints, often repeated ones in different forms and articulations, which have remained neglected and unresolved until they become the cynosure of media publicity and political fanfare.

Even though the extent and intensity of a commitment may vary with the degree of reciprocity among and between the three-agency government workforce (a total of 600-frontline employees), the findings have established that there is a relationship between the level of workforce commitment and satisfaction and employee job attitudes which affects quality service delivery. This is evident in the number of public complaints received at the 12-frontline counters in Kuala Lumpur City Hall, the 39-frontline counters in Kuala Lumpur Police and the 11-frontline counters in Kuala Lumpur Public Works Department.

1.1 Background of the Study

In 2020, Malaysia hopes to achieve her vision of becoming one of the most developed and progressive countries in the Southeast Asian region and in the world. The country, until today, is experiencing problems with its bureaucracy, particularly in the way its government agencies are operating and responding to public services delivery. The Public Complaint Bureau in the Prime Minister's Department is touted to receive hundreds of letters regarding the employee dissatisfaction, inefficient and neglected delivery of due services, and a menu of complaints by numerous citizens about the services in various government frontline agencies. Furthermore, the aggrieved public has voiced their discontent in print and electronic media, adding fuel to fire and thus denting the general public image of good government delivery systems.

Some of the critical questions related to this negative publicity include the following: Why is it that such complaints are mounting when the government has allocated a big portion of its budget for these agencies to improve staff performance and, at the same time, improve their working environment to induce better productivity? Has the employee commitment in government frontline agencies been slacking and slow to tackle the backlog of problems and resolve issues? What are the factors that have affected workplace commitment? Can the workforce commitment be further improved to encourage more effective and efficient frontline government agencies?

1.2 Problem Statement

Feedback from the general public in terms of complaints about different facets of public service delivery is the backbone to achieving the purpose and objectives of this study. The cumulative increase in public complaints in the Public Departments suggests, among other possible reasons, a lag of commitment among the Civil servants in Malaysia. And this issue has been raised intermittently within the Civil Service itself and in public forum and media special editions over the years. From the year 2009 to 2012, the Police Department, the Public Works Department and the Kuala Lumpur City Hall were among the top three frontline departments that have received the highest number of complaints from the public. The overall number of complaints derived from the Public Complaint Bureau, Prime Minister's Department, is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Statistics of Public Complaints

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Public Complaints	1788	5609	12,683	13,352	14,700

Source: Public Complaint Bureau

The numbers in Table 1.1 are translated into a more visible graph to highlight:

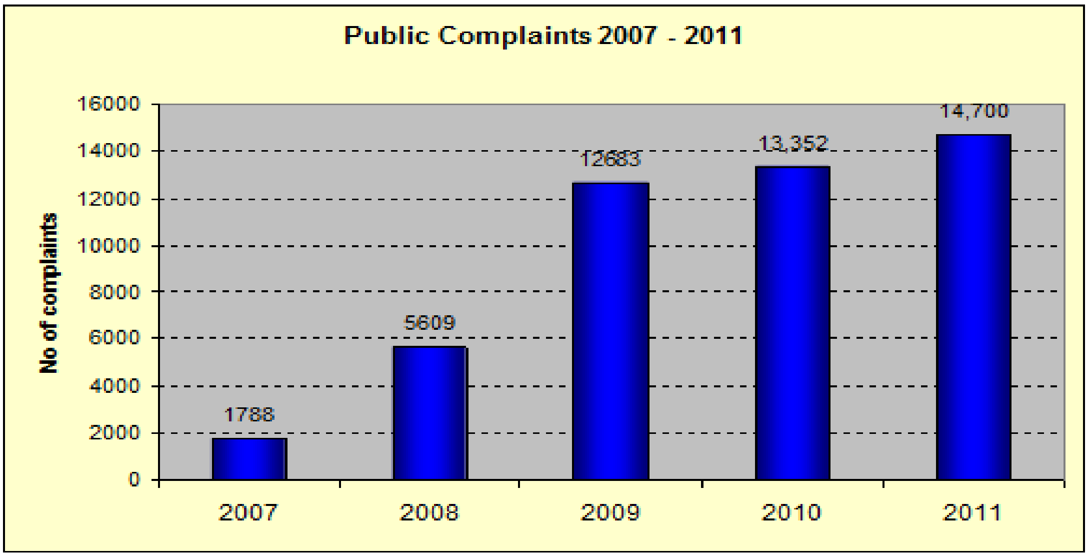
(a) The magnitude of the problems faced by the civil departments.

(b) The adverse trend emerging from the complaints as shown in Figure 1.1a below.

(c) The breakdown of the numbers by agencies from the highest to the lowest number of complaint cases received between the year 2009 to year 2012 by the target Frontline Agencies as shown in Figure 1.1b.

Figure 1.1a

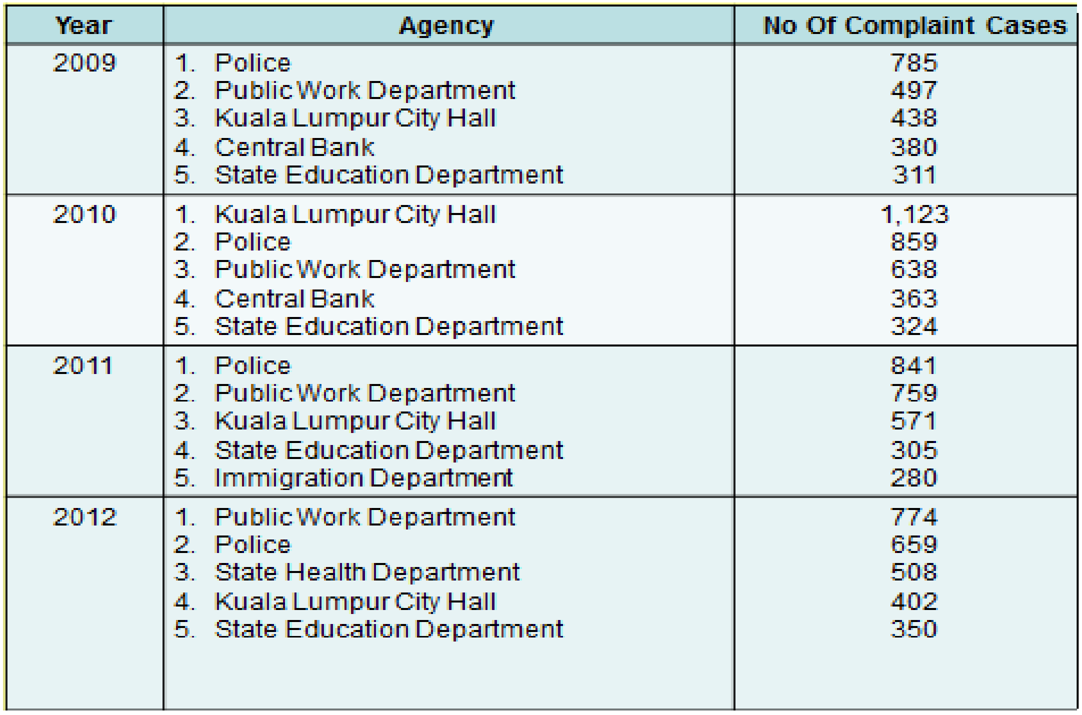
Public Complaints between Year 2007 to Year 2011



Source: Public Complaint Bureau

Figure 1.1b

Highest Number of Complaint Cases Received by Frontline Agencies



Year	Agency	No Of Complaint Cases
2009	1. Police	785
	2. Public Work Department	497
	3. Kuala Lumpur City Hall	438
	4. Central Bank	380
	5. State Education Department	311
2010	1. Kuala Lumpur City Hall	1,123
	2. Police	859
	3. Public Work Department	638
	4. Central Bank	363
	5. State Education Department	324
2011	1. Police	841
	2. Public Work Department	759
	3. Kuala Lumpur City Hall	571
	4. State Education Department	305
	5. Immigration Department	280
2012	1. Public Work Department	774
	2. Police	659
	3. State Health Department	508
	4. Kuala Lumpur City Hall	402
	5. State Education Department	350

Source: Public Complaint Bureau

There are different factors or variables that affect organizational commitment and produce different outcomes at the same time. Consequently, different researchers in the field of organizational behaviour tend to provide different interpretations on organizational commitment, based on the models founded in the United States of America or other countries in the West. These models, however, cannot be applied to countries such as Malaysia with a racial population of diverse cultural background. As a result, following its independence in 1957, Malaysia adopted an integrated framework aimed at reforming its public sector but patterned after the models of Japan and Korea. This is because these countries were able to come up with programs and strategies that effectively address the needs of their employees. For example, the QCC or Quality Control Circles and TQM or Total Quality Management which have incorporated various specific-focus factors directed at increasing productivity and improving the level of organizational commitment among Japanese and Korean employees. In the case of the Malaysian government frontline departments, the application of the values and work ethics in the Japan-Korea model is intended to determine the attitudinal orientation and Behavioural characteristics of their frontline employees as manifested in their intention to leave and display of any burnt-out syndrome respectively.

1.3 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to the frontline civil servants in the targeted three government agencies. It focuses only on the commitment of this workforce and how it tends to affect employee turnover and burnout. The findings from this research are specific to the said agencies but, because they typically represent the frontline government-bureaucracy model, the interpretation of the results may be generalized to include similar attitudes and behaviours in the Malaysian public service. And this is recommended as an area of future study to cover other Civil Service departments as well.