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## MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Assessment of management commitment in Malaysian public sector

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**Abstract:** Currently, the public sector is a matter of global concern due to the constant cases of failures in governance, fraud, inefficacy, and corruption. Management commitment is a critical issue as lack of it could lead to failures in governance, fraud, inefficacy, corruption, as well as weak financial management, particularly in the public sector. This study evaluated the state of present practices of management commitment among public-sector employees in Malaysia. Primary data were collected using a questionnaire survey from 194 heads of departments in the Malaysian federal ministries. The collection of data was in accordance with the perspective of 10 factors in management commitment practices, using a 5-point Likert scale. Factor analysis and descriptive statistics were utilized for data analysis. In addition, data reliability was checked by Cronbach's alpha test, data normality was examined by skewness and kurtosis tests, and data validity was tested by using Kaiser–Meyer Olkin test and Barlett's test. The findings show that 97% of the

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### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Recent few phenomena in various issues, such as corruption, fraud, governance failures, and poor financial management, have raised numerous enquiries about the accountability of the public-sector agencies in Malaysia. To overcome these problems, management commitment can play a very vital role because management commitment is considered as an essential component to ensure organizational accountability and good governance. Therefore, this study was carried out to examine the level of commitment among the Malaysian public-sector officers. In the current study, a 5-point Likert scale approach and ten measurement factors were utilized to assess management commitment; in addition, the findings of the study will assist the policy makers to ensure better accountability in the public sector of Malaysia, and those may also applicable to other similar emerging countries.

participants reported that they practised management commitment within their departments. Nevertheless, the priority for these management commitment factors varied according to the service schemes. In general, management commitment practice was the highest within the groups that used the finance scheme and the lowest among the employees who were under the accounting and audit schemes. The result of the study will help policy makers to take the necessary steps to improve the practices of management commitment in the public sector in order to create a more dependable and efficient public sector in Malaysia.

**Subjects: Work & Organizational Psychology; Business, Management and Accounting; Industry & Industrial Studies**

**Keywords: public sector; management commitment; accountability; factor analysis; Malaysia**

### 1. Introduction

Management commitment is vital and considered as a crucial and desirable element in employee's behaviour (Aladwan, Bhanugopan, & Fish, 2013). This is because the success of an organization can be ensured by the commitment from the management. Management commitment, especially from the top management, represents an emotional commitment, conviction, intention, or a strong attitude towards pursuing a goal, and it will affect the employee performance-related behaviour (William, Morrell, & Mullane, 2014).

The synonyms that are often used to describe the term commitment relate loyalty, allegiance, engagement, and attachment (Lämsä & Savolainen, 2000). Many researchers have tried to define the nature of commitment; however, among the researchers, there is no agreement with regard to defining its nature (Goffin & Szwejczewski, 1996). The concept of management commitment has been extensively researched over the last 20 years, and every researcher has his or her own explanations regarding this term. However, most of the researchers have come to the same agreement that management commitment has a relationship with the goals and values of the organization. For example, Chiu and Chen (2016) found a positive significant effect of the management commitment on the organizational effectiveness.

Management commitment can be defined as engaging the behaviours of the management (Goffin & Szwejczewski, 1996), willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979), and having a strong desire to maintain membership of the organization. In another point of view, management commitment is defined as the employees' feeling of obligation to stay with the organization, and the feelings are resulted from the internalization of normative pressures exerted on an individual prior to entry or following entry (Hashim, 2010). However, the meaning has been evolved into a complex concept that can serve as a summary index of work-related experiences and as a predictor of work behaviour intentions (Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, & Sincich, 1993).

Management commitment can be divided into different perspectives, and behavioural and psychological perspectives are the examples of the approach of management commitment. Behavioural approach is related to the output of the reward or contribution exchange processes between employers and employees; on the other hand, psychological approach is related to commitment of the management from the point of view of the attachment or identification of employees with the organization where they work (Salim, Kamarudin, & Kadir, 2010).

According to Cooper (2006), management commitment behaviours can have impact on the employee behaviour since different management levels exert different effects on employee behaviour. In other words, commitment is shaped by the way an individual is managed (Metcalf &

Dick, 2001). The same notion was supported by Bennett (2002), who mentioned that the aspect of organizational management might result in employee absence due to low job satisfaction, the organizing of the means of the task or work context, and organizational commitment. On the other hand, it is observed that one of the major reasons for failure of the firms is due to the lack of commitment from the top management (Goffin & Szwejczewski, 1996).

Although recognition of management commitment is universal, few authors have tried to identify the essential components of management commitment. In addition, it is found that participation of top management in quality programs, specific quality goals, and comprehensive quality planning are examples of those components (Goffin & Szwejczewski, 1996). This finding is supported by the statement of William et al. (2014), and in their study, they proposed that top management commitment not only increased the job satisfaction among the workers but also might have impact on an organization's performance as well.

This study examines the practices of management commitment in the public sector of Malaysia. This study selected Malaysian context as an area of research since many recent issues are found in the public sector, and they relate corruption, fraud, governance failures, poor financial management, etc. These occurrences have raised numerous enquiries about the accountability of the public sector in its obligation to uphold the public's trust. This study hopes to help the government to find out the factors that will be able to nurture and promote the accountability value, using sound management commitment practices in the government sector.

## **2. Research methodology**

### **2.1. Data collection and sampling**

The current study collected data, using a questionnaire survey filled by heads of departments of six Malaysian federal ministries in January—June 2016. The six selected ministries include the following: (i) the Ministry of Education, (ii) the Ministry of Communication and Multimedia, (iii) the Ministry of Defence, (iv) the Ministry of Health, (v) the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, and (vi) the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry. These ministries were chosen since these ministries were frequently found reprimanded in the Auditor General Report for three consecutive years, i.e. from 2012 to 2014 in relation to issues, such as integrity, accountability, mismanagement, and ethics.

There are 402 sub-departments in total under these six ministries. The target of the study was 210 samples, using the systematic random sampling method along with using every two listed departments in each ministry. The selection began with a department's second list followed by the fourth list, the sixth list, etc. until it reached 402 and ended up with 210 items in the samples. Last, 194 questionnaires from 210 target samples were employed in the data analysis.

The present study properly maintained the compliance of ethical standard of the respected institutions of the authors as well as of the respondents. The questionnaire was finalized based on the ethical clearance from the ethical committee of the affiliated institution of the main author of the research. Furthermore, it was confirmed that the individual level data were collected only for academic research purpose, and it was kept strictly confidential only among the researchers.

### **2.2. Measurements of variables**

The participants were required to offer their perspective on the practices that promoted management commitment in their department by utilizing a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The management commitment were measured by using 10 items that were adapted from the study of Geer (2009), Gollmar (2008) and Hopkins, O'Neil, and Williams (2007). Table 1 provides in detail the measurement that is used in this study.

**Table 1. Factors of measuring the management commitment in the Malaysian public sector**

Code	Description of Items
MC1	Establishing policies and plans to achieve the goals.
MC2	Providing training and ongoing support for all staff to discharge their duties.
MC3	Establishing effective two-way communication system with the staff.
MC4	Creating the environment of continuous improvement.
MC5	Developing leadership behaviours that are consistent with delivering the company's strategy and goals safely.
MC6	Have proper arrangements for the supervision and appraisal of the staff.
MC7	Regularly reviews and assesses the performance of staff individually.
MC8	Showing passion and interest for safety by formulating and establishing safety policy.
MC9	Promoting safety culture in the workplace.
MC10	Ensuring control at all levels of organization.

Moreover, to reduce the respondents' inclination to describe themselves in a biased way, this study took consideration by including few "experimental/indirect" questions in the survey questionnaire that was supposed to control the self-reporting and self-rating baseness (Fisher, 1993).

### 2.3. Analysis of data

The collected data were analysed, using the descriptive statistics and factor analysis techniques. Descriptive statistics is normally utilized to analyse the overall features of the data; on the other hand, factor analysis is utilized to calculate data consistency in the study. In addition, the data reliability of the current study was measured by utilizing the Cronbach's alpha test and data normality was examined by skewness and kurtosis tests. Last, the data validity was tested by using Kaiser–Meyer Olkin test and Barlett's test.

## 3. Findings and analysis

### 3.1. Demographic profiles of respondents

The respondents were asked to reveal certain demographic information, including gender, ethnicity, age, academic qualification, type of qualification, job position, department, grade, and working experience. Table 2 provides the summary of the demographic information.

The results of the study demonstrated that 59.3% of the respondents were female. As much as 38% of the respondents were in the 41–50 years' old age group followed by 33% in the 31–40 years' old age group. Most of the respondents were Malays, comprising 90.7%. All the respondents had a minimum qualification of a bachelor degree. The job positions of 90.7% of the respondents were management and professionals. 40% of the respondents were in the administrative job scheme, and 23.7% were in financial services, with only 5.2% in accounting job scheme. The remaining 7.7% were from various other departments, such as officers in the tax, legal, health, education, information & technology, and procurement departments.

### 3.2. Factor analysis

Factor analysis was used to ensure the consistency of the variables and to determine the management commitment. In this study, the factor loading of all the variables was higher than 0.6 with exceptions on items MC5, MC8 and MC9 as observed in Table 3. Thus, after removing these variables, the factor loading values ranged from 0.64 (MC1) to 0.9 (MC7). This shows that 7 out of 10 variables are usable in measuring management commitment of the Malaysian public sector.

**Table 2. Respondents' demographic information**

Demographic profiles		Frequency (N = 194)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	79	40.7
	Female	115	59.3
Ethnicity	Malay	176	90.7
	India	11	5.7
	Chinese	7	3.6
Age	20–30 years	24	12.4
	31–40 years	64	33.0
	41–50 years	74	38.1
	51 years and above	32	16.5
Academic qualifications	Degree	100	51.5
	Master	90	46.4
	PhD	4	2.1
	Non Accounting	96	49.5
Job position	Supporting Staff	7	3.6
	Management and Professional	176	90.7
	Top Management	11	5.7
Department	Accounting	45	23.2
	Administrative	78	40.2
	Audit	10	5.2
	Finance	46	23.7
	Others	15	7.7

**Table 3. Management commitment factors based on the service schemes**

Service schemes	MC1	MC2	MC3	MC4	MC5	MC6	MC7	MC8	MC9	MC10	All average
Accounting	4.2	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.2	4.6	4.5	4.0	4.2	4.4	4.3
Administration	4.4	4.3	4.6	4.6	4.3	4.9	4.9	4.3	4.3	4.7	4.5
Audit	4.4	4.3	4.4	4.1	4.3	4.4	4.6	4.3	4.0	4.4	4.3
Finance	4.5	4.5	4.7	4.7	4.4	4.9	4.9	4.3	4.3	4.6	4.6
Others	4.3	4.5	4.1	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.3	3.9	4.4	4.4
All average	4.4	4.3	4.5	4.6	4.3	4.8	4.8	4.2	4.2	4.6	4.5
Factor loading	0.64	0.65	0.81	0.74	0.46*	0.88	0.90	0.57*	0.53*	0.69	

\*The factor loadings of the parameters less than 0.6 are considered as not suitable to measure management commitment for Malaysian public sector.

### 3.3. Descriptive analysis based on service scheme

Based on all the groups of service schemes, the average highest result for all the management commitment factors was measured at 4.6 by the group on finance scheme, and the mean lowest score was measured at 4.3 by the group on accounting and audit scheme (Table 3).

The group on accounting service scheme scored a total average of 4.3; on the other hand, its highest score was measured at 4.6 for MC6 and lowest score was measured at 4.0 for MC8. Moreover, the scores for factors MC1, MC2, MC5, and MC9 were lower compared with the average management commitment scores of the group. The group on administrative scheme's average total score was measured at 4.5; on the contrary, the highest score was measured at 4.9 for the MC6 and MC7 factors and the lowest score was measured at 4.3 for MC2, MC5, MC8,

and MC9. In addition, the score for MC1 was lower than the average management commitment scores of the group. The group on audit scheme's average total score was measured at 4.3, while the highest score was measured at 4.6 for the MC7 factor, and the lowest score was measured at 4.0 for the MC9 factor. Moreover, scores for MC4 were lower compared with the average management commitment scores of the group. The group on finance scheme's average total score was measured at 4.6; on the other hand, the highest score was measured at 4.9 for the MC6 and MC7 factors, and the lowest score was measured at 4.3 for MC8 and MC9 factors. Additionally, the scores for MC1, MC2, and MC5 were lower compared with the overall average management commitment scores of the group.

### 3.4. Descriptive analysis based on factor of management commitment

The study attempted to measure the management commitment practice in the public sector, using 10 variables. Based on the respondents of the current study, it is observed that a total average of 97% agreed that they practiced the management commitment factors as shown in Table 4. Based on all the factors of management commitment, the highest mean score was at 4.6 for factors MC10. However, the lowest mean score was at 4.2 for factors (MC8) and (MC9) as shown in Table 3.

Based on the factors on practicing management commitment in the public sector, it is found that 96.9% of the respondents claimed that *their department is establishing policies and plans to achieve the goals* (MC1) as shown in Table 4. The employees who used the scheme on finance regarded that the most, and the employees who used the scheme on accounting perceived that to be the least as shown in Table 3.

However, 97.9% of the participants regarded *providing training and ongoing support for all staff to discharge their duties* (MC2) as shown in Table 4; on the contrary, the employees who used the scheme on finance perceived that as the most, and those in the accounting scheme perceived that to be the least as shown in Table 3.

95.9% of the participants regarded *establishing effective two-way communication system with the staff* (MC3) as shown in Table 4; on the other hand, the employees who used the scheme on finance perceived that as the most, and those in the accounting scheme perceived that to be the least as shown in Table 3. Based on the results of the other schemes on service, employees in the audit scheme practised that lesser compared to the average level.

**Table 4. Frequency scores of factors of management commitment**

Score	MC1	MC2	MC3	MC4	MC5	MC6	MC7	MC8	MC9	MC10	All average
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	0	2.9
3	6	4	4	1	0	0	0	3	6	6	3
4	114	121	74	72	122	32	29	129	121	74	88.8
5	74	69	112	117	68	158	161	58	62	114	99.3
Disagree (1-2)	0	0	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	0	2.9
Agree (4-5)	188	190	186	189	190	190	190	187	183	188	188.1
Disagree (1-2) %	0.0	0.0	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.6	0.0	1.5
Agree (4-5) %	96.9	97.9	95.9	97.4	97.9	97.9	97.9	96.4	94.3	96.9	97.0
Minimum	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Std. Dev.	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.4

97.4% of the participants agreed to *create the environment of continuous improvement* (MC4) as shown in Table 4. The employees who used the scheme on finance scheme possessed that the most; on the other hand, the employees who used the scheme on audit possessed that the least as shown in Table 3. Based on the results of the other schemes on service, employees in the accounting scheme considered them to be lower compared to the average level.

97.9% of the participants agreed that *they have proper arrangements for the supervision and appraisal of the staff* (MC6) as shown in Table 4. The employees who used the scheme on finance and administrative schemes possessed that the most; on the contrary, the employees who used the scheme on audit possessed that the least as shown in Table 3. Moreover, based on the results of the other schemes on service, it is observed that employees in the accounting scheme practised that lesser compared to the average level.

97.9% of the participants agreed that *they regularly review and assess the performance of staff individually* (MC7) as shown in Table 4. The employees who used the scheme on administration and finance practised that the most; on the other hand, the employees who used the scheme on accounting practised that the least as shown in Table 3. Based on the results of the other schemes on service, it is found that employees in the audit scheme practised that lesser compared to the average level.

96.9% of the participants agreed that *they are ensuring control at all level of organization* (MC10) as shown in Table 4. For this factor, it is found that the participants in the administration scheme practiced that the most; on the contrary, those in the accounting and audit scheme practiced that the least as shown in Table 3.

### 3.5. Diagnostic tests

Skewness and kurtosis tests were used to carry out the normality testing. Skewness can be defined as something that is out of the line depending on the extension of the curve if it curves out to the right or left. When the curve extends more to the right, that is known as positively skewed, and when it extends more to the left, that is known as negatively skewed (Wuensch, 2014). On the other hand, kurtosis measures how flat the symmetric distribution is at the top. The rule that is observed for both the skewness and kurtosis and to be considered that the data are normally distributed, the range of the values needs to be from  $-2$  to  $+2$ . When the skewness and kurtosis values are in this range, the data distribution is considered normal. Nevertheless, in this study, the skewness value is  $-3.55$ ; on the other hand, the value of the kurtosis is  $16.78$ , and this indicates that the value is outside of the range of normality. This signifies that the data is not normally distributed. However, Field (2013) suggests that the data can be considered normal if they exceed 30, and here the sample size of the study is 194. The reliability testing for factors of management commitment is provided in Table 5.

The Cronbach's alpha value on management commitment as shown in Table 5 is 0.877, and this means that the reliability of the items in the questionnaire is excellent (George & Mallery, 2016). The test's eigenvalues indicate that the factors utilized for management commitment is able to explain 91.22% of the variance. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test shows a greater value than 0.6, at 0.726. The Barlett's test sphericity approximate Chi-square determines the value's significance (Chi-square = 2,056.1,  $p < 0.0000001$ ). Thus, the sample is adequate for utilization in the factor analysis for measuring the management commitment.

## 4. Discussions

Malaysia has a vision of reaching a developed nation status by the 2020; however, many steps must be undertaken to improve the management commitment level of the public service sector (Said, Alam, & Khalid, 2016; Aziz, Rahman, Alam, & Said, 2015). This study attempted to measure the level of the present practices of management commitment in the Malaysian public sector by evaluating the effects of 10 factors.



**Table 5. Reliability testing for factors of management commitment**

Cronbach's alpha	0.877
Eigenvalue	9.0
Eigen % variance	91.22
% of variance	91.22
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy	0.726
Bartlett's test of sphericity approximate Chi-square	2,056.112
Bartlett's test of sphericity sig.	0.00000

A total of 97% respondents claimed that in general, they practice the mentioned factors of management commitment; nevertheless, various service schemes prioritized the 10 factors differently. In general, the management commitment practice in the group with the finance scheme was the highest and lowest among the employees under the accounting and audit schemes. This might be the reason for the presence of several areas of weaknesses, corruption, and weak controls of asset management that were reported in the recent official report by the auditor general.

The government continuously initiates programmes that aim to promote and motivate the practices of management commitment in all the departments in the public sector in order for them to be more transparent in carrying out their duties. However, the initiation has not given the expected impact as reported in the 2014 corruption perception index by Transparency International, where Malaysia has only improved by three ranks from 53 to 50 among 175 countries; this shows that the measures and efforts undertaken for fighting graft are still insufficient (Zainal, 2014). In addition, this demonstrates that although the government has taken the right steps to improve the public's perception, there are still many more steps that must be undertaken to increase the confidence of the public towards the good governance of the public sector. Therefore, it is insufficient to just change the structures of bureaucracy to improve this situation. The public sector needs to be transformed to create an efficient and reliable sector to ensure adequate accountability and an effective evaluation system (Said, Alam, & Aziz, 2015). Improvements in the management commitment practices would be able to assist the achievement of the intentions of the stakeholders and to make sure that there is accountability in the public sector.

## 5. Conclusions

The occurrences of various reported mismanagement cases, involving the issues, such as corruption, fraud, governance failures, and poor financial management, have raised numerous enquiries about the accountability of the public-sector agencies in Malaysia. This study was carried out to examine the practices of management commitment in the Malaysian public sector so as to confirm the level of commitment from the management. It is found that the management commitment practice in the finance scheme group scored the highest commitment value, whereas the accounting and audit schemes scored the lowest commitment value. The findings of the present study would assist the various departments and agencies in the government to improve their level of management commitment in accordance with the related service schemes. In addition, the factors of management commitment measures and approaches utilized in this study could assist the government in creating techniques for the measurements of accountability in the public sector.

Nevertheless, this study also faced several limitations that could be addressed in future researches. In this study, only six ministries were taken into consideration even though there are 24 ministries in Malaysia, and the survey only included heads of departments. The levels of management commitment practices could be different in the other ministries and among other government officers that could be addressed in future researches. It is also recommended that each department and ministry would



produce or report their activities of management commitment and ethics and ensure that they enhance to create a culture of good governance in the various departments in the public sector. The report should be made available to the public to create awareness and to educate them on the important steps that could be undertaken to reduce employee misconduct in the government.

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