

# Public Sector Officials' Commitment to Anti-Bribery Management System Implementation: A Case Study in the Malaysian Context

Nurisyal Muhamad<sup>1\*</sup> and Norhaninah A. Gani<sup>1</sup>

Faculty of Business, Accounting, and Social Science, Kolej Universiti Poly-Tech MARA, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

#### **ABSTRACT**

Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) had introduced the Corruption-free Pledge to be signed by public servants - showing their commitment to not engage in any corruption or misconduct throughout their tenure. Even though almost every public sector's officers have signed the pledge, there are still many corruption cases occurring among public sector officers (MACC Arrest Statistic 2019). Thus, the signing of a pledge does not indicate the true commitment of combating corruption. Due to the lack of empirical evidence in understanding factors that could enhance employees' commitment to mitigate corruption, this study aims to explore whether demographic factors such as gender, age, service category, and the officers' tenure have the relationships with their commitment in implementing Anti-bribery Management System (ABMS) among Malaysian public sector officers. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare employees' commitment in terms of gender, age, and service category. Besides that, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the officers' tenure in terms of their commitment. The study found that there were significant differences between gender, age, service category and officers' tenure in relation to ABMS's commitment implementation.

**Keywords:** Anti-bribery Management System, MS ISO 37001:2016, Public Sector, Commitment, Gender, Tenure, Service Category.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

On 27 October 2017, Malaysian Anti-Corruption Malaysia (MACC) and the Department of Standards Malaysia (Standards Malaysia) had launched the Anti-bribery Management System (ABMS) Malaysian Standards (MS) ISO 37001:2016. It provides guidelines and techniques representing global anti-corruption good practices to assist an organization in preventing, detecting and responding to bribery (Brescia, 2017).

The current Malaysian Government highly supports the implementation of ABMS amongst public sector organizations. Primarily, based on the National Anti-Corruption Plan (2019), every public sector organization is required to be certified under Anti-Bribery Management System (ABMS) MS ISO 37001 within 2 years (January 2019 to December 2020). The success of ABMS implementation is in conjunction with public officials' commitment. A committed employee will follow the anti-bribery policy and the anti-bribery management system's requirements. Thus, the commitment of public officials is crucial for the fulfilment of ABMS implementation in the public sector.

Basically, there are three components of commitment which are affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Affective commitment refers to the employees' emotional attachment towards their organizations, and thus, they would continue their employment with their organizations because they want to do

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<sup>\*</sup>Corresponding Author: nurisyal@kuptm.edu.my

so (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Continuance commitment refers to the awareness of the cost associated with leaving the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Lastly, normative commitment reflects the feeling of obligation to continue employment (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

In another writing, Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) have provided a more general definition of commitment that can be adapted to any workplace commitment scenario. Workplace commitments include a commitment to organizations, unions, occupations, teams and leadership, goals and personal careers (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Thus, this study focuses on the employees' commitment towards the implementation of ABMS – a management system to prevent, detect and address bribery towards better ethical organizational culture (Ishak, Haron, Ismail, & Saidin, 2017).

This study suggests that employees with affective commitment will perform the assigned tasks to the best of their ability (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). They may also have a sense of obligation (normative commitment) towards their jobs and thus will regard their assigned task as their duty (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Therefore, ABMS can be defined as the implementation commitment as the level of employees' support towards the system through their emotional attachment to their organizations and their obligation to implement the system.

The latest empirical studies in the area of organizational commitment have been focusing on the area of nursing (Cao, Liu, Liu, Yang, & Liu, 2019; Labrague et al., 2018), leadership (Eliyana & Ma, 2019), and research organization (Khunsoonthornkit & Panjakajornsak, 2018). Currently, no studies have been done to understand employees' commitment towards anti-corruption initiatives. As a fundamental research to understand factors that could influence the implementation of ABMS, the general objective of this study is to examine individual factors that could enhance commitment among public servants in implementing the ABMS. This study could contribute to the knowledge and provides suggestions for a better ethical organizational culture.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Earlier studies in organizational commitment area of research had focused on understanding the influence of employees' age and tenure on their commitment (for example Allen & Meyer, 1993). Even though studies have shown that age, gender and tenure could influence employees' commitment, those studies did not consider the public organizations' commitment to eradicate corruption in public sector organizations. This aspect of integrity might have some influence on an individual's decision to commit.

Basically, according to the Theory of Effective Government Organization, to achieve high performance in a public organization, the public sector employees should be motivated to provide services that benefit a community, able to achieve the agency's mission and contribute a valuable public service (Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999). Other than the public sector employees' motivation factor, to be an effective government organization, the organization should consider the following aspects: a) should receive support from the external stakeholders such as political authorities; b) has the autonomy in refining and implementing its mission; c) has attractive missions; d) has a strong mission-oriented culture; and e) has effective leadership behaviour (Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999).

Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the relationship between public employees' individual factors (age, gender, tenure, working group level) and the ABMS implementation commitment.

#### 3. HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

## 3.1 Gender and Commitment to Implement ABMS

In terms of personal (material) benefit, women are less likely to risk the common good (Dollar, Fisman, & Gatti, 2001). Even Torgler and Valev (2006) argued that being a woman instead of a man increases the likelihood that an individual will never accept a bribe. Meanwhile, previous studies had shown that women are more willing to comply with anti-bribery conduct than men (Torgler & Valev, 2010b). Even more, a previous study had also found that the greater the representation of women in parliament, the lower the country's level of corruption (Dollar et al., 2001). Besides that, previous studies had also found that women are less involved in bribery, and are less likely to condone bribery (Swamy, Knack, Lee, & Azfar, 2001; Torgler & Valev, 2006).

In terms of organizational commitment, Messner (2017) found that female employees appear to have a higher level of organisational commitment than their male colleagues. Consequently, we propose the following;

## **Hypothesis 1:**

Female employees are more committed in implementing ABMS compared to male employees.

## 3.2 Age and Commitment to Implement ABMS

Previous studies had found that age has a positive correlation with affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1984). They found that employees who are older have a stronger affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1984). Besides that, Torgler and Valev (2006) found that age is an important determinant of other illegal activities; older people (30 to 65+ years old) are on average more tax compliant and less likely to be involved in crime. Meanwhile, the lack of involvement may be due to exposure to corruption as Mocan (2008) found that individuals aged between 20 to 54 are more likely to be asked for a bribe compared with the reference group (younger than 20).

Age is also related to knowledge exposure. Zipparo (1999) studied the attitudes of the public sector's employees in reporting workplace corruption in New South Wales, Australia. The majority of respondents in the youngest age group (18 to 24 years) had not heard of the New South Wales Protected Disclosure Act compared with 53 percent of respondents aged 55 to 64 years.

However, a previous study had found that young and educated employees working in public sector organizations in Pakistan had the courage to take the risk of disclosing wrongdoings (Bashir, Khattak, Hanif, & Chohan, 2011). They found that seventy-seven percent of the whistle-blowers aged 30-year old and younger.

We formulate the following hypothesis:

## **Hypothesis 2:**

Older employees are more committed in implementing ABMS compared to younger employees.

## 3.3 Workgroup Level and Commitment to Implement ABMS

Employees' commitment is important in enhancing an organization's value (Zareie & Jafari Navimipour, 2016). Previous studies had also found that the higher the commitment of workers in the organization, the lower the level of bribery in the organization (Manurung, Suhartadi, & Saefudin, 2015).

Mayer and Shoorman (1992) had found that respondents of various hierarchical levels are committed to giving extensive effort for their organizations. Studies have shown that employees of all positions with high ethical values are more committed in their work (Salahudin, Baharuddin, Abdullah, & Osman, 2016).

Both management and lower-level workers are exposed to corruption activities (Jancsics, 2015, Salleh et al., 2019). Navot, Reingewertz, and Cohen (2016) claimed that increasing pecuniary incentives for public service might cause the public employees to advance their own self-interests and encourage justifications for accepting bribes. Based on their results, the upper-level respondents with better salary tend to be more tolerant of bribery. For lower-level employees, they might be exposed to petty corruption (Jancsics, 2015). Petty corruption would appear in places where most of the people are honest (Dion, 2010). Examples of petty corruption are the managers of firms dealing with low-level government officials regarding transactions involving the filing of appropriate tax returns, payment of import duties, clearance of regulatory or licensing requirements, or applying for government benefits (Lambert-Mogiliansky, Majumdar, & Radner, 2007). Due to the direct contact of lower-level workers with the public and their exposure to corruption, we suggest the following hypothesis:

## **Hypothesis 3:**

Supporting-level workers are more committed in implementing ABMS compared to the management-level workers.

## 3.4 Tenure and Commitment to Implement ABMS

Winardi, Nugroho, and Wijayanti (2017) found that long tenure in public service might increase the probability of corruption between civilians and public servant. Thus, they suggested periodic rotation should be implemented among public officials and penalties be imposed to disincentive corrupt behaviour.

However, Allen and Meyer (1993) found affective and normative commitment to be significantly higher in longer, rather than shorter, tenure in organizations. Similarly, Brammer and Millington (2007) also found that a longer duration of employment in organizations will enhance the employee's commitment to corporate social responsibility. Thus, we suggest the following hypothesis:

#### **Hypothesis 4:**

An employee who serves organizations longer is more committed in implementing ABMS compared to those of shorter employment tenure.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

Emails acquiring for permission to conduct a survey were sent to the head of five public organisations; among which are Malaysian pioneer organisations that implemented MS ISO 37001;2016 in 2018. Those organizations were chosen because their employees are well aware about the standard and they are in the process of implementing the standard. However, we only received approval from three public organizations; which are Malaysian Qualification Agency, Pengerang Local Authority and Immigration Department of Malaysia.

A total of 220 questionnaires had been given to the person-in-charge of the Integrity Unit at every organisation. The questionnaires were given to employees of departments directly involved in the implementation of the standard. A total of 320 sets of questionnaires had been gathered from the respondents. There were seventy respondents from Malaysian Qualification

Agency, forty respondents from Pengerang Local Authority and two hundred and ten respondents from the Immigration Department of Malaysia.

The instruments used to measure employees' commitment in the survey were adapted from Herscovitch and Meyer (2002), and we had integrated the ABMS implementation elements in the instruments. Table 1 shows the instruments used to measure the employees' commitment. All the seven items were anchored on a 10-point Likert scale, ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 10=strongly agree.

**Table 1** Employees' commitment in implementing ABMS

#### Items

I think that the implementation of ABMS in this organisation is reasonable.

I think that the management makes a good decision in introducing ABMS.

I believe ABMS will improve staff's integrity.

I choose to implement ABMS.

I give continuous commitment in the implementation of ABMS.

I feel responsible in the seamless implementation of the ABMS system.

I support this change.

#### 5. FINDINGS

Independent sample t-tests were performed to examine whether there are significant differences in the commitment of implementing ABMS among the 320 respondents. The resulting significance values for the t-tests for the employees' commitment variable were higher than the threshold of 0.05 and the confidence intervals for the mean differences for the variable did not contain zero, indicating that there are significant differences between the two groups.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the employees' commitment between male and female conditions. Table 2 shows a significant difference in the scores for male (n = 191, M = 7.9043, SD = 1.73887) and female (n = 129, M = 8.3134, SD = 1.53666) conditions, t (318) = -2.162, p = 0.031. These results suggest that gender does have an effect on employees' commitment to ABMS. Specifically, the results suggest that females would be more committed to implementing ABMS compared to male employees.

An independent sample t-test in Table 2 shows that the difference in employees' commitment between the younger employees (18 - 21 years old) (n = 91, M = 7.7300, SD = 1.61827) and the older employees (43 - 60 years old) (n = 49, M = 8.4900, SD = 1.35338) is statistically significant, t (138) = -2.650, p=0.009. These results suggest that age does have an effect on employees' commitment to ABMS. Specifically, the result suggests that older employees would be more committed in implementing ABMS as compared to the younger employees.

The results also show that participants who were in the management group had lower commitment to ABMS (n = 163, M = 7.9150, SD = 1.68954) than those who in the support group (n = 157, M = 8.2293, SD = 1.63945). An independent sample t-test found this pattern to be significant, t (318) = -1.688, p< 0.1).

Table 2 Sample Descriptive Using t-test for employees' commitment

	n	M	SD	t-test
Gender				
Male	191	7.9043	1.73887	-2.162**
Female	129	8.3134	1.53666	
Age				
18-21 (younger)	91	7.7300	1.61827	-2.650**
43-60 (older)	49	8.4900	1.35338	
Service Category				
Top management, management & professional	163	7.915	1.68954	-1.688*
Support Group	157	8.2293	1.63945	

<sup>\*\*</sup>p<0.05

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the length of year service in the current organization with the employees' commitment. An analysis of variance in Table 3 shows that the effect of the current job's tenure length on the employees' commitment is significant, F (2,317) = 9.621, p = .000. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicate that the mean score for the tenure length of current job >= 7 years (M = 8.5444, SD = 1.45137) is significantly different than < = 3 years (M = 7.5757, SD = 1.86892) and 4 to 6 years (M = 7.8526, SD = 1.65595). However, the < = 3 years does not significantly differ from the 4 to 6 years condition. These results suggest that the tenure length of the current job really does have an effect on employees' commitment. When employees have been working for a long period of time, they are more committed to implement ABMS. However, it should be noted that the employment length of the current job must be high in order to see a commitment. Employees of the medium length tenure in the current job do not appear to significantly give commitment.

**Table 3** One-way ANOVA test for tenure and employees' commitment

Tenure	n	M	SD	F	Comparison Group	Post hoc (P)
< = 3 years	67	7.5757	1.86892	F = 9.621 p<0.001	less than 3 years vs more than 7 years	0.001
4 - 6 years	126	7.8526	1.65595		less than 3 years vs 4 to 6 years	0.499
>=7 years	127	8.5444	1.45137		4 to 6 years vs more than 7 years	0.001

#### 6. DISCUSSION

This article extends previous studies by examining the commitment of public sector employees in implementing Anti-Bribery Management System (ABMS) in Malaysia's Public Sector. This study looks into several aspects such as age, gender, tenure and working group level. We found that female employees are significantly more committed in implementing ABMS compared to

<sup>\*</sup>p<0.1

male employees. Moreover, the previous study had also found that women were more compliant than men when it comes to corruption (Torgler & Valey, 2010a). This is due to women being less likely to tolerate corruption, and even women managers are less involved in bribery (Swamy et al., 2001).

Without getting a high commitment from each employee, both male and female employees, the ABMS cannot be successfully implemented. Therefore, organizations may need to consider enhancing feminism culture in their organisations. To enhance feminism culture, the organisations might want to develop a culture that concerns more about the quality of life, since men are mostly focusing on material success (Tavanti, Stachowicz-stanusch, Krause, & Teaching, 2013). Besides that, organisations should also increase the number of their female employees because increasing female participation at all levels can help to reduce corruption (Chaudhuri, 2012).

This study has found that older employees are more committed in implementing ABMS. The previous study also found that older people are less likely to be involved in crime (Torgler & Valev, 2006). This is due to older employees' commitment that increases significantly as they might see that being committed is part of their duties towards organisational success (Allen & Meyer, 1993). The previous study also showed that religion and organizational culture are important factors to enhance the Generation Y (Gen Y) perception of corruption issues (Kirana, Fee, Johari, & Ain, 2015). Thus, organisations should from time to time, improve their employees' values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in order to combat corruption.

The previous study also found that longer duration of employment in an organisation would increase the probability of corruption between citizen and public servant. However, a penalty could be used to control corruption activities (Winardi et al., 2017). For this study, we have found that employees' with longer employment tenure are more committed than those juniors in the organisation. This is most probably because those who have served longer have more experience and understand the consequences as well as the penalty that they will have to face if involved in any misconduct activities.

In corruption practices, the lower-level employees have direct contact with outsiders and are the primary beneficiaries of corruption (Jávor & Jancsics, 2016). Meanwhile, middle-level management will often assist in covering up the top management coalition's illegal deals (Jávor & Jancsics, 2016). This study reveals that supporting-level workers are more committed in implementing ABMS compared with the management-level workers. This finding supports the previous study that top management with greater tenure length has shown a lower level of reasoning while making an ethical decision (Bigel, 2000). This might due to the complacency of those with long career tenure might experience (Bigel, 2000). Since the finding shows higher supports from the lower-level workers, organisations should use this good sign of support to develop a corruption-free culture in their organisations.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study extends the area of organizational commitment and ethical research by focusing on employees' commitment towards the implementation of the ABMS among selected Malaysia's public sector organisations. Individual factors such as employees' gender, age, tenure and working group level are found to have a relationship with the ABMS implementation commitment. These findings could assist in setting up policies and developing a culture of combating corruption in the organisations. Besides that, the study's limitations may help to direct future research. First, as the sample is limited to only three organisations, future study should involve a larger population for the purpose of generalization. Furthermore, future study should consider extending this research by examining the influence of other organisational

factors, both internal and external that might enhance the employees' commitment towards anti-bribery practices.

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