

## **Chapter One**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Organisations are developed by people and people comprise an important component of the organisation. This symbiosis is even more apparent in an institution that makes education its core business. Today, in Malaysia, many more organisations are increasingly involved in the business of education. This is seen in the recent proliferation of private institutes, colleges, and universities in the country. This phenomenon coincides with the government's ambition to make Malaysia the "Centre of Education Excellence" in the new millennium. The government's effort is now complemented by the newly established National Board of Accreditation for Higher Studies known locally as "LAN" or "Lembaga Akreditasi Nasional" - the "gate-keeper" to maintaining quality education in the country.

It must be remembered that without the "people" who form the basic component of an education institution, the institution cannot begin operation even though it may have the best-designed curriculum, the noblest of education intentions, and the stamp of government approval. Also, without the student population, an education institution cannot function even though it is sited in the most conducive location, possesses the best

equipment, highly competent teachers, and the most efficient management and support staff.

Even if all these people components are present, an institution cannot function well if human relations among its people components are over-shadowed by organisational considerations that tend to dehumanise the operations of the institution. It is observed that often people relations in an education institution are submerged in an intricate web of impersonal operations that place a high premium on meeting policy requirements and are constantly reinforced by rules, regulations and other bureaucratic idiosyncrasies that ignore the value of interpersonal relationships of its people and the consumers (i.e. the paying parents of students) at large.

Whether one considers education a business or not, the reality remains that private education today is often associated with “big bucks” and private institutions of higher learning, rightly or wrongly, have become tagged as “big business” and “money-making machines” despite claims to the contrary by its operators. Regardless of the nature of the operators and the size of their operations, private institutions of higher learning, similar to their counterparts in the public sector, cannot operate efficiently and effectively without the commitment of their human resources to ensuring that quality education is finally delivered to their clients - the students who have chosen to pursue the education for personal and professional reasons.

Invariably, of course, how these human resources – teachers, administrative and other support staff, and students – interact with one another will affect the way the institution functions.

With the increasing size and complexity of the modern organisation, greater strain is put on the system of communication, which is needed to keep the organisation together and constantly functioning. Communication is a central part of everything we do. Most “people” problems can be traced in part or in full to poor communication, a breakdown in communication, or no communication at all. In fact, human interaction succeeds or fails as a direct function of an ability to communicate, and communicate well. And communication, as an organisation in action, is the way in which the parts interact and affect the whole. Thus, the nature of communication and the way the people components of an education institution communicate can and will affect the well being of their organisation. In short, human relations in terms of personal and interpersonal communications that can fortify and sustain satisfactory personal and professional relationships at work are imperative for achieving the avowed mission, goals and targets in the interest of the institution and the clients it serves.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

At the heart of communication is interpersonal skills. Usually, such skills are founded on the ability of an individual to build personal, social and professional relationships with

other people at work, inside and outside his or her own organisation. In the context of private institutions of higher learning, the interpersonal skills required of the Principal and the teachers are important in determining the nature, direction, contents and quality of education offered to the public and in achieving the mission, goals and targets of the organisation as a whole.

Specifically, human relations are critical skills in a private education institution, the absence of which often leads to organisational problems. Poor interpersonal skills may lead to poor classroom management, which may deteriorate if the interpersonal relationships between the Principal and the teachers, and between the teachers and the students are stretched, stress-prone, or in conflict. On the other hand, good interpersonal skills at work between the people components of the institution can alleviate tension-prone situations and ensuing negative consequences, leading to a more favourable climate of work, improved morale and self-esteem, better co-operation and job commitment, more effective communication, more efficient operations, and increased productivity.

Therefore, to improve quality education, the operators of private institutions of higher learning must ensure that human relations between its chief operating officer - the Principal - and her teachers are amicable, functional, and current all the time. And they must also endeavour to ensure that these ongoing relationships are reviewed and upgraded constantly to improve organisational growth, retain quality orientation, and increase productivity and better performance results.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

This is an exploratory study of human relations in a private education institution of higher learning. It attempts to establish the types of activities that the Principal and her teachers actually spend time on or/and prefer to spend time on. The study also discusses the varying principal-teacher perceptions and expectations of human relationship that can affect work performance, quality standards, organisational productivity, and the bottom-line of target operations.

Specifically, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

- (a) How does the Principal view the importance of her areas of responsibilities in relation to human relations *vis-à-vis* her teachers?
- (b) How do the teachers view the importance of their Principal's areas of responsibilities in relation to human relations *vis-à-vis* themselves?
- (c) How much time does the Principal normally spend on matters related to human relations?
- (d) To what extent would the Principal like to spend time on matters related to human relations?

- (e) How much time do the teachers perceive their Principal spend on matters related to human relations?
- (f) How much time would the teachers prefer their Principal to spend on matters related to human relations?
- (g) What does the Principal think are the hindrances that obstruct her from achieving the ideals of her job in relation to human relations?
- (h) What do the teachers perceive to be the hindrances that obstruct their Principal from achieving the ideals of her job in relation to human relations?

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because the information or data generated by the questionnaire survey will provide fresh insights into the importance, and the varying perceptions and expectations, of principal-teacher human relations that can affect work performance, quality standards, organisational productivity, and the bottom-line target operations of private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. Consequently, the information will enable the operators of such institutions to improve the human relations aspects of their organisation.

## **1.5 Limitations of the Study**

Due to time and budget constraints, apart from keeping the survey manageable, the questionnaire survey was limited to a selected college whose identity remains anonymous for security and professional reasons. The sample, comprising the Principal and the teachers in this institution, is therefore only representative of its operational leadership and teaching staff. The survey results, especially their analysis and interpretations, are valid only to the population under study. Any extrapolation from these findings to other institutions should be done with extreme care even though the reliability of the research instrument has been pre-tested in a pilot survey. This is because people, especially the Principal and teachers of other private institutions of higher learning, are not only different but their perceptions and expectations of similar dimensions of human relations may be different and vary from time to time. Moreover, the interpretations of the research findings are limited only to the items of responses in the questionnaire, which are by no means comprehensive in determining the extent and depth of human relations. However, these limitations do not undermine the significance of the contributions of new information and data on the research area of this study.