

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In a competitive world, academic qualifications alone cannot guarantee overall success. Other attributes are necessary. One such attribute according to Dr. Stephen Covey is what he terms "effective habits"<sup>1</sup>. In his best selling book, he recommends the following "effective habits":-

- i) Be Proactive;
- ii) Begin With The End In Mind;
- iii) Put First Things First;
- iv) Think Win-Win;
- v) Seek First To Understand, Then To Be Understood;
- vi) Synergize; and
- vii) Sharpen The Saw (or Renewal).

A habit is defined as "a thing done often and, hence, easily" and "a usual way of doing"<sup>2</sup>. So, effective habits are patterns of behaviour a person repeats often which bring certain intended results. They are consistent and often internalised patterns of

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<sup>1</sup> Covey (1989), The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, New York: Simon and Schuster.

behaviour that express one's character. In the words of Aristotle, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit".

Effective habits are particularly important to professional employees. They may be especially useful to consulting engineers who appear more prone to internal conflicts than other professional employees<sup>3</sup>. Consulting engineers often feel that there is no balance between their personal lives and their professional work, invariably work under conditions of high stress and are always torn between the demand to do a professional job and the demand to meet a predetermined budget and time schedules. Some even feel that they are no longer in control of their lives. Can "effective habits" help the consulting engineer? Is he perhaps lacking "effective habits"? Certainly these questions deserve to be researched for consulting engineers as a group are one of the largest providers of professional services in the country.

## 1.1 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study will be useful to the consulting engineers themselves as they will be made aware of their existing habits. This should make it easier for them to take steps

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<sup>2</sup> Webster's New World Dictionary (1984), New York: Prentice Hall.

<sup>3</sup> The Association of Consulting Engineers Malaysia (ACEM) defines a consulting engineer as a professional engineer who performs services for his clients on a fee basis. The objective of ACEM is to promote the profession of consulting engineering by grouping together for consultation and cooperation those engineers whose work is of a purely consultative character. In 1992, 61 engineering consulting firms were members of ACEM (ACEM Directory 1991/1992).

to adopt habits that would be more effective for them. Their employers (who are also engineers) can also use this study as a guide to assess the suitability of potential employees. And management training centres may find the study useful as they can tailor their training programmes towards effective habits that are lacking in consulting engineers. Finally, it is hoped that this study will spur further research on effective habits in other employees in other engineering disciplines or other professions.

## **1.2 OBJECTIVES**

The general objective of this exploratory study is to determine the habits of consulting engineers. Its specific objectives are:-

- i) to identify the effective habits that consulting engineers lack;
- ii) to identify the effective habits consulting engineers have and the extent to which they have these habits; and
- iii) to determine the influence demographic variables have on the effective habits of consulting engineers.

## **1.3 METHODOLOGY**

Primary data on the effective habits of consulting engineers were collected by means of a questionnaire administered to a sample of consulting engineers employed by engineering consulting firms located in the Klang Valley <sup>4</sup>. The questionnaires were

administered either by the researcher himself or by the managing directors of these firms. The data obtained from the questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) programme. Statistical techniques used in the analysis include mean, cross-tabulation and anova. Secondary data on effective habits were gathered mainly from Covey's book.

#### 1.4 SCOPE

This study is confined to consulting engineers working in engineering firms in the Klang Valley<sup>5</sup>. The study excludes consulting engineers working in other firms due to time and money constraints. Engineers working in the public sector are also excluded for the same reasons.

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<sup>4</sup> The list of the engineering consulting firms were obtained from the Board of Engineers Malaysia (BEM). BEM was established under the Registration of Engineers Act 1967. This Act stipulates that all engineering consulting firms set up as a body corporate must register with the BEM. The main functions of BEM are i) to approve or reject applications for registration by engineers; ii) to fix the scale of fees to be rendered; and iii) to determine and regulate the conduct and ethics of the engineering profession.

<sup>5</sup> According to ACEM 1992/1993 Directory, 46 of the 61 engineering consulting firms listed are situated in the Klang Valley.

## 1.5 LIMITATIONS

This study suffers from a number of limitations. First, it assumes that the "effective habits" advocated by Covey will actually be effective habits for consulting engineers, that is, they will enhance the quality of their worklife. Second, the questionnaire used in the study has not been tested for reliability and validity<sup>6</sup>. Third, as the study is confined to consulting engineers working in engineering consulting firms in the Klang Valley, its findings are usable only to a limited extent. Because of these limitations, the usefulness of the study is somewhat restricted.

## 1.6 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter I serves as an introduction to the study. Chapter II reviews the literature on 'effective habits'. Chapter III outlines the research methodology including the sampling and data collection procedures, the selection of measurement scales and the analysis of the data. Chapter IV discusses the results of the analysis. Chapter V concludes the study by summarising the findings and making a recommendation for further research.

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<sup>6</sup> The questionnaire was obtained from Personal Leadership Application Workbook issued by the Covey Leadership Center.