

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Instrument

An eleven-page close-ended questionnaire (see Appendix B) was used to inquire about the respondents' ethical perceptions on various situational statements and business scenarios. Recognising the inherently sensitive nature of the research, as many people do not take too kindly to being the subject of an ethical investigation, the questionnaire design was carefully and elaborately thought out. The questionnaire proper was in five sections, with sections dealing with personal values, relationships with one's own organisation and colleagues, customers and vendors and a section on demographic profiles. Each of the three main sections relates to respondents' relationship with their own organisation and colleagues, customers and vendors and comprises statements or fictitious work scenarios that are likely to be encountered by respondents in their workplaces.

The 5-point Likert scale was used in the study. This was deemed the most appropriate method since it had been extensively used in more recent researches. (Tyson, 1992; Whipple and Swords, 1992; Stevens *et al*, 1993; Rappaport and Himschoot, 1994) Even Baumhart (1968) in his landmark empirical investigation into ethical perceptions of American businessmen employed the 5-point Likert scale. However, it is important to note that the scope of Likert scales typically range from 5-points to 9-points. Some local researchers have also made good use of 7-point scales to measure hypothetical ethical situations (Zabid and Alsagoff, 1993). The usefulness of the Likert scale lies in its ability to capture and report psychographic data. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1992), *psychographics* refers to the "use of demographics to study and measure attitudes, values, lifestyles and opinions".

The third party projection technique was also utilised to ensure a healthy psychological distance between the respondents and the statements and scenarios depicted in the questionnaire. This technique in questionnaire design involves using a “mask”. Respondents were asked what a third person would do when put in a specific work situation, without direct reference that the third person would personify themselves. By transferring his or her attitudes to a third person, the respondent enjoys psychological distance which means that he or she puts a distance from self-identification and is free to agree or disagree with the statements or scenarios as the situation warrants. This technique ensures better returns on data collection since it creates a buffer between researcher and respondent for ethical questions deemed too pointed or sensitive to be asked in a direct manner.

Additionally, to ensure that respondents do not fall into the trap of order bias, several questions were purposely rephrased inversely to ensure that respondents do not just rate them passively in line with earlier questions. Order bias occurs when respondents read the first few questions of the questionnaire and then assume that the rest are more or less of the same genre, with the result that they would then rate the other questions “blindly” without really reading or understanding the requirements.

3.2. Sampling Procedure

A total of 500 questionnaires was sent out by mail throughout Malaysia. The targeted respondents were travel industry personnel comprising of travel agents, tour operators, hoteliers, airline employees and public sector employees in the tourism industry such as staff from Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board and also state tourism units. The minimum level to qualify as a respondent was identified as one holding a clerical position as the objective of the research is geared more at the office workers than blue-collar job-holders.

The sampling procedure used was simple random, with selection taken at random from the Directory of Tours and Travel Agents 1997 and the Directory of Hotels in Malaysia 1996. Industry contacts by the researcher were also helpful in providing the impetus for a wider distribution, including contacts with Malaysia Airlines and state governments. Moreover, as the tourism industry is congregated around urban areas like Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Johor Bahru, Kuching and Kota Kinabalu, efforts were made to concentrate the research in these areas. In particular, assistance was sought from the regional offices of Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board in Penang, Johor Bahru, Kuala Trengganu, Kota Kinabalu and Kuching to help distribute the questionnaires. Pre-testing of the questionnaire was done with 10 respondents and as a result, several inconsequential questions or statements deemed too personal in nature were either amended or deleted from the questionnaire proper.

3.3. Data Collection

Data collection was spread over a period of 5 weeks, commencing from the month of June to the first week of July 1998. The questionnaires were self-administered but telephone reminders had to be made to ensure compliance with the deadlines. In some instances, personal meetings had to be arranged to hand over the questionnaires due to the rather unreliable postal system. Two separate cover letters were used : one for staff of Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board and the other in official company letterhead which was used for other respondents in the private sector. To ensure strict confidentiality, the returned questionnaires from staff of Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board were unmarked and respondents could personally see their copies shuffled among other returned copies during collection. Outstation questionnaires were returned in bulk per organisation, thus ensuring that their confidentiality remains intact.

The modus operandi in returning the questionnaires had an impact on the outcome of some of the questions. This relates to the question of rating one's own level of honesty as well as that of the superior. Since many outstation questionnaires were distributed and subsequently collected back by the managers or CEOs, in many instances the respondents left the column of superior rating either blank or were rated unusually high. This could be attributed to fear from offending the boss or a desire to "polish the bosses' apple" for certain strategic reasons. Those respondents who mailed back the questionnaire individually exhibited none of these symptoms.

Out of the 500 questionnaire mailed out or distributed personally, subsequent search revealed that about 85 copies were not received and deemed lost in the mail. This includes the total consignment for the Kota Kinabalu office, state governments and part of Malaysia Airlines. By the stipulated deadline, a total of 203 questionnaires have been received, thus providing a return rate of 40.6 percent. However, during the encoding process, it was found that 6 questionnaires were found to be incomplete and had to be discarded, which means only a total of 197 samples were usable, reflecting a 39.4 percent rate of return.

3.4. Statistical Analysis

Data collected was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). T-tests were used to compare means for gender differences for perceptions in terms of relationships with one's organisation, customers and suppliers. This statistical technique was also used to compare the means for respondents in the public and private in relation to their response to ethical-related statements and scenarios. For the other demographic comparisons such as age, race, marital status, religion, education, income and organisational factors like occupation type, level, organisational size and work

experience, the Analysis of Variance or ANOVA was used. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the magnitude, direction and significant level of the relationship between the demographic and organisational variables and the relationship situations stated on the scales. The correlation coefficients were compared to the criterion value for Pearson's "r" to determine statistical significance. Reliability of the scale was also tested using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha. Finally, regression analysis was also utilised to assess the relative importance of the various predictor variables (namely, age, sex, education, religion, income, etc) in their contribution to variation in the criterion variable (namely, total ethical perceptions with own organisation, customers and suppliers).