

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in the study. The materials presented in this chapter are pertaining to the mechanics of the study plan. It provides a description of the data collection procedure, questionnaire design, sampling design and the various statistical analysis adopted. Besides the objective of the study will be reemphasize and the limitation of the study is discussed

#### **3.1 Purpose of the Study**

As mentioned in chapter 1, the purpose of the study is to find an answer on what it takes to be successful in overseas posting. The emphasis is to look at the right traits and competencies that an expatriate should possess in order to be successful in their foreign assignments. The study is important since it will look at the issue from Malaysian point of view. Thus, one of the most important objectives is to look at the applicability of previous studies that have been conducted in other countries to Malaysian context. The other objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify the qualities and competencies needed for a successful overseas assignment perceived by Malaysian expatriates.
- To look at the factors that can affect the performance of expatriates in foreign assignment.
- To identify the common problems that being faced by them
- To provide local literature on the pertaining issue

## **3.2 Data Collection procedures**

The relevant data to the study were obtained from both secondary and primary data search.

### **3.2.1 Secondary Data Research**

Secondary data research has been conducted at the early stage of the study. It served as a start for data collecting procedures. This is because, through the search of secondary data, it provides guideline and gives better understanding on the research problem and issues. Particularly, in this study, local research and literature were very limited. Thus, there was a need to look at foreign researches and literature in order to gain further understanding on the issues.

The secondary data were obtained from magazines, journals, reference books, government publications and many others form of publications or information sources. For this study, secondary data have been gathered from the extensive search of journals, books and other publications from various sources, among others; UM's library, UKM's library, internet and MATRADE's library.

### **3.2.2 Primary Data Research**

In this study, personal interviews as well as questionnaires were employed as primary data search tools.

At the initial stage, after the theoretical background of the study has been gathered from the secondary data search, a few interviews were conducted with two human resource (HR) executives and one expatriate. The reason was to see the relevance of the issues surveyed in Malaysian context. It was also adopted to fine-tune the subject under study. At this stage, the interviews were conducted using open-ended questions. This is to prevent the respondents to be influenced by existing findings from other literature. The questionnaires then were reconstructed into close-ended version and it was tested with two more expatriates. This pilot study was to look at the relevancy of the questions and the clarity of the question instructions.

The second stage of primary data collection involved the distributions of questionnaires that have been constructed based on the interviews and pilot study. The survey questionnaires were sent at the end of March through middle of April to the HR managers of selected MNCs and other organizations that have expatriate staffs.

The following approaches were adopted for the primary data collection procedures using questionnaires.

- i. After contacting and explaining to the HR managers/ executives of the companies selected about the study. The survey questionnaires were distributed to them for further action.

The HR managers/executives were requested to distribute the questionnaires to the expatriates or former expatriates in their organizations. Two weeks have been given for the completion of the questionnaires.

- ii. In addition, to those expatriates that are still serving their duty overseas, their email addressees have been requested from the HR managers/ executives. Then, the survey questions were sent out through email to them.
- iii. Follow up to the distribution of the questionnaires were made one week after the first distribution using telephone and email where appropriate. This is to increase the response rate of the survey.
- iv. The completed questionnaires were then collected by hand from HR managers/ executives after the two weeks period completed. In the situation where extension period was asked, an appointment was set the week after that.

### **3.3 Questionnaire Design**

The data for this research were obtained through the used of structural questionnaires design. The questionnaire was prepared in English and it has two versions, one is hard copy (Appendix 1) and another one is in soft copy (for internet distribution). The reason for having a different version for internet survey, is to increase the response rate by making the question simplified and make it easy for the respondents to answer (Appendix 2).

The questions designs have gone through two stages. The first stage, involved the open-ended questions for the interviews. This is due to the reasons:

- i. To get the general idea on the issue
- ii. To look up the similarity with the previous studies
- iii. To list out the relevant issues to be discussed

Following this stage, the questions were then reconstructed into close-ended questions, for the survey purposes. However, before the questionnaires were distributed, a pilot study has been done with two expatriates in order to find out the following matters:

- i. To determine the overall impression of the questions
- ii. To evaluate the appropriateness of the questionnaires' format
- iii. To determine the effectiveness of the instructions
- iv. To determine the clarity of the meaning of the questions.

After having satisfied with the questionnaires, it was then distributed.

In designing the questionnaires, it was carefully tailored to be in line with the objective of the study. Close-ended questions were deliberately used for survey as it will increase the potential response rate and reduced the variation in the findings that can lead to difficulties in data analysis. The questionnaires begin with a proper introduction by disclosing the identity of the researcher and objective of the study. It then were subsequently divided into six sections.

Section 1, look at the motivating factors to take overseas assignment. Five points likert scale were used to indicate whether they are agree with the statement or not. This section was included to serve as the 'warm-up' phase of the questionnaire. The variables were derived from the interviews and discussions with HR executives and the expatriates themselves.

Section 2 deals with the factors that influence expatriates performance in their overseas assignments. Five points likert scale were used to indicate the importance of the factors. These factors were also derived from interviews and discussions.

Section 3 requires the respondents to choose four problems that commonly faced by them.

Section 4 asks the respondents to rate the importance of the characteristics and competencies listed out on five points likert scale, that a successful expatriate should have. These traits and competencies were derived from previous studies conducted in the area (Jordan and Cartwright, 1998; Tung, 1981, 1982; Zeira and Banai, 1984, 1985) and interviews conducted.

Section 5 requires the respondents to pick five of the most important advice that they could give to newly appointed expatriates. The list of advices were obtain from a study conducted by Suutari and Brewster (2001).

Section 6 requires the respondents to fill up their demographic information that enable meaningful interpretations and comparison of the results. All the respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their personal information provided.

### **3.4 Sampling Design**

The respondents involved in this research were selected in such a way so that the result will represent the population of expatriates studied.

#### **3.4.1 Sampled Population**

The sample population consists of Malaysian expatriates that work either in local MNCs or foreign MNCs that are available for sample.

#### **3.4.2 Sampling Frame**

The sampling frame is consisting of the list of expatriates that available in the MNCs that have been chosen for the purpose of sampling. In this study, the companies' chosen were local MNCs and the selection was based on non-probability judgment sampling considering the constraint in time. The purposive sampling also has been adopted since it helps in locating the right sampling frame for the purpose of the study. This is due to the fact that not every company employs expatriates in their organization.

#### **3.4.3 Sampling Unit**

The sampling unit of this study consists of the Malaysian expatriates that taken as a sample from the sampling frame. They were expected to have at least one year of international experience to be qualified and being accepted as respondents

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

This section provides an overview of the statistical tools and procedures employed in the study.

Firstly, the general characteristics of the respondents will be discussed based on their demographic profiles. This is done by running the frequency count and percentage computation. From the output of the frequency tables, any errors in the data can also be identified and corrected.

For the second part of the analysis, several descriptive measures of analysis were used to look at the means for the comparison purpose of the study.

### **3.6 Limitation of the Study**

The study has faced a few limitations that could give an effect on the validity and generalization that can be made from the findings. The limitations are:

- i. The sampling size is small compared to the actual total Malaysian expatriate population. Thus, it might limit the validity of the finding and no generalization can be made.
- ii. There has never been a study similar in nature carried out in Malaysia. The questionnaires were basically based on foreign researches and literature. Thus, the dimensions of dependent variables adopted from those researches might not fully represent variables in the context of Malaysia. Although interview and pilot test were carried out to ensure the suitability and completeness of the dependent variables used, it is still disputable.



- iii. The study also only focus on the Malaysian expatriate, thus it cannot be generalized to other nationalities.
- iv. There have been difficulties in measuring the effect of the perception of those expatriates and how it was influenced by the location of the host countries. This was due to the reason that most of them have been assigned to few countries instead of one.