3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. EXPERIENCE SURVEY

The initial step of this research project was the exploratory stage. The experience survey technique and convenience sampling method were applied. Ten expatriates are chosen as the sample. They are from Europe, America and Australia and cover different marital status, with and without children.

The discussion focused on the reasons for working in Malaysia. The following issues were discussed:

- The motives to move to Malaysia
- Issues during the process of adjusting
- Factors encouraging to continue staying in Malaysia
- Other issues of concern

The information obtained from the experience survey is used to design the questionnaire for the survey, which will be conducted at a later stage of this research project.

3.1.1 Getting started in Malaysia

The expatriates have very different motivations to take up employment in Malaysia. Some are driven by work related factors; others are attracted by culture, climate or recreation. In general, the initial reason for expatriates to come to Malaysia falls into one of the following categories:

- **Recommendation** – The expatriate had peers that drew his attention to Malaysia. The recommendation was linked to business opportunity or cost of living, or a combination of both. The expatriate then took the initiative to seek employment in Malaysia.
- **Company-internal transfer** – The present employer had a project in Malaysia or a vacancy at their Malaysian office. The expatriate then transferred internally to Malaysia.
• **Own initiative** – The expatriate was travelling through Malaysia for business or pleasure / hobby. He liked the place and sought expatriate employment in Malaysia.

• **Ambitions / career** – The expatriate heard of the fast growing economy in Malaysia and came here with the intention to start his own business.

### 3.1.2 Adjusting to Malaysia

Most expatriates need time to adjust to Malaysia. The degree of difficulties encountered varies when compared among expatriates with different levels of previous exposure to other cultures, as well as the marital status of the expatriate. Difficulties are mostly described in comparison to the previous country of residence. Therefore an expatriate moving to Malaysia from a developing country judges differently than one moving over from his home country. An example is an expatriate moving from Bangkok to Malaysia.

Expatriates with family also experience their new home differently than single expatriates. Besides adjusting themselves, they also need to comfort their family. Expatriates with a local spouse experience the least difficulties with the adjusting process.

Following is a summary of issues discussed:

• **Orientation** – The expatriate needs to change his strategy of orienteering himself. Recreational activities, shopping, and other services are often organized in a different way than the expatriate was used to. Pursuing a particular activity or shopping for a special item is initially a tiring task.

• **Housing** – A wide variety of housing options is available and any expectations can be matched, provided the budget is sufficient. In some cases, the expatriate and his local employer initially have a different perception of an acceptable housing standard. But consensus is normally found. The expatriate and the real estate agents have a different perception of notions like an unfurnished house. This often causes some confusion when looking for a place to stay. A matter of concern is to claim the deposits made to the landlord at the termination of the contract.
• **Medical services** – The standard level of services is generally below expectations. But better service can be obtained at higher cost. Still, expatriates are often critical and value references from friends highly.

• **Uncertainty** – The level of above-mentioned medical services is often not consistent. Expatriates feel, that even though the equipment is the most modern, the outcome of a surgery finally depends on the doctor itself. Surgeries are high in credence qualities. In case of an emergency, the outcome of the operation then depends on the doctor on duty. The combination of these factors creates uncertainty for the individual who might seek immediate treatment.

• **Road safety** – Traffic is perceived as dangerous (also as pedestrian), because in an emergency the desired level of medical service might not be available. The uncertainty described above is even greater in rural areas. The administrative burden of settling an accident is not to be neglected either.

• **Safety from crime** – Malaysia is generally perceived as a save place in respect to crime. But there might be a difference in the level of safety perceived by Europeans and Americans.

• **Language** – English is widely spoken. This helps the expatriate to socialize with locals and ask his way around town. Knowledge of a local language is not regarded as necessary. Bahasa Malaysia might be of advantage when doing business with government bodies.

• **Spouse** – As working permits for the spouse are not available, the spouse faces difficulties in adapting to the life of an expatriate’s spouse. For many, especially those who gave up their own career, the important element of business and social contacts is missing. They also might feel, that they had to give up their independence. Additionally their family income is reduced.

• **Public transport** – Most expatriates like the LRT service. But at the same time they acknowledge that with few exceptions, LRT stations are placed inconveniently. The taxi service is considered very unreliable. Too often when calling for a cab, none is available. Most taxis charge by the meter, but an increasing number of drivers try to set their own “standard prices”. Busses are hardly used since information on the routing of bus lines and
timetables are not conveniently available. Due to the amount of traffic jam around Kuala Lumpur during peak hours, a convenient alternative in public transport would be appreciated.

- **Live to work** - Some expatriates spend more time at work than they would do when working in their home country. Some say that work dominates their life. This adds stress to their family, especially their spouse.

### 3.1.3 Staying in Malaysia

The expatriates who manage to adjust themselves to Malaysia appreciate it in many different ways. Following is a summary of the factors mentioned.

- **Culture** – The multiracial society of Malaysia brings a large variety of foods and festivities.
- **Climate** – Many expatriates refer to Malaysia as having always summer. They enjoy the warm temperature and the sunshine.
- **Nature** – With jungle, beach, sea and mountains, Malaysia has a variety of natural attractions.
- **Recreation** – The climate in combination with the natural attractions is a good playground for many recreational activities.
- **Cost of living** – The cost of living is low, compared to their home. This allows the expatriate to pay off loans from previous education faster, build of funds for retirement, travel more, or just enjoy a better lifestyle.
- **Nightlife** – The nightlife offers a good variety and is happening on seven days a week.
- **Career** – The job overseas often bears more responsibility. The expatriate is likely to get more exposure to corporate issues.
- **Working environment** – Some expatriates feel less pressure when working away from their headquarters. This seems to be especially true for the Japanese.
- **Contract** – In some cases benefits are only paid out if the expatriate finishes the contract / assignment. This makes the option of a premature return to the home country less likely.
For most expatriates it is a combination of above factors. The factors themselves then are weighted according to the inclination of the individual.

3.1.4 Other issues

- **Career advancement** – Staying overseas for too long might lead to losing touch with the working culture at home. Therefore career orientated expatriates feel a need to move in order to be in demand. Staying in one place too long makes moving back home an extremely difficult task, as the roots to “home” started rotting. The time span associated with this “point of no (likely) return” is mostly regarded as five to eight years.

- **Environment** – It is often perceived, that locals do not respect the nature enough. Nature loving expatriates encounter places where waste is dumped in the jungle around the city. Also the degree of littering is disturbing. Construction developments are eating up the green lungs in and around Kuala Lumpur at a rapid pace. For many expatriates this is a significant loss in life quality.

- **Ownership of property** – Buying property is a tiring process for foreigners. The time from signing the contract until all the necessary documents are processed and the property can be used, often takes several months.

- **The best blend** – When comparing Kuala Lumpur with other capitals in the region, it is often described as the best blend; Bangkok is too chaotic, Singapore too sterile and strict, and Manila too criminal, just to mention a few.

- **Retirement** – Only few expatriates consider retirement in Malaysia. Also the retirement program “Malaysia my second home” is not widely known.

**Local staff** – They are sometimes perceived as less dedicated to work and less loyal to the organization. They are occasionally said to lack analytical skills and motivation. Some expatriates also experienced under-surface conflicts of subordinates of different races, which is destructive to the company. A very different view on the same issue is that the average employee is not valued by the organization, and therefore is not motivated to perform. In some cases the expatriate was hindered by the organization in managing and promoting his staff.
In services, where with every staff turnover the organization loses a part of the clientele, this hinders the building of a superior service. The truth may be somewhere in between and would be a research paper by itself.

3.1.5 Implication of experience survey

The information collected can be grouped into categorising information and possible satisfiers.

The categorising information is used to profile the respondents by demographic and job information. The following variables are identified to have possible impact on the perceived importance and satisfaction of work and non-work factors (where applicable):

- Malaysian spouse
- Children
- Length of time working in Malaysia
- Location of previous overseas posting
- International or local employer
- Working hours outside Malaysia
- Degree of internationalisation of working environment
- Amount of working hours compared to ‘home’

The possible satisfiers are used to construct the questionnaire sections to measure importance and satisfaction non-work related factors. As for the work related factors, also the factors identified in the literature review as well as those from the experience survey are used. It was found that most factors identified in the experience survey are included in the relevant section of the survey conducted earlier by Dr. Kamarul Zaman Bin Ahmad on prospective Malaysian expatriates. In order to facilitate the comparison of the two studies at a later stage, the scale and formulation of those factors were adopted. Additional factors retrieved from the experience survey were added into the questionnaire.

Chapter 3.3 will discuss the sections of the questionnaire in greater detail.
3.2. Research Design

The survey method was employed to gather the primary data. The respondents received an email with the questionnaire attached in Microsoft Word format. Email was chosen because it is fast and inexpensive. Email is a widely used way of communication and is therefore not considered to restrict the sample.

The email introduced the respondent to the purpose of the study, asked the respondent to fill out the attached questionnaire, and forward the questionnaire to few of his expatriate friends.

The questionnaire itself was password protected, so that the respondent can complete the questionnaire, but not alter any of the other text. The questionnaire could then be returned by email or fax.

A test run with five respondents was conducted, before the questionnaire was distributed to the whole sample. This was done to eliminate eventual misinterpretations of the questions.

Respondents that did not return the questionnaire within two weeks were contacted by email or phone to give a friendly reminder to return the questionnaire. Where it was deemed as appropriate, the respondent was also reminded to forward the questionnaire to few other expatriate friends of his. These measures were taken to increase the response rate of the survey.

3.3. Questionnaire Design

The information collected in the experience survey was used to design the questionnaire. Only structured questions were used. Most of them were closed end, fixed-alternative questions. Filter questions were used to screen respondents that do not qualify for questions regarding spouse and/or children.

The layout of the questionnaire was chosen as to display conveniently when administered on the computer screen. Every section was started on a new page and questions were not to be split by page break (see Appendix A). The information obtained from the first two sections as well as the last one are to profile the respondents and allow meaningful interpretation of the results. The
third and fourth sections are to measure the satisfaction with various work and non-work related factors.

The cover page of the questionnaire stated the context and purpose of the study in more detail that the email itself. The identity of the researcher was disclosed and contacts were provided to return the questionnaire.

The first section gathered demographic information. Marital status was used as a filter. Only married respondents were asked to complete the second half of this first section. Questions on children, and origin and residence of spouse were used to filter respondents further for the purpose of the analysis. The respondent was also asked to indicate the overall satisfaction of his family on a nine point Linkert scale.

The second section collected job information. In addition to the generic questions, the variables identified in the experience survey were added. These variables are expected to show differences between groups of expatriates.

The third section was designed to measure the weighted satisfaction with work related factors. The respondent was first asked to indicate the extent to which the items are important or unimportant in his employment on a five point Linkert scale. Subsequently the respondent was asked to indicate the extent to which he is satisfied or dissatisfied with the same item on a nine point Linkert scale.

The fourth section is designed in the same way as the previous section, but is related to non-work factors. The scales for importance and satisfaction are the same as in the previous section.

The final section required the respondent to provide general information. The respondent was asked for the initial reason to move to Malaysia, how long he intends to stay, what will be a likely reason to leave Malaysia, as well as if he would consider retiring in Malaysia.

3.4. Sampling Design
The expatriates participating in the survey are a convenience sample. This method was chosen due to time constraints as well as its low cost. Because of
the non-probability sampling, the statistical analysis is not allowed to be projected beyond the sample.

The target population are expatriates that live and work in Malaysia. The sampling frame consists of expatriates from developed countries.

3.5. **DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**
The questionnaire was distributed as a Microsoft Word attachment by email.

**Figure 1: Data Collection**

As displayed in Figure 1, the respondents had several options to return the questionnaire.

3.6. **DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES**
The data analysis is conducted with SPSS for Windows.
3.6.1 Descriptive Statistics

At first a frequency analysis is conducted to screen the data for errors in the data entry.

Subsequently the demographic and job profile were derived through frequency tables for nominal variables and arithmetic mean for variables with interval scale. The same analysis is applied to the general questions in the last section of the questionnaire. Crosstabulations are conducted where it is deemed appropriate.

The attitude scales in the questionnaire sections Work Related Factors and Non-work Related Factors are analysed as interval data (Zikmund, pg 294). The five point Likert scale for importance is coded from zero (0) to plus four (+4). The nine point Likert scale for satisfaction is coded minus four (-4) to plus four (+4). Also a weighted satisfaction is computed. For every variable, importance enters the calculation as the weight and is then multiplied with the satisfaction. Afterwards descriptive statistics are used to derive the means for importance, satisfaction and weighted satisfaction of the variables. Also an overall mean for importance, satisfaction and weighted satisfaction for the two constructs is calculated.

The weighted satisfaction was found unsuitable to identify satisfiers and dissatisfiers. The reason is that in some cases the contribution of the weight prevails over the satisfaction and the outcome is rather a weighted importance than satisfaction. Satisfiers and dissatisfiers are identified as described in the following chapter.

3.6.2 Identification of Satisfiers and Dissatisfiers

Importance refers to expectation, satisfaction refers to experience.

Factors that are low on importance are not relevant in terms of satisfaction and hence do not need to be given further attention on the satisfaction list.

Factors are considered to be high on importance if their mean is above the overall mean of the work factors, respectively non-work factors.
Factors that are high on importance do need to be given further attention and are ranked according to their satisfaction. The ranking on the satisfaction list is then related to the ranking in the importance list.

Factors that are higher ranked in terms of satisfaction than in terms of importance result in a positive rating. The expatriate perceives the satisfaction of this factor as higher than its importance. The factor reflects positive on the company / host country, is therefore a satisfier, and can be used to promote Malaysia.

Factors that are lower ranked in terms of satisfaction than in terms of importance result in a negative rating. The expatriate perceives the satisfaction of this factor lower than its importance. The factor reflects negative on the host country and is therefore a dissatisfier. The factors mark areas where improvements would be appreciated.

The factors are then ranked according to their rating. The mean of the weighted satisfaction will be used to differentiate factors of the same rating.

3.6.3 Other Analysis

Correlation studies are then conducted on several variables with interval scale. Independent-samples T-Test and One-way ANOVA are used to describe the mean of different groups of expatriates.